

"The Rest Available in Jesus Christ"

Part 5

Hebrews 3:7-4:16

Introduction: Today as we come back to our study of Hebrews we have finally come to chapter 4. Tonight we shall look at the "rest" which God has made available to the believer.

In chapter 3 we looked at warning which the writer issued to the Hebrew believers. He had reached back to the Old Testament and pointed to how most of Israel who had come out of Egypt had failed to enter into the land of Canaan because of unbelief. Now let me remind you that Canaan is not a picture of heaven. Canaan is a picture of the victorious life of the believer which is only attained when he or she walks by faith. Israel looked into the land of Canaan and were able to see the people in all of their power. They were to believe that God would give them the victory over the people of Canaan and therefore they could enter into Canaan by FAITH. But they refused to walk by faith and therefore they did not enter into the land of Canaan. Now last week I told you that there was something which contributed to Israel's lack of faith and it is seen in Hebrews 3:10.

Hebrews 3:10

¹⁰ *Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do always err in their heart; and they have not known my ways.*

The end of this verse is very important and we must not miss what the writer says here. Israel did not understand the ways of God. In other words God brought them to the edge of Canaan and allowed them to see the inhabitants of the land for a purpose. It was to test their faith and help them to see that in their own strength they could not enter into the land of Canaan. Ultimately God wanted them to trust in Him for the victories. But they missed this. They believed that because they followed God life would be without trials and tests. They did not understand that God would strengthen them through the trials and the tests.

This was something that the readers of Hebrews also needed to grasp. They were facing the persecution due to their faith in Jesus Christ. They needed to know that God had permitted the persecution. It was a test of their faith. It was designed to strip them of self dependence and make them more God dependant. If they did not understand this they would fail to enter into the rest which God had for them.

Application:

This is a TRUTH which you and I must never allow to escape our minds. Whatever we face in life is not there to harm us but it is there to strip us of self dependence and to make us more God dependant. Last week I showed you the words of John the Baptist and they are currently on our church sign.

John 3:30

³⁰ *He must increase, but I must decrease.*

Let us remember that God is working in our lives to make us more like Jesus Christ.

Philippians 1:6

⁶ *Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:*

When we were saved God started a work in our lives and this work will continue until the very day that we leave this earth.

Romans 8:29a

²⁹ *For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son...*

This means that there will be times when life makes no sense from where we are standing. There will be times when life will be very painful. This is part of the plan of God for our own personal lives. Israel thought after they came out of Egypt life would be all "sunshine and roses". They did not know that God would lead them into situations designed to strengthen their faith.

There are many believers that enter into their New life in Christ and they have entered with the false belief that all the problems are behind them. Then when the trials and the tests come they are very confused and afraid. They desire to run away from where God has led them. Therefore they are like Israel and the sad point is that many never learn to trust God in the midst of the trials and the tests. They come short of where God desires for them to be.

That was the very danger facing the Hebrew believers who received the letter of Hebrews. Now the writer is going to move on and explain how to enter into the "rest".

I. The Warning

Part 4

Notice Hebrews 4:1

The first point I see as I look at this verse is the seriousness of entering into God's rest. Let me ask you a few questions to begin with. Are you resting in Christ tonight? I am not talking about being saved. There are many who are saved but are not resting in Christ. Is your heart troubled? Are you full of anxiety? Is there something that has entered into your life that you cannot control and this situation has completely robbed you of the peace and joy in your life? Let me show you what the rest looks like in the words of Jesus.

Matthew 11:28-30

²⁸ *Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*

²⁹ *Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.*

³⁰ *For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*

Do you know this rest which Jesus speaks of here? There are so many believers who would desire to say, "YES I am resting in Christ". But the truth is that there are few who have entered into His rest. The reason is because they have not come to surrender to His work in their life or in the life of a person who is close to them. Then there those who are still living in the power of their own strength and are so frustrated because they cannot seem to gain victory over a particular sin in their life. In the lives of both of these groups there is no rest and no peace. There is fear for those who are not surrendered to God's mighty hand and there is discouragement for those who have not learned to apply the resurrection power to their everyday lives.

To not enter into God's rest is serious. It is where God desires for us to be. When we get there it is the place where He is magnified in and through our lives. To come short of that is an offense to God. That is why the writer tells his readers to "fear" coming short of the rest.

Notice Hebrews 4:2a

Let us take this verse in several small bites because there is much to consider here.

The writer tells his readers the "gospel" was preached to them just as it was to the people of Israel. Now we must understand that the word "gospel" here means "good news". The

writer is not speaking about the gospel as Paul defined it in 1 Corinthians 15. In that passage the Gospel is that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the 3rd day. That is not the "good news" which the writer is referring to here.

He is referring to the "good news" that God has provided a place of rest for His people and that He would give them victory in the land of Canaan. Let me show you the promise given to Israel.

Exodus 23:20-30

²⁰ Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared.

²¹ Beware of him, and obey his voice, provoke him not; for he will not pardon your transgressions: for my name is in him.

²² But if thou shalt indeed obey his voice, and do all that I speak; then I will be an enemy unto thine enemies, and an adversary unto thine adversaries.

²³ For mine Angel shall go before thee, and bring thee in unto the Amorites, and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Canaanites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites: and I will cut them off.

²⁴ Thou shalt not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do after their works: but thou shalt utterly overthrow them, and quite break down their images.

²⁵ And ye shall serve the LORD your God, and he shall bless thy bread, and thy water; and I will take sickness away from the midst of thee.

²⁶ There shall nothing cast their young, nor be barren, in thy land: the number of thy days I will fulfil.

²⁷ I will send my fear before thee, and will destroy all the people to whom thou shalt come, and I will make all thine enemies turn their backs unto thee.

²⁸ And I will send hornets before thee, which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite, from before thee.

²⁹ I will not drive them out from before thee in one year; lest the land become desolate, and the beast of the field multiply against thee.

³⁰ By little and little I will drive them out from before thee, until thou be increased, and inherit the land.

The "good news" which was preached to these Hebrew Christians and to us is really twofold in the context here.

First of all we have the good news that God is in control of all that comes into our lives. He has started a work in us and He will be faithful to complete the work. We know two things about the work of God in our lives:

1. **Everything works together for good.**

Romans 8:28

²⁸ And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

This verse tells us that EVERYTHING works together for good. Not just some things but ALL things are used by God. God is sovereign over our lives and therefore He is in control of all that happens.

God had a message for King Cyrus in Isaiah 47 and I want you to show you some of what God told him.

Isaiah 47:1-3, 6-7

Thus saith the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut;

² I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron:

*³ And **I will give thee the treasures of darkness**, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I, the LORD, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel.*

⁶ That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me. I am the LORD, and there is none else.

*⁷ I form the light, and create darkness: **I make peace, and create evil**: I the LORD do all these things.*

There are many things which God told Cyrus but there are 2 that I want you to see. First of all God said He would give him the TREASURES OF DARKNESS. Did you ever stop to think that in the times of darkness which we go through there are TREASURES there? These are spiritual lessons which we would never know if it were not for the times of darkness in our lives.

The second point I want you to consider is that God told Cyrus that He made peace and created evil. The word "evil" does not refer to sin. It refers to "physical calamity". The entire verse speaks of God's control over all that His people go through.

The other "good news" preached to them and to us is:

2. **We are no longer slaves to sin. The very power that resurrected Jesus from the dead is within us.**

Romans 6:6-11

⁶ *Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.*

⁷ *For he that is dead is freed from sin.*

⁸ *Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him:*

⁹ *Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him.*

¹⁰ *For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God.*

¹¹ *Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

We now have within us the power to overcome sin in our lives.

These are just 2 examples of the "good news" that was preached to the Hebrew believers and to us.

Notice Hebrews 4:2b

Here we see that the good news did not profit the people of Israel because it was not mixed with faith. They knew what God had said but they would not apply it to their lives and they were therefore not able to enter into Canaan. They refused to walk by faith in the promises of God.

Application/conclusion:

You and I know what God's Word says about how God is in control of everything and how He has given us the power to overcome sin. But let me ask you a question, "Do you believe what the Bible says?" In order to enter into God's rest we must mix **faith** with the promises and the facts of God's Word.

Hebrews 11:6

⁶ *But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*

Let me leave you with the words of Ray Stedman on Hebrews 4:1-2.

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"These words must be taken seriously. The Word of God knows nothing of the easy believeism that is so widely manifest in our own day. We think we can receive Jesus as Savior, raise our hand to accept Christ, and that settles the matter. We will go to heaven and there can never be any doubt about it from then on, though there is no change in our life. But the promise of Christ is that when he comes into the human heart there is a radical change of government which must inevitably, in the course of its working, result in a revolutionary change in behavior. Unless that takes place, there has been no reality to our conversion. The goal of his working in us is rest."

Next week we shall see exactly what the REST is.