

**Video: I have overcome the world** It seems that a lot of people are tired these days. Last year, google searches for “Why am I tired all the time?” hit an all-time high. And a survey reported that 3 out of 5 U.S. adults felt more tired now than they’ve ever been.

Many people have blamed COVID for this. Not just the long term symptoms of this disease. But also the impact of having lived through numerous lockdowns, working longer hours, too much screen time and a breakdown of regular routines.

And this isn’t just a problem for the older generations.

- Millennials, basically those in their 20s and 30s, are often referred to as the Tired Generation.
- A study from the American Psychological Association reported that they are the most stressed out generation, struggling with anxiety and loss of sleep.
- And another survey claimed that young adults are now twice as likely to experience constant exhaustion than they were 20 years ago.

It seems that we are all in need of rest. And so there are many people who will advise us how to deal with this. Things like:

- Get more exercise.
- Drink less caffeine.
- Get more sleep.
- Disconnect from social media.
- Take a holiday.

And some of those things can help. As can going to the doctor to check that there isn’t an underlying physical reason for our tiredness.

But we need something more than just physical rest. We need a better rest than that. Something that will quieten our hearts and settle our restlessness. It was Augustine who many years ago prayed: “You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless, until they can find rest in you.”

And that is why in his letter the writer of Hebrews continued to urge his readers not to walk away from their faith in Christ, because he knew that only Christ can provide this better rest. Hebrews 4:1-13

“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. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: “And on the seventh day God rested from all his work.” <sup>5</sup> And again in the passage above he says, “They shall never enter my rest.”

<sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> 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.”

<sup>8</sup> For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. <sup>9</sup> There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; <sup>10</sup> for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. <sup>11</sup> Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no-one will fall by following their example of disobedience.

<sup>12</sup> For the word of God is living 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. <sup>13</sup> 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 account.

## 1. A Day of Rest

The idea of rest in the Bible goes right back to the beginning. As quoted in v4 of our reading, Genesis 2 records that “By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work.” Genesis 2:2

Now, obviously this was not because God was tired or exhausted. And it doesn’t mean that since then, God has been inactive in this world, that he God kind of stepped back and left creation on its own. As we’ve seen, Jesus did not just create this world, he is also “sustaining all things by his powerful word.” Hebrews 1:3

### a) A Day of Completion

Instead this means that God rested on the seventh day to declare that “The heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.” Genesis 2:1 God had accomplished his work of creation.

In the previous 6 days he had spoken into existence light, sky and sea, dry land filled with plants, the sun, moon and stars, sea creatures and birds, land animals and human beings. And so God stopped and rested from that work, because it was complete. As v3 says, “His work has been finished since the creation of the world.” Hebrews 4:3

### b) A Day of Commemoration

And because of this, “God blessed the seventh day and made it holy.” Genesis 2:3 He put his divine favour on this day, setting it apart for his particular use.

And in the Law given to Moses, Israel was commanded to “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. <sup>9</sup>Six days you shall labour and do all your work, <sup>10</sup>but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God.” Exodus 20:8–10

The word Sabbath simply means to cease or to rest and is closely related to the word for rest used in Genesis 2. So each Sabbath, the nation was to rest from their work.

This provided a helpful rhythm to their lives and a time for relaxation and restoration. But it did more than this.

- It was a time to remember that God was their creator.
- It was an expression of their reliance on him to provide for their needs, rather than just depending on themselves.
- And it was a celebration of their covenant relationship with him, that he was their Lord!

## 2. A Place of Rest

But this day of rest also pointed forward to a greater rest that God had promised for his people. Moses said to them “You have not yet reached the resting place and the inheritance the LORD your God is giving you. But you will cross the Jordan and settle in the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, and he will give you rest from all your enemies around you.” Deuteronomy 12:8–10

The land of Canaan was supposed to be a place of rest for the nation. Rest from their travels, rest from their enemies and rest in God’s good purpose and plan for them.

## 3. A Loss of Rest

But as we saw last week, many of them missed out on that. Despite all that they had seen, they did not trust God. They questioned his love. They doubted his goodness. And so they took control of their lives and disobeyed God’s commands and rebelled against his rule.

And in judgement, God said, “They shall never enter my rest.” Hebrews 4:3 Except for Joshua and Caleb, the generation that left Egypt did not enter into the Promised Land. For 40 years they died in the desert. That was because although they’d heard the good news of God’s rest, “the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith.” Hebrews 4:2 They missed out on God’s rest because of their sinful and unbelieving hearts.

But some did enter into that rest. Joshua led the new generation of Israel across the Jordan and into the Promised Land. Later he could declare, “The LORD your God has given your brothers rest as he promised.” Joshua 22:4

## 4. A Promise of Rest

But this was not the fullness of the rest that God wanted for his people. The writer of Hebrews proved this with his quotations from Psalm 95. As we saw last week, this psalm warned people against following the example of those rebellious Israelites.

“Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.” Hebrews 4:7

David wrote this psalm about 400 years after the nation had entered the Promised Land. But despite this, he warned them against hardening their hearts and so missing out on God’s promised rest.

So “If Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day.” Hebrews 4:8 If they were already enjoying God’s ultimate rest, then through David, God would not have spoken about another day of rest.

So, the writer of Hebrews concludes on the basis of the Word of God, “There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God.” Hebrews 4:9

This is the rest that all those other rests in the Scriptures were pointing forward to:

- Not a day of rest, like that in the law given to Moses which pointed to Creation.
- Not a place of rest, like that given through Joshua, in the land of Canaan.
- But the ultimate reality of rest, given through one who was greater than Moses, and greater than Joshua, a rest that was won for us at Calvary through Jesus!

#### a) Through Jesus

That's why Paul wrote: "Do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ." Colossians 2:16–17

As Christians we don't need to follow the pattern of rules and regulations of the Old Covenant, like the Sabbath day, because all of those were pointing forward to the promise of God's ultimate rest that comes through Jesus.

So we need to come to Jesus because only in him can we find true rest. His invitation to us is, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." Matthew 11:28

#### b) For Now

But what rest was the writer of Hebrews talking about? Some scholars think it was a rest to experience now, others a future rest? But maybe it was both!

"Anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his." Hebrews 4:10 This rest is about stopping our work. It's about no longer trying in our own strength to be good enough to be loved and accepted by him. It's about stopping our desperate attempts to make ourselves right with God and instead resting in Jesus' finished work on the cross.

As we will see in this letter, as our Great High Priest, Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice for us. So "When this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God." Hebrews 10:12

He sat down, because his sacrifice was finished, it was complete, it was sufficient. On the cross, Jesus paid the full price for our sins. He suffered the full wrath of God that we deserved. He died our death sentence.

And so nothing more is needed. We can't add to this. We could never earn it. We could never pay it back. All we need to do is accept it by faith. Rest in his unconditional love and outrageous grace. Rest in his sacrificial death and victorious resurrection. Rest in his finished work!

That's what the apostle Paul did. In Philippians 3 he spoke about all the things that he used to depend on in order to be right with God – his heritage and ancestry, his fanatical keeping of the law, his zealous persecution of the church, his faultless commitment to his religion.

But when he met Jesus, he let all of that go and instead rested in Christ. "Not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ." Philippians 3:9

This is the rest that Jesus offers to each one of us. Whoever we are and whatever we have or haven't done. We can stop working to try to make ourselves good enough for God and instead experience the Sabbath-rest of Christ!

#### c) For Later

But of course, the ultimate experience of this rest will only be realised when Jesus comes back and takes us to be with him forever. This is ultimately what the writer means when he says, "There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God." Hebrews 4:9

Yes, through faith we can step into the rest that Christ won for us on the cross. But it will only be in heaven that we will fully experience all that Jesus accomplished for us. Then it will be fully true that: "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. <sup>4</sup> He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

Revelation 21:3–4

### 5. The Way To Rest

And that's why, this passage again calls us to persevere to the end. "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

The phrase translated, "Let us be careful" literally says "Let us fear." This is because the writer of this letter understood the seriousness of the what might happen to his readers.

Some of them were being tempted to do what the Israelites did all those years previously. They too had heard the gospel of the promise of God's rest. But like the Israelites, some of them were tempted to turn away, reject the offer, go back to working in their own strength to make their lives significant, satisfying or secure.

And so the writer again pleaded with them not to miss out. Not to fall short. If they did not respond with true, persevering faith in Jesus, then they were in danger of being lost and heading to a lost eternity, and this was something to be fearful of.

#### a) Working Hard

And so because so much was at stake, he called them to be absolutely sure. "Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no-one will fall by following their example of disobedience." Hebrews 4:11

Some people say that they believe that Jesus died for them. But they don't do anything about it. They treat the gospel as something of minimal importance. They expect that because God loves them, that they will automatically be saved.

But that's not true. The gospel is of no value to us, if we don't combine it with faith, if we don't put our wholehearted trust and dependence on Christ. If we don't accept him as the forgiver of our sins and the leader of our lives, then we will not be saved.

And so we need to be sure that we've put our faith in Jesus. We need to do everything we can to check our hearts so that we can be certain that we're trusting in him, that we have been saved by him and are resting in him. In a sense we need to work hard to make sure we've stopped working!

#### b) The Word of God

But we need help to do this. We can so easily deceive ourselves and others. We can look the part, put on the act, convince ourselves that we are ok when we are still far from God.

But God is not deceived. "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 account." Hebrews 4:13

He sees us as we really are. He sees the reality of our hearts. When he judges the world, he will see if we are still trusting in ourselves and our own goodness and our own efforts.

But then it will be too late to fix our situation. We need to see ourselves as God sees us now, before that day of judgement. And that's why God has given us his Word. "The word of God is living 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." Hebrews 4:12

This book is alive and active. When we read it, it cuts through our hypocrisy, pride and pretense. It penetrates into our hearts. It reveals to us where we stand. It convicts us of our sin.

But it also points us to our Saviour, the one who loved us and gave himself for us, the one who today invites us into his rest!

That's why we need to be people who committed to reading, studying and responding to the Bible. It is through God's Word we can see ourselves as we really are,

- So that if we have not put our trust in Jesus, then we can repent and turn to Christ.
- But also so that if we have put our trust in Jesus, then we can rest in the assurance of our salvation and eagerly look forward to that ultimate Sabbath-rest for the people of God.

#### Conclusion

In this world of fatigue and exhaustion, Jesus' invitation to us is still, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." Matthew 11:28

- The Sabbath day pointed forward to it.
- The gift of Canaan was supposed to be a place that illustrated it.
- But the Israelites lost it because of unbelief.
- But the good news is that this promise of rest still stands today.

- So I pray that none of us will fall short of this, but that we'll make every effort to enter this rest through faith in Jesus as revealed in his Word!

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