

R12.2 September 2023 Blog

Rest

"Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened."
(Hebrews 4:1–2)¹

All people long for rest. Christ alone offers true rest. True rest does not exist apart from Christ. Rest is most understood as "the refreshing quiet or repose of sleep; refreshing ease or inactivity after exertion or labor."² While this definition is correct, it is far too narrow and shallow to describe the rest mankind seeks and the rest only Christ can provide. True rest exists contemporaneously on three levels.

Our bodies need rest. Our bodies need to replenish from our physical exertions. Our cells need to be regenerated. Until we are in heaven with Jesus Christ, our bodies will continue to gradually break down. Our physical rest will always be temporary and partial. Our present bodies have built-in obsolescence. In heaven Christ will give us new bodies; bodies that will not be subject to age, disease, deterioration, or death.

Even though we are sinners, we yearn for rest from the power and presence of sin. Only Christ provides rest from the power and presence of sin. He gives us the desires of our hearts (see Psalm 37:4). That is, He replaces our worldly, sinful desires with holy desires that He implants in our hearts. The Holy Spirit embeds godly desires and causes them to grow and multiply. We will have eternal rest from envy, lust, covetousness, selfishness, deceit, treachery, stealing, murder, etc. We will be free from being the *perpetrators* of sin and *the victims* of sin. Christ will free us from the lament of the Apostle Paul: "For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the

¹ All scripture references in this blog are ESV unless otherwise noted

² <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/rest>

good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me."³

The divine, eternal rest includes a desire for ever-deeper intimacy with Christ. Throughout eternity we will never have enough of Him. There will always be something new and alluring to discover about Him. We will never be bored, and life will never be humdrum. As our desire for Christ deepens, our dissatisfaction with our polluted world will correspondingly increase. We marvel at sunsets and sunrises, but they pale before Jesus who is "the radiance of the glory of God."⁴ Sin will increasingly lose its allure until at last our eyes will see all sin in all its terrible repugnance. We will no longer be deceived or beguiled. We will be forever free from the desire of Lot's wife to look back and long for Sodom and Gomorrah.

Christ gives us rest from guilt and from our past. The Apostle Paul, whose past could have choked the life out of him, revealed in this truth: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."⁵ All of us have something in our past that haunts us, saps our joy, depletes our energy; however, if we are "in Christ," we have rest from the universal, existential questions of life: "Why am I here?" What is my purpose?" Our purpose is to know God, obey Him and love Him, not for His benefit, but for our benefit.

Christ also gives us rest from the *eternal penalty* for sin by taking upon Himself the punishment for sin that we deserve. So long as we are in the flesh grace may not erase the worldly penalty for sin. But when we are absent from the body and present with Christ, the divine rest we will have in Christ will forever vanquish the penalty for sin. But for now, the thief will still go to prison; the murderer will still face either execution or a life sentence. But for those who receive the salvation of Jesus Christ, grace will

³ Romans 7:18–20

⁴ Hebrews 1:3

⁵ 2 Corinthians 5:17

remove our alienation from God who invites us to call Him Father. In eternity we will rejoice in our status as God's sons and daughters.

Christ gives us rest from death and the fear of death which oppresses us. When we receive the salvation of Jesus Christ, we immediately receive new and eternal life in Him. Christ will "deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery."⁶ We access this divine and eternal rest only by receiving the salvation of Jesus Christ. We must believe Jesus. There is no other way. We must strive not to be one of those who "could not enter in because of unbelief."⁷

Do you have this rest?

Applications:

1. Invest time to consider and meditate on the closing question of this blog, "Do you have this rest?"
 - a. If not, why? If so, count your blessings and give thanks and praise to God.
2. Divine, eternal rest includes a desire for ever-deeper intimacy with Christ. Are you experiencing and pursuing a deeper intimacy with Jesus? If not, why? Identify those things holding you back and address them through prayer.
3. As Bill pointed out above, "As our desire for Christ deepens, our dissatisfaction with our polluted world will correspondingly increase." Is this your experience in the present? If not, why?
4. Observe those around you and look for opportunities to introduce them to the One who can give them true rest. Their countenance reveals much about their condition.
5. Build up fellow believers by discussing the meaning of true rest. Remind one another of the rest only found in Christ and celebrate the gift of His grace.

⁶ Hebrews 2:15

⁷ Hebrews 3:19