

Heb. 4:1-11 Divine Rest

Our passage today gives us the great opportunity to consider the subject of rest. If you remember from chapter 3, God promised to take Israel into the promised land of Canaan. They sent 12 spies into the land. Ten of them said, *“We cannot enter, the people are great, we will be destroyed.”* Two of the spies, Joshua and Caleb said the opposite. They said, *“God is with us. Let us go up and take the land.”* Well, that particular generation took the advice of the ten. They did not believe God’s promise. And to that generation, God, in his great wrath, swore **“they shall not enter my rest”** (v. 11). Well, we know that it was the following generation that ultimately entered Canaan under the leadership of Joshua. And, it was considered a place of “rest.” But, there is much more to the subject of rest, than merely entering the land of Canaan. You see, the author of Hebrews takes their example as a picture, to teach its fulfillment in the gospel of Christ. Look over at vv. 8-10. **“For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.”**

AND, the author uses their example as a warning for them and to us today. Look back to 3:12: **“Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.”** Look at 4:1: **“Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it.”** Also 4:11: **“Let us therefore strive to enter that rest so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.”** With this in mind, as we prepare to take the Lord’s Supper, let’s consider the topic of rest with 5 truths from this passage: 1) The foundation of rest; 2) The promise of rest; 3) The recipients of rest; 4) The fulfillment of rest (part 1: Now); and 5) The fulfillment of God’s rest (part 2: Not Yet).

1. The foundation of rest. Throughout this passage, we see the author refer to rest as “God’s rest.” It is the foundation of his teaching on this subject. God is the founder, the author, of rest. This is divine rest. Look at v. 3: **“As I swore in my wrath, They shall not enter my rest.”** Also v. 5, **“And again in this passage he said, They shall not enter my rest.”** Also look at v. 9: **“So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God.”** This word “Sabbath” is used in Gen. 2:2 to refer to God’s rest on the 7th day after creating the world. Look at the 2nd part of v. 3 up to v. 4: **“although his works were finished from the foundation of the world. For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.”** Gen. 2:3 says, **“So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy”** And why did God make this day holy? **“because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.”**

Now, it is obvious that God continues to work. For He governs and orders all things in heaven and earth. If he were to stop “working” in this sense, all things would fall apart. But, the point in Gen. 2:2 is that God ceased from his work of creation. It was finished. And God was satisfied. And this is the foundation of all REST. This “rest” of God is greater than any rest found in this world, and with our example, the rest found in the land of Canaan. This is why he says there “remains” a rest for the people of God (v. 9) that is far superior than any physical Sabbath rest on

the 7th day, or any physical entrance into the Land of Canaan. I think we will see this as we move through the passage.

Application: The rest that God promises us is his own rest. It isn't merely a rest from tension on hard day, but is of the same quality as that which God enjoys. And I believe for this we were created. Only one thing can satisfy the restlessness of the human soul! Therefore, strive to enter this rest! (v. 11)

Let me mention one more thing before moving on. It is very important to our context that the "rest" of God found in the seventh day continues. It is interesting to me that on the first six days of creation, we see that morning and evening are mentioned, but on the seventh day they are not mentioned. Why? Because this rest remains. It is perpetual. It is available now, and for the people of God, this "rest" will always be! And we strive for this rest.

2. The promise of rest. Rest is God's promise. Look at v. 1. **"Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands . . ."** Our example in this text is the Land of Canaan. We know the story. It is pretty simple. God promised to give Abraham a land . . . flowing with milk and honey. And when God brings his people out of slavery from Egypt, God says, *"Enter the land of promise. Go up and take it. It is yours."* As they stood before the land, they knew God's promise. Moses, Joshua, Caleb, all made sure they knew God's promise.

Brothers and sisters, the Bible is one big book of promises. And they don't come from sinful men and women who break their promises. Here we are at the beginning of a new year. How many of you made promises to yourself last year (or any previous year for that matter) that you would do something different. I know myself. I break resolutions. (It is probably better to make goals than resolutions.) But, you get my point. God is faithful to his word. His promises do not fail. God will not fail to give what He has promised. And God has promised rest for the people of God.

3. The recipients of rest. Let me ask, *"Who will enter into God's rest?"* *"Who are the recipients of his blessings of promise?"* It's pretty simple. Those with FAITH, those who BELIEVE. Look over at Heb. 11:6: **"And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him."** Let's think about our context. Look at 4:2: **"For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened."** What happened to the older generation in the dessert that did not enter the land? They perished in the dessert (3:16-19). Why did they die in the dessert? Unbelief! They HEARD the message. They KNEW God's promise. They SAW his mighty miracles. And then, they did not believe God to keep his promise of giving them the land. So, if anyone will enter God's rest, he/she will enter by faith. (We will apply this in a moment.) But up until now, I've said very little about what this "rest" means in the Book of Hebrews, and how this applies to us today. Well, in order to do this, we must now turn our attention to the fulfillment of God's rest in the Gospel.

4. The fulfillment of God's rest (part 1: Now). This is the author's point. You've heard the message of the gospel. **"God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son . . ."** (1:1-2). Look at 2:1: **"Therefore we must pay much closer**

attention to what we have heard . . .” And v. 3: **“How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation.”** From one perspective, this GREAT SALVATION is found in the Gospel of Christ. The Gospel of Christ is God’s plan to give his people rest: NOW. Just this morning in my quiet time, I read Matt. 1:21-23 these words: **“She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel”** In cp. 2 we see more details of this great salvation. Look at 2:9-10: **“But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering”** (and throughout Book). Today, to find God’s rest is to trust Christ, “receive” Christ, “believe” on him. This is “faith.” And if you do, you will be justified in God’s sight. This is the great doctrine of justification. When the judge of the earth charges you not guilty because someone else has taken your punishment, your rest can begin. For a holy God is no longer angry with you. And he has thrown your sins as far as the east is from the west. In this we remember our Lord’s death today. To believe on Jesus is to find rest. And for God’s people, this begins NOW.

Let me make a few comments from this passage about faith in God’s promise of the gospel.

i. The only appropriate response to the gospel is faith. It is not works. (Eph. 2:8-9). However . . .

ii. Faith is more than intellectual assent.

iii. The principle of faith in God’s rest has been the same in principle from the beginning. V. 2: **“For good news came to us just as to them . . .”** Our author’s example is the message of the promised Land. And then, OT sinners were saved by believing God’s promises. According to Rom. 4:1-25 Abraham was justified by faith. Our author’s example is the message of the promised Land. That generation did not enter, but their children did. Later, David writes Psalm 95 which our author quotes. And David writes hundreds of years after Moses. And he says to those Israelites (who were actually living in the land), **“Today, if YOU hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.”** In other words, there many in Davids day who were physically in the land, but had no rest in their souls because of a hard heart. The same goes for us today in the gospel.

5. The fulfillment of God’s rest (part 2). As we’ve seen, I believe we begin our “rest” now in Christ, as we cease to work for our salvation. However, I also see that this passage looks to a FUTURE rest, a rest that will not come while we are here, as we live in the world. Look at vv. 6-11: **“Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, again he appoints a certain day, “Today,” saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.”** Now notice particularly v. 8. **“For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that**

no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.” I believe the ultimate fulfillment of our rest will be found ONLY in the new heavens and the new earth. Consider again the context of our passage with those Hebrew Christians. Do you think they felt that had entered God’s rest with all their persecutions? They left everything they ever knew with the Law of Moses and looked unto Christ. And what happened? They entered the most difficult war ever. This is why there must be a future to “remain” concerning the rest of God. And it must be heaven. We are not in heaven yet!

When you go to sleep at night, you rest, sometimes good, sometimes bad, but nonetheless it is rest. But when you wake up the next day, what do you find? Parents, you find sickness, as one of your children has strep throat, or Covid. You find heartache with a teen age rebellious child who does not listen to your instructions, and may even treat you with contempt. You turn on the news and you find death, where there is another shooting or another war going on somewhere in the world. You look around and you see injustice and partiality. You may find it hard to trust those in authority over you. Maybe you find disappointment as someone lets you down or one of your friends turns his or her back on you. Children, school and studying and change from year to year as you grow can be like a warzone. You think you’ve got one thing figured out and then something else happens. Those who are older, what do you find in the morning? A sore back, something new growing on your body you didn’t notice before. The days of youth are long gone. The house is empty, and for many days and perhaps years, you have very little company.

Well, I say to us all, Life is short and full of troubles. Paul puts it another way. He says we are in a constant wrestling match in an evil world (Eph. 6). Does this sound like rest to you? Yes, in the gospel we rest! Jesus says to us now: **“Come unto me all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you “and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls”** (Matt. 11:28-29). Today, WE DO REST from our works of righteousness. In reference to our justification, It is FOR SURE that the author here is showing a parallel between the rest of the OT Sabbath and the rest found in the Land of Canaan and the Gospel of Christ. It is interesting that the last words of Buddha are recorded as this: *“Strive on Untiringly.”* But, what were the last words of Jesus? ***“It is finished!”*** 1 Pet. 3:18 says, **“For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit . . .”** And we will see this in the Book of Hebrews as well. In 9:26 we read: **“But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.”** This we remember today as we take the Lord’s Supper. In his death, by faith, WE rest from our works of trying to save ourselves by our own efforts! When I came to Christ, by faith, Rest came to my soul.

However, I believe this passage is ultimately speaking of a future rest . . . the new heavens and the new earth. You see, those folks in the Hebrew Christian community of that time were leaving Judaism and they were finding it very difficult. How do we know this? Look over at 12:3. The author says, **“Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself . . .”** (they were also under hostility from their community.) And he continues: **“so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.”** Because of this evil world, they were in danger of growing wear and faint of heart. And then look at 13:3: **“Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body.”** This is why I believe the primary focus of REST here is a future rest. Look at 13:14: **“For here we have no**

lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.” It is not the rest of the OT Sabbath, nor the rest of the Land of Canaan, but rest begun in Christ, but fulfilled in the new heavens and the new earth. V. 8 again, **“For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God.”** So, what does this ultimate rest look like? What remains for God’s people?

This week in my daily reading, I read these words from Rev. 21:1-4: **“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”**

Therefore, brothers and sisters (v. 11), **“Let us strive to enter that rest . . .”** Let us press on in this new year, looking unto Christ NOW for our salvation and striving for heaven, which will be our final place of rest.