

God's Rest  
Hebrews 4:1-16

I went to a dinner last night that had several speakers. Two of them were black. They were up front all evening. When I read a Scripture passage from Mark chapter 10 into the microphone these two speakers amplified my voice so that everyone in the place could hear. I fully appreciated these speakers. I cannot say the same for all of the human speakers. During two of the presentations, I found myself thinking, "Give it a rest."

One young woman went on too long. She made some good points, but just kept going and going. At some point I put my elbows on the table, rested my head in my hands, closed my eyes and began to think, "Give it a rest."

I thought the same thing as one of the men was speaking. This time it wasn't a time thing. Throughout his speech he made numerous inflammatory remarks. He was doing quite the opposite of what we learn in the Eighth Commandment which says of our neighbor to "defend him, speak well of him, and explain everything in the kindest way." Again, I began to think, "Give it a rest."

God wanted to give His people a rest, but instead many went on and on about how good things had been when they were slaves in Egypt: *Oh that we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt that cost nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic. But now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna...* (Numbers 11:4-6).

Others said some things that I see as quite inflammatory: "That Moses guy has taken off again and is doing God knows what.

Maybe he and his God has abandoned us. Let's make a golden calf to be our god!" And so they did. *And they said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!"* (Exodus 32:4). God may have also thought their words and actions were a bit inflammatory. Three thousand of them were put to death immediately. Last week we heard from Hebrews about all of the rest of the adults who left Egypt, how their *bodies fell in the wilderness*. God wanted to give them a rest in the Promised Land, but they failed to reach it.

This morning's reading from Hebrews has something to say to us about rest. It comes to us as a warning: *Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it.* The reading goes on to tell us what this rest is not. It is not the rest of living in the Promised Land. That rest has come and gone. Some entered it, but many did not because of their unbelief.

*Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, again he appoints a certain day, "Today," saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God...*

There is a rest yet to come, and God wants to give you that rest. And yet there is a problem. We are very much like those people of Israel. Instead of thanking God for all the great things He has given us, we can be very whiny and go on and on about all the things we don't have. We also say and do some very inflammatory things against our neighbor and

against God. The Eighth Commandment is not the only one we trampled underfoot. And these things do not go unnoticed. Our text says, *[N]o creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.*

That doesn't sound very good, and it's not. The writer of Hebrews aims to lead us to despair – to get us to realize we are in danger of losing the rest God wants to give. Many of the Israelites lost the rest of the Promised Land God wanted to give them. All of us are guilty of similar acts of disobedience. The author of Hebrews leads us to despair ... but he does not leave us there. He points us to Jesus.

*[W]e have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God... [W]e do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

Jesus, the Christ, is our high priest. As our loving high priest He sacrificed Himself on His cross. His blood was poured out to wash away all your sin. He died on the cross and rose triumphantly from the grave to give you new life – a life of rest.

We have a small taste of that rest now. How amazing is it that we are naked and exposed in God's eyes and yet we are not afraid! We know that God does not see as we deserve to be seen – poor miserable sinners – but as His beloved children forgiven and redeemed by the blood of His Son, Jesus. How blessed are we that we do not live in frenzy of fear, but in the rest of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

The fullness of that rest will be ours when Jesus raises us from our graves to live eternally with Him. There are many misconceptions about this rest. I'm going to read a few paragraphs from the first chapter of a book I recently read:

“Tragically, however, most people do not find their joy in Christ and heaven. In fact, many people find no joy at all when they think about Heaven. A pastor once confessed to me, ‘Whenever I think about Heaven, it makes me depressed. I’d rather just cease to exist when I die.’ ‘Why?’ I asked. ‘I can’t stand the thought of that endless tedium. To float around in the clouds with nothing to do but strum a harp ... it’s all so terribly boring. Heaven doesn’t sound much better than Hell. I’d rather be annihilated than spend eternity in a place like that.’”

The next 45 chapters are about what our eternal rest will really be like. I could go on and on, but I won't. I will say that Scripture does not describe our rest as sitting around on a cloud playing a harp. We will have new and perfect bodies which will have a rest from the pain and suffering which we experience now. There will be a new heaven and a new earth, and we will have an endless amount of time to explore and enjoy all they have to offer as we live eternally with Christ our great high priest.

Are you beginning to think about me and this sermon: “Give it a rest”? I will, right after I remind you one more time of the rest that is yours in Jesus Christ. He shed His blood on the cross to earn for you the forgiveness of all your sin. The heavenly Father sees you as you are and calls you His beloved child. This rest you have now. And also because of Christ you have an incredible and everlasting rest to come! Amen.