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(Revised sermon)

## **The REST of Thanksgiving**

Psalm 95

Rest is rarely a word that one readily connects with Thanksgiving...at least if you are the one who is preparing the meal. Now if you are looking forward to the day off of work. If you are anticipating an large meal and afternoon of lounging around watching football and conversation with friendly relatives, then perhaps you might think of Thanksgiving as restful. But for many of us Thanksgiving is time of busyness, fighting rush hour traffic to travel. Crowded homes. Loud noises. Working hard at playing hard. A lot of fun but not what I consider restful. For those who are in charge of preparing the meal, Thanksgiving Day rest can seem like an oxymoron at 4:00AM when you are sleepy eyed and putting the turkey in the oven. Thanksgiving is not restful for those mom's trying to look attractive and unflustered for your guests as you sweat for six hours in a hot kitchen, all the while enduring body tackles from the kids, and fighting a scream induced headache. I think Thanksgiving is one of the best holidays we celebrate, but there are many who would not think of Thanksgiving as rest, but instead view it with gloom as the kickoff for the holiday season insanity.

Holiday busyness is filled with the "I've gotta get this done...", "I've gotta buy that." "I've gotta write that note." "I gotta prepare that" "I've gotta...I've gotta restlessness. But, really most of life is filled with opportunities for restlessness. If things are not going well between you and God, life can be very disjointed. Your spirit finds itself restless. If you are a discouraged Christian...life is going to be restless. If you find yourself in a time of spiritual lethargy...a spiritual desert...your spirit is restless. If you are in full blown rebellion. If you are angry. If you are harboring bitterness and refuse to forgive another, it should be no surprise that your heart is going to be restless. You may fill the hours of your day with lots of activity...but there is no rest?

Maybe you are a genuine seeker of God desiring to know Him better? Has that restlessness in your heart drawn you to seek Him? Do you want to quiet that turmoil that gurgles within? There is prescription to taste to quiet, restfulness...but it's not a sedative, not a feel good cover up. It's the real thing.

In the entrance to the New York RCA building on Fifth Avenue, is a gigantic statute of Atlas. It is of an incredibly chiseled and well built man who's muscles are straining and back bent while holding up the whole world on his shoulders. The picture is the most powerful man in the world barely able to stand up under the burden. Now, that is one way to live...and I millions of people try to do it. Just work harder. It's all up to you. Fight through the pain. If one walks across to the other side of 5th Avenue, he can walk up a few steps and into Saint Patrick's Cathedral. Right behind the huge alter is a little sculpture of Jesus as a young boy. He is perhaps age eight or nine and yet he is effortlessly holding the whole world in one hand.

I think many people struggle to make this life work all on our own. We strain to keep the business, the difficulties, the pain all up on our shoulders. Some even seem to do a pretty decent job for a while. I've seen some folks last longer than others desperately trying to do it on their own. But ultimately...trying to make life work out all on your own just doesn't work. We can't hold it all together on our own. Jesus came to show us there is batter way to live. Not one of striving and restlessness, but one of peace and comfort and security, knowing that the One who died for us can easily hold our mess up, He can hold up a restless, heavy world together. Let me give you hope this morning. For there is no problem too big God cannot solve it. There is no sorrow too deep he cannot sooth it. There is no storm too dark He cannot calm it. And if He has carried the weight of the world upon His shoulders, I know my brother, I know my sister that He can carried you.

Turn with me in your Bibles to Psalm 95. Life gives us many reasons for restlessness. Have you entered into His rest? You may find yourself this morning with a feeling of restlessness. If you are a believer that is disappointed with God, my guess is you are secretly restless. If you are in a state of rebellion against God and the truths of the Bible, if you were honest with yourself you could not say, my heart is at rest.

Perhaps you are a seeker, a genuine seeker who is searching for God and searching for the truth. There is a God placed restlessness, an empty space that will never be calmed until you let God take over calling the shots of your life, until you say to God, "I give up, I can't carry it all on my own; here's my life. I want to enter into your rest. I believe the Psalmist this morning wants to introduce us to the REST of Thanksgiving.

As we begin our look at Psalm 95 this morning, I want to start at the end of the Psalm and go back to the first. I think it will be easier to understand this Psalm if we turn it inside out and first look at the reason for the author to write this Psalm. Lets start at the end of verse 7. God is speaking. (READ)

Point #1 There is no rest for the rebel. You may be a rebel this morning and you know it. You may know that you have been running from God for a long time. It may have started when a leader in the church said something or did something that disappointed you, maybe even hurt you deeply. So you took it out on God. It may have been God didn't come through for you when you thought He should have. He may not have lived up to your expectations for what a God ought to be doing. It may be that you felt His righteous truth and walk was too confining and you want to do it your way for a while. It may be that when you saw all the hypocrites in the church saying one thing and doing another, made your stomach churn and your heart grow spiritual cold. You are a rebel and you know it. Maybe you're a rebel and you just don't see what the big deal is. Why are people getting so exercised about faith in God. Didn't He make the whole world and love everybody. Why bother? You may be an apathetic rebel. If you are a rebel and you are an honest rebel, you must ask yourself. Why am I not experiencing any rest?

Some of you may be saying to yourself, "Hey, I'm not a rebel, I'm just disappointed that God has not come through when I needed Him. He hasn't lived up to my expectations. I'm not a rebel, these are just some dry times in my life. It feels like a desert. I don't want to be there, but here I am. I am just being plagued by doubts and filled with confusion of what is really right. You may say, I'm not a rebel, but I have felt my heart for God slipping. I have felt like I'm doing, doing, doing and imprisoned by the urgent. I just want to know where all that rest is?

Look at verse 8. The people reading this were in danger of hardening their hearts against God, just like the Israelites did at Merebah and Massah. Moses named the places they stopped with meaning behind it. We do the same thing. Fisherman call it “beginners hole” because that’s the best place for a newbe to start. Snag alley is named for a good reason as it the pumphouse hole. Moses named these places Merebah and Massah, because they mean strife, and testing, and fighting, putting God on trial. We are in danger of that too.

Let's remember that OT story together. The people of Israel were miraculously delivered from the oppressive hand of the Egyptian Pharaoh. God had miraculously split apart the Red sea and allowed the people to pass through, while drowning the Egyptian army behind them. God had provided shoes that never wore out. He dropped Manna from heaven for them to eat. But...soon the people grew tired of the manna didn't they. They really liked it at first, but then they got tired of eating the same old food all the time. It takes a heavenly appetite to enjoy a heavenly food. So in Exodus 17 we find the people of Israel, complaining and ready to kill their leader Moses, because they are getting thirsty.

In the first verse of Exodus 17, it says that God had commanded them to go to this place, Rephidim, but there's no water and the people are thirsty and mad. What do the people do? They doubt God. Isn't it easy for us to doubt God when it appears He's not coming through for us. When life is not turning out the way we expect? In the middle of the desert when there is no provision and no sign of it coming soon? God wants to strengthen and test our faith, but what do we do? We complain to God, we test Him we put out our fleece. God if you do this, if you get me out of this jam, I will believe you. I'll do this for you. We want to see a direct response to our plea. We want to see some sign of God's power, presence, maybe hear His voice. But then God doesn't play the bargain game with us.

There are things to be learned in the desert. There are things to be remembered in the desert. God tells Moses to hit the Rock with His rod and the water flows out to quench the thirst of the people. God is the living water that is the ultimate thirst quencher for the thirsty dried up soul.

Verse 9. God says these people "tested me" even though they had seen my Work. Verse 10 "they are a people who have erred in their hearts." They have let their hearts slip away. Even though these are the very same people who experienced God work in the plagues in Egypt. God move in parting of the Red Sea. God provide manna from heaven. They forgot to remember what God had done for them in the past. They had seen God work in some very powerful ways v. 9. They had audibly heard His voice. They were guided through the desert by a pillar of fire at night and a cloud column by day. But, they still allowed their hearts to slip away from God and rebel.

In our doubts and disappointments with God, have you ever called to God to speak audibly to you or show you some incredible miracle or visibly demonstrate His power? I sure have. Yet, I wonder if God did choose to speak audibly to us in the midst of our rebellion would we get it? Would we even believe it? Would we remember it? If God's chosen people, the children of Israel respond this way in complacency and cold heartedness and rebellion, we would do the same. I can almost hear the people of Israel complain. God if you would only write down all these things that you want us to do. Put a book, a handbook for life for us to read. Then we could read it for ourselves. We wouldn't have to listen to priests interpret. Be straightforward. Don't be so elusive. It would be all so easy

Isn't that what we have right now? Do we not have the very words of God in our hands? Do we not have the revealed words of God for us to read and enjoy whenever we want? And yet...our response is sometimes so similar to the Israelites. We take it for granted. Our heavenly appetite is so weak we no longer enjoy the things of heaven. Our heavenly thirst is restless for a different kind of drink, and it no longer is content with the living water from God. So we reject God's provision and doubt that God will give us what we need.

If rest does not come to the rebel, the ungrateful. Rest does not come to the complacent, the apathetic, the doubters or disappointed. Look at the end of verse 11 "they shall not enter into My rest". Rest does not come to the rebel. *Then who are those who are ushered into His rest? How can we experience rest.* Lets go back and read the first seven verses (READ) Did you catch it? Did you hear the Psalmist inviting us into the

REST of Thanksgiving? Augustine in his book *Confessions* writes, "Thou hast prompted men that he should delight in Thee, for Thou hast made us for Thyself and restless is our heart until it comes to rest in Thee."

When the people of Israel were released from their Egyptian bondage they were elated, they expressed authentic expressions of praise and worship and thanksgiving to God. But soon the complaining and bickering got the best of them. Nothing seemed good enough. The memories of deliverance and salvation faded, and God Himself was eclipsed by their discontent and fear. Have you ever felt your own thankfulness coming and going in waves shifting back and forth based on the circumstances of life and not anchored to the rock of our salvation? We as believers must be honest with the tragedies of life, but we are also called to be thankful. To give back to God the worship of our praise and thanks to Him for all He has done. To live a life that is in response to what He the Rock of our salvation has done in our lives. The storm of the past that He has drawn us from.

Point #2. Restfulness comes when we offer enthusiastic and thankful praises in his presence. Have we let complaining, doubts and faulty memories get the best of us? We need to enter the REST of Thanksgiving. When we are expressing Thanksgiving to God we are vaulted into His presence. Look at verse 1. "O Come" The psalmist is trying to get our attention "Oh, Hey, Yo!" come let us.. When he calls us to comes that implies movement from where we are right now. A call to join him from our complacency, our doubts, our fear, our forgetfulness, out of our restlessness and join in enthusiastic praises of God.

Singing thankful praises is joy leaking out. " We are called to sing for joy directed to the Lord." Joy is a fruit of the spirit. It's a mark. A characteristic of the believer. Joy is the flag that is flown from the castle of our hearts. In London, Buckingham palace there is a flag that is flown on the top anytime the queen is at home. Everyone who passes by knows. My queen is there. Joy is the flag flown from our hearts to prove that the king, Jesus is in residence there. Can those around you tell if the king is at home in you? Can they see clearly the flag of joy flying from your heart?

A joy filled worshipper will infect others. Four times the Psalmist says, "Let us" Let us. he says it enough times to make a Thanksgiving

Salad. Some of you are slow "let us....Lettuce". The Psalmist encourages us to shout several times praises and psalms. This is not apathetic, weak, half hearted self inhibited worshiper. These words are packed with emotion and enthusiasm. "Come before His presence! shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation! That rock reminded the reader of His provision of water in the desert, of the security there is in clinging to the God our immovable Rock. Restfulness comes when we enthusiastically offer thankful praises in His presence.

In a moment we are going to join the Psalmist in shouting praises to God. I want to enter in the rest of thanksgiving. But first let's remind ourselves of why we should be filled with thanks. Let's remind ourselves of God's greatness.

Point #3, Restfulness comes from affirming God's greatness. Verse 3 "FOR" clues us that a reason for thankfulness is coming. The reason for shouting. The reason for enthusiastic praise is not just to jump on some emotional high for an hour. The praise makes sense because of whom the praise is FOR. For the Lord is a great God. He is above all other gods. This is not a validation of the reality of other gods. It simply states that God is above all other forces whether real or imagined. We can express thanks for He is a great God. Our great God will not feed out His greatness to us through a thimble. His creative touch and influence are far reaching.

The psalmist uses a word picture to tell us a truth about God. He talks about God as having hands. Verse 4. In Whose hand are the depths of the earth. This is a finite human attempts to explain the far reaching influence of an infinite God. End of verse 5 His hands formed the dry land. Our God is creative. A potter at the wheel of spinning earth, his fingerprints touch and are seen molding and shaping at will the deep crevasses and mountains of the earth.

In verse 7 it says that "we are the sheep of His hand." The psalmist is reminding us of the provision of God. His hands speak of power, influence, creativity and provision. Truly our God is Great. From the depths of the earth, the mountain peaks, the sea and the land. He has a handle on the Deep the High the Wet and the Dry. Amen? Our God can handle our situations no matter where we are, and that should give us

an excellent reason to put aside our self conscience inhibitions and shout praises to God.

In the Old testament, the word for praise to God and thanks are the same. Without God, thanksgiving makes no sense. Without a God who is a creator standing outside our world who lives in our lives and reigns in majesty, then there is no reason to give thanks. Gratitude becomes a ridiculous concept, because it leaves no one to thank. It's not without reason, Thanksgiving Day is referred to by many as simply "Turkey Day", because people who have placed God into the margins of their lives, with no praise, no thanksgiving...Without God, giving thanks is meaningless. But we have a reason to praise Him; AMEN? We have excellent reasons to shout His praises in Thanksgiving.

Are you with me here? Lets join the Psalmist and see if we can begin to enter into the rest of giving Thanks.

Look up and say with me. "GOD IS MY ROCK"

Look at each other and say "GOD IS OUR ROCK!"

Repeat with me "GOD IS THE ROCK OF OUR SALVATION!"

Louder now, "The Lord is a Great God!"

Let it all out "He is our God!"

Quietly now, "Come let us worship and bow down."

Point #4 Restfulness comes from a correct perspective, of knowing who's we are and who we are. Verse 7 Do you see the attitude of humility we are to take on before God? For He is our God. not us. We are the sheep, the people of His pasture. Are we staying in His pasture? Are we listening and obeying His voice? The reputation of the shepherd is at stake! John Wyeth words "Come, thou fount of every blessing, tune my heart to sing thy grace, streams of mercy never ceasing, call for songs of loudest praise...last stanza, "prone to wander Lord I feel it Prone to leave the God I love, Here's my heart O take and seal it seal it for thy courts above." We are not God. He is God. God calls to us, "Stop striving and know that I am God." Matt 11:18 Come to me all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Now is the time to enter that rest. Look at the end of verse 7. Today it says. "If you would hear His voice" God is always speaking, we just have to listen and respond. Tomorrow may be too late. Do you hear the good shepherd Jesus calling you to come into the rest of His pasture?

Maybe you are a seeker of God and truth and have felt that restlessness in your heart, that emptiness. Maybe you could relate to Augustines words, "Thou hast prompted men that he should delight in Thee, for Thou hast made us for Thyself and restless is our heart until it comes to rest in Thee." Are you ready to take that step this morning? Well, I'm going to give you an opportunity to respond not before people, but before God. Recognize you are a sinner. Roman 3:23 says "All have sinned...we have missed the mark of God's perfect glory". Believe that Jesus who died on the cross has paid the death penalty for your sin. Believe and receive him into your heart. Romans 10:9,10 says "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved." Confess your sins and he will be faithful and just to forgive them and wipe our slate clean. We are called to repent to make a 180 degree turn from the way we were once headed in restless struggling. We no longer have to try and be an Atlas holding up the whole world on our own strength. We say to God, "I give up, Lord, here's my life, I give you my world, take it.

Everyone bow their head those whose God is drawing, feeling a pulling on their heart, pray this prayer with me.