

A Better Rest

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Date: 28 January 2018

Preacher: Martin Ayers

[0 : 00] So we've started this series at St. Silas in the book of Hebrews, working through it together. The original heroes of the book were under pressure. And because of that pressure, they were drifting away from being Christians.

And there might not be a more important book of the Bible for us today than this book Hebrews. It's got essential teaching in it, magnificent teaching about Jesus as the majestic son and as our high priest.

But it's also essential because every one of us in every generation faces that same battle not to drift away from God. If you're not being intentional about being a Christian, you will drift away.

Unfortunately, and I wish it was the other way around, you don't drift into spiritual health. If you're not thinking about your Christian life and being holy, you don't drift towards holiness and effectiveness in God's kingdom.

Natural drift is always away from Christ. It's what we all do. And so the truth in Hebrews and the warnings in there are commands written by God to pull us back from drifting and from danger.

[1 : 08] In chapters 1 and 2, we had this magnificent opening about Jesus, the eternal son. And the big idea was that Jesus is a better word from God. And so we should pay careful attention to him.

And now in chapters 3 and 4, we hear that he offers a better rest for us. So we're thinking about God's rest. I don't know what you think of when you think about rest. Some of us might think of rest very positively.

And Darren said at the beginning, didn't he, that he'd love a good rest given his pattern of life. But for others of us, sometimes we don't think positively about the idea of rest because we're active people.

And we think of rest as like being a couch potato. But be assured that when God talks about his rest, he's not talking about doing nothing and being a couch potato.

God's rest is everything that we were made for. It's everything our heart longs for. It's the place of ultimate satisfaction and fulfillment and contentment. And in Hebrews 3 and 4, the writer opens up for us the story of God's rest as it's set out in the whole of the Bible.

[2 : 14] So we're going to look at the nature of God's rest, the warning about God's rest, and then thirdly, the way to God's rest. Those points are in the service sheet if you find that helpful. So first of all, the nature of God's rest.

Let's just think about what God's rest is. We encounter it right back at the start of the Bible. In Genesis 1, you have this poetic six-day, carefully structured account of creation to teach us important theology about who God is and what he has done.

And the pinnacle of that creation account in Genesis 1, the pinnacle is mankind as God makes us in his image. But the goal of creation is rest.

God creates, it is good, and then he rests. And it's picked up here in chapter 4, verse 4 of Hebrews, where it says, reading from the end of verse 3, His works have been finished since the creation of the world.

For somewhere, that means Genesis 2, he has spoken about the seventh day in these words. On the seventh day, God rested from all his works. Not that God has stopped doing anything.

[3 : 25] In fact, Jesus says in John chapter 5 that his father hasn't stopped working to this very day. Rather, it's that God's work of creation was complete, and he was satisfied in it.

And he began a different kind of work, of sustaining and reigning. So God creates our fantastic universe out of nothing. And when that creating work is done, he sits down on his throne to reign.

And in the creation account, the seventh day doesn't end. There isn't an eighth day. God is still resting. So that the goal of mankind is to share in that rest of God.

That's what we were made for. Being in God's rest means that all is well with you. It's like harmony. It's living in harmony with God, knowing him, being blessed by the relationship with him. In harmony with each other, serving each other. And living in harmony with the world around us, as God has called us to care for his creation. To look after the world for him.

[4 : 26] Now today, we live in a world that's been wrecked by sin. We live in the post-Genesis 3 world. The world that comes after Genesis chapter 3 when humanity turned away from God.

And so there's lots that's still good in the world, but it's a world that is wrecked. It's in discord. It's not in harmony anymore. It's a place where work is grim. Where our relationships go wrong.

And where we were reminded last week that we live our lives in the fear of death. Which we do, don't we? We live in the world today ever conscious of growing old. Of the fear of being bereaved. Of being lonely. Of becoming old ourselves. Of dying. We live our lives in fear of the reality of death. So there's so much about life that makes it a struggle today.

And yet God continues to hold out to us the offer that one day we can enjoy his rest. And the best way I can think of for us to imagine God's rest is this.

[5 : 28] Rest is what happens when the harsh struggle is over. It's the climax of great stories. If you think about Star Wars. If you think about the original trilogy.

Before they plan to make three more. Okay. How does it end? Right? You've had this epic struggle between the forces of good and evil. The Empire and the Rebel Alliance. And in the great finale. The good wins. And that massive struggle is over. And the characters that we've grown to know and love. They're having this party on the moon of Endor. In the Ewok village. What's going to happen after that?

That's how it ends. We leave the story. What's going to happen next? Well, it's not that those guys. Leia and Luke and Han Solo. Those guys. And all the inhabitants of the galaxy. Are now going to do nothing.

Forever. Now it's not that. But the harsh struggle is over. They're liberated to build a new life together. Or in the Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe.

[6 : 25] By C.S. Lewis. You've got this great struggle of good and evil. There's the White Witch. Who's made it always winter and never Christmas. And Aslan overcomes and wins the victory.

And the book, the story ends with the four children being placed on thrones in Narnia. Crowned to reign. They're not about to do nothing forever.

They've got work to do. They're going to reign in Narnia. But the harsh struggle is over. And the reason we love stories like that is because they're just pictures of what God is doing in the world that we live in.

It's the picture of the future for us. That he is going to put things right. And there will be a new creation. He promises that in that grand finale he will wipe away every tear from our eyes.

And that we will reign there with Jesus. Entrusted by God with work to do. The evil and all that it's brought to our world today will be gone.

[7 : 26] And the harsh struggle will be over. Now at the beginning God gave humanity a sign of that rest that's coming. A way of displaying it and enjoying it. By commanding his people to keep a Sabbath day.

In that just as he had rested on the seventh day from creating. He commanded that we would set apart a day where we rest from our work. And we celebrate his reign as king.

It's just a sign woven into the life of God's people. That there's a place of God's rest. So the writer here in Hebrews. If you have a look at chapter 4 verse 9. He picks up on that sign.

He says there remains then a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For anyone who enters God's rest. Also rests from their works. Just as God did from his.

It's a sign of what we're looking forward to. The ultimate Sabbath rest. Is being with God. When he fully and finally establishes his reign as king. And living for that hope.

[8 : 26] Is what makes sense of life today in the world. In a way that nothing else quite can. We're accustomed to people thinking. Well that's what I'm aiming for in life. I'm aiming for some kind of contentment.

Satisfaction. We'd probably say. People are living in the pursuit of happiness. Of some kind. The Canadian psychologist Jordan Peterson. Has been over in the UK. And he was in the news a lot the last two weeks.

You may have seen because he did this remarkable interview. With Kathy Newman on Channel 4 News. But it was reported in the Observer last Sunday. About Jordan Peterson. The headline was that he says.

The pursuit of happiness is a pointless goal. Alright. And that kind of wakes people up. Alright that's interesting. Because I guess we're kind of accustomed to the idea. That's what we're all doing in life. We're pursuing happiness.

And he's saying it's pointless. When you look at what he actually said. He was saying that the problem with saying. That my goal for life is happiness. Is how are you going to react if you're unhappy.

[9 : 25] And in his book he describes the terrible struggle. In his own personal family life. From discovering that his daughter Michaela. Had a rare bone disease. So he's not actually saying.

When you think about it. That we shouldn't strive for happiness of some kind. He's just suggesting that because the world is messed up. And you can get blindsided by sickness and sin.

We shouldn't be naive about the happiness that we're pursuing in life. You've got to think about your life goals differently. So that the darkness of life doesn't leave you devastated.

Because you don't feel happy. And you think that's what my life was for. And I failed. But I think the ultimate answer really comes in God's promises here.

What if there was hope that you could put your hand on. That the darkness in our world will be taken away one day. That the living God is promising.

[10 : 22] That there is a place to look forward to. Of true harmony. The place that our hearts long for and need the most. That is real. He's going to do it.

And we know he's going to do it. Because in chapter 1 of Hebrews. Hebrews. We heard. We had things that God the Father has said to God the Son. And in chapter 1 verse 13. He said to the Son. Sit at my right hand. Until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet. So the Lord Jesus. The eternal Son of God. Is seated in victory. In eternity. Waiting for this world to be put right.

And we can enjoy rest with him. He offers it to each one of us. Even if you're here today. And you've never called yourself a Christian. You wouldn't say you're a Christian. You can have God's rest. You can enter God's rest today. That's our first point. The nature of God's rest. It's what we were made for. Secondly though. We get the warning about God's rest. We get an example of the warning.

[11 : 22] In the beginning of chapter 4. If you just have a look there. 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.

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 believed.

If you go back in human history. What we see is that. Just as our world was ravaged by the effects of sin. God put a prototype into history.

Of his place of rest. He made a promise to Abraham. Genesis 12. He chose Abraham's family. He blessed them. They became numerous. And then came the moment.

When they're in slavery in Egypt. When God acted on his promises. To liberate them. To bring those people out. And bring them into the promised land. Canaan. As a place of God's rest.

[12 : 21] A prototype. A foreshadowing. Of the rest that's to come for everyone. So he frees them in the exodus. The living God. And that's under Moses.

And then they enter the promised land. Under their new leader Joshua. A generation later. And the promised land. Looks like God's rest. Because they build a temple there.

To symbolize the presence of God. Among his people. They can enjoy relationship with God. And when things are going well. And God's people are faithful. And they've got a faithful king.

We keep hearing the refrain. In the Old Testament. That the land enjoys rest. On every side. But it's not just rest from enemies. The land is prosperous as well. And fruitful in God's kindness.

It's a foretaste. Of God's future rest. Planted for us in human history. So that we can look back at it. And look forward with confidence. But here's the shock.

[13 : 17] That's in Hebrews 3 and 4. It's that that first generation. That God led out of slavery. Under Moses. They never made it. Into the place of rest.

They got through the desert. Until they were camping. Just to the south of the promised land. They come out of Egypt. They come up through the wilderness. They go to Mount Sinai. They get the law from God. And they're just on the south.

Of the promised land. And then they send spies into the land. God says send 12 spies. Into the land. And they come back with a report. It's in Numbers 13. They say the land.

Is just like God promised. It's epic. They don't say epic. But they bring. Some fruit. They bring some grapes. They bring pomegranates. They bring figs. They're saying to this wilderness people.

You would not believe. How fruitful this land is. That God has promised. But they say. The people in the land. Are really big. They're powerful. Their walls are fortified.

[14:16] There is no way. God could get us that land. Two of them dissent. But there's 10 spies. Who say. We're not going to get in. And the people. Rebel. Against God. It's in Numbers 14.

It's a key moment. In the history. Of humanity. They refuse to believe. That God. Will get them into the land. The same group of people. Who had seen God.

Bring plagues on Egypt. And part the Red Sea for them. He fed them in the desert. With manna and quail. But what had happened is. That their hearts. Had gradually. Drifted away. From him.

And they lost confidence. And ultimately. They wouldn't trust him. So God's judgment on them. In Numbers 14. Was that that generation. Will never enter the land.

Only Joshua and Caleb. The two spies. Who didn't doubt God's. Power and goodness. Everyone else. So instead. The verdict on those people. Is they have to roam in the wilderness.

[15:10] For 40 years. Until every adult. In that generation. Dies out. And the children can grow up. And go into the land. So I think.

One of the most haunting lines. In the whole Bible. Is the beginning. Of the book of Deuteronomy.

They're on the edge. Of the promised land. They've been there 40 years. The next generation. Has grown up. We'll just put it on the screen. Deuteronomy chapter 1. Let me read it for you. It says. It's about the words. That Moses spoke. To all Israel. In the wilderness.

East of Jordan. So they're on the edge of the land. Look at verse 2. It says. It takes 11 days. To go from Horeb. That's Mount Sinai. To Kadesh Barnea. By the Mount Seir road.

In the 40th year. On the first day. Of the 11th month. Moses proclaimed. To the Israelites. All that the Lord. Had commanded him. Concerning them.

[16:02] You see that? 11 days. Journey. 40 years later. Moses is speaking to them. They could have been. In the land. 40 years. Minus 11 days.

Ago. And they've had to wait. Killing time. While people died. Because they wouldn't trust God. And Moses says to that next generation. Whatever you do.

Choose today. To trust God. And you'll enter the land. Do not be like. The last generation. And that challenge. That that today.

On the plains of Moab. That today. That Moses gives them. Becomes the today. Of every day. Of God's people. The whole rest. Of their history. So there's a psalm. Psalm 95.

Even once the people. Are in the land. That we said together. At the beginning of our service. Saying today. If you hear God's voice. Don't harden your hearts. Like they did. Keep trusting.

[16:56] And five times. In our section today. Hebrews 3 and 4. The writer quotes. From that psalm. Let's have a look. At chapter 3. Verse 7. Hebrews 3.

Verse 7. So as the Holy Spirit says. You notice that. So it's the Holy Spirit. Speaking to us. Right now. Holy Spirit. Who spoke to them. Then. When David was alive. Speaks to those. First recipients.

Of the letter. Hebrews. And he speaks to us today. Through the same word. He says. Verse 7. Today. If you hear his voice. Do not harden your hearts.

As you did in the rebellion. During the time of testing. In the wilderness. Where your ancestors. Tested and tried me. Though for 40 years. They saw what I did. That is why I was angry.

With that generation. I said. Their hearts. Are always going astray. And they have not known. My ways. So I declared on oath. In my anger. They shall never enter. My rest.

[17:52] And the warning comes. It continues. In verse 16. Who were they. Who heard and rebelled. Were they not all those. Moses led out of Egypt. And with whom. Was he angry for 40 years.

Was it not those. Who sinned. Whose bodies perished. In the wilderness. And to whom. Did God swear. That they would never. Enter his rest. If not to those. Who disobeyed. So we see.

That they were not able. To enter. Because of their unbelief. See what happened. They rebelled. In their hearts. They disobeyed God. Because they didn't believe.

They didn't trust. It's an agonizing story. And every time. Somebody says. I'm a Christian. And then says. I'm not a Christian anymore. Exactly the same thing.

Has happened. Every time. A follower of Jesus Christ. Says. I'm not a Christian anymore. It's the same process. We just like them. Are living in the desert.

[18:48] We're on the way. To the promised land. Today. The grimness of our life. Is because we're in the wilderness. We just like them. Can look back. At God's great rescue of us. He rescued them.

From slavery in Egypt. He's rescued us. By Jesus. Living the life. We should have lived. And dying the death. We should have died. He has rescued us. From our slavery to sin. And our fear of death. But the warning is. How will you respond. To his word. Today. And I'm sure that you could look around. If you've been at St. Silas. Any length of time. You could look around.

And you can think of people. Who you wish were here today. But they're not here. Because they've drifted. They've drifted spiritually. I can think of several friends.

Who 10, 15 years ago. Really inspired me. To serve Christ more wholeheartedly. And today. They're nowhere. Spiritually. They have drifted away. I wonder if you can think of someone.

[19:44] You're concerned about spiritually now. So how do we heed the warning? That's our third point. The way to God's rest. Wonderfully. The reason that Hebrews 3 and 4 is here.

Is because the offer is still open to any of us. To enter God's rest. But the writer urges us. We have to keep the faith. Have a look with me at chapter 3. Verses 12 to 14.

See to it. Brothers and sisters. That none of you has a sinful. Unbelieving heart. That turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily. As long as it is called today.

So that none of you may be hardened. By sin's deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ. If indeed we hold our original conviction. Firmly. To the very end.

So folks. The Christian life is about finishing well. You don't get into God's rest. Because you made a commitment to God. When you were 14. You don't get to God's rest.

[20:44] Because you went through an evangelical phase. In your life. Or you can. You can look at a few years of your life. When you really serve God. With commitment. Now you hold your conviction.

To the very end. Chapter 4 verse 4. Verse 11. Let us therefore make every effort. To enter that rest. So that no one will perish. By following their example.

Of disobedience. So any of us can enter God's rest. But our heart has to be responding rightly. To God's word. God will never abandon us.

He will keep his promises. And he will never abandon you. The only thing that can get in the way. Of entering God's rest. Is our hearts. A heart that's described here in.

Chapter 3 verse 12. As sinful. Unbelieving. That then turns away from the living God. A heart that stops listening obediently. To God's word. And did you notice.

[21:38] That it says. Our hearts. Chapter 3. Verse 13. Our hearts get hardened. Not by intellectual arguments. Against God.

But by sin's deceitfulness. That is that. However we might consciously think. That we're struggling to believe. And we might have intellectual objections. And we want to talk about evidence.

But ultimately. Our biggest danger. Is that. Sin deceives us. And it draws us away. From. The goodness of God. And so we find ourselves.

Questioning. The reality. Of who Jesus is. But it's because our hearts. Are being lured away. Perhaps we would be drawn.

To an attraction. The attraction of. Having an affair with someone. Or. Putting our career. Ahead of our Christian life. Or. Just living for comfort. And leisure. But the promises of sin.

[22:34] Seduce us away. And they lie to us. Sin is deceitful. Where are you most in danger. Of believing. The lies. Of sin. And how do we spot those lies.

For each other. Well. According to Hebrews. We need each other. Did you notice that. In verse 12. It doesn't say. So don't have a hard heart. Listener. No.

He says. See to it. Brothers and sisters. That none of you. Has one. In verse 13. The antidote is. Encourage one another. Daily. As long as it's called today. I don't know what you think about that.

But I think that's very countercultural. In Scotland. Might not be elsewhere. Maybe it is everywhere. But if someone asks me how I am. I say I'm fine. And that's the end of that.

I wonder how we react. If someone asks us. How we're doing spiritually. If a friend asks us questions like. What's encouraging you in the Bible at the moment? What are you reading about Jesus at the moment?

[23 : 34] Are you having good time in God's word? How's your prayer life at the moment? What sins are you battling with? At the moment? Do we welcome that? Or do we feel judged by that?

And on the defensive. Well Hebrews shows us that keeping going to God's rest. Is a corporate business. We need each other. That's why it's so dangerous to make life choices.

That mean we can't be at church every week. Meeting among God's people. But even once we are together. Could we at St. Silas. Step out of our comfort zones.

Cross the pain barrier. To be willing to. Feel a responsibility towards each other. To be willing to do. Spiritually. So that if we've read something in the Bible. Maybe that we're really encouraged by. We would share it with a friend. Or a coffee. So you know what. Can I just share this with you? I was reading this. And reading this about Jesus. It's amazing. Can I just share that with you? Or could we even be willing to challenge a friend.

[24 : 33] And say. Are you okay? I'm worried about you. You haven't been to growth group very often. Or. I haven't seen you at church. Or. Whatever other barometer we might use. Not to be legalistic. But just to say. I'm worried about you.

Are you keeping going? My experience has been. That if I am worried about someone spiritually. That they're drifting. And I say to them. That it looks like they're drifting.

And I'm worried about them. They get really angry with me. And. I shouldn't be too surprised.

Because if somebody. Tries to challenge me spiritually. I get angry as well. So I guess it's pride.

Isn't it? And we need to be willing to humble ourselves. For the sake of ensuring that every one of us. Finishes well as a Christian. And enters God's rest. But what if we're here today.

And we feel we've not been faithful. And we've drifted. Well let's be encouraged. That today. Is a new day. And however much we've drifted.

[25 : 29] Or turned away from God in the past. If you're willing to draw near to God today. He will accept you. Not because of your unfaithfulness. Or faithfulness. But because of Christ's track record.

Just at the beginning of chapter 3. We're told in verse 2. He was faithful. To the one who appointed him. Christ is the one who has been faithful to God. And God will accept you today.

If you draw near to him. With your confidence in Christ. If you're here and you're not a Christian.

There's nothing stopping you. From accepting and the offer. Of entering God's rest.

You get a foretaste of it today. As his spirit comes into your life. And you share in this hope. Of a world to come. When the harsh struggle is over. And we enjoy glorious rest.

So we're left for the encouragement. Of verse 1 of chapter 3. Therefore holy brothers and sisters. Who share in the heavenly calling. Fix your thoughts on Jesus. Whom we acknowledge as our apostle.

[26 : 30] And high priest. Christ. He will get us there. Let's pray together. Father God. We thank you for the rest that you promise.

As the goal of your good creation. Thank you that your promise of rest still stands. And that Jesus Christ has made the way. That we can share in him.

And through faith in him. We can enter that rest. We marvel that he is our pioneer. Who has gone ahead of us. To make that rest secure. He is our liberator.

Who by his death. Has given us freedom from sin. He is our sympathizer. Our priest. And we pray that you will help us. To heed the warnings of your word today.

Not to be like those who disobeyed in the wilderness. And missed out. Help us instead to encourage one another every day. So that we hold firmly to the end.

[27 : 25] The confidence we have had at first. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.