

January 22, 2017

Hebrews 4:1-16

“A Rested Development”

This week I discovered a very “tiring” fact. I learned that people slept much less in 2016 than they did in 1966. In fact, every night we sleep an hour and a half less than people did back then.

To put it more clearly:

- In the 60’s people used to sleep an average of eight and a half hours a night. Now the average is just under seven.
- Thirty-one percent of people say they sleep less than six hours a night
- And a whopping sixty-nine percent report always feeling that they don’t get enough shut-eye.

All these statistics explain why people are NAPPING whenever and WHEREVER they can.

- Some people nap while riding on the METRO.
- Some slip into the bathroom at the office to catch a few winks—notice he is fully clothed!
- Some nap on a chair.
- Others nap on a plane.
- And some do so in front of a train.
- Some nap in their food.

- And others nap in ways that are just plain rude!

Pardon me—I slipped into “*Dr. Seuss mode!*”

All humor aside—as all these nap practices show—ours is a culture that is full of people— young and old—who are TIRED. And the thing that makes matters worse is the fact that people are not just PHYSICALLY weary—they are SPIRITUALLY weary. Their minds—their souls—are not at peace. They are stressed—hurried and harried. They experience fear—and depression. For all these reasons they are rest-less. I bring this up because in Hebrews chapter 4 we read about the only antidote for this rest-lessness. I’m referring to a caliber of “soul rest” that only God gives. St. Augustine was talking about it when he wrote, “*Thou has formed us for Thyself and our hearts are restless until we find our rest in Thee.*” If that “soul rest” appeals to you raise your hand. Great—then let’s read more about it. Take your Bibles and turn to Hebrews 4. Follow along as I read.

1 – 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. 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.’” 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.” 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.” 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, 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. 14 – Therefore, since we have a great High Priest Who has ascended into Heaven. 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.

Okay—let me try and describe this REST that we just read about—the rest GOD gives. It’s similar to the way that physical rest is ceasing from work—ceasing from labor—because God’s rest comes from the realization that no self-effort is required as far as our salvation is

concerned. We don't need to labor—we don't need to DO anything to be saved—we simply trust in—REST IN—what Jesus did on the cross. We're talking about an ***"it is finished"*** kind of rest. As I've said in the past, this is what differentiates Christianity from other faith systems. Our faith is a DONE faith. All others are DO faiths—their adherents never REST.

Here's something else—the rest we are talking about here is the rest that is based on an accurate understanding of God's CHARACTER. For example, it comes from the understanding that God is LOVE—that He loves us—and the assurance that nothing can ever separate us from that love. As Paul puts it, ***"not death, not life, not angels, not demons, not the present, not the future, nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus."***

And—this caliber of rest is the peace that comes from knowing God is SOVEREIGN—always in control—always working even in the WORST times of life for our good—using even the BAD of life—for our good—always working to make us more and more like Jesus. Quoting Paul again, it's the peace-filled confidence ***"that He Who began a good work in us, will carry it on to completion."*** Do you get the gist of what we're talking about here? One more thing. God's REST—the rest we read about here—is a kind of rest that can never be taken away from us. We can experience it even as we go through hardship and heartbreak. With God's help we can be at rest—be at peace—even in UNPEACEFUL times. Well, just like the first readers—many Christians today aren't experiencing this kind of rest. As verse 1 says, some have ***"fallen short of it."*** I mean, just as the Hebrews who were so recently freed from bondage in Egypt didn't enter in to the Promised Land—there are too many of God's children today who haven't

entered into this rest that only God provides. So this morning I want to talk about how we can experience this rest of God that we long for.

First, we must OBEY Him. The writer reminds us that the Hebrews who did not enter the Promise Land—failed because they didn’t believe Joshua and Caleb who told them that with God’s help they could conquer. They didn’t have enough faith to OBEY God and enter. As it says in verse 2 “...*the message they heard was of no value to them—because they did not share the faith of those who OBEYED.*” You see the fact is, TRUE SOUL REST comes from having enough faith to OBEY God when He commands us to do something. This is not a rest that comes from inactivity. No—ironically this is a REST that comes from WORK—or more specifically joining God in His work. And please understand me. I’m not saying that if Christians don’t obey God they lose their salvation. I’m not talking about the eternal rest we will enjoy in Heaven someday. No—a Christian can never lose that. As I said a moment ago—we don’t have to DO anything to be saved. Jesus did it all. No—we can’t lose our salvation. We can’t lose our FUTURE reward. But we can lose our PRESENT reward—the rest—the feeling of peace and FULFILLMENT that comes from obeying God.

The fact is salvation is free—but discipleship is costly. It involves work—and only those who work—those who have the faith to OBEY God enjoy the full benefits of their salvation. Dallas Willard puts it this way, “*Christianity has not so much been tried and found wanting as it has been found difficult and left untried...The cost of discipleship—though it may take all we have—is small when compared to the lot of those who don’t accept Christ’s invitation to be a part of his company in The Way of Life.*”

And, remember, as the writer warns in verse 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.”* I emphasize that verse because when we do enter the eternal REST of Heaven, we want God to commend us on our labors. We want Him to say, *“Well DONE thou good and faithful servant.”* (Matthew 25) So—OBEY HIM. As verse 11 says, *“Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their [the Hebrews’] example of disobedience.”*

(2) The second thing the writer says we must do to experience this rest is STUDY His Word. Look at verse 12 which says, *“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.”* The word in verse 12 that we translate as *“active”* or *“powerful”* is *“energes”* in the Greek and it is the word from which we get energy and energetic. The word literally means *“at work.”* I share this as a reminder that as we study it—God’s powerful living Word works in us, changing us. Charles Swindoll says, *“News articles may inform us. Novels may inspire us. Poetry may enrapture us. But only the living, active Word of God can transform us.”* There are tons of examples of the transforming power of God’s Word but in my mind one of the most dramatic involved the famous Mutiny on the Bounty. Following their rebellion against the notorious Captain Bligh, nine mutineers, along with the Tahitian men and women who accompanied them, found their way to Pitcairn Island—a tiny dot in the South Pacific only two miles long and a mile wide. Ten years later, drink and fighting had left only one of the original men alive—John Adams—no relation! Eleven women

and 23 children made up the rest of the Island's population. Now, so far I imagine this is the same familiar story made famous in the book and motion picture. But the REST of the story is the best part.

You see, about this time, when he was literally the last man standing, Adams came across the Bounty's Bible in the bottom of an old chest. He began to read it, and the divine power of God's Word reached into the heart of that hardened murderer on a tiny volcanic speck in the vast Pacific Ocean—and changed his life forever. The peace and love that Adams found in the Bible entirely replaced the old life of quarreling, brawling, and liquor. He began to teach the children from the Bible until every person on the island had experienced the same amazing change that he had found. Today, with a population of slightly less than 100, nearly every person on Pitcairn Island is a Christian—all because of the transforming power of this book.

The Bible is indeed a powerful book! Reading from its pages not only reminds us of God's promises—promises that give us peace and rest—it also empowers us to become more like Jesus—the Prince of Peace. So to experience this peace we must obey God—we must study His book and finally...

Third, the writer of Hebrews says we must ASK for His Help. Look at verses 15 and 16 again: *“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. 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.”*

Listen. When it comes to entering God’s rest—we have a High Priest to help see us through. And we don’t need to FEAR coming to Him. No—we can always come with confidence knowing we’ll find welcoming arms. Do you remember in *The Wizard of Oz* when Dorothy and her entourage approach the Wizard for the first time? He responded with balls of fire and a thunderous voice, and they all cowered in fear. That is not how we approach God. He is infinitely powerful—perfectly holy—but sinners like you and me need not fear coming to Him. Thanks to Jesus’ sacrifice on our behalf we are forgiven—and have been given direct and immediate access. We can come asking for help with boldness and confidence—knowing we will find not judgement—but mercy and grace. In fact, Jesus URGES us to ask for His help in this area. Do you remember His invite in Matthew 11:28? Jesus said, ***“Come to me all you who are weary and over-burdened—STRESSED OUT—and I will give you rest.”***

Did you know that if you had TWO pianos in ear shot of each other in this sanctuary and just around the corner in Dena’s office. If you hit Middle C on one—the middle C string on the other piano would vibrate? That’s called *“sympathetic resonance”* and I share it to illustrate the fact that there is nothing we go through in life that Jesus does understand. R. Kent Hughes puts it this way, *“There is not a note we can play not a melody or a dirge, no minor key, no discordant note, that does not evoke a ‘sympathetic resonance’ in Jesus.”*

As most of you know eight years ago I was diagnosed with a hole in my heart, because of a stroke I had. I had surgery and thank God it’s gone. I sit with a lot of people who have had stroke issues. I know exactly what thoughts are filling their minds. I understand their fear. I

sympathize with them—because I have been there. Well, the writer reminds us that Jesus’ experience is not limited to one scare like I faced eight years ago. No—He experienced EVERYTHING we do—He faced every fear—every hardship. For example: He knows what it’s like to be betrayed—to grieve over the passing of a parent—He’s faced fear and physical hardship. As this text says Jesus understands temptation—understands it better than we do. In fact, as I said a week or so ago He faced it to the full because He never gave in—never sinned. Well, Jesus urges us to come to Him with our struggles—urges us to ask for His help when we aren’t experiencing the peace—the Rest of God—because He wants to help. He wants to give us His forgiveness—and His power. He wants to remind us that He has overcome anything we face.

So—the rest we all long for is available to us. As verse 6 says, ***“It still remains for some to enter it.”***