

Hebrews 4

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[0 : 00] This evening at six o'clock, we're going to be going back into the Old Testament, and we're going to be looking at one of the most extraordinary events that took place in the life of Solomon, a chapter that is largely neglected in the church, and it's the chapter where Solomon was faced with two prostitutes, one of whose baby had died, and we're going to be looking at the question, whose baby?

And how by the wisdom that he asked God for, he was able to make a crucial decision that I think has ramifications and implications for Christians in every age.

So, if that has whetted your appetite, I hope it has, then six o'clock this evening, if you're able to come. If not, there's always a live stream. I think that live stream is such a wonderful blessing.

I often, when I'm away, I tune into live stream, and it's always bon accord I come to, and I just love the way that you can be part of the service as it's taking place at that moment.

Recordings are great, but live stream is great. But it's not as good as being here. That's the best of all. That's the best solution of all. So, just in case you're tempted to just stay where it's nice and warm in the house, then please make the effort to come out, because it's always good to meet other people and to enjoy fellowship with one another.

[1 : 36] Hebrews chapter 4. I remember in 1969, I went to my first free church camp in Helmsdale. I won't tell you what age I was, because then that will give too much away.

But I can remember the excitement of attending my first camp. There was a little bit of homesickness. I think there is quite often.

But that was tempered by all of the activity that was going on. They didn't have mixed camps in those days. They had boys' camps and girls' camps. And they had all kinds of activities and a lot of strict discipline, which I don't believe is the same today.

But nonetheless, I'm sure that there is an adequate degree of control. In those days, you had to get up at 7 o'clock in the morning and lights out at 10.

Now, that didn't mean you went to sleep at 10, but you had lights out at 10. And the food was okay. The activities were okay. The one thing, and you'll probably be shocked to hear me say this, the one thing that we all hated was rest hour.

[2 : 51] It happened every day without fail after lunch. After you had your lunch, there was a whole hour where the rule was you went to your dorm and your feet must not touch the floor.

You had to lie in your camp bed and rest. Now, for a young teenager, as I was in those days, it was a pain to be told that you had to rest for a whole hour.

I mean, five minutes would have been okay, but an hour was way beyond what was bearable. It's only when you get a little bit more maturity that you realize that actually a rest hour is quite a nice thing.

Rest was built into the schedule of the Israelites. And it was included as a mandate in the Ten Commandments.

The Sabbath day was a whole day which was to be spent doing nothing. And Christians have traditionally viewed Sunday as the New Testament extension of the Old Testament Sabbath day, regarding it not only as a day of worship when you come together like we're doing just now, but a day of rest.

[4 : 21] And not that long ago, whole communities in this country, they shut down for the whole of Sunday so that everyone could get the benefit of not having to go to work.

Of course, on a personal basis, as a Christian, quite how you keep Sunday is going to vary from person to person.

But perhaps this is an opportune moment to rediscover the value of a day of rest. It was built into the weekly schedule of God's people as an act of kindness by God Himself because He deeply cared for His people and knew that their bodies and their minds needed a time of doing nothing. Resting. Resting. Resting. Resting. Resting. Resting. Coming away from all the duties. And if that was true a long time ago, how much more is it appropriate in a day of high stress for us to rediscover the value of a day of rest?

For too many people, Sunday was seen as a negative, what you shall not do. But the reason why God mandated what the Israelites should not do was for their own good.

[5 : 53] That was the only way that He could force His people to rest because He knew that they would benefit from it and the wise amongst them realized that just as the wise amongst us will know exactly the same thing.

Perhaps it is a good moment for us to think, well, how do I keep, how do I make the most of Sunday? Is it a day that I've allowed to slip and become like every other day?

Or as a Christian, do I see the value of taking advantage of these 24 hours when I can come and worship with my friends and my brothers and sisters as Christians and make use of the opportunity to learn more about the Bible and then to spend the day in a way that will glorify God at which God is at the heart of everything that I do.

Now, of course, that should be true every single day of our lives. And yet God has given us this special moment, this special period of time to be spent differently, I believe, for His glory.

If you only see it as what you're not allowed to do, then you're going to miss a whole lot of the joy of having a Sunday, having a Lord's Day.

[7 : 21] If you're only going to look at it legalistically and say, if I tick certain boxes and if I make sure I don't do certain things, then I am keeping, you've lost it. You really haven't begun to understand it.

Neither have you begun to understand the significance of the Sabbath. And that's what I want us to look at because this chapter seems to me to be burrowing deep into not only the value of having a day of rest, but the significance theologically.

God in this principle is teaching us about Himself. That's what theology is all about. It's all about knowing God and learning and discovering more about the God whom we've come to trust.

And the idea of the Sabbath in the Old Testament and in the New Testament is a way in which God teaches us about Himself. That's what this chapter is all about.

In actual fact, there were three Sabbaths. There are three Sabbaths in this chapter. Let's look at each one of them.

[8 : 34] In turn, there's the first Sabbath, which goes all the way back to the beginning of the Bible, to the first chapter of Genesis, where God, after having created the universe and everything in it, He chose to rest on the seventh day.

Now, quite what God resting means is a bit of a mystery. Why does God need to rest? He doesn't have a body. He's not subject to the failures and the weaknesses that we are subject to.

He doesn't need to rest. He's infinite and all-powerful and all-knowing. He's God as a spirit, infinite, eternal. He doesn't need to rest. And yet, that's the way He chose to describe Himself in the pages of Genesis 1.

And there is a mystery involved in it. This is one of these places where you have to just take God at His word. God rested on the seventh day. What's more, what God did in resting was to become a pattern for His people.

They were to observe a day which was to be different from every other day in the week. And this was established more than anything in the wilderness when the children of Israel were making their way from Egypt to Canaan.

[9 : 58] And they were told, as part of the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments, remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. And in that commandment, it's the only one that begins with remembering.

Everything else is, you shall or you shall not. But in the fourth commandment, they were to remember. They were to begin their obedience to that commandment by remembering.

And thereafter, they were forced not to work. A little bit like our camp, except it lasted a whole day. And in all likelihood, there were people like we were at the camp who rebelled against God.

Why should we be forced into having a day that is different? Well, I've already told you. It was because God knew them better than they knew themselves. And they would have worn themselves out if they had continued to work every single day of the week.

We have to ask, well, what if these restrictions are actually positives? What if they are for our good? You see, we have this way of turning what God means for our good into negatives.

[11:13] And we make them an excuse to rebel against God. That's not the way God intends it. He's actually saying to His people, look, I know what you need and I know what's good for you.

Please trust me. And that's our failure, isn't it? It's part of our sinfulness to refuse to trust God. But there's more to it than that.

The Sabbath was not just a day in which they were forbidden to do certain things. It was a day in which was supposed to be enjoyed.

Look at how the Old Testament describes the way in which God rested on the seventh day.

Exodus 31, I'll read it for you. Exodus 31, verse 14 to 17. You shall keep the Sabbath because it is holy for you. Everyone who profanes it shall be put to death.

[12:15] Whoever does any work on it, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the Lord. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day shall be put to death.

Therefore, the people of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, observing the Sabbath throughout their generations as a covenant forever. It is a sign forever between, this is the bit I'm coming to now. Listen to this.

It is a sign forever between me and the people of Israel that in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested.

Now, look what the ESV puts in. And was refreshed. It's not in the NIV, but it's in the ESV.

And was, and there's evidence that it should be there. And God was refreshed. And what I'm saying is this, that in order to really appreciate the Sabbath principle in the Bible, and what's being taught in this chapter, you have to try and ask, how does God look upon this seventh day, this day of rest?

[13:29] What's God's attitude to it? What does it mean by God rested and he was refreshed? I think when you think about it, actually you come up with some very interesting truths.

The first thing it means is that God had reached the point where his work of creation had come to an end. He had created the universe, the sun, the moon, the stars.

He had created the earth, everything that is within the realms of nature, the mountains, the valleys, the seas, the fish, the vegetation, the trees, the forests.

He had created all of them in their beauty and in their majesty and in their intricacy. And then he came to an end. Now when you think about it, God who is infinite, he could have carried on.

There was no end to what he could have done. But he chose to stop there because in his estimation, that was enough. His work came to an end.

[14:38] There was a starting point at the beginning and there was an end point. He ceased his work. I think there is something that is really important in that principle that extends into the human race.

Enough is enough. Enough. And there is something within our sinful nature that just wants to carry on because the sky is the limit.

There is something within us where if the opportunities are there, we want to grab them. And we want to make the most that we possibly can out of them. And it is endless. It is 24-7.

It is non-stop. And here is God. He is showing us by his own example. He comes to the point where he's reached the end.

Because he's done enough. Isn't that fascinating? Isn't that relevant for much of a modern, stressful, crazy world in which you and I are involved?

[15:56] And then the second thing was that he was satisfied. It's closely linked with the first. He was satisfied with what he had done. Because what he had done was the work of his skill.

If I can use that word, I don't think there's anything wrong with that. Of course, God is the ultimate skill, isn't he? The ultimate creator. The ultimate artist. The ultimate scientist.

The ultimate genius. But he was also able to step back and to be satisfied with what he had done as enough.

But like the ESV says, it's not the ESV that says it, it's the original that says it, that he was refreshed. I find that really fascinating, don't you? What does that mean?

It actually literally means, if you go back into the Hebrew, it means it did him good. It gets even more fascinating, doesn't it, when you actually get into the original language.

[17:06] It did him good. How can anything do God good? Are we suggesting that there's some kind of deficiency in God, that he needs something to kind of augment his godness?

Is he lacking in something? That he needs something to keep him satisfied? Of course not. Otherwise, he wouldn't be God.

God is all sufficient in himself. He doesn't lack anything. There is no deficiency in God. What we're coming across here is what they call an anthropomorphism.

You know how sometimes God describes himself in human terms. He tells us sometimes that the arm of the Lord is not shortened. God doesn't have an arm.

He tells us that he walked in the garden in the cool of the day. God doesn't walk because he doesn't have legs. He doesn't have a body. But he's describing himself in human terms.

[18:05] And he often does that in the Bible. In order for us to understand an important truth about God. And the truth that he's teaching us here is that God takes ultimate delight.

Ultimate, divine, perfect pleasure in what he has done. In other words, when we read that God rested on the seventh day, we're not to imagine God just taking a step back and forgetting all about it.

Quite the reverse. God looks at everything he has done and he's like, wow. He is blown away by it. He is utterly thrilled by what he has done. And he is perfectly entitled to be because this is the work of his hand.

If you and I are thrilled with creation, and we ought to be, how much more do you think God in his perfection is thrilled with what he has done?

[19:29] Because it is a reflection of himself. What is Psalm 19 tells us? It tells us the heavens declare the glory of God. So, as God looks on all that he has done, he sees a reflection of himself.

He is glorified. And therefore, he is utterly thrilled with what he has done. What I'm saying is this, that the Lord's Day, which is the New Testament equivalent of the Sabbath day, is a day in which God takes the central place and in which we, as men and women who have been reconciled to God, are given the opportunity to praise God in joy for what God has done.

This ought to be the moment of rejoicing. If the Sabbath day for you is a day when you're terrified of not doing the wrong thing, or not, or always ticking the boxes, you haven't even begun to keep the Lord's Day.

The Lord's Day is a day in which we rejoice in God and all that he has done. And church is a perfect place for that to happen.

Because it's a place where we come together with one heart and one soul and one mind to sing his praises and to discover what God has done in all its depth and in all its beauty and in all its greatness, as well as being a recognition of our need for a rest.

[21:13] And if you don't come away, if your heart is, if your mind is full, and by the way, I'm speaking from my own experience, I know how difficult it is to sit in church on a Sunday and your mind is filled with all kinds of stuff you've been doing in the week and stuff you're aiming to do in the next week and you're so easily distracted and you're stressed.

I know how difficult it is. We have to ask God to take it away from us just for this moment of time to be able to concentrate on God because that's what really, really matters.

But it's obvious from this chapter, look at the time, it's obvious from this chapter that the rest did not end there. In fact, in many ways, this was only the beginning. When God said to them to remember the Sabbath day, it was a marker.

It wasn't just a 24-hour period and here's what you're not allowed to do. It was a marker that signified not just what God had done in the past in His work of creation, but actually what God intended to do in the future.

That's what this chapter is all about. Because when God spoke about His promise that the Israelites would enter into the promised land, the land of Canaan, that's how He described it, that you will enter my, when you enter my rest.

[22:46] So there was the rest that was the seventh day of the week, but there was also the rest that they were to look forward to, the promise that one day they would cross the Jordan and they would enter into a land where they would dwell.

They would have permanent residence and they would enjoy the presence of God forever in peace and in security if they kept their covenant with God.

And so, if I can put it this way, if you are an Israelite, you're camped in your tent and you're in the middle of the desert, you're on your way to the promised land and you woke up on the seventh day, it wasn't just a question of what must I not do, but that this was another reminder that God was going to fulfill His promise to Israel and that they would one day enter into the promised land.

And He says, Deuteronomy chapter 12 and verse 9 to 12, and there you shall rejoice. You see this note of rejoicing again?

You shall, when you enter into my rest, you shall rejoice before the Lord your God. The seventh day of the week was a day of rejoicing and those who kept it in faith, they recognized this.

[24 : 09] Just the same way as in faith, I hope that we recognize the value of what we're doing today as we worship and as we rejoice in God on His day.

And so, there was a link between the Sabbath day in which the Israelites enjoyed temporary rest from the work they did all week and the promised land in which the Israelites would enjoy rest from all their toilsome traveling and wandering.

That was the second Sabbath. The second Sabbath was the promise that God gave to them that one day they would enter into the promised land and that promise He fulfilled.

Sabbath number two. But it didn't end there. This chapter makes clear there is therefore still another rest for the people of God.

And he goes back to the Old Testament again and he says in Psalm 95, even having entered into the promised land, the psalmist still talks about the rest that God has promised in the future.

[25 : 27] And I believe that that promise finds its focal point in one place and in one place alone, which is the day that Jesus was raised from the dead.

When you think about it, what happened the day that Jesus was raised from the dead? It was the end of God's work of salvation.

It was the culmination point, that moment when God having sent His only begotten Son, Jesus, into the world to die the cursed death of the cross.

And His body having been taken from the cross and laid in the grave, God raised Him from the dead as the final validation that His work was successful and that He had accomplished our salvation.

Just like Genesis chapter 1, God is working in sending Jesus into the world because it is the only way that He can redeem a lost and condemned world to be reconciled to Himself.

[26 : 54] There was only one way. God, there was no other way in which our sin could be atoned for other than Jesus coming into the world as the perfect second person of the Godhead, the Son of God, the eternal Son of God, and Him becoming one of us and dying on the cross.

When Jesus rose from the dead, it was God's stamp of approval. It was that final mark of victory in which Jesus rose triumphant over death and over sin.

And it was that guarantee moment which secured our salvation and in which God rejoiced.

Just as He rejoices in the result of that resurrection and that death. He rejoices in His people because we are the work of His hands.

We are His Sabbath. We are His delight. Think about it.

[28 : 20] And I know it's difficult. Because we tend to think in terms of our own failures, at least I do, and I hope, I'm sure that we are conscious of our own failures. And you ask yourself, you get to that point where you ask yourself, how in the world can God possibly, how can a holy God delight in me knowing what He does about me?

How can He possibly be thrilled with me? Well, there is an answer to that question. The only answer is this, because He has united you to His Son, Jesus Christ, and because He sees you in Jesus, because you have become joined with the Lord Jesus Christ.

That's what faith means. That's what a faith relationship to Jesus means, that we have become united in Jesus. And in Christ, what does the apostle say?

If anyone be in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away. Behold, all things have become new. The life that you live is a changed life. It's a new life.

It's a transformed life in which the Holy Spirit is operating day by day, hour by hour, to transform you into the likeness of Jesus Christ.

[29 : 45] Your sin has been forgiven. You are in Christ. God is thrilled with His creation. Are you okay with that?

I hope so. I hope that's the best thing you've heard this morning. God is delighted.

You know, when we talk about the love of God, we often sing about it, don't we? We like to talk about it. But have you ever actually unpacked it? The more you unpack it, the more wonderful it becomes.

And it's only as you unpack it that actually you get to grips with it. Here is a love that doesn't just talk about love, but here's a love that's done something about it.

It's God has sent His Son into the world so that by His death in agony on the cross that we could be reconciled and redeemed and brought into His kingdom.

[30 : 53] That's His work. It's not. We haven't done anything. He's done it all. We are His handiwork. We are His craftsmanship.

We are the consequence of what He has done for us in the Lord Jesus Christ. And so therefore, I hope you're able to accept that.

Take it. Accept it. Don't let it be an excuse for you to live any way you want. That's not the way it's to be at all. But let it be an impetus for you to go out of here all the more determined to put God first and to give Him the glory in your thoughts and your words and your actions and in everything you do.

That's what this truth is all about. Three Sabbaths. Actually, there's a fourth. We don't have time to go into the fourth. There's a fourth.

And that's the Sabbath that's still to come. Where? Beyond this life. When we die. What is it the revelation tells us?

[32 : 05] Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord. They are blessed indeed and they will rest from their labors.

ultimate rest is still to come. Perfect, sinless rest is still to come. And it will come because God has promised it.

Our Father in Heaven, we thank you for these promises. We thank you. We thank you. Like you said, we thank you. We thank you. I'm just trying to uh, hold you up.

We thank you. TwoFre█ in Heaven and we thank you. I tried to repent because of faith and the faith that God has promised us and we thank you. Do you want to listen to our Rogers