



Grace Lutheran Church
Valentine, NE

MAIL MINISTRY

The 23rd Sunday in Trinity

November 19, 2017

Pre-Service Meditation: Psalm 85

Hymns: 11:1, 4-5; 513; 467; 463:1-3

Scripture Readings: Genesis 1:31-2:3
Luke 13:22-30

Topics: Salvation; Judgment Day

In Nomine Jesu!

Text: .Hebrews 4:9-13

There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His 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. 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 Christ Jesus, the Key to and Giver of genuine spiritual rest, dear fellow redeemed:

The Bible tells us: “*God...rested on the seventh day...blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made*” (Gen. 2:2-3). At Mount Sinai the LORD commanded His Old Testament people: “*Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy*” (Ex. 20:8), and told Moses to instruct the Israelites: “*Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you....Work shall be done for six days, but the seventh is the Sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death*” (Ex. 31:13, 15). In an ill-advised attempt to keep that commandment, the Pharisees in Jesus’ day created over 1,400 laws regulating what could and could not be done on the Sabbath day. When on the basis of those man-made laws the Pharisees condemned Jesus’ disciples for plucking and eating heads of grain on the Sabbath, Jesus responded that God desires “*mercy and not sacrifice*” from His people, declaring regarding Himself that “*the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath*” (Mt. 12:7-8). The apostle Paul would later write: “*Let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ*” (Col. 2:16-17).

My dear friends, how does this all hang together? There is a lot of confusion still today regarding the Sabbath and its rest. Is it a specific day of the week, Saturday, upon which we must worship, as Seventh Day Adventists insist? Can we work on Sundays, or must we refrain from working as other professing Christians at times insist? As long as we are asking questions, did God really get tired after six days of creating, and was that the reason why He rested on the seventh day?

In order to answer these and other questions and provide some clarity to this issue, consider one last Bible reference before we turn to our text in Hebrews. Jesus once cried out: “*Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*” (Mt. 11:28). Jesus is indeed the Key to and Giver of God’s spiritual Sabbath-rest. Keep that thought in mind as we consider the admonition offered in our text: **LET US BE DILIGENT TO ENTER GOD’S REST!** The writer of Hebrews offers five truths to help clarify for us the meaning of the Biblical Sabbath and God’s intention to bring us rest in our present lives and our future life in heaven.

I.

Our text begins: “*There remains therefore a rest for the people of God.*” The Book of Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians who, under the threat of persecution, were considering denying Jesus and returning to their Jewish faith. In the chapters leading up to our text Jesus is identified

as the One through whom God addresses New Testament believers, and the writer warns these Jewish Christians not to turn away from God's appointed Christ. He reminds them of what happened to the entire generation of Israelites who were delivered from Egypt but then rebelled against God in the wilderness. They were not permitted to enter the Promised Land—to receive the rest that God had promised to give these descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But, he wrote, *“there remains therefore a rest for the people of God”*—**a rest God desires for His people!**

When God rested on the seventh day, after creating the world in six days, it was not because He was tired. God never gets tired—He is omnipotent! He merely ceased His work of creation. He was still working—sustaining that which He had created, even as He continues to sustain His created universe today. But He stopped His creative working, rested, and observed with great joy that which He had accomplished. All of creation was singing His praise and honoring His work. The Bible tells us that when God *“laid the foundations of the earth...the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy”* (Job 38:4, 7). God's intention in sanctifying that seventh day and instituting it as a day of rest for us human beings was so that we might join Him in rejoicing in the creative work He did and enables us to do. Thereby we honor Him as the Giver of *“every good... and...perfect gift”* (Jam. 1:17). God wanted those created in His image to enjoy such rest, and so to rejoice with Him in His creative genius and goodness.

Sin, however, destroyed that desire and delays the experience of perfect rest for His believing children until heaven. Here in this life, there is still rest—but not a rest of perfect joy, but rather a rest from the labor and wearisome toil imposed by sin. It is a rest found in Jesus...**a rest God desires for His people!**

II.

LET US, therefore, **BE DILIGENT TO ENTER GOD'S REST**—**a rest from the weariness of work-righteousness!** Our text goes on to say: *“For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His.”* By nature our hearts and minds are separated from God and fail to understand His truths (cf. 1 Cor. 2:14a), but by the grace of God and the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit, you and I have been brought to repentance and faith. As Peter describes the situation—you and I were *“called...out of darkness into His marvelous light”* (1 Pet. 2:9b).

By nature we human beings are firmly committed to work-righteousness. Ask any ten people on the street—even those who profess outwardly to be Christians—the question: “How do you get to heaven?” The majority of them will say: “By being good,” or “by keeping the Ten Commandments,” or “by doing more good than bad in your life.” All such answers reflect work-righteousness, and all such answers are untrue. The only way that anyone can work his or her way to heaven is by being absolutely perfect, which is an impossibility. The apostle Paul rightly testifies, that *“all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”* (Rom. 3:23). That is why he can also emphatically state: *“By the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin”* (Rom. 3:20).

But when the Holy Spirit leads us to repent of our sins and to look to Christ for forgiveness, we enter God's rest—the rest for our souls, which enables us to relax and rejoice in the gift of salvation given us by God's grace. It is then that we understand that we are *“complete in Him”*...in Christ, in whom *“dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily”* (Col. 2:9-10). Then we cease from our works and our striving to earn God's favor, for we have been blessed with that favor by grace through faith in Jesus. It is by such faith that we then take Jesus' *“yoke”* upon us—a *“yoke”* that *“is easy”* and a *“burden (that) is light”* (cf. Mt. 11:30). Yes, **LET US BE DILIGENT TO ENTER GOD'S REST**—**a rest from the weariness of work-righteousness!**

III.

A rest, however, **that can be lost through disobedience!** Remember that this letter was written to Jewish believers in danger of turning away from Christ. Our text goes on: *“Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.”* To be diligent means to be zealous or eager, to take pains, to make every effort to secure God's rest. It means to strive mightily not to grow cold, slack, or to give way to doubt.

That admonition is necessary for every generation of Christians. As mentioned earlier, the

writer pointed to that generation of Israelites who died in the wilderness in view of their rebellion. With the exception of Caleb and Joshua, every Israelite over twenty years of age did not enter the Promised Land. But spiritual rebellion, just as spiritual apathy, is not limited to any single generations. Satan, the world, and our own sinful flesh are constantly trying to divert our attention and our devotion away from our Savior God. Think of how easy it is to fall out of the good habit of daily personal devotions and prayer. Think of how easy it is to skip church a second week after missing the first, and even easier to skip the third week after missing two.

My dear friends, listen to the apostle Paul—perhaps the greatest Christian missionary of all time, when he says: *“I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified”* (1 Cor. 9:26-27). *“Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall”* (1 Cor. 10:12). **LET US, therefore, BE DILIGENT TO ENTER GOD’S REST—a rest that can be lost through disobedience!**

IV.

But also a **rest secured through God’s Word!** Our text goes on with these familiar words: *“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.”* The ultimate goal of war is to secure a lasting peace. The weapon God has given us in our war with Satan, this world, and our own sinful flesh is His Word.

That Word is living! The Bible assures us that while *“all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass”* which withers and falls away, *“the word of the LORD endures forever”* (1 Pet. 1:24-25a). That Word is powerful! The Bible reminds us that *“by faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God”* (Heb. 11:3a). Yes, the entire universe was created and is sustained by the Word of our God. That Word is sharper than any two-edged sword! The point of the illustration is that God’s Word can do the seemingly impossible—divide one’s soul and spirit. It gets to the heart of the matter—dividing joints and marrow. It lays open, both condemning and uplifting the thoughts and intents of our hearts.

It is the Word of God that reveals our sin and God’s grace. It is through that Word that faith is created within us and sustained among us. **LET US, therefore, BE DILIGENT TO ENTER GOD’S REST—a rest secured through God’s Word!**

V.

A rest fully bestowed after Judgment Day! Our text ends in this way: *“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.”* My dear friends, our God is omniscient and omnipresent. That means He knows absolutely everything about every one of us, because He is present everywhere and can look into our hearts and minds. We cannot hide anything from Him, and one day we will stand before His throne of judgment and give an account of everything we have thought, spoken, and done. Truly, we will hear Jesus say one of two things. He will either say, *“Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world,”* or *“depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels”* (Mt. 25:34, 41). There is no third alternative!

God’s greatest desire is that we come to Jesus and receive the gift of rest in this life—rest from the fear and uncertainty that lies within the heart of everyone who does not know and believe the gospel of God’s love and forgiveness in Christ. But God also desires that we obtain eternal rest in heaven. That is why the Holy Spirit moved Paul to reassure us by writing: *“He (God) who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ”* (Phil. 1:6). Therefore, **LET US BE DILIGENT TO ENTER GOD’S REST!** Amen.

--Pastor Paul D. Nolting
To God alone be glory!