

# † The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

*...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)*

## **Coming to Rest (Part 2)**

*Hebrews 4:1-11*

*Hebrews 4:1-2*

*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.*

Last week I began by asking you the question, “What is rest?” And while a number of things will certainly come to mind upon pondering such a question, we turned our attention to what “rest” is in the context of Hebrews 4 and within the larger framework of the Scriptures.

This morning I intend to give you a broader outline of this text and then go back and begin to explore this issue of what it means and how we might come to the “rest” of God. There are three areas of thought, the first of which we began last week:

- I. The Reality of Rest (4:1, 3b-5, 6-9)
- II. The Requirements for Rest (4:2-3a; 10)
- III. The Responsibility to have Rest (4:11)

I know that this represents a rather complicated picture of the passage, but let us take it one point at a time and pray that we will not only come to better understand the rest of God, but also that we might come to better experience this blessed “rest” in which God would have us continually dwell.

### **I. The Reality Of Rest**

This is where we began last week – to consider what this word rest means. Please recall that “rest” as to be understood in this passage, does not refer to either a specific time or place of rest. Although heaven will certainly be a place and time of rest, the primary focus of such a time and place is not on heaven itself, but rather upon the One who occupies heaven itself. True rest is not found in a time or place, but in the Person of God, and specifically in the Person Jesus Christ. We noted that rest is not the cessation of all work, but is rather the focusing of all thought and energy elsewhere. The true and ultimate rest of the believer is not found in lying around on some cloud with a harp in our hands but is rather found in the ability to continually praise God and praise the Lamb that was slain without interruption, without the corruption of sin and with the sense of absolute joy and pleasure.

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# The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

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So, as we come to understand the reality of rest as presented to us in the text, I found it helpful to see the author as answering several questions or even potential objections that some of his first readers might have had concerning this idea of “rest” as found in the Person of Jesus Christ. For remember that for many, if not most of these believers, coming to Christ was not without its hardships and sufferings. Many had been forsaken by their families. Many had lost their jobs. Most were being ridiculed for their faith. If the promise of coming to Christ was to include rest, at least rest in the earthly understanding of the term, then these had missed it. And with the thought that they were not experiencing God’s rest because of such things, they began to assume that God’s blessing was absent. So then, perhaps Christ was not enough. Maybe they needed to add to Christ some of their previous works of the law of God. But remember, the whole point of the book of Hebrews is to show what – the superiority of Christ over all things. So then, let me take you quickly through a series of questions that are answered and show this reality of rest that is available for all who come to Jesus.

## Question 1 – What is rest?

We did go back in the Scriptures last week to answer this question, so for now, let me simply give you the definition we used – rest is a consideration, a contemplation and a celebration of the works of God. It is a finding of peace and joy when thinking about the things of God. To put another way, “rest” is living or dwelling in such a state as to daily enjoy the work of God in providing and preserving life both physically and spiritually. Thus, we noted that after six days of creating, God rested, which was not the abstinence of all work, but rather was His own considering, contemplating and celebrating in the work of creating the world and of creating man. Man was to join God in this “rest” and also live in this state so as to daily enjoy the work of God in providing for and preserving his life through God’s work of creation.

Remember that man forfeited the fullness of this rest by his act of disobedience which was revealed how (children) – by the eating of the forbidden fruit. Ever since then man has had to concern himself with both provision and preservation. While God certainly still provides and preserves man, it is not in the same manner and certainly not to man’s ultimate pleasure as the very ground that provides and preserves him with food has been cursed, keeping man from being able to enjoy the fullness of rest.

Remember than as well that of all the peoples on the face of the earth, God chose the people of Israel to be the recipients of His special blessings. And part of that special blessing was what – a lifting of the curse of the ground. In Deuteronomy 28 and in other places we learn that if Israel would obey God, then

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God will bring the increase to their land so that they could focus more attention on worshipping God rather than survival. But if they were disobedient, then the curse on the ground would continue.

Question 2 – Did Israel's disobedience nullify the promise of God's rest?

This brings us to our second question that may have well been on the hearts and minds of these first readers. Did Israel's disobedience nullify the promise of God's rest? We must look back to the end of Hebrews 3 to get this the sense that this question was a concern. We read:

***Hebrews 3:18-19***

***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 not able to enter because of unbelief.***

In other words, did the sins of the previous generation change or nullify God's promise of rest? I find this to be a most applicable thought for there are times in our lives when we may be tempted to have such thoughts. Whether it be because of the sinful state of others, or due to the sins we see so prevalent in our own lives, we may conclude that God's rest is out of reach and no longer available. Sometimes we find our lives in such a mess, our thoughts have been far from God; our lives lived for the pleasure of self or the world; or we see how the sins of others have so affected our lives we begin to wonder, "could it be that there is no hope, no peace and no rest for me?"

Beloved, rest has not departed; look with me at the repeated reality of rest. The author is emphatic that for those who will obey God, this blessed rest, this joy, this glory is here, and it is available. Read again the words of hope in our text:

***Therefore...a promise remains of entering His rest...(4:1)***

***Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it...(4:6)***

***So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God (4:9)***

What is the key word in each of these verses? "Remains." The word "remains" in each of these verses comes from the same root word in the Greek meaning "to leave behind." The idea here is that God has left this promise behind for others to partake of since Israel did not fully realize the promise. So, this rest, this state of dwelling so as to daily enjoy the providing and preserving work of God in my life is available. You see, while the question "Did Israel's disobedience nullify the promise of God?" may be legitimate, the answer is given

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# The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

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both in the positive and negative. The promise of rest remains, as we have noted. That is the positive. The negative reality is found in verse 2, verse 6, and verse 11 that can be summed up this way – only those whose lives are characterized by disobedience and disbelief nullify the promise of God’s rest for themselves. This, beloved, is a crucial point of this passage, namely that *the presence of disbelief and disobedience in our lives are indicators that we may not be entering God’s rest.* I will come back to this thought in a moment.

Question 3 – When was God’s rest made available?

Our third question, “When was God’s rest made available?” is important. Did God only promise rest to Israel as He led them out of Egypt and to the Promised Land? No, our passage actually indicates otherwise. And the end of Hebrews 3 and on to verse 5 we have Old Testament quotations from Psalm 95 and Genesis 2. Let us read these verses again –

### ***Hebrews 4:3-5***

***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. 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.”***

This may seem like a complicated passage but in reality it is quite simple. At issue is our question, “When was the promise of God’s rest made available?” If the answer is that it was made available to only those who were denied entrance into the rest of the promised land, then the rest of us might have a problem. God has not promised any in the Church the physical land of Israel as a place of rest. Remember that our promise of rest is found in the Person of Christ. So the question is, did God intend the promised land to be the ultimate reality of His rest or only a picture of it? Our text reveals that latter. In the first six days of creation the phrase, “and there was evening and morning” was present. However, in Genesis 2:2 that phrase is missing for the seventh day which means that the rest in which God entered began with the completion of the cosmos and continues on and on. Rather than beginning, or in a sense never beginning with Israel’s entrance into the promised land, God’s rest began and the completion of creation and is available to all His children.

Question 4 – Hasn’t God’s rest been realized in some degree by Israel?

A fourth potential question may have been, “Hasn’t God’s rest been realized in some degree by Israel?” The concern here would be that while that

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## The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

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disbelieving generation of Israel did not enter God's rest, haven't there been others of Israel, those under the leadership of Joshua and such, who already participated in God's rest?

This is a good question and then answer is revealed to us in a most interesting way. The most basic answer to the question is that Israel did in fact experience a part of the rest of God, but not it's fullness. How do we know this? Let us look again at our text. In verse seven, please note that the author quotes God Himself as speaking the words of Psalm 95:7-8 through David. Those words are:

***“Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.”***

The author placed an emphasis upon the word “today.” Isn't it interesting that at the time of David, a time when the kingdom of Israel was expanding and God was giving rest and peace to His people, that even then God speaks this invitation to come and enter His rest, “today.” If God had intended to David to be the one who gave His people rest, some 430 years after entrance into the Promised Land, they why did God speak this invitation to yet enter His rest?

And so the author takes it one step further back. Perhaps Moses and that generation which came out of Egypt did not enter God's rest, but assuredly then Joshua, the son of Nun, led the people of God into the rest of God. But look at the argument of Hebrews 4:8 –

***For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that.***

What is the point? Consider the great figures in Israel's history. We have already seen that Moses did not bring God's people into this ultimate rest. Nor have Joshua or David. So then, where can this rest be found? It is found only in a proper faith in the proper person, that is the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. The issue is not about being faithful to the law of Moses, or loyal to the great captains Joshua or David. The issue is simply of following Jesus Christ; of being loyal to Jesus Christ, of loving and having true faith in Jesus Christ. What was it that caused Adam and Israel and ultimately what is it that will cause any person from experiencing the fullness of God's rest – we find the answer again in Hebrews 3:18-19; 4:2, 4:6 and 4:11 – disobedience and unbelief.

Now then, in the subsequent message I intend to consider the requirements of rest – that is, to what extend do we participate in entering into this rest, not by means of our own meriting such rest, but rather by revealing that our hearts are being transformed and conformed to the image of Him who made

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## The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

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our entrance into God's rest possible. But for now, please ponder with me the root cause, the chief indicator that revealed those who were unfit for entrance into God's rest, this state of eternal joy in which one might rightly consider, contemplate and celebrate the provision and preserving power of God. What is it that robs the mind and soul of such an ability? What is it that keeps the heart hard and unmoved by the gracious and loving advances of the living God? To be sure it is disbelief and disobedience.

Should the believer, the redeemed and chosen of God, be concerned about the presence of disbelief and disobedience in his or her life? Oh that we could say, "Of course not, for the believer is secure. Or have you not heard, once saved always saved?" But again, the question is not about God's ability to save His own. The Scriptures give ample evidence to the fact that God will complete His work of salvation in those whom He has chosen. The question however is how can the "believer" be sure of his salvation? What evidences are to be present. And while we could go through a lengthy list of what a genuine believer looks like, citing proper Biblical passages to confirm such assertions, I submit to you that one of the easiest "tests" that Scripture gives for knowing that you are among the elect, destined for the eternal bliss of God's rest, is found in your response, or lack of response to expressions of disbelief and disobedience in your life.

By way of application, let us turn to another passage of Scripture that I believe reveals how the believer ought to respond to disbelief and disobedience. Do not think that the believer is actually incapable of disbelief and disobedience for he is. The question is how does the believer rightly respond to such things in his life? The passage is found in James 4:7-10. As I read through these verses, please note that there are no less than seven commands given:

1. Submit therefore to God (v. 7a).
2. Resist the devil and he will flee from you (v. 7b).
3. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you (v. 8a).
4. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and (v. 8b).
5. Purify your hearts, you double-minded (v. 8c).
6. Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom (v. 9).
7. Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you (v. 10).

Do you know what really stands out to me as I read these verses – that these responses to sin, that is various forms of disbelief and disobedience, are often found so lacking in those who say they believe. We are so busy either ignoring the presence of sin in our lives or pretending that sin has no effect up our lives

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## The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

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that we fail to respond biblically to sin at all. Do you feel remorse for entertaining the sin that you do? O that we would feel a greater sense of the weight of guilt for the corrupt things we do and say. Read again James 4:9. What does it say?

***Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom.***

The KJV actually says, “your joy into heaviness.” Doesn’t that sound strange? Should believers mourn and weep and have their joy turned to heaviness? We must take James 4 in its context. Essentially the theme of James 4 is basically how to overcome sin, that is disbelief and disobedience and experience God’s grace or rest. So then, how does verse 9 fit into the plan of things, to what exactly is it referring? The idea is that all sin, every thought of disbelief and every act of disobedience must be wept over. The truth is, every such sin will be wept over, either now in godly sorrow, or, in the life to come in eternal misery. Given the options, I would rather mourn for sin on this side of glory before it is too late.

The truth of the matter is that the Lord will not refuse to comfort the person who deeply mourns for sin, or to exalt the person who humbles himself before Him. The right response to disobedience in our lives then is painted here as a picture of repentance. If we would desire to cleanse our hands (our lives), and purify our hearts, does it not follow that we might be miserable, that is weep and mourn for such sin, such filthiness to be a part of our lives? So I ask you, do you weep and mourn over your sin, beloved, or do you just shrug your shoulders, or maybe even snicker at your behavior? Does it deeply grieve you, or are you so toughened that you can’t feel anything anymore? Our heavenly Father wants us to be sorry after our sin with a godly sorrow, a sorrow that reaches right down into the core of our soul and breaks our heart. A worldly sorrow only touches our understanding but doesn’t produce any real bereavement. Grief and mourning are distinctive emotions expressed when a tragedy has occurred. Does God not consider sin a tragedy? Something that sends people to hell surely seems the greatest of tragedies to me! So you consider your sin a tragedy for which to be miserable and for which to mourn and weep over? Remember that true repentance precedes a change of behavior. Are you truly ready to change your ways?

Consider what Jesus says in Matthew 5:4, “*Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.*” No one will ever truly appreciate the grace of God or the rest of God if he has not first mourned and wept over his sin. For

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## The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

*...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)*

God's rest to be sweet to you, you must first confess the terribly bad taste of sin that has been left in your mouth. Is your disobedience like the taste of bad milk lingering in your mouth without the relief of water to rinse it out? Have you come to that place in your life where your sinful ways bring you to your knees in sorrow and shame, begging God for forgiveness? Or do you only mechanically and without feeling tell God you are sorry - again, for your sinful choices? How do you usually feel after you sin? Unmoved? Unresponsive? No big deal at all to you? Have you convinced yourself you're a victim so you can excuse yourself from the penalty? Take a moment and think about the thought process you go through after sinning. Does any remorse show up on the scene? What was the Psalmist's response? Psalm 38:18 says,

***For I confess my iniquity; I am full of anxiety because of my sin.***

Beloved, if you want to experience the blessings of God's rest, such an experience begins by grieving over your sin. God wants you to feel something - He wants you to grieve over your sin! He wants you to mourn over your sin! Do you realize what mourning means? It means to express that grief or sorrow through either weeping or audible sounds, sobs, sighs, or silent inward grief. Does your sin leave you behaving this way? Yes, God wants us to weep over our sin! Weeping means to lament, to bewail, to express sorrow, grief or anguish by outcry; the shedding of tears. When was the last time you experienced this kind of grief for sin? When was the last time you witnessed a Christian (including yourself!) in such condition at a church service? We tend to piously close our eyes and bow our heads, whispering some short, concise prayer, perhaps asking forgiveness, but not so long as it might appear to others that we are truly grieved over some deep, dark sin for which we need cleansing, for which we long for purification and for which we desire to be set free from. Upon the conclusion of our prayer time we tend to feel quite satisfied within ourselves that we have "done business with God."

There is only one word for this – "yuck." I can't do any better than that. What a waste of time to go through such motions when so often we have little if any intention to turn from it! We must come to see our sin as God see it. Do you long, I mean really long for a revival to take place in the church? Do you know where it will begin? When each one of us will start weeping and mourning over our sins the way God intended us to. The reason why so few people are truly remorseful for sin is because no one else is remorseful. If sin is no big deal, if it doesn't warrant our remorse, then who is going to remorse over it. But no



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# The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

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matter what we think of our sin, God is still grieved. So, what kind of an example are you of true Biblical repentance? Consider Job 42:6 where he says, “*Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.*”

Now, are we to carry on and put on some kind of show when we sin? Not at all! Mourning over our acts of disobedience are not for show but are to keep us sensitive and tender to the things of God and keep our hearts in right condition to experience the rest of God. I tell you the truth, you cannot be thankful for the grace of God and not feel a sense of shame and remorse for your sin at the same time. If you do, you are taking God’s grace for granted. For the truth is this, the greater your sin appears to you, the greater God’s grace will appear to you!

So then, think about God’s grace next time you plan on dirtying your hands with your sinful disobedient ways and pray that it will keep you on the right track! Think about God’s grace the next time you are tempted to give way to your secret sins and it will give you the strength to overcome.

God’s grace and God’s rest is real. It is available to all who will receive it. And those who receive it are not those who have ceased from all sin and disobedience, but are rather those who weep and mourn for the presence of sin in their lives, asking for the grace of God to guard their hearts and minds and seeking the power of God to overcome more and more the sin that so easily entangles them in the hope that their lives might be a testimony of the salvation of God in Jesus Christ. May this be our prayer. Amen.

*Soli Deo Gloria*

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