

(Hebrews - Part 12): Enter Into the Rest of Jesus

by A.W. Tozer

The sermon emphasizes the importance of trusting in Jesus Christ for spiritual rest, rather than trying to earn it through our own labor or merit.

Duration: 23:29

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, John 17:4, Acts 13:36, Hebrews 4:1-3, Hebrews 4:11, Hebrews 4:14-16

Topics: "Expositional"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of finding rest in God. He highlights that building character and doing virtuous deeds alone cannot bring true rest. The speaker shares an anecdote about a preacher named Norman Grubb who spoke about the desire to do meritorious deeds and be known as virtuous. The speaker also references Benjamin Franklin's attempt to be a good man by checking off virtues on a daily basis. The sermon concludes with a call to search ourselves before God and to enter into the rest that Jesus Christ has provided for us.

Transcript

The man of God says, Let us, therefore, and you will note that let us is one of the, uh, the characteristic expressions of the book of Hebrews, exhorting. Let us, therefore, and the word therefore is a word meaning because of what went before. Because of what I have said before, let us fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any view should seem to come short of it.

For unto us was the gospel preached as well as unto them, that is, the Jews of olden times of whom he had spoken in the third chapter. But the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it. For we which have believed go enter into rest.

As he said, I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest. Which means they shall not enter into my rest, as it says above in chapter 3.11. So I swear in my wrath they shall not enter into my rest. If they shall enter into my rest, I understand is, uh, Hebraism for meaning not.

Although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. For I speak in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise. And God did rest on the seventh day from all his works.

And in this place again, if they shall enter into my rest, that is, they shall not enter into my rest. Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief. Again he limited a certain day saying in David, Today, after so long a time, as it is said, Today, if you will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

For if Jesus, that is, Joshua, had given him rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day. There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that has entered into his rest, he also has ceased from his did from his.

Let us therefore labor to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief. For the word of God is quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight, but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.

Sing then that we have a great High Priest that is passed into the heavens. Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. We have not a High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but one who was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in times of need. This chapter deals with a certain kind of rest. It is a moral rest, a spiritual rest, an inward rest, and a rest that satisfies.

And this rest springs out of a labor finished, and in this case finished by someone else. The Bible is very clear that no one has any right to rest until his work is done. The Lord never wants his children to take unnecessary breaks from their labor, but to finish the work David, after that he had by the will of God served his generation, fell on sleep.

And our Lord labored till he could say, I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. Rest follows labor according to the will of God. According to the will of man, rest and labor are so intermingled that the average fellow never gets tired.

But in the Bible this is not true. We labor, and when the labor is finished, then we wash our hands and say, thank God that's done, and we can properly sit down and rest. Now, the argument from scripture here is that God once did a work and rested from it.

That's in Genesis. And he entered into his own rest after he had done a necessary work. Then he entered into his own rest, that is, a cessation of labor.

For you will notice that rest is a negative thing. Rest is not a positive thing. I remember once a gentleman who hoped that he could help me, he said, Told you what you need is an intensive rest.

I've always smiled about that. I can just see a man with his muscles tense and his knuckles white trying to rest. He was intensely trying to rest.

And we do that, but don't get rested. Now, God entered into his rest, that is, he ceased from doing something. That's what rest is.

It is a cessation of labor. Then rest is automatic after that. Now, when a work is to be done, I say that no man has any right to rest till it's done.

Either the man has to do it, or someone has to do it for him. Now, God offered Palestine to the Jews. That's in the chapter here, that's the argument of the chapter.

God offered Palestine to the Jews, and he said, Now this is yours, it's all yours. You will not need to plant a vineyard, it's all planted for you. You will not need to clear a field, all the fields are cleared and fenced.

You will not have to start herds, the herds are everywhere. Milk and honey are flowing, the bees are there, and the vines are bearing. Everything is prepared for you, and I am driving out the unworthy inhabitants who are unfit to live, and I am going to turn this whole thing over to you free of charge.

The work has already been done. But Israel refused, and they failed, brought all down the way. In unbelief they refused and forfeited their rest.

And so, after all these years now, the book of Hebrews is written, and the man who wrote it argues from this history of Israel. He said there was a rest that could have been the possession of the Jews, they could have had it, it was theirs. God was offering them Palestine because a work had already been done.

All they had to do was move in and unpack their things and settle down, because it was all done for them. The rest was theirs by the labor of others. Now, he said, Israel met this in unbelief and they never occupied all of the land.

And they were in and out of the land, they were sometimes in bondage to the people of the land, and they never had the faith nor obedience to go in and take over the land and enter into God's rest. Now, that's the argument. It goes on that there is another rest offered to us in the gospel.

And this is not a rest by having herds of cattle and houses already built and fountains already flowing and orchards already bearing. This is a spiritual rest of which the others were symbolic. This is a rest of the heart.

This is the rest of the question of what am I going to do about sin. It has to do with holiness and how am I going to face the great God Almighty in that day to come. How am I going to stand up there in that awful judgment day before the blazing throne with sin on my heart? How am I going to satisfy justice which demands that I should die for my sin? How am I going to pay the moral debt? I am a man under deep debt.

If you were in debt to the Canadian government for unpaid income tax, you would be worried, and you should properly be worried. And yet, if somebody came along and said, Now, here, you owe \$10,000 in back taxes, and they're breathing down your neck, but here, I'll take care of it for you. It'll be paid.

It is paid. Here's the receipt. You'd rest.

You'd relax for the first time, and you'd sleep well at night. You'd say, Now, I'm not worried when I see a Mountie. I'm not thinking he's after me.

I know better now. He's just going down and walking down the street looking for bad men, but I'm all right. I have entered into my rest.

Not mine, but the rest of another. Now, that's exactly what the Bible teaches here. The rest of the Christian is based upon the work of another.

It is not his own work, for that he could never do. It is done by another who is capable of earning that rest, capable of procuring it. The Christian isn't capable.

Nobody's capable. That is, I cannot deal with the matter of holiness outraged. I cannot deal with the matter of justice violated.

I cannot take care of the question of sins committed and of moral debt. I can't. It's impossible that I should, for the best I could possibly do, and I can't do that, but the best I might do in a remote way would be to stop sinning now and not add any more.

But I can't pay one penny on the debt I already owe. And the debt I already owe is so great that it would sink me into hell. So now I've got to pay that.

I've got to pay that before I can rest. I owe not to a government, but to God Almighty, the Eternal God, a debt I can't pay, and it's weighing me down. And when the conviction of that strikes the sinner, we call it getting under conviction.

And that's the only place anybody ever was, was under conviction, weighing conviction, weighing him down. Now, either we've got to pay that or somebody else has to pay it. And I say when I can't pay it, the best we can do, the best we can do, is to pay from here on.

But we couldn't even do that. And so all the back tax is still owing, and all the moral debt behind us is still owing. What happens then? There is someone who comes and lays down his life just for the unjust, pays the debt he didn't owe, and includes in that debt all of our debts, propitiates for violated holiness, attunes for justice that is broken.

He does all of this. Now, he's capable of it, and the whole book of Hebrews argues for the capability of Jesus. Is he able to do it? It's one thing to make a promise, it's quite another thing to be able to carry it out.

And our Lord Jesus Christ came and said, Lo, I come in the volume of the book it is written of me to do thy will, O God. Was he able to do it? The whole book of Hebrews declares loudly with logic that he was able to do it. By himself he purged our sins and sat down on the right hand of God.

Now, if you will hear his voice, that's the vital question. Shall we be like Israel in those days when they heard the gospel, that is the good news, that there was a place prepared for them, that they didn't have to cut down a tree or blow out a stump, nor clear a field, it was all theirs? They didn't have faith to believe it, and so they never enjoyed it. They entered in, but as I've said before, it was always under a shadow and they never got it all.

Shall we be like them and so feel completely, or shall we try to do our own labor and enter into our rest? For any man who knows his own heart, who would dare to stand and say, I am morally capable of earning my own rest, we'll put that man down as being a moral fool. For a man who knows his own heart knows better. We either have to do this, we either have to satisfy God's holiness and satisfy violated justice, deal with the sin question and pay the moral debt, or we have to have somebody do it for us.

The book of Hebrews declares that somebody did it for us. That work was done by the Eternal Son. It's a dual rest that we rest from.

We rest from the labor of Egypt and we rest in Canaan from the labor of trying to make ourselves good or fix ourselves up. Now from what do we rest? Let's look at that for a little bit. Now a lot of people don't want this kind of rest, they want another kind, but those of you who want a moral rest, want to know what it is to rest in the heart, you're concerned.

What is it? What is it that I rest from? Well, you rest from the yearning for character. From the time I was a boy I've heard an expression I've never liked, and that is character building. I've never liked it.

The liberals use it a lot and educators use it. They're building character. I suppose it's all right.

Really if you're oppressed I guess I would have to admit that it's a valid phrase, but you usually like or dislike a phrase because of the context you've heard it in. I used to hear it uttered by men that I knew didn't know what they were talking about. So character building has never pleased me.

You can't build a character. You can take a man dying of cancer and you can teach him Greek and Hebrew and Latin and sing grand opera and enjoy great music and art, but he's still a dying man and you're not building anything in him. He's a dying man.

You can take a sinner and you can teach him to be honest and be a square shooter and to be a good Canadian or a good American or a good Britisher. You can help a man. There's no question about it.

Our schools can help the characters of our children. And I think that when we're criticizing everybody we ought to stop one minute and salute and stand in salute to the teachers that have helped to train our young people of the world and teach them that it's better to be good than be bad, and it's better to be honest than to be crooked. It's better to tell the truth than to lie and find fault with the teachers, but they've done a pretty good job.

If I had been as good a young fellow as my teachers taught me when I was going to school, I'd have been much better than I was. I think we ought to thank God for the teachers. But all you're doing is building is teaching a dying man how to speak good English.

All you're doing is making a cultured man out of a dying man. He and his culture are going to die together. That's what character building is.

It's all it is. It's better than nothing that it isn't enough. Meritorious deeds.

People want to do meritorious deeds. Did you ever dream? Now, I won't ask you to put up your hand because I know you have. Did you ever dream of doing noblights? I used to when I was a young fellow in my teens dream of going to war and coming home a hero.

You know, when I'd hear the Star-Spangled Banner I'd get goose pimples on my wrists and I'd say, oh, I'd just love to go out and die for something or come back. You know, I wanted to die for my country and then I wanted to come back and enjoy it. But it didn't work out somehow or other.

I never got any higher than a buck private in the rear rank when I was in the service. Never had a gun in my hands. So I sort of fizzled on that one.

But we all want to do meritorious deeds, you know. We want to go out and do something big. And then when we come to think of God and things of the eternal world, we want to do virtuous deeds.

We want to be known as virtuous, we want to be good. Benjamin Franklin, as you remember, was so eager to be a good man that he made a sheet of paper, divided into squares like a tight checkerboard, and he had Monday, Tuesday, when seven of them. Then he had the virtues on the left-hand side.

Honesty, modesty, humility, truth. He had all the virtues he could think of down on the left-hand column. And then each day he'd go down that list and check off where he'd failed.

If it was a blank spot, that meant he'd been all right. But if he failed, he checked it off. Well, he was wanting to be good.

And I thank God for everybody who would rather be good than to give up and sink into the mud. But that still isn't enough. You never find rest.

You never find rest when you're only building character, because you're never done building. You never find rest when you're only seeking to do virtuous deeds and the warfare of the flesh and the spirit. We can only be delivered in that warfare.

We can only win if we take deliverance by resting. I was at a gathering of preachers at Knox Christian Church Thursday. The Gray and I were there, and I was one of the speakers briefly.

And there came into our meeting, without our knowing anything that he was coming, or we'd have asked him to speak, no doubt, but he just wandered in and had lunch with us, Norman Grubb. Most of you know him or know about him. And he stood up there and gave us a little talk just after we'd eaten, while we were still around the table.

And he said something that interested me. He said that he thought that we ought to arrive at a place where aspiration had given over to realization. The person that aspires all the time, that's a good person.

The person that doesn't aspire is a finished and finite club. There's no hope for him. But you can aspire for a lifetime, but never realize.

He said, let's lay aspiration aside and begin to realize. That is, enter in. Not only want to get into Palestine, but cross the river and get in.

Not only want to give up the struggle, but to actually give it up and trust the Holy Ghost to take over. He didn't add that, but I'm adding that and explaining what he said. The man who writes in the Spirit says, Let us fear that the promise being left us of entering in, we as they, should seem to come short of it.

The promise still holds good, but somebody said, Didn't Joshua lead them in? Well, the argument is, if Joshua had led them in and they had obtained that rest, then why should, centuries later, God repeat it in David and say, If therefore you will hear his voice, harden not your hearts? No. He said, Joshua could not give rest to Israel because of Israel's unbelief. But there is a rest spoken of by David centuries after Joshua.

Therefore he talked about rest, not the rest that Joshua could bring to the people by taking them into Palestine, but another rest. The writer makes the application and says, It's an inward rest. It's a rest of the soul.

It's a rest from our labor. The promise still holds good. We are to attain God's rest.

What have we to be afraid of? It is that there may be some among you who will be found to have missed this chance. We've fooled with religion. We've played with Christianity.

We've been in and out of churches. We've heard this and that speaker. We've read this book and yonder book.

But in unbelief, we've blocked any effort of the Spirit to lead us into rest. We get mental habits. They get fixed.

Our hearts get tough and unresponsive. And then we should plow deep, our fowler ground, and seek to be able to respond quickly, to be responsive and sensitive to the voice of God, calling us to cease from our labors and trust in Jesus Christ completely, wholly, that we might be able to rest from our struggles. I'm afraid that most Christians are not very restful about this matter.

A Methodist bishop said once in a sermon that he had found as a pastor that 70 percent of his parishioners were not ready for heaven. They had to cram for the examination at the last minute before they felt free to get in. They weren't resting in what Christ had done.

They were vaguely hoping about what they might do or had done. Somebody said, Bishop, were you not a bit wrought up there when you said 70 percent? He said, Is that right? He said, I am telling you the truth, it's 70 percent. He said, I counted them.

Only about 30 percent of my parishioners were ready to go. Two-thirds, over two-thirds, of those who went to church for a lifetime and sang the hymns of Zion and heard the scripture read and listened to prayers and engaged in them and heard great preaching, for there were great preachers in those days. When they came to die, they hadn't entered into rest, and they couldn't go without fear.

I want God to lead me to a place where there is no fear in dying, because you are resting in God, resting in what Jesus Christ has done for you. God did his work and entered into his rest. His Son, Jesus Christ, did another work, and we enter into that rest.

Let's see that we do it. I pray that this may be a heart-searching morning as we continue with the service. Let's search ourselves before God.

Amen.

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