



The Sabbath Rest

Hebrews 4:1-10

In the 1800's, there was a missionary to China named Hudson Taylor. His love for Jesus and his desire to tell the Chinese people about the Lord was clear to those who knew him. Through his mission work, God increased the mission to the Chinese and eventually, Hudson Taylor founded China Inland Mission. By the end of the 19th century, China Inland Mission was known around the world. When he died in 1905, China Inland Mission had 825 missionaries in all 18 provinces with more than 500 Chinese helpers and 25,000 Chinese converts.

If you've ever heard of Hudson Taylor's life and ministry, you might think to yourself, "Wow, what a great life." But I also want to highlight some other things about his life. When he was a missionary in China for five years, he met another missionary named Maria Dyer. They married and had eight children. Not many years before he started China Inland Mission, he had a serious case of hepatitis and had to return to England – a months-long journey by boat. In England, his passion only rose for China. He couldn't bear people worshipping in peace while others around are perishing without the knowledge of Jesus. Through a sequence of events, he went back to China. I believe it was in China around 1868-69, that God addressed certain areas of his life and gave him greater freedom. He wrote, "We may fail – do fail continually – but he never fails. . . . I have continually to mourn that I follow at such a distance and learn so slowly to imitate my precious Master. I can not tell you how I am buffeted sometimes by temptation. I never knew how bad a heart I have. Yet I do know that I love God and love His work, and desire to serve Him only and in all things. And I value above all else that precious Saviour in whom alone I can be accepted." One person writes of this time period by saying that this was part of God setting the stage for crisis in his life. After this experience, God grew Hudson Taylor in greater joy and trust in the Lord and even Taylor talked of God making him new! He had renewed hope and vigor and trust.

But then, in 1870 came his most difficult days. In January, his son Samuel died. In July of that year, Maria gave birth to a son who died two weeks later. Then not long after that, his own wife of 12 years died of cholera. She was only 33 years old. Hudson was 38. That was all in one year. But keep in mind something else. Hudson and Maria had a total of eight children, but a total of three died at birth and two in childhood. So, when Maria died, Hudson had four children.

Not long later, Hudson married and had two more children. In the 1880's, his wife Jennie was in England while Hudson traveled to China twice. The separation was a total of six years. In his total lifetime, he traveled to China ten times. Just the water travel would total four to five years.

Then came the Boxer rebellion in China. In that time, 58 of China Inland Mission's missionaries and 21 children were killed, but the next year when the allied nations demanded China to compensate for what

they did, Hudson Taylor refused to accept any compensation because he wanted to show them the love of Jesus in response.

Did Taylor have an easy life? And, what about his wife and children? How much death had this man and his family seen? How much separation had they experienced? And yet, of his children, at least four of them became missionaries.

But I want you to hear what one of his sons said at his funeral: **“Day and night this was his secret, ‘just roll the burden on the Lord.’ Frequently those who were wakeful in the little house at Chinkingiang might hear, at two or three in the morning, the soft refrain of Mr. Taylor’s favorite hymn [‘Jesus, I am resting, resting in the joy of what Thou art’]. He had learned that for him, only one life was possible—just that blessed life of resting and rejoicing in the Lord under all circumstances, while He dealt with the difficulties, inward and outward, great and small.”**¹

In all the pain, turmoil, travels, death, suffering, joy, delight, salvation, endurance; his son could say that his father’s legacy was that he *rested* and *rejoiced* in the Lord under all circumstances. Rest, Ventura. Rest. In our minds we can think, “How can you rest in all of that?” And we think that because we think rest only was a physical and visible component to it. But what if physical rest is merely a shadow of a greater rest? As you hear Hudson Taylor’s story, you might think, “Well, he was super-spiritual and only those *amazing* people can do these things.” But didn’t you hear what he said of himself. He wondered how God could use him with all of his sin and weakness. When you look at Hudson Taylor’s life, you should be amazed at God’s grace and then you also should be impelled by the same power of God to work in you as he did in Taylor. And how did God do it? God showed Taylor where true, lasting *rest* is found. This is what we need to understand. As we go through pain and difficulties, do we recognize the beauty of our union with Jesus and the rest he gives to us? Do you rejoice in the eternal rest of Christ even when life is in turmoil?

This idea of the importance of rest is something that the author of Hebrews has already picked up on as we studied last week’s message, and this is something he focuses on all-the-more in the text we’re studying today. To a struggling Christian church in Rome, facing persecution, he tells them that the answer is not in shirking back or trying to get away from the pain. And the author’s exhortation is for us as well. We need to know where *real rest* is found and then we must pursue that rest. Before I say any more, let’s pray and then read Hebrews 4:1-10 together.

4 Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. ²For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened. ³For we who have believed enter that rest, 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. ⁴For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: “And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.” ⁵And again in this passage he said, “They shall not enter my rest.” ⁶Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, ⁷again he appoints a certain day,

¹ Info for this biography came from <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-ministry-of-hudson-taylor-as-life-in-christ>; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hudson_Taylor; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/OMF_International

“Today,” saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.”⁸ For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on.⁹ So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God,¹⁰ for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.²

As I think through an overarching idea for this passage, I think it could be said that **We must have a godly fear for our church family’s rest.** We ought to be concerned about our individual rest, but we are to be concerned about the whole church’s rest. The reason I say this is because we can’t forget the previous passage we studied last week. In chapter 3, we were commanded to exhort the local church body – the others with whom we are one. This exhortation comes because he spoke of the days of Israel’s wilderness wanderings and how the first generation didn’t enter the Promised Land because of their disobedience. Similar things seem to be happening in the Roman church. People are leaving it and denying Jesus. The Christians could wonder what’s going on and how they need to address this. The author essentially admits that these things can happen, but instead of giving up, we should be exhorting each other all the more in the midst of all of life – whether in pain or pleasure. Why should we not give up? Because there’s a greater rest than the land of Caanan.

The first part of this verse says that the promise of entering his rest still remains. What that means is that rest is available and the offer is extended even *today*. How sad it would be for someone to know the truth about rest, but spurn it. It’s not like God talks about rest and says “Too bad, this isn’t for you.” He promises that it exists and that people can really have it. Do we believe God’s promises? Then we must be very concerned that all the people, especially those with whom we’ve committed to in our church gathering, experience and pursue this rest.

“Therefore,” the author writes, “while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it” (v. 1). What’s the command that follows exhorting one another and the danger of drifting from Jesus? Answer: Let us fear. We can hear that we need to exhort one another daily and we can think to ourselves, “Isn’t that a little extreme? I’m not sure it’s *that* necessary to exhort. After all, we live in safe Holland, Michigan; and I’m sure other people are exhorting other people in the church.” But here, the author tells the local Roman church why they should fear? Lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. One man named Philp Hughes writes of this, “. . . **there is no attitude more dangerous for the church than that of unconcern and complacency**” (P.E. Hughes, p. 155). He says this because of the word “fear.”

Let us fear! Fear? Really? I thought Christians shouldn’t fear. Is that very godly? It must be because it’s written right here in the Bible. This word for fear refers to “a state of severe distress, aroused by intense concern for impending pain, danger, evil, etc., or possibly by the illusion of such circumstances—‘fear.’”³ Well, in the context of Hebrews, it’s the thought that one of the people in the Roman local church could drift away from the faith and shipwreck. The author says that this shouldn’t just be our individual fears for ourselves. This should be a fear for others. Like we would have a concern for the spiritual welfare for our spouse and our children, so we should have a concern for our brothers and sisters in Christ. Ventura, we cannot allow the dangerous attitude of unconcern and complacency. We must have a godly fear for

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Heb 4.

³ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, [Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains](#) (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 315.

our church family – a godly fear that leads us to truly exhort one another daily, as long as it is called today (to pick up on the command in chapter 3).

But you may still be wondering why this exhortation to fear is so important. Why must we have a godly fear for the local church's rest? The author gives at least three reasons in these verses.

1. Someone doesn't have God's rest merely because they are with God's people (vv. 2-5).

This point might seem contradictory to what the author stated in the previous chapter. Didn't he say that we endure in our growth in holiness through exhorting the believers around us? So, why does he seem to be putting down being with the people? Well, he's not putting it down. Get the context. Look at verse 2 again: ²For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened.⁴

There's a comparison here. Good news came to us. Good news came to the Israelites in Moses' day. So, they were given a promise of rescue and rest, and we are given a promise of rescue and rest. Moses' message looked forward to the Messiah, and the New Testament points to the fulfillment of the Law, Jesus. But then the author says that the message didn't benefit those in the wilderness wanderings. Why didn't it benefit them? They weren't united by faith with those who listened.

You're not saved simply by knowing the information. Biblically speaking, faith and belief is more than mental assent to truths. The apostle James picks up on this idea in his letter. Remember when he talks about believing that God is one. And he says that we do well to believe this. But then he adds that even the demons believe that God is one. But he goes one step further and says that the demons tremble! The demons not only know what's true about God, but they have an emotional response to that. The force of that passage is that you can have knowledge and emotional responses, but that doesn't mean that you actually trust God. Put it back in the context of Hebrews. The people had amazing experiences with the Exodus. They saw the pillar of fire and the cloud. They walked through the Red Sea. They were fed daily. Their shoes didn't wear out. God miraculously provided water and food. And there were times when they trembled at God's holiness. But did that first generation make it into the Promised Land? No. Only two men did: Caleb and Joshua.

Listen carefully, Ventura. The people couldn't presume to think that Caleb and Joshua's faith was enough for them, too. And same with you. Don't say because you're at a church that preaches the Word that you are therefore good-to-go. Here's my question: are you melted and moved by the gospel of Jesus? Do you not only know the information, but are dependent on Jesus as your forgiveness and life? Do you embrace that he and he alone is your hope and your identity?

Faith is what is necessary to have God's rest. Once you have faith, then the community of believers matters! Look at verses 3-5 again: ³For we who have believed enter that rest, 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. ⁴For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: "And God rested on the seventh day from all his works." ⁵And again in this passage he said, "They shall not enter my rest."⁵

⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Heb 4:2.

⁵ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Heb 4:3–5.

We who have believed enter that rest. In order to make sense of what's being said here, remember the Hebrew situation. They've experienced persecution before. Many have lost homes. They're facing an upsurge of persecution under Emperor Nero. They were told that Jesus gave them the life they'd been longing for. But in following Jesus, they've experienced greater pain than they could have imagined. How is following Jesus actually beneficial? And now, as pain arises, all they want is rest. And is that so bad? Can you relate? When trials or temptations increase, don't you just want rest? Is that so bad?

Well, according to the author of Hebrews, longing for physical rest could be bad if you think physical rest is actually going to give you the rest you long for. You see, we need to know real rest – a rest like Hudson Taylor, where he learned that there's a greater rest from God. This is what is said here. In quoting Psalm 95 again, the author is highlighting that in the days of the wilderness wandering, rest was available to them, but they didn't get it. Then he says this strange statement, "although his works were finished from the foundation of the world." What does that even mean? Well, look at verse 4. He quotes from Genesis where we read that "God rested on the seventh day from all his works." Then in verse 5, he reiterates the "They shall not enter my rest."

While this may seem confusing, and hopefully I can explain it well. The author goes all the way back to creation. And, in creation, there were six days mentioned. For each day, Moses writes that there was an end to each day: evening. But on the 7th day there is no evening. This seems to be what's highlighted here in Hebrews, too. God rested on the seventh day, and guess what? That rest continues on. That's why God can offer that rest to people in the wilderness wanderings. That's why David can offer that rest to the Israelites in his day. And that's why the author of Hebrews comments on us needing to enter God's rest today.

By the way, with the author highlighting this rest of God in Genesis, he is bringing in a new concept of God's rest. There's a greater rest than the Promised Land. The Promised Land was a shadow of the rest of God. R.T. France writes, "**The 'rest' he is talking about is not a mere cessation from trouble in an earthly paradise but a sharing in the eternal rest of God himself, which began when creation was finished and will never end**" (Longman, p. 66). Those who didn't enter the Promised Land didn't merely *not get land*, they didn't enter the rest of God. And why didn't they enter that rest? Because they didn't trust the Lord.

What about you? Do you trust the Lord? According to verse 3, you can enter that rest *today*. While there's definitely a future component to it, looking to the day when sin completely ceases and we arrive at the land whose builder and maker is God, we must remember that even as we look forward to that eternal day of rest, we can walk in rest today. And realize, the rest wants to give you isn't merely creaturely rest. The rest he gives is *his* rest. Ponder that. God delights in gifting his children with his rest. This is not a rest that causes us to stop doing things. Even as we look back at creation and God resting, that doesn't mean God stopped doing things after he made Adam and Eve. He is sovereign and he works providentially in all things, holding everything together and causing all things to work together for good! In a similar sense, his rest that he gives us doesn't call us to *not* do things. Instead, as one man puts it, this rest is a "repose of. . .soul." There's a divine rest God gives to us now as we work in this world.

Through trust, dependence, reliance on Jesus, we can experience rest. One man writes, "**Trust brings rest because it sweeps away, as the north wind does the banded clouds on the horizon, all the deepest causes of unrest**" (Maclaren as quot. in R.K. Hughes, p. 110). Are you trusting the Lord? Do you look to him as your rest or have you been drifting from Jesus? In the midst of the distractions of life or the pains of life, have you diverted your attention from God's rest to this world's rest?

But don't just think about you. The health of the body of Christ needs your loving exhortation. The application of this text would be things like: Do you pray for and exhort the other believers around you to keep looking to Christ? Do you do this daily, as long as it is called today? Don't assume because someone's in attendance that they're all good. They might have a pasted on smile or a mask they're wearing that is deceiving you (and maybe even themselves) of where they're at spiritually. Oh Ventura, mere attendance doesn't mean someone is doing ok. We must exhort one another to continue in faith in Jesus.

So, even though persecution, pains, trials or even joys come into our life, we have God's rest and that's what we delight in! Because of God's faithfulness, we can say "we are resting in the joy of what Jesus is!" Exhort one another to depend on Jesus. Fear for the believers with whom you've committed. Attendance doesn't mean someone's in God's rest. Now the author gives more reason to have a godly fear for one another.

2. Sin keeps people from God's rest (vv. 6-7).

⁶Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, ⁷again he appoints a certain day, "Today," saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." ⁶

"Since therefore" emphasizes that on the basis that God's rest began when he completed creation, then that rest continues on. Again, that's why it was offered in the days of Moses and it was offered in the days of David, and it's offered today, too.

With this open offering then, people should be concerned about this rest. The world is weary and tired. We are exhausted in dealing with sin and with other people's pains even. Where are we going to find rest for our weary souls? In Jesus, the One who is the superior prophet and is superior to angels and Moses.

But if you do not trust him, you remain in your condemnation. The pain and turmoil you experience here are only tastes and hints of what Hell is like in its turmoil. I pray you'd hear this warning. Again, I need to say that I am so concerned that even in Christian circles, professing Christians seem to think that sin doesn't matter. As long as you said the right words in the form of a prayer, you're set for Heaven. But again, salvation isn't merely a change of destination. Salvation includes a change of who we are – a change of desire that leads to a progressive change of actions. I say this again because the author of Hebrews says that the people didn't enter because of disobedience. Sin is sinful. Christians increase in knowing how sinful sin is.

This past Wednesday night at the praise and prayer night, we were discussing last Sunday morning's message and Scott Moe said something that I thought was profound. He said he's not the kind of guy to get together with other men and ask how they're doing, but he found that in his life if he doesn't have men in his life, he'll coddle sin. But when there are men in his life who know his weaknesses and sins, he then fights sin. Now, get the context of the words of Hebrews here. We are to exhort one another and fear for one another's pursuit of Jesus. If disobedience and sin reveals a lack of faith, then how do we

⁶ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Heb 4:6–7.

help one another go grow in faith. We engage one another and we even help each other to see the exceeding sinfulness of sin!

Again the author writes, “If you hear his voice, do not harden your heart.” This should be the message we preach to one another. Consider Jesus and don’t harden your heart. Let’s kill sin together. If you’re a Christian, you’ll heed the exhortations of fellow believers. If you’re not a Christian, you won’t listen. You’ll turn and spurn. But we need to be a people who keep exhorting because we know that mere attendance doesn’t mean you’re saved, and we also know that sin always festers and seeks to destroy! So, Ventura, fear for the believers around you for these reasons But we have a final reason, stated in the positive:

3. God gives God’s rest to God’s people (vv. 8-10).

Verse 8 says, “⁸For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on.”⁷ The line or argument goes this way. God created and then rested. That rest continues on and God calls people throughout all time periods to enter it. The Promised Land is just a shadow of the eternal rest. Canaan is not *the* rest of God. After all, if Joshua had really given the Israelites rest, then David wouldn’t be warning fellow Israelites of *not entering* the rest. David and the Israelites were in Canaan. Hadn’t they entered rest? Not the rest God was pointing to. God was pointing to a Sabbath rest for all of his people. This Sabbath rest isn’t based on land. It’s not based in prosperous circumstances. It’s a rest that supersedes circumstances. It’s God’s rest.

I want to give very practical application on this. Many of you know the story of one of my sisters who lived in rebellion, eventually ran to Chicago and we didn’t know where she was for weeks on end. She was addicted to drugs and even sometimes slept under porches. She refused to repent of her sins, and in this season, it sent my mom spiraling emotionally. Understandably her prayer was that Shelby wouldn’t die. But that longing for Shelby’s life was controlling my mom. She sunk into depression, and as a child I can remember her stuck in her room. She wasn’t engaging the body of believers. She wasn’t engaging her family. And then one day, she remembers when God overwhelmed her. It was as if he said to her, “If Shelby dies, am I still good?” And finally, my mom said “Yes.” And in that moment of surrender to the Lord, she got up out of her bed and went to the piano to play “Like a river glorious is God’s perfect peace.” Did circumstances change? No. Shelby could have been dead that day. We didn’t know. But in that moment, my mom surrendered to the rest of God. And, in the midst of pain, she connected with believers in the local church, and as a young boy, I saw my parents needing the body of believers. I saw my parents loving fellow Christians. I saw God’s grace in empowering my parents to live for his glory.

How can we have that joy? Because we realize that Jesus is in control and we are not. Verse 10 says, “¹⁰for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.”⁸ How did God rest from his works? Again, this doesn’t mean God stopped doing things. But he did stop a specific work that led to the work he is doing now. So, as Kent Hughes wrote, “God’s repose is full of active toil. God rests, and in his rest he keeps working, even now” (Hughes, p. 113).

How does this apply to us? We have rested from our works. What does that mean? We all are born with this innate tendency to prove ourselves and even to be the master of our fate. We defend ourselves and

⁷ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Heb 4:8.

⁸ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Heb 4:10.

highlight what we do. Or, we tend to think that what we do is going to save others or change people. If we're just better parents or if we work harder at this or that, then the other person is going to do what I want. This tendency comes in, I believe, because we are prideful. We put way too much stock in what we can do. It's not that what we do doesn't matter. Everything we do has ramifications. But none of our works can attain salvation. None of our works guarantee *anything*.

But what about Jesus? Do you know what Jesus' Sabbath rest gives us? Resting from self-salvation. When we look at Jesus and the good news of his life, death and resurrection; we see that we are sinful in trying to prove or redeem ourselves. Life isn't about us. It's about God. When we're elevating ourselves, we are not depending on Jesus. But when we see Jesus and recognize him, then we are set free from working that way. Now he fuels our works in a whole different way. I don't work to gain his approval. I work because he works in me. I work in order to delight more in him. I work in order to love others. My work doesn't weigh me down because it doesn't condemn me. And my work isn't dependent on what people think of me. Instead, it's fueled by Jesus! This is rest that only God can give.

In all of this, please remember that **this Sabbath rest that we experience today is only a taste of the fullness of the Sabbath rest. The author of Hebrews is going to highlight greater rest to come, and I believe I need to highlight it here, too. There will be a day when there will be no more pain, sorrow, sickness or sin. There will be a day of no morning and evening, so to speak. A day of unending delight where we will work without sweat and we will worship without remnants of sin. It's the day we enter the heavenly country, the heavenly Jerusalem – as Hebrews writes in chapters 11 and 12. This is God's rest to us, and since it is for us, let us be concerned that we all experience it daily and fully.**

Because of the glorious promised rest, will you encourage the fellow believers in Jesus daily? Ventura, I've been so encouraged in my preaching through Hebrews because I have seen many of you practically making application over the last few weeks. I have received more texts or e-mails from people wanting to grow together and even involving me in asking me for prayer or even having people ask me how they can be praying for me. But I want to share one instance with you. This past week as I was working on the sermon for today, I received a text from someone that said, "One day, we will be sitting at the great marriage feast together rejoicing and eating the best food we've ever tasted in the presence of our Savior. How amazing is that?!" Then, a few hours later, I got another text from someone else: "One day we will marvel at the incomparable riches of his grace expressed in His kindness to us which He will lavish upon us over and over again throughout not just the age to come but age upon age forever in a new and more glorious earth than the one we already know! Chew on that for a moment!"

Both friends encouraged me in the eternal future rest, and in doing so, they encouraged me in my rest right now. They helped me as I was praying and as I was working through my sermon. They strengthened me in the assurance I have in being the Lord's. And this is how we all ought to be towards one another. From elders to deacons to the youngest member of our body, we must exhort and encourage and strengthen one another. God made a promise that his children will enter his rest. Since he made that promises, and since he works through his children to encourage his children in his promises, let's exhort one another until we see our Savior face-to-face!

And what a perfect way to enter into communion this morning. This practice is God's ordained means to encourage one another in the rest we have in Jesus.

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