

Our Glorious Rest in Christ

By David Harrell

Bible Text: Hebrews 4:1-13
Preached on: Sunday, December 4, 2016

Whenever we consider the Lord Jesus Christ, our minds tend to get lost in the wonder of who he is, of his glory, of his grace, and today it is my prayer that we will get lost in the wonder of his glorious rest, Our Glorious Rest in Christ, and we learn more of this in Hebrews 4. So if you will turn there with me, Hebrews 4, we will look at the first 13 verses of this text this morning. Before I read it to you, may I remind you that here the author continues to exhort those Jewish people in the first century who had intellectually embraced, they were intellectually convinced of the Gospel, of the general message of the Gospel, but they had never personally committed themselves to Christ as Savior and Lord, nor were they therefore willing to renounce Judaism. Like their ancestors who failed to wholeheartedly trust in God and were therefore doomed to wander 40 years in the wilderness and were not allowed entry into the Promised Land, so too these people would never enter into the rest that is available in Christ. Like their ancestors who wanted to return, you will recall to the bondage of Egypt, they were tempted to return to the bondage of Judaism in the first century and many of them had already done that. In both cases because of their unbelief, because of their unwillingness to really trust God, to take him at his word, to worship and obey him, they forfeited the glorious blessings of rest that he offered them. Ancient Israel forfeited the rest that was available to them in the Promised Land, that land flowing with milk and honey that symbolized the spiritual and eternal rest that man can only enter through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and as we will examine today, this glorious rest in Christ is something that every believer can begin to experience right now today. And I might add that if you don't experience rest, comfort, joy, satisfaction in Christ and in your life, something is terribly wrong. Either you do not truly believe in him or you are not fully trusting in him in terms of how you are living your life; you're not living consistently with what you claim to believe about Christ who is our rest.

Well, with that little background, that little introduction, let's look at what the Spirit of God says in his word beginning in verse 1 of Hebrews 4.

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. 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

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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." 6 Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience, 7 He again fixes a certain day, "Today," saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before, "Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts." 8 For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that. 9 So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. 10 For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. 11 Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience. 12 For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. 13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

So here the inspired author gives us great insight into this glorious blessing of rest that we have in Christ and here we seeing three great truths emerge that I would like to address this morning. First of all, we will see that rest cannot be obtained or entered apart from faith. Secondly, rest is ultimately fulfilled in Christ. And finally, rest ignored results in judgment. And it is my sincere prayer that these great truths will deeply impact your heart this morning, especially those of you that know nothing of the rest that is available to you right now through faith in Christ.

Now, it's important that we wrap our minds once again around the background, the context of what the Spirit of God is speaking about. We have to go all the way back to the time when the Israelites left Egypt. After witnessing the miraculous plagues that God sent upon Egypt, 2 million Jews were freed from their wicked taskmasters. It's amazing to think about it: the greatest empire on earth at that time could not touch them. They were no match for Yahweh. Two million Jews crossed the Red Sea on dry land to escape the Egyptian charioteers. They saw the hand of the Lord drown that vast army in the sea. The word of God says that they even saw their bodies washed up on the shore and floating on the sea. What an amazing spectacle that would have been. And as a result according to Exodus 15, they sang a song of deliverance called the song of Moses, praising God for what he had done. But God knew their hearts. God knew that they did not fully trust him. They did not believe in the fullness of his character and then the grace that was inherent

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in his plan, therefore they had not personally committed themselves to worshipping him and the concept of worship basically means to serve, to obey him, and so God tested them.

If we go back to Exodus 15, we see that after the miracle at the Red Sea, God deliberately did not provide water for them for three days. Imagine what that would be like. So they began to grumble and complain and murmur against the Lord. Their newfound religion was totally man-centered, not God-centered, which is typical of most religion today, because the people were self-centered; they were not committed to God and trusting in him and like many today, they believed that God existed for them rather than the other way around, that we exist for you. So, in essence, they are shaking their fist at God saying, "Serve me! Meet my felt needs now! Come through for me on my terms, in my timing, on my cue, or else I will ignore you, I will curse you, I will have nothing to do with you." Whenever difficulties would arise, they would say, "Let's go back to Egypt where it was so much better." They were victims of what I would call collective nostalgia. You know what nostalgia is when you long for the good old days. We all do that, don't we? And we think of the good old days in the past. We imagine the past as being so much better than the present. Well, the Jewish people had memories of Egypt that really painted a picture of their past with beautiful colors and hues that greatly distorted the true picture.

According to Exodus 16, we learn that within one month of them singing about the hand of the Lord that delivered them out of the Red Sea, they changed their tune, and according to Exodus 16:3, they said, "Would that we had died by the LORD'S hand in the land of Egypt." You see, that kind of negativity and distrust characterized their hearts and God knew it and so he continued to test them while at the same time being merciful to them through his faithful provision and protection. Even as the law pointed to their inability to conform to the holiness of God proving their desperate need for his undeserved mercy, so too his testing in their desert wanderings pointed to their desperate need for rest and ultimately both mercy and rest can only be found through faith in God's saving grace.

Think what it would have been like to be a part of that vast number of people wandering around in the vast wilderness trying to survive. Imagine if you were there with your family right now, utterly dependent upon God to sustain you. Two million people. By the way, that's basically all of middle Tennessee. Get the picture? With hardly any water. Can you imagine what we would all smell like after a few days? Imagine the stench. I did a little bit of calculation and I know this sounds a bit gross but I'm doing it for a purpose. I studied the amount of feces that would be emitted from one person in one day and when

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you calculate that by 2 million, you get 20 large dump trucks per day of just feces in the camp. Imagine the stench, the sanitation problems. Now, let's add to that about 2 million animals, all the livestock, all of the sheep. If you've ever been around sheep and goats, they really stink and camels are no better. No wonder when you read in the Old Testament, you see over and over a phrase, "And they set out from blank, and camped at blank. And they set out from that place and camped at another place." No rest, just wandering. Imagine traveling with all you own, constantly tearing down and setting up, packing and unpacking, never able to settle down. Imagine choking on dust, trudging your way through the sharp rocks and at times the oceans of sand, scorching heat during the day, bone chilling cold at night, poisonous snakes, scorpions, vicious animals. Imagine all along the way you're also having to fight warring barbarians. You have to care for the sick and for the injured. And if that isn't bad enough, imagine all of the sin that would have been in the camp, the camp that would be spread over many miles. As you look in the Old Testament, you see that there was everything from murder to rape to sorcery to bestiality. In fact, Moses had to judge the disputes of the people, we're told, day and night. It got so bad that finally he had to appoint many judges to help him. Well, you get the picture, and yet there was this great promise of rest in the land of Canaan, a land flowing with milk and honey, and what was necessary to enter into that rest? It can be captured in one word: belief. "You have to trust in me, the living God. Take me at my word. Trust me to do for you what I have promised to do in my timing, in my ways. Worship me. Obey me."

Well, with this background we see beginning in verse 1, the first point that I would like for you to think about and that is that rest cannot be entered apart from faith. Notice verse 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." In other words, being eternally separated from the living God should be the terror of all terrors, but they failed to fear God.

Verse 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. 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." An amazing statement, a reference to the finished work of Christ in securing our salvation in delivering us from his well-deserved wrath and allowing us to enter into his rest which, by the way, is another name for life, eternal life, when we are forever united to the living God, we are forever blessed by his presence in our life as his children, and here we see that this was finished from the foundation of the world. In other words, this was a plan that was decreed by a sovereign God before time began and therefore because God decreed it, it was as certain as if it had already been

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accomplished. It was finished before it ever even happened. But the good news of God's redeeming grace is useless unless it is accompanied by faith. We must exercise an unqualified, wholehearted belief in who God is. We must trust in him with all of our heart, take him at his word, personally commit ourselves to worshiping and serving him come what may; believe that God's rest, notice in verse 3 he calls it "My rest," God's rest can only be obtained and it can only be experienced through faith in the living God. But they fell victim to the deceitfulness of sin and so their hearts became hardened all the more against him. Even the generation that entered the land never experienced the fullness of God's rest, do you realize that? Because they did not fully trust him to give them victory over the evil Canaanites even though God commanded them to destroy them.

Imagine these people, they were pagan beyond imagination. They were like ISIS today, grossly immoral, demonized people that would sacrifice their babies by throwing them alive into the fire. They would bury some of their young alive in jars and put them in the walls of every building that they built. These people were hideously evil and I might add that they are equally as heinous as what abortionists do today. They would torture their captives in ways that are unspeakable like their descendants do to this day in the Middle East. But instead of exterminating them as God had commanded them for the glory of God, they accepted them. They embraced them. They intermarried with them which led to worshiping with them. So God judged them and if you look at the history of Israel, you will see that even in their Promised Land, they were exploited, they were conquered, they were exiled and eventually God sent their long-awaited promised Messiah but what did they do with him? They rejected him, refusing to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God. So that judgment continued under the yoke of Rome. In A.D. 70, the temple was destroyed and millions were killed. They were taken into captivity and, you know, they still have no rest to this very day. Only now, they are returning to their homeland as the prophet Ezekiel has promised but they are returning still in unbelief.

But won't you notice in verse 1, a promise still remains. God is not finished with his people Israel, Israel as a nation, Israel as an ethnic people as many would have us believe. The church has not permanently replaced Israel. You will recall in Romans 9 in the first five verses Paul expresses his deep burden for his unbelieving kinsmen and Israel's unchanging advantages as God's chosen people even affirms his own Jewishness, and then he expresses how together they are, according to verse 4 of chapter 9, "Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh." So obviously God still maintains a present covenant relationship with his people even in unbelief. And Paul went on with great exuberance to

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reveal in chapter 11 and verse 26, the climactic expectations of Israel's national conversion when he says, "The Deliverer will come from Zion." So God has indeed, according to Scripture, sovereignly bestowed a special calling, covenants, blessings, protection, upon Israel as a people. And Paul reminds them in Romans 11:29 that "the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable." And of course, this would include his covenantal promises to Abraham. You remember in Genesis 4, there were essentially four elements to that promise. Out of Abraham would 1, come a seed, referring to Christ. Secondly, there was promised a land, a specific territory that would be set apart by God for his people, a place where he would eventually dwell with them in holy and an intimate union. Thirdly, there was the promise of a nation where Abraham's godly reputation and legacy would be displayed materially, spiritually and socially, where the glory of God's grace would be put on display. Then finally, the promise of divine blessing and protection. So to be sure, God's elective promises in the Old Testament for his covenant people will be fulfilled in the salvation of many individual Jews. We see that happening a little bit now but, oh, what a revival it will be when the Lord returns and then national Israel and all the territorial terms of the covenants will be fulfilled in the messianic age.

So please understand, the Jewish rejection of their Messiah did not nullify the unilateral, unconditional, irreversible covenants that God made to Abraham and to David concerning the establishment of his earthly kingdom. It only postponed them. So their rest is coming, "By grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone." Jeremiah prophesied of this in Jeremiah 31. God has promised that "only if the fixed order of the sun and moon and stars vanish from his sight will the offspring of Israel cease from being a nation before Me forever. If the heavens above can be measured and the foundations of the earth searched out below, then I will also cast off all the offspring of Israel for all that they have done, declares the Lord." So obviously God will not and has not forsaken Israel. You will recall in Acts 3, Peter confronted a group of Jews outside the temple with the Gospel and he said to them in verses 14 to 15, "But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, but put to death the Prince of life." But then what is interesting is he doesn't leave it there as if they are without hope, without promise. He followed up his strong indictment with a precious word of encouragement, an invitation in verses 25 through 26, he went on to say, "It is you who are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.' For you first, God raised up His Servant and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways."

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So to be sure, God has not forsaken his covenant people. His promises to Israel have not failed and his promise, as we read here in verse 1, still remains of entering his rest. But that rest, once again, cannot be entered apart from genuine saving faith, a true faith that demands a dependence on God's works instead of our own works, and this is something that the Jews had such a hard time with. They thought that by keeping the law they could contribute to their salvation and for this reason the writer warns them beginning in verse 6 of Hebrews 4, "Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience, He again fixes a certain day, 'Today,' saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before, 'Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.'" "Today" refers to that season of grace, that opportunity whereby man can still come to Christ. It's still an opportunity that is available to them. But like every day, night is approaching. It's for this reason that the Apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 6:2, "now is the acceptable time, behold now is the day of salvation."

So here we see that rest cannot be entered apart from faith. Secondly, rest is ultimately fulfilled in Christ. Notice verse 4, "He who has said somewhere concerning the seventh day: 'And God rested on the seventh day from all His works,'" a quote from Genesis 2:2 and 3. "And again in this passage, 'They shall not enter My rest.'" Now, think about what his argument is here. He's saying that after God created everything, he rested, which means he ceased from his labor. It doesn't mean that he was tired and he had to take a break, it means that he ceased from his labor because his labor was completed perfectly. We know that God created everything that man needs to fully enjoy a perfectly satisfying life. That's the way the creation was, including an unending, soul-satisfying relationship with the living God. Prior to sin entering the world, Adam and Eve enjoyed perfect rest and God wants us to share in that completely. At that time with Adam and Eve, and it is hard for us to imagine this, everything was perfect. Imagine living in a place and in a time where you have no problems, no sickness, no pain, no worries, and you perfectly enjoy intimate fellowship with your Creator God. Boy, don't you long for that day? And folks, it's coming but we certainly don't have it now because sin destroyed all of that. Why? Because they stopped believing in God. They didn't take him at his word. They chose instead to trust in Satan, to be deceived, and to seek the desires of their own flesh, and when that happened, the rest ended.

But it is this rest that God offers to all who place their faith in Christ. In fact, it's interesting and he addresses that here, that God instituted the Sabbath as a symbol of the glorious rest found in a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus. You may recall, for example, how Jesus deliberately violated the Sabbath during his ministry on earth. Why? Because he was the Lord of the Sabbath. He was the reality of what the Sabbath

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symbolized. Remember in Colossians 2, beginning in verse 16, the Apostle Paul says, "Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day," here's why, "things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ." You see, the Sabbath was the sign to Israel of the old covenant, but like all of the other holy days and festivals and so forth that were a part of the old covenant, the Sabbath is not binding in the new covenant. God has granted eternal rest that that Sabbath pictured; he has granted that to all who place their faith in Christ. You see, a shadow has no reality, right? It's just a shadow of a reality. The reality is what makes the shadow. Jesus Christ is the reality. That's the point. When the true and final rest appeared, the symbol was no longer necessary.

Now, some people will ask, maybe you are asking that right now, "Well, if that's the case, how were people saved before Christ appeared?" The same way they are saved today: by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. "Yeah, but they didn't know who Christ was." Well, that's right, but they knew who God was and they knew that God had a plan and he would be merciful and so you might say that they were saved on credit. Think of Romans 4, beginning in verse 3, Paul says, "For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.'" He goes on to say, "Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness." You see, Abraham entered God's rest made available to him through the person and the work of Jesus Christ whom Abraham never knew until he entered into glory. Later on in Hebrews 11, the author will address this beginning in verse 9, we read, "By faith he," referring to Abraham, "lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise," here's why, "for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God." He was looking ultimately for the Promised Land of heaven and he trusted God to take him there. But it is important for us to understand that when we come to faith in Christ, we immediately enter into God's rest, rest in this life as we will see in a moment, but the fullest expression of that rest. We will not enjoy until we see him face-to-face. Imagine the kingdom rest we will enjoy in the millennium. Imagine the eternal rest that we will enjoy in heaven. And this was the ultimate rest that the writer of Hebrews is speaking of, a rest far beyond the Promised Land and the practice of Judaism in every respect.

Notice what he says in verse 8, "For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that." In other words, this rest was way more than what they experienced in the Promised Land's. "So there remains," verse 9, "a Sabbath rest for the

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people of God. For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His."

Now, the concept of rest is multidimensional in Scripture. The term "rest" in the original language has a variety of shades of meaning. Let me give you kind of three general ones. First of all, the term carries the idea of ceasing from work or any kind of action. So spiritually speaking, God's perfect rest is the blessing, shall we say, of free grace. We do not have to work to somehow earn our salvation. But secondly, rest denotes security; it denotes confidence. When we trust in Christ, we can be assured that our salvation is in him. We can rest in his finished work. Our confidence is in God, it's not in ourselves. We cannot save ourselves nor can we keep ourselves saved. We rest in what God has done. And thirdly, rest also means to lie down; to be settled; fixed; grounded; established in a safe place. When we come to Christ in repentant faith and humble obedience according to Ephesians 4, we attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God. When this happens, we are no longer children tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine by the trickery of man, by craftiness and deceitful scheming.

You see, folks, if you were not personally committed to the Lord Jesus Christ through faith, you are like these wandering Jews destined for eternal restlessness. Some of you have searched in vain your whole life for contentment, for lasting joy, but you have done so in vain. You're still not at rest. The word of God says there is no rest for the wicked apart from Christ. And ever since man was driven from Paradise, his polluted soul has been tossed here and there by the waves of temptation and carried about by every wind of deceptive philosophy. I mean, just look at what has happened in our country, all of this craziness with political correctness and all of the false religions that are out there. People always learning but they are never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Some of you are trying to save and sanctify yourself through endless religious works and rituals, never able to enjoy the rest that the Sabbath pictured. Some of you enjoy foolishly a Christ-less Christianity that is absolutely phony, this cultural Christianity that is totally man-centered and so your life is all sizzle and no steak, there is no real substance to it. You have no real joy, no real satisfaction, no rest in Christ. And for some of you like ancient Israel, if I can put it bluntly, your life just stinks. Your life stinks. You're always packing and unpacking. You're moving from one thing to another, from one church to another, from one relationship to another, from one job to another, following the crowd in endless circles and going nowhere. My friend, you will have no peace. You will find no joy. You will have no comfort, no contentment, no hope, no help, no rest until you come to faith in Christ and begin to walk with him and serve him with all of your heart.

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But you say, "You know, I'm a believer but I still struggle with these things." I'm sure that's the case. I've dealt with that in my own life. I often deal with believers who are chronically upset. They worry over everything. They struggle with guilt, distrust, anger, jealousy, loneliness. They run to all of the prescription drugs that are out there and all of the other anesthetizers of life that's available to people but they are constantly in turmoil and yet they say they trust in Christ. Relationally, emotionally, financially, spiritually, they have no rest. What's going on? Well, the answer is: if they truly know Christ, they're not living consistently with what they claim to believe. It's one thing to profess faith in Christ, it's another thing to act on that faith. Let me give you an example, a man can have faith in a walking bridge that crosses a great gorge like one that I experienced when I was in Kenya. You can have faith that that bridge will allow you safe passage and protect you from the charging elephant, but if you do not put your weight on that bridge, your faith is useless. And that's how many people live their Christian life. Now, be careful, God's rest is not speaking of a life that is free from problems but rather it's a peaceful calm in the midst of problems that we have. When we are at peace with God, when we walk in fellowship with him, we experience the perfect peace that we possess because we are in relationship with Christ and therefore we can trust him in the storm.

"Yes, pastor, but I struggle over lingering guilt because of my sins in the past and sometimes in the present." Well, then what must you do? Confess your sins for he is faithful and he is just to forgive you your sins and cleanse you from all unrighteousness. Choose to rejoice in this. Do you not believe what God has said? Then take him at his word. Only then will you enjoy his rest. "Oh, but pastor, I have such a strong tendency toward certain besetting sins, secret sins that are just so hard for me to conquer." Then, my friend, you must learn to walk by the Spirit, and when you walk by the Spirit, you will not carry out the desires of the flesh. When you surrender to the Spirit of God as he has revealed himself to us in his word and you walk with him, he gives you victory over those sins. And then remind your troubled heart that God has suffered for you; he has suffered in your place and met all of the demands of holy justice. Tell yourself these great truths. Tell yourself that indeed at the cross he crushed the serpent's head and all of your sins were crucified with him therefore all those inward lusts are nothing more than dying villains, and rejoice in that. The God who has saved you is also the God who will sanctify you. Do you not believe that? Then live consistently with that. Live consistently with these great truths that he who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. Find your rest in this.

"Oh yes, but pastor, I have so many cares. I have so many concerns in my life. My soul is so troubled. How can I find rest in all of this?" My friend, you must learn to cast your cares on him because he cares for you. Do you not believe that? Do you not go before the

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throne of grace and say, "Lord, I'm overwhelmed with all of these things. I don't know what to do except what you've told me to do and that is to give it to you. And so, Lord, I'm going to give it to you and now the biggest issue in my life is what's for lunch?" Learn to be anxious for nothing but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God and then what's going to happen? The peace of God, there's the rest, the peace of God which surpasses all comprehension, you can't explain it. What's it going to do? It's going to guard your heart. It's going to guard your mind in Christ Jesus.

My friends, you have to learn to make a choice to shift your thinking from all of this negative stuff to the positive. He goes on to say in that passage, "let your mind dwell on whatever is true and honorable and right and pure and lovely and of good repute. If there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things," not the Eeyore, woe is me. What a lie and you must remember that God is not only in your troubles, he has ordained them for your good and his glory. Do you realize that? Therefore you can celebrate that. He is the Good Shepherd that leads you. He has promised that he will never leave you nor forsake you. He is the faithful high priest we are told that can sympathize with our weaknesses. So he says, "Therefore we can draw near with confidence to the throne of grace that we might receive mercy and may find grace to help in the time of need."

"Oh yes, but pastor, I'm trying to provide for my family. I'm trying to raise my kids. My health is not good. My bank account is low. My expenses are great. How can I find rest in all of this?" The answer, dear friends, is exercise confident faith in the lover of your soul. Has not Jesus said in Matthew 6, "Do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink nor about your body and what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?" Oh, troubled soul, find rest in the promises of God and then live your life as if you truly believed those promises. Too often we carry about a dungeon complete with a torture chamber deep within our soul, then when our soul is troubled, we run inside and we lament, we moan and we groan over our troubles as if we have no help, and it's as if we ask Satan to come in and to beat us unmercifully with accusations and threats of divine abandonment, and then we wonder why we have no rest in Christ. What fools we are. It reminds me of Christian, you remember him in Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress? Remember, he was seized by Giant Despair. He was thrown into Doubting Castle. Ring any bells? And because of his defective faith, he became suicidal. Giant Despair had a wicked wife, her name was Distrust, and she insisted that Giant Despair beat them without mercy and so he ridiculed them, he insulted them, and they mourned with bitter

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Our Glorious Rest in Christ

By David Harrell

Bible Text: Hebrews 4:1-13
Preached on: Sunday, December 4, 2016

lamentations as if God had forsaken them. Folks, this is what happens when we act as if there is no hope, when we think as if God doesn't mean what he said, that Christ isn't sufficient for all of our needs.

What did they do? Do you remember? Hopeful was with him in that dungeon and when the misery was so unbearable that he was at the point of absolute suicide, he began to pray, prayed for discernment. Bunyan said that he prayed all night because it was his testimony. Then he says this, "Then Christian a short time before daylight became astounded and passionately exclaimed, 'What a fool I am! Here I lie in a stinking dungeon when I could be walking in complete liberty. I have a key in my pocket called promise that I'm sure will open any lock in Doubting Castle.'" Beloved, that's what it means to believe in God, to trust in him. Oh, child of God, please hear me: you cannot enjoy the rest that is yours in Christ if you refuse to believe it. Belief is the key and then you must act consistently with what you know to be true. It's an amazing thing to see how the grace of faith works in us such a deep and abiding sense of resignation, of total trust and confidence in his sovereign grace, in his sweet providences in our life. Then the Holy Spirit instructs us how to live, how to act consistently with those truths.

So practically speaking, dear friend, if you believe in Christ and you're not experiencing his rest, if I can put it bluntly, stop your pouting and your whining, get your thumb out of your mouth, get rid of your blanky, get up off of the couch, pick up your sword and get in the battle. The victory has already been won. Jettison all of those sinful strategies that you are using to find life in Christ, all of these manipulative things or whatever it might be, and trust him to satisfy your soul, then get in the fight. Get your eyes off yourself. Put them on Christ. Be a warrior, not a whiner. I hate whiners. I hate it in my life because it dishonors Christ. It says, "You're not who you claim to be. I cannot fully trust you. I have to trust in my own strategies." Well practically, dear friends, spend time around warriors, not around whiners. Learn to wield the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God and celebrate the victory which has already been won, the one which you will one day experience in full when you enter into glory.

Well, finally, and I close with this: we need to understand that rest ignored results in judgment. Notice what he says, "Therefore let us be diligent." "Diligent" means "to make haste; to be zealous; to be passionately concerned." Over what? "To enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience." In the immediate context here he's referring to those that are prone to fall back into Judaism rather than believing in Christ.

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Then he says this, "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit." By the way, soul and spirit, they are not two different parts of man, they are terms that are used synonymously to describe the immaterial part of man, the core of our being. "The word of God pierces both soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." Dear friends, what he's saying is God's message that is found in the word, the Bible, it is alive, it is dynamic, it is powerful, it is productive, it is active, it is sharp, able to perfectly discern the heart. That's what it's doing right now, it's discerning your heart. Every thought, every motive, every secret cavern in your imagination it exposes, it lays bare.

It's interesting, notice the term but "all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." "Open" is a term that had two very distinct meanings in the first century, both of which underscore the power of the word of God. One of the meanings is this: it was used to describe a wrestler in the Olympic Games facing his opponent and grasping his throat, looking at him face-to-face. He had the ability to kill his opponent at that point. That's what the word of God does, it lays us bare. We are completely helpless before it and God has us face-to-face. Secondly, it was used in the context of a criminal trial. What they would do in order to force the accused to face his accusers in the court that was trying him, they would place a collar around the neck of the accused and that collar had fixed in it a very sharp dagger. It would come up right underneath the chin and this would prevent the accused from bowing his head in indifference or disrespect. It's as if God is saying, "Look at me when I'm talking to you. Look at me when I'm talking to you." And that's what happens when the word of God is unleashed upon our soul, it confronts us and it forces us to come face-to-face with the living God and hear his warnings, but also hear his merciful invitation.

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Dear friends, I invite you this morning to enter into this greatest treasure of all, God's rest, that lasting joy, that unassailable peace and hope and promise that we have in Christ because you will find it nowhere else. So many people are whirling about on the gerbil wheel of life, never able to find any satisfaction in life. We see it all the time. Isaiah says that "the wicked," in other words those who are self-centered rather than God-centered, "are like the troubled sea that cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." But isn't it amazing when by sheer grace alone, God brings the Gospel to us and we hear the Gospel and by the regenerating power of the Spirit we believe, then suddenly we are radically transformed. The Holy Spirit invisibly secretly does a work in the core of our being. We are radically changed. We are born again. We become a new creation in Christ and at that moment we enter into eternal rest with the living God, that rest that God has secured for his people through his Son the Lord Jesus, and as a result even in the midst of our greatest trials, we experience that rest. We constantly experience the peace of God that passes all understanding. Amen? A wonderful, wonderful truth.

Let's pray together.

Father, I pray that you will move upon any heart that is here today that does not know you. May today be the day that they place their faith in Christ and enter into your rest. And Lord, for the rest of us, may we celebrate our rest in Christ, especially during this Christmas season. We thank you. We give you praise. In Jesus' name. Amen.

We pray you've been edified by this presentation. You've been listening to Pastor, Bible Teacher and Author, Dr. David Harrell. For more information or for other messages from Dr. Harrell, please visit the Olive Tree Christian Resources website at otcr.org.

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