

Sermon for October 6, 2024 – 20th Sunday after Pentecost*

Hebrews 4:9–16 EHV

Theme: Real Rest

- 1) Is only given through God's Word
- 2) Is only found in Jesus

⁹So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. ¹⁰For the one who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God rested from his work. ¹¹Therefore, let us make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall into the same pattern of disobedience. ¹²For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword. It penetrates even to the point of dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow, even being able to judge the ideas and thoughts of the heart. ¹³And there is no creature hidden from him, but everything is uncovered and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we will give an account. ¹⁴Therefore, since we have a great high priest, who has gone through the heavens, namely, Jesus the Son of God, let us continue to hold on to our confession. ¹⁵For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin. ¹⁶So let us approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Just a glance over how much money is made by Hollywood, professional sports teams, casinos, and social media companies, and it becomes clear: our society prioritizes comfort, leisure, and entertainment over almost everything else. Why? Because people want to feel happy.

However, despite an abundance of material wealth and leisure opportunities, people are no happier now than before. Depression and anxiety rates are rising, not declining. Why? Because people are searching in the wrong places for true happiness, peace, and security. These blessings cannot be found in what the world offers. No, they can only be found in one place, through one person.

With the author of Hebrews as our guide, let us heed God's command to establish proper priorities so we can experience **real rest** for our souls. 1) This rest is offered only through God's Word, and 2) found only in Jesus.

Part One: Real Rest is only offered through God's Word.

Our sermon text is from the New Testament letter called Hebrews, which was written to encourage Jewish Christians who were being pressured by their countrymen to convert back to Judaism. The Jews claimed that their worship, with all its laws, was more God-pleasing than Christianity.

However, before our text, the author of Hebrews demonstrates that the Jews did not please God through their outward display of religiosity. Why not? Because they did not genuinely take God's

Word to heart. Despite their outward actions appearing noble, they did not believe the Gospel that was preached to them. Their worship became like that of Cain.

Do you recall the Bible story about Cain and Abel? They were two sons of Adam who made offerings to the Lord. Even though both offerings may have appeared “God-pleasing” to the casual observer, the Lord only accepted Abel’s offering, not Cain’s. Why? Because Abel’s offering came from a heart of faith, while Cain’s offering did not.¹

Like Cain, the Jews had an outward show of religiosity, but their hearts were far from God. Some pursued worldly fame, fortune, and leisure instead of the Lord. Others relied on their ancestry or accomplishments rather than on the Lord himself for salvation. That is why they never attained the rest God offered through the Gospel: blessings that come only through faith in the promised Christ.

Now, if the Jews, to whom God first promised forgiveness, peace, and everlasting salvation, failed to receive these blessings, does that mean they don’t exist? No, they exist and are freely offered to everyone through the Gospel, as the author of Hebrews writes:

⁹So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. ¹⁰For the one who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work, just as God rested from his work.

The word “Sabbath” means “rest,” recalling how the LORD rested from creating anything new on the seventh day of creation, as everything was perfect.

Similarly, as God rested from his labour on the seventh day, He offers us rest from all our spiritual labour. What is this rest? It is Jesus and the righteousness He won for us through His perfect life, innocent death, and glorious resurrection. God offers us this righteousness and peace only through faith in the Gospel, which is why the author of Hebrews writes:

¹¹Therefore, let us make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall into the same pattern of disobedience.

Oh, how easy it is to rebel against God without even realizing it. In a commentary on this text, a Lutheran pastor posed a thought-provoking question:

“Why do Christians fall? Is it primarily because of full-frontal attacks by Satanism, gross sin, or materialism? Is it not rather by “lifestyle” decisions, confusion of priorities, or gradual conformity to the world?”ⁱⁱ

Yes, it’s all too easy to worship like Cain, going through the motions without truly understanding what we’re singing, saying, and hearing. It’s all too easy to become like the Old Testament Israelites who rebelled against God by chasing after worldly idols with a “you do you” or “no one should tell you what you want is wrong” attitude. It’s so easy to forfeit the genuine, everlasting rest God offers us in the Bible by falling into the same pattern of disobedience as the rest of the world. For this reason, the author of Hebrews urges us to make every effort to enter the rest God offers us.

But what exactly does God mean when he tells us to “make every effort” to enter the rest He offers us? Aren’t we saved by God’s grace alone and not by our works? That’s right; we are saved solely through the grace He offers us in Christ! But here’s the thing: if we don’t take God’s call seriously to receive that grace, we might lose it.

Imagine a dad who received a big bonus at work and wanted to share it with his family. After entering the house, he called his wife and three children, telling them that he had \$100 for each of them. He said they should come and get it right away, warning that he would keep the money if they didn’t come. The youngest child comes first and gets the money. While he was excitedly running around, telling everyone what Dad had given him, Mom came to get her share. However, the other two children were engrossed in a movie and texting their friends. Despite repeated calls, they responded with, “We heard you. We’re busy right now. We’ll get it later.” Now, I ask you, does that answer show love and respect for their dad, who was offering them a generous gift? Do they have any right to be angry with their dad if he refrains from giving them any money because they did not heed his calls to get it right away?

Understand that the gift God offers us in Christ is far more valuable than anything else we might be prioritizing ahead of it. Therefore, ignoring God’s calls to come and receive it because we’re busy doing other things shows disrespect for both the gift and the giver. So, then, when the author of Hebrews urges us to “*make every effort to enter that rest,*” he’s telling us to go immediately to the Lord to receive His forgiveness, which He offers us through faith in His Word.

¹²For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword. It penetrates even to the point of dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow, even being able to judge the ideas and thoughts of the heart. ¹³And there is no creature hidden from him, but everything is uncovered and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we will give an account.

God’s Word is alive and active, always accomplishing what the LORD desires. Why? Because the Holy Spirit is constantly working through His Word. Like a super sharp sword, God’s law penetrates deep into our hearts, stabbing the pride and selfishness that attempts to separate us from Christ. Not only that, but the Holy Spirit uses His Gospel to connect us to Christ by creating and strengthening saving faith in our hearts, through which He grants us the everlasting rest Jesus won for us through His cross.

Consider this: the LORD knows every thought and inclination of your mind and heart. If left to earn salvation on your own, you would certainly perish. Fortunately, the LORD does not leave your salvation to your efforts. He has provided a Saviour who has secured real, everlasting rest for you—which you receive solely through faith in the Gospel. Who is that Saviour? It is Jesus, as the author of Hebrews proclaims:

Part Two: Real Rest is only found in Jesus

¹⁴Therefore, since we have a great high priest, who has gone through the heavens, namely, Jesus the Son of God, let us continue to hold on to our confession.

Unlike the Jewish High Priest, who could only enter the Most Holy Place of the temple once a year, Jesus entered the very essence of heaven itself. After making the ultimate sacrifice of himself on the cross for the sins of the world, he ascended to heaven alive and well, having been resurrected and proving beyond any doubt that the world's sins had been fully paid for.

In heaven, Jesus sits at the right hand of his Father, interceding on our behalf. This knowledge and belief bring us immense comfort, as the author of Hebrews explains:

¹⁵For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin.

Just think: even though Jesus is true God, he voluntarily took on human flesh to be fully human. Since he was tempted in every way like us, he understands all our struggles and sympathizes with our weaknesses. He knows all about your emotional battles and the pains and sorrows you face in life. He knows about your struggle with sin and the weakness of your flesh. Jesus is not a distant, disconnected God; He knows and cares for you. He endured many of the same temptations you did, with one crucial exception: he never sinned!

And what a supreme joy it is to know that he didn't sin! How so? Because through faith in Him, His perfect record of keeping God's law has become yours. His death on the cross paid for your sins in full. It is finished: you're reconciled with God, and heaven is your home. This is the peace, the sabbath rest, that comes from God through faith in Jesus. It transforms us, giving our lives new purpose and meaning. We no longer seek to satisfy our sinful flesh's cravings; instead, we desire to please God because we know He's looking out for us, working everything for our everlasting good.

In response to everything Jesus has done for us, the author of Hebrews urges: *¹⁶So let us approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

You no longer have to fear approaching God, thinking He'll ignore your prayers or condemn you because of your sins. Why not? Because you're clothed with Christ through faith in Him. In other words, whenever God the Father looks at you, dear Christian, He sees Jesus and loves you. He forgives your sins and listens to your prayers. For that reason, you can come to Him boldly, confident that He'll do whatever you ask in accordance with His good and gracious will. Why? Because He loves you—the proof of which is Jesus Himself.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, where can a person find true rest for the soul? Do we find it in our wealth, experiences, or ourselves? No. True rest for the restless soul is found only in one place, offered by one person. Let us make every effort to enter and remain in that rest by staying in God's Word – prioritizing Jesus' Gospel above everything else in life. It's there that we learn what genuinely matters: the truth about our sins and our need for a Saviour. More importantly, it's there that we learn the truth about Jesus and the everlasting salvation we receive through faith in Him. Amen.

ⁱ Cf. Hebrews 11:4

ⁱⁱ Richard D. Balge and Curtis A. Jahn, [*Sermon Studies on the Epistles \(ILCW Series B\)*](#) (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1993), 282.