

Text: Heb 4.3-9

Today we will return to Hebrews and work through the next several verses in Heb 4.

Some weeks ago, we got to Heb 4.2, then we got sidetracked by discussing the concept of “rest” and the comparison between the Exodus generation and the Hebrews generation (and our generation).

Now we are ready to proceed with our passage. It has a message for us in our day that is as relevant to us as it was for the Hebrews generation.

So far, we’ve emphasized the danger of missing the rest our passage is talking about. In our verses today the emphasis changes. From warning the author turns to emphasizing opportunity.

- They disobeyed. They missed out.
- You are entering. A rest remains for you.

These are words of encouragement.

When you have a major task ahead of you ... a long day’s work, especially a long day of hard physical labour, what motivates you to keep going?

Surely one motivation is the blessing of rest at the end of the day!

- When I have some hard task around my house, I think of sitting in the shade of the porch with a Seven-Up Zero (or some such refreshment).
- I think of resting there, reading a book... or enjoying the blessing of an afternoon nap...

And I can keep going one more hour...

The book of Hebrews does offer warnings. There are real spiritual dangers for believers and consequences for disobedience, but there is also encouragement to press on and continue.

Read Heb 4.1-9

Our title:

What Remains for You?

That which remains is your encouragement.

Proposition: God’s Sabbath rest is well worth every effort of pressing forward into His coming kingdom, and hearing his voice, “Well done!”

I. The continuing way into that rest (3-5)

A. Key items in v. 3

1. “We” – the author is including himself in this reasoning: all in it together
2. Tenses:
 - a. “We who have believed” – looks at the action as complete (or past)
 - b. “enter” – present tense – “are entering”

B. The verse contrasts with those to whom the good news did not profit (2)

1. They (Exodus gen.) did not believe God’s word
2. We, on the other and, have believed God’s word
3. Consequently, we are entering the rest he speaks of

Defining this rest is key: “The significance of the present tense verb ‘enter’ is the key interpretive issue in this verse. Is the rest to be entered into something available in this life or is it future when one arrives in heaven?”¹

C. Reviewing the theology of rest

1. Various views, but commentaries wrestle with two main ideas
 - a. The peace of present Christian experience (culminating in the blessing of the eternal state — *i.e.*, heaven)
 - b. The privilege of future Christian reward as participants in the Kingdom (Millennium)

There are ways in which both can be true

2. Surveying all the passages

- a. The rest involves the land of promise
- b. The rest involves then end of all works (and wars): a sense of victory

¹ David Allen, *Hebrews*, The New American Commentary 35 (Nashville, Tenn: B & H Publ. Group, 2010), 276.

c. The rest involves the enjoyment of perfect personal fellowship with God (as in Eden, pre-fall): a sense of celebration

D. Key facts adding to the doctrine of rest in our passage

1. The Exodus generation was prohibited *although* the rest was always available (3b)

“It was not because the ‘rest’ of God was not yet available that the wilderness generation of Israelites failed to enter into it; it had been available ever since creation’s work was ended.”²

2. The rest we are speaking of began on the seventh day of creation (4)

a. It is not that God became inactive, but he ceased from the works of creation

b. This rest included placing the man in the garden, to keep Sabbath (rest) with God

c. Though Adam fell, and men constantly disobey, God’s rest stands as the beckoning offer of God’s hand ever since

Interestingly, in the weekly Sabbath evening Synagogue rituals, the liturgy began with first:

- A recitation of Psalm 95, ending, “they will not enter my rest”
- Followed by a recitation of Gen 2.1-3, “God rested on the seventh day”

In the Greek speaking synagogues, reading from the LXX, the words would be the same, the word used in this verse.

² F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Rev. ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 106.

- d. That rest is the one missing ingredient in human life: we must always strive, and it seems we strive for the wrong thing

Isa 55.1-2 ¶ “Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; And you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk Without money and without cost. ² “Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And delight yourself in abundance.

3. The rest Psalm 95 speaks of is the same rest (5)
- It is the rest Adam lost
 - It is the rest the Exodus generation missed
 - It is the rest the Psalm 95 generation is offered
 - It is the rest we are entering, if we are believers

II. The present opportunity to enter that rest (6-8)

- A. The available rest needs someone to come in and rest (6)

- Someone’s gotta do it!
- They disobeyed the word

Jesus told the parable of the wedding banquet (Lk 14.15-24)

Those invited refused (various reasons — this isn’t the Exodus generation!)

The master invited more, and then sent servants *compelling* guests to come in

“so that my house may be filled” (Lk 14.23)

- B. The available rest is available Today (7)

- God spoke the word through David (in the Psalm)
- The call is “Today” don’t harden your hearts
- “Today” includes today... *i.e.*, Right Now!

Are you a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ? Have you personally come to him, acknowledged your sin, and called on him to save you?

Rest is available Today!

C. The promise has never come to completion (8)

1. The rest Joshua accomplished wasn't the end of the story
 - a. There was a rest, of a kind
 - b. Yet it wasn't "that rest"
 - c. Proof: Psalm 95 speaks of another day
2. Every generation of Israel had to trust God, take possession of God's promises, and grasp hold of that rest themselves
 - a. Many of them also failed
 - b. And those who believed nonetheless did not come to that place of final rest
3. The rest to come is spoken of elsewhere

a. The invitation

Mt 11.28 "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest."

b. The timing

2Th 1.7 and *to give* relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire,

c. The conclusion

Rev 14.13 ¶ And I heard a voice from heaven, saying, "Write, 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!'" "Yes," says the Spirit, "so that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them."

III. The remaining promise of Sabbath rest (9)

A. The concluding assurance: there remains a rest for the people of God

1. We are exhorted to work in the day

Jn 9.4 “We must work the works of Him who sent Me as long as it is day; night is coming when no one can work.

2. We are exhorted to not grow weary in the work

Gal 6.9 Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary.

1 Cor 15.58 ¶ Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not *in vain* in the Lord.

3. And here, we are assured: rest is coming.

B. Coming back to the debate

1. Is this rest heaven or the kingdom?

- a. Many good interpreters make it out to be heaven (my view is an interpretive view)
- b. Yet we know that many of the Exodus generation (including Moses, Aaron and Miriam) were people of faith who God will not abandon: (won't go over the proofs again)

2. What did the Exodus generation miss out on?

- a. They missed Canaan and the victory over the promised land
- b. Clearly, though, Canaan and victory cannot exhaust the idea of rest
- c. Rest is something more:
 - 1) Complete peace
 - 2) End of all battles
 - 3) In the Land
 - 4) And in fellowship with God

i.e., The kingdom!

C. The idea of celebration needs to come into this

1. Here the author of Hebrews changes the word: rest is *sabbatismos*, a very rare word
 - a. Only found once in secular Gk before its use here
 - b. Only used here in the entire Bible
2. The idea isn't just "ceasing from work" — "settling down in a place"
 - a. It is the idea of celebrating the Sabbath, the pleasure of perfect fellowship
 - b. Do you recall what time of day God came looking for Adam and Eve after the fall? "In the cool of the day"

The time of *sabbatismos*. The time of rest.

Conclusion:

Where are the labours of life taking you? Even if you succeed in gaining fabulous wealth, luxury houses, freedom from want, the ability to travel where you like when you like...

Will you be free from disease?

Will you be free from family heartache?

Will you be at rest?

Proposition: God's Sabbath rest is well worth every effort of pressing forward into His coming kingdom, and hearing his voice, "Well done!"