

Christ Community Covenant Church
God has spoken; "Today – Enter the Sabbath rest"
Hebrews 4:1-14
Pastor Dave Scherrer – October 6, 2013

Breathe in me O Holy Spirit, that my thoughts may all be holy;
Act in me O Holy Spirit, that my work, too, may be holy;
Draw my heart O Holy Spirit, that I love but what is holy;
Strengthen me, O Holy Spirit, to defend all that is holy;
Guard me, then, O Holy Spirit, that I always may be holy.
Great are you, O Lord, and exceedingly worthy of praise;
Your power is immense, and your wisdom beyond reckoning. Amen
~ St. Augustine

Those who follow Jesus say that ultimate rest (satisfaction and wholeness) is found only in God through your relationship with Christ – ultimately only he satisfies. St Augustine in the fourth century said this in an eloquent way in his *Confessions*:

"You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."
~St. Augustine's Confessions

I think that we believe that – but I am not sure we know how to experience that in our lives. I know that this rest is more than feeling. It is more a place. How do we find ultimate satisfaction and rest in God and not in trying to find satisfaction through all the other desires we encounter in this world? The writer of Hebrews is building his case. Christ is pre-eminent; he is more wonderful than angels, more magnificent than the creation. He is more compelling than Moses and now we are told that *today* is important as it is the day that God has asked us to enter into His rest.

Hebrews 4:1-13

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. 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. ³ For we who have believed enter that rest, 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. ⁴ For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: “And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.”

⁵ And again in this passage he said,

“They shall not enter my rest.

⁶ Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, ⁷ 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.”⁸ For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. ⁹ So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, ¹⁰ for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. ¹¹ Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. ¹² For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

¹³ And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

This seems like a confusing passage – almost impossible to follow especially when you try to look for the flow of thought or an outline because the passage is not built around a linear argument but it is really built around a word and a series of incidences where that word is used. Rabbi's would

often draw an inference based on the analogy of words. This was common in their teaching – the practice is called *gezera shava*. The author’s audience is very used to this – they are Jewish – so it makes perfect sense to them. To us it is confusing. But we do not want to miss the point – because it is very important. The key word that everything is centered around in this passage is “REST!” Let us strive to enter that rest . . . What exactly is this rest do you think? How is it found and then once found how is it entered? That seems to be the question of the hour!

Utilizing this literary technique the author references historical events to make a case about God’s rest. It helps to look back just a little bit because this reference to ‘rest’ in history is to a very specific time that would be very familiar to the Jewish audience:

Hebrews 3:16-19

¹⁶ For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? ¹⁷ And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? ¹⁸ And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? ¹⁹ So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.

First, we have the story of Israel in the wilderness – the rest of the Promised Land was so close but they failed to enter land promised to them. The image is of Israel in the wilderness never satisfied always wandering. Deuteronomy 5 tells us that the land of Canaan was a place of rest from their enemies and also the place of rest from their slavery – so it was the place of freedom. It represented their hope and fulfillment of all God had for them. But they did not enter that land out of fear and faithlessness and they missed the rest that should have been theirs.

Then in our passage today in Hebrews 4, there is also the reference to the seventh day of creation when God rested – the Sabbath rest. This was when God rested from his work at the beginning of time. God creates the world and then he rests and declares it good. You find it in Genesis 2. Remember God cannot get tired – so how does he rest? We physically have to rest but God does not. It means that God steps back and that he was satisfied with his works so he lays it down. Rest means to truly lay something down – deep inner rest and satisfaction. Rest is not essentially the absence of endeavor; it is the end of carrying a burden.

Then there is the story of Joshua when they do enter the land – again a picture of the promised rest but after this God speaks of another day of rest. So entering into the land gives rest but not in its wholeness or fullness.

The Point: Do not miss entering God’s rest!

I think this might be one of the gospel promises that can capture the imagination of the 21st century culture. We are so busy and so frenzied and so tired. Rest is a compelling concept.

III - Death of a Salesman, a lifetime of striving and nothing to show for it, no money, no relationships, no hope, only exhaustion. And death.

Of course, people have been feeling tired and hopeless for a long time. Maybe the most brilliant Frenchman ever to live, perhaps the most brilliant man ever to live from anywhere is Blaise Pascal, the mathematician physicist, theologian and put it this way:

What is it then, that this desire and this inability proclaim to us, but that there was once in man a true happiness of which there now remain to him only the mark and empty trace, which he in vain tries to fill from all his surroundings, seeking from things absent the help he does not obtain in things present? But these are all inadequate, because the infinite abyss can only be filled by an infinite and immutable object, that is to say, only by God Himself.

Blaise Pascal, Pensees

Three things to note about God's rest

1. It can be missed
2. Realize what it is and what it is not
3. It is not earned but entered

First, understand that *it can be missed*. We have already had a couple of warnings in this little sermon. We are to pay attention so that we do not drift away from this rest. And we are to pay attention to what we have heard so that we do not fall away (3:12).

Hebrews 4:1 – 3a

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.

We can know of this land of rest, know right where it is, even find it on a map so to speak and still miss it.

We need to realize what it is and is not. **It is not** – the easy life, the comfortable life, the life without challenges or hardship or difficulty. It is not simply 'not working on Sunday.' The promised-land, the place of rest, was a place of giants, and fortified cities, and enemies, and battles to be fought and land to be conquered, it was a place of struggle and engagement not leisure and holiday – it was not a vacation destination. You may be experiencing the fullness of God's blessing and rest in this life and it may be very hard and very challenging and very difficult. We often assume that if life is hard then we are missing God's best – where in reality, just the opposite may be true.

What rest is then is the front line of God's purposes and agenda – it is entering into and experiencing the fullness of his rule and reign – his kingdom. When you are in God's rest you are entering into his lordship and his rule.

Finally, the rest of God is not earned but entered.

Heb. 4:9-10

⁹ There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God;¹⁰ for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his.¹¹ Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience.

Their example of disobedience is referring to the nation of Israel, faltering at the door of a promised place of rest and respite. We don't understand the kind of rest that the writer of Hebrews is talking about. We see rest as the result and reward of our work and our effort – we earn the break and the vacation – that is how our economy and our thinking work. Rest is earned and deserved and we are entitled to it.

But that is not how God's economy works. That was the whole point of Sabbath. It is a concrete reminder that we are not defined nor are we to find our significance by and in our work. Our good works do not make us acceptable. What is wrong with work? Nothing – but the reason or attitude or worldview for work is what gets us in trouble - **it cannot be self-justifying** – the reason we are working is to feel alright, to make ourselves acceptable. The rest that comes from this kind of formula is short lived because we know that after the vacation, we have to go back to earning our self-acceptance. We do not experience rest for the soul in this manner.

John Gerstner - Professor of Church History at Knox Theological Seminary said;

"The thing that is really separating you from God is not so much your sin but your damnable good works."

How do we enter this rest?

This is the question of the hour for us.

***Exercise of Faith,
Practice of Obedience,
Surrendering to Jesus***

The exercise of FAITH.

Heb. 4:2-3a

² For we also have had the good news proclaimed to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because they did not share the faith of those who obeyed. ³ Now we who have believed enter that rest . . .

It takes faith to enter the rest. I am going to trust God that he can deliver on his promises. It is amazing that Israel refused to obey God. They had been through the 10 plagues, crossed through the Red Sea, had been led by the fire at night, received manna as food and water from the rock – miracle after miracle. God can destroy an Egyptian army but he cannot help me to defeat a few giants. They do not want to take the risk – we have to throw ourselves on the mercy of God to enter his rest.

The practice of OBEDIENCE.

Heb. 4:6 & 7

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,

Obedience. Good works, moral behavior, righteousness – none of that saves us – it just manifests our faith, it gives evidence of it. So on the one hand they are absolutely necessary and required and not optional, but they are never meritorious – they never earn they only reveal.

Finally this rest is found in surrendering to Jesus.

Surrendering to Jesus.

"Come to me all you who are weak and heavy laden and I will give you rest."

Hebrews 4:12-14

¹² For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. ¹³ And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Don't work harder so that your rest is earned. Come to Christ and yield to the peace that surpassed understanding. For in the world we have tribulation, but we can take heart – Christ has overcome the world!

Today, go back to the fire!

This gospel is like a fire in the fireplace in the middle of the house – walk away and you get cold. You need to regularly go back to the gospel and receive again the warmth of the truth and the hope that is found in the faith and the obedience of Christ. We all have a lot of self-justification – so we have to go back to the gospel. Every time we make longer lists of what we feel we need to do to feel OK to feel right – we need to go back to the fire. And be warmed and experience the depth of his rest.

That is why we keep coming back again and again to communion – it reminds us that it is only in him we find our rest!