

HEBREWS 4 : 8 – 16

EASTER AND REAL REST

For if Joshua had given them rest, then He [God] would not afterward [at King David's time] have spoken of another day. There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His [God's] rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His.

Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience [recorded about the Old Testament people]. For the Word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

What is the difference between a feral cat and a house cat? A feral cat has never been in a house or been associated with people. It is truly wild. The house cat on the other hand is often in the house and is very familiar with people. The feral cat is always on the lookout for its next meal, a place of shelter, and is extremely wary of danger. The house cat has its food provided, a soft place to sleep, and not a worry in the world. Do you perhaps feel like the feral cat today?—on the move, searching, looking over your shoulder? Or do you feel like the house cat today?—at peace and leisure, with rest and safety at every turn? Likely you have felt like both. But which do you prefer? I'm guessing the life of security and peace—not just physical peace and safety, but peace of heart and soul, knowing that even when things get “bumpy” all will turn out well.

This text and its surrounding verses speak about REST. The first mention of “rest” in the Bible comes on the seventh day of creation. God “rested” on the seventh day and blessed it. He rested in the sense that He ceased from His “work” of creating, as does the attorney who says, “Your Honor, I rest my case—I’m done.” But God also rested in the sense he was at peace with all things He had made; and all things He had made were at peace and rest with Him, particularly Adam and Eve. Imagine Adam and Eve, busy in the Garden, having no care, or worry, or fear, in the world. But sin changed all that. Guilt and shame before God and death from God loomed large. Yet, God promised rescue, rest, relief—forgiveness and peace—through His Son. Adam and Eve’s descendants did not always have it easy. Cain killed Abel. Wickedness ran rampant at the time of the Flood. Abraham, from whom the Savior was promised to come, was merely a nomad in the new land that God had said was his—on the move, no secure home or resting place. His succeeding generations did find some safety and peace when they lived in Egypt, but that turned sour when the Egyptians made them into sweat slaves. No rest, no peace. God sent Moses to lead them out of Egypt back to the land of Canaan—promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—a land flowing with milk and honey! The Israelites were looking forward to this promised rest in their own homeland. But they were hardhearted with Moses and the Lord, and did not trust or obey. Consequently, those twenty and older died during forty years wandering in the wilderness. Joshua, the leader after Moses, did lead the next generation into the Promised Land of Rest. But that wasn’t Real Rest either. The people continued to turn away, drift away, fall away from God. Several hundred years later, the writer of Psalm 95 (King David, based on Hebrews 4:7) wrote “He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand—today if you will hear His voice—do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, as in the trial in the wilderness, when your fathers tested Me though they saw My works. . . . So I swore in My wrath, ‘They shall not enter My Rest!’ ” David was encouraging his people not to lose out on the Rest that was yet to come, a Rest which the disobedient, scorners, and unbelievers would not enter. The real Rest wasn’t provided by Moses, or Joshua, or David—it was yet to come! “For if Joshua had given them rest, then He [God] would not afterward have spoken of another day There remains therefore a rest for the people of God.” The real Rest was yet to come.

It is significant that the text says, “For he who has entered His rest [God's rest] has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His. The real Rest involves ceasing from one's own labors—from

striving, struggling, sweating to merit by your own feeble works and deeds, God's acceptance and favor. It can't be done. "By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in His sight" (Romans 3:20). Peace with God is found only in Jesus—"Come to Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest . . . Ye shall find rest unto your souls" (Matthew 11:28). "The peace of God that passes all understanding which shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:7).

It is in Christ alone that you are anybody. Beware when thoughts come to mind, "I'm a good rancher because I . . . , I'm a good father because I . . . , I'm a good mother because I . . . I'm a good son or daughter because I . . . I'm a good student because I . . . I'm a good husband or wife because I . . . I'm a good citizen because I . . . I'm a good example to my neighbors because I . . ." If you sat down with an honest friend, not one just trying to win your favor, or sat down with Jesus, and asked "How bad am I?" your pride would take a hit, but you would hear the truth and would conclude, "I am a big disappointment Dear Father, I humbly ask, Forgive me. I cling to the forgiveness and rescue Jesus has provided me." Indeed, hear your heavenly Father say, "Yes, forgiven." Real rest and peace!

The text continues, Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall—according to the same example of disobedience [*as recorded about the Old Testament people*]. For the Word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account. In other words, Do not turn away and lose the Rest to come. Be diligent to live in Him and for Him who is your only Savior. You can't fool God. He knows your heart. His Word, His Wisdom, is so sharp it can cleanly divide bone joints (have you ever done any butchering?). It can even divide the little strands and fibers of bone marrow (talk about a scalpels!). It can divide soul and spirit (the same!), also thoughts and intents (the same!). You can hide nothing from God. Everybody likes to hide things—children (candy in their room), and adults (money in their mattress). But it doesn't work with God. All the secret sins, God knows. Stop thinking that your yourself earn His favor.

Your Rest is in Jesus. "Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." The Old Testament priest offered the sacrifices on the altar for the people. The High Priest offered the blood of atonement in the Most Holy Place—Holy of Holies—one day a year, sprinkling it onto the Mercy Seat covering the Box or Ark of the Covenant—where the Ten Commandments were kept. Jesus has fulfilled that role. He is your go-between between you and God. Through His blood He pleads for you with the Father. Jesus does not come to condemn you for your sin. Note: Nor does He excuse you! However, He understands the temptations of Satan. He Himself faced every temptation—surely not in the exact details but with the same allure. He knew what it was to be tempted to turn away from God, to blaspheme God's name, to disregard parents and authorities, etc. He faced every temptation that you do, yet was without sin. He understands your weakness. He was strong for your and was punished for you. He goes to the Father in your behalf. In Him you have Rest and peace. Now, do not despise Him, lest you lose the Rest and Peace that is yours already now, and ultimately fulfilled in heaven!

Do you get it? We just had Easter. Are you thinking, "I'm glad that's over with. A year from now will be all too soon for the next one"??? Was your Easter built on new life in Christ, or your own dead end ways? OR, "Easter? Ho-hum. We had a bit of a family gathering. Too much candy. I've forgotten that it was only two weeks ago"??? Was your Easter built on Jesus' resurrection after His death for your forgiveness and your victory over sin, death, Satan, and hell? In your heart treasure Easter every day! Consider the name "Easter." Have you ever heard of a "nor'easter," a "northeaster"—a rain or snow system that blows in from the northeast—usually a "big one"? The name "East-er" is similar. Just as the dawn of a new day comes from the east, so you ou have a new day, a new beginning, a new life, in Jesus after the night of sin and death. Jesus brings you a Dawn, an "east-er" indeed! Every day, every moment into eternity! Here is your Peace and Rest. "There remains therefore a rest for the people of God." REST, ahh! So then you are not a feral cat—and on Good Shepherd Sunday we say not a "feral sheep"! You are a "house sheep" of God's household and family. The Good Shepherd cares for all your needs. You lack nothing! His goodness, mercy, and forgiveness are with you every day of your life. When you walk through "bumpy" times on earth, He is at your side, even through the valley of death. In Him you have an East-er! You shall dwell in the House of the Lord forever! Here is REAL REST!

"There remains a rest for the people of God. Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest!"

Amen! So be it!

Pastor Kanzenbach---