

The Book of Hebrews

Part 9: The Sabbath Rest (Heb. 4:3-11)

I. Rest: Quieting the Inner Storm

In the last session we looked at the not-so-subtle warning to the reader about repeating the tragic mistakes of their ancestors. There are real consequences that come when we leave the shelter of grace.

We've been exploring this wondrous reality of grace throughout the letter. This "grace" is the truth of the Messiah, Jesus, who is our High Priest. He stands in our place and reveals who we are. He is the "radiance of God" who also redeems our broken perspectives of the Father. Jesus is the Word and Voice of God.

In all of this, the letter calls us to have "*pistis*" in this message of grace, a word for confidence and fidelity. This takes us back to where we left off...

1 Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it. 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 by faith in those who heard. 3 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.

(Hebrews 4:1-3)

The urgent message and invitation of the letter is that we don't miss out on a "rest" being offered to our souls. God's will for our lives is that we would *enter this rest*. There are many aspects of "God's will," but this is foundational to everything else. In fact, 90% of this letter is about this. Every other aspect of God's will (as it affects our moral and relational lives) flows out of this.

The Greek word behind our English term "rest" is *katapausis*. It was often used for the calming down of winds.

The root word in *katapausis* is *pauo*—which simply means "stop" or "cease." Ironically, one of the first times *pauo* shows up in the Bible is in Luke 8 when Jesus commands the wind and waves to **stop**.

22 Now on one of those days Jesus and His disciples got into a boat, and He said to them, "Let us go over to the other side of the lake." So they launched out. 23 But as they were sailing along He fell asleep; and a fierce gale of wind descended on the lake, and they began to be swamped and to be in danger. 24 They came to Jesus and woke Him up, saying, "Master, Master, we are perishing!" And He got up and rebuked the wind and the surging waves, and they stopped

(pauo), and it became calm. 25 And He said to them, "Where is your faith (*pistis*)?" They were fearful and amazed, saying to one another, "Who then is this, that He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey Him?"
(Luke 8:22-25)

It is significant that this passage utilizes the root word for "rest" right after Jesus literally napping in complete rest during a dangerous storm. Jesus unlocks the meaning of this concept here, showing us how we're called to be still internally, even when dangers are raging all around.

The book of Hebrews in its call for rest was written to people facing real dangers. They were encountering persecution and judgment from the culture around them. They were fatigued and weary. This was on top of whatever personal guilt or struggles were tempting them to go back to the law of Moses to appease their conscience and help them feel right with God.

These circumstances and feelings were like storm winds. The winds of inward accusation and outward pressures all blow against the message in which we're called to have faith/*pistis* . . . **the truth of our sonship and of God's good and precious Fatherhood.**

In the New Testament, there are several other accounts involving storms that mention winds that are "contrary" (Matthew 14:24, Mark 6:48, Acts 27:4). These all speak of anything that "contradict" this message.

In the case of Jesus, he knew who he was and who his Father was. Therefore, he was asleep in the middle of the storm. When he rose up to silence the winds, it came from this place of inner peace. The voice of truth within him overcame the power of "contrary" voices around him!

- **Note:** Authority in our own prayers and declarations needs to come from this same place of inner rest. There is a power released when we don't fear the danger around us. In fact, there are times our prayers do not seem to be answered right away partly because we are being called to first step into this inner peace *during* the storm.

These storm stories were written for us. The letter to the Hebrews is simply giving the command to take hold of it. Our souls are called to enter this rest.

But this rest doesn't just come from meditation or some spiritual/religious "law." True rest is found in the true Gospel:

"For indeed we have had good news preached to us ... we who have believed (that good news) enter into rest..."

It is faith—*pistis*—in the good news of our redemption that brings true rest. This is the revelation Hebrews is trying to unfold in our hearts. In this next part of the chapter this will become even clearer as we reminded of the "finished work" of Christ.

II. "Shabbat" & Trust

When the writer says, *"although His works were finished from the foundation of the world,"* a new depth of revelation is being presented to us...

4 For He has said somewhere concerning the seventh day: *"And God rested on the seventh day from all His works";* **5** and again in this passage *"They shall not enter my rest."*

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, **7** 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."*

(Hebrews 4:4-7)

The phrase *"His works were finished"* is connected to the seventh day of creation when God *"rested...from all his works."* The author is showing us that entering into rest is intimately tied to the story of God resting on the seventh day in Genesis 1 & 2.

In that part of scripture, God's rest was not because he was tired and needing to rejuvenate. We learn elsewhere God *never* grows tired or weary (Isaiah 40:28). This particular rest was a celebration of the work he had finished. God looked at his creative work and called everything "very good," a statement of satisfaction. So, the seventh day was about enjoying and taking in the beauty of an accomplished work.

This idea of seventh day for rest ended up in the law Moses delivered to the Hebrew people:

3 For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest, a holy convocation. You shall not do any work; it is a sabbath to the Lord in all your dwellings. **(Leviticus 23:3)**

The root word for "Sabbath" has the same meaning as the root word for "rest" in the New Testament. It means "stop" or "cease." On the Sabbath, people were required to *stop (sabat)* their work. In a world that worked seven days a week, this was a way for them to be set apart and demonstrate to the nations that our own hands do not provide for us. The Sabbath communicated a message of trust.

This root word is used in Psalm 46, a famous poem about being still and trusting God. Interestingly, it mentions storms and raging seas as well...

9 He makes wars to cease (*"sabat"*) to the end of the earth...

Psalm 46:9

The Sabbath in the law was used to point to the sovereign power and authority of God. It communicated the importance of faith—trust. On top of this, the call to take off work brought mental, emotional, and physical benefits, which the human race had not embraced at that point in time.

However, there was something much deeper than just taking a day off and trusting God with our time and provision. We see this developed in the next part of Hebrews 4:

8 For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that. 9 So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. 10 For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His.
(Hebrews 4:8-10)

This is continuing to refer to the Promised Land/Wilderness narrative, telling us that the Promised Land was pointing ahead to the Gospel; and that trusting the Gospel means entering into rest. On the other hand, disbelieving the Gospel means entering a spiritual wilderness.

- Amazingly, the name “*Jesus*” comes from the same Hebrew word “*Joshua*,” the One who led the people into the Promised Land after the generation under Moses passed away.

III. The Number Seven

Seven becomes a significant and meaning-filled number all throughout scripture. The first time it appears in the creation story shows us that it has to do with completion, perfection, and rest.

But like the Sabbath itself, this number was pointing to something greater. God’s work of creation in Genesis was prophetically pointing to his greater work of salvation—the making of a new creation.

According to the New Testament, we are that new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17).

When Christ died on the cross, he cried out the words, “*It is finished!*” (John 19:30).

When we take the Bible as a whole, combining Jesus’s words with Hebrews 4 and the beginning of Genesis, we see that Jesus was saying the new creation was finished. In other words, God finished the work of our redemption at the cross. This is confirmed by the image of Jesus our High Priest sitting down at the right hand of God. As we’ve explained before, it is only when the priest’s work is done that he could sit down.

The work of our salvation is finished. Our sins are forgiven and canceled. The barriers between us and God are gone. We are holy children of God right now... God invites us to *enter into* his celebration of this reality. We do this *by faith*. We do not see it, yet it is the truth we’re called to pay close attention to.

This is the call of the Christian life and the urgent message behind the book of Hebrews. This is the will of God for our lives. This is the “too good to be true” news that reflects the free gift of the Promised Land to the original Hebrews.

So, today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts! We need to keep our heart soft and open to this reality. We need to have faith in it, holding to it, even when contrary winds are around us.

Just as God rested from his work, we are to rest from any “work” to become more holy, righteous, or accepted by God.

IV. The Seriousness of Rest

The writer continues:

**11 Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience.
(Hebrews 4:11)**

Again, the writer is speaking to people who come from a deep tradition of honoring the law of Moses. A huge part of the law was the Sabbath Day. There were grave consequences if the people did not adhere to this day off. The entire exile of Israel into the hands of the Babylonians was due to the fact that they neglected the Sabbath (see 2 Chronicles 36:20-21).

Why would not taking days off come with such harsh consequences?

While this sounds harsh, the warning is what the book of Hebrews is trying to wake us up to. Joy and rest are the serious business of heaven. Heaven is filled with joy and rest! To neglect this is to invite non-heavenly realities into your life.

To live in striving, in self-righteousness, self-promotion, and self-effort is to engage in self-destruction. It's to welcome *hell* into your life. So, as the apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:6, the Old Testament is given as prophetic warning pointing to this greater reality.

These verses explain that it was never about literal Sabbath day. That outward “law” was pointing to something deeper.

Practicing a “shabbat” and focusing on family and spiritual renewal is a wonderful principal for life; however, it is not at all a requirement or even the real meaning of the Sabbath. The point is not taking off.

Colossians 2:16, Galatians 4:10, and many other verses make it clear that Saturday (or Sunday) is not some holy day you are required to take off. This is man's religious ways to bring people under the law (and force them to come to church).

Jesus made this even clearer when he said, ***"The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath"*** (Mark 2:27).

In reality, the "Sabbath Rest" is something we are called to enter into *all the time*. **It is a realm of faith where you enter into God's celebration over your salvation.**

God is celebrating your forgiveness and innocence. You are free from shame and brokenness. You are called to rest with an inner quiet over the fact that you are a delightful son or daughter and that God is good, and he cares for you as the best Father imaginable.

This is our foundation. And this is what we are to "diligently labor" for.

All good fruit in our lives comes this foundation. In fact, the writer will spend twelve chapters focusing on this before getting into what people consider the basics of the Christian life in the last chapter (good deeds, hospitality, faithfulness in marriage, freedom from greed, worship and prayer, etc.). This is because all these other things flow this truth.

Follow-up Encounter:

Prepare to take communion.

Ask the Lord where there is a lack of "rest" in your soul... Ask him how this might connect with either how you see yourself or how you see God (or both)... Spend some time inquiring about this, meditating on it, and even journaling about it.

*Receive the bread and the cup. By faith, declare the truth of your redemption. Declare that you are a new creation. You are a **complete** son or daughter of God. You are not halfway there. You are a fully begotten child of God, right now. Speak this out. Pray it over yourself (and others if you are in a group).*