

October 6/7, 2018

Be Diligent to Rest
Christ is Enough Series
Hebrews 4:1-16
Pastor Bryan Clark

First century Roman culture was a culture of despair. Some historians would refer to it as a culture of suicide. It was violent, it was bloody, it was dangerous, it was oppressive, it was full of death and disease. On top of that the religious establishment had created such religious oppression that people lived in bondage. Most had given up any thought that they could ever stand right before a holy God. It was into that context that Jesus uttered the words, “Come unto Me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” About three decades later, the writer of Hebrews would give a message to people on the threshold of bloody persecution. The message was not a message of health, wealth and prosperity. It was a message that in the midst of the pain, you can enter His rest. So here we are two thousand years later. I think we all get this. Sometimes the world can be very, very painful, hurtful, heartbreaking, confusing, devastating. In the midst of all of that, what Jesus offers us is rest. That’s what we want to talk about this morning. If you have a Bible, turn with us to Hebrews, Chapter 4.

One of the terms that we’ve seen a lot in the book of Hebrews is the word **therefore**. You know the old adage: Whenever you see the word ‘therefore’ you stop to see what it’s *there for*. And it basically reminds us that all of these truths are connected. You can’t take any one passage in Hebrews and pull it out of its context, for one truth leads to another truth leads to another truth and it’s all connected together. It’s good that we keep remembering that. Chapter 3 was all about the cost of unbelief, which then leads us to Chapter 4 verse 1:

Therefore (in light of that, the cost of unbelief), then let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, anyone of you may have seemed to have come short of it.

(*NASB, Hebrews 4:1)

So what’s the **fear**? The fear is that even though there’s still a promise of rest, it wasn’t just about people thousands of years ago entering a land. It wasn’t just about people in the first century. It’s every bit as true for us today. There is a promise of rest. The word **promise** is really an important word in the book of Hebrews. As a matter of fact, no New Testament book uses the term more than the book of Hebrews. What do you say to a group of people that are on the threshold of bloody persecution? You remind them, there’s a promise. There is a promise that, in the midst of the storm, I will give you rest now, and a glorious future to come. But the concern is that they won’t believe it. It’s interesting that he says, **anyone of you may seem to have come short of it**. This basically confirms what we talked about last week—that when the writer is looking at the first readers, his audience, he’s identifying them primarily as believers but he’s not convinced they’re all believers. There is no New Testament writer who could know that everyone who will receive this letter is a believer. So there seem to be some who perhaps don’t believe. Maybe they’re giving lip service; maybe they’re just going with the flow, but he says, “But it maybe *seems like you’re coming up short*. You don’t really believe it.” So that’s our audience—primarily believers—but the writer is not convinced that everybody believes, and that’s part of his concern here. Verse 2:

For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united (mixed in) by faith in those who heard.

So the children of Israel heard good news. We talked about this last week. The good news was that God will give you the Promised Land—a land flowing with milk and honey. But the truth was not **mixed with faith**; therefore it **did not profit them**. They did not believe. The writer is saying, in the same way we have good news. We, too, have an offer of rest that we can enter into—a promise of rest. But that promise has to be mixed with faith if we are going to profit from it. It is a reminder that even though Jesus died for the sins of the world, the message is not universalism. It's not, "Everybody's in!" The truth has to be mixed with faith. There's God's part and there's our part—that's always the way it is. God's part is He has done the work, and He offers rest. Our part is we have to believe, **mixed with faith**, in order for that truth to profit us. Verse 3:

For we who have believed (the writer puts himself in there) enter that rest, just as He has said,

**"AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH,
THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST,"**

although His works were finished from the foundation of the world.

So what is he talking about there? He's saying **we who have believed enter into this rest**. When David said to the children of Israel in Psalm 95 that with belief they can enter God's rest—**My rest**—God says, there's a reminder that even though they were in the land, David was concerned that they would not enter into His rest. In other words, the land wasn't the point. The land was a picture; the land was a shadow. Are we saying today that in order to enter into God's rest, we have to all fly to Israel and enter the land? And we all understand, "Of course not!" So the land was a picture, a metaphor. David comes along with Psalm 95, *They're in the land*—David's king over the land; he's reigning over the land—but his concern is they still won't enter His rest because the rest isn't just the land; it's just a picture, a metaphor. So what is it? It's God saying, "**My rest**," which goes all the way back to Genesis 2:2 where it says the *rest of God* started all the way back at the foundation of the world. In Genesis 2:2, we're told that "*on the seventh day God rested.*" He quotes that in verse 4:

For He has said somewhere concerning the seventh day: "AND GOD RESTED ON THE SEVENTH DAY FROM ALL HIS WORKS"; and again in this passage, "THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST." (Vs. 4-5)

So here's what he's saying: *On the seventh day of creation, God rested*. Why did God rest? Was He worn out? Had he had a really hard week? God didn't rest because He was tired; He rested because the work was done. The text says that when God had completed His work, He rested. Then He placed Adam and Eve in His rest. This is essentially what defined paradise. God had done the work; once it was completed He rested, and Adam and Eve entered into that rest. This is what God has always wanted for people made in His image. But as you know the story, Adam and Eve sin; chaos enters the world, yet God still promises rest—"to enter into My rest." Was it the land? The land was just a metaphor, just a picture. David comes along hundreds of years later and he still desires for the people by faith to enter God's rest. It wasn't just the land; it was something far more

than that. Now one of the interesting parts of Genesis 2:2: When God rested is not on day 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6—each one of those days ends with, “There was morning and there was evening.” But on the seventh day, when God rested, you don’t read those words because *the rest of God* was not a day of the week. It was not one day of the week. It was a state. God had now completed the work; it was a *state of rest*, and He wanted people made in His image to enter into that rest. So the land is a picture, the day of the week is a picture, but the rest is something far more than that. Verse 6:

Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience,”

So today there remains a rest for us to enter into, but we do so by faith. We talked about this last week: *Disbelief leads to disobedience!* Whenever I don’t believe God tells the truth, then I do it my way. Whenever I don’t believe that God’s going to meet some need in my life, I do it my way. Disbelief always leads to disobedience; that’s the concern of the writer.

So verse 7: **He again fixes a certain day...**Okay, there it is! **He again fixes a certain day**—a day of rest. What day is that? Well, it’s *today!* Oh, it’s Sunday. Last night I said, “It’s today,” and they said, “Oh, it’s Saturday.” This has been a longstanding debate: Is it Saturday or is it Sunday? Are we still under the Sabbath of the old covenant? Or is Sunday, the new covenant Sabbath? Answer: “Neither...Neither!” This has nothing to do with whether or not you mow your lawn on Saturday or Sunday; it has nothing to do with whether or not a business is open or closed on a Saturday or Sunday; it has nothing to do with whether you have worked the fields on a Saturday or Sunday; it has nothing to do with that! The Sabbath rest today is *today!* Ask me on Tuesday; I’ll say, “It’s today!” Ask me on Friday, I’ll say, “It’s today!” It’s not a day of the week; that was just a metaphor; it’s just a picture. It’s not a piece of ground; it was just a metaphor—a picture. Ultimately it is a state to enter into the *rest of God*. That’s what he’s saying: “What day is it?” “It’s today!” Verse 7:

He again fixes a certain day, (what day?) “Today,” saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before,

**“TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE,
DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS.”**

For if Joshua had given them rest, He (God) would not have spoken of another day after that. (Vs. 7-8)

So **Joshua** is the Hebrew version of the name Jesus. So Jesus is the Greek version. The Hebrew version of the exact same name is Joshua, and it reminds us that Joshua in the Old Testament was a type or a picture of the Messiah to come, a picture of the Jesus to come. So what did Joshua do? Joshua led them into the land of promise. They claimed the land. But God still promised that day of rest was yet to come. So what he’s saying is, “If entering and possessing the land was the rest, then there would be no reason to say there’s still another day of rest coming, unless the land was merely a metaphor, a picture. Just like the day of the week is a picture, a shadow of the ultimate fulfillment to come. Verse 9:

So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God.

Now that phrase **Sabbath rest** is actually one word in Greek. Most scholars think the writer of Hebrews made up the word. It's not found anywhere else—this is the only place it is found—and like a preacher, he's making up words. It doesn't say that there is a Sabbath *day*; it says there is a Sabbath *rest*. So what is the Sabbath rest that remains for the people of God today? It's not a piece of land; it's not a day of the week; those were just shadows; they were just pictures. What is it? Verse 10:

For the one who has entered His rest (how did he do that?) has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His.

There it is right there—verse 10! This is the main theme of the gospel all throughout the New Testament. Who is it that enters into God's rest by faith? It's the one who ceases from his or her works and enters into *God's rest*. So what is the Sabbath about today? It's about not working. What does that mean? It has nothing to do whether or not you mow your lawn on a Sunday. It has nothing to do with whether or not your business is open or closed on a Sunday. It has nothing to do with whether or not you are working the fields on a Sunday. It has nothing to do with that. Sunday is not the new covenant Sabbath. It has nothing to do with that. What does it have to do with? The idea of **works** is used consistently throughout the New Testament as defining those things we're doing to somehow try to merit favor with God—efforts of self-righteousness, religious activity, things we're trying to do to make ourselves good enough for God. The world is full of religion. Religion taps into our desire to be our own god. I want to do it myself; I want to make myself righteous; I want to make myself spiritual; I want to measure up on the basis of my own efforts. But religion is oppressive; religion is damaging; religion is full of hopelessness and despair because every day you are reminded that you're actually just a loser that will never measure up to the standard before a holy God.

I have conversations with people all the time who have been devastated and damaged by religion. With all their hearts they sincerely desire to figure out some way to stand right before a holy God, but again and again and again they're reminded that, "You're just a loser that will never measure up," and at some point people just check out, just like they did in the first century. "I stand no chance of ever standing right before a holy God." We know from the book of Hebrews what the work is that God completed—the fulfillment of a promise that at a point in time, the Creator God of the universe took on human flesh. He blazed a trail of salvation by conquering sin and death once and for all. As the ultimate High Priest, He offered Himself as the ultimate sacrifice for sin to make propitiation for sin. Chapter 1 said *to make purification for sin*. He was buried; He rose again; He returned to the Father and what did He do? We learned this in Chapter 1: He sat down. The priest was never allowed to sit because their job was never done, because it was only a foreshadowing of the promise of One who would ultimately pay the price for sin. Jesus uttered on the cross, "It is finished!" When He rose from the dead, He returned to the Father and the great High Priest sat down! Mission accomplished; paid in full! What did He do at the right hand of the Father? He rested. He created *the rest of God* that God has always wanted for people made in His image. How do we enter into that rest? By faith! We cease from our own self-righteous works. We give up our own attempts to merit favor with God through religious activity, and in brokenness and humility we acknowledge the only hope we have is what Jesus did for us. We enter into the finished work of Christ. This is a consistent message throughout the New Testament. We're going to throw a couple of verses on the screen just to remind ourselves of this message:

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. (*NASB, Ephesians 2:8-9)

...not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.
(*NASB, Titus 3:5)

But to the one who does not work but believes.... (Some people say belief is a work. It's not a work; read the verse) **the one who believes does not work but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness.** (*NASB, Romans 4:5)

But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. (*NASB, Romans 11:6)

One more: **....nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.** (*NASB, Galatians 2:16)

We could do this all morning. This is the theme of the New Testament. This is verse 10. There is a *Sabbath rest*. "Is it a piece of ground?" "No, it's not!" "Is it a day of the week?" "No, it's not!" Those were just shadows or pictures. But ultimately Sabbath rest is when we rest from our own attempts at self-righteousness and we simply rest in what God has done for us through Jesus. Sometimes people will say to me, "How come you don't keep the Sabbath?" Answer: "I keep it every day." What a shame just to keep one day of the week. Ask me on Tuesday, I'll say, "It's today!" I rest in the finished work of Jesus on the cross *today*. Ask me on Friday, I'll say, "It's today!" I rest in the finished work of Jesus on the cross. It has nothing to do with mowing your lawn, opening your business, or working in the field. It has to do with resting in what Jesus has done for us on the cross. There is a Sabbath rest. Verse 11:

Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall through *following* the same example of disobedience.

Now clearly **rest** is not automatic. It's not even automatic for believers. That's why he says, **"...be diligent; work really hard at resting."** There are those who have never trusted Christ. They need to believe this is true. Perhaps they've been used and abused and beat up by religion and need to hear, "That's not what it's about." But it's also possible for those of us who have trusted Christ to still be miserable because we don't rest in the finished work of Jesus on the cross. The enemy comes along and he whispers in your ear, "You're a loser; you're a failure; you'll never measure up. Who do you think you are that God just hands out some kind of a salvation as a gift? You've got to be kidding me. God probably is so annoyed that you're in His presence because you're a loser." How many lies does the enemy whisper in our ears and we're anxious; we're fearful; we're hopeless, and we're despairing because we are not *diligent to rest*.

On my best days, but especially on my worst days, I need to be diligent to rest. At the end of the day when I've blown it and I've messed up, and I know I have, and I feel the guilt and the disappointment of that, it's in that moment I have to remember that I do not stand right before God on the basis of my performance, on the basis of my ability to be good, on the basis of my self-righteousness. I stand right in the presence of God on the basis of what Jesus did for me on the cross. In those moments I have to be disciplined to be diligent to rest and know that no matter what's going on, I'm going to be okay. Not because of what I have done, but because of what Jesus has done for me. No matter how painful, no matter how hard, no matter how confusing life gets,

nobody can take that away from me! And I know in my worst moments, I'm going to be okay, and my future is glorious, and I rest in that!

Can I come to the end of a day where I've blown it, biffed it, and disappointed God and myself again and still be at rest? Answer: "Yes!" ...*resting in the finished work of Jesus on the cross*. I need to be diligent to rest because when I rest, when I think that way, when I remember what's true, that is the most likely scenario where I'm going to be repentant, where I'm going to confess, where I'm going to do it differently tomorrow—because I remember again who I am in Christ! Verse 12:

For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. (Vs. 12-13)

In other words, **Him with whom we will be accountable**. So the Bible is not just words on a page. It's a living, breathing book. It's the God-breathed Word of God. God takes His words with His Spirit and He penetrates and He judges and He sorts out, and He presents us naked. That's literally what it says—naked before a Holy God—the One to Whom we will give an account. For some people that is an absolutely terrifying thought. For some people they will avoid the book because the book terrifies them because it penetrates and it judges; and it discerns and it sorts out; and it presents us naked before a Holy God. But for those of us who believe, it is where we find the truth. It's where we find grace and mercy. It's where we find relief from the bondage of religion and enter into the rest of God. It's where we find guidance; it's where we find life. When we understand the truth about God's rest, I am not terrified to be presented naked before a holy God because I know I stand in the rest—the finished work of Jesus on the cross. It's the living, active Word of God that gives me life, that gives me hope, that gives me a future, that gives me what I need to rest in my most difficult moments in life. Verse 14:

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens (meaning back to the Father to be seated), **Jesus the Son of God** (that's His humanity and His deity), **let us hold fast our confession** (our statement of faith, what we believe). **For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence** (boldly) **to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.** (Vs. 14-16)

When we go through the most difficult moments of life, we cry out not to a god who is so abstract and disconnected we have no sense that he understands what we are going through. That's not who He is. It's the One who actually took on human flesh. As remarkable as that may seem, the God of the universe actually became one of us—and He walked on this earth. He knows our struggle; He knows our pain; He knows our trials and our temptations; He knows what it means to be betrayed, to be brokenhearted, to grieve. He knows the struggles of life on this earth. He's been used and abused; He's been tortured and He's been executed. He's not unaware of the suffering and the pain of this life. And yet because we rest in God's rest—we rest in the finished work of Jesus—in my hour of need I don't come before God with great hesitation and fear. I come boldly; I come confidently. This is the God who loves me; this is the God who saved me; this is the God who's experienced the struggle and the pain that I'm going through. I come boldly and confidently into

the presence of God, and in my hour of need I find grace and mercy. I find what I need to get me through another day!

There is a *Sabbath rest*. It's not a day of the week; it's not a piece of ground. It's a Person. It's a Person who did for me what I could not do for myself—and He offers it freely as a gift! If mixed with faith, I believe and enter into His rest. In my most painful, my most disappointing, my most devastating moments of life, I come to One who knows my struggle; He knows my pain; He knows what it's like to walk on this earth. He has walked the walk; He has been devastated and tortured and executed. I come to One who knows what I'm going through, and I come confidently and boldly into His presence, and in my hour of need, I find grace and mercy. There I rest. No matter how horrible it gets, I find my place of rest that will be enough to get me through one more day with the promise that one day my future will be more glorious than I could possibly describe. Sin and death do not win. The story doesn't end here, and the future is glorious!

There's got to be some here with us this morning who have never experienced new life in Christ. Perhaps you've just never understood it. Maybe you've been up to your eyebrows in religious activity, in attempts at self-righteousness. Maybe you're one of those who's just been used and abused by religion. You walked away because you just couldn't take it anymore. You never really understood that that's not what God is asking of you. He's just asking you, by faith, to believe that Jesus did for you what you could never do for yourself. He's just inviting you, by faith, to enter that rest, to experience the forgiveness of sin, and to experience a relationship with God. I would invite you this morning, to enter into that rest. What day is the Sabbath day? Why it's *today*! Why would you wait? Why would you wait until tomorrow? Why wouldn't you enter that rest today? I want to close in prayer; then we are going to give you a little bit of quiet time just to talk to God. You make the decision, and then we'll close with the final song.

Our Father, it's really just so hard to comprehend that the God of the universe actually took on human flesh to make a way of salvation, to conquer sin and death once and for all, to make payment for sin, and to simply offer it freely as a gift. Lord, we've been reminded that truth has to be mixed with faith. We have to choose to believe that's true to enter into Your rest. Lord, I know there are those here this morning who have never experienced that rest for their tired and weary souls. God, for them may today be their day of Sabbath rest. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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Christ is Enough

Hebrews 4:1-16

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Opening Discussion

1. How would you describe the condition of your inner self this past week? What were the dominant emotions? If you were to describe your inner self, on most days, like a weather report, what would it be? Why is this?
2. What do you think is the relationship between your emotions (weather report) each week and your faith?

Bible Study

1. Do a quick review of Hebrews 3. What are the consequences of unbelief?
2. Read Hebrews 4:1-11. Compare with Jesus' words in Matthew 11:28-30. What does Jesus offer and what does that mean?
3. What is the writer of Hebrews concerned with in 4:1,2? How does that relate to us today?
4. What is meant by "My rest?" What does the writer of Hebrews connect that phrase with from Genesis? Why did God rest?
5. What is the Sabbath rest the writer refers to? Is it land? Is it a day of the week? Notice especially verse 10.
6. How does verse 10 line up with the following passages?
 - a. Eph. 2:8,9
 - b. Titus 3:5 (KJV)
 - c. Romans 4:5
 - d. Romans 11:6
 - e. Gal. 2:16
7. Based on your answers to questions #5 and #6, what is the Sabbath day today in the New Covenant?

8. Read Hebrews 4:12-13. How does the writer describe the Word of God? What does this have to do with belief? Based on what we just discussed concerning the Sabbath rest, should verses 12,13 comfort us or terrify us? Why?

9. Read Hebrews 4:14-16. Why should we be able to find rest in our hour of need according to these verses? Do these verses imply smooth sailing or rest in the midst of the storm?

Application

1. Do you experience a Sabbath rest in your soul regardless of the circumstances? Why or why not? If not, what is lacking according to this text?

2. What are some practical steps you can take to experience Sabbath rest on a daily basis? What are the major barriers for you?