

The Rest of the Cross

"Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, 'Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as when they provoked Me, as in the day of trial in the wilderness.'... And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? So we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief." Hebrews 3:7-8; 18-19

Jesus Christ commands His disciples "to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect (Matthew 5:48)." Yet Jesus also promised, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me... and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light (Matthew 11:28)." Many Christians would admit their experience has fallen far short of Christ's command and promise. His yoke of discipleship has not seemed easy or light and His commandments have seemed difficult to keep. Why is this? A look at God's ways in the wilderness with Israel may help us to understand why and help us find His promised rest today.

The Lord saved His people Israel by the blood of the Passover lamb (Exodus 12:1-13) and delivered them from a kingdom of slavery (Exodus 13:3). He then baptized them in the sea and in the cloud of His Presence (symbolic of baptism in water and the Spirit/Exodus 13-14; 1 Corinthians 10:2). Then what does God do after His people are saved and baptized? Does He immediately bring them into the bounty of the Promised Land? No. Instead He led them into the wilderness (Deuteronomy 8:15) - a "great and terrible" desert lacking in food and water and inhabited by deadly serpents and scorpions (symbolic of demonic spirits/Luke 10:19-20). In this wilderness, God miraculously protected and provided for them with food and water (a picture of Christ/John 6:31-58; 2 Corinthians 10:3-4).

The Lord's intent in the wilderness was to test His people and reveal whether they would trust and obey Him (Deuteronomy 8:2). The Bible says

God used the wilderness to discipline His people as a father trains his son (Deuteronomy 8:5). God's goal was to humble His people so they would learn to depend on Him alone for their sufficiency (Deuteronomy 8:3). God wanted His people to realize that they had no ability or righteousness of their own to possess the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 8:17; 9:4-5). However, Israel failed to understand the Lord and His ways during their wilderness testing. Despite the fact that they had witnessed His miraculous works (Hebrews 3:9) and zealously built His tabernacle (Exodus 39:42), they did not trust God and did not recognize His purpose in the wilderness (Hebrews 3:10-12). Therefore, the Bible calls them "a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation that did not prepare its heart and whose spirit was not faithful to God (Psalm 78:8)." As a result of their unbelief, most of God's people died in the wilderness without entering His promised rest (Hebrews 3:17-19).

Today, God still disciplines every son and daughter who belongs to Him (Hebrews 12:6-7). After we are baptized in water and the Spirit, the Lord will often lead us into a "wilderness" experience where we suffer hardship and affliction. The apostle Paul said, "We do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction... that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength... so that we would not trust in ourselves but in God (2 Corinthians 1:8-9)." The Greek word for affliction is *thlipsis*. It is also translated as tribulation and simply means pressure. God has designed our experience in the wilderness to press us beyond our natural ability so that by faith we will enter into Christ's rest. The wilderness is God's school of the Spirit. The wilderness is where God reveals to us the hidden attitudes and motives of our hearts (Hebrews 4:12). The wilderness is the crucible God uses to purify our faith in His Son, Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:6-7). The wilderness is intended to show us that we are incapable of living the overcoming Christian life in our natural strength (2 Corinthians 1:8-9; 3:5) and to enlighten the eyes of our heart to see what His Son has

accomplished for us on the cross. When we finally come to the end of ourselves, God will reveal the mystery of Christ's crucifixion to us. This is the divine revelation that God has included us in His Son's death so His risen Son might live in us (Romans 6:3-11; Colossians 1:27).

When you know (believe and act on) the Biblical truth that when Christ died, your sinful nature died with Him, you are then free to serve God without the fear of being defeated by sin (Romans 6:1-14). When you are convinced of this historic and divine fact of your inclusion in Christ's death, you can then live by faith in the Son of God who lives in you (Galatians 2:20; Colossians 1:27). When you know (believe and act) that you no longer have sinful nature, you will learn to no longer rely on your natural ability to serve God (Philippians 3:3) and Christ will become your true food and drink (John 6:55-56). So then, you enter into the rest of the cross when you know that "you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3:3)."

Israel failed to enter God's rest because of their unbelief. Although they professed faith in God, they trusted in their own righteousness and strength instead of God (Psalm 78:36; Isaiah 29:13). Today, God's promised rest is fulfilled by Christ's completed work on the cross. The secret to entering God's rest is to know that we have died with Christ and we no longer live. We will then cease from depending on our own works and enter into His spiritual rest and His works (Hebrews 4:10). By resting in His victory on the cross, we can trust in Christ to sovereignly live in us and His yoke becomes easy (Galatians 2:20).

"Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it... so there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. Hebrews 4:1, 9-10

www.ChristCrucified.info