

# ***“An Invitation to Rest”***

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**Hebrews 4:1-13**

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I want to start this morning by saying thank you. As Bob mentioned last week, I graduated seminary after almost 9 years, with a lot of life and babies thrown in. And it never would have happened without Corinth and you. Thank you for loving me and my family. You have supported us in every possible way. And over the last week, I got this one question a lot, how does it feel to have graduated?

And my honest reaction is I am so tired. I walked out of graduation, saw my family and just burst into tears. And I had this one thought in mind, man that was really hard. I am tired. Any other graduates tired? Any parents tired? No one ever makes it to graduation on their own.

And it is not just that the school year or academic life is tiring, life is exhausting. Anybody tired from work or maybe just tired of work? Maybe you are getting over being sick? Maybe someone you love is sick and that is wearing you out? Maybe you are tired from trying get people to notice you? Maybe your tired of holding your family together? Maybe you are tired of praying and nothing changing?

How about you? Are you tired? Would you like real rest?

Well I have good news. Rest is available. The big idea of Hebrews chapter 4 is you can rest. Not just a nap or a vacation. Not just a moment to yourself or a summer break from quizzes and test. A deeper, better rest is available. You can rest.

We are introduced to the opportunity of rest at the beginning of our passage with these words, “Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands,”

9 other times in this passage rest is mentioned and referred to indirectly many more times. I told you the big idea today is rest. You can rest. But what kind of rest is this? Verse 1 says it is “his” rest. Whose rest?

And the short answer is it is God's rest. And what kind of rest is it? God's rest is a place and a quality of life. God's rest is the place where everything is good. God's rest is life with God under his care and provision and that is available now in bits and pieces and fully in the life to come. God's rest is life as it was always supposed to be.

Bob said the first week of our study as he was introducing Hebrews that it was a master's class in theology. And in our passage we have stumbled upon one of the greatest ideas in scripture, "God's rest" and the offer to enter into God's rest. There have been whole books written about this idea. God's rest has captured the hearts and minds of people for the thousands of years including the author of Hebrews.

Verse 4 says, for somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: "On the seventh day God rested from all his works."

God's rest goes all the way back to creation.

If you're familiar with the creation account in Genesis 1, there are 7 days of creation. And every day God speaks and creates, bringing life and order to emptiness. And there is evening and morning the first day, the second day, third, fourth, fifth day, finally on the sixth day God makes a man and a woman, in his likeness and image, which is family language and he blesses them and gives good work to do, to fill the earth, create family, and culture, and technology and to do this with God, until all the world is filled with God's family doing God's kind of things, on earth as it is in heaven, as Jesus would say.

And then on the sixth day, again evening and morning and then Gen. 2:2 says "By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

God rests from his work and not because he was tired. In fact, the story of creation, especially compared to other ancient near east creation stories makes God's work look surprisingly easy. He speaks and it happens. There is no great battle or chaos. God is not creating servants or helpers because he has too much to do and needs help. He created family to be with him who can join him in the family business of creating and ruling and enjoying.

But then there is something missing in the Creation account. There is no evening and morning on the Seventh day. And that is not an accident. Because the creation account is trying to tell us that the 7th day was never supposed to end. God's plan for mankind was that we would always be with Him in his rest. But we read in Gen. 3 about how all that falls apart.

Going back to our passage, the author of Hebrews has spent all almost 2 chapters talking about Psalm 95. Which if you remember is a flashback to the Exodus, where God rescues the family of Israel from 400 years of slavery and offers them His rest. What an amazing offer!

But it is here we are introduced to a problem. The people of Israel don't receive God's gift.

Hebrews 4:6 - Therefore since it still remains for some to enter that rest, and since those who formerly had the good news proclaimed to them did not go in because of their disobedience, They didn't trust God to take care of them and they refused to enter the land. God wanted to give them rest and they refused and so he does not give rest to that generation.

The Israelites did not receive God's rest, life as God intended.

But finally with Jesus, God's rest is available in a fresh way.

In Matthew 11:28-30 Jesus says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

I love these words from Jesus. Jesus came to give rest. The rest of God is available. Rest for today and rest for forever.

God's rest is the place where everything is good. God's rest is life with God under his care and provision and that is available now in bits and pieces to those who trust in Jesus and is the promised future for those who trust Jesus. The church I grew up in used language like, we can experience a foretaste of the feast to come. God's rest is life as it was always supposed to be and it is available. You can rest.

But there is a problem, people miss God's rest. The Israelites missed God's rest through their disobedience, see vs. 6 and 11. They didn't trust God's character. They didn't believe what He told them. They made their own way and they missed God's rest. And the author of Hebrews wants his reader to know, it is not just the Israelites that can miss God's rest through disobedience.

Back to v.1, Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it.

Here in the passage, the author of Hebrews says "let us be careful" and in the Greek this is the word phobeomai, which means to be afraid. And since we are in a master's class, this form of phobeomai is a hortatory subjunctive and means "Let us begin to be afraid."

Vs. 1 says You can rest. God's rest is available. Life as it should be is available to you. So "let us begin to fear" so that we won't miss it.

I think the command to be afraid is difficult given all the commands of scripture to not be afraid and about perfect love casting our fear. This seems strange and confusing. But here is my best explanation. On occasion I have gone to Christian counseling and it has been enormously helpful to me. And in one of the sessions, I will never forget, my counselor and I were working through some fear from a painful experience and he said, "fear is a gift from God. It is a biological gift to us in response to being out of control." When we experience a situation, where we are out of control and we feel fear, that is our body becoming fully alive, adrenaline getting

pumped into our brains and giving us energy to respond.” Fear is a gift, and it is what we do with the energy that matters.

So often when angels appear they say, “Do not fear,” and it is obviously too late. The people are already afraid, but the invitation to not fear is the angel or God saying, you don’t have to flee, or freeze, or fight. Use your energy and listen well to God. Remember God loves you. Fear is a gift and we should fear missing out on life as it should be with God. So what do with all our energy?

Well, there is one more hortatory subjunctive, one more “let us” phrase in this chapter and it is in v.11. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience.

Let us strive, make every effort to enter that rest. Again this sounds strange, let us make every effort possible to rest. Aren’t those at odds with each other? Open your bulletin. Dallas Willard a theologian I love said wisely

Grace is not opposed to effort; it is opposed to earning.

You will remember back to Gen. 2 that it was always God’s plan that we would exert effort with him in creation. We were to be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth with God’s way of life. We were made to be partners in his work. When we fully enter God’s rest, we will have real work to do. But it will be a delight. Effort was always part of the plan. But in no way do we earn God’s rest. It is a gift of grace.

So the rest of God is life as it was always supposed to be. And that rest is available through trust in Jesus. And we should want it so bad, we would make every effort not to miss it. So finally, how can we direct our fear, all our energy and effort this week?

I want to suggest we practice resting with God.

Bob asked in bible study on Thursday, does this passage have anything to do with what we do on Sunday? What we do on the Sabbath? And my answer is almost no.

The rest talked about in this passage is largely cosmic and eternal, but one way we can practice the eternal kind of rest, is by practicing a weekly rest called a Sabbath.

I don’t know your experience with this spiritual practice, but often it comes with a long list of do’s and don’ts, at least in Jesus’ day it did. So it is important to learn from Jesus, as he said in Mark 2:27, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.”

The Sabbath is a 24-hour gift to us, a practice for heaven. I want to give you a three themes for Sabbath and a list of things that might mean for you. But this is not a to do list, or a not to do list. You don’t have to do any of these things. Remember that.

On the Sabbath, we make effort to do three things:

Rest.

Play.

Remember God.

First, rest. One way to acknowledge that God runs the universe and not us is to rest from all paid and unpaid work (school work, yard work...) Rest from checking email. Sleep. I am at my worst as a follower of Jesus, dad, and husband, when I am tired. Anyone else? Rest from watching the news. It can be exhausting. For a day go uninformed. Rest from social media and being triggered by people you haven't talked to since high school. Rest from buying stuff. We live in a culture consumed with the accumulation of stuff. Rest from looking in the mirror. Just rest. As my spiritual mentor said to me this past week. It is enough. Enough. Just rest.

Second big theme: play. This is subtly one of the most powerful spiritual practices we have. Because who gets to play? Kids. Why? Because their parents are taking care of them. So too, our heavenly father is taking care of us. So you can play. In the Thursday men's bible study this meant mountain biking, playing with model railroads, fly fishing, going to the pool, going to gym, spending time in nature, spend time with friends and family. The Sabbath is not about doing nothing. It can be, but God's rest was always supposed to include activity.

So rest, play, and remember God. This means go to church. Get alone with God. Often we use the busyness of our lives to avoid God or dealing with our feelings. Well not anymore. Tell God how you are actually doing. Invite God to be with you while you rest and play. Ask God to take care of all your emails that you are not looking at. Pray. Read your bible. Rest, play, and remember God.

A few quick disclaimers and then we are done. When practicing Sabbath and any other spiritual practice, it is important to remember your stage of life. Parents with new babies will have a very different Sabbath than a newly retired person or a college student.

Also start where you are. If you have never taken a Sabbath, try an hour, or three hours or half a day. And finally, it is okay to be bad at this. My Sabbath is from dinner on Friday to dinner on Saturday and I woke up at 5 something Saturday morning thinking about my sermon. I couldn't sleep because I was planning a sermon about how to take a Sabbath and sleep. The goal is not to get great at Sabbath and you shouldn't feel guilty about your Sabbath keeping. The goal is not to get good at Sabbath, the goal is to become like Jesus, to practice the rest we were made for. Friends we can rest. You can rest. It is enough.