

# Resting or Restless?

by Thom Ernst

Regardless of how it is used, “rest” indicates the cessation of normal routine by entering into repose.

Some time ago, my daughter, Jen, and I entered into a nonsense texting spree using the word “rest”. Little did I know it would be an exercise to prepare me for this endeavor in writing. She started by telling me that because of unintended circumstances, she was going to have her weekend free and was going to use it to prepare for an intense presentation; here is a short excerpt:

Me: Rest is good. Rest for the rest of the weekend so you’re rested for your presentation. I rest my case; you can figure out the rest.

Jen: This text was arresting.

Me: It’s all good, unless you get arrested cuz you’ll get no rest in jail. You’ll just be restless!

...

Jen: I don’t like to restrict my diet these days. Not big on restraint.

Me: I guess we better start looking for restaurants for when you’re here. Don’t worry about restitution we’ll take care of it.

Jen: Cardiac arrest fest!!! [That really is a good one ... your heart stops working]

While the above was a fun but senseless exercise it served to plug my mind into the various uses and nuances of our word “rest”. “Rest” whether used as a noun, a verb or as a compound word has the basic meaning of ceasing from work. Attorney’s will use it at the end of their portion of a trial as in “I rest my case”; thus, their portion of trial work is finished and now it’s up to the judge or jury to continue the work.

Rest is also used to differentiate time spent in sleep as contrasted with the work of making a living. A restless night would indicate that the desired rest was less than what was needed or required in order to meet the demands of its antithesis – work. We even have an adage regarding our oft times in the futility of being able to rest: “No rest for the weary”.

God Himself “rested” on His seventh day of creation; a truth instilled for all time as the Fourth Commandment. Over 30 verses in the Bible speak of the need for physical rest with the ultimate rest being eternal.

Cleland Boyd McAfee, the hymn writer, used “rest” to show that God’s work of salvation through Jesus was finished at the Cross in his hymn: “There is a Place of Quiet Rest”.

There is a place of quiet rest,  
Near to the heart of God,  
A place where sin cannot molest,  
Near to the heart of God.

Refrain:

O Jesus, blest Redeemer,  
Sent from the heart of God,  
Hold us, who wait before Thee,  
Near to the heart of God.

There is a place of comfort sweet,  
Near to the heart of God,  
A place where we our Savior meet,  
Near to the heart of God.

(Refrain)

There is a place of full release,  
Near to the heart of God,  
A place where all is joy and peace,  
Near to the heart of God

(Refrain)

Jesus' final words from the Cross about that work were "It is finished." The writer of Hebrews further equates that finished work with "rest"; Chapter 4 of that book reminds the reader of the purpose of the Sabbath as a day of rest: "<sup>10</sup> for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his. <sup>11</sup> Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience." The whole theology of the Christian life is summed up in those words: "...make every effort to enter that rest...". It almost seems like a paradox - laboring to enter rest; yet that is often what happens in the moments before physical death, struggling to enter the rest equated with death. That is the complete opposite of the rest a fetus experiences in the womb and the contrast of the struggle to embrace life outside that rest.

Why is this struggle to enter His rest so difficult? Why is it a struggle in the first place? Perhaps it's not for you; however, it is for me. I think too it is for most people who were raised with a strong work ethic. Hearing and believing such adages as "Nothing in life's free", or "There's no such thing as a free ride or free lunch". Even the expectation of having to pay for what we get makes it hard to accept gifts without the niggling thought that we have to reciprocate or slipping into minor paranoia by wondering what the person giving the gift expects in return. To too many, even love is something they feel needs to be earned instead of freely given and freely received. Too many of us still cling to the Jewish belief that God's blessings are a result of things we do to curry His favor – failing to remember the

words "...for he makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" ~Matthew 5:45. He is "...no respecter of persons" ~Deuteronomy 10:17, meaning that status, position or wealth in life is not His criteria – it's ours, often to our detriment!

God's given us a gift – it's free to us but not without cost to Him. Our only "work" is to accept it, believe it and rest in it. In other words, we cannot earn His approval, nor can we work our way into heaven. The balances are not between good works and evil works but between His work and our acceptance (belief) of it. Like the Hymn writer stated: "Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to thy cross I cling...".

God rested his case against sin at the cross – isn't it time we did too?