

THE ABC'S OF ENTERING GOD'S REST (Hebrews 4:1-11)

How many of you got a good night's sleep last night? That is difficult for many. It is estimated that 70 million people in the U.S. suffer from insomnia or some other kind of sleep disorder. The CDC claims that insufficient sleep is a public health epidemic. It is speculated that half of all automobile accidents are caused by sleepy drivers.

Helping you get a good night's sleep is a multibillion, dollar industry on several different fronts. Upwards of 10 million Americans take doctor prescribed sleep medicine, and countless other people take over-the-counter "sleep aids" as they are euphemistically called. Millions of other people buy new mattresses and bedding in an effort to sleep better.

The conclusion of the research is clear: We are a nation of tired people who are badly in need of rest.

The Bible has much to say about *rest*. The word is used a total of 100's of times in the Old and New Testament. In the NT, it appears most often in the Book of Hebrews where it shows up 12 times. Ten of those times are in today's text, Hebrews 4:1-11. The title for today's message is "The ABC's of Entering God's Rest." Let's begin by reading our text.

A: God's Rest Is Available to All, But It's Not Automatic.

The word *rest* is used to speak of three separate things in our passage. **The first is found in v. 4.** This is God's Sabbath rest. One dictionary definition of the word *rest* is "to cease activity or to stop working." God spent six days creating the earth, and on the seventh day He ceased His creative activity.

Do you suppose God needed to rest? Do you think God was tuckered and needed a day off? Why then did God rest on the 7th day? I think there were two reasons. First, He was teaching us that is what we need to do. Unlike God, we do not have an inexhaustible supply of energy. We need to rest. Second, I think God was giving us an illustration of another kind of rest that we all need.

The second use of rest is found in v. 8. What kind of rest did Joshua seek to give the people? The people were meant to rest from their wilderness wanderings when they entered Canaan, and they were meant to take the land from the inhabitants and to rest from the work of securing the land. But the people disobeyed God. They didn't destroy the inhabitants as God commanded them to do. As a result, they were constantly harassed by their neighbors and were often subjugated by them. The book of Judges tells us story after story of how the people were victimized by their own disobedience.

The third rest is mentioned in v. 9. This is the most important rest of which the other two rests were simply illustrations. This third rest is what we have in Christ. This rest is both a present rest and a future rest. To rest is to cease working. Our salvation is not obtained by our working our way to God. Jesus did all the work that was needed to secure our salvation. To rest is to cease striving. Christ gives us peace, and we can rest in the peace He offers. We can enjoy peace with God and the peace of God.

John MacArthur pointed out that to rest means to be free from whatever worries or disturbs you. He said:

Some people can't rest mentally because they're always bugged by everything. Every little thing just pounds away in their brain, and they can never just rest because they're always hassled by [what happens]. To rest means to be free from whatever hassles you, from whatever disturbs you or creates worries in your mind. It means, in this sense, to be quiet, to be still, to be peaceful, to be free from guilt and the things which drive us to neurosis, psychosis, etc. And so, bringing that across to God's rest, we would say that to enter God's rest simply means to be at peace with God. It means to possess the perfect peace that God gives. It means to be free from guilt. It means no need to worry about sin because sin is forgiven, and we're at rest all of a sudden, no more anxiety, no more pressure, no more guilt: peace.

This kind of peace and rest is available. Look again at v. 1, and notice vv. 9-11.

This kind of rest is available, but it is not automatic.

I remember a conversation I had with a man who said he believed in God, that he believed in Jesus. Now, his life showed no indication that his belief in Jesus had in any way changed his life. I said to him, "I think you and I mean two different things when we use the word *believe*." I explained that to believe in Jesus means more than to simply accept the notion that He exists. I recalled that verse in James that says, "The demons believe and tremble." Satan believes in Jesus. Satan would qualify as a very good evangelical. He believes that Jesus is the son of God. He believes that Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty of sin. He believes that Jesus rose from the grave. And I imagine that Satan believes that Jesus is coming back to this world just like He said He would.

Satan believes in Jesus about Jesus, but he is not trusting Jesus. When the Bible uses the word *believe* it is talking about *trust*. Trusting Jesus is what you and I need to do.

What are you trusting today? If you are not trusting God, what are you trusting. On our money, both our coins and our cash, we find the words, "In God We Trust." I wish that were so. If we really practiced truth in advertising, I am afraid that many people would have to scratch out the word *God* and replace it with the word *this* because far too many people are trusting in this. They are trusting in money to solve their problems. If paying your bills were the only problems you had, money might solve those, but they are not the only problems you and I face.

Listen to this quote. You have probably heard it before, but it is worth hearing again:

Money can buy a house, but not a home; a bed, but not rest; food, but not an appetite; medicine, but not health; information, but not wisdom; thrills, but not joy; associates, but not friends; servants, but not loyalty; flattery, but not respect.

Only God can give you those things in life that truly matter. When you know Him, you can rest in the knowledge that He loves you, that He is taking care of you, and that He will take care of you regardless of what happens. To know God is to trust God.

The rest God offers is available to all, but it is not automatic. As we look at the ABC's of entering God's rest, there is a second thing I want you to notice.

B: God's Rest Is a Blessing That Belongs to Those Who Believe.

Look at vv. 2-3. It is not enough to hear the good news; we must act on the word we hear.

Think of it this way: If you got stopped by the police for speeding and the officer was about to write you a ticket, you wouldn't say:

I'm sorry officer, but you can't give me a ticket. You see, I own a copy of the Oklahoma State traffic laws, and I've even read them. I took a defensive driving course. I took a test, and I'm glad to say that I made an "A." I know all there is to know about how to drive safely, so you can't give me a ticket.

I suppose you could say that, but it wouldn't do you any good. When it comes to driving, it is not a matter of what you know; it is a matter of what you do with what you know.

Likewise, salvation is not merely a matter of knowing what the Bible says, nor is it a matter of knowing what God says and knowing what He wants. We are to give God what He wants, and that means we are to trust Him. We will get the benefit of the rest God offers when we join the message we have heard with our personal response of faith.

We need to keep in mind, however, that faith is not merely a personal thing. When we respond to Jesus with belief, that belief joins us to a larger group. Look again at the latter part of v. 2. Faith is something that unites us with others who share that same faith.

As believers, you and I belong to one another. The life of being a Christian is not a private affair. We are part of a believing community.

This past week, I was on the telephone with a man who lives here in Enid. He retired as an Army Chaplain. He is originally from Oregon. He moved from his home in Oregon to Enid to attend Phillips Seminary back in the early 70's. He came in large part because Fred Craddock was teaching here at the time. I told him what I've told you, that Fred Craddock was one of my favorite preachers. Craddock left here and moved to Atlanta where he became a preaching professor at Emory University for many years.

I also believe that I shared with you one of my favorite Fred Craddock stories, but I'm going to tell it again. When he was just getting started in the ministry, he served a little church in the Appalachians between Knoxville and Chattanooga.

It was the custom of that church to have baptismal services in the nearby lake. After the candidates had been baptized, they and the pastor would change their clothes in little booths that had been constructed by hanging up blankets. After changing into dry clothes, they would warm themselves at the fire in the center of their little camp. The church would gather around and sing songs.

Fred said that Glenn Hickey always introduced the new people. He would tell their name along with where they lived and worked. Then, each person in the circle would tell their name. One would say, "My name is [Mary], and if you ever need somebody to do

washing and ironing, call on me.”

“My name is [John]. If you ever need anybody to chop wood, call on me.”

“My name is [Betty]. If you ever need anybody to babysit, call on me.”

“My name is [George]. If you ever need anybody to repair your house, call on me.”

“My name is [Sue]. If you ever need anybody to sit with the sick, call on me.”

“My name is [Leon], and if you ever need a car to go to town, call on me.”

Around the circle they would go.

After they ate and had a square dance, Percy Miller would put his thumbs in his bibbed overalls, and he would say, “It’s time to go.”

On one occasion, as Percy was kicking sand on to the dying fire, Fred stuck around thinking about the experience. Percy looked up and said, “Craddock, folks don’t ever get any closer than this.”

As he reflected on that experience, Craddock commented, “In that little community, they have a name for that. I’ve heard it in other communities too. In that community, their name for that kind of ritual is ‘church.’ They call that ‘church.’”

When we believe in the message about Jesus, we are bound together, and we become the church. And when the church is what it was created to be, we get a taste of the rest God offers and the benefits that rest brings.

In looking at the ABC’s of entering God’s rest, we have seen that God’s rest is available to all but it’s not automatic. We have seen that God’s rest is a blessing that belongs to those who believe. Finally . . .

C: God’s Rest Comes to Those Who Continue in Its Conditions.

We have seen one condition already, the condition of faith or belief. Other conditions show up in our text. Look at v. 6. This verse teaches that disobedience disqualified some from entering God’s rest. From that we learn that obedience is another condition for experiencing God’s rest. We have to be careful here. It is not that our obedience earns us God’s rest, but rather, our obedience is evidence that we have truly received Christ.

Belief and obedience are really two sides of the same coin. You show me someone who believes God, and I will show you someone you obeys Him, and vice versa We obey the one we believe, and the failure to believe will lead to a failure to obey. For Christians, Jesus is both the object of our belief and our obedience.

Something interesting occurs in v. 8. It just so happens that the name *Joshua* is the Hebrew form of the Greek name *Jesus*. In the OT, Joshua sought to give the people rest, but they failed to believe him and obey him as he followed God’s leadership. Thus, he did not succeed in leading them to God’s rest. Now, Jesus is offering us an even better rest—a rest that is good now and will continue into eternity. Will we believe Him and obey Him?

Verse 11 offers a final condition that we are to meet in order to experience God’s rest. We are to chase after the rest God offers. We are to pursue it. We are to strive to obtain it. The New Living Translation reads, “Let us do our best to enter that place of rest.” Eugene Peterson renders it, “So let’s keep at it . . .”

Andrew Jackson was the 7th President of the United States. He was the first president of the newly formed Democratic Party, and he had many critics. His critics dubbed him a jackass which he took a liking to. That is how later the donkey became the symbol of his party.

The story is told that Andrew Jackson's boyhood friends just couldn't understand how he became a famous general and then the President of the United States. They knew of other men who had greater talent but who never succeeded. One of Jackson's friends said, "Why, Jim Brown, who lived right down the pike from Jackson, was not only smarter but he could throw Andy three times out of four in a wrestling match. But look where Andy is now."

Another friend asked, "How did there happen to be a fourth time? Didn't they usually say three times and out?"

"Sure, they were supposed to, but not Andy. He would never admit he was beat—he would never stay 'threwed.' Jim Brown would get tired, and on the fourth try Andrew Jackson would throw him and be the winner."

Picking up on that idea, someone has said, "The thing that counts is not how many times you are 'threwed,' but whether you are willing to stay 'threwed.'"

Life is going to throw us from time to time, but the question is, "Are you going to stay throwed?" We need to keep on keeping on. We need to pursue the Lord with passion. If we will do so, we can be assured we will experience His rest, and that rest will be sweet.

We live in a world in which evil and injustice seemingly prevail.

- It is a world where a bigger and stronger nation attempts to gobble up a smaller nation just because it thinks it can.
- It is a world where the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.
- It is a world where many are just one illness or hospital stay away from complete bankruptcy.
- It is a world where many die before their time, and even parents have to say "goodbye" to their children. It is not supposed to be that way.
- It is world where the innocent suffer and the wicked prosper.
- It is world where our questions go unanswered and our fears don't leave us. They stick around.

How can we find rest for our souls in such a world? All I can say is, "Do what Jesus said. Accept His invitation." Jesus said, "Come to Me, all who are labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

Jesus said, Come to Me,"; so, I say, "Go to Him." He promised to give you rest if you would simply come to Him. He didn't promise to solve all your problems and answer all your questions. He said He would give you rest for your soul. Do you need that? Go to Him in faith. Let Him make good on His promise. Let Him give you what you need. Let Him give you rest.