

The Final Word on Rest

1. Intro

- If you pay attention to the ads we're bombarded with on TV ... you'll see a recurring theme in many of them
 - It doesn't matter what they're selling ... but the words, the actions, the facial expressions of the actors all suggest
 - If you use / buy this product you'll be happy
 - Sometimes it's subtle ... often it's just in your face telling you ... you will be happy
- Not a new thing ...
 - Go back to the days of cigarette advertising ...
 - Lucky Strike cigarettes > Be Happy - Go Lucky!
- One of the leaders in product advertising is Coca Cola
 - Their ads always depict young ppl having a great time drinking Coke
 - Now ... they're much less subtle ... maybe they think the current generation can't work it out for themselves and they need to be told directly
- Similar vein of thinking with Clinique perfumes – Happy
 - Put this on ... you'll be happy
 - Not just women ... it's for the men too!

- Those ads aren't particularly clever or subtle, but they are appealing
- They offers to us in some form – happiness > or in some form a perfect world ... a happy world
 - Or if offering us a perfect world is too big a thing, it offers us a piece of a perfect world
 - A perfect
 - Body
 - Relationship
 - Look

- Fragrance
- Job
- Home
- Family
- We all know what advertisers are up to ... if we think about it we're not taken in by it
 - But the reality is ads tells us truths about ourselves
 - Deep inside we long for that perfect world
 - Or if that's too much to long for, we long for perfection in part of our world
 - Perfect
 - Relationships
 - Job
 - Family
- And the advertisers know that
 - They know we long for those things inside
 - And they play on it
 - And they offer it to us ... happiness in a fragrance or a can of Coke or a Lucky Strike cigarette
 - We know it won't make us happy ... but we wish it would
 - Because that's what we want
- We long for a perfect world
- We long for things to be right in our lives
- And yet we can be increasingly cynical that we will ever find it
 - *"Living in an age of advertisement, we are perpetually disillusioned. This perfect life is spread before us every day, but it changes and withers at a touch" – JB Priestley¹*
- In Hebrews 4 we've got an advertisement from God

¹ English novelist, playwright and broadcaster, 1894-1984

- An advertisement that he offers us something called his REST
- And in light of God's offer of his rest ... we're going to see that the world's promises of happiness and perfection are a hollow sham
- They are insubstantial
- And God's advertisement will show them to be a sham, because what he offers fulfills what they offer but can't fulfill
- What he offers answers our longing for real happiness and perfection in life

2. God's offer of rests remains, so don't miss out

- God's offer of rests remains, so don't miss out
 - *v1 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.*
- The promises still stands, the offer is still on ... make sure you don't miss out
 - v 9 & 11 ...
 - *There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; [...] ¹¹ Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.*
- The rest remains, the offer is on ... make sure you don't miss out
- Make sure you enter the rest

- **Illustration – Sales**
- I'm sure you've all seen in the sales in the shops at Roselands / Hurstville / Bankstown ... big posters up in the windows saying something like ...
 - 'Half price sale, must end today!'
 - 'Sale ends today!'
 - 'Sale ... last day'
- You think to yourself ... "Shall I? No I'll wait"
 - Then come back a few days later ... and the sale is still going!
 - That last day seems to go on for a very long time

- What they're trying to do is to conjure up a sense of urgency
 - To create a sense of opportunity
 - So that you don't miss out while the offer is on

- That's what our writer is doing here
 - He's saying the offer of God's rest is on
 - Its open to you > don't miss out!

- The advert put up by the shops not to miss out ... is merely hype
 - If you don't bother to go in or if you don't get around to it ... it won't make any difference

- But God's advert is different like that
 - When God says
 - *'be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it'*
 - *'make EVERY effort to enter this'*
 - He means what he says
 - And if we don't get around to it and make the effort ... we'll find out that this is not empty sales hype
 - It's a real warning, with real consequences

- Now for these Jewish Christians who he's writing to ... they may have found this message about God's rest a little confusing
 - They would've been very familiar with the OT ... they would know that it was Joshua who led the people into the Promised Land
 - They knew in the OT that God had promised the Jews to take them out of Egypt and into the Promised Land and give them rest
 - And that rest would be peace and life with him in the Land²

² Joshua 21:43-45 ⁴³ So the LORD gave Israel all the land he had sworn to give their forefathers, and they took possession of it and settled there. ⁴⁴ The LORD gave them rest on every side, just as he had sworn to their forefathers. Not one of their enemies withstood them; the LORD handed all their enemies over to them. ⁴⁵ Not one of all the LORD's good promises to the house of Israel failed; everyone was fulfilled.

- Therefore, for these Jewish Christians the only notion of rest they had was the rest God has given Israel in the Promised Land
 - They had already received it!
 - It didn't make sense then to be talking about entering into God's rest now!
 - They would've thought ... we've already got God's rest
- Our writer anticipates this problem and so he uses the OT scriptures to help these Jewish Christians see that God's rest is far greater than what was experienced in the Promised Land
- To do this he once again turns to Psalm 95
 - v7-8 ⁷ *Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later he spoke through David, as was said before: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts."* ⁸ *For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day.*
- The point is this ... after Joshua took Israel into the Promised Land and they lived in the land for hundreds of years
 - But while they were living in the land King David wrote Psalm 95
 - And in the Psalm God warns the people 'do not harden your hearts or you won't enter my rest'
 - But notice he saying that to people in the land already!
- Which means that God's rest cannot be the Promised Land ... it must be something else
 - There must be another rest ... a greater rest!
- And our passage explains to us what this rest really is ... God's real rest

3. God's real rest

- Real rest is God's perfect world with God enjoying us and us enjoying God
- v3-5
- v3 quotes Psalm 95 again

- *"So I declared on oath in my anger, 'They shall never enter my rest.'" And yet his work has been finished since the creation of the world. ⁴ For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: "And on the seventh day God rested from all his work." And again in the passage above he says, "They shall never enter my rest."*
- Do you see there in v3 quoting Ps 95 he uses the phrase ... 'my rest'
 - This is God talking ... he says 'my rest'
- What is God's 'rest'?
 - Is the ultimate 5 star resort with pools, spas and free massage in Fiji?
 - Noooo
- The answer is found in Genesis 2:2 that he quotes there in v4
 - *"And on the seventh day God rested from all his work."*
 - That's when God rested
 - That's God's rest
- So when God says in Psalm 95... "they shall never enter my rest" ...
 - What its saying is "they will never enter the rest I had back in Gen 2"
- What is that rest then that God had in Gen 2?
 - In Gen 1 God created the world in 6 days
 - And then he rested from his work of creation
 - Now that doesn't mean God had to have a sit down because he was a bit puffed out!
 - Not that he needed a little nanna-nap because he was tired!
- Rather after creating everything he wanted to create and after creating everything just has he wanted it created
 - God stood back from his work and enjoyed it
 - That's his rest

- Like an artist finishing his work, his creation ... and standing back and admiring it and thinking ... "it's finished, its complete, its perfect. It's just as I wanted it to be"
- He's stopped work and now he's enjoying his creation
- Only the artist never can never do that because it can never be perfect
- But with God ...
 - It's exactly perfect
 - It's exactly as it should be
 - So he enjoys what he has made ... and that includes us who are also part of his creation
 - He enjoys us ... he delights in us
- But he didn't stop there ... God not only made us to enjoy us ... he made us to share in his rest
 - Now that means we're to enjoy his perfect creation too
 - And not just to enjoy what he has made ... but to enjoy the one who made it
 - We are to enjoy him, to marvel at him, to delight in him, to wonder at him and how marvellous he is in all his majesty
 - That is to enjoy God's rest
 - It's God's perfect world with God enjoying his creation and his people enjoying him
 - That's real rest
- Important to get that clear because we use rest very differently
 - We use rest to mean doing nothing
 - We retire / going on holidays to have a rest
 - We finish up work and no longer do the 9-5 thing
 - We go and lie on the beach and do nothing
 - And while that's all well and good to go and do nothing for a while ... given long enough ... we'd get bored!!

- We don't want to lie on a beach forever ... we want to do something
- We want to be active and occupied
- God's rest is not doing nothing and getting bored

- God's rest is not like our work either
 - I don't think any of us have holidays long enough to actually experience getting bored on holiday
 - Just imagine if you were bored on holiday and you'd had enough and you began to long to go back to work, to do something, to be active, to be stimulated
 - And you get back to work and you are occupied ... too occupied
 - And you're stressed and you don't like it
 - And you realise that doesn't satisfy either
 - And so we go off on holiday again ... and then we go back to work
 - And we alternate

- And so we need both and we're satisfied with neither
- God's rest isn't like that
 - Its neither inactivity nor grueling work
 - Rather it's an active rest
 - Enjoying God and his perfect world
 - It's a restful activity
 - Perfectly satisfying and fulfilling

- Now you're probably saying ... that's all well and good, but we're no longer in the world of Genesis 2 anymore
 - So what's the point?
 - You're right!
 - Through our sin, we lose this perfect world
 - We still long for it ... but we don't experience it
- But it's **now** on offer in v1 ... the promise of entering his rest still stands

- We might have lost the rest ... but Jesus has won it back
- Through Jesus, God says to us ... you can enter my rest
- You can live with me in my perfect world, enjoying me and me enjoying you
- This perfect rest lies in heaven for us
- And it's on offer today

- Now if you've found yourself searching for ... seeking for the happy life
 - Found yourself being drawn into the perfect life that our advertisers are trying to offer us ... but realising they just can't deliver on it
 - Then this is a good message to hear
 - Because a perfect world does exist ...
 - You're right to be disillusioned with the ads we see and hear on TV and radio that promise much but never fulfill what we're looking for
 - They're a sham
 - But a perfect world does exist
 - And it's on offer today in Christ

- Which raises the question ... how do we get that? How do we enter this rest?

4. We rest by trusting in Jesus

- Answer is ... we rest by trusting in Jesus
- We covered this last week
- But we see it again here in v2
 - *For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with **faith**.*
- Hearing is not enough
 - Knowing the gospel is not enough
 - Hearing about Jesus is not enough
 - You must combine it with faith ... you must believe

- v3 - *Now we who have believed enter that rest,*
- We enter God's rest by trusting in Jesus

- But it's put in an interesting way in v9
 - *There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God*
 - Our writer changes the word here
 - He hasn't used this word before
 - He uses the word that is linked with the OT idea of Sabbath ... having a day of rest
- And what our writer is saying is
 - Just like our land wasn't the real rest
 - So too that weekly Sabbath wasn't the real rest either
 - In fact the weekly Sabbath points ahead to the real rest that is to come
 - The real rest is in Jesus in heaven
- The real way to rest therefore ... is not to obey the Sabbath ... the real way to rest is to put your trust in Jesus

- Now that has implications for us as Christians and how we regard Sundays
 - Because it's very easy for us to carry over ideas of Sabbath to Sunday and think that
 - No work allowed
 - Wrong to go shopping
 - Can't play sport
 - Can't have any fun
 - Just need to go to church then go home, read the Bible and sing hymns all day!

- But those Sabbath commandments don't apply any more
 - Or rather they do apply, but they apply to us by pointing us to Jesus in whom we find true rest
 - Because that's how we truly rest

- What that means in practice is there's nothing sacred about Sunday or a Saturday
 - There's nothing intrinsically wrong with working on a Sunday
- That doesn't mean there aren't good reasons for having a day off > there are ... we need a physical rest
- That doesn't mean there aren't good reasons for protecting Sundays in our society as a day of rest
 - There are good reasons
 - Ask any retail worker doing shifts on Sundays
 - How good it would be not to have to work on a Sunday > they can get to church
 - Good to set aside Sundays for hospitality and having new / old ppl over from church
 - Many good reasons for having a day of rest on Sunday
 - But they're pragmatic reasons, not theological reasons
 - There's nothing theologically special about Sunday
 - That's not our day of rest
 - Our day of rest is in Christ in heaven
- While it may not matter if we rest on Sunday or not ...
 - It DOES matter if we rest in heaven or not
 - That means ... what really matters is what you say to God's offer of rest
 - Will you trust in God's offer of perfect rest in Jesus or not?
 - That's what really matters

5. Conclusion

- So the stakes are high
 - God's offering us his rest
 - He's offering us a perfect world with us enjoying God and God enjoying us

- But the offer comes in the form of a promise
- And so the way to enter is to trust ... to trust in Jesus and to keep trusting in Jesus

- But is a hard thing to do in our world
 - It is a hard thing to do when we are surrounded by all that the world offers us
 - The ads we see on TV are powerful
 - That's why companies spend millions and millions of dollars advertising each year
 - All that the world offers us ... is powerfully alluring
 - And it's a scary thought because we're surrounded by it
 - And it is powerful because it offers us something we want
 - Something we were made for

- But we must see, that the world's promises of a perfect world ... here and now without God ... are empty promises

- We must see that it's only God who offers us the real thing ... real rest
 - Life with him, in a perfect world
 - It's only God who can give us this
 - And we must see that its only his promise that is certain and sure
 - And we must see that we can only enter that rest, by holding onto Jesus all of our days

- If we don't see that
- If we're not convinced of that ...
 - The power of what the world offers us in its TV ads ... will be too strong for us
 - We will give in
 - We will be deceived

- We will look for this rest elsewhere
- We will let go of Jesus ... and then God's word will judge us

- There remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God
 - Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest

PRAY

Our Father in heaven, we praise you for the eternal rest of heaven that awaits all who trust in our saviour, Jesus. We thank you that your offer of rest remains open to us today. We ask that you be merciful to us and help us see all that you offer us and help us grasp it firmly in Christ. Keep us we pray, trusting in him until the end of our days – saying no to empty offer around us that the world provides; that we might live with you and enjoy your heavenly rest. Thank you that your word gives us a vision of what this will be like and what to look forward to. Help us to persevere in our faith and encourage one another. In Jesus name, **AMEN**