

**Text: Heb 4.9-11**

A common feature of our culture is holidays. I suppose this is true of all cultures, but I am no expert.

We have national holidays, reflecting political values – Canada Day, Labour Day, Remembrance Day, Victoria Day. (There might be some exceptions to these in Quebec!).

We have religious holidays – Christmas, Easter with Good Friday and Easter Monday, etc.

We have holidays just to have a holiday: the August Civic Holiday used to be what the first Monday of August was called in BC. Is it something else now?

Yesterday saw the renewal, after a 21-year hiatus of “All Sooke Day,” which really should be a national holiday, in my opinion.

Where I grew up similar holidays included the Calgary Stampede and Edmonton’s Klondike Days (although I think they got rid of that one). Vancouver has the Pacific National Exhibition coming up.

Who doesn’t like holidays?

What is a universal feature of holidays? ... *rest*, or, at least, *taking time off from normal work*.

In the book of Hebrews, we have spent a lot of time thinking about rest. Last week we concluded with the promise of rest in verse 9. We will pick up right there for this week’s message:

Heb 4.9-11

Our emphasis today is on the *character* of the promised rest, which should serve as our motivator to attain it fully.

**Proposition:** The Sabbath rest God promises should be the earnest desire of every believer, motivating constant personal effort to attain every advantage it offers.

## I. The celebration to come (9)

A. Sabbath rest refers to the way the Sabbath is kept

1. The term

a. Previously mentioned: used only here in the Bible

- b. A. T. Robertson thinks the author coined it (dismisses Plutarch's use as "doubtful")
- c. In any case, it is a rare word, emphasizes "the way of keeping the Sabbath, the celebration of the Sabbath"

Edersheim: "The return of the Sabbath sanctified the week of labour. It was to be welcomed as a king, or with songs as a bridegroom; and each household observed it as a season of sacred rest and of joy."<sup>1</sup>

## 2. Jewish keeping of the Sabbath

- a. On Friday, the man returned home from his fields (or other labour)
- b. Attended the synagogue, then to home
- c. Found his home "festively adorned, the Sabbath lamp brightly burning, and the table spread with the richest each household could afford"<sup>2</sup>
- d. Blessed all his children with the blessing of Israel
- e. Shared in the bounty of his labour with those in want (the stranger, the widow, the fatherless)

Encyclopedia Britannica: "At home, the Sabbath begins Friday evening some 20 minutes before sunset, with the kindling of the Sabbath candles by the wife, or in her absence by the husband. In the synagogue, the Sabbath is ushered in at sunset with the recital of selected psalms and the *Lekha Dodi*, a 16th-century Kabbalistic (mystical) poem. The refrain of the latter goes: "Come, my beloved, to meet the bride," the "bride" being the Sabbath. After the evening service, each Jewish household begins the first of three festive Sabbath meals by reciting the *Qiddush* ("sanctification" of the Sabbath) over a cup of wine. This is followed by a ritual washing of the hands

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<sup>1</sup> Alfred Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life in the Days of Christ*. (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2003), 97.

<sup>2</sup> Edersheim, 97.

and the breaking of bread; two loaves of bread (commemorating the double portions of manna described in Exodus) being placed before the breaker of bread at each Sabbath meal. After the festive meal, the remainder of the evening is devoted to study or relaxation. The distinctive features of the Sabbath morning synagogue service include the public reading of the Torah, or Five Books of Moses (the portion read varies from week to week) and, generally, the sermon, both of which serve to educate the listeners. Following the service, the second Sabbath meal begins, again preceded by *Qiddush* (of lesser significance), and conforming for the most part to the first Sabbath meal. The afternoon synagogue service is followed by the third festive meal (without *Qiddush*). After the evening service, the Sabbath comes to a close with the Havdala ("Distinction") ceremony, which consists of a benediction noting the distinction between Sabbath and weekday, usually recited over a cup of wine accompanied by a spice box and candle."<sup>3</sup>

- f. The day is a day of peace and blessing, celebrated by prayers and special meals.
3. The description of the day of the Lord (the great Sabbath of the millennium)
- a. The King shall reign, all his enemies defeated (Rev 20.6)

Rev 20.6 Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.

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<sup>3</sup> "Jewish Religious Year - Sabbath, Holidays, Shabbat | Britannica," accessed August 19, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Jewish-religious-year/The-Sabbath>.

b. God's people will *sit* with Him in his throne (Rev 3.21)

Rev 3.21 'He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.

c. Our Lord will keep his kingdom in peace (Isa 11.1-9)

Isa 11.9 They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain, For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD As the waters cover the sea.

d. The Kingdom will commence with the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev 19.7-9)

Rev 19.7-9 "Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready."<sup>8</sup> It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright *and* clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.<sup>9</sup> ¶ Then he said to me, "Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'" And he said to me, "These are true words of God."

Mt 8.11 "I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline *at the table* with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven;

B. The Sabbath rest remains: it is Future, not present

"What then is this sabbath rest which awaits them? It is evidently an experience which they do not enjoy in their present mortal life, although it belongs to them as a heritage, and by faith they may live in the good of it here and now. ... this blissful rest in unbroken fellowship with God is the goal to which his people are urged to press forward; this is the final perfection which has been prepared for them by the sacrifice of their heavenly high priest."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Rev. ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 110.

1. The rest itself is future
2. The celebration of rest can be anticipated
  - a. Faithfully following Christ
  - b. Rejoicing consistently in worship
  - c. Living according to the Spirit

## II. The labours to lay aside (10)

### A. Resting = ceasing

1. The comparison is with “God’s labours”
2. God’s labours = the works of creation (not his continued working)
  - a. God never tires (Ps 121.4, Isa 40.28)

Ps 121.4 Behold, He who keeps Israel Will neither slumber nor sleep.

Isa 40.28 Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth Does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable.

### b. And of course, God continues to work

Jn 5.17 But He answered them, “My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working.”

### c. Remember that God put Adam in the garden: in a sense, “he rested him in the garden”

Gn 2.15 ¶ Then the LORD God took the man and **put him into the garden** of Eden to cultivate it and keep it.

- d. After man was expelled from the Garden, he must do works (offer sacrifices) to restore any kind of fellowship with God
- e. Yet can the blood of bulls and goats take away sin? Jesus came to do the work he was sent to do, giving us access to God again

- B. Yet our access is incomplete: we have entrance by faith, but not by sight
1. Our worship, in a sense, is labour
  2. We cultivate our delight in worship by the Spirit, but
    - a. Have you ever got up on a Sunday morning and not felt like getting ready to come to church?
    - b. Have you ever felt the need for extra effort to respond in the Spirit to someone who is unlovable?
    - c. We could go on
- C. There remains a rest for us
1. Our labours will cease
  2. We will know even as also we are known
  3. We will worship in the immediate presence of the Lord (Ps 122)

Ps 122.1 I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD."

### III. The zeal of Today (11)

- A. The zeal (diligence) our text calls us to

Ep 4.3 being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

2 Tim 2.15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.

2 Pt 1.10 Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble;

2 Pt 3.14 ¶ Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless,

1. BDAG def: “to be especially conscientious in discharging an obligation, *be zealous/eager, take pains, make every effort, be conscientious*”<sup>5</sup>
2. Thayer: “*to exert oneself, endeavor, give difference*”<sup>6</sup>
3. In light of the resurrection, Paul said:

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.

B. The passage (Heb 4.1-6) gives us a faithful pattern: Jesus and Moses

“In the meantime, before we enter into our rest, we need to follow Jesus’ and Moses’ examples of faithfulness to God.”<sup>7</sup>

“In the present age of unrest, what God’s people need is not the comforts that come from a robust economy or a peace treaty in the Middle East, but rather the joy of worshiping in the safety of the soul-satisfying presence of God.”<sup>8</sup>

## Conclusion:

Augustine: “Thou madest us for Thyself, and our heart is restless, until it repose in Thee.”<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> Joseph Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (International Bible Translators (IBT), Inc., 1889).

<sup>7</sup> Tom Constable, *Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Heb 4.11.

<sup>8</sup> Randall C. Gleason, “The Old Testament Background of Rest in Hebrews 3:7–4:11,” *Bibliotheca Sacra : Dallas Theological Seminary* 157, no. 627 (2000): 303.

<sup>9</sup> Saint Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996), 1.1.