

Better Things

by Doc Greenway

Doc Greenway's sermon emphasizes the availability and attainability of God's rest through faith, highlighting the importance of practical holiness in the believer's life.

Duration: 37:12

Scripture: Genesis 2:2, Hebrews 4:1-4, Hebrews 4:6-7, Hebrews 4:9

Topics: "New Covenant"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on Hebrews chapter 4 verses 1 to 9. He mentions that he felt compelled by the Spirit of God to speak on this topic. The sermon emphasizes the importance of entering into God's rest and warns against unbelief. The preacher highlights that sanctification and practical holiness cannot be achieved through self-effort, but rather through faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ. The sermon concludes by emphasizing the condition for rest, which is active belief in God's promises.

Transcript

Hebrews chapter four, verses one to nine. Although we still mentioned some time ago that he was concerned about this rest of God and so on, I found that as I prayed the Spirit of God was speaking to me from this chapter, I felt that I had to give obedience to the Lord. And so I just want to look at these nine verses at least for tonight, because there's so much in this chapter really that it would be wrong, I think, to brush over the ground unduly.

Let us therefore fear lest the promise being left us or entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come shortly. For unto us was the gospel preached as well as unto them. But the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith than them that heard it.

For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, as I have sworn in my wrath, they shall not enter into my rest. In the Orthodox version it is, if they shall enter, but really it means this, they shall not enter into my rest, although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. For he spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this promise, and God did rest the seventh day from all his works.

And in this place again, 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 limiteth a certain day, saying in David, Today, after so long a time, as it is said, today if ye will hear his voice,

harden not your hearts.

For if Jesus, literally this is if Joshua, had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day. There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. And I mentioned a moment ago that it is Joshua, not Jesus, who is mentioned here.

You will see this from the context. And also the fact that the word, the name Joshua means Jehovah saves and is the Old Testament equivalent of the New Testament Jesus, Jesus, which is Saviour. I suppose if there is one comprehensive and yet simple word that describes the epistle to the Hebrews, it is the expression, better things, better things.

Because in this epistle it shows the superiority, principally, of Jesus Christ. He is superior in many particulars, superior to the prophets, superior to the angels, superior to Moses, superior to Joshua, superior to Aaron. And the main argument that is chosen by the writer here is that Christianity, as it is expressed in its founder, Jesus Christ, is vastly superior to Judaism.

Because these people to whom this epistle was written, at least we know this, they were Hebrew Christians who were in danger of slipping back into Judaism. As to where they met together, as to the location of the church, this is not known by anyone. Some say that they were at Jerusalem, and others that they were at Corinth, still others that they were at Ephesus, some that they were at Alexandria.

Well, no one really knows, and no one really knows who actually wrote this letter. Some think it was Paul, and others think it was Apollos, others say it was Luke, and some say it was Clement of Rome, and so on and so on. But as I think it was Luther once said, Who wrote this epistle, God only knows.

We'll have to leave it there, I'm afraid. No one really knows, and so we can't say with absolute certainty who wrote this letter. I know that in the Orthodox version it is the epistle of Paul to the Hebrews, but there is no real ground for this, as we have mentioned.

If you're looking at the first half of chapter four, and here we learn that salvation, in its fullest sense, is not simply deliverance from the fear of death, as it is expressed in the second chapter, and the fifteenth verse, but it is really participation in the rest of God. And this rest of God is not the rest of justification, but it is the rest of sanctification. In other words, it is the life of practical holiness.

Not imputed holiness, but empowering holiness. This is what the writer is speaking of, particularly in this chapter when he talks about the rest that remain unto the children, or unto the people of God. The Old Testament equivalent of this rest of God is the entrance into the land of Canaan, as we see.

This, you see time and time again, is repeated in this epistle, especially in chapters three and four, but so far as we are concerned, this is not entrance into Canaan to know the rest of God. It is entrance into Christ, in whom we have not only imputed holiness or sanctification, but as I said, imparted holiness or sanctification. Therefore, to experience and to enjoy the rest of God, in the ideal sense, is to know in practical terms a life of holiness.

I am quite concerned to know that it is nothing short of this, nothing less than this. However, we may interpret what that holiness means in actual Christian life. So, we are looking, first of all, at the promise of rest in verses one to three.

Here, the first point of notice is something about the promised rest, that it is really available. It is available. This is firmly stated in verse one, Let us therefore fear, lest the promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.

So, this promised rest is available. Then the writer says, Let us therefore fear, it is the unbelief of the wilderness generation, who refuse to obey God, and fail because of unbelief to enter into Canaan, that is, underlining this exhortation, like a timely warning. They failed.

They were full of unbelief. They disobeyed God. They didn't enter in.

Now, let us therefore fear. This should be our experience too, in our day and generation. The word fear is phobos.

Phobia comes from this word, of course, phobos. And it first has the meaning of fight, induced by a sense of dread. That's the original thought here.

But, what the writer really means is this. Let us then, instead of reposing on fancied privileges, be filled with dread. And here it is a reverential dread.

Let us lay this fear. A reverential dread in relation to God, lest we might fail to possess our possessions, to lay hold of what we have in Christ. And what we have in Christ is not really, or merely salvation from sin, as a consummation, but it is also sanctification for a holy life.

So, let there be a reverential, godly fear, which is wholesome, lest we fail at this point. A dread, a displeasing God, because of our unbelief. Remember how Paul, writing to the Romans in the 8th chapter, in the 15th verse, says, For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father, showing us that this reverential fear is in relation to God.

The S. Way translates it very beautifully, I think. Nor serve our spirit, nor clinging spirit, is it that you have accepted this sign. No, you have accepted the spirit which gives you the status of sons.

In the rapture of which we cry, My Father, my own dear Father, a reverential fear, a dread of failing God, which is healthy and wholesome and clean and pure and intensely wise, the beginning of wisdom. Fear what? Lest a promise being left us of entering into His rest. The thought which is emphasized here, on the ground on which the argument stands, is this, that God's original promise of rest remains unchanged.

It is still available. And whoever doubts the reality of this promise, well, he is excluded from it because of his unbelief. As the wilderness wanderers were excluded from Canaan because of their unbelief.

This is the point which is made. Put it plain, God's offer of a sanctified life as an experience is conditional on the faith of the believer. So it's all right for us to say, well, Christ is made unto us sanctification.

We have it all in Him. As many people often say, and use it almost as an excuse, for not pressing into the land, if you like, pressing in to possess their possessions. Because, you see, what we are, positionally in Christ, we are called to be experientially.

And this is really where the test comes, as the writer shows us. Lest any of you should seem to come short of it, is of the promise. The meaning here is, lest any one of you thinks he has come too late for it.

For anyone to think he has come too late to inherit the promised rest or the sanctified life, is an expression of unbelief. You know, these gloomy feelings of failure were prevalent among the Hebrews all the way through. Even in Isaiah's day.

In Isaiah 28, 12 you read, To whom he said, This is the rest wherewith he may cause the weedy to rest. And this is the refreshing. Yet they would not heal.

They would have nothing to do with it. And so their unbelief cut them off from it. This promise, then, is available.

That brings us to the second point about the promise of rest. Not only is it available, because God has not withdrawn it, but it is attainable. Verses 2 and 3 teach us this.

Verse 2, For unto us was the gospel preached as well as unto them. But the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it. Literally, the gospel preached is, We have good tidings proclaimed to us.

The authorized version would give you the impression that it is the preaching of the gospel in the technical sense. But it isn't so. It's a special application here.

It is the good news, the glad tidings, that God has provided the rest of holiness, of sanctification for his people. It is not only available, but it is attainable. To the Old Testament believers, this proclamation signified the promise of rest in Canaan, the Promised Land.

But to New Testament believers and to us it signifies the promise of rest in Christ, of holiness of life, not only positionally, but practically. All right? To them and to us was the word preached. Literally, again, the word of the message, how gracious God is in his offer of a holy life, a sanctified life, a pure life.

He prophesied as good tidings, as the very gospel we are to believe and look to. But it did not profit them, that is, it was of no effect or benefit to them, and that is to the ones in the wilderness. What reason? Well, we are told, not being mixed with faith in them that heard.

Literally, because it was not by faith made part of the inward life of those who heard. This is where they failed. Oh, they received the rich promise of the land of Kin.

We got that all right. But the word was of no value to them because they did not take advantage of it. They did not mix it with faith when they heard it.

And the writer sums up the cause for this at the end of chapter three when he says, So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief. Belief, then, is everything. Believing is everything.

The function of faith is the one thing that makes the promise attainable. It's available, all right, but it is only attainable when we exercise the necessary faith toward God in the promise which He made. Firstly, for we which have believed do enter into rest.

As He said, As I have sworn in my rants, they shall not enter into my rest, although the works were finished from the foundation of them. We believers, He says, who embraced the Christian faith when it was offered to us, we are the ones whose right it is to enter by faith into the rest which was promised. We have this right.

We have this privilege. As for those who disbelieved the promise, this is what He says, As I have sworn in my wrath, they shall not enter into my rest, because, as we have seen, unbelief debarred them from doing so. He goes on to say, Although the works were finished from the foundation of the world, this may be a bit obscure, but what He means is this, the providing of the rest is implied in the completion of God's work in creation.

Because when that work was finished, when He ceased from His work in creation, then after this He rested from His rest. So this is sort of implied in verse 3, but it is going to be plainly stated in verse 4. Now as God rested from His work, so in like manner the believer who experiences the rest of sanctification must cease and rest from His work, for there is no sense in which sanctification is the result of self-effort. This is what is plainly told to you.

Verse 10 confirms this in this chapter. For he that is entered into his rest, he also has ceased from his own works, as God did from His. So there is no self-effort here.

He is not a self-made man. Oh, these self-made people. I remember visiting one in Auckland years ago, and he had tons of money, any amount of possession.

He was so boastful about it all, and so arrogant and so proud. I've got four cars, you know, he said. Four cars.

After he described all the other possessions which he had. I don't need to tell you he wasn't a Christian, although his wife was. As I heard him say this, I have four cars.

At that time, as a servant of God, I didn't have even one. But as I heard him say it, I looked at him, poor man. Because he sat there, he was suffering from a terrible stroke.

He had four cars and he couldn't drive one of them. I'm a self-made man, you know, he said. I thought, oh, poor fellow, he certainly looked like it.

Poor man. But the thought here is this, that sanctification of a holy life, in a practical sense, is never the result of self-effort. He ceases from his own works as God did from his.

And he rests upon a work which has been accomplished. Not his own. But, thank God, the glorious, wonderful, finished work of Jesus Christ.

This is where he stands. The promise of rest which is experiential sanctification, of practical holiness, is therefore both available to us, and, thank God, attainable, by us, if we dare to believe. That brings us to the principle of rest.

Verses four to nine. The principle of rest finds expression in active belief. And it is this point that the writer emphasizes over and over again.

You find it, for instance, in the condition for rest. In verses four to seven. The condition for rest.

It comes to light at the end of verse six in particular, where you read, And they entered not in because of unbelief, which is the opposite of faith, or of belief. Verse four. For he spake in a certain place of the seventh day in this one.

And God did rest the seventh day from all his works. That's Genesis 2.2, as you know. So what was implied in verse three, is now stated in verse four.

God finished his work, he rested. Right? Verse five. And in this place again.

They shall not enter into my rest. The emphasis here is on the word, my. Psalm 95, 11.

This affirms the fact that God has a rest for his people, which is peculiarly and uniquely his own rest. Which only he can give. Because of the unbelief of those in the wilderness.

He made this solemn oath. They shall not enter into my rest. Oh, they'll find the measure of rest, but it will not be my rest.

Verse six. Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein, into the rest of God. And they to whom it was first proclaimed entered not in, because of unbelief, which is implied disobedience.

Seeing that therefore it remaineth that some must enter in. What is he saying? The promise of the rest, which has been given by God, has not been entered upon. It remains then that some must enter in.

Because otherwise the promise that God made is valueless, groundless, meaningless. It has no point at all. It has no foundation.

It is not a promise. If some do not take advantage of it. This is what the writer is saying.

Therefore over and above and long after the original proclamation, God is still offering this rest to his people. Still offering. Verse seven.

This is what he means here. Again. He limiteth.

No. He defineth. This is the word.

He defineth a certain day, saying in David, or through David, today after so long a time, as it is said, today if you will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. That's Psalm 95, 7. Today. Which implies that the promise holds good in David's time, in David's day.

It shows a merciful God extending this offer of rest far beyond the bounds of what human patience could accomplish. He is a patient God. He has to be to put up with people like us.

He is a patient God. And here he is, longing, pleading, urging, yearning over his people that they might banish their unbelief and venture by naked faith to believe for a sanctified, holy life, which is part of their heritage in Christ. For it is active faith in the promise of God.

It is the condition for spiritual rest. Now notice the contrast in this rest in verse 8. For if Jesus, as I said, if Joshua had given them rest, then would he, that is God, then would he not afterwards have spoken of another day, as he did in David, for instance. It might be affirmed that under Joshua, some of the people at least did enter into the promised rest.

He entered into Canaan. So the writer shows here that Israel's rest in Canaan, even those that did manage to get in, did not fulfill the divine ideal which God intended. Otherwise he would not have said, through David, so long after the event, that there is a rest into which people can enter.

Then would he not afterwards have spoken of another day, which you find in Psalm 95. So there it is. If the entering in of the people, some at least did to Canaan, was a fulfillment of the promise offered, ideally fulfilling it, then God would not have spoken in David years and years afterwards, saying, today, if you will hear his voice, don't harden your heart, as they did in the day of provocation, because today the promised hallelujah is still to come.

You know, the writer of Hebrews evidently believed that the day of the psalm extends right into Christian times. Why? Because this 95th psalm is a Messianic psalm, a psalm of the Messiah. And so, in point of fact, a day extends right through this age, right up to the time when Christ will come again.

That's a wonderful thing to realize, isn't it? In this day, this year of grace, as we say, in these present times, in this age in which we live, this promise is as real as when it first left the lips of God. It still holds good, because he said it, and hallelujah, he will fulfill it. So we've got in verse 9 the certainty of rest, there remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.

Do you believe? There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. And a wonderful thing here, a different word for rest is used now. It's the word sabbatismus, and it means a sabbath rest, making it a sort of cessation of work, as in the case of God.

This rest is the rest of perfect adjustment of all things to the purpose of God. And such is the result, which comes from the completion not simply of God's creative work in the first instance, but of Christ's creative work. For if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation, and the consummation of that creation, the aspect that we must see is that to reach the apex, the climax, is nothing short of a holy life, lived here and now. A holy life, yes, if you like, in the relative sense, but in any case, it is practical holiness that is intended here.

Who is it for? Well, we are told it is for the people of God, the true Israel, the true spiritual Israel, who inherit the promise by faith in Christ. There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. There still abides, there still remains this practical holiness upon which we can, by the grace of God, lay hold if we are prepared to exercise the faith that is necessary.

What is involved in practical sanctification? Two things, two things. One, separation from the world, from sin, from self, from these things, separation, so that they do not dominate the life. Romans 6.11, if you like, they do not dominate the life.

That's the first thing. And the second thing, dedication to God, in an unconditional surrender of ourselves to Himself. Dedication to God in an unconditional surrender of ourselves to Himself.

That's Romans 12.1 and 2. Then what are the agencies which God employs in order to bring about this practical sanctification in your life and mine? What are these agencies? First, the word of truth. John 17 and verse 17. Sanctify them through thy truth, thy word is truth, the word of truth.

You can call this, if you like, the informing agent, because through that word of truth we are instructed. I know I've mentioned these before, but it will do to mention them again. Second, the blood of Christ.

That's Hebrews 13.12. It means that He might sanctify the people with His own blood. This is the cleansing agent, the blood of Christ. The first is John 17.17. The second is Hebrews 13.12. Third, the Spirit of God.

Romans 15.16. It means being sanctified by the Holy Ghost. Call this the applying agent. The applying agent.

Fourth, the faith of the Christian. The faith of the Christian. Acts 26.18. Among them which are sanctified by faith is in me.

This is the appropriating agent. Acts 26.18. The appropriating agent. And now for all practical purposes we can say that the experience of the rest of God, the experience in practical life of a holy way of living, is to truly live the Spirit-filled life.

It truly cannot be less than this. To truly live the Spirit-filled life. Well, I'm sure you are concerned as my concern is that we should not fail to enter in because of unbelief on our part.

And thus repeats the experience of the wilderness wanderers. We could not enter in because of unbelief. But rather we were pressed on and pressed in to possess our possessions.

Surely one of those possessions is a bullion. Well, may God bless this Buddha. I felt that was as far as we should go.

It has been by the grace of God a means of opening our understanding and opening our hearts to all. I don't mind confessing that it was a very searching time for me when I came to deal with these questions. In a sense I wish that it had never been brought to my attention.

It was too late then. It was worth dodging the issue. And I'm so glad that God gave me the necessary grace to continue and to persevere and to... I was sure in my heart that this was what the Spirit of God was saying when I answered Him.

And therefore I can speak without measure of my own. Because He said it. And I've only been seeking to speak in living echoes of the Spirit.

Hallelujah.

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