

## Our Rest in Christ

Numerous benefits accompany salvation: the forgiveness of sin, becoming a child of God, indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and the promise of a home in heaven are but a few. We also receive eternal life; to live forever in heaven speaks to its duration. It is also for here and now as Paul expressed in 1 Timothy 6:12, 19 "lay hold of eternal life". God offers His children countless blessings, which remain unknown to those who are unsaved. Joy, peace, grace, the leading of the Spirit, all have the potential to make our lives distinct and different. Yet all of these gifts are conditional on our being in fellowship with the Lord Jesus and appropriating what is available as part of His blessings. (Eph.1:3).

Another blessing available to all believers is the promise and provision of rest. Positionally all believers have this when they respond to the offer of the Lord Jesus: *Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.* (Matt. 11:28) Practically, however, not all believers seem to enjoy the "rest" that is offered within the Christian life. This is most unfortunate, as it is this "rest" that allows us to enjoy the Lord and bask in the value of the finished work of Christ.

Hebrews 3:7 - 4:11 present a call for us to enter in and to enjoy the rest that the Lord Jesus offers us. There are certainly different approaches to this passage, all of which are to some extent based on the theological position to which one adheres.

There are those who see this call related to our performance and thus ensuring our salvation. Words such as "unbelief", "hold", "rebelled" "diligent" and phrases like "an evil heart of unbelief", "let us fear lest any of you seem to come short of it," appeal to this perspective. This viewpoint, however, puts our eternal security in our hands instead of His, and makes our performance and not His power the basis for keeping us to the end.

A different perspective sees this passage referring to our perseverance to the end of life. Phrases like, "departing from", "hold the beginning of our confidence steady to the end" appeal to that position. Perseverance is important but again our security is due to His preservation and the promises in Christ.

Another interpretation views the pronouns "us, we, and you", along with the word "brethren" (3:12) to be referring to believers. In addition, the illustration of Israel not entering the land is not about salvation, but about appropriating what God promised them. Further, in Heb. 4:3 we read, "We who have believed do enter that rest".

A play on words is also evident in this passage with regard to the word "rest" as it relates to different realms.

- In 3:11, 18, and 4:8 it is the land of Canaan.
- In 4:4, it refers to the Sabbath as the day God rested after His creational work.
- In 4:9, a different Greek word for "rest" looks to our eternal rest in heaven.
- In 4:10, it may be heaven or may look back to our salvation and the end of self-effort and works to please God.
- In 4:11, it is our present situation and experience.

We may ask, "Why do we have to be diligent to enter that rest?" (4:11). Throughout the New Testament there are promises and provisions that we must lay hold of ourselves. God gives peace, joy, rest, and the expression of His love but we must still appropriate these blessings. There are attitudes and actions we must put to death or put off and virtues we are to pursue and possess. (See Colossians 3:5-14; Ephesians 4:20-22; 2 Peter 1:5-7).

This is true with the rest the Lord offers us. It is ours positionally in that we lay down our burdens at the cross. Practically and experientially, we must be "diligent to enter that rest." Diligence expresses the thought of effort, of discipline, desire and devotion. Many Christians fail to appropriate the peace and rest God offers them. This may not be obvious when everything is going well. The true test happens when we are in the midst of difficult circumstances and an uncertain outlook.

This truth changed Hudson Taylor and his life and ministry in China. For a time in his early years this thought consumed him - "am I doing enough to please the Lord and win his favor?" He got a letter from a friend expressing the joy and peace found simply by enjoying the presence of the Lord. From that point on, Taylor's work became a pleasure as it flowed from his enjoyment of time spent with the Lord.

The following excerpt taken from "Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secrets" expresses the wonder of it all, just to enjoy the Lord.

*The secret of his [Hudson Taylor's] own strength was not far to seek. Whenever work permitted, Mr. Taylor was in the habit of turning to a little harmonium for refreshment, playing and singing many a favorite hymn, but always coming back to—*

*Jesus, I am resting, resting, in the joy of what Thou art; I am finding out the greatness of Thy loving heart.*

*One of the eighteen evangelists, Mr. George Nichol, was with him on one occasion when some letters were handed in to his office, bringing news of serious rioting in two of the older stations of the Mission. Thinking that Mr. Taylor might wish to be alone, the younger man was about to withdraw when, to his surprise, someone began to whistle. It was the soft refrain of the same well-loved hymn:*

*Jesus, I am resting, resting, in the joy of what Thou art . . .*

*Turning back, Mr. Nichol could not help exclaiming, "How can you whistle, when our friends are in so much danger!"*

*"Would you have me anxious and troubled?" was the quiet reply. "That would not help them, and would certainly incapacitate me for my work. I have just to roll the burden on the Lord."*

*Day and night this was his secret, "just to roll the burden on the Lord." Frequently those*

*who were wakeful in the little house at Chinkiang might hear at two or three in the morning, the soft refrain of Mr. Taylor's favorite hymn. He had learned that, for him, only one life was possible just that blessed life of resting and rejoicing in the Lord under all circumstances, while he dealt with the difficulties, inward and outward, great and small.*

This raises the question for us, "are we enjoying the rest offered in Christ?" If we worry and stress about the mundane things of life, how will we cope in difficult times? Unbelief keeps us from entering into this rest just as in the illustration about Israel. The Promised Land was not heaven, there were still battles to fight but there were victories and God's provision. Unbelief kept a generation in the wilderness missing the blessed life available to them.

The death of the Lord Jesus on the cross is the basis of our salvation and thus we trust our eternal future to Him. Secure in the thought that we are safe in His hand and in the Father's hand. It only makes sense that we trust Him day by day and bask in the sunshine of His love no matter how dark the day may be. This rest makes this life a joy instead of drudgery and a wonderful testimony to the unsaved.

I hope that we can say today, "Jesus I am resting, resting in the joy of what Thou art; I am finding out the greatness of Thy loving heart.