

The Christian life has its ups and downs. Sometimes we experience the spiritual mountain top when we're excited about God and passionate about our faith. Other times we live in a valley. We wonder what God is doing. We don't understand His ways or why something happened in our lives. Most of the time, our Christian lives are ordinary. We carry on with daily life trusting the Lord for His wisdom and grace. This is all normal for the Christian life.

We can experience God's rest on a mountaintop, in a valley or living an ordinary day. The writer of Hebrews raises this possibility in the next section of his letter. So whether you're on a mountaintop or in a valley or just plugging away with the normal Christian life, I have a question for you to ponder. Are you currently experiencing God in rest? Or might the word restless more accurately describe the state of your soul? Last week we talked about the problem that some people who start out as Christians end up not to be Christians. We learned that the greatest indicator of a genuine Christian faith is persevering in the faith to the end of our lives. If you continue to pursue with you walk with God; if your sin bothers you and if you still pray even when life is hard, those indicate a genuine faith.

In this next passage, the writer exhorts unbelievers to believe and join the ranks of the believer. But He also encourages those who already believe with a great promise of hope called God's rest.

He talks about God's rest as wonderful to experience and available to anyone who believes. So here is the main idea for today's message. To enter God's rest, rest your life on him. Our passage today will help us unpack this statement. It will help us answer the questions: What is God's rest? What does it mean to experience God's rest? How do we rest our lives on Him? I pray if you are already a believer, encouragement and joy will flood your heart because of God's rest. I pray if you are not a believer, you will be one by the end of our time together having entered God's rest.

Hebrews 4:1-13

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. **2** For 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. **3** For 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. **4** For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: “And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.” **5** And again in this passage he said,
“They shall not enter my rest.”

6 Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, **7** again he appoints a certain day, “Today,” stating through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted,
“Today, if you hear his voice,
Do no harden your hearts.”

8 For if Joshua has 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.

11 Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. **12** For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. **13** And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

So if you were with us last week, you may remember that the author gave two examples of faithfulness to God in chapter 3. Jesus was the positive example in verses 1-6. The Israelites who left Egypt were the negative example. In verses 7-9, those Israelites in mind, the author continues in chapter 4.

He has just talked about the fact they did not enter God’s rest. He quoted God’s declaration of this back in Hebrews 3:11, “As I swore in my wrath, ‘They shall not enter my rest.’” So the Exodus Israelites would not enter God’s rest. But their failure did not exclude anyone else from God’s rest. He says in verse 1, “the promise to enter his rest still stands.” So it is still possible to enter God’s rest.

What is God’s Rest? Well, the author does not write “this is what I mean by God’s rest.” But he gives several clues to its meaning throughout. First, we see that it is something that God Himself possesses. It is referred to as His rest in verse 1, my rest in verses 3 and 5 when God speaks, and God’s rest in verse 10. So it is not our rest of some general rest. It is the rest God Himself has and experiences.

Next, we see that it is something God did on the 7th day of creation. Do you see that in verse 4? “For he (God) has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way “And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.” That is a direct quote from Genesis 2:2. God rested. He did not rest because he was tired. Rest, in that context, meant he ceased from using his creative energy. In fact, let’s hear Genesis 2:1-3. “Thus the heavens and the earth were finished and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work that he has done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the

seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.” So the word “finished” shows up twice in Genesis 7. This gives us a clue that God’s rest involves an aspect of completion and reflecting on what has been finished.

So God’s rest is something He possesses. It is something He did on the 7th day after He finished his creative work. We also learn that it is available to us. We can reach it in verse 1. Believers have entered it in verse 3. It remains for some to enter in verse 6. This rest is somehow a present reality and a future hope. Verse 3 says “For we who have believed enter that rest” – like we have already gone in or got it. Verse 10 talks about whoever “has entered God’s rest” – past tense. Some have already entered in. Yet it is also a future hope for those who have not yet entered this rest. Verse 1 – the promise of entering His rest still stands. Verse 6 – It remains for some to enter it. Then in verses 9-10 he seems to be talking about some greater rest that is still coming. In verse 7 He qualifies rest with the word Sabbath. “So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. That phrase “resting from one’s works” could have both a present and future meaning.

So with all this mind, what is God’s rest? **It is the satisfaction that God enjoys over His finished works.** This same rest is available to believers. We can experience this sense of completion and satisfaction in what God completes or finishes. One commentator writes this – “God’s people share his rest. What he did, they do. By becoming identified with him, they enter into his experiences.” When the author adds the phrase Sabbath to rest in verse 9, it adds another dimension. Not only is it satisfaction but some celebrated – they gathered together. Heard God’s Word. They reoriented their lives to God. They also rejoiced in God and what He had done.

So this gives us a clue to the second question. **What does it mean to experience God’s Rest? It means we experience the satisfaction that God enjoys over His finished works and rejoice in him.** So notice, it is not primarily about satisfaction in our completed works. It is not about getting physical rest. It is soul rest that experiences the satisfaction of God. But there also seems to be some aspect of celebration over the works of our lives. Notice verse 10 – “For whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from him.” So somehow, when we enter God’s rest we also get to experience a similar satisfaction rest about our own works. That might mean a satisfaction from persevering as a parent; or working hard at a career; or living the Christian life; or persevering in the faith; or being faithful in our marriage or relationship, or doing

something just because it was the right thing to do. But we all know we do each imperfectly. So we can rest from the work of trying to live the perfect life. And instead we can rest in the finished works of God including His creation and Christ's finished work on the cross. And we can rest in the fact that God promises to finish or complete His work in our lives. So resting in God is a massive giving over of our work and life to God.

Now I hope that you're beginning to see the staggering possibilities that entering God's rest opens up. When do we think we can experience deep soul rest? – On a beach somewhere in the Caribbean during winter; at the beginning of a long summer vacation; at a time when everything in life is going well and we have few stressors. Except these hardly ever happen in our lives. We have to live the vast majority of our lives at home in the ordinary daily grind with real people and ongoing issues. So if the beach, or summer vacation, or no stressors are the only ways to experience soul rest, we won't experience much. But if God's rest is available anytime and anywhere, a dramatically different life lies before us.

How do we rest our lives on him? First, Enter God's rest through faith in God. At the end of verse 1, the author states "Let us fear, lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it." It is possible that someone that is connected to God's people may not be part of God's people. When we put the trust of our life onto Christ, we enter God's rest. Please do not fail to enter into this rest. It is not enough to hear the word. We must respond to it with faith.

Second, we live lives of obedience by the power of God. Notice how disobedience marked an inauthentic faith. Verse 6 – Those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience. Verse 11 – Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience." So we must stop tolerating ongoing disobedience to the Lord in our lives. The growing Christian must address disobedience in their lives. Then they will turn to the Lord and other believers to leave such disobedience behind.

Third, guard against hardening your heart against the voice of God. This was Israel's problem. They kept hardening their hearts to God's promises and provision. So the writer repeatedly reminds his readers of this possibility for us. Verse 7 – Today, if you hear his voice do not harden your hearts.

Forth, continually reorient our souls by coming to God. Life throws us curveballs, trials, tragedies, and frustration. This can affect our heart attitude towards God. We go through times when we don't understand

what He is doing. We go through pain or some deep tragedy. We don't have all the answers. Many things are beyond our control. They can all contribute to soul dissatisfaction with God.

So we need to check our soul satisfaction with God. We need to renew satisfaction with God, His word, His ways and His will. We need to check whether we really trust that He is at work. We may need to regain that greater vision of God's sovereignty and power, then we can trust the things of our lives to Him. We may need to put less trust in our feelings and more trust in His promises. When we experience loss, we need to regain confidence that He does supply all we need – not necessarily all we want. We may need renewed confidence that Christ's work on the cross was in fact sufficient to pay for all of our sins, the more we gain satisfaction in God, the more likely we will experience His rest. We need guidance to do all of this. So this gives some greater weight to Jesus' famous invitation – "Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest;" – not sleep – not ceasing from life's struggles – the rest of God; soul satisfaction in God and His finished works and His ongoing work. Too often God's rest is meant to rest our life on Him.

One - Enter God's rest through faith in God

Two – Live lives of obedience by the power of God

Three – Guard against hardening your heart to the voice of God

Four – Continually re-orient your soul by coming to God

Fifth, pay serious attention to the word of God. I haven't even mentioned the most famous verse in this passage on God's word. We quote it all the time to point out the living nature of God's Word. But here, I think the author points to God's Word in general after showing how a specific passage of God's Word deeply impacts us. He quoted God's word from Psalm 95 over and over since chapter 3. This about the way this Word penetrated deeply into our hearts over these past 2 weeks. This shows when the Word of God is living and active. So pay attention to God's word because it speaks deeply to our souls and discerns the thoughts and intentions of our hearts. After all, nothing is hidden from God's sight. So let's stop pretending like it is and instead let God speak to us through His Word.

But I pray most of all today that you are encouraged by the possibility of experiencing God's rest in your life today. We also look forward to experiencing it in all its fullness in eternity. Until then, enter his rest and rest your life on Him even now as we go to the Lord's Supper.