

The Promise Of Entering His Rest Still Stands

Introduction

Last week we learned about a generation of Israelites who failed to enter into the Promised Land because of unbelief. Their lack of faith kept them from entering what is referred to in today's passage as God's rest. The Lord issued the invitation for them to enter and they did not listen and hardened their hearts, in doing so, they forfeited their opportunity to enter into God's rest. Rather than worshipping God and seeking refuge in Him, they looked back to Egypt for comfort. This was not a one-time problem, they focused on the world throughout the 40 years in the wilderness. The result of the grumbling and lack of faith was Almighty God swore in His wrath that generation would not enter into His rest or the Promised Land and they did not.

Since Moses was unable to lead the Israelites into Canaan, the writer reflects now on the position of Joshua, who did lead the new generation into the Promised Land. But the writer explains that Joshua did not secure for his people God's rest. Joshua failed for the same reason as Moses, that is, because of the people's unbelief. This leads the writer to exhort his readers to seek that superior rest, true peace and rest found by faith only in Christ.

The Lord's invitation to enter into His rest is still valid today. The message is the same today as it was in those days. We must enter into that eternal rest by faith in Christ Jesus.

Last week because of the grumbling of the Hebrews in the wilderness, the writer took us to Psalm 95 where we discovered that the Holy Spirit through David told the people not to be like that evil generation in the wilderness. This week the writer continues to use Psalm 95 to warn his readers; which was the Hebrew convert church at the time this epistle was written and this epistle applies to every church of every generation since. The writer is calling for people in the church not to be of the world, but live for the glory of God by faith in Jesus. The bottom-line truth put forth is; **the promise of spiritual rest is secured by faith in Jesus still stands and also there is the promise of one being denied eternal rest because of their unbelief in Jesus.**

Pray

A Rest Denied Because of Unbelief (v. 1-2)

Let's face a fact of American society and culture; Americans are a busy, noisy and self-important people. In the rush and noise, we do not notice many things and we often fail to listen to God. This is a real and present danger for American Christians. This is also one purpose of prayer; to slow down, get quite and listen to God. Think about the Israelites in the wilderness, did they all hear the Word of God? Yes, every one of them heard, but only some believed.

Reading the first 2 verses of chapter 4, "*We should fear, therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it.*"² For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened." Your Bibles probably do not begin with "**We should fear**". In the Greek the opening reads "We should fear", why these 3 words are left out of the translations I do not know, but these words have meaning; "We should fear" is

telling the reader - knowing the story and failure of their forefathers should bring fear into their hearts and therefore they need to pay special attention to these following verses, where they and we are instructed that many of the Israelites heard the good news, but hearing it is not the same as believing it and acting upon it. The writer of Hebrews is making the same point as the Apostle John.

Throughout John's gospel he constantly refers to the difference of those who know who Jesus is and those who believe in Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

The writer is clear the promise that the Old Testament Israelites heard in the wilderness still stands for the New Covenant people and furthermore, this promise is still the same for us as it was for both the Old Testament Israelites and the first century converts to Christianity. The promise is for spiritual rest in Christ or we could call it an eternal Sabbath in Christ. At some point when we die or Jesus returns true believers will enter into eternal Sabbath rest in the presence of the Lord. The wondering Jews heard the same message of good news but it was of no benefit to them because they did not believe by faith. The Word of God fell on deaf ears. This is true to this day in churches and with people in churches and those who are outside of the church; knowledge by itself does not bring salvation. One must hear with the heart of faith and believe.

How many times do the writers of the Bible tell the people to have ears to hear God? In the psalms King David said of the people, **"They have ears, but do not hear."** (Psalm 115:6) In the Gospel Accounts how many times does Jesus say, for those who have ears, let them hear? The answer, in theological terms is, a bunch. Jesus is instructing the people to listen to the truth of God and not men. For example, in Matthew's gospel, Jesus' words are recorded, ¹³ **"For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, ¹⁴ and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. ¹⁵ He who has ears to hear, let him hear."** (Matthew 11:13-15) It is vital

for our understanding that we equate the gospel or good news with God's eternal Word. Hearing God's Word is not enough, one must believe God's Word by faith.

The Word of God was heard by the Israelites through the prophet Moses but most did not believe it. This good news was, that they could enter into a land flowing with milk and honey, but the good news did not benefit them because of unbelief. As they marched through the wilderness they were marching in unbelief. God spoke to the new generation of people through His prophet Moses saying, **“Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; but I will not go up among you, lest I consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people.”** (Exodus 33:3) They were not given good news once and rejected it - but they heard God's Word over and over, again for years and rejected it. People today have heard the Word of God through history, preaching, the Bible and various ways and like the stiff-necked Israelites they refuse to believe and are without excuse. As Paul made clear, ¹⁹ **“For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.”** (Romans 1:19-20) A key principle is evident here. God fulfills His promises to those who believe and those who refuse to believe will not experience God's goodness but will experience God's wrath. It is so important that as we hear the Word of God, we must also couple it with faith and live it out in light of our belief in the Word of God for this is faith in action and a mighty witness to the world.

We are to be God's ambassadors to the world until our Lord returns. Paul asks, ¹⁴ **“How then will they call on him *meaning Jesus* in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? ¹⁵ And how are they to**

preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!’ (Isaiah 52:7) ¹⁶ But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?’ (Isaiah 53:1) ¹⁷ So **faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.**” (Romans 10:14-17) Faith enables believers to live in obedience to God’s Word and it is not a burden. Taking in the breath of the New Testament makes me believe that here in Hebrews, the writer, speaking of God’s rest, is saying Christ is the only place one finds God’s rest. To know the peace and rest of God one must, must have given their life to Christ in faith.

This is why the writer later, in chapter 12 says, “**Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ²looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith,** who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Hebrews 12:1-2) We enter into God’s rest because His promises still stand today. It is also important to see that while His glorious promises still stand, His wrath is still real, as well.

Everyone must have a personal belief in Christ. No one can enter into heaven based on their mother or father or spouse’s faith and no one can enter believing anything else but the true Gospel of Christ. The Israelites for the most part did not believe and over time perverted God’s Word with their many man-made rules and laws. On the other hand, Joshua and Caleb did enter God’s rest based on their personal belief. History repeats itself, because of the sin and brokenness of man; many churches have done what the Israelites did and have over time perverted the Word of God.

The writer of Hebrews warns us not to stop short of entering into God's rest. We must be strengthening our faith and caring for our souls by daily building up faith in Christ. Jesus tells us of some people will stop short of true faith, saying, ²¹ "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but **the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.** ²² On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' ²³ And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'"
" (Matthew 7:21-23)

What is the will of God the Father? Is it that we will do great and mighty things? Is it that we will work harder than anyone else? Is it we excel in our careers? Jesus answers these questions, first saying, "**This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.**" (v. 29) and secondly, a few verses later, ⁴⁰ "**For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.**" (John 6:29 and 40) In these 2 verses Jesus defines the work and the will of God the Father and those who believe in Christ by faith will have eternal life.

A Rest Guaranteed By Faith (v. 3-4)

As we think together through this issue of God resting after creation as verse 4 quotes Genesis chapter 2, verse 2, it is important to see that God was not tired. He did not need to rest because of exhaustion. He rested for a different purpose and I think the writer of Hebrews shows us why. Reading at verse 3, "For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said, 'As I swore in my wrath, "They shall not enter my rest," ' (Psalm 95:11) although his works were finished from the foundation of the world. ⁴ For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in

this way: ‘And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.’ ” (Genesis 2:2)

When God created everything in 6 days, it sounds redundant, but He created absolutely everything. He not only created the universe and everything in it but, now I want you to take this to heart, He also created the Covenant and the plan of mankind’s redemption. In the Old Testament the Israelites were commanded to observe the Sabbath. On the Sabbath Israelites were to stop their normal work and rest and worship God.

The reason was because God had entered into the Sabbath rest and offered His rest to all who would believe. So, when an Israelite observed the Sabbath by resting, the act of resting for a day was a symbol for the present and future eternal rest that God’s people can experience through Jesus Christ. The problem was in the days of Jesus the Sabbath had with it so many man-made rules and regulations that it was more work to observe the Sabbath the way the Jews taught - than if it was the other days of the week. The work one did to observe the Sabbath was more exhausting than the other six day’s work. Jesus comes along and shows everyone the right way to observe the Sabbath. When He spoke of it they almost killed him and began plotting His murder and would carry out their evil desires when He allowed it.

Reading from Mark’s gospel, ²³ “One Sabbath he was going through the grainfields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. ²⁴ And the Pharisees were saying to him, ‘Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?’ ²⁵ And *Jesus* said to them, ‘Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him: ²⁶ how he entered the house of God, in the time of Abiathar (ab·ee·ath·ar) the high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?’ ²⁷ And he said to them,

‘The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.’²⁸ So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.’ (Mark 2:23-28) When Jesus said He is Lord of the Sabbath He was saying a lot. He is the Creator of all things. He is Creator of the Sabbath. He is also Creator of the eternal Sabbath rest that God’s people will enter into. The Israelites got it backwards, for what God wanted for His people. They thought it was about rules and they could earn God’s acceptance. But the Sabbath is about rest in God through relationship –**“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.”** (Mark 2:27) The Sabbath is God’s gift to those of true faith.

There are different views that godly people have concerning the Sabbath. Some say we are to still observe it like the Israelites on Saturday. Some say that there is now a Christian Sabbath which we should observe on Sunday. While I think, there is some merit in the second view, since Jesus rose from the grave on the first day of the week and having the Christian Sabbath on Sunday separated those of the New Covenant from the Old. I personally believe like with some others that symbols in the Old Testament are fulfilled when the reality comes. Once the reality comes the type or symbol becomes obsolete. God’s people were called to observe the Sabbath because it pointed to an eternal rest that they could enter into physically and remind them of the spiritual rest found in God. Now that we have Christ, all who are in Christ have entered into that rest. This rest is not completed yet. But to observe a Sabbath as ceremony is to say we are still waiting for the reality. I say, the reality is here, Christ is present. Our Sabbath of Sunday is now a celebration of the reality of Christ and we are to experience God’s rest.

When Jesus came nothing was done away with but much was completed. He finished or fulfilled or finalized the Law. Jesus was what the Law was waiting on. We dishonor our Savior and the work He accomplished when we still keep the sign

or symbol rather than rejoice in the reality of Christ Himself. This is the difference between man-made religion and a spiritual relationship with God. The writer tells us God rested and we enter into His rest by faith in the work of Christ on our behalf. We do not work to earn salvation; Christ earn it for us. His work is done and He has entered into a Sabbath rest. We also enter into God's rest by faith in what He has accomplished for us.

The Rest that Remains (v. 6-10)

Up to now as we follow the writer's reasoning through the text, we see that there is a rest that has been prepared from the beginning of creation. The Jews in Moses' day failed to obtain it because of unbelief. While Joshua did lead the people into the Promised Land, he did not lead them into God's rest. The promised rest remains open for God's people who enter through faith. Reading at verse 6, "Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience,⁷ again he appoints a certain day, 'Today,' saying through David so long afterward, in the words 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 of another day later on.⁹ So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God,¹⁰ for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his."

Let me focus for a moment on verse 9, "So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God." We can rest from the works of religion and the works of seeking to be good enough to enter heaven. Jesus did all the work for us. If we trust Christ as Savior, we are "the people of God" and enter into the Sabbath rest promised by God and foreshadowed by the Old Testament prophets and being lived the remnant of true believers.

Finding spiritual, physical, emotional rest in Christ, for believers, becomes a way of life. This is why Jesus said, ²⁸ “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30) The work of the world can be hard and tiring, but for those whose believe in Jesus they experience spiritual rest. Jesus paid it all, He did it all, so you would not have to pay the price of your sin. In Jesus and by the power of Him, our yoke is easy, and our burden is light.

My beloved, if your soul is weary and worn out by the cares of this world, Jesus would have you to rise above this world and enter into His rest. The call to come to Christ is still ringing forth. It still remains. Do not be like the Israelites who all heard the Gospel and failed to secure the benefits of the Gospel because they did not believe and act on what they heard.

Hear words of truth and life, “*We should fear, therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it.*” ² For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened.” My beloved, hear, believe, obey and live in the rest of God through faith in Christ. Amen!