

Jesus: Our Promised Rest

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[0 : 00] Please do have a seat, it's super to see you here this morning. If I could invite you to take your Bibles again and turn back to the book of Hebrews. We are in our series and this is the fourth installment and our series is called Out from the Shadows.

As we start to see Jesus maybe in a different way to how we've seen him before this morning, we're looking in chapter 4 at Jesus, our promised rest.

Hebrews is written to a disturbed group of Jewish Christians who are facing persecution, pressure and doubts. And they're starting to drift away from the Lord Jesus.

Jesus is starting to be in their rear view mirror as they continue on their journey of life. And so the writer to the Hebrews writes them this letter to intercept them and bring them back.

To get in front of them and point them back to the Lord Jesus. He writes this wonderful letter to thrill their hearts with who Jesus is.

[1 : 07] And to say if you lose Jesus you lose everything. He's telling them don't do a U-turn on the gospel but stick in with Jesus Christ.

In chapter 1 we saw that Jesus was 100% God. The one given the name that is superior to angels and illustrates how superior Jesus is to all other people.

In chapter 2 we saw that Jesus was 100% man. That he took on flesh. That he is our unashamed brother. That he became lower than the angels for a little while.

And as such he conquers our eternal enemies of sin, Satan and death. And then last week with Graham we saw this great challenge.

This great warning to these people about the danger of hearing from God and turning away. Just like the Exodus generation who all died in the desert because of their unbelief.

[2 : 07] Which brings us nicely into chapter 4 which carries on that same argument. That same argument about the rest that Jesus offers.

So I'm going to read Hebrews chapter 4 verses 1 to 13. And as I read I want you to listen for a word that's repeated 10 times in these 13 verses.

So we'll need to listen carefully. Here we go. Hebrews chapter 4 verse 1. 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 good news proclaimed to us just as they did. But the message they heard was of no value to them.

Because they did not share the faith of those who obeyed. Now we who have believed enter that rest. Just as God has said. So I declared on an oath in my anger they shall never enter my rest.

[3 : 07] And yet his works have been finished since the creation of the world. For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words. On the seventh day God rested from all his works.

And again in the passage above he says they shall never enter my rest. Therefore since it still remains for some to enter that rest. And since those who formerly had the good news proclaimed to them did not go in because of their disobedience.

God again set a certain day calling it today. This he did when a long time later he spoke through David. As in the passage 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 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 all his works.

Just as God did from his. Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest. So that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience. For the word of God is alive and active.

[4 : 14] Sharper than any double edged sword. It penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit. Joints and marrow. It judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight.

Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him. To whom we must give an account. Anybody tell me what the word was?

God? That was repeated a lot of times. It wasn't the one I was thinking of. I'll give you a clue. The four dashes on the screen might give us an idea.

Rest. There we go. Ten times God mentions rest or rests or rested. See as well at the beginning and end of our passage there's an exhortation.

Kind of like a sandwich. Chapter 4 verse 1b. Let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. And then in verse 11.

[5 : 14] Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest. So that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience. What is really on offer here is rest.

And the writer is saying make every effort. Leave no stone unturned. Don't hold back. Don't be lazy. But persevere and pursue the rest that God is offering.

The average person is exposed to 3,500 adverts a day. They see them on billboards, on bus stops, on the side of buses, in newspaper magazines, junk mail, TV commercials, those emails you never sign up for but always come, placards, posters, sponsorship logos.

A million different ways the consumerist mantras enter our field of existence. And at base level all advertising is promise making.

All advertising is promise making. The advertisers are promising you things. And they say if you buy these you will not be disappointed. You will be utterly fulfilled. It will be everything that you wanted it to be.

[6 : 25] Will Rogers, the early 20th century actor said advertising is the art of convincing people to spend what they don't have on something they don't need. And advertising executive B.O. Puckett described his company like this.

It is our job to make women unhappy. Unhappy with what they have and who they are. And once that is achieved to show them our products that promise to make them happy.

So we have beauty products that convince us that to look old is a great problem. You should be very worried about looking old. And therefore if you buy this cream you needn't worry about looking old.

You can rest in peace because this will solve all your problems. A promise is made by our product. Problem solved. Rest accomplished. Or the person with a cluttered life who misses all his phone calls, never gets his emails responded to in time, is utterly amazed in chaos.

He is shown an iPhone that will solve all his problems. And in this one device will be efficiency, organisation and straightforwardness. Worried about missing, buy an iPhone.

[7 : 35] No problem. That's not a promise. That's true. Or the man terrified by what his car says about him. Worried about his unreliability and its pollution level.

And he's shown a top spec, ultra gleaming new one and suddenly worry is over. Rest assured. We've got you covered. Our car will fit the bill. Or you're trying to book the family holiday and you've been on TripAdvisor.

You're terrified about wasting money getting stuck at a hotel covered in tarantulas. And being accosted and ripped off by the locals. And then you're showing this family on a beautiful holiday by a reputable holiday company.

Don't worry. Rest assured. We've got you covered. Don't fear anymore. Loads of products promise peace of mind.

Rest from worry. And to solve any and every problem. Real rest. Super satisfaction.

[8 : 38] No more worry. Okay. British essayist Samuel Johnson commented, Promise. Life-changing promise is the soul of all advertising.

What we have before us this morning in Hebrews chapter 4 is kind of like an advert written by God himself to us. An advert about life-changing promise.

An advert about where we find ourselves in our lives. Worried. Stressed. Tired. Exhausted.

Dissatisfied. And he writes this advert to tell us about something that he's promising us.

But it's not hollow promise or transient hope. It is absolute reality that he holds out to each of us this morning. It is the promise of his rest.

If there was an advertising slogan, it would be this. God's real rest really delivers. Don't miss out. God's real rest. God's real rest really delivers.

[9 : 41] Don't miss out. It's not the most straightforward passage. It's kind of in line with rabbinic argument where he's trying to take Psalm 95 and that concept of rest and Genesis 2.2 and that concept of rest and merge them together.

That's why it reads a little bit clunky to our Western ears. But if you were a first century Jew, this would be right where you're at. You would understand it. No problem.

So I think our task this morning is relatively easy. We're going to look at rest, what it is. And rest, how do we get it? Rest, what it is. Rest, how do we get it?

So let's do some work. Rest, what is it? Rest, what is this rest? Is it just simply that we get a slumber light duvet, a nice mattress, a onesie, and we can just curl up?

Is that what God is offering us? Well, I think we can say three things from this passage about what this rest is. First of all, it is better than what Joshua secured. Look at verse 8.

[10 : 41] Do you know that feeling when you arrive home after a busy day?

You just put everything on, don't you? Onesie on, slippers on, heating on, telly on, kettle on. And there's that great feeling as your feet get put on the footstool, you think, wow.

Finally rest at the end of a busy day. That feeling of being home at last. Well, that must have been how the Exodus generation, how Joshua's generation felt when they got into the promised land.

They've been walking there for a long time. They've been hoping for it. They've seen lots of generation die in the desert.

And they get, as they cross the Jordan, they think, wow, we're finally home. And yet, though that was real rest that God really offered, and in the law, the land is described as God's rest.

[11 : 41] Of being safe on Canaan side is real rest really arrived at. We see that it's still not everything that it's meant to be.

So at the end of Joshua, we read, And the Lord gave them rest on every side, just as he had sworn to their fathers. Not one of all their enemies had withstood them, for the Lord had given all their enemies into their hands.

So God is saying, I've really given you rest. And yet, when David writes Psalm 95, which is hundreds of years later after this, he's still saying there's rest on offer.

That if that was real rest, why then is David talking about rest again? David is in the land. He's the king of the land. It's the golden era of Israelite life.

So if Joshua had been final rest, why is David still going on about a rest still to come? Why does he pen Psalm 95, picking up this theme of rest, saying you can enter it today?

[12 : 42] This is real prosperity in God's land of rest. And yet, David is saying, there's another rest. There's more rest. There's a better rest to come. So God's rest that he's offering us today is better than what Joshua secured.

But we also see that it's participation in God's own rest. Look at verse 3. They shall never enter my rest.

God speaking, or verse 9. There remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. That God seems to say this rest, this rest on offer is his rest.

He says it is my rest. It is the rest that I experience, that I own, that I am governor of. This is earth-shattering.

That the rest on offer in Hebrews 4 in this advert is entry into the divine rest enjoyed by God himself. It is rest of the magnitude of a master painter standing back from the canvas and resting in what he's done.

[14 : 00] And resting in a completed work and taking real satisfaction from what he sees. That rest experience by God on the seventh day when he stands back after six days of creation and says, no, it's perfect.

That rest. It's like the satisfaction. I'm sure I've never experienced it. Of standing on top of the podium with a gold medal. After years of toil and sweat and struggle and getting up early and doing countless reps.

And you stand on top of the podium and you're satisfied. I've done it. It's completed. It's completed. It's completed. Or like the unstoppable smile and thrill of parents being handed their newborn child for the first time.

It's been a long time coming. About nine months I'm led to believe. And the last bit's apparently rather painful. And then you get handed a baby and there's a satisfaction. We're parents. It's like all those things. Master painter, Olympic gold medalist, new parents. It's like all those but on a God-sized scale.

[15 : 14] Satisfaction of creating a very good world and unspeakable perfection and unfathomable genius. And standing back and resting from that work. I've done it. It is that rest that God is inviting us into this morning.

There remains a Sabbath rest. A rest like God experiences himself. I think a helpful way to explain it is this rest is being in God's perfect world with God enjoying us and us enjoying God.

This rest is to be in God's perfect world with God enjoying us and us enjoying God. That's what's on offer. That's what he's holding out to us this morning. And that is what we're all longing for deep down.

That kind of rest that we were created for. We were created to be in God's perfect world with God enjoying us and us enjoying God. That's what he's holding out. That's what's being recovered and held out to us this morning.

So Augustine, the early church father, wrote, This rest of being in God's perfect world with God enjoying us and us enjoying God, which brings us nicely to the third thing we can say about what this rest is.

[16 : 37] It is both a present reality, but also a future hope. Look with me at verse 3. Now we who have believed enter that rest.

Now we who have believed enter that rest, present tense. But just flick down to verse 11. Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience.

That seems to be a future reality. We who have believed enter that rest now, but we're also to make every effort to enter that rest future. That this rest on offer is both a present reality and a future hope.

So which one is it? Is rest now or is it later? And the answer is it's both. God's rest is a present reality.

It is possible now to know something of that rest. If you like the second half of our definition, it is possible now for God to enjoy you and you to enjoy God.

[17 : 47] That is available. But you're not yet in God's perfect world. That is a future reality. So we get like a foretaste now of what it is to have peace with God, peace with others through the Lord Jesus.

It's possible to enjoy God too, witness his glory and have to the sustaining satisfaction of being in relationship with him. But as yet we're still in a sin-tainted world, so it's not yet. There is a present reality and a future hope.

So what we have on offer is revolutionary rest. Rest that far exceeds the promised land. Rest of divine nature that starts now and continues on into eternity.

It becomes ultimate rest. Ultimate rest for being forever in God's perfect world, with God enjoying us and us enjoying God. That's what he's holding up to us.

That is the adverse. This real rest really delivers. And if you missed out, there's no rest. There's no rest now and there's no rest in eternity.

[18 : 51] You miss out. You just lose. And you lose everything. It is rest on offer today.

But you can miss out. That is what the writer is in such page to tell them. Today if you hear his voice, don't harden your heart. Don't miss out. Make every effort to enter that rest. Don't turn back. Don't turn away. Don't cash in. Don't tap out. They are flirting with falling short in danger of perishing. They risk this life-changing news being of no value because they're not acting on what they are hearing.

They're in church. They're nodding along to the message, but there's nothing going on in their hearts. Which brings us to the second point. Rest. How do we get it? If it's that good, that satisfying, that eternal, that beautiful, how do we get it?

How do we know we've attained that rest? How do we take hold of what God is offering? I think the writer to the Hebrews again gives us real indicators in this passage.

[20 : 01] He gives us four of them. He says you've got to trust God's promise, verses 1 and 2. Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest of stands, let us be careful that none of you be

found to have fallen short.

For we also have had the good news proclaimed 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.

They had the promise, but they just left it on the shelf. God gave them this gift, but they left it unwrapped. They left it wrapped under the tree.

He's saying that this is the promise, and to take hold of it, you need to lean your whole life upon it. You need to trust it. You need to invest in it. You need to believe what God is saying and trust what he's holding out.

This is good news that God promises us rest, and it becomes efficacious if we trust it. And say, God, yes, I believe that you can deliver what you're offering, and I want it, so I trust you for it.

[21 : 15] The Exodus generation, they didn't cash in. They didn't trust God. They did not enter God's rest.

So I love Amazon almost as much as I love Apple. And in Amazon, you get a lightning deal, which is a remarkable discount only available for a few hours. And I'm always on there, and I always see things, and I think, that would be great.

I'll look at it in a couple of hours, and it's gone. The window closes. The window is closing on this, God says. Still remains for some to enter that rest today.

Enter that rest. Don't miss out. The window is closing. This rest is unmissable. And yet, if you don't act, you will miss it. You will miss the chance, through trusting this promise of being in God's perfect world, with God enjoying you, and you enjoying God.

The clock is ticking. While it is still today, make sure you don't miss out. Are you trusting God's promise today? When he says, I want to give you rest, are you saying, yes, God, I believe that?

[22 : 26] Does it just wash over your head, in one ear and out the other? And does it provoke a heart response in our lives? Second way we can be sure that we've got it, is if we're obeying God's command, and responding to God's voice.

In verse 2, the idea is of not having faith, but in verses 6 and 11, see how the words change to disobedience. Now trust and obedience do go together.

If we trust what someone says, we'll obey what they ask. If someone gives the greatest gift imaginable, like ever satisfying eternal rest, then that will change the way we respond to what is asked of us.

There's a great difference between trust and obedience. The two go together, but they're intrinsically necessary together. So our national treasure, Tim Peake. Tim Peake, who spent eight years training to be an astronaut, he's worn his space suit in swimming pools, in zero-gravity simulators.

And yet, I dare say there's a real thing, as he did a spacewalk two weeks ago, when he opens the airlock, and looks out into the abyss that is space.

[23 : 41] And he thinks, will this really work? He's gone through all the training he's heard, all the scientists say all this, but it's really going to come down to, does he trust what they say, and go out into deepest, darkest space, to run some repairs on the International Space Station?

He's faced with gargantuan nothingness. Does he really trust? Is he going to obey when they say, right, Tim, it's time to step out? Because the Exodus generation failed.

They got to the edge of the Promised Land. God said, go in. They said, well, it's been good so far, but we don't really trust you. We're not going to obey. You say, go, we're going to turn back. The desert's not so bad.

His gift of rest is ours, by trusting that God can deliver it. And then we know that it's ours, if we're obeying what God says.

If we're doing what he says, loving what he loves, then we can be pretty sure this rest is ours. Our destiny will be rest.

[24 : 47] Are we trusting God's promise? Are we obeying God's voice? That's their problem today. If you hear his voice, do not harden your heart. He was speaking to them, and they just put their fingers in their ears and turned on their heels and went home.

What about us? Is this rest shaping our lives? Because God has got our eternity sorted. Is that shaping how we live in the present? Thirdly, be subject to God's word, verse 12 and 13.

The biggest problem with the previous two of trusting God's promise and obeying God's command is that I quite often deceive myself. I think that I am obeying when I'm not, and I think I am trusting

when I'm trusting wholly in myself rather than in what God can do.

My heart is deceitful above all things. I check myself and convince myself it's fine when really it is anything but. And that's where God's word comes in, verses 12 and 13.

For the word of God is alive and active, sharper than any double-edged sword. It penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

[26 : 00] God's word is like the sharpest scalpel ever that cuts deep down into my life and exposes what's really going on deep down in my heart, where my trust is, the motivation for my obedience.

What is going on in the deepest recesses of my life? It unearths what's really going on. If, as verse 13 says, that God sees everything, then I'm not going to be able to blag it on that day.

I'm not just going to be able to bluff my way through and fake it and cover it up. So it's really important that I know what's going on in my heart now. And the way to know what's going on in my heart now is through this word.

This word doing surgery on my life, this perfect mirror showing what's really going on. Because it's vital that I find out what's really going on now so I don't lose everything then.

So it's like this. I'm in a hotel room. And in the dim light of the bedside lamp, I look on the floor and it's covered with shiny black gems. They look like jade.

[27 : 08] This is amazing. I got a great deal on this hotel room and now I've got loads of black jades to take home on quids in. And so I'm there and I'm picking up these jades and I'm holding on to them and I think this is great.

And then Aileen walks in and turns the big light on, screams in horror because it turns out these little black gems are actually beetles that are now, they're ugly and they're crawling all over me. See, in our lives, in the dim light that we discern for ourselves, we think these are beautiful things that we pick up and trust in. And yet the light of God's word, the incision and truth of God's word says, no, they might be beetles.

We need to be really careful what we're gripping onto and God's word tells us whether we're really gripping onto God's promise and really doing what God asks.

Your attitude to this word reveals everything about your relationship with God. Casual about this, casual about God's. Loose with this, pretty loosely affiliated to the Lord Jesus.

[28 : 20] Obsessed with this word, obsessed with the Lord Jesus, real rest is your real destiny. Lastly, and then we're finished, resting on God's grace.

Verse 10, I think, is one of the most amazing verses I've read. For anyone who enters God's rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his.

The overarching indicator, over and above trust and obedience and God's word, the real indicator of whether rest is yours is where you're leaning upon.

If you're leaning upon your own works, pulling up your own socks, trying to shine yourself up and reach the standard to get into God's rest, you will fail.

You will fail miserably. There is nothing we can do to make ourselves acceptable to God. And so real rest is found by resting from our works to be good enough and resting on the performance and perfection of Jesus Christ.

[29 : 29] For anyone who enters God's rest also rests from their works, rests from this insatiable labor of trying to make God pleased with us and resting on Jesus through whom God is always pleased with us.

If we're resting our lives upon Jesus, then rest will be ours. Because he lived the life we could and he died the death we deserved and he rose victorious to say, yes, rest is available in and through me.

So Jesus says in a debate with very religious people who thought God would have no problem with them, he says in the Gospels, I thank you, Father, the Lord of heaven and earth that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children.

Yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father and no one knows the Son except the Father and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

And then he says this, come to me all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

[31 : 04] Jesus says the way into this rest is to rest your life upon me. is to lean your whole life on my performance not yours.

Take my yoke, trust in me. You'll find rest for your souls forever that starts now and continues into eternity the hope of being in God's perfect world with God enjoying us and us enjoying God. Hebrews 4 is God's advert for the rest that he alone offers. It has shown us our inbuilt desire for a relationship with him in the place he has promised and shown us that the way to get there is to trust his promise to obey his commands to lean our whole lives upon Jesus and to be shaped and molded and transformed by this word.

One of my biggest fears in life is to be transitioning into that rest with all of eternity and being in God's perfect world with God enjoying us and us enjoying God lying out before me and thinking to myself oh if I'd have known it would be this good I would have invested more in it that's my biggest fear in life and I hope it's yours.

God's real rest it really delivers don't miss out. Let me pray. Father God we understand afresh that you made us for ourselves and that our hearts will be eternally restless until they find their rest in you.

[32 : 56] So Lord thank you so much for showing us this this morning. Father I pray that the promise of rest would be combined with faith in our lives that rest might be ours that we might obey your commands we might love your word and trust it fully and that we might lean our whole lives upon the Lord Jesus.

Father for those that are older here Father would this be a real comfort that all that this life has offered will pale into insignificance compared to what you offer. Father for those here middle aged with pressures of family and life and work bearing in on them Father would this reorientate their lives and know there's nothing better than what you yourself offer.

Father for those that are young would this rest provoke people to live radical lives knowing that Jesus has a sorted eternity and therefore there's nothing we need to hold back from him.

And Father for those that as yet know nothing of this rest Father may they combine this promise with faith in your son that rest might be theirs and the glorious hope of being in God's perfect world with God enjoying us and us enjoying God forever be their hope too.

Father thank you that you're so good and gracious and kind so bless us and see your words in our hearts by your spirit we pray amen