

Chapter 4:1-11**"PROMISED REST"**

When we think of the word "rest", I think we can all agree that we are living in unprecedented times of total unrest! Our world has been turned upside down not only by this pandemic (although that, in itself, would be bad enough), but also by the social unrest in our country and the ensuing division and hatred it has caused. And where is God in all this chaos? What is our reaction as believers? I believe today's lesson will give us a little insight as to where God is, and where WE, as followers of Jesus Christ should be.

Vs. 1-2. We know that the reference here is to the Israelites in the desert. The author saying, they could have had rest, instead of wandering around in fear, or crying and complaining about everything! God had promised them that He would lead them to the land of milk and honey. They knew this, and it sounded great, but they kept focusing on all of the obstacles there would be along the way -- even though God had promised them victory. Our scripture talks about the gospel being preached to them. They not only heard it, they were eye witnesses to some of God's greatest miracles. You would think that under those circumstances, they would have been totally submitted to God, and yet they were not. The word says the gospel did not profit them? Why? Because of their disobedience and unbelief! Now, before we begin shaking our accusatory little fingers at them, if we think about it, isn't that our problem, too? Haven't we seen God do great and marvelous things for us, too? And yet, what happens when a crisis arises? Do we in faith turn everything over to God and immediately say, "Thy will be done, Lord?" Or, like the Israelites, do we start flailing our arms about, running here and there in a panic, calling every hot line we can think of?

Let's look at what happened to the great prophet Elijah when he found himself in a panic. (1 Kings 19:11-13) As God's prophet, Elijah knew that the evil Jezebel had put a contract out on him. He knew that other prophets had been killed just for being faithful messengers of God, and he feared for his life! Let's read what God tells him:

"Then He said, Go out, and stand on the mountain before the Lord.' And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind, and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice. So it was, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. Suddenly a voice came to him, and said, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?'"

God had to bring him to a place where Elijah could stop focusing on the "what ifs" and listen for God's still small voice. He had to come into God's rest in order to do that, because God wasn't doing it in a loud, spectacular way. It was that still small voice he had to listen for, and for us, too, that still small voice can only be heard if we stop all of our striving and complaining and just listen for it. *"Be still and know that I am God."* (Psalm 46:10)

V. 3-5. While the Israelites were not able to enter God's rest because of their lack of faith and unbelief, the same gospel they heard had been preached to the Hebrews, and the same gospel has been preached to us today. So, the question remains, are we able to enter the rest that God promises? Do we know how to do that? And then the word switches gears here and gives the example of God, our Creator, having rested on the seventh day of creation. Of course, this is the basis for the establishment of resting on the Sabbath day, or seventh day. Are we diligent about observing what some may argue is an antiquated commandment? Does the busyness of the world influence us and take precedence over resting on the Sabbath

the way we should? It's still a commandment; that hasn't changed. And just as Pastor Charlie said in his sermon this week, this is the only commandment given directly to God's people. (Exodus 31:12-13) So, not only was it a commandment, but also a sign, or a covenant, between God and His people. This is something that God took very seriously, and so should we.

And why is our coming into His rest so important to God? Because when we are at rest, we rest not only physically, but also mentally and emotionally. Our batteries get recharged, so to speak, and don't we all need that? When we're refreshed, we're in total rest and it is in that state that we can really worship. God doesn't want us multitasking on the Sabbath – he wants us to be rest, because he knows we need rest, and He wants us to be able to commune with Him .. to worship Him the way He deserves to be worshiped.

Vs. 6. I liked the analogy that Pastor Charlie gave regarding God's pattern for resting on the seventh day. The six days that God took to create the heavens and the earth represent the six days of toil and labor, and the seventh day represents rest. For us, the time it takes us to find our way to the cross of Jesus is also toil and labor for us. During that time, we are in disobedience and unbelief, just like the Israelites. The enemy had blinded them in order to keep them in darkness, and so he does to us today until we finally come to the end of ourselves. We may work to try to earn our salvation which, as we know, can never be bought with works. When we come to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ and surrender our lives to Him; that represents the seventh day ... the day God rested and, for us, the time that we are finally able to enter God's rest, something the desert generation was never able to do because of their disobedience.

V. 7-8. Again, in these passages, we see the warning from David about not allowing our hearts to be hardened. He refers to Joshua because as we know, it was not Moses, but Joshua who would finally take God's people into the promised land. And we also know that the desert generation did not make it .. only those that came after them. As Shirley taught last week, disobedience, unbelief, lack of faith and trust ... these are the things that kept the desert generation from reaching Canaan where God had promised them rest. That rest that God promises is always there for those who believe. It's there for us today if we will trust Him and surrender our will to Him. It's there even in the midst of what is going on in the world today. Let's look at what the rest of our text says.

V. 9-11. There remains a rest .. in other words, it's always there .. for the people of God who will accept it. For those who stop striving to do things "their way", and allow Christ to be at the center of their will. It's not always an easy thing for a believer to do, but when we realize that our salvation is not earned by anything we have done, then we begin to understand that it doesn't matter what we do ... it's all about what Jesus has already done.

We're told to be diligent to enter that rest so that we don't fall into the same trap as the Israelites did. We are always in danger of that. That's why we have to guard against being negligent about studying God's word, about praying, about resting on the Sabbath, about reaching out to our brothers and sisters in Christ ... all of these things can draw us away from entering God's rest.

Does being in God's promised rest mean that we are exempt from trials, struggles and bad things happening to us? No, but it does mean that we're able to cope with whatever happens. That's God's promise. "*I will never leave you nor forsake you.*" (Hebrews 13:5) Do you love God? Do you trust Him today? Those are the questions that if we answer, "Yes, God, I love You ... I trust You." Then we will hear God say in that small still voice ... it'll be alright ... 'come into my rest.'