

The Promise of Rest

Introduction

- A. It was about twelve years ago that Heidi and I traveled from Orlando, FL to Chicago area conduct a gospel meeting with a church I had formerly worked with.
1. As I'm sure you can imagine, it was a busy, exhausting week filled not only with preaching, but visiting with old friends and sharing meals.
 2. On Friday night, we completed the last service of the meeting and piled in the van to head home. We decided just to drive straight through. So, we left about 9:00 p.m. that night and got back to Orlando about 5 p.m. the next afternoon.
 3. Needless to say, we were all tired. We unloaded the van, put some things away, grabbed a bite to eat; then, about 8:30 I headed to bed.
 4. I'll tell you, that bed never felt so good. Do you know that feeling, when you're absolutely exhausted, and you crawl between those sheets and put your head on the pillow?
 5. I know some of you are thinking, "He should have just flown"; but that's not my point. I want you to appreciate how wonderful rest is when we're tired. Keep that in mind as you turn with me to **Hebrews 3**.
- B. Hebrews is addressed to Jewish Christians who are struggling.
1. It seems clear that those addressed in this book were considering abandoning their faith and turning back to Judaism (**3:12-14**).
 2. The writer is trying to persuade them to hold on to the end. Don't give up your faith. Don't turn back.
 3. In his effort to do this, the writer reminds them how much better they have things with Jesus under this new covenant.
 - a. As part of that grand purpose, he reminds them in chapters 3-4 of the wonderful promise of rest when this life is over that is shared by all who trust in Jesus.
 - b. But to have this rest, they must stay with Jesus. If they turn from Him, they would forfeit their rest.
- C. But in reminding them of this, the writer also reminds us.
1. As we read His words to them, we are also made to remember that one of the wonderful blessings we enjoy in Christ is His promise of rest.

2. I want us to spend some time here in Hebrews 3-4, not just appreciating the important appeal that he was making to these struggling Christians, but appreciating the wonderful hope and comfort it provides for us as well.
3. There are three vital things we need to see in this passage as the writer discusses our rest. I want you to notice these with me.

A Glorious Promise

A. **Hebrews 4:9** says it plainly.

1. Keep in mind that this "Sabbath" rest is not about the Sabbath observed on the seventh day in the Old Testament. He is referring to the promise of Heaven.
2. Actually, this is the point to which the writer has been building throughout chapters 3-4. The idea is introduced in chapter 3 where he draws upon the example of Israel (**3:5-11**).
 - a. Notice that the writer alludes to the time when God brought Israel to the border of the promise land, but they rebelled against His will and refused to go up and take the land of Canaan. As a result, they were not allowed to enter Canaan and enjoy rest there (**3:11**).
 - b. Again, this is not about the seventh day of rest, it's about the rest they would receive in the Promised Land...Canaan. This rebellious generation missed it (**3:18-19**).
3. In **Hebrews 4:1** he would go on to allude to the rest that is promised to us. God's people have a promise of rest.
 - a. It is part of the good news that has been preached to us (**4:2**).
 - b. Those who believe enter that rest (**4:3**).
 - c. In vs. 4-8 he explains that in the Old Testament there were veiled allusions to this greater rest, greater than the rest enjoyed by Israel in Canaan.
4. In **Hebrews 4:9** the whole point reaches it's climax. One of the great promises God has made to us is that there is a coming a rest for us in Heaven.

B. But rest from what?

1. Notice the promise made to the struggling Christians enduring abuse at the hands of the emperor Domitian (**Revelation 14:13**).
 - a. Here were people trying to serve Christ, trying to spread His message, trying to be faithful to Him, but who had encountered a wall of opposition.
 - b. They were involved in a battle. With Rome as his instrument, Satan was trying to wipe out the people of God. They were being persecuted (economic hardships, jail, death).

- c. But these disciples faced all these trials with this promise that, one day, this battle will be over and they will have rest from all this labor.
- 2. Certainly it is true that our circumstances are not as desperate as theirs, but we have our battles to wage with the Devil nonetheless.
 - a. Sometimes it's just a battle not to get discouraged with the corrupt world in which we live. We are confronted with it all the time...when we pick up the paper, when we watch the evening news...

- 1) A nurse kills a young mother so she can kidnap her baby
- 2) A 17 teen year old is charged in the death of three students after a school shooting
- 3) The leaders of our country defend perversion as a sacred right

Sometimes it just gets discouraging...exhausting!

- b. We must resist opposition, those who would reject us, ridicule us, malign us because we stand up for what's right.
 - c. We have to fight the battle within, dealing with our weakness and struggles, resisting temptation to sin.
 - d. Beyond just the struggle to stand against the tide of sin flowing against us, there is the challenge to move in the other direction, to become the kind of person that God wants me to be, to put on that new man the Paul describes in Ephesians 4:24.
 - e. It's not just for ourselves that we battle. We fight to help our spouse, our kids and grand kids, our loved one's, our brethren, our lost neighbor resist Satan's snare and pursue the will of Christ in their lives.
 - 3. God called into a battleground, not a playground, where we wage a vicious struggle against a persistent enemy.
 - a. The Hebrew writer wanted his audience to remember for those engaged in such a struggle there is a promise of rest in the paradise of God.
 - b. One day we will not have to fight against the devil and his henchmen. There's going to be rest (**Revelation 21:22-27**)!
- C. How this strikes us largely depends on what we happen to be doing with our lives.
- 1. Those who are not tired do not appreciate rest.
 - a. When my kids were small, they did not appreciate rest. Sometimes on Sunday afternoon Heidi suggest we all go home and take a long nap.
 - b. Heidi always liked the idea; my kids did not. They were young, full of energy; they were not tired. They did not want to nap.

2. It's hard to appreciate rest when you're not tired.
 - a. That's why I fear this promise is not that meaningful to some.
 - 1) If I'm compromising with the world so as to avoid criticism or ridicule
 - 2) If I'm going along with the flow of society so I will be accepted
 - 3) If I'm not battling for the lost souls around us
 - 4) If I'm not spending myself on spiritual labor
 - 5) If I'm not wearing myself out in God's service
 - 6) If I'm tired from spiritual labors...then this rest may not mean much to us.
 - b. And if that's the case, perhaps we need to reconsider our level of commitment.
3. But for those who are using themselves up for the good of the kingdom, that glorious promise of rest is so very inviting.
4. There is a second things in the next we need to see...

A Frightening Possibility

- A. While God has promised rest, there might be some who miss it. This was the danger confronting the people who would receive this letter (**4:1**).
 1. Remember, some of them were in danger of falling away (**3:12-14**). They were considering abandoning Christ and returning to Judaism.
 2. But the Hebrew writer warns that, if they did this, they would forfeit their rest.
 - a. Let's be clear that this rest is not unconditionally guaranteed. Those who are saved can be lost again!
 - b. This is clearly what the Hebrew writer is trying to say (**3:6,14**)? Contrary to popular religious thought, salvation is not can be lost.
- B. The writer would draw upon the example of Israel to illustrate this possibility.
 1. God had promised the land of Canaan to the descendants of Abraham.
 - a. Under Moses' leadership, He brought them out of bondage in Egypt, destroying their enemies without them lifting a sword.
 - b. He brought them safely through the wilderness to Mt. Sinai where He select them as His people and gave them His law.
 - c. He bore with their complaining and brought them to the very doorstep of the promise land, ready to bring them in to the land and give them rest.
 2. And how did they repay God's faithfulness and goodness?
 - a. They did not trust Him.
 - b. They refused to go up and take the land.

- c. As a result, God barred that generation from entering the promise land (**3:11**). They were to wander in the wilderness until the generation died.
3. It was the ultimate tragedy for this generation.
 - a. The people later regretted their choice and agreed to go up, even tried to take the land without God's endorsement and failed.
 - b. Imagine this: to have come so far and be camped on the very doorstep of the promise land, then to miss it because of unbelief and disobedience.
 - c. For the generation, it was the ultimate tragedy!
- C. But in mind that the writer cites these examples as a warning to his audience...and to us as well: 3:12, "**take care, brethren**" 4:1, "**let us fear**".
 1. We need to be concerned about that same kind of thing happening to us.
 - a. As God's children, we have been promised rest, just as they were promised rest in Canaan.
 - b. But the danger to fear is that we might miss it. Because of unbelief, we might disobey Him, choose another path, and fall away...and miss our rest!
 2. What a tragedy! The ultimate tragedy!
 - a. Think of what we miss (**Revelation 21:3-4**). What we are told about Heaven is awesome. How tragic to miss our rest!
 - b. But what is worse is what does happen to us (**II Thessalonians 1:6-9**).
 - c. The consequences of missing God's rest are awful. We have reason to fear; we must take care to avoid missing that rest!
 3. Michelle's Story:
 - a. I worked with a young family in Chicago; the husband was a Christian, but not faithful; the wife was not a Christian. And though a series of Bible studies she learned the truth and obeyed the gospel.
 - b. Then she began to reach out to her mother, Anna. The four of us studied together for two years. It was difficult trying weed out some entrenched denominational errors and instilling the simple truth of the gospel.
 - c. During that time Anna contracted cancer, which further hindered our studies. At one point before she had obeyed the gospel, Anna almost died. But finally, one evening she called and said she was ready. We took her that night and baptized her.
 - d. Five months later, she died. We were so comforted knowing she was saved.
 - e. But her daughter who had worked so hard and cared so much for her mom was distraught over her death. So much so, that she fell away.
 - f. I have always been touched by the tragic irony in that story. The daughter worked so hard to be sure her mother found that rest. But, unless she changes the course of her life, she may well miss her own.

Summary: Because God's rest is the ultimate reward for the Christian, because missing it is the ultimate tragedy, the writer would give us a fundamental challenge...

A Fundamental Challenge

- A. The Hebrew writer lays out the challenge...(4:11).
 - 1. To be diligent simply means that we make every effort; to we earnestly pursue it as the thing we prize more than anything.
 - 2. Going to Heaven, entering our rest must become our all-consuming passion.

- B. It was almost exactly seven years ago that our brother, Pat Riley, spoke to us and challenged us to think about something we really wanted.
 - 1. Maybe as a child we really wanted a bike, or as a teenager we really wanted a car, or as an adult we really wanted a certain job or to buy a house.
 - 2. He asked us to consider how our desire for that thing consumed our thoughts; how we made every effort, working sacrificing, to get it.
 - 3. He then cited his favorite text (Matthew 6:19-21).

- C. Heaven needs to be that one thing we want more than anything.
 - 1. Thoughts of that single objective need to dominate our thinking every day.
 - 2. We need to pursue it as THE PRIZE, the single most important thing in our lives, the ONE THING we want more than anything. I think of Paul's words...(Philippians 3:12-14).
 - 3. Our fundamental challenge is this – to spend our days pursuing our rest.

Conclusion

- A. Israel missed hers. They traveled so far and endured so much only to miss out on the rest in Canaan. For that generation it was the greatest of tragedies.

- B. To those addressed in this book, the writer would warn them not to make the same mistake (3:12). The Holy Spirit hoped that you and I would learn something too. We have a great rest awaiting us after this life, a rest that can be lost because of unbelief and disobedience. Be diligent to enter it.

- C. What do you need to do tonight so that you can enter that rest?