

“There Remains a Sabbath Rest”
Hebrews 4:1-13

Introduction: As the author to the Hebrews exhorted us last week, we are all to be striving forward to reach the eternal kingdom of God. Paul says that the Christian life is like a race which is being run, with all of us endeavoring to reach the finish line. It is a race that we are called to run well. We cannot stop running. We cannot go backward. Nor can we turn to the left side or the right. We must move forward. It is a race that we are to seek to win. We are to run with all of our might towards the goal, holding nothing back. But it is also a race that we will not have finished, nor should we consider ourselves as having finished it, until we have reached the finish line. That finish line is in heaven, it is through the gates of the eternal kingdom of God. And we will not have reached that goal until our lives are over.

But the author has also told us that we cannot run this race, nor finish it, in our strength. We need help. And God has supplied this help. There is One who has gone before us. There is One who has run the race and finished, and He has entered into His rest. He is now in heaven, enthroned over all of the Creation as her Lord and King. The author to the Hebrews tells us that in His victory, our victory is assured, in His finishing the race, we shall finish it, if we but put our trust in Him. That One, of course, is the Lord Jesus Christ, the One who took upon Himself the obligation to guarantee that the requirements of the Covenant of Grace would be fulfilled for us and in us. He would provide what we need to enter heaven. And He would also change us to make us conform to His image of righteousness. In doing this, He accomplishes what Moses could not do for the Old Covenant people of God. He brings us into the promised rest of God. Moses, as a picture of the redemption of Christ, led the people of Israel out of Egypt to the Promised Land. But he was not able to bring the people in. This was not so much his fault, as it was the fault of the people. They rebelled against God, even though they had seen His wonderful works for forty years in the wilderness. As a result, they did not enter the land, because they did not believe, they did not trust that God would do what He had promised. The author to the Hebrews warns us that we should not do what they did, we should not doubt the promises of God. Christ has entered into His rest. He now stands ready with the door open calling to us to enter into heaven through Him. And we must press forward into that rest, lest the door forever close on us, and we are left standing in the outer darkness.

This morning, the Spirit of God tells us that,

If we are to enter into the promised rest of God, we must believe and persevere in Christ.

I. First, the author continues his sermon to the Hebrews with a warning. “Therefore, let us fear lest, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you should seem to have come short of it. 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 by faith in those who heard.”

A. He begins by repeating what we saw last week, the warning to “beware,” beware of

turning aside.

1. As long as we live, there is the possibility of going two directions.
 - a. As Paul tells us in his illustration of the race, if you are going to win, you must constantly move forward, and not allow yourself to go back.
 - b. We must press forward into the kingdom. If we are not pressing forward, then we are going the wrong way, we are actually going backward, and if we go backward, we will not end at the finish line that we had hoped for.

2. He says therefore that we must fear. We must fear lest, while there is an opportunity, while there is the hope of entering the promised rest, we should fall short, as the Israelites did.
 - a. The Jews who left Egypt had a very promising future. The Lord had delivered them through many wonderful works. He showed Himself to be strong on their behalf, and He greatly magnified His name through what He had done for them.
 - b. God had declared that He was fully ready to bring them into the land of promise, into the land which flows with milk and honey, a land which is described as the garden of God, a garden which is watered from heaven.
 - c. But yet they failed to enter. Seeing the wonders of God was not enough. Having the good promises held out to them was not enough. Even beginning down the path toward receiving those promises was not enough. They utterly failed to enter and were destroyed.
 - d. The Spirit tells us that we should fear as well, for we might fail!

- B. But what was the problem, what kept them from entering the promised rest? If we know what it was that they did wrong, then perhaps we can avoid it. Well, we are told what the problem was: it was a lack of faith.
 1. We need to remember that for the most part, the Christian life, in any of its dispensations, is a life of faith. It is a life of trusting in the Word of God.
 - a. The author to the Hebrews will tell us this in chapter 11, verse 1, where he writes, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."
 - b. In the Old Covenant economy, there were things which could be seen. There was the Tabernacle, and the Temple. There were the priests and the sacrificing of animals, for the forgiveness of sins.
 - c. But yet even in this very visible and concrete religious system, there was still the need of faith. They still had to believe that God was and that He was a rewarder of those who sought Him.
 - d. The author will go on to show us that anyone who ever gained the approval of God, did so through faith.
 - e. But how much more true is this today? How much more true is it in the New Covenant system? There are some things which He has given us which can be seen. He has given to us men to govern His church and to preach and teach His Word. He has given to us a system of worship. And He has given to us the sacraments, which are visible signs of an invisible grace. But this is actually very little compared to what they had.

- f. And when you add on top of this the blinding influence of science, as it is taught to our society today through the eyes of the evolutionists, how much more the visible glory of God is hidden from men.
 - g. There are many today who look at these things and don't see God in them at all. All they see are the bare outward elements, without the inward reality. There are even many in the church who overlook the significance of these things. They live as though these things were instituted by man, and not God. And so they neglect them as well.
 - h. How much more do we need faith that we might take hold of God? We need enough for us to be assured that the things of God which we cannot see, are real, and enough to live, banking our lives on them.
2. They had good news preached to them, "but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard." The point is that we have had good news preached to us as well, and unless it is united in our hearts with faith, it will only profit us as much as it did them.
- a. The knowledge of God and of His Christ, the knowledge of the Gospel, is the most precious and valuable knowledge on earth. It is more valuable than all other knowledge out together. If you were to earn a thousand PhDs, in every field of learning, and were to become the most knowledgeable person on earth, what would you really gain in the end, if you were still ignorant about the plan of salvation?
 - b. The knowledge of the world is only useful while we are here. But the knowledge of Christ holds out a promise, not only for this life, but also for the one which is coming.
 - c. The forgiveness of sins is by far the most precious thing we can receive. With it comes the eternal kingdom of God and our everlasting happiness in it. Without it comes the eternal lake of fire, with not a moments rest in it for the rest of eternity.
 - d. We must believe the Word of God and act upon it. It must be united in our hearts with faith, if this good news will do us any more good than it did them. If they had believed God, they, like Abraham, would have entered into God's eternal kingdom, into the reality behind the shadows and pictures. We also, if we believe in the Christ who is revealed in the pictures, will enter into that rest.

II. And this is what the author tells us next. "For we who have believed 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."

- A. God's rest, that which the Gospel promises, may only be entered into through faith. And those who have believed in God are entering into it.
 - 1. I want you to take note of the tenses of the verbs here.
 - a. Notice that he says that those who *have believed, enter* that rest.
 - b. Those who believed is in the past tense. It refers to those who have heard the good news and have responded. It has already happened.
 - c. But notice what tense "enter" is in. It is in the present tense. If something is in the present tense, then it describes something which is going on now, which is

not yet completed. Those who believed have not yet entered that rest, but they are in the process of entering.

- d. This process begins when you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. The fact that you believe in Him means that you have already been united to Him by the Spirit of God, and His life is now yours. The moment that union takes place, and you are in Christ, then you also begin to enter into that rest. You begin in principle.
 - e. But you do not enter fully into it. You will not actually do that until the Lord sends His angels to bring you into your heavenly rest at the end of your life. And God promises you, that if you believe in His Son, and serve Him with all your heart, for all your days, that when you do lay down to sleep the sleep of death, He will send His angels to gather you to Himself.
 - f. You are now entering that rest, if you are trusting Christ. If you had already entered it, there would be no need for the author to exhort you and further. You would already be there.
- B. But this rest that the author has been speaking about, he now explains.
1. This is the rest of God, that which He entered into when He finished His work of Creation.
 2. The author writes, “For He has thus said somewhere concerning the seventh day, ‘And God rested on the seventh day from all His works’” (v. 4).
 3. The Bible tells us that when God created the world, all the beauty that we see, He did so in six days, and rested on the seventh.
 4. Now God did not need six days to make the things which He did. He could have done so in a moment. But He did it in this way to teach us. He wanted to give us a pattern of how long we should work.
 5. And when God rested on the seventh day, we are not to think that He was somehow exhausted and needed to rest after the great exertion that He put forth, for the Lord, in His infinite power, made the heavens and the earth with infinite ease.
 6. Rather, God rested on the seventh day, and sanctified that day to show us that we should also rest every seventh day, after the six days of work, and that we should consecrate that day to Him, to worship Him and to give Him glory.
 7. But that rest of God, that seventh day, was also to teach us another lesson. It was held out to us from the very beginning to show us that there was an ultimate rest toward which all were to strive, that we should strive to enter into God’s eternal rest, so that we might rest from our labors.
 8. God, as it were, holds out to us a picture of that eternal rest which He promises as a reward for our faithfulness to Him. At the very beginning, He was pointing to the very end, the very goal of all things.
 9. Now, this was what was He held out to Adam. And if Adam had passed this test in the garden, he would have eventually entered into God’s rest, at the end of time, along with the whole human race.
 10. But when he failed, he made it impossible, not only for himself, but for all who were to be born into his family, to ever enter into God’s rest. The fact that his fall

had these results is vividly illustrated for us in the failure of the Israelites to enter into the land of Promise.

III. But again the author shows us, as he does throughout the whole book, that there is One who has come and has reopened the door of opportunity for us. It did not close forever with Adam. It did not close forever with the failure of the Israelites to enter the land. And even when they finally reached that land, which was held out to them as a picture of the heavenly rest, they found that it had not yet closed upon them either. There was yet the possibility of entering God's rest. And this is what he now argues. He continues, "Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience, He again fixes a certain 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.'"

A. He tells us that God's plan has not been thwarted. His purpose in eternity to have an elect people through whom He would reveal His glory forever has not been set aside. There is still the possibility of entering His rest, while it is still called today.

1. This possibility still exists because God is gracious, and He has willed the salvation of a multitude which no man can number. This is the only reason why the day of salvation still exists for anyone.
2. Adam forfeited any right to it, for himself and everyone else.
3. The children of Israel, who had the good news preached to them, failed to enter into it because of their disobedience.
 - a. And I want to note here briefly that the fruit of unbelief will always be disobedience to the commandments of God.
 - b. When you truly believe, you will obey. But when you really do not believe, disobedience will be the inevitable result.
4. But even though these failed, the author says that there is still a day of salvation, an opportunity to be saved and to enter into God's rest.
 - a. This opportunity even existed, he says, for the people who were in the land of Promise. But weren't they in the promised rest of God already? No. They were only brought into the picture. They needed even then to persevere in faith in God's Messiah, if they were to enter the true rest of God.
 - b. Joshua was not able to bring them into the promised rest of God. If he had, David, who lives some 400 years later, would not have spoken concerning another day after that.
 - c. Why wasn't Joshua able to bring the people into the promised rest of God? It was because he personally was not meant to. Joshua was but a type of the One who would do so.
 - d. The name "Joshua" is the Hebrew name of Jesus. They are actually the same name. Some of you here use the King James version of the Bible. If you look in your Bibles, you will see the name Jesus in verse 8, instead of Joshua.
 - e. The author writes, "For if Jesus had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that."
 - f. Joshua was but a picture of Christ. He foreshadowed to the Jews what the

coming Messiah would do once He came, namely, bring them into the true rest of God.

- B. But in order for anyone to enter into that rest, there must be some basis for it. There must be some *just* reason why God still offers it to them.
1. God cannot simply give any sinner what they don't deserve without an adequate basis. He must have a just ground to offer this opportunity to enter into His rest.
 2. And that is exactly what He does in the next two verses. "There remains therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the One who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His" (vv. 9-10).
 - a. God has been telling us through David that a rest remains, but He has not yet revealed to us why. Now He does.
 - b. First he tells us that there yet remains a Sabbath rest. The word literally means a Sabbath Day. The Sabbath Day is a picture to us of heaven, even as the land of Promise was. This day yet remains as a type of what we will ultimately receive, because the possibility of entering God's rest yet remains.
 - c. And this Sabbath rest yet remains, even though Adam and his children failed so miserably, because of the work of our Great High Priest, who has overcome death, hell and the grave, and has passed into the heavens in order to appear now before God on our behalf.
 - d. A Sabbath remains to the people of God as a sign of the rest which Jesus will bring us into if we hold fast to Him and continue with diligence to enter into His rest.
 - e. I would encourage you to come this evening as we finish out this section of Scripture to see what it is that Christ has done to bring us into this rest.
 - f. But on the basis of what we have seen, I would like to ask you this one simple question, Knowing that there is a possibility of entering into God's rest through Jesus Christ, are you entering into it? Do you show that you are through the power of a changed life? A life which is dedicated to the Savior's kingdom and glory?
 - g. If that is not the case with you, I invite you now on behalf of Christ, to be reconciled to God through Him. Jesus says to you what profit is there even if you should gain the whole world and lose your own soul? Your soul, and its everlasting well-being is more important than anything else you could ever possess. Make sure that it is safe, by running to Christ this morning. Christ will turn no one away who truly comes to Him with all his heart. Ask the Lord to change your heart this morning, and to enable you to believe. He is graciously inclined to save. Amen.