

7. Understanding the Rest that God Promises

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain the danger of a heart of unbelief to those who are professing Christians but live lives that give no evidence of repentance and faith. We saw that it is important to encourage all professing Christians because some may still be depending on their own efforts to please God and have not entered into the rest that God has promised. Today, we are going to see that God explains what He means by that rest.

Hebrews 4:1-3 says, “Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard *it*. For we who have believed do enter that rest, as He has said: ‘So I swore in My wrath, “they shall not enter My rest,”’ although the works were finished from the foundation of the world.” This promise is mentioned several times in the book of Hebrews and will define what it means to enter His rest. Here, we are warned about the danger of coming short of the rest that Christ provided. We see that God has given a promise that some will enter His rest. We saw in our last topic that God said that some would not enter into His rest.

At the same time, we also see that Christ gave an invitation to enter into that rest. Matthew 11:28-30 says, “‘Come to Me, all *you* who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 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. For My yoke *is* easy and My burden is light.’” Here, we see that Christ invited all those who are burdened down with their sin to come to Him. He promised that He will give rest to all who come to Him. We see that Christ promises an inner rest to our souls here on this earth as well as the eternal rest that God will give to all those who come to Christ in repentance and faith so that they can receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

The word translated “the gospel was preached” means *to announce or bring good news*. The writer makes it clear that both the Jews in the wilderness and the Jews in the New Testament had good news preached to them. However, those in the wilderness did not profit from that good news because the Jews in the wilderness did not have faith in the promises of God. As a result, God said that those who did not have faith would not enter into that rest. In contrast, verse three says that we who have placed our faith in the message of the Gospel do enter into that rest. That Gospel is defined in 1 Corinthians 15:1-5 where we read, “Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you--unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve.” This is the message in which each person must place their faith to enter that eternal rest.

We also see that “the works were finished from the foundation of the world.” When God determined in eternity past that Christ would pay the penalty for sin, God had determined how we would enter that eternal rest. As a result, that work was already completed in the sight of God

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before the foundation of the world. Ephesians 1:4-7 says, “Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.” God had determined all these things before He ever created the world so this rest was already completed in the sight of God.

To illustrate the fact that God has completed that eternal rest by purposing it, we see that God illustrates it with His rest after He completed the creation. Hebrews 4:4-5 says, “For He has spoken in a certain place of the seventh *day* in this way: ‘And God rested on the seventh day from all His works’; and again in this *place*: ‘They shall not enter My rest.’” God completed the creation of the heavens and the earth and then He rested. Genesis 1:31-2:2 says, “Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed *it was* very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day. Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done.” God ended His work of the creation and then He rested.

In the same way, God determined how He would provide salvation so that each person who came by faith in the promises of God could enter that eternal rest. Old Testament saints entered that rest by believing the promises that God had made about the future salvation that Christ would provide. Hebrews 11:8-10 says, “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as *in* a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God.” Abraham showed His faith in the promises of God by His obedience.

The faith of Abraham and other Old Testament saints is further explained in Hebrews 11:13-16 where we read, “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced *them* and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that *country* from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly *country*. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.” Here, we see that the writer of Hebrews describes the eternal rest that God has prepared for the Old Testament saints that believed the promises of God by faith. The writer of Hebrews then quoted from the last part of Psalm 95:11 the words, “They shall not enter My rest.” This showed that those who rejected the promises of God did not receive that rest.

As New Testament saints, we have a greater understanding than the Old Testament saints. We have had the opportunity to learn about the death and resurrection of Christ to pay the penalty for our sin. As a result, when we place our faith in Christ because He is the One who fulfills the plan that God purposed before the foundation of the world, we enter that eternal rest. That is why Hebrews 4:10 promises us, “For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his

works as God *did* from His.” Just as God ceased from His works and rested on the seventh day when He created the earth, we entered into that rest by faith at the moment of salvation and ceased trying to earn salvation by our works.

The writer of Hebrews gave the Jews two additional reminders from the Old Testament to remind them of the need to come to God by faith. Hebrews 4:6-8 says, “Since therefore it remains that some *must* enter it, and those to whom it was first preached did not enter because of disobedience, again He designates a certain day, saying in David, ‘Today,’ after such a long time, as it has been said: ‘Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts.’ For if Joshua had given them rest, then He would not afterward have spoken of another day.” Here, we are reminded that God says that some must enter His rest. The Jews in the wilderness did not enter that rest because they did not accept the promises of God by faith. Instead, they chose to show their rebellion against God by disobedience.

Hundreds of years later, God led David to write to the people of Israel again in Psalm 95:7-8, “For He *is* our God, and we *are* the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand. Today, if you will hear His voice: ‘Do not harden your hearts, as in the rebellion, as *in* the day of trial in the wilderness.” David reminded the Jews that God had chosen them to be His people. David reminded the people of this day that God wanted them to hear His voice instead of following the example of the people in the wilderness who chose to rebel against God.

The writer of Hebrews quoted the words that David had written to remind the Jews at the time that the book of Hebrews was written about the danger of hardening their hearts. The writer of Hebrews recognized that there were some of the Jews who were professing Christians were speaking outwardly of believing while at the same time they were actually rebelling against God in their hearts because they had not accepted the promise of salvation by faith. Ephesians 2:8-9 reminds us, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” These Jews needed to know that they could only be saved by faith.

In the second illustration, the writer of Hebrews reminded the Jews that Joshua was not able to bring the people into the eternal rest of God. Joshua did give the people of Israel a physical rest from their earthly enemies but the fact that David spoke of another rest showed that Joshua had not brought Israel into that eternal rest. We want to help our physical and spiritual children fully understand what the writer of Hebrews is teaching. Then, they can help others to understand that the only way to enter the eternal rest of God is through faith in Christ. May the Lord richly bless you as you help others to understand the eternal rest that God promises.