

Study #4: The Place of Rest

So far, Hebrews has been adding elements, one on top of another, about the greatness of Jesus the Messiah and his gospel. First we learned that he is far above the angels, then that he shared our human suffering as he led the way to glory, and again that he is worthy of more honor than Moses because he is a son, not a servant.

At the same time, certain other elements keep resurfacing. The chief concern is: don't drift, focus! Hebrews keeps coming back to that. I'd add four other elements that fit into the larger scheme and keep getting repeated:

- A) *God's Word*. Read 1:2; 2:3-4; 3:5; 4:12. What is the basic thought?
- B) *God's Rule*. Read 1:13; 2:5-9; 4:3b. What is our place in this rule?
- C) *Our Obedience*. Read 2:1; 3:19; 4:2. What does obedience look like?
- D) *Our Atonement*. Read 1:3b; 2:9; 2:17. Why is atonement necessary?

Read Hebrews 4:1-16

1. "Rest" is cited from three different contexts: the creation of the heavens and the earth, the Exodus, and a warning (attributed to David) from Psalm 95. What do you learn about it from the Genesis context? (4:3-5)
2. From the Exodus, it might seem that "rest" equals the Promised Land. How does Psalm 95 show that this is incorrect? (See Hebrews 4:8, particularly.)
3. What, then, is "rest?" Is it a psychological state, a place, or a condition?
4. How does one enter this rest? Is it a destination you can arrive at in this life?
5. How would you compare the idea of "rest" with Jesus' preaching about the kingdom of God?
6. Why does the author immediately go on to describe the power of the word of God? (4:12-13) What does this have to do with entering the rest?
7. What does "a great high priest" (4:14-16) add to this picture?
8. Overall, what kind of portrait of the Christian life is Hebrews giving us so far? Do you find it inspiring, or depressing? Why?

God's Word

Hebrews 1:2

2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe.

Hebrews 2:3-4

3 how shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. 4 God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

Hebrews 3:5

5 "Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house,"[a] bearing witness to what would be spoken by God in the future.

Hebrews 4:12

12 For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

God's Rule

Hebrews 1:13

13 To which of the angels did God ever say,

"Sit at my right hand
until I make your enemies
a footstool for your feet"[a]?

Hebrews 2:5-9

5 It is not to angels that he has subjected the world to come, about which we are speaking. 6 But there is a place where someone has testified:

"What is mankind that you are mindful of them,
a son of man that you care for him?
7 You made them a little[a] lower than the angels;
you crowned them with glory and honor
8 and put everything under their feet."[b][c]

In putting everything under them,[d] God left nothing that is not subject to them.[e] Yet at present we do not see everything subject to them.[f] 9 But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

Hebrews 4:3

3 Now we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said,

"So I declared on oath in my anger,
'They shall never enter my rest.'"[a]

And yet his works have been finished since the creation of the world.

Our Obedience

Hebrews 2:1

2 We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.

Hebrews 3:19

19 So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.

Hebrews 4:2

2 For we also have had the good news proclaimed to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because they did not share the faith of those who obeyed.[a]

Our Atonement

Hebrews 1:3

3 The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

Hebrews 2:9

9 But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

Hebrews 2:17

17 For this reason he had to be made like them,[a] fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.

Hebrews 4

4 Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. 2 For we also have had the good news proclaimed to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because they did not share the faith of those who obeyed.[a] 3 Now we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said,

“So I declared on oath in my anger,
‘They shall never enter my rest.’”[b]

And yet his works have been finished since the creation of the world. 4 For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: “On the seventh day God rested from all his works.”[c] 5 And again in the passage above he says, “They shall never enter my rest.”

6 Therefore since it still remains for some to enter that rest, and since those who formerly had the good news proclaimed to them did not go in because of their disobedience, 7 God again set a certain day, calling it “Today.” This he did when a long time later he spoke through David, as in the passage already quoted:

“Today, if you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts.”[d]

8 For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. 9 There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; 10 for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from their works,[e] just as God did from his. 11 Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience.

12 For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. 13 Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Jesus the Great High Priest

14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven,[f] Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. 16 Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Footnotes

Hebrews 4:2 Some manuscripts because those who heard did not combine it with faith

Hebrews 4:3 Psalm 95:11; also in verse 5

Hebrews 4:4 Gen. 2:2

Hebrews 4:7 Psalm 95:7,8

Hebrews 4:10 Or labor

Hebrews 4:14 Greek has gone through the heavens