

# I Can Do Nothing of Myself

by Robert B. Thompson

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*Robert B. Thompson's sermon emphasizes the importance of entering and living in the rest of God through faith and abiding in Christ.*

**Scripture:** Hebrews 3:1

**Topics:** "Rest In God", "Christian Maturity"

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## Description

Robert B. Thompson preaches on the importance of entering and remaining in the rest of God, as highlighted in the Book of Hebrews. He emphasizes the need for seasoned Christians to press forward in Christ, not being content with past experiences but striving for maturity and conformity to the image of Christ. Thompson warns against neglecting the rest of God, which involves ceasing from our own works and trusting in God's will and performance. He challenges believers to seek union with God through Christ, living in untroubled rest in God's will, and being prepared for the Kingdom of God on earth.

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## Transcript

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. (Hebrews 4:1--NIV)

The Book of Hebrews is addressed to Jewish believers, to "holy brothers."

Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess. (Hebrews 3:1--NIV)

That the people being addressed were seasoned Christians is shown by some of the passages of the Book of Hebrews.

Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, Instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And God permitting, we will do so. It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, Who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, (Hebrews 3:1-5--NIV)

These Christian Jews had been once enlightened by teachers who had heard from Jesus Himself, they had tasted the heavenly gift of eternal life, they had shared in the Holy Spirit, and they had tasted the

goodness of the Word of God and the powers of the coming age.

They were not novices.

Also, they had endured persecution.

Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. (Hebrews 10:32-34--NIV)

There is a great lesson for us here. We would suppose Christians with a background such as these Jewish believers had would be well on their way to Heaven. All they were to do now was to wait until they died and went to their mansion.

However, the writer of the Book of Hebrews at several points in his epistle warns them of severe consequences if they do not press forward in Christ and enter the rest of God.

We of today have not even heard if there be any such thing as the rest of God.

The truth is, we do not understand the Christian salvation. We are thinking of it as a ticket that we get when we make a profession of faith in Christ. The Christian salvation is not a ticket, it is a program that starts when we are in the rest of Satan and ends up when we are in the rest of God.

You can receive Christ, repent of your sins, be baptized in water, receive eternal life, be baptized with the Holy Spirit, be born again, talk in tongues, prophesy, be healed, pray for someone else to be healed, all in one evening. You are not a mature Christian at this point. You have just started through the wilderness. You have just left Egypt. You are not in the land of promise as yet.

Salvation is always today. You cannot be saved yesterday or tomorrow. There is no tomorrow. When you get to tomorrow it will be today. What you were yesterday you were. You may have been in a state of salvation at that time.

Today you are faced with the challenge of abiding in Christ. If you are abiding in Christ today you are without condemnation and you are moving from grace to grace and from glory to glory. You are being changed into the moral image of Christ.

If you are not abiding in Jesus today you are on the path toward condemnation and spiritual death. No change is taking place in you. Your salvation is being aborted.

Right now ask the Lord Jesus if I am correct in this.

The Hebrews Christians had all the experiences that we Pentecostal Christians have, and probably some additional ones. But the writer reprimands them severely in several verses, warning them that if they draw back it will be to destruction.

These people had had their possessions confiscated. Now they were busily establishing new households. The pressure was off for a season. And so, holding their ticket to salvation (as they thought) they were neglecting to assemble together. They were not encouraging one another to press into the rest of God.

But what is the rest of God. Let's see if we can find out.

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. (Hebrews 4:1--NIV)

Go back in your mind to the description we just gave of the spiritual background of the Jewish believers. Now think! The writer is concerned that they are not being careful about entering and remaining in the rest of God.

What is this "rest of God" that these veterans of the cross appeared to be neglecting? Are we of today neglecting to press into the rest of God?

For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith. (Hebrews 4:2--NIV)

Now here is a remarkable thing! The "gospel" was preached to the Jews who had left Egypt. Dispensational thinking has had an undesirable effect. It has left us with the impression the new covenant is entirely different from the old, having new Divine goals; new Divine ways. In fact we imagine that Jesus is different from the "God of the Old Testament."

Nothing could be further from the truth. The work of God, the Kingdom that operates through faith, is one from Abel to the present hour. We notice this fact by observing the heroes of faith of the eleventh chapter of the Book of Hebrews.

The Gospel of the Kingdom was preached to them as it is being preached to us. There are not two religions, Judaism and Christianity, except in the minds of people. There is only the one Divine intervention of God. God who spoke through the Prophets is speaking today. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Jesus Christ is the "I am" of the Old Testament. He is not I was, He is I am. Salvation is always today. One of the great errors of the current preaching is that you can be "saved yesterday" and now you are holding your ticket to Heaven.

Do you remember what happened to yesterday's manna? If your relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ is not current, then the forces of spiritual decay and death already are at work in your personality.

The incidents and institutions of Israel, such as the Altar, the Lampstand, and the Booth, are symbols of the reality that is in Christ. Today we have the spiritual fulfillment of the incidents and institutions, but we are still Israel, still the family of God, still the olive tree with its roots in Abraham and Sarah.

That which was preached to the Jews was the Life and power of God Almighty. But they did not mix faith with what was spoken. The same is true now. It is very simple to make Christianity an idle form, such as the "four steps of salvation," a form demanding no real repentance, no real moral transformation of the convert.

The righteous have lived by faith since the time of Abel. Salvation through faith is nothing new, it is just that today greater demands are made on us than on earlier members of God's Israel, and we have been given much more grace with which to conform to these new demands.

But God's goal never changes. The goal is that His people, His elect, live in iron righteousness, fiery holiness, and stern obedience to God.

Now we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said, "So I declared on oath in my anger, 'They shall never enter my rest.'" And yet his work has been finished since the creation of the world. (Hebrews 4:3--NIV)

The rest of God is that place in the center of God's will where all He has spoken concerning us as an individual is being performed. We have ceased from our own works and are trusting in God to will and to perform that which pleases Him.

The rest of God is portrayed in three dimensions:

The fact that God finished His work of creation in six days and rested on the seventh. The work of creation extends through the new heaven and earth reign of Christ. All has been finished, including our role in the Kingdom. We are to cease from our own works and enter God's rest.

The Sabbath rest of God.

The land of promise.

If we would enter God's rest we must understand that all was finished thousands of years ago. This does not mean we are to adopt a spirit of inevitability, to do nothing, waiting fatalistically for the inevitable to take place. The rest of God does not work that way.

It does mean we are to look to God to discover His will for our life. While we pray that God will make a way for us and our loved ones, and grant us the desires of our heart, our primary prayer is that we will find out what it is we are supposed to be and do at any given moment. We do not have to create another heaven and earth or even plan our own life.

Think carefully about the following:

My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, Your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. (Psalms 139:15,16--NIV)

"All the days ordained for me were written in your book." Notice the past tense--"were written."

What is your understanding of this expression? It sounds like our days were decided before they started.

One of my favorite verses is as follows:

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. (Romans 8:29--NIV)

I know there has been an uproar about predestination because it is not democratic. Also, there have been excesses in time past.

But just because it is not democratic and there have been excesses does not mean we can just throw out of the Bible what doesn't suit us.

The verse does not say we have been predestined to be saved. It says we have been predestined to be conformed to the likeness of Christ. In fact, to be in the moral image of Christ, thinking as He thinks, speaking as He speaks, acting as He acts, is the rest of God.

How do we know whom God foreknew? We don't. In fact, we do not know for sure whether we ourselves were foreknown. This is why we have to be diligent to make our calling and election certain.

We are to preach the Gospel to every creature. If we do this, the Spirit of God will call forth those who have been ordained to eternal life. This is what the Bible states.

Jesus did not tell us to save everybody, He told us to preach the Gospel to everybody, to bear witness of the Kingdom of God to all nations. If we do what we have been commanded to do, following the Spirit closely, then God can work according to His predetermined purposes. But to rush around in our own strength and wisdom trying to build the Kingdom ourselves results only in Babylon, the realm of confusion and the murderer of the saints of God.

Our job is to present our body a living sacrifice that we may prove God's will for ourselves. God's job is to will and to perform in us His purposes. This is the rest of God.

The fourth chapter of Hebrews refers also to the Sabbath. The Sabbath day was a covenant of God with the Jews under the Law of Moses. The Sabbath covenant commanded us to refrain from working on one day of the seven.

The rest of God is an eternal Sabbath. We are to be in the rest of God at all times, not just on one day of the seven.

The following shows the heart of the Sabbath:

"If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the LORD's holy day honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, Then you will find your joy in the LORD, and I will cause you to ride on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob." The mouth of the LORD has spoken. (Isaiah 58:13,14--NIV)

Today the Orthodox observe the Sabbath day in many ways. One way is not to push the button in an elevator on Saturday. They have to wait for a Gentile to get in the elevator and push the button. Another way is to refrain from throwing a light switch.

Now compare such actions with the passage above.

If you keep from doing as you please.

If you call the Sabbath a delight, holy, honorable.

If you honor the Sabbath by not going your own way.

If you honor the Sabbath by not speaking idle words.

Can you see that much more is involved here than pushing the button in an elevator or throwing a light switch?

This is the way we are to live at all times, not just one day of seven. This is the way the Lord Jesus always lives.

He does that which pleases the Father.

He finds His relationship with His Father delightful, holy, honorable.

Jesus does not go His own way.

Jesus does not speak idle words, only that which the Father gives Him to say.

This is the eternal Sabbath. This is the rest of God.

Jesus gave them this answer: "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, to your amazement he will show him even greater things than these. (John 5:19,20--NIV)

How would you like to live like this? I sure would. This is the eternal Sabbath, the rest of God.

By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me. (John 5 30--NIV)

How many times do we judge people and situations incorrectly? The Lord Jesus always judges righteously because He seeks to please God rather than Himself.

But if I do judge, my decisions are right, because I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me. (John 8:16--NIV)

I like this verse in particular because it reveals that we do not ever have to be alone. If we go where God sends us then He always is with us and we make correct, fruitful decisions.

"I have much to say in judgment of you. But he who sent me is reliable, and what I have heard from him I tell the world." (John 8:26--NIV)

The Lord Jesus did not come into the world and then decide what to say. The Lord kept in prayer constantly so He would declare only that which He was hearing from the Father.

How totally different Church history would have been had the various organizations and leaders said to the world only that which they were hearing from God. Hearing from God is an important part of the rest of God concerning which the Book of Hebrews is exhorting us.

So Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know I am the one I claim to be and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. (John 8:28--NIV)

This is the eternal Sabbath rest.

The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him." (John 8:29--NIV)

We see from the above that living in the eternal Sabbath requires constant prayer. If we are to always do what pleases God then we have to be in touch with Him continually. The Bible gives us general guidelines but it does not tell us what to do in each specific instances. But the Spirit of God will tell us what to do if we are listening.

Do not believe me unless I do what my Father does. (John 10:37--NIV)

"If you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please."

Don't you believe I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves. (John 14:10,11--NIV)

If you stop to think about it, we never really "saw" the Lord Jesus or heard His words. The Sermon on the Mount did not actually come from the Lord but from the Father in Heaven. Whoever sees Jesus is seeing the Father. Whoever hears the words of Jesus is hearing the words of the Father.

This is the spiritual fulfillment of the Jewish feast of Tabernacles, the major convocation that comes after the feast of Pentecost.

Paul was dwelling in the feast of Tabernacles. The life Paul was living was that of Christ living in him. This is the rest of God.

Can you see now why the writer of the Book of Hebrews was so upset? He knew the Jewish believers, although they were saved and filled with the Spirit as we use the terms, were not continuing to press forward that they might be living in the eternal Sabbath rest of God.

There really remains much more of God for us who have come as far as Pentecost.

We have discussed two dimensions of the rest of God, as presented in the fourth chapter of the Book of Hebrews. The first dimension has to do with the fact that God finished all His works when He created the world. The second dimension concerns the eternal Sabbath rest of God.

The third dimension of the rest of God refers to Canaan, to the land of promise.

We rest in the fact that God finished all His works in six days. We rest in the fact that we do not have to speak our own words or perform our own works. We might refer to these two aspects as the rest that we experience on the way to the rest.

Canaan is our goal, our land of promise, our rest. But of what is Canaan a symbol?

Traditionally Heaven, the spirit Paradise, is thought of as our Canaan, our land of promise, the goal of our salvation. We are saved to go to Heaven. But a little thought will reveal that Heaven does not really fulfill the types. Do we have to fight our way city by city to enter Heaven? Is Heaven occupied by tribes that worship demons? The New Testament does not present the spirit Paradise as the goal of our salvation, in spite of our long tradition.

We must look for a more scriptural, more fitting spiritual fulfillment of Canaan if we hold this to be the rest of God.

There is a Heaven where God, Jesus, the saints, and the holy angels are resident. I am not at all certain the spirit Heaven is as we have pictured but I feel confident it will exceed in glory anything we can imagine at this time.

However, to make eternal residence in Heaven the goal of our salvation causes problems when we are discussing the rest of God. In the first place, there is no passage in the Old Testament or the New that presents eternal residence in Heaven as the goal of salvation.

Second, the thought of resting forever in a mansion in Paradise really detracts from our zeal in pressing forward to the stature of the fullness of Christ. What good will it do us in Heaven to endure the rigors of becoming a new creation if there are no temptations or problems where we are going?

The issue of both Testaments is the Kingdom of God, the government of God that is to come to the earth, not a mansion in Heaven.

The New Testament sets forth two major attainments as being the goal of our salvation. The first attainment is conformation to the image of Jesus Christ in our spirit, our soul, and our body. The second attainment is untroubled rest in the center of God's Person and will.

Our ability to successfully perform the eternal role in God's Kingdom, for which we were predestined, depends on our being conformed to the image of Christ and living in untroubled rest in God's will.

These are the two great goals of the redemption of the elect of God.

Repenting, being baptized in water, being born again, being baptized with the Holy Spirit--these are the authority and power to attain the Divine goal of conformation to the moral image of Christ and rest in God's will.

As to conformation to the image of Christ:

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. (Romans 8:29--NIV)

As to rest in God's will:

That all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so the world may believe you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. (John 17:21-23--NIV)

It is not enough just to be in the likeness of Christ, to have the love He has, to have the power He has. Satan himself desires to be like Christ, like God.

It is the second part of the goal that Satan resists. He would never consent to live in the center of God's Person and will.

So we have image, but not just image. We have image and union to consider--the image of Christ and union with God through Christ.

To have image alone is not enough. We must be at rest in the center of God's Person and will.

To have union alone is not enough. We must have the moral character and behavior of Christ.

When we have the moral character and behavior of Christ, and are resting in God's Person and will, then we are ready to perform the role in the Kingdom of God for which we have been predestined. We are ready to be raised from the dead when the Lord appears, to be caught up to meet Him in the air, and to descend with Him and help establish the Kingdom of God on the earth.

The Charismatic move of today is at a crossroads. The Charismatic believers have greater knowledge of the Scriptures and greater familiarity with the gifts and ministries of the Spirit than has been true previously.

Many of the leaders are seeking power. They are endeavoring to command the Spirit of God so miracles will be present.

This is an attempt to be like Christ, to have the power of the Lamb.

Now the issue is: shall we give all this back to God so God may use us as He will, or shall we attempt to go forth and deliver the world? When we attempt to use the things of God to save the world we become part of the False Prophet that will support Antichrist. This is a great temptation to an ambitious minister of the Gospel.

Or shall we return to the Lord Jesus, lay our lives at His feet, and wait until we are hearing from Him? Are we willing to become nothing, to remain in the prison in which we are placed, to hang on the cross? Are we willing to humble ourselves, not counting our sonship a thing to be grasped?

Are we ready to be like Jesus in the sense of not speaking or acting except as He directs, just as He did not speak or act apart from the Father?

I think the majority of believers will choose to try to save the world without hearing from God, assuming they have this commission from the Scripture and do not need to wait on God. Just do what the Bible says. They then will change the Great Commission from going into all the world and making disciples, teaching them to keep the commandments of Christ, into going into all the world and getting people "saved," building churches, and teaching the people that because of grace we do not need to keep the commandments of Christ.

I think this is what the majority very well may do.

I believe also there will be a godly remnant who will return to Jesus and ignore the religious ferment of the proselyters. They will pray and wait until they know the Lord's will. They will continue to do what is set before them, but in their heart they will be living on the cross, waiting for the power of His resurrection, ready to share His sufferings.

It seems there always has been a godly remnant and a huge Babylon. Sometimes Babylon tries to eliminate the remnant, seeing these humble believers as a threat to the denomination.

Israel always murders her prophets.

The Book of Hebrews points us toward the rest of God. We are in the rest of God when we know deep in our heart we can do nothing of ourselves.

God finished everything from the beginning and our days were ordained of Him at that time. We must grasp this deeply and strive to find out what we are supposed to be and do.

We are under a better covenant than that of Moses. Our Sabbath rest operates every second of our life. We always seek the Lord's will and ways and we rejoice mightily in them. We delight to turn away from our own thoughts and plans and to rest in His almighty will.

And we have a clear goal--to mature in the character of Jesus and to be in union with God through Jesus; finally, to have the Father and the Son come and make Their eternal abode in us as we prepare to put on a redeemed body.

Then we have all eternity to fulfill the role for which we have been predestined, in the meanwhile revealing to all of God's creation the Person, will, way, and eternal purpose of God in Christ.

We spoke earlier that residence in Heaven is not a fitting fulfillment of the symbolism of the land of promise because we do not have to fight the enemy city by city to enter Heaven. It is true rather that the fulfillment of the symbolism of the land of promise is the rest of God. When we decide to enter the rest of God, that is, conformity to the image of Jesus Christ and untroubled rest in the center of God's will, rest in the Person of God through the Lord Jesus Christ, we discover that the enemy will resist every step we take. But every step we take, as we are guided by the Holy Spirit, is our possession for eternity.

I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. (Joshua 1:3--NIV)

If we are to enter the rest of God we must realize that the enemies that oppose us are also God's enemies. We could never conquer them in our own wisdom and strength. They are far wiser and stronger than we.

But when we understand we can do nothing of ourselves, that the battle is the Lord's, that His wisdom and power are far, far superior to that of our common enemy, then we can rest in God while we press forward toward the rest that is the goal.

The LORD your God will drive out those nations before you, little by little. You will not be allowed to eliminate them all at once, or the wild animals will multiply around you. But the LORD your God will deliver them over to you, throwing them into great confusion until they are destroyed. He will give their kings into your hand, and you will wipe out their names from under heaven. No one will be able to stand up against you; you will destroy them. (Deuteronomy 7:22-24--NIV)

We have been called from the foundation of the world to be God's witness and His covenant with mankind. Now God is resting while the power of His Word is bringing His will to pass. Let us strive to enter that rest.

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