

Superior Rest

We are back in our series from the New Testament Book of Hebrews, a series that we are calling ***Christ Superior***.



I've described Hebrews as a sort of theological textbook explaining that Christ is superior to everyone and everything and every idea, religion or theology.

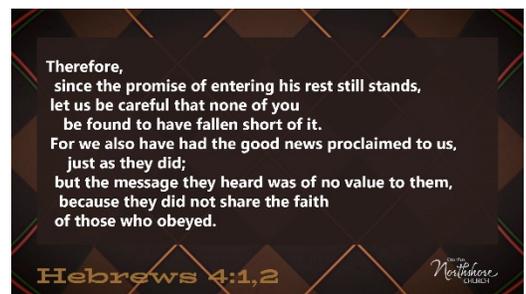
With chapter 4, we find that Christ provides superior **rest**.

Perhaps a message on **rest** is a strange way to start a new year. For many, the holidays provided a break, opportunities to *wind down* and recharge. We enjoyed some wonderful days of rest; we missed a lot about our regular, Christmas routine, traditions delayed, and gatherings skipped... but we were able to replace much of it all with some deeply meaningful moments of slowing down and enjoying the season at a less hectic pace.

But now with the new year ahead, and schedules back to normal (at least **normalish**), we can put the rest behind and get after our goals and resolutions and such. This first Sunday of the month might rather be about boldly charging ahead... but here we are with rest.

I'm confident that we will find that the rest promised here in Hebrews 4 might challenge, or at least expand, our usual notions of rest. It begins by reading:

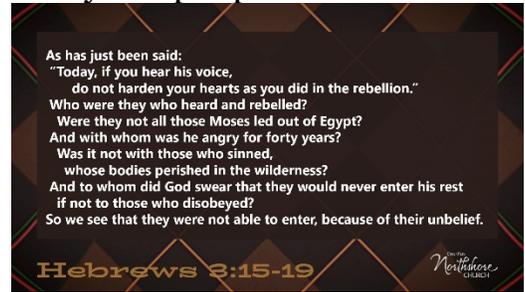
Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. ² For we also have had the good news proclaimed to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because they did not share the faith of those who obeyed.¹



Let's begin by unpacking what is referenced here. First, of course, the "his" of "his rest" is God.

¹ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Heb 4:1–2). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

The “they,” referenced here, is God’s People, specifically the people delivered from Egypt’s Pharaoh, under the leadership of Moses, to the Promised Land. If you have a Bible open, you can see that chapter 4 picks up where chapter 3 left off, a message we tackled in November that held Christ up as superior to Moses.

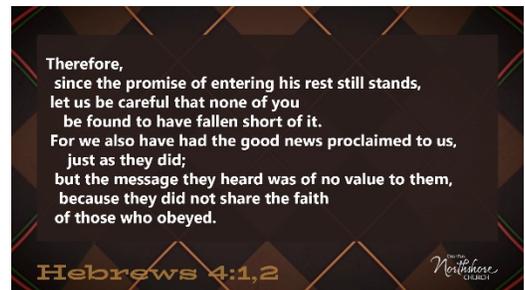


It was a call to faith, a call to trust God and believe His promises; the ancient People of God were revealed as an example of those who did not take hold of God’s promise “because of their unbelief.”

We are called to remember that wilderness generation... our own ancestors in the faith that were called by God out of slavery, delivered from their enemies... yet would not move into the fullness of God’s promises and the rest He prepared for them in Canaan, the land of promise.

God’s promise still stands, and that promise is positioned, here in chapter 4 as rest.

This word, rest, is used several different ways in our passage.



- It is materialized in a place, a land, promised by God. A destination meant to be home. Rest.
- It is ritualized in Sabbath, the first Sabbath established and enjoyed by God Himself, and then given to His People. Rest.
- It is theologized, and expanded to mean right relationship, and fellowship with God. In this context, we should understand rest as faith... believing and trusting God. Rest.

So here in the beginning of chapter 4, the Book of Hebrews proclaims simply this: that just as there was promise waiting for that wilderness generation, there is promise waiting for us. We are called to enter into that promise, rather than allow our fears to keep us out of His promise... resulting in our continued wandering in the wilderness. Don’t be faithless. Don’t be disobedient. Don’t fear. But rather, enter into His rest.

We ought to think a moment about this word **rest**, that we see in the passage, and contrast it with the story of that wilderness generation. After God had performed extraordinary miracles, they made their way out of slavery in Egypt. God again saved them from Egypt's armies by providing escape through the Red Sea. He met with His people, making them His covenant people at Sinai, all the while leading them to the edge of His promise. Moses dispatched spies into the land and the reports came back positive (God had brought them to a wonderful place)... but, the majority report was that they could not conquer those who inhabited the land that God had promised. Instead of faith, there was fear. They believed they would be beaten in war... that they, coming from one captivity, would find themselves in another captivity. They couldn't do the work, so they turned their backs on God's promises, preferring the wilderness instead.

The problem here is that they understood the step into God's promise as **work**, not **rest**. Even though God had led and provided every step of the way, they viewed this next step as their step, their work, and they rightly surmised that they couldn't do it.

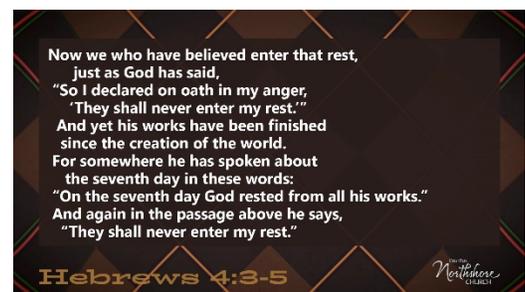
They were right; they couldn't do it. They were wrong in not moving forward, but they were right in understanding that they could not prevail. Where they were wrong was in misunderstanding that God was not calling them primarily into their work, but His rest.

There would be work; God routinely calls His people to work alongside Him. He let's us have some skin in the game. There is labor and sacrifice... but ultimately, the battle belongs to the Lord. He wins the victory.

Our passage continues along this line of rest. It says

we who have believed enter that rest²

Faith is the key that unlocks the door to that rest. Believing God results in the rest of God.



Furthermore, that rest, into which we are welcomed, was established at the beginning

his works have been finished since the creation of the world³

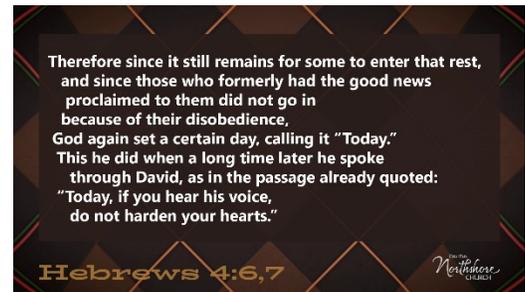
² [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Heb 4:3). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

³ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Heb 4:3). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

The point is this: If God, the Creator of heaven and earth everything seen and unseen, comes to a point where He speaks that things are finished and rests... AND He calls us into that rest, what more can we do than obey?

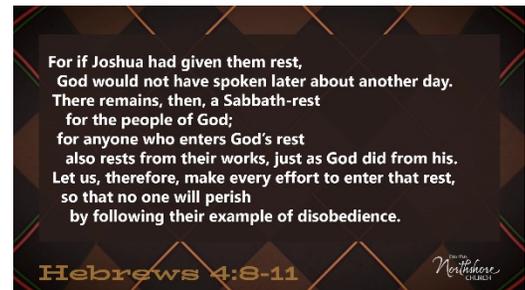
The wilderness generation disobeyed and did not enter that rest.

It wasn't merely that they did not cross over into the Promised Land, flowing with milk and honey and all; it was that they did not believe and obey. They hardened their hearts, living in fear rather than faith.



God help us to hear Your voice; help us to not allow our hearts to be hardened.

Even though God's ancient people eventually entered the land, under Joshua's leadership, they did not enter rest, but continually faced fierce opposition. That opposition continues even today.



⁹ There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God;

¹⁰ for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from their works, ^f just as God did from his. ⁴

... a Sabbath-rest, a rest that is God's rest, a rest that is a result of God's promise.

It is a rest that is more than merely a day that we honor and keep holy as a Sabbath. We can start there, I suppose. It isn't that this passage isn't about a Sabbath day, but it is about so much more.

The point here is that God has provided rest for His people and He is calling His people into that rest... superior rest. This superior rest is provided for by the work of the Son. Christ is the Superior Rest; Christ is the rest of God personified.

It isn't merely about ceasing the work we perform for our livelihoods for a day... it is about ceasing our work for salvation for an eternity. The point is that God is calling us to be His and that He has done the work. He is calling us to hear His voice and obey; He is calling us to believe in the power of Christ to be our work for salvation.

There is a peculiar turn of a phrase here in verse 11. Do you see it?

⁴ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Heb 4:9-10). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

¹¹ Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest⁵

Every effort to enter rest? It seems like an oxymoron doesn't it... work to rest?

I suppose we get that; it usually takes some work to rest and relax. That is especially true these days with COVID protocols and restrictions and such. It takes some preparation to unplug.



Like I said, we enjoyed some meaningful days of rest last week... but it didn't happen by accident. There was preparation. There was planning and effort.

The point in our passage is that it does take effort to discipline ourselves to obey God and receive the rest that He promises.

This may be a perfect description of the Christian life. We hold these two things in tension: effort and rest, work and grace.

Religion that is based on our effort, our ability to make a way for ourselves, or even earn a way for ourselves, is not the Gospel. The Gospel is not merely effort.

But that does not mean that the Gospel is effortless. In order for us to enjoy God's rest, we must enter that rest. It starts with a step of faith, believing Jesus... and life in God's rest is sustained by effort too. The disciplines of the Christian life should be intended to keep us in that rest.

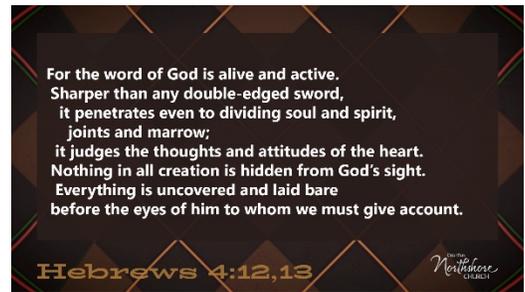
- Devotion to God, prayer and Bible reading, is not to earn God's favor, but to keep us in His rest.
- Saying no to sin is a matter of keeping us in the center of that rest.
- Generosity, tithing and such, are matters of affirming our trust in Him as provider, worthy of obedience.
- Worship elevates and magnifies Him in our eyes, keeping us in His rest.

These are all among the ways we make effort to enter that rest, and reside in that rest.

⁵ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Heb 4:11). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

The remaining portion of Scripture reminds us that when we are on God's side, we are on the right side.

¹² For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.⁶



We're reminded that we have God's Word to guide us in His ways. Furthermore, His guidance through His word is more than just superficial; it is penetrating guidance. We have more than just a map to guide our steps, but guidance that that penetrates to our thoughts and attitudes. Entering God's rest is more than mere behavior, but it includes our intellect and emotion.

I tend to be a results-oriented person. When choosing a path, I generally prioritize effectiveness and efficiency. I often have one simple question: "Does it work?" But God, by His Word, is concerned with more than mere utility, more than behavior, more than just "does it work"; God judges thoughts and attitudes, intellect and emotion, motives and intentions.

Am I the only one who looks back and sees that there have been times when I've failed in success? That there have been times when the results were a great success, but the motives and intentions (soul, spirit, joints, and marrow) were not what they could have, or should have, been?

¹³ Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.⁷

God guides us fully and knows us fully. I suppose this could be a scary thing, that we can't hide from God. But really, we should, rather, take great encouragement! Our God, who knows us better than we know ourselves still bears with us, still guides us, still loves us, and provides salvation so that we can live these lives in worship to Him and enjoy His presence, His rest, forever.

I'm not all that committed to, or consistent with, picking a verse of Scripture for a coming year or season (although I have from time to time). It could be that this is it for 2021, or for at least the coming season:

⁶ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Heb 4:12). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁷ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Heb 4:13). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

make every effort to enter that rest⁸

I'm certain that there is a year of rebuilding ahead. 2020 was tough, and a lot of what 2020 brought us remains (while there is light at the end of the tunnel). The rebuilding will take work, sacrifice, and effort. We welcome the work. We want God to use us in the rebuilding. But let's be sure that our efforts are efforts to enter His rest. Our work should be to more fully experience and share His grace, mercy, and blessing. His rest is great, powerful, and expansive... so our effort can, and should be as expansive, as long as it is directed toward His rest.



Let's be ready for work, eager to rebuild in the days and months ahead... and let's be all the more focused on that effort resulting in experiencing His rest. Let faith arise in our lives and in the lives of those around us.

We have an excellent opportunity to rehearse that effort, to enter that rest, with Communion.

Communion should always be a reminder of God's work on our behalf. The bread and the cup of Communion remind us of the price that was paid for our salvation. Work is required to provide for our salvation... but it is work that we are unable to perform. Strive as we may, we are not equipped to secure our place in heaven. Work as we might, we cannot please God in this life.



Communion reminds us that we were purchased, that God sent His Son, Jesus, to be our way. Jesus did the work on our behalf so that we may enter into God's rest. And not just so we can enter His rest on Sundays in church, but His rest is for us each and every day. We may start our workweeks again tomorrow, but the work that brings us peace with God is never ours to pick up again. Jesus paid it all and we are called into God's rest.

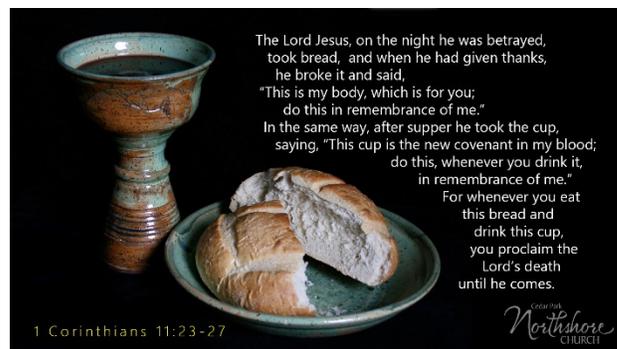
Today is a day to believe. If you are not sure if Communion is for you today, know that it is. Today can be your day. Receive the bread and the cup today, take it along with this simple prayer: Jesus, I believe. That is the first step... and then join us in making every effort to fully receive, fully enjoy, fully enter His rest.

⁸ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Heb 4:11). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Hold the symbols the broken Body and spilled Blood of Jesus, worship and pray with the words of this hymn, and then we will receive together.

Behold the Lamb

The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." ²⁵ In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶ For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. ⁹



⁹ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (1 Co 11:23–26). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.