

The Traveling Pulpit

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The Lord's Day and The Lord's People Part II

“For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it. For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. For he spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all his works. And in this place again, If they shall enter into my rest. Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief: Again, he limiteth a certain day, saying in David, To day, after so long a time; as it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. For if Jesus had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day. There remaineth therefore rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief”..... Heb. 4:2-11

A Wonderful Example (v.2-8)

Israel's tragic example is a warning for Christians of every generation, including us “today” (v.2-4). Knowledge and “faith” are two separate issues and must never be equated as the same. The Israelites witnessed God's miracles in Egypt, they heard God's instructions through “Moses”, and had been challenged to trust God through “Joshua” and “Caleb” (Num. 13:30, 14:7-9), but they failed to exercise “faith.” Likewise, today the same problem exist as the “gospel” is “preached”, but in many, the “word” does not “profit” because it is “not ... mixed with faith.” Just because a person hears and knows the “gospel” is not the same as believing it (Jam. 2:9). Just like the “mixed multitude” (Ex. 12:38) that left “Egypt”, there has always been a bunch of unbelievers among the true believers who are not going to enjoy God's “rest.” Ever since God's creative “works were finished from the foundation of the world”, His desire has been for His people who “have believed” to “enter into rest.” When Adam sinned, fellowship

with God was broken and disrupted the “rest” that God intended for the human race. After God “finished” His creation, “He rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made” (Gen. 2:2-3). Unlike the other days mentioned in Genesis 1, the “seventh day” does not have an “evening” and “morning” (Gen. 1:5) simply because God’s “rest” is eternal with no end. This in and of itself proves that the Hebrew word *yown* (yome) that is used repeatedly in the first chapter of Genesis does not have to be a 24-hour day.

The Old Testament “Sabbath” commandment (Ex. 20:8-11) was for God’s people to imitate God’s “rest” that He has predestined for them throughout all eternity. With the resurrection of Jesus Christ, that “seventh day” is now observed by the New Testament Church on the “first day” of the week and is called “the Lord’s day” (Acts 20:6-12, I Cor. 16:1, Rev. 1:10). When we “rest” today on “the Lord’s day”, we are reminded that the world has not yet been transformed and that a better day is coming for the people of God. The Lord’s Day is for the Lord’s people and has no spiritual significance to the unregenerate. It’s a day when believers not only remember the glorious resurrection of our Lord and Saviour, but to commemorate the eternal “rest” that will be ours in heaven. There are various views as to which day of the week that ought to be observed as a day of “rest.” Some still hold to a Saturday “Sabbath”, but the most common within the church is the “first day” of the week. Sunday has become the traditional day because of the references made to the disciples congregating together in the New Testament following the resurrection of Christ. The mention of God’s “rest” has nothing to do with exhaustion (Isa. 40:28), but it speaks of completion. In other words, once God completed His work, He ceased from His creative activity because everything was prepared for man to enjoy the blessing of fellowship with God. However, the unbelief of Adam undermined that fellowship of spiritual “rest” which caused God to begin His sovereign work of redemption (Gen. 3:14-15,21).

In the case with the Israelites who were not permitted to enter Canaan, it was also due to their “unbelief” (v.5-8). Those “to whom” the promise of “rest” in Canaan “was first preached entered not in because of unbelief.” Their children entered the land, but their disobedience turned it into a place of conflict and defeat. Therefore, we learn from this that incomplete obedience leads to incomplete blessing. The blessings upon Israel could have been greater if they had obeyed the Lord once they entered the land (Deut. 30:11-20), but they made covenants with the Canaanites (Judges 2:1-5) and entered into the worship of false gods which provoked the Lord to send them into exile.

In the time of “David”, Israel was well established in the Promised Land under the leadership of a godly king. However, the same thing happened as it did with the first “generation” of Israelites that “came out of Egypt”, “unbelief” limited their enjoyment of God’s blessings. The 95th Psalm was a call to God’s people to hear His voice and “harden not” their “hearts” (Ps. 95:7-11). The Israelites might have concluded that “Joshua” led them into “rest” when he led them into Canaan, but if that were the case then they failed to recognize that the “rest” to which God spoke went far beyond the physical. Keep in mind that the Hebrew name “Joshua” is translated into the Greek for “Jesus.” In the KJV, “Jesus” in verse 8 is referring to the Old Testament character of “Joshua.” 400 years after “Joshua”, God was still challenging them to enter His “rest” from the inspired pen of “David” in Psalms 95. The Bible records many examples from which God intends us to learn and avoid the pitfalls of others. One of many

lessons and examples of God's sovereignty and human responsibility is recorded in the story of Israel's "unbelief" and failure to enter the "rest" that God had promised them in Canaan.

A Glorious Fact v.9-11

The truth of the matter is that during the first century when the Book of Hebrews was first written, there still "remaineth ... a rest to the people of God" reminding us that the "rest" to which God speaks is spiritual. The only way to enter into this kind of spiritual "rest" is by "faith" (Eph. 2:8) bestowed upon the sinner by God. Human achievement can never arrive at this kind of "rest" because our "own works" can never satisfy the qualifications. All we can do is "rest" in the arms of Jesus by "faith" trusting completely in Him alone.

When we are admonished to "labour" (strive or endure), it's referring to persevering in "faith" and exercising obedience. Otherwise, we, like the Israelites will fall "short" and demonstrate a life of "unbelief." If we are not living by "faith" and walking obediently to God's Word, then we cannot enjoy the blessings of peace, joy, and sweet "rest" in the Lord. When we come to verse 11 in the 4th chapter of Hebrews, we need to note that the word "rest" is a different word than the one used in the previous verses (v.1,3,4,5,8). The Greek word "rest" in verse 11 is sabbatismos, meaning keep Sabbath. The Greek word used in verses v.1,3,4,5,8 is katapausis, meaning putting to rest. At the end of life, God has promised to His people an eternal Sabbath "rest" (cessation) from all the toils and troubles of life. The "rest" into which we shall enter will be "his rest", because God alone is our righteousness, peace, source, and strength.

Closing

When we think about how the children of Israel failed to enter the land of promise because of their "unbelief", there are several things that we need to keep in mind. First of all, there was an election within an election, or in other words there was a spiritual election within a national election (Rom. 9:7-8). The nation of Israel is not a type of God's elect in the New Testament church, but it is a figure of Christendom as a whole composing both saved and lost. The spiritual remnant of God's elect within the nation of Israel foreshadows God's people of today. Unfortunately, oftentimes the heathens within the nation of Israel had an adverse effect upon the elect within the nation, which provoked God's judgment upon them. We need to learn from them the danger of failing to maintain close fellowship with the Lord and our need of daily sanctification (Phil 2:12).

Multitudes of people yearn for "rest", but it's only promised to God's elect having been granted the gift of "faith" (Eph. 2:8). Although, we oftentimes stumble and fall in our journey to heaven, God has given us reminders of our promised "rest." As we have seen from this study, there are two "rests" mentioned in the Old Testament as pledges of God's favor upon His people. First, there is Creation "rest" on the "seventh day." Secondly, there is Canaan "rest" in the land of promise. When David wrote of God's "rest" (Ps. 95) for His people, he was not referring to either one of these, but to an eternal Sabbath "rest" of which they typified. When God rested on the "seventh day", He did not enter into a state of inactivity, but ceased from His work of creation. When God's redeemed people enter their heavenly "rest", it will not be a state of idleness, but ceasing from all the carnal works in which we were engaged while in the flesh. Presently, while living in this world of turmoil, we're still subject to difficulties and trials along

the way, but God uses them to teach us not to trust in ourselves, but to cling on to Him by “faith.”

The Lord has always had a people, both in the Old and New Testaments and those people are His “elect”, the spiritual “Israel” of God (Rom. 9:6-8). Before the cross, their designated day of weekly “rest” was on the Saturday “Sabbath.” But, after the cross, believers shifted that day of “rest” to Sunday, to remember the resurrection of Christ from the grave and to commemorate their hope of a home in heaven. That day of “rest” has always been important to the Lord’s people because it is a constant reminder to us that there is coming an eternal “rest” to which we look forward in great anticipation. Jesus Christ is the only One Who can bring a sinful soul into the fullness of God’s “rest.” On the cross, He destroyed the power of the enemy and grants victory beyond the grave to the believer. Today, He offers a guarantee to His people that He will bring them into the fullness of His promised “rest” (Jh. 14:1-3).

The “rest” that we have today is merely the firstfruits of the “rest” that is to come. Christ alone is the source of eternal “rest” and fulfills the types presented in Scripture of our heavenly hope. Therefore, when the Lord’s people gather with the assembly to worship on the Lord’s Day, we are to be reminded that it is only a foretaste of our eternal heavenly worship that is yet to come. The Lord’s People are people who have been chosen from before “the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4) and redeemed by His sovereign grace. In salvation, every believer begins a spiritual journey of “rest” that will reach its final fulfillment when we see Jesus face to face. We can know and enjoy the “peace of God that passeth all understanding” (Phil 4:7) as we travel this pilgrimage of “faith.” However, the ultimate climax of that “rest” will be known when sin is eradicated, we are housed in a new glorified body, and stand in the very presence of our Lord.

A Ministry Update

The Bible Study in this edition of “The Traveling Pulpit” concludes a two-part study on “The Lord’s Day and the Lord’s People” that was begun last quarter. I’m glad to report that I’ve completed my new booklet entitled, “*Godly Servants, A Glimpse into the Subject of Elders, Deacons, and Deaconesses.*” Hopefully, it will cause the reader to think biblically when it comes to these issues. It’s free for the asking. May God bless you with a desire to learn and know God’s Truth. Thanks to all our supporters for all you do to make this little ministry possible.

Because of His Sovereign Grace.....BWM

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