

There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no-one will fall by following their example of disobedience. *Hebrews 4.9-11.*

Hebrews is, as we have seen, a letter of *encouragement*, originally to Jews who had accepted Jesus as their Messiah. It was a letter of encouragement not to give Jesus up, just because they were getting grief from their Jewish relatives and neighbours. Because Jesus is God himself, to reject him is to reject God, and they must not turn away from the living God. And nor must we turn away from Jesus, from the living God.

In chap 3, to make his point, the author of *Hebrews* used *Psalms* 95, which said how the Israelites, having been miraculously freed from being slaves in Egypt and kept safe by the parting of the Red Sea, now rejected God. God is not indifferent to our rejection of him. He cares whether we turn to him, so God promised that they would 'not enter into my rest', 3.7-11...

Of course, the 'rest' they would not be allowed to enter, was the end of their long journey from Egypt through the desert – the Promised Land of Canaan, the land flowing with milk and honey. This would be a land of plenty and freedom, so different from Egypt which was a place of starvation and slavery. That is history from nearly 3,000 years ago, but that most famous of Bible stories provides us with a template of what God plans for us today. We too live in Egypt, as slaves, oppressed and weighed down. It is God's wonderful purpose for us, the children whom he loves, to deliver us from that house of bondage to the Promised Land where we will one day be truly free, no longer weighed down with worry, fear, abuse, sorrow and pain. We have the promise of that in the last book of the Bible, *Revelation*, where in chap 21 we are told that one day, when Christ comes again, there will be a new

heaven and a new earth. This is the Promised Land, even greater than an earthly Canaan, where God will wipe away all tears from our eyes, and there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain. This is all summed up in that one simple word 'rest'. And it is 'God's rest', 'God's sabbath' when one day all striving will end, all war and bitterness shall cease, all tensions will relax, all restlessness and dissatisfaction will vanish. This Sabbath rest which is our eternal destiny is when everything will finally be resolved; when everything is complete and we shall be at peace. What a future!

Ah, you say, But I'm not a slave. But we are. Aren't we 'wage slaves'? Isn't that why we look forward to retirement, to be 'free'? Don't we sometimes feel slaves to our families? In simple daily life, don't we feel that sense of obligation and duty? And then there are many people who have quite obvious forms of bondage: those who are addicted to alcohol, to drugs, gambling. And what about our youngsters, stapled to their phones and screens? Who of us is really our true selves? We are so anxious to keep up with the Joneses and we feel that awful peer pressure. And then we have that recent phenomenon called Political Correctness which tells us what we have to think and say. It's like secret police where we can't say what we really think. Are we really free? Is this still a free country? Or are we actually slaves in Egypt? We need deliverance. We need to be liberated from the thought police, from the daily conveyor belt of life, from our addictions, from our past, from our longings and cravings. Many people at the end of a pressurised week look for relief in drinking and recreational drugs. But they just enslave you more. If only they knew the Bible with God's promise of a real liberation from the oppression of Egypt! If only they could hear Christ's own invitation: 'Come unto me, all ye

who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you *rest*'. He could say this because he not only died for our sins to get rid of our guilt which never lets us rest, but because he is God himself.

God graciously gave us a weekly Sabbath not only to give us a regular day of rest, but also to remind us each week of the eternal Sabbath which one day will be ours for ever, just like the meal of this holy communion which is a regular reminder of the great feast in heaven which one day will be ours. The Sabbath and the Lord's Supper are little glimpses now of the future God has planned for each of us. Even God rested from his labours, 4.4...9-10...

We all long for the noise, for the pressure, for the hassle and the cravings to stop. The bottle, mindless shopping won't do it. 'Come unto *me* all ye who labour and are heavy laden, and *I* will give you rest,' said Jesus. *He* alone is the way, and those who reject him cannot enter into that rest they so much crave, 4.2-3a... St Augustine was right: 'You, Lord, have made us for yourself and our souls are restless till they rest in *you*.' Solzhenitsyn got to the root cause of modern people's unhappiness: 'men have forgotten God'.

There is nothing sentimental about God. Those ancient Israelites forgot God, so he said, 'They shall not enter into my rest'. People today think they can pooh-pooh Jesus. They also, alas, shall not enter into his rest. Only by Christ can we enter. So get right with Jesus and you will enter his rest, when everything is completed, resolved, 'sorted'. No-one got that wonderful vision of our future better than John Donne, Dean of St Paul's in the 17th century:

Bring us, O Lord God, at our last awakening into the house and gate of heaven, to enter into that gate and dwell in that house, where there shall be no darkness nor dazzling, but one equal light; no noise nor silence, but one equal music; no fears nor hopes, but one equal possession; no ends nor beginnings, but one equal eternity; in the habitations of thy glory and dominion world without end.