

Hebrews 3:7-4:16 (DHT)

Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, “Today, if you should hear his voice, and not harden your hearts as in the rebellion in the wilderness on the day of testing where your fathers tried and tested me, and saw my works for forty years. Therefore, I was angry with that generation and I said, ‘They always go astray in their hearts, and they have not known my ways; so I swore by my wrath that they shall not enter into my rest.’” Take heed, brothers, at risk that any of you would fall away from the living God or unbelief be found in any of your evil hearts. But encourage each other every day while it is called “today,” so that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ, if indeed we hold firm to the assurance from the beginning to the end. As it says, “Today, if you should hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.”

For who were those who heard and rebelled? Was it not all these who were led by Moses out of Egypt? Now were these who sinned not at whom he was angry for forty years, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? Then to whom did he swear that they shall not enter into his rest, if not they who disobeyed? And so we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief.

Therefore, while the promise to enter his rest remains, we should fear otherwise any of you will seem to have fallen short. For the gospel was preached to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not profit them, not having been united with the faith of those who heard. For we who have believed enter into the rest, as he has said, “So I swore in my wrath, ‘They shall not enter my rest,’” and yet the works from the foundation of the world have been finished. For he has spoken somewhere concerning the seventh in this way: “And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.” And in this again, “they shall not enter into my rest.” Therefore, since it remains for some to enter into it, and those who formerly received the gospel did not enter because of disobedience, again he appoints a certain day, “Today,” saying through David after such a long time, just as it has been said, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts;” for if Joshua had given them rest, he would not have spoken about another day after this.

So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the People of God for those who enter his rest has also rested from his works as God did from his own. Therefore, we should be diligent to enter into that rest, so that no one should fall by the same disobedience. For the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, even penetrating as far as the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and judging the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And

there is no creature hidden from his sight, however all things are uncovered and laid bare to the eyes of him to whom is our reckoning. Therefore, having a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, we should hold firmly to our confession about Jesus, the Son of God. For we have not a high priest unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things by the same way, but without sin. Therefore, we should come to the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and grace and find help in time of need.

Illustration and Introduction

By a show of hands, when you’re reading a novel or watching a movie, how many of you like to have the ending spoiled for you? When reading a novel or watching a movie for a second time, how many of you have a more enjoyable experience? There’s just something special and refreshing about experiencing a piece of literature or cinema for what it is. Yet it is entirely different to experience the genius of the author or cinematographer when reading or watching for a second time, because you see things the second time that you didn’t know you needed to look for the first time. Our Hebrews passage this morning briefly tells the story of the People of God, concluding that God’s Sabbath Rest always was and still is available for all those who have faith in the finished work of Christ—a work prepared from the foundation of the world—so much so that now to go back to the beginning of that story, we can see the genius of the Holy Spirit through things we didn’t even know we needed to look for. To spoil the ending, the conclusion toward which I hope to lead you is that God’s Sabbath rest *is* divine enthronement—God’s Sabbath rest *is* divine enthronement.

Sabbath Rest as Divine Enthronement

In the beginning, God worked, he rested, he gave, and then he instructed. In many ways, this short summary sets the tone for the entire Bible—God worked, God rested, God gave, then God instructed. The creation of the cosmos is told to us in six segments. We know there are six segments because they all have the same beginning and end. They all begin, “And God said...” and then they all end “and there was evening and morning” such and such day. The earth was formless and empty, and the first, second, and third days describe God forming what was formless by separating or making holy certain things like light from darkness; and the fourth, fifth, and sixth days describe God filling those now-formed but still empty spaces with flora,

fauna, and humanity. While the creation of humanity is presented in Genesis 1 as the crown of creation, the culmination of creation is what *follows*—the seventh segment; seven being the biblical number for fullness or completion; and God rested from his work on this seventh day.

“Within the framework of the narrative...there is an ascending order of hierarchy culminating in Sabbath which demonstrates” the supremacy of Sabbath in creation; demonstrating “consecration in an ascending order.”¹ And so on this seventh day when God separated the Sabbath or made it holy, there is not just a horizontal separation but also a vertical elevation of the Sabbath over all the other days. In ANE myth, sacred spaces were designed as the location immediately above which a deity resided to reign over its sphere of influence. In the Bible, this concept is used to conceptualize sacred space as the place where the glory and presence of God *rests with* the cherubim, *between* the cherubim, *above* the cherubim, or *behind* the cherubim—these mysterious guardian-creatures of worship. And so, when creation culminates in God’s rest, page one of the Bible tells us God reigns over *all* of creation; his sphere of kingship is over *everything*. When the Bible says God rested, it’s not talking about God laying down to take a nap because God never grows faint or weary (Isa. 40:28). God resting is a reference to the place he resides, lives, or inhabits in the sphere of his reign. God’s Sabbath Rest *is* his divine enthronement over the cosmos.

Just prior to the creation of humanity, God tells us in Gen. 2:5 that there was no man to *abad* the ground—*abad*; to work or to serve. Then God created an earthling and commanded him in Gen. 2:15 to *abad* and *shamar*—to serve and to keep or guard. These are two key words in the HB. Every other time both of these words are used together, they refer to the Israelites serving and guarding God’s word or Israel’s priests serving and guarding in the tabernacle or temple. God’s commands to *abad* and *shamar* are not merely about gardening; these are priestly duties for Adam and Eve to expand the boundaries of the first earthly temple to the ends of the earth.

While humanity goes on to work the ground, they fail to guard God’s Word by instead listening to the infiltrating voice of the serpent, and violating the one instruction they received from God after he gave to them from the fruits of *his* work. And so, humanity sinned and is exiled from the garden back into Eden where their priestly status is reaffirmed but also redefined. God clothes Adam and Eve with garments. Much like the last pairing, whenever the two Hebrew

¹ Kyle Hauck, “The Beginning and the Sabbath: Indicators for the Perpetuity of the Sabbath.” *PRJ*, Vol. 9, 2017; page 36, 45.

words for clothed and garments are use together, they *always* refer to the ordination of priests. Moreover, in all but one of these instances the priest is clothed by someone else just as Adam and Eve were clothed not by themselves but by God; and the one exception is when Aaron clothed himself in the high priestly garments. Adam and Eve thus retained their priestly status after they sinned but they could no longer remain in the holy of holies. That said, their priestly tasks to *abad* and *shamar* have been redefined, for when God handed out punishments to Adam and Eve in Genesis 3, both would continue to work but it would be hard labor; for Eve hard labor in giving birth and for Adam hard labor in the fields. Moreover, the Cherubim were permanently-rested to *shamar* the door into the Edenic holy of holies. Adam and Eve lost the ability to *abad* and *shamar*. The originally good and refreshing work God gave them would now be hard; they would continue to *abad* the earth, but now the Cherubim would *shamar*; God’s presence was *behind* the Cherubim.

Now let’s fast forward. The nation of Israel arrives at Mount Sinai, they enter into a covenant with God who just rescued them from slavery in Egypt, and then he gives them the Ten Commandments. Now if you know your OT, you may know that we get the Ten Commandments twice, once in Ex. 20 and the other in Deut. 5. The fourth commandment is the first commandment where the Deuteronomy version differs from the Exodus version. Let’s see if you can pinpoint them. For the sake of time, I’ll only mention two of the differences. In Exodus, the command is rooted in creation while in Deuteronomy the command is rooted in their redemption from Egypt. At first glance, the Deuteronomy version seems to shift away from creation.

Another difference is that the very first word has been shifted from *Zakar* “Remember” to *Shamar* “Keep.” Ah! I thought humanity lost the task of *shamar*? Whereas it seems Deuteronomy’s version has shifted away from creation on one end of the command, it has shifted back on the other. Why did God choose to take six days? He did this to establish a pattern for the way his people were to live, yes; but he also did this that humanity might return to their priestly-garden tasks once again. In six days you shall *abad* and on the seventh day you shall *shamar* the Sabbath. In the Fourth Commandment, working six days then ceasing from work on the Sabbath is fulfilling the command from the Garden of Eden to *abad* and *shamar*.

But the story keeps going! Moses and seventy-three leaders of Israel ascend Mount Sinai to affirm the covenant, and we are told in Ex. 24:16 that the glory of the LORD rested on Mount Sinai in a cloud. But God wanted to rest with his people. They were supposed to go up the

mountain, but instead they refused. And so begins the construction of a new Eden called the tabernacle. The purpose of this tabernacle is stated in Ex. 25:8, *let them make me a sanctuary, that I may permanently-rest in their midst*. The same word *permanently-rest* is used in Gen. 3:24 about God permanently-resting—or in the ESV “stationing” the Cherubim to guard his presence.

It’s not just that God wants to be with his people, but he wants his people to be in his resting place. And so in Ex. 25-31, the construction plans for this sanctuary are given, and they are given in six segments. We know they are six segments because they all have the same beginning: “And YHWH spoke to Moses...” And in one of those segments, they were to construct the mercy seat, which on the Day of Atonement was the place where the presence of God would be, and they were to set up Cherubim to guard the mercy seat; God’s glory and presence are behind the Cherubim. Does this sound familiar? The creation of the cosmos was told in six segments, with the presence and glory of God *behind* the Cherubim. But what about the seventh segment in which God rested from his work of Creation?

Immediately following the six segments of tabernacle construction instructions, at the end of Ex. 31(:12-17), we find a seventh segment: *And YHWH said to Moses, “You are to speak to the people of Israel and say, ‘Above all you shall shamar—you shall keep my Sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, YHWH, make you holy. You shall keep the Sabbath, because it is holy for you... the people of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, observing the Sabbath throughout their generations, as a covenant forever. It is a sign forever between me and the people of Israel that in six days YHWH made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed.*

As if this wasn’t enough, in Ex. 40 Moses assembled the tabernacle in seven segments that all end with the same concluding phrase “As the LORD commanded Moses.” After the seven segments of assembling the tabernacle pieces that were constructed in seven segments corresponding to the seven segments of creation, some of the final words of the Book of Exodus read: *Then the cloud covered the tent, and the glory of YHWH filled the tabernacle. But Moses was not able to enter...because—here’s this special word again—because in it the cloud permanently-rested and the glory of YHWH filled the tabernacle.* I wish we had the time to take you down this rabbit trail to Solomon’s Temple and Ezekiel’s apocalyptic temple, but for the sake of time I will just say that both of those culminate in the glory of God *resting* in the holy of

holies.² The construction of the tabernacle mirrors the construction of the cosmos in that all culminate in God’s Sabbath Rest as divine enthronement.

And so the Israelites took this mobile sanctuary-throne-room with them through the wilderness, and they were absolute pills. They grumbled and complained; they even desired to go back to slavery in Egypt because at least they knew what was coming; at least there was familiar food and drink. Isn’t it sad that God had just supernaturally freed them from slavery through the same waters he used to destroy their oppressors? God redeemed Israel *before* he made them live in a certain way. The Ten Commandments were given in *response* to his redemption of them. Despite their sinfulness and grumbings, God’s redemption was motivated by his own remembrance of his covenant with Abraham. Lev. 26:(12-13) supplies a helpful summary of this dynamic: “I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people. I am YHWH your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, so that you would no longer be their slaves. I broke the bars of your yoke and *enabled you to live in freedom.*” Legalism states that you must change you behavior *before* you can be redeemed. But the redemptive plan of the Bible is that your redemption *is the basis for your change in behavior.* A person must *belong* before they can *behave*. Redemption precedes transformation. I have counted no fewer than 97 times in the HB when God or his prophets explicitly and verbally remind Israel that God redeemed them from Egypt and therefore expects them to behave as already-redeemed people. Another example is in Deut. 24:(21-22), a law about leaving the excess crop for the resident alien. The reason why: “Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt. *Therefore,* I am commanding you to do this.” Their redemption was the basis for their expected behavior—not the other way around.

Their grumbling amounted to unbelief—unbelief in the God who just supernaturally rescued them. They approach the Promised Land and send in spies to scope out the land of Canaan, and when they get back ten of the spies lead the nation to believe the Canaanites are too strong for them to overtake, undercutting Joshua and Caleb. This unbelief resulted in that generation not being able to enter God’s rest in the Promised Land and their bodies fell in the wilderness. But the possibility of entering God’s rest remained for the second generation, and some did enter that rest. The Book of Joshua tells us that through his leadership, God did give them rest but the people did not take it, *even when they were already living in the Promised Land.* They did not have it in themselves to take the gift God gave to them. They could not enter

² For more, see my message: “What Makes a Temple a Temple?”

God’s rest because of their continued unbelief and their continued reliance on their own works; worshipping idols they could see rather than worshipping in Spirit the God who is Spirit; obeying the commands of God when it was convenient to them but when it was inconvenient everyone very post-modernly did what was right in their own eyes.

Even though God was enthroned in their midst, they insisted on having a physical, human king. But these kings could not give rest. In Psalm 95, David speaks of the greatness of God in terms of creation: *For YHWH is a great God, and a great King above all gods. In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also. The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land. Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before YHWH, our Maker! For he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts...as on the day...when your fathers put me to the test...though they had seen my work. For forty years I loathed that generation and said, “They are a people who go astray in their heart...therefore...they shall not enter my rest.* In this psalm quoted in our Hebrews passage, David writes that the prospect of entering God’s rest remains as long as this age remains; or in other words, until the end of Revelation when the New Heaven and the New Earth are established, all people to the ends of the earth will see God’s work of creation and they will either put their faith in him or wander about in their own wilderness of unbelief searching for tangible things to direct the worship of their heart.

Approaching the Throne with Boldness Because of the Gospel

The writer of Hebrews tells us that while it is still today, entering God’s rest remains available to us. The writer of Hebrews tells us that those who *will* enter into God’s rest are able to do something that those who do not enter into God’s rest cannot, and that is to come before the throne of God with *confidence*. Why with confidence? When priests entered the holy of holies, if they were found with sin, they would die, and so they would frequently enter *fearfully*. Three times in the NT all Christians are called priests. And so we can approach with confidence rather than fear because Jesus our great high priest successfully made atonement for us, and the reason he was successful was because he was found to be totally without sin. Those who have faith in the finished work of Christ can and will enter into God’s rest, which is the divine enthronement towards which we can approach with confidence in times of need, in times of temptation, and in

times of weakness. “Before the throne of God above, we have a strong and perfect plea. A great high priest named Love who ever lives and pleads for you and me.”

Hebrews tells us to enter God’s rest is to cast aside our own works and rest ourselves in the finished work of our great high priest Jesus Christ. The writer tells us we do this by holding firm to our confession about the person and work of Jesus Christ, which we call the Gospel. The Gospel is that through his virgin birth, his virtuous life, his vicarious death, his victorious resurrection, his visible ascension, and his vindicating exaltation that Jesus is the Christ—the longed for Messiah of God. And it is especially the work of Jesus’ vicarious death and victorious resurrection that we must remind ourselves every day, for it is the source of our redemption.

The reason we can approach the throne with confidence is because we have a high priest able to sympathize with our weaknesses; one who has been tempted in every kind of way as us *but without sin*. Isaiah prophesies about Jesus beforehand that in him there was no wrong, violence, or deceit. Peter twice writes of Jesus’ sinlessness: “for you were ransomed from futility...with the precious blood of Christ, [who died] like an *unblemished* lamb” in a way that was known and planned from the foundation of the world (1 Pet. 1:18-20; 2:22).

The virtuous life is of great importance to a proper understanding of the person and work of Jesus Christ, for it means his death could actually be vicarious. “Upon a Life I have not lived, upon a death I did not die; [but upon] Another’s Life and upon Another’s Death I stake my whole eternity. Not on the tears that I have shed, not on the sorrows I have know; [but on] Another’s tears and on Another’s griefs...I *rest* on these alone. Jesus, Son of God, I build on what your cross as done *for me*; there bore my death...I read, my guilt and pardon there I see.” This is why Paul writes in 2 Cor. 5:(21) that Jesus who knew no sin became our sin so that we who know no righteousness would become his righteousness. The substitutionary, vicarious death of Jesus is of utmost importance because without it there is no forgiveness of sins.

Jesus lived the life we fail to live; he died in our place the death our sins deserve; and he was raised as a victorious, conquering king over the last enemy, death—so that all people who believe by faith in his resurrection will be forgiven of their sins, given a new heart, and indwelt by the Holy Spirit who enables you to live in freedom; to instead let Christ live in you—as Gal. 2:20 says, “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me,” and was raised for me (cf. Rom. 4:25).” And those who believe—those who

have faith in the resurrection of Jesus are given the promise to enter into God’s rest, to confidently enter into Christ’s divine enthronement, to eternal life in the restored Garden of Eden with every other sinner who repents and puts their faith in Jesus.

We do this by casting aside our own works to cling to the finished work of Jesus, who has redeemed us. And this is hard because our sinful nature tells us we need to earn it. “I am a good person because of what I have done,” many are inclined to say. But Christianity is the only religion in the world founded upon grace; in every other religion you have to earn it. The hardness of heart; the unbelief of the Israelites in the wilderness that led them to grumble and complain against the God of their redemption can manifest itself in us. Just like Israel needed to be constantly reminded of God’s redemption of them through the Exodus, we also need to be constantly reminded of God’s redemption of us through the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion – Alistair Begg

Alistair Begg says it like this: “Without preaching the cross to ourselves all day and every day, we will very quickly revert to faith plus works as the ground of our salvation. So to go to the old Fort Lauderdale question, ‘If you were to die tonight and you were getting entry into heaven, what would you say?’ If you answer that, and if I answer it in the first person, we’ve immediately gone wrong—because I; because I believed; because I have faith; because I am this... The only proper answer is in the third person—because *he*; because *he!*... That’s the only answer. If I don’t preach the Gospel to myself all day and every day then I will find myself beginning to trust myself; trust my experience, which is part of my fallenness as a man. If I take my eyes off the cross, I can then give only lip service to its [power] while at the same time living as if my salvation depends upon me, and as soon as you go there it will lead you either to [hopeless] despair or a horrible kind of arrogance. And it is only the Cross of Christ that deals both with the dreadful depths of despair and the pretentious arrogance of the pride of man that says, ‘You know, I can figure this out and I’m doing wonderfully well.’ No, ‘because the sinless, savior died, my sinful soul is counted free, for God the just is satisfied to look on him and pardon me.’ ...We’re saved as a result of what *Christ* has achieved [and] it gives to the believer...a confidence that I couldn’t otherwise have; a confidence in the Gospel.”³

Let’s pray.

³ Alistair Begg, “The Cross of Christ.” Sermon accessed via YouTube.