

Entering His rest...

"There remains therefore a rest for the people of God.

For he who has entered His rest has himself ceased from his works as God did from His. Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest..."

Hebrews 4:8-10a

What does it mean to enter God's rest? How do we do it? Does it mean we need to simply slow down and "smell the flowers"? Are we in God's rest if we stop being workaholics and keep a good balance to our schedule? Is entering God's rest the same as learning how to relax?

My attention was arrested in Hebrews the other day, when I read Hebrews 3:11, and saw it again in 4:5: *"they shall not enter My rest."*

I began to remember to whom these words were spoken -- the nation of Israel in the wilderness, on their way to the promised land. God wasn't pleased with them. Whatever they did, God responded, *"So I declared on oath in my anger, 'They shall never enter my rest.'" (Heb. 4:3)* It turns out that "entering His rest" really meant to God that they were to "enter the promised land". This is indicated in Deuteronomy 12:8-10:

"You are not to do as we do here today, everyone as he sees fit, since you have not yet reached the resting place and the inheritance the Lord your God is giving you. But you will cross the Jordan and settle in the land the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance, and he will give you rest from all your enemies around you so that you will live in safety."

The resting place was to be in the land of their inheritance, that land which God had promised them. It turned out that they didn't want to go!

What is it like to "enter His rest"?

Remember when they sent spies into this land which was meant to be their place of rest? Most came back saying "we can't go up there! There are giants in the land!" The whole nation broke down and cried like babies. They decided to appoint a new leader and go back to Egypt. Were it not for Moses intercession, God would have killed them all on the spot. (See Numbers 13,14)

Why did they get so upset? God just wanted them to "enter His rest"!

Only Caleb and Joshua saw with the eye of faith, and said it was a good land, and that they should go up and take possession of it. In fact, Caleb later said He wanted the mountain of Hebron as his "resting place". Hebron was the home of the Nephilim, Goliath's ancestors. For Caleb, "entering God's rest" meant eliminating a multitude of giants, each as big as Goliath or bigger!

For Israel to enter God's rest, it would require faith -- and obedience. That is just what they did not want to do. They wanted a nice land, but they didn't want to fight for it. In their fear and unbelief, they rejected their own inheritance, looking at the giants rather than God. God did not like this. According to Numbers 14, He decided to smite them with pestilence and start over with Moses! Though this was stopped through Moses' intercession for them, most of them never saw the promised land. An entire generation died in the wilderness, except for Joshua and Caleb, who after forty years, led the children of that faithless and disobedient generation up to possess the land.

It was this unbelieving generation of whom God spoke in Hebrews 3:17-19:

"And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the desert? And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed? So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief."

Entering God's rest is in reality a life of faith in Jesus, lived out in obedience to God's promises and commands. It speaks of entering your inheritance, your promised land, your life and your divine purpose in Christ. It is indeed ceasing from your own works! It is entering into God's works.

Like the example of Israel, God's inheritance or promised land for each of us must be conquered and possessed by faith and obedience.

God's rest is not like taking a lunch break, or a vacation. His rest is that which brings rest to your spirit and your soul. It doesn't mean relaxation so much as it means fulfillment. You see, your inner man cries out for meaning and purpose, and your inner man will never rest until that cry is fulfilled. It is in a life of faith in Jesus and obedience to Him that you will find this rest. It is what Jesus spoke of in Matthew 11:28:

"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

God's rest is what the apostle Paul had when he wrote,

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day..." 2 Timothy 4:7

Your soul is most at rest when you are in a place of faith and obedience. It may not be a place of comfort, and it may not be easy. You may be facing giants, but what you are really doing is "entering into His rest" -- trusting totally in Him, relying on Him, and doing what He has told you to do.

The rest of God is found in the "yoke", not in being put out to pasture to do whatever you want. Your spirit feeds on the will of God. Didn't Jesus say His food was to do the Father's will? Your soul finds peace in being bound to Christ, and in *"following the Lamb wherever He goes."*

This life of faith and obedience, this rest of God, is lived outside your comfort zone (where you can get along without exercising much faith.). When you have abandoned yourself to the care of God, and have taken on the God-size assignments that come with His guidance, you are entering His rest.

"Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest is still open, let us take care that none of you should seem to have failed to reach it. For indeed the 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. For we who have believed enter that rest..." Hebrews 4:1,2

"Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one may fall through such disobedience as theirs." Hebrews 4:11

Entering God's rest is first a call back to the secret place, to be reminded of who the Lord is, what the Lord has called you to do, and what are His fresh marching orders. It is

then to step out in faith and obedience. No one enters the rest of God without a fight of faith. And this you can do! You were made for faith! You were made for obedience! Lift your eyes off your circumstances, and put them on Jesus and on His Word. Take on the yoke of His Word, and take one day at a time. It will put your soul at rest.

At times, entering God's rest means getting out on a limb, where it feels uncomfortable to your flesh. Remember, the fruit is out on the limb! His rest is found out there where you have to trust God to come through, out where you need His intervention, His provision, His grace, His strength. Rest is not found clinging to the trunk of the tree!

Your soul was made for faith in Jesus and obedience to His commands. Only in such a life will you find peace of mind. Only there will your spirit relax. Only there will your inner man find fulfillment. Only there will you know His rest.

John Matthews