

God's Promised Rest

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- [0:00] Whether you want to think of it as a race or a hike or a journey, one thing is for sure, we have a start point and we have a destination as Christians. We need to keep moving. Whether you're in a race or up a hike, standing still doesn't really do anything for you.
- We've got to keep putting one foot in front of the other, whether we want to or not, if we want to get to the destination. Now, Gen W, they were the perfect example of how not to go on a good journey.
- You see, they set out following God. They had their destination, His promised rest. And then when it got hard, they tried to take the easy way out. They got to the precipice of the promised land and thought, you know what, actually, we're better to stay here because to go forward, that's way too hard.
- For them, the enemies were way too big. They thought, we'll take the easy way out. We'll just wait here and not do what God told us to. Gen W are how not to go on a pilgrim journey.
- So how should we carry on? How will we respond to this journey that we're on? What will we do when the going gets tough? Will we stop, look around for the easy way out, or will we make every effort to keep going?
- [1:27] What we're going to see tonight is that God's promised rest, it still stands. It is still ahead of us. We still have a destination, and it is glorious. So let's make every effort to get forward.
- We've got three points tonight. They're in your notice sheet. If you want to have that in front of you, that'll help. It'll also help to keep Hebrews 4 open so you can make sure I'm not chatting nonsense. And let's look at our first point tonight. God's promised rest still stands.
- Are you believing? Now for Gen W, God's promised rest was to be found in the land filled with milk and honey. The promise for them was inextricably linked with the physical place that was a land called Canaan.
- But when talking about God's promised rest now, how are we to understand it if it's not specifically Canaan-shaped? We don't have a land to get into.
- What is this rest? Well, before we get there, the writer of this letter, he really wants us to understand that just because Generation W did not make it to the rest, he wants us to know the rest still stands.
- [2:35] Look at verses 3 and 4 with me. God said, God said, They shall never enter my rest. And yet, God's works have been finished since the creation of the world. On the seventh day, God rested from all his works.
- And again, in the passage above, he says, They shall never enter my rest. God had rested since Genesis chapter 2 verse 2 after he created the whole of the universe.
- He rested. So the reason Gen W did not make it was not because the rest stopped existing or the promise didn't come true.

Verses 3 and 4 show us God's rest pre-existed everything. The reason Gen W did not make it into the rest was because they disobeyed.

So we need to learn from their mistake. Look at verse 6 with me. Therefore, since it still remains for some to enter that rest, and since those who formerly had the good news proclaimed to them, that is Generation W, they did not go in because of their disobedience.

[3:47] God again set a certain day calling it today. So here again, as in chapter 3 last week, the writer quotes Psalm 95 to prove to us that God's promise still stands for faithful believers.

When David, who wrote that psalm, wrote it, he said, Today do not harden your hearts. And that today is still true for us, according to Hebrews.

What that means is God's final promised rest extends well beyond any land in the Middle East. How do we know that?

Well, the next argument he makes in verse 8, If all there was was Canaan, He wouldn't, verse 8, God wouldn't have spoken after Joshua.

Verse 8, For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. You see, Joshua was Moses' successor, God's promised man, who led Israel to the physical place of Canaan for rest.

[4:53] And yet here we see in Hebrews, everything God was promising is still available. There was more to come than that place. That is the main point of the whirlwind of biblical theology that Hebrews is giving us about rest and the promised lands.

God did promise it to the generation W. They disobeyed, did not get it. He did promise it to Joshua and the land, but it wasn't perfect. He said again to David that today, if you harden your hearts, you will not enter my rest.

And that is still true for us. There is still a promised rest to come. That rest still remains. So what is this rest?

Well, I think the way that Hebrews uses these stories, they're helpful to make us get this picture of what our rest looks like. Think about Genesis. He quotes Genesis 2, and we see in that section of Genesis that Adam and Eve, the first humans, they got to enjoy, at least partially, this rest.

They were in Eden before the fall. There was no sin, no evil. Everything was made for them. It was given to them. Every tree, every bit of food, every animal to name, they had work.

[6:10] They had perfect relationships with each other, and even better, they had a perfect relationship with God. It was in Eden that God walked with Adam and Eve.

He spoke to them. They could roam the garden freely, enjoying everything in it. That is what our rest will be like. We will be with God, enjoying Him forever.

Everything we have ever been made for will be true of us in that day, in that coming rest, because we will walk with Christ Himself, in perfect relationship with Him and with everyone who is with us.

When that day comes, you will never have to worry again. No sickness, tears, death, no mourning. There will be no pressure to have the most productive day you ever can at work.

You will never have to meet any expectation of any emotionally unhealthy and unstable boss again. You will be safe, secure, and free in God's rest, just like it was in Genesis.

[7:20] You know that feeling of weight lifting off your shoulders after some stressor ends. Maybe you finally got to the end of your exam season, and you walk out and you can just go, or maybe the job you've been working towards, the task at job, it's been overwhelming you.

You've felt the burden on your shoulders until one day it's done, and you can just stand tall and breathe fully again. That is what I think it's going to be like to be in God's rest.

The wilderness generation did not believe they would ever enter that rest. They did not believe that following God was worth it.

When faced with a challenge and a hardship, they tried to take the easy way out. They did not believe that God could take them there, so they did not obey God's words to get them there, and so they perished in the wilderness.

Do you really believe that God's full, final rest that will fulfill all our needs is coming? It is so easy for us to ruminate on our earthly toil, to feel the weariness as we trudge slowly on this Christian journey.

[8 : 42] Every step feels like our shoes are filled with lead. We're tired. The glorious rest that is still ahead of us, that Hebrews assures us is still to come, will be worth every single step.

We need to enamor ourselves with it. We need to believe it. Present weariness makes it so easy to try and force our own rest.

We just so desperately want to just sit down just for a minute. I do this all the time in my life. I get home from work and I'm knackered.

I'm exhausted. Dinner needs cooked and there's jobs that need done, and I just, you know what, I just need to stop. So I sit down. I switch my brain off by scrolling on my phone, ignoring any responsibilities in the house.

And when I do finally get up off the sofa and do what needs done, I cook dinner, I do the dishes, whatever else needs done, well then realistically I've got no time left to enjoy my evening with my wife.

[9 : 50] Traitors has to wait till the next day. The problem with me is that my view of proper rest is flawed. So I accept a counterfeit rest.

If I kept in mind how good it will be to actually sit down at the end of the day with none of my mental load still in there, I would never wait on my phone for half an hour.

I wouldn't let that counterfeit rest distract me. That is what it's like to be on this Christian walk. We need to keep the glorious vision of the final rest in our minds.

It needs to be so vivid in color that we will never see past it or look away from it. It's when the color drains away that counterfeit rest looks more and more and more engaging.

We are pilgrims walking the narrow way to the heavenly city, but that walk is hard. When the color drains, we start to doubt if God's promise really will come true.

[10 : 56] Which part of God's promises or God's character are you struggling to believe today? What is the counterfeit rest you are grasping at just like generation wilderness?

Might it be that you're struggling to believe that God might actually want you with Him forever? Have you been so convinced by the world or the people around you that you are just so unlovable, that your sin is so much greater than anything else, that the shame is so ingrained in your heart that it would be preposterous to assume that the God who made all things really wants you with Him forever in His rest?

If that is how you view that rest, that God doesn't want you there, then the promises don't seem worth following. Heaven might seem awful. It will feel like you're the awkward outsider in a friend group.

You know, everyone's polite because you're there, but do they really want you? That is one example of how a misplaced view of God and a misplaced view of what His rest will look like might lead to us seeking counterfeit rest elsewhere.

If that is you, maybe you are trying to rest from your guilt by doing everything you can at church or every good thing you could to earn love from other people.

- [12:20] For some of us, counterfeit rest might just pop up exactly on the days when roots or growth groups meet. Right when there's a chance to gather with God's people, we think, you know what? No, tonight I just am way too tired.
- I don't want to face those people today. Counterfeit rest appeals because we do not believe that God's promises really are that good. So we make our own, but it will never satisfy.
- It will never last. It is so much lesser than what we're offered. Gen W did not trust in God's goodness. We see that in our passage.
- They disobeyed. That's what verse 2 says. They settled for counterfeit rest and they paid the price perishing in the wilderness. Counterfeit rest is no rest at all.
- It only papers over our deepest needs for something more. Something that can only be found in a gracious God who has promised you everything and will deliver.
- [13:26] We look for rest now at the cost of our future. We look to our own opportunities rather than the gracious Christ who will give us all rest.
- It is on that day when we enter that promised rest that we will see the love of the Father on full display in His Son who will be revealed in His glory.
- We will all finally sit at the wedding feast of the Lamb and we'll share what our journey's been like. We'll reflect back on our lives and see that every single lead-filled step that took us towards our rest was worth it.
- Don't let counterfeit rest satisfy you when there is so, so much more waiting for you. His promises still stand. Will you believe it? Now, knowing that God's promised rest remains isn't enough.
- Knowing a finish line exists when you're running a race, well, it's not going to get you any closer. Especially if you stop and stand still. You can know the race is there. Who cares if you're not moving?
- [14:42] It is what we do with the information that counts. So that leads us to our second point. God's promised rest remains are you moving forwards? Look at verse 9 with me in Hebrews 4.
- 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. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest so that no one will perish by following Gen W's example of obedience.
- When we realize that that promised rest remains, we have to be careful not to fall short of it. That's what verse 2 says. And we have to make every effort to enter it.
- Verse 9. Let me be clear. We are not making every effort to gain salvation. It is not our efforts that will save us from our sin.
- That only comes, as we saw in Hebrews 2, through Jesus Christ, who took on human flesh, who became lower than the angels in His humility and sacrificial death.
- [15:51] It is only through Jesus tasting death for us that we would receive new life from Him along with the eternal promised salvation of God through faith and belief.
- We are truly saved by grace alone and yet, Hebrews tells us, we cannot stand still waiting for someone else to pick us up and move us there.
- Our salvation requires no effort. It is yours, offered freely from Jesus. But according to Hebrews 4, our perseverance does require action.
- We must make every effort to keep moving towards the promised rest. Generation W are the example of what it looks like to not make every effort.

Look at verse 2 with me. Generation W had the same good news proclaimed to them that we had, but it was of no value because they did not share in the faith.

[16:57] And then down in verse 6, because they did not go in because of their disobedience. The wilderness generation failed because they did not have faith and so they did not keep moving.

They disobeyed. In other words, making every effort looks like hearing the gospel, believing the gospel, obeying the gospel, obeying God's words.

Listening to God's word and obeying God's word is not the same. It's like seeing a direction sign and then just going, cool. It says if I go that way, I'll get to my destination.

I'm just going to stand here and look at it. Maybe that'll help. Doesn't do anything, does it? It sounds silly. It sounds so silly, but every single one of us face moments of such immense weariness when all of our desires are drawn away and the colors slowly fades that we don't necessarily think logically.

Our mind is foggy and actually getting to a direction sign and looking at it, it's fine. We'll just look at it. I don't need to do anything just now. Just let me rest. I'm just so tired.

[18:12] What we need in those moments is something to snap us out of the days and to keep us moving forward. Hebrews 4 is that warning. It is not just a wooden sign with directions on it.

It is a huge flashing warning. I am picturing it as if it's like an old black and white movie and people are walking through New York and then the vents, you know, the vents on any ground that probably exists and all the steam comes up and suddenly you can't see anything and they're walking and they're slowing down and they don't know where they're going and all of a sudden, bang, the flashing yellow neon brightness is in their face and the warning sign of Hebrews is saying, do not stop here.

Keep believing God's promises. Have faith in the Lord Jesus. He will get you through. Look at what he said.

Believe what he said. Act on what he said. There is so much more here for you than you think. Do not be like Generation Wilderness.

The neon is blindingly bright. This is a firm warning. So are you going to make every effort to follow it? When you next feel like stopping on the roads to look for the counterfeit rests, will you look up and see the bright neon of Hebrews?

[19:40] Do not stop. Do not be like them. Keep moving. The best way to keep moving is by sticking together.

Verse 1 says, let us be careful. Verse 11 says, let us make every effort. The writer and the Hebrews are to rally and move forward together.

They need to unite around the good news that they have heard. The good news that Jesus Christ loved them so much. He died for their sins. He bore human flesh.

And He rose again that they might enter the promised rest forever. Have any of you seen this new movie that's come out? It's called The Long Walk.

It's based on a Stephen King book. So it's kind of weird. Basically, the plot is people are forced to walk at a specific pace for as long as they can.

[20:38] And as soon as they get slower than that pace, they get shot. Don't ask me why. I've not figured that out yet. But that's the premise. The Christian walk is nothing like The Long Walk.

You don't need to be running full pelt all the time. Some of us will get weary. We will get tired. But let me tell you, if you slow down, no one's going to shoot you in the head. Sorry.

Sorry. Abby got me. That's not going to happen. What's going to happen is you're going to start slowing down. But because we're going together, people will put their arms around you.

And they will take you forwards. It can sometimes really feel like when we're honest at church about needing to slow down and struggling with belief that we might get kicked out.

People might go, you what? I've never felt that way in my life before. Let me tell you, no one will act that way if you share your struggles. We believe in gathering under grace, striving together, making every effort together.

[21:50] When someone slows down, we pick them up and keep going with them. You need to make every step yourself, but you do not need to do it alone. When we slow down, we want to take the easy way out.

The easy way out is not telling anyone and is walking off on your own in the wrong direction. But the good way, the good way is a journey filled with radical honesty when the road gets hard.

You are not alone. And even better, we are not alone. This road that we walk is not one that has not been trodden before. Jesus himself walked every step.

In fact, he has paved the way on this journey. So together, we need to hear his words, believe them, and obey them. That is what it means to make every effort.

We believe in God's promises and we act on them. It is really common, I think, to think that if we struggle to believe in God's words but still follow his ways, we're inauthentic hypocrites.

[23:00] You don't really think that. Why are you doing it? That's what the liar likes to tell us. If that's where you are, let me encourage you. Obeying Jesus if you're uncertain is actually the pinnacle of faith because it is saying, Jesus, I don't even know what I don't know anymore but I want to go your way.

God's promised rest still stands. Are you moving towards it or are you standing still or are you trying to find a shortcut? John Bunyan wrote a brilliant book called Pilgrim's Progress.

If you've not read it, read it. It's literally everything we're talking about in Hebrews kind of, the journey forwards and there's this little section that I thought sums up perfectly what we're talking about.

Shoot me on the screen behind me and let me read it out for you. This hill though high I covet to ascend the difficulty will not me offend for I perceive the way to life lies here.

Come pluck up heart let's neither faint nor fear better though difficult the right way to go than wrong though easy where the end is woe. The wilderness generation found woe in the wilderness but we still have today to make every effort to enter that rest.

[24:17] Let's keep moving. Let me close briefly with the final point of tonight. God's word will work. Are you listening?

So Hebrews big flashing warning sign of a chapter, of two chapters actually, three and four is just this warning sign. It ends with these really well known verses. I in this prep for this sermon have actually been very shaken by these verses.

It is verses that we think are like great about God's word but they are a warning. Let me read them out for all of us. 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. 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. God's word is alive and it will never return empty.

[25 : 25] God's words, the Bible, it lives, it works, it moves and is the sharpest sword that will never miss. Are you listening to it?

Are you letting God's word uncover your deepest desires and intentions? or are you suppressing the truth every time you see it opens?

Ignoring what is said and following your own way. Either way, the word is at work softening or hardening you. For those who let it, God's word will soften our hearts.

With the precision of a surgeon's scalpel, this sword will cut out sin and disbelief. Every single Sunday, you sit in that congregation hearing God's word preached.

God's word is at work. Do not harden your hearts. Every time you open your Bible at growth groups or roots or at home, God's word is alive and active.

[26 : 31] Do not harden your hearts. Humbly read it, believe it. As we walk through the world on our way towards the promised rest, we need God's word to cut through the noise and the mist and the lies.

for those who do not want to be shown their true nature, for those who want to remain covered in the dark because it's too hard to be told the truth, for those people, the world will harden their hearts and it does lead to death as we've seen in the wilderness generation.

If that is you, if you are worried that is you tonight, if you think that maybe could possibly be me, then listen to Psalm 94. Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.

God is calling every single one of us today through his word, look to Christ, the perfect Savior, as is being proclaimed to you and believe in his death. Turn to him now and he will work in your hearts as you take that first step on the pilgrim's journey to his promised rest.

Hear, believe, obey, and you will enter the promised land. Let's not be like the wilderness generation who perished because they doubted God's alive and active words, who took the easy way out with their counterfeit rest and who perished.

[28 : 08] We need to keep moving, make every effort, do not stop, cling to Christ, cling to each other, cling to God's words because God's promised, final, perfect rest, it still remains for us today and it is more glorious than we could ever imagine.

Do not settle for counterfeit rest. this journey we are on will lead you to the most glorious view. Better though difficult the right way to go than wrong though easy where the end is woe.

Let me pray. Father God, we thank you that you have given us this bright, vivid warning. Lord, I pray that all of us tonight would be snapped out of our days and look to the glorious rest that you have promised us.

Lord, for those of us who are struggling, give us strength to believe, to obey, and to move forwards. For those of us who are struggling, give us brothers and sisters to help us, to share with, to walk forward with until that day when we enter your rest forever.

Lord, thank you that your word is alive and active, a living sword judging and bearing us before your perfect sight. Lord, I pray that everyone in this room would today not harden their hearts but instead make every effort to enter your rest.

[29 : 45] We pray these things in your son's most precious name. Amen.