



The Wonderful Rest He has Promised Hebrews 4

Introductions

REST! How we long for it, sometimes consciously, perhaps always unconsciously. Opposed to rest is stress, which oddly enough contains the same letters but in jumbled fashion. We are built for rest such as we experienced in the womb. There, nothing disturbed our rest. Nourishment was continuous, comfort complete, and the ride was pleasant. We were surrounded by soothing watery sounds and the steady, rhythm of our mother's heartbeat, combined with the melodious, muffled tones of voices. If there was cause for alarm, we were unaware of it. Nothing troubled us. We had nothing to do but rest, and in resting grow and develop to prenatal maturity. What a beautiful plan.

By contrast, in the world we have stress. The current phrase is "stressed out". Our nerves are frazzled, minds confused, emotions fragmented, personalities skewed, goals frustrated, souls tormented, and bodies worn. The Psalmist cried *Oh that I had wings like a dove, for then I would fly away and be at rest* (Psalm 55:6). Yet, another Psalmist could say *Yea, in the shadow of Thy wings will I make my refuge until these calamities be overpast* (Psalm 57:1, KJV). Our wings cannot carry us far enough. His wings are for our refuge.

Could it be that God's plan for us still includes complete, wonderful rest? How many doctors have said "There's nothing really wrong physically, except that you need complete rest?" Such was the case of a missionary, Audrey Wetherell Johnson, who came to the United States from eighteen months of house arrest in China under the communists. Prior to that, she had been interned for two-and-a-half years by the Japanese in inland China, in places where the people had never seen a Westerner. An American doctor told her she was near collapse and needed at least six months rest. She took the advice and afterward was led to begin the work which became Bible Study Fellowship (She tells her story in Created for Commitment by A. Wetherell Johnson).

You, too, need rest, the rest of being able to say, "It is well with my soul." You may be young and vigorous or older and retired, but your soul is longing for the total rest that is provided in Jesus Christ. That is what Hebrews 4 is all about. *There remains therefore a rest for the people of God* (Hebrews 4:9). Jesus has provided it. You can have it. Let us examine it and take it for our own.

Outline of Hebrews Chapter 4

- I. Let Us Fear Failure to Enter His Rest - Hebrews 4:1-10
- II. Let Us Labor to Enter His Rest - Hebrews 4:11-13
- III. Let Us Hold Fast Our Confession - Hebrews 4:14-15
- IV. Let Us Come Boldly to the Throne of Grace - Hebrews 4:16

I. Let Us Fear Failure to Enter His Rest - Hebrews 4:1-10

A. Unusual Exhortation to Fear - 4:1

We are not accustomed to being exhorted to fear. The "fear-nots" are more familiar. However, a few things should cause us to fear: wild animals, sudden danger, falling airplanes, etc. These are things which gear us to action instinctively. So should *The fear of the Lord* (Proverbs 1:7). Fearing the commandment carries a reward (Proverbs 13:13). Jesus feared that He would die before He could say *It is finished* with regard to God's will (Hebrews 5:7).

What are we to fear? We are to fear coming short of God's promised rest. We are to fear committing the sin of the generation which left Egypt. They were out of slavery, free of Pharaoh, in God's care, on the right way, but unable to enter into the promised land because of their unbelief. We too find ourselves unable to enjoy the abundant life which God has made available to us through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ if we likewise stumble through unbelief (John 10:10).

B. The Message Must Be Believed - 4:2-3

We have seen that Moses' generation could not enter into the promised land because of unbelief. They knew the message, they received God's word but they did not believe it. They were like people today who are saved, serve in the church, pray, and study the Bible but never seem to arrive at the love, peace, joy, and fulfillment that accompanies the fullness of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). Jesus was full of joy, peace, and love all of His life, even at the cross (Hebrews 1:9; 12:2). He experienced the rest which God gives to us.

The work of providing rest is complete. It was finished on the cross. Just as God rested from His work of creation, so Christ rested from His work of salvation and

sanctification for us sinners. We can now experience the Sabbath rest, which the Father and the Son experience. It is an ongoing rest. Nothing more needs to be done. It has been said that when Christ's work was finished, the Holy Spirit's work began. While that is not totally accurate, since He was at work all along, it means to say that the work being done now is the kind of work belonging to the Holy Spirit, namely, to enable you and me to believe God's words and promises in the Bible. When we do, when we really believe them in the same way we believed them in order to be saved, we will enter into rest.

C. Today is the Day to Believe and Trust - 4:4-10

The time to believe is today. Again, the writer emphasizes the importance of today. There is no other time to believe. Whatever God is telling us today in His word, we had better believe it, or we will not experience the rest He has for us. We will be like the Israelites and, in a sense, die in our own wilderness.

Joshua, in verse 8, could take the new generation in, but even so great a warrior as he could not give them rest. Joshua 13:1 states that there remains very much land to be possessed.

The people of Israel had fought great battles and had control of the land, even though every last enemy had not been slain. So they began to settle down in order to maintain what they had. But they did not experience perfect rest because the victory had not been complete. The rest that eluded them is available to us because we have a greater Commander, Jesus Christ. He can give us that rest. However, we need to grasp it by faith.

The proof that we are living by faith is that we cease from depending on self, or the flesh, or self-effort. We begin to depend on God, not for some things, but for everything, not just sometimes, but all the time! The only thing left to labor for is entering into His rest.

II. Let Us Labor to Enter His Rest - Hebrews 4:11-13

A. Faith is Work - Hebrews 4:11

Although faith and works are sometimes seen as opposites, faith is actually called a work by Paul, *Your work of faith* (1 Thessalonians 1:3). James wrote, *I will show you my faith by my works* (James 2:18). Likewise the Hebrews' writer exhorts us to *labor* (KJV) to enter into that rest in order to avoid the failure inherent in unbelief. *Labor* (KJV) probably means to give our attention to the business of experiencing God's rest for us just as we would any other task. We are to get on with it and accomplish it.

B. God's Word is Sharp - Hebrews 4:12

The way we enter His rest is by believing His word. That word is described in verse 12 as *living, powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing, and discerning*.

1. Living

The word of God is *living* (*quick*, KJV). It is unlike any other writing. All other writings are exhaustible, that is, they can be read, understood, applied, and there is no more to be done with them. The word of God is inexhaustible. No amount of study and application can exhaust its potential. One of the editors of this study has studied the Book of Hebrews four times, has learned something new and valuable every time, and would eagerly study it again!

It requires supernatural revelation. *The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them for they are spiritually discerned* (1 Corinthians 2:14). This is not true of any other book but the Bible.

2. Powerful

God's word changes lives. It transforms cultures. It has molded and influenced western civilization in a way that is unprecedented in history. Where the gospel has gone, education, sanitation, and civilization have followed.

3. Sharper than any two-edged sword.

God's word is both a tool and a weapon. See Ephesians 2:17, Revelation 1:16, and 19:15. As a weapon it is both defensive and offensive, as used by Jesus against Satan (Matthew 4:1-11).

4. Piercing even to the division of soul and spirit and of joints and marrow

The descriptive words, *piercing* and *division of soul and spirit...joints and marrow* proclaim that God's word gets under the skin into the soul as nothing else can.

5. A discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Discerner is a translation of the Greek word "kritikos", which means "critic". God's word critiques us. "We may think that our thoughts and intents are ours alone. However, God's word sheds light upon them and is *able to judge* them" (The Emphasized New Testament Joseph Bryant Rotherham).

C. Everything is Known to God - Hebrews 4:13

Nothing is unknown or hidden from God (Psalm 139:1-2). We need not waste our time and effort trying to fool Him. He knows whether we are truly resting in Christ's finished work, or trying to add our little bit to it. We can neither shock Him, nor surprise Him. We can, however, grieve Him and we can also please Him.

The priests in the Old Testament were not allowed to wear wool while doing the Lord's work. They were to wear linen garments (Exodus 28:39-42), so they would not sweat while doing their service (Ezekiel 44:17-18). They worked hard, they labored, but not to the point of stress and strain. The message is clear. We are to labor under God. When properly done, His work enables us to experience His rest. We can do it with "no sweat".

D. Application

Are you working at resting? Will you give your attention today to learning the techniques of resting in Christ? Will you practice it until it becomes automatic to rest and not doubt nor worry? *Do not be anxious*, the Savior says (Matthew 6:31-34 RSV).

III. Let Us Hold Fast Our Confession - Hebrews 4:14-15

A. First Man in Space

Our great High Priest, Jesus, the human man who is also the divine, supernatural Son of God, has passed from this life into the heavens (See Ephesians 1:20).

Many preachers seized upon this text at the time the first astronaut, Alan Shepherd, left the confines of this earth's atmosphere and entered outer space. It was a thrilling, historic moment which thrust our civilization into the space age. No less thrilling or historic was the ascension of Jesus Christ as a human being. He too left the confines of earth's atmosphere and disappeared into another dimension where He serves as our High Priest.

B. Our Profession

The Church is built upon the rock of the confession of its members that Jesus is Lord, as Jesus said it would be (Matthew 16:18). Every denomination and congregation has this in common. We confess with the apostles that Jesus is Lord, and with the reformers, Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin that we have, "No sacrifice but Calvary, no priest but Christ, and no throne but grace" (What More Can God Say, Ray Stedman).

The strength and underlying unity of Christianity is the unequivocal and irrefragable confession that

Jesus is Lord and Savior. Your personal confession of Christ as Lord is your ticket to heaven. Hold fast to your ticket.

C. In Touch With Our Feelings and Frailties

His having passed through the heavens to be seated at the right hand of the throne of God does not mean that He is far away. On the contrary, He is close enough to know our weaknesses and have compassion. A priest needs to stay close to his people. He is not an administrator but an intercessor. He must know their needs intimately. Jesus knows your needs and He cares. In fact we can cast all our care upon Him for He cares for us (1 Peter 5:7).

D. Tempted in All Points but Without Sin

We are tempted in a few points. For instance, we may be tempted to steal but not to swear, or vice versa. He not only experienced every temptation in the range of human experience but He suffered them to the fullest. We probably have not felt the full thrust of temptation's power, because we give in to it. He endured the full effect. No wonder that at the end of the forty days of temptation angels came and ministered to Him in His exhaustion (Matthew 4:11).

E. Application

Will you today bring your weaknesses and temptations to the One who understands and cares? Will you thank Him for qualifying Himself by enduring your temptations?

IV. Let Us Come Boldly to the Throne of Grace - Hebrews 4:16

A. Three points

1. Come boldly

In spite of, or perhaps because of, the fact that our weaknesses and temptations have just been mentioned, we are exhorted to come confidently, even boldly, to God.

We have the rights and privileges of sons and daughters of the King in the courts of heaven. We have been given the right to come with confidence. The Father is eager to receive us and there is no waiting. By faith we are instantly in His presence.

2. The throne of grace

God's throne is a gracious throne. *The law was given through Moses but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ* (John 1:17).

3. We may obtain mercy and find grace to help

At the throne are mercy and grace. For coming to the throne, we receive mercy, this wonderful quality by which God is described more than by any other quality. We never go away empty handed.

We receive grace to help in what Hershel Hobbs calls “the nick of time”. No matter how immediate or desperate our need, it pays to pray. Some kind of help will be given, either mental, emotional, spiritual, or physical, either in ourselves or through someone else.

Applications

1. Will you choose today to rest in Christ?
2. Will you promise God to practice His rest daily? How will you do this?
3. Will you hold fast your profession of Christ by sharing it with someone who does not profess Christ? Who will you share with? What will you say?
4. Will you exercise your throne rights and privileges today with confidence in God’s grace and mercy, anticipating and trusting in the help you will receive in “the nick of time”?