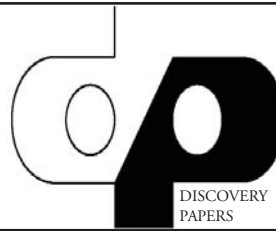


# A REST RESERVED

**SERIES: SABBATH: REMEMBER TO REST. REST TO REMEMBER.**



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Hebrews 3:7-4:16  
3rd Message  
Paul Taylor  
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This morning is Palm Sunday. On this day almost two thousand years ago, a Jewish man of about thirty years old was welcomed into the city of Jerusalem by a crowd of people convinced that He was their Messiah. They were sure that He was going to change everything. He would be a political hero. He would be a religious hero. He would be a social hero. He was going to make everything right. All the problems that they had been living with so long would finally be made right. When this man walked through the gates of Jerusalem, they were sure that what they had waited for was about to happen. This was it.

What are you waiting for? What lies ahead in your future? The election in November? The raise you've been promised? The end of a long period of sickness? What's in your future that you are excited about? This morning, as we continue our four-week series on Sabbath, we're going to be talking about the future. What does Sabbath have to do with our future? How do Sabbath and hope relate?

In the movie *Under The Tuscan Sun*, Frances is a newly divorced American woman who has purchased an Italian villa on impulse. In one scene, she inadvertently pours her heart out to her realtor about what seems like a foolish decision. She says, "You idiot! You're the stupidest woman in the world. You bought a house for a life you don't even have." Frances didn't know what she was looking forward to—she didn't even know what her future held—but she bought a house that prepared her for something beautiful. As we think about how Sabbath relates to our future today, I want us to be thinking about Frances. And we'll be wondering about two questions this morning: What is that life that we don't have? And what does it mean for us to buy a house to prepare for that life? Where are we going? What do we now in light of that future?

This is the third week of our series on Sabbath. We started by talking about *why* God commanded Sabbath. Last week, we talked primarily about *how* we can practice Sabbath. This week, we are going to focus on *when* we get to enjoy Sabbath. We'll see that though we can appreciate rest today, real Sabbath rest is something that awaits us in the future. To understand that, we're going to spend most of our time in Hebrews 3 and 4. This passage marks a real turning point in terms of how Sabbath is understood from a Christian perspective. For in this passage, the author of Hebrews takes the rich Jewish idea of Sabbath and connects it with the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ and shows us how all of history is moving toward God's final Sabbath. He shows that God has a rest reserved for us, and he helps us to understand what it means to anticipate that arrival. In other words, he talks about hope and he talks about how it relates to our lives today. So let's look

at Hebrews 3-4 to try to understand how Sabbath relates to our future and what we do now to prepare for it.

## All of Creation Moves Toward Rest

This passage in Hebrews is basically an exposition of Psalm 95. It starts by quoting a significant part of Psalm 95 and follows with a detailed explanation of what that psalm means now that Christ has come. The part of the Psalm that is quoted has to do with the Israelites trying to enter the Promised Land. After God rescued His people from Egypt, Moses led them up to the border of the Promised Land: the land flowing with milk and honey. He sent spies to scope out the land, but the spies brought back a discouraging report. The people got scared and lost their faith that God would bring them into the land, so they didn't enter the land. Moses brought them right up to the border of the land. They could practically smell the honey, but God didn't let them enter. Psalm 95 says that they didn't enter God's rest. Moses couldn't lead them into the Promised Land. So they couldn't enter God's rest.

Now, this idea of entering is one that comes up repeatedly throughout this passage in Hebrews. The Greek word is used eleven times in these two chapters. One of the dominant ways it is used is in this phrase that sounds really super-spiritual: "entering God's rest." This is the way the Psalmist uses it. But it's not actually a spiritual phrase—it's a geographical phrase: to move into the place of rest. Rest is pictured as a place. A restful location. So this phrase "enter His rest" involves movement, moving from one place to another. It is a picture of moving from a place without rest to the place of rest. Can you picture that? How does this phrase "enter His rest" make you feel? What kind of a place do you see? Take a moment and see it. Envision a place of rest. Can you imagine entering it?

The place that Psalm 95 is primarily referring to is the temple. You see, this is a worship Psalm. We actually sang part of it this morning. "Come let us worship and bow down. Let us kneel before the **LORD**, our God, our maker." These words come from Psalm 95 immediately before the section that the author of Hebrews has quoted here. So this Psalm invites God's people into His presence. They would sing it as they came into the temple. They would sing it as they came into His presence. Entering the Promised Land is pictured as entering God's rest, which happens when God's people come into His presence.

Forty years later, Joshua brought the people back to the same spot. By now most of the original generation had died in the wilderness, and this time, they entered the land. God gave them faith and courage, and they poured into their new land with a miraculous military victory. Now

they had their rest. After a long journey through the desert, they finally had their rest. Or did they? The author of Hebrews points out something very interesting. Psalm 95 was written long after Joshua led the people into their land, and the Psalm encourages its current readers not to miss out on God's rest like the people of Moses' generation. So while Joshua may have led them into the Promised Land, this must not have been the ultimate rest. In chapter 4, verse 8, the author of Hebrews points out,

**If Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day.**

So Moses didn't lead God's people into rest, and Joshua didn't lead God's people into rest either.

There's an island off the coast of Nova Scotia in Canada called Oak Island. A little over two hundred years ago, someone decided that a treasure was buried on this island after they found a funny looking tree with some markings on it and a mound of dirt that looked like it had been dug up. So they started digging to see if something lay below it. After four feet of digging, they found some flagstones, which they removed to keep digging underneath. At nine feet, they found a platform of oak logs. They removed it and kept digging. They found seven more similar platforms, each spaced around nine feet apart. And then, at almost ninety feet, they found a stone tablet with an inscription on it that spoke of a treasure buried forty feet below. They ran out of time and came back the next day only to discover that their pit had flooded and they were completely unable to dig any more.

Digging on Oak Island has basically continued on and off for the past two hundred years, and as the hole has gone deeper, diggers have discovered more curious layers of wood and stone. Finally, at 140 feet deep, they struck stone and more oak and discovered a fragment of parchment with the letters "V.I." on it. Currently, a team of four American investors are planning to resume digging in the next several months in hopes of finding whatever buried treasure still remains on Oak Island. People are convinced that with so many curious things buried beneath the surface, a treasure must be there somewhere. Nobody has found it yet, so it must still be there.

This is the conclusion that the author of Hebrews makes about God's Sabbath rest. Moses didn't find it. Joshua didn't find it. It must still be out there. In 4:9, he states his main conclusion:

**There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God.**

If there is such a thing as Sabbath rest and it hasn't been found yet, then it is still out there. He is pointing out that for the readers of Psalm 95, God's rest was something that awaited them. They hadn't entered His rest yet.

This is why the people were so eager to welcome Jesus into Jerusalem on the day we remember today as Palm Sunday. The long awaited Messiah had entered God's Holy City. As Jesus entered Jerusalem, the people were certain that this meant one thing: they would finally get to enter

God's rest. The Romans would be defeated. God's rightful reign would be established from Jerusalem. All would be set right. The people would enter His rest.

Part of what the author of Hebrews wants to point out in this passage is that Jesus did bring rest. Hebrews 3:14 says,

**We have come to share in Christ.**

Hebrews 4:3 says,

**We who have believed enter that rest.**

Jesus did bring in the rest that God had promised His people. And so if you are a believer in Christ, you have entered into God's rest. Real Sabbath rest isn't found in the Promised Land, it is found in the Promised One. Jesus offers us rest. This is what we'll be talking about in detail next week as we celebrate Jesus' resurrection and see how it forms the basis of our rest.

The author of Hebrews tells us that Jesus did bring rest, but that's not where he leaves it. In 4:1, he says,

**Since the promise of entering His rest still stands.**

And then in 4:11, he encourages his readers to

**Make every effort to enter that rest.**

If we are supposed to make every effort to enter that rest, then it must be something in our future. Jesus did bring rest, but not all the way. Rest is also something that awaits us in our future. Real Sabbath rest is something that is out there waiting for us. Just like that treasure somewhere on Oak Island, Sabbath rest is still something we anticipate. This is good news to us because if you're like me, this life is good, but really hard. It would be really nice to rest. Well, Jesus brought rest, and Jesus will bring rest. Moses didn't bring rest. Joshua didn't bring rest. Jesus did. And Jesus will. The people that Moses led during forty years of wandering were waiting to enter God's rest. The people that Joshua led into the Land were waiting to enter God's rest. The people later on in Israel's history who sang Psalm 95 coming into the temple were waiting to enter God's rest. And we, gathered here this morning, are waiting to enter God's rest.

This is the big point that we want to understand: all of creation is moving toward rest. You can think of God's working in the world as a long and beautiful story. The story began with six days and a garden. In the garden there was rest. But something terrible happened in that garden, something that disturbed the rest that God intended. Then, because of one man's disobedience, rest was destroyed. Relationships were broken. Work became tedious. People invented things like Blackberrys, working vacations, and fat-free ice cream. God's rest was destroyed, and His people were forced to leave the garden. But ever since then, God's

people have been waiting to come back into His presence. Ever since then, God has been working to make that happen. This is the story that the Bible tells from the creation to the destruction to the redemption and final arrival of history at a new state of rest. All of creation is involved in this process: animals, plants, people, the earth. All of it was marred by sin; all of it will be restored through God's redemption. So all of creation is moving towards rest. This is the story that we are caught up in: God's story, the history of the world, everything. It all culminates in rest. Sabbath. Not sleepiness, not lethargy, but rest.

In fact, a physicist by the name of Gerald Schroeder has written several books trying to reconcile the story of God's creation with the current state of scientific knowledge in our world. He makes an interesting conclusion about time and the age of the universe. Dr. Schroeder points out that ever since Einstein, scientists have agreed that the rate that time passes is dependent on the speed of the object. Since the earth is moving away from the center of the universe at a changing speed, the rate of time passing on earth is variable. However, he suggests a universal way of measuring the age of the whole universe and concludes that based on this timing, the universe is only six days old. That means that God created the universe in six days and then rested, but we haven't gotten to that day of rest yet. Now, I'm not fully convinced by his arguments, but I find his theory compelling. If the universe is created in six days, then the seventh day is coming. Regardless of whether his science is right, his theology is exactly right. As far as God's plan is concerned, the seventh day is coming. There remains a Sabbath rest for God's people. All of creation is moving toward rest. The seventh day is coming.

So for us, the message is a simple one. We have something left to wait for. Even if you are a follower of Christ—*especially* if you are a follower of Christ—this isn't as good as it gets. Something better is coming. There is something to look forward to. I remember when I was in college, people would tell me, "Enjoy these days—they are the best days of your life." Does that mean that life just goes downhill from there? Does it all get worse and worse? Other people will suggest that as Christians, we experience a completely fulfilling life. But that hasn't been true for me, either. I've had dreams come apart just like Frances working through the pain of divorce. Most of us in this room have experienced pain that we didn't know this world had in store for us. We need hope for something better. And that's why it is so important to understand what this passage suggests: all of creation is moving toward rest. There remains a Sabbath rest for God's people. Our lives are moving toward rest. As members of the kingdom of God through Christ, our stories end in rest. They end in the new creation: the new heavens, the new earth, God's original creation redeemed and made new. Our story moves towards rest.

Do you think about your future that way? I know I frequently think about my immediate future that way: "Man, I can't wait until the end of the day when I can lie down and rest," or, "I can't wait until this project or

event is over so I can have some down time." But do I think about my future future that way? Do I think about the culmination of God's story that way? And do I long for it? Do I even realize that my life, the lives of God's people, the history of God's plan is moving toward rest—a glorious, peaceful, completely fulfilling rest? Do you think that way? How would your life be different if that became more real to you? If you really, truly thought that our story moves towards rest? If you really believed that your story moves toward rest?

## Sabbath Reminds Us to Anticipate His Rest

What can we do to make that story more real to us? The real story. You see, we live in the midst of two stories that compete for our belief. The world tells us a story every day that has to do with us and what we can do and where we can get. But God's story is about Him and how He is drawing us into His presence. The world's story ends in futility. God's story ends in rest. What we are trying to do in the Christian life is take part in God's story and leave the world's story behind. So how do we get there? It sounds great to rest, but I'm not there—I'm here. How do I get from here to there?

Hebrews says that lack of faith prevented God's people in the Old Testament from entering God's rest. And it's faith that allows them—it's faith that allows us—to enter God's rest. In chapter 4, verse 3, he says;

**We who have believed enter that rest.**

In chapter 3, verse 11, he says,

**We have become partners with Christ if in fact we hold our initial confidence firm until the end.**

And in 4:11 he encourages us to

**Make every effort to enter that rest.**

It may sound strange to make every effort to rest. It's like trying really hard to fall asleep, which never really works. But what is the effort we are supposed to make? Believing. The effort is faith. We're here, in our lives, right now. And all of creation is moving toward rest. How do we get there? Faith. Faith in Christ gets us from here to there.

This is why resting is so hard for us—because it's hard to have faith. When you live every day in the midst of a world that tells you about one story, it's hard to believe that another story could be true. When your own heart misleads you and yearns for parts of the world's story, it's hard to live in God's story. It's hard to rest because it's hard to have faith. It's hard to live in God's story. But this is the essence of faith: living in God's story, and we are led into that story by a person. Not religious principles or theological truths, but a person. Faith is a relationship with a person. It's being caught up into the story of God—the true story—by His Son.

You'll hear people say, "it's not what you know, it's who you know." That's good theology. It isn't what you know,

it's who you know, and the who that you know is Christ. All of creation is moving toward rest. We enter that rest through faith. Faith in Christ. But those are lofty, spiritual concepts. It's easy to dismiss this story as fairytale. When you walk out of those doors, that's probably what it will feel like. I feel that way every week. Sometimes this truth that we believe in just seems far away. It can seem like it doesn't relate to my life. And I work here!

This is exactly the reason why God's people were commanded to remember Him through Sabbath. Remembering is an interesting idea in Scripture. I said the first week that remembering means doing something; remembering is an action. It involves doing something to remind you of the past. However, the interesting thing about remembering is that it isn't just about the past. Biblically, remembering is just as much about the future as it is about the past. Remembering means looking back at the past as a way of anticipating the future. So for us, remembering Sabbath is not only a reminder of who God is, but it's also an anticipation of what God will do in the future. Sabbath reminds us to anticipate what God will do in the future.

What we are anticipating is the rest that is waiting for God's people like that treasure on Oak Island. But this rest isn't just sitting there idly; it's being prepared for us. In John 14, Jesus was talking to His disciples trying to prepare them for the time when He would no longer be with them. And when He started talking about leaving, He said this:

"In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you."

And so it's not just that a Sabbath rest remains for God's people. Jesus Himself is preparing that rest for His people.

All throughout the Old Testament, God's people are pictured as a bride awaiting their perfect husband. Jesus is that husband, and He is eagerly preparing a house to live in with His new bride. He is waiting for His new bride to enter her house. He is preparing a room reserved just for her, and we are that bride. There is a rest reserved for us. Jesus is preparing for us to enter His rest.

When we get to Revelation and read about the culmination of God's plan for creation, we get a bit of a surprise. Revelation 21 introduces the new heavens and the new earth—the final installment in God's creation. Revelation 21:2 reads,

"I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband."

So it's not that we enter the New Jerusalem. We usually think about entering in terms of the traveler entering the destination, but here in Revelation, we see the destination coming to meet the traveler. Jesus prepares the New Jerusalem for His bride, and then He comes down with the new heavenly residence to meet His bride on earth. Jesus brings our final Sabbath rest to us. Once again, it is Jesus who is doing the entering. Just as Jesus entered

Jerusalem amidst a crowd of people waving palm branches, He will enter again. This time He will be entering the earth bringing Jerusalem with Him. This is why we celebrate Palm Sunday. We remember that Jesus entered Jerusalem 2,000 years ago to anticipate His future entering with the New Jerusalem. Palm Sunday is about the past, but only because of what the past tells us about the future. Our faith is rooted in the past but looks to the future.

This is the life that we don't have yet. The New Jerusalem. Rest. Sabbath. New Creation. We have these in part, but not all the way. This is where we are headed. This the rest that all of creation is moving toward. And when we remember Sabbath, when we stop and rest, we are reminded that our lives are moving toward rest. Resting now makes our rest in the future more real to us. Sabbath for us is something that points us toward the arrival of this ultimate rest. Sabbath reminds us to anticipate His rest.

Last week, we talked in detail about what Sabbath might look like practically in your life. Earlier this morning, we heard from some people about things they've done to celebrate a type of Sabbath. It doesn't matter what Sabbath looks like for you: taking a day off, reading the Bible regularly, walking in the woods. Resting *now* reminds us that we will rest *then*. All of these things are concrete actions that we can take to foster hope as we anticipate arriving at our destination—or rather, our destination arriving at us.

We can picture a family that gets in the car in New York City for a six-day road trip to visit Hollywood. The car rides during the day are filled with fights over toys and complaints about boredom and bathroom stops and greasy fast food. But every night, at the hotel, they look through brochures of some of the places they want to visit. Universal Studios. Disneyland. Celebrity homes. The California beach. Looking through those brochures gives them hope, it builds their excitement for their arrival at their destination. Each brochure is like a little taste of what is to come. It's not as good as being there, but the pictures and evocative descriptions get them excited and eager to see the place in person.

This is what Sabbath is for us: a brochure advertising the rest that is to come. It's just a little taste. It's a reminder of the reservation that God has for us to rest. It is a practical event that reminds us of the rest that is reserved for us. There's a phrase in the Lutheran liturgy that captures this perfectly: "a foretaste of the feast to come." That's what remembering Sabbath is here, no matter what the practice looks like. Those times are a foretaste of the feast to come. Resting now gives us hope for the final rest. Sabbath reminds us to anticipate His rest.

## Conclusion

This brings us back to Frances buying a villa in Italy: a ridiculous thing to do, buying a house for a life that she doesn't yet have. But this is Sabbath. It's living in preparation for the life to come. It doesn't make sense to stop working if this is all there is. It doesn't make sense to

depend on God if He isn't there. Rest doesn't make sense apart from hope. But if what we believe is true—if it's true that all of creation is moving toward rest, if it's true that faith in Christ is what allows us to enter that rest—then resting now, celebrating some kind of Sabbath now, is like buying a house for a life that we don't yet have but that we believe in. This is a life that we have faith in because we have faith in the One who is preparing it for us.

Our passage in Hebrews ends with a beautiful description of what that day will look like. It's the last picture of entering that we want to talk about. We've talked about God's people trying to enter the Promised Land. We've talked about Jesus entering Jerusalem. We've talked about entering God's rest. But once the New Jerusalem has arrived, once we have entered into that final rest, we have one last place to go: the center of God's presence. And so at the end of Hebrews 4, Jesus is referred to as a high priest. The high priest was responsible for representing God's people in His presence, but this time the high priest does more than just represent our concerns. He's more than a liaison. He's an escort. He accompanies us into God's presence. Because Jesus is our guide, Hebrews 4:16 encourages us:

**Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence.**

This happens now in small ways but reaches its fulfillment at the end of time. Jesus takes our hand and leads us into the place of rest. He leads us into the Father's presence. Can you imagine? Standing in the presence of the living God? Led there by His Son?

Thus, as Jesus entered Jerusalem, we will enter the throne room. All of creation is moving toward a final Sabbath. It's by faith that we enter into that rest. When will we enter that rest? At the end of time. But we rest now as a reminder of that future. Sabbath reminds us that there is a rest reserved for us. Sabbath reminds us to anticipate it.

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