

INTRODUCTION

A man died and left all he had to his wife. She didn't know how much money they had but she went out and purchased a nice tombstone for her husband reading, "REST IN PEACE." Once she started looking into their finances, she discovered her husband actually left them deep in debt. It made her so angry she scrounged up some more money to have three words added to his tombstone. After the additional words, it read, "REST IN PEACE ... "TILL I COME!"

The good news is you don't have to wait for a cemetery to rest in peace. You can find rest here and now. Do you ever tired and stressed out? If you do, you're like most Americans.

If that describes your life, then you need to discover the power of the Sabbath. When you do, you'll enjoy the BEST REST of your life.

I mentioned in the last message that the word "rest" appears eleven times in this passage. That's more times than the word appears in any other New Testament book. Once it is the word Sabbath-rest, but other ten times a powerful Greek word is used: *katapausa*. We get our word "pause" from it. Kata means "down" so it could mean slow down and pause. So as we read this passage I'm going to pause each time we come to the word "rest."

Hebrews 4:1-11. "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. 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. 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. For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: 'And on the seventh day God rested from all his work.' And again in the passage above he says, 'They shall never enter my rest.' It still remains that some will enter that rest, and those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in, because of their disobedience. Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later he spoke through David, as was said before: 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.'

For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience."

We live such busy, hectic lives. For the next few minutes, I want you to clear your mind, and try to relax and rest. Let's pull over at a spiritual rest stop. I want to lead you through how the whole concept of rest is developed in the Bible. Then I want to apply it to our lives so we can get in on this Sabbath rest that remains for the people of God. Let's explore five truths about rest.

1. GOD RESTED AT CREATION TO GIVE US A PATTERN

The idea of the Sabbath didn't begin when God gave the Law to Moses at Mount Sinai. God practiced the first Sabbath when He finished creating the Universe. The Bible says, "By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done." (Genesis 2:2-3)

So after God created the heavens and the earth, do you think He was tired? Do you think He sat down in a heavenly La-Z-Boy recliner and raised His legs? And said, "Whew! I'm tired! I've got to rest." Of course not! God doesn't get tired. He doesn't lose His strength. God doesn't need rest or sleep. "He who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep." (Psalm 121:4)

God didn't need six days to create the universe. He could have done it in six nanoseconds, or in one millionth of a nanosecond. The reason He worked six days and rested one day was to teach us by His example. We all must set aside time for rest and for worship. You have to teach children using object lessons and repetition. So, God showed us every week. Work six; rest one. Work six; rest one.

If you work your fingers to the bone, and never stop to rest and relax, you will miss God's best for your life. Americans are burning the candle at both ends. Someone wrote: "This is the age of the half-read page; a quick hash and a mad dash; The bright nights with the nerves tight; the plane hop for a brief stop; the lamp tan in a short span; the big shot in a soft spot; the brain strain and the heart pain; the cat naps 'til the spring snaps; then the fun's done."

We all need to follow God's example of a healthy cycle of working and resting. That's why God gave us His laws, to make our lives better, not to restrict us or to make us miserable. But as we will see, what God intended as something to help us live better lives, the Jews turned into a bunch of tedious rules and regulations.

2. ISRAEL KEPT THE SABBATH AS A SIGN OF THEIR COVENANT WITH GOD

We're familiar with the Ten Commandments. And in the Fourth Commandment, God says, "For six days a week, get all your work done. But then stop working on the Seventh day, and get some rest." The Jews still follow that rule in the 21st Century. I've been in Jerusalem on a Friday many times. It is both amazing and refreshing to see the transformation that happens in the busy city of Jerusalem on Friday afternoon.

A curtain of serenity, tranquility and quietness falls over the Jewish part of this holy city. The hectic noise of busses, trucks and cars is replaced by silence on most of the streets. An eerie stillness replaces the constant drone of construction. And all of this happens in the more secular sections of Jerusalem. As Jews prepare for the Sabbath, there is a special Friday greeting. They say, "Shabat Shalom!"

Of course, what God gave as a good rule to make life better, the Jewish rabbis have loaded the

law down with hundreds of additional rules, and loopholes. For instance, igniting a fire is considered work, and the modern rabbis have determined that pushing an elevator button on the Sabbath constitutes work. So every hotel has a Sabbath Elevator. From sunset on Friday until Sunset on Saturday it automatically goes to each floor and the door opens for a minute, then closes and goes to the next floor. We have had unknowing travelers get stuck on Sabbath elevators. They can punch away at the buttons, but they have been disabled.

When it comes to the Sabbath Day, many Christians are confused. They wonder if they can go fishing, mow their lawn, or go to a football game on Sunday. Are they violating the Fourth Commandment?

Well-meaning Christians often make two mistakes. First, some believe we should keep the Sabbath rules exactly as the Jews kept them. That's why we have groups like the Seventh Adventists, or Sabbatarian fellowships. They also follow the dietary rules of the Old Testament and don't eat pork or catfish. I believe they are sincere, but sincerely wrong. It's okay if they want to do that, but to expect and require it of others departs from the scripture. In Colossians 2:14, we read that Jesus nailed those written regulations to His cross, taking them out of the way. So Paul writes that we shouldn't let anyone judge us by what we eat or drink, or a religious holiday, or a Sabbath day.

The other mistake is that some Christians think Sunday is the Christian Sabbath. Roman Catholic dogma teaches that, and even the Westminster Confession in 1646, the Church of England stated that Sunday is the Christian Sabbath.

But Sunday did not become the Christian Sabbath. You can find the other nine commandments repeated somewhere in the New Testament—but not the Sabbath Commandment. Jesus said the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath, and His disciples were criticized for breaking the Sabbath rules. The Sabbath wasn't given to the church; it was given to the nation of Israel.

"The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant. It will be a sign between me and the Israelites forever, for in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he rested and rested." (Exodus 31:16-17) So it is a covenant between Israel and God, not for New Testament believers.

Even though the fourth commandment is not a moral law of God, it is a wonderful principle that New Testament Christians should observe. As I mentioned earlier if all you ever do is work, you will be missing God's best for your life. You need to maintain a healthy rhythm of work, rest, and worship.

3. THE ISRAELITES FOUND REST WHEN THEY OCCUPIED THE LAND

In Hebrews 3 we studied how Moses led the children of Israel toward the Promised Land. But when they came to Kadesh Barnea God said, "Go in and take the land. I will give you victory over your enemies." But the people were afraid of the giants in the land, so they turned their

backs on the Living God and wandered in the desert for forty years until a new generation led by Joshua finally trusted God. They claimed the land flowing with milk and honey, and they finally found rest.

After all their battles and victories, we read in Joshua 21: "So the Lord gave Israel all the land he had sworn to give their forefathers, and they took possession of it and settled there. The Lord gave them rest on every side, just as he had sworn to their forefathers. Not one of their enemies withstood them; the Lord handed all their enemies over to them. Not one of all the Lord's good promises to the house of Israel failed; every one was fulfilled." (Joshua 21:43-45)

Remember, their story is our story. When they were slaves in Egypt that represents our lives before we were delivered by the blood of the lamb, Jesus. Kadesh Barnea represents coming to a place in our walk with God where He calls us to move forward and claim His promise by faith.

But through the years, we have been confused about what Canaan represents. I love the old hymns, but we need to remember that hymns are not inspired like the Word of God. They are prone to error. Many of the old hymns talked about crossing the Jordan and entering Canaan as dying and going to heaven. Do you remember this one? "On Jordan's stormy banks I stand and cast a wishful eye. To Canaan's fair and happy land where my possessions lie." Well according to that song and others, Canaan was heaven and you never get there until you go through a cemetery. Another verse of that hymn says, "When I shall reach that happy place, I'll be forever blest. For I shall see my Father's face, and in His bosom rest." It's a pretty song, but there's only one thing wrong with it. You don't have to stand on this side of the spiritual Jordan and cast a wishful eye. You can enter the land of God's promise by faith.

Canaan represents a spirit-filled Christian. It represents the abundant life. It represents living a life of victory.

One of my favorite Bible teachers of all time was Ron Dunn. Before he went to heaven, he came and taught here on a couple of occasions. He pointed out the meaning of Canaan. He wrote: "Canaan never symbolizes heaven in the Bible. There were giants in Canaan—there are no giants in heaven. There were battles to be fought in Canaan—there will be no battles in heaven. Canaan represents the fullness of salvation, the victorious life, the possessing of our possessions."

So, as we've been talking about for the past couple of weeks, you may be a follower of Jesus and you have been "brought out" of Egypt. You're saved and going to heaven. But have you "entered in" to the land of claiming God's promises?"

The writer of Hebrews tells us there is still a rest we can enter into, and it wasn't the rest they found when Joshua led them in. So where do we find our REST today? How do we claim the Sabbath rest? As usual, the answer is Jesus.

4. WE FIND PERFECT REST WHEN WE SURRENDER TO JESUS

"Now we who have believed enter that rest." (Hebrews 4:3) Jesus is the source of our spiritual rest. Let me give you two words that describe our modern American culture: restless and stressed. There is a serious illness called Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. According to the Mayo Clinic website, over 1 million Americans suffer from this debilitating illness. You may be someone who struggles with this disease. It goes beyond physical exhaustion, and involves mental and emotional exhaustion.

Whether or not you suffer from Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, we all become weary and burdened and we need a different kind of rest. We don't just need sleep. We need rest for our souls. In all the recorded literature of the world, there has only been one person who claimed to have the ability to give us soul rest.

Jesus said, "Come unto me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." (Matthew 11:28-29)

A yoke was a wooden harness farmers put on the necks of cattle to plow a field or pull a load. Being linked with Jesus in a yoke is no burden, because He provides all the power and the direction. Stop struggling and just surrender to Him. We're just along for the ride.

The great British pastor F. B. Meyer confirms Jesus is our source of rest. He wrote: "The Land of Canaan is Christ. He is our Land of Promise. Those mountains are the mountains of His strength. Those valleys are His humility. Those springs are His joy. Those rivers are His Holy Spirit. Those treasures are His Wealth. That land—look at it! It is all yours! It is Christ in you and you in Christ—that is Paradise. (*The Christ Life for Your Life*, p. 57)

You come to Christ for salvation, but you also must keep coming to Christ to find rest and refreshment when you find you are weary and burdened. Do you need to yoke up with Him today?

5. OUR SABBATH DAY IS EVERY DAY THAT WE STOP TRYING TO WORK FOR OUR SALVATION

So, do Christians have a Sabbath Day? Absolutely. Which day is it? Saturday? Sunday? The writer of Hebrews gives us the clue in verses nine and ten. "There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his." (Hebrews 4:9-10)

Remember "Shabat" means "rest." So what would be the opposite? Work. There are millions who are still "working" to earn their salvation. They go to church, read the Bible, pray, help people and do good deeds all in the hope that one day God will look at them and declare them good enough to enter heaven. They haven't entered the Sabbath rest.

The Bible says in Ephesians 2:8, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith." Then it says, "Not by works, so that no one can boast." You are not saved by performing good deeds. You can only rest in the finished work of Jesus on the cross!

There are two ways to spell salvation. Some spell salvation D-O. They think they get into heaven by the good things they do. The other way to spell salvation is D-O-N-E. When Jesus died on the cross He said, "It is finished!" He has done everything necessary for you to be saved. Will you rest in His work on the cross?

So, what day is the Sabbath Day? It's Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, because every day, we rest in the finished work of Jesus on the cross.

CONCLUSION

We've covered three chapters of Hebrews where the writer has proven Jesus is superior to the prophets. He is superior to angels and to Moses. Then the writer tells us to focus our thoughts on Jesus and NOT to harden our hearts against Him like that generation in the wilderness. Now, he pleads with us not to make the same mistake by turning back on God's promised rest.

So are you a miserable Christian wandering in the spiritual wilderness? You're saved, but there's no real joy. You're a child of God, but you have no peace, purpose and rest? I challenge you to enter into God's land of promise and claim your spiritual inheritance.

In 2012, Timothy Gray, age 60 was found dead of hypothermia under a railway bridge in Evanston, Wyoming. He was homeless and penniless. Lawyers and private investigators had been searching for him for over a year. His great aunt had died in New York and had left him with an inheritance of \$19 million. For eighteen months Timothy Gray had been a millionaire and didn't know it. He never claimed his millions. How sad. But I'll tell you something even sadder: For you to live like a spiritual pauper when you are an heir of God and joint-heir with Christ.

Ruth Paxton was a missionary to China in the 1920s. She was a great writer. She understood the meaning of coming to Kadesh Barnea for Christians today. She understood how we should claim our riches in Christ. In an obscure book she wrote entitled, *Life on a Higher Plane*, she wrote: "Every Christian has inherited untold riches. As a child of the King and a joint heir with Christ he or she is a spiritual multimillionaire. But comparatively few Christians bear the marks of spiritual affluence. Their conversation, character and conduct give the impression rather of spiritual impoverishment."

Are you like Timothy Gray who died penniless and didn't claim his inheritance? You have access to all the promises of God, but you're living in spiritual poverty? Ruth Paxton was also a poet and she understood the meaning of Kadesh Barnea. I'll conclude with her brief poetic challenge:

They came to the gates of Canaan.
But they never entered in.
They came to the very threshold,
But they perished in their sin.

So we are always coming
To the place where the two ways part.
One leads to the land of promise
And the other to a hardened heart.

Come to Jesus today and let Him give you rest unto your souls! He can give you the BEST REST
of your life!

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



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