



D-Group Material for February 7, 2024

Hebrews 4:1-13

As a reminder, take some time to read and reread the passage. Make note of any questions you have and watch out for major themes and ideas as well as anything that stands out to you as useful.

Rest is an important concept. Many of us have a standard answer to the question of “*how are you?*” Many of us will quickly respond, “*tired*” or “*busy*”. Which is fair. Most of us are tired because we don’t slow down, and we don’t rest. We have a lot on our plate, *and* a lot of plates to balance. A recent article in *Forbes* pointed out that nearly 40% of Americans get less than six hours of sleep each night, which leads to a higher risk of health problems. In 2014, the CDC called our sleep problem a public health epidemic. And it’s not just physical, it’s also emotional and spiritual. In 2019, 85% of college students said they felt completely exhausted at some point in the last year from *non-physical* activity. 50% said exhaustion was a regular part of life. And as most of us know, life doesn’t slow down after college. Being busy and being tired seem to have become just an *expected* condition of life for so many of us. ***What are some of the things in our lives that keep us from resting? Why do we find it hard to rest? How do you find rest?***

In chapter three, the author of Hebrews gives a warning against rebellion in the desert, quoting Psalm 95 at length to remind and warn the audience against committing the same error as the Israelites when they were in the desert. They had been rescued from Egypt and given a promise of rest in the Canaan, but when things got difficult, their hearts *hardened* and they *rebelled* against both God’s promise *and* God’s messenger, Moses. The warning is to not rebel against the greater messenger, Jesus, in the same way.

And with that sobering warning still echoing in the background, the writer then makes an incredible statement in chapter 4:1: ***God’s promise of entering his rest still stands. What makes this statement so staggering?***

With the reminder that the promise of rest still stands, we are reminded of something critical. God’s promises to Israel were not ultimately about a plot of land, they were about a *greater* rest in God himself, through Jesus. Again, this is the way the old covenant operated: although it was filled with external structures, (*temples, land, a physical nation, high priests and sacrifices*)—all of those things ultimately pointed to a *fuller* reality to be found in Jesus. The promised land of Canaan was not God’s highest goal for his people. His goal was that they would, through *faith*, join him in a rest found in and through Jesus Christ. (see verse 8-9). ***How does faith relate to entering the promised rest of God?***

Through Jesus, we have access to God’s rest. It’s woven into the very fabric of God’s design in creation: on the 7th day, God rested. This was the plan from the beginning. It’s still the plan today. We work *and* we rest. Notice the Hebrew writer’s use of Psalm 95 (the same Psalm quoted at length in chapter three). The Psalmist emphasized the word *today* in the Psalm and Hebrews emphasizes it five times in chapters three and four. ***Listening*** to God and ***entering*** his rest was not just a call to Israel in the past, it was an urgent call for the original audience of this letter, and it still is urgent for us ***today***. Every day is ***today***. Every day is an invitation to trust God and to rest in his completed work of salvation. This is not just a future hope. It’s a present reality.

Read verse 3. *Believed* describes a completed action followed by the verb *enter* in the present tense. The implication is that entering God's rest is not something reserved for the future. It's presently available.

There is an urgency to entering God's rest. What are some of the ways the world would have us try to find our rest? How do we enter God's rest? What disciplines can you adopt to remind yourself that you're in God's rest?

Take some time and reflect on verse 10. Memorize it even. (And maybe Matthew 11:28-30 as well). We rest from our works and enter God's rest when we trust in Christ. We no longer must live our lives trying to *prove* our righteousness before God, instead we *rest* from that labor because Christ has already stood in on our behalf and given us His righteousness. This is a reminder that the gospel is not morality, or external religion. It's not a seven-step program to live your best life. The gospel is the message of Christ's accomplishments *on our behalf* so that we might *rest* from *our* works by trusting in *His*. ***Why is it so difficult for us to rest from our attempts to earn our own righteousness? Why is resting in this way such a constant struggle for Christians?***

Verse 11 introduces the so what of this section. Because this rest is available, *do your best* to enter it. Yes, we're talking rest, but we're also talking work. This echoes the warning against drifting away earlier in Hebrews. And the exhortation to *consider Jesus*. Resting in Jesus still contains an element of work. ***Why do you think this is? How do we do our best to enter rest? What are the responsibilities that we carry as Christ-followers? Maybe take a look at Ephesians 2:1-10. How do we avoid falling into the trap of legalism?***

Verses 12-13 are some of the most recognizable verses from all of Hebrews. God's word is *alive* and *active*. The Greek words are the words for life and energy (or power). God's word isn't some abstract concept. It's not a lifeless historical curiosity. It's alive. It's powerful. Read Isaiah 55:11 and Psalm 147:15-18. God's word is amazing. And contextually, it is likely that the word of God referred to here isn't a direct reference to the canon of Scripture as a whole (*although what's said here is true of all Scripture; see Tim. 3:16-17 for example*). The Word of God is a reference back to God's word of promised rest. This promise not only still stands for us, but it is the very promise and hope of life from an active and living God. ***How have you seen that God's word is alive and active and powerful? In verse 12, we also see that the Word is penetrating. How have you seen that aspect of the word of God?***

Here are some questions to think on and possibly discuss with your group:

In what ways have you been tempted to doubt the truth of God's word?

How should we study the Bible differently or listen to the word preached differently, given that it is alive and active?

What are some steps you can take to make sure you are learning and listening to the Word of God?

How does Scripture help us strive to enter God's rest? How do the attributes of Scripture from 12-13 help to strengthen your perseverance?