

## RESTING IN CHRIST

(SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 4, 2016)

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**Scripture Reading:** 10 Words; Hebrews 4

### INTRODUCTION

Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy...

It is ironic that there is so much debate about a command that encourages us to rest.

Complications: theology, culture, and man's sin.

Chapter 21 of the WCF – Of Religious Worship and the Sabbath is one of the areas where we have slightly modified the WCF.

The proper balance can be difficult for families and for local churches.

Not going to try to resolve all the questions but direct our focus to the ultimate purpose of the Sabbath – The Lord Jesus Christ and His great work of redemption.

Main Text: Hebrews 4 and the four challenges this text sets before us.

**Make sure you are resting in the Lord Jesus Christ.**

### FOUR CHALLENGES IN HEBREWS 4

Book of Hebrews is a written sermon – Heb. 13:22

The Church as we see in 1:2 is living in the last days that began as Christ at the end of the ages appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

**Heb. 9:26** He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. **27** And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, **28** so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.

The focus of Hebrews is on the glory and superiority of Christ and how your focus must be on Him.

**Heb. 12:2** looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith,

Most of chapter 4 is really connected with Hebrews 3:7 and following.

There are at least five references to Psalm 95.

I have chosen Hebrews 4 because I wanted to end with the beautiful words in vv. 14-16.

OT Background and Context:

Failure of Israel to enter the Promised Land.

Psalm 95 which looks back on that horrible time in Israel's history.

Creation and God's Rest on the 7<sup>th</sup> Day

Joshua who brought Israel into the land, but did not provide the ultimate rest.

Hebrews 3:19 shows the bottom line issue was and always is unbelief.

**Heb. 3:19** So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.

Let us consider the four challenges now of chapter 4 and their application for this congregation.

### **Challenge 1: Hebrews 4:1**

**Heb. 4:1** Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it.

Psalm 95 – A great hymn of joy and praise.

Singing, shout joyfully, worshipping, bowing down, considering God's power in creation.

Verse 7: Today, if you will hear His voice.

Verse 8: Do not harden your hearts, as in the rebellion.

Combination of joy, reverence, and a seriousness related to matters of eternal life and death.

This hopefully is part of our gathering together – joy, awe, and appropriate fear.

The fear of verse 1 as John Calvin states is not that which shakes the confidence of faith but that which fills us with concern that we do not grow lazy or sluggish with indifference.

The goal is not doubt but rather certainty in the promises that God has given to us.

Each week we gather for worship we give a witness to the awesome nature of God and the reality of eternal life and death in connection with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Children, do you see we are most concerned with your spiritual wellbeing?

It is a horrible thing to consider that even one of us here would be apart from Jesus Christ and face eternal judgment.

The writer of Hebrews reminds us that the gospel was preached to the children of Israel just as it has been preached to us.

What was the problem?

Heb 4:2b but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard *it*.

Another version reads:

they were not united by faith with those who listened. (ESV)

Then look at the first part of verse 3.

**Heb. 3:3a** For we who have believed do enter that rest,

Here is the beauty, power, and simplicity of the message of the gospel.

Confess that you are indeed a wretched sinner, deserving of God's judgment, but that God in His mercy sent the Lord Jesus Christ to take our place on the cross bearing our shame, guilt, and God's wrath. Believe that Jesus Christ is Lord and that He was raised from the dead for our salvation.

The writer of Hebrews continues to discuss Psalm 95 and also Genesis 2.

You see the references to Psalm 95 in verses 3, 5, and 7.

Verse 4 quotes from Genesis 2:2.

The author of Hebrews is doing something very important.

He is showing to us how God's work of creation is connected so beautifully to His work of redemption.

God rested after creating the heavens and the earth in six days.

God was not tired nor did He need a break. God was giving us a picture of salvation.

Just as creation is the work of God alone, so salvation and true rest are found in Him alone and according to His work.

In the OT, the fourth commandment was given to remind Israel how their salvation could never be according to their own efforts.

They needed to believe and trust in God alone for their salvation.

**Ex. 34:21** “Six days you shall work, but on the seventh day you shall rest; in plowing time and in harvest you shall rest.

The Sabbath commandment we can say was a test of faith.

Will you trust in God and in His provision or in your own ability and strength?

The Sabbath commandment also had the most severe punishment attached to it.

Working on the Sabbath except for acts of mercy and necessity warranted the punishment of death.

Was God being harsh?

No, God was presenting the reality of even more important matters.

If you try to earn your own salvation through your own efforts, you will die.

You will die a death much worse than just being put to death!

The repeated quotation from Psalm 95 serves to call every generation of people to not harden their hearts and turn away from God’s truth.

Verse 8 shows how the Promised Land of Canaan was not the ultimate rest that God had for His people.

It was a picture of eternal life, but it was not the reality.

Verses 9 and 10 are very challenging verses, which we will not explore in their fullness today.

Part of the question is how we see the OT Sabbath fulfilled in Sunday, the Lord’s Day.

Should Sunday be called a Sabbath Day?

Is there application of the Sabbath Day for Sunday?

These are some of the questions that are connected with verses 9 and 10.

Verse 9 uses a different word for rest than what is found in the rest of the chapter.

The word in verse 9 is a word first found in Greek here in Hebrews 4 – *sabbatismos*.

Some believe it refers to the Lord's Day that Christians are still called to celebrate.<sup>1</sup>

Others believe that it speaks of the eternal state of glory.<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, there are questions related to verse 10.

Some say that the one who has entered His rest is the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>3</sup>

Others say this rest means turning from our wicked works or speaks of the eternal rest that will enjoy in eternity.<sup>4</sup>

Part of the challenge is that the Sabbath and the Lord's Day have both an application for today as well as pointing to the fullness of salvation that we will enjoy in eternity.

We are called to turn from our sinful works now and we look forward to the joy of our eternal rest.

Now, we must be very clear. Salvation is by God's grace alone. And every person enters this world as a sinner. The problem is not simply our environment or who we had for parents.

These points should be beyond debate.

However, this we can say as a general observation.

There is a strong connection between the gospel and the Lord's Day.

It is not that we earn our salvation through our keeping the Lord's Day.

But, parents who neglect the worship of God's house on Sunday and who simply fill the day with their own activities are doing a great disservice to their children in terms of bringing to them the gospel.

No person is saved because they kept the Sabbath day holy or because they do everything they should do on Sunday.

The Lord's Day is an incredible gift that has been given to God's people.

Let us make the most of the time that God gives to us, especially on the Lord's Day, because we are to fear lest any come short of entering God's rest.

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<sup>1</sup> A. W. Pink, Walter Chantry, Joseph A. Pipa to name a few.

<sup>2</sup> William Lane and others.

<sup>3</sup> John Owen, Walter Chantry, Joseph Pipa.

<sup>4</sup> John Calvin (first view); Richard Gaffin (second view).

This connects with the second challenge of this chapter.

## **Challenge 2: Hebrews 4:11**

**Heb. 4:11** Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.

I think it is important to keep in mind the OT background of the Promised Land.

We can say that the Children of Israel were not diligent to enter the Promised Land and they fell because of their own disobedience.

Verse 11 is not saying that salvation is based on our own work or diligence.

Far from it!

The command is given to the entire community to rest in Jesus Christ alone for salvation and continue in holding fast our confession as we see in verse 14.

So it is not that we are live our lives doubting our faith or salvation, but nor are we to lose our focus on the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is perfectly in line with Paul's testimony in Phil. 3:13.

**Phil. 3:13** Brethren, **I do** not count myself to have apprehended; but one **thing I do**, forgetting those **things** which are behind and reaching forward to those **things** which are ahead,

Verses 12 and 13 are a beautiful testimony to the Word of God. One thing that I learned in my studies this week is how we again should be thinking of the connection these verses have with the account in Numbers.

What happened after the children of Israel first refused to enter the Promised Land and then thought they could later enter by their own efforts?

They were driven back and fell by the sword of the Amalekites and Canaanites.

**Num. 14:43** For the Amalekites and the Canaanites *are* there before you, and you shall fall by the sword; because you have turned away from the LORD, the LORD will not be with you."

**Num. 14:44** But they presumed to go up to the mountaintop. Nevertheless, neither the ark of the covenant of the LORD nor Moses departed from the camp. **45** Then the Amalekites and the Canaanites who dwelt in that mountain came down and attacked them, and drove them back as far as Hormah.

It is not the fearsome Amalekites that must be our concern today.

It is before Almighty God we stand.

He has given His Word and those who declare His Word.

And you will one day stand before Him and there is absolutely nothing that you will be able to cover on your own.

Be diligent to entire that rest of God through the Lord Jesus Christ alone.

### **Challenges 3 and 4:**

Some commentators would see a break after verse 13 and a shift now to the focus on the High Priesthood of Jesus Christ.

That probably is the flow of the text, but I think it is also good to consider the final two challenges of this chapter with the material we have just considered.

Let us hold fast our confession!

Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace!

These final verses are a wonderful preparation for coming to the Lord's Supper.

In the Lord's Supper we celebrate that Jesus Christ is our great High Priest.

Let us hold fast then our confession.

In the Lord's Supper we also rejoice that we have a High Priest who can sympathize with our weaknesses.

This particular word, weaknesses, is used over 20x in the NT. In Romans 8:26 we are encouraged by the truth that the Holy Spirit helps us in our weaknesses.

**2Cor. 12:9** And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. **10** Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

The Lord Jesus Christ is able to sympathize with your weaknesses.

Why can the Lord Jesus Christ do this?

It is because He was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.

Can we even begin to consider how important and precious this truth is?

How many people when filled either with their own sins and failures simply turn inward?

How many people when tried by various temptations think, no one knows what I am going through?

Are you looking to your great High Priest?

Do you frequently go to the throne of grace to obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need?

This is all part of the glory of the gospel that we have such a Savior who we can fully rest in.

Are you resting fully in the Lord Jesus Christ?

**Prayer**

**Hymn: 357**

### **Benediction – Hebrews 12:1-3**

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.



