

The Lord Jesus said ... "My Sheep

It is perfectly true that faith alone in the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross yields a soul a sure entrance into heaven and an eternity in the glory of the heavenly Jerusalem. It is perfectly true that to all who have placed their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, whom God has raised from the dead, a time will come where "all tears shall be wiped away..." (Rev 21:4). But these are not the primary points of God's promised blessing. They are not what is meant when God exhorts men to "enter into that rest" which God specifically calls "my rest" (Heb 4:5,11).

The abolition of sorrow and an eternity in the bliss of heaven itself are merely companion blessings of something infinitely greater.

God's primary blessing to the believer is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. "Rest" is simply the means by which a believer can fellowship with Him: and not only in some far-off future, but right now! Today!

God's Creative Rest

It is recorded, "...on the seventh day God ended His work ...; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work ..." (Gen 2:1-2). The contrast presented between what God did on the first six days and what He did on the seventh is plain: it is the difference between "work" and "rest."

During the first six days, God established a relationship with man: first by creating an environment to sustain him (Gen 1:1-25); then by creating man himself (Gen 1:26-27; 2:7; 2:21-25); and finally by instructing the man, providing a basis on which the relationship was to exist (Gen 1:28-30; 2:15-16). This was God's "work."

On the seventh day, God did nothing more to establish that relationship, rather He sought to enjoy it. He

hear my voice, and

"walked" with man, His creation and companion (Gen 3:9). This was God's "rest."

From Adam's point of view, God placed him in an environment where he had nothing to do of urgency (Gen 2:8-9; 2:15-17). When he grew tired, he could sleep. If he grew hungry, he could pluck the fruit from a nearby tree, and eat (Gen 1:29-30; 2:9; 2:15-17; 3:2). There was nothing to hinder him from enjoying fellowship with his Creator.

Adam was placed directly into a personal relationship with God: a relationship he had done **no work** to establish. This man knew God's rest. (He did dress the garden, but not to establish a relationship with God.)

When God rested, man became His focus. Likewise, it was intended for Adam and all future men who would enter into God's rest that God would be their focus.

Rest Lost

With Adam's transgression, of course, came much sorrow. It not only resulted in the sin nature and man's accountability to God, it also required God to change the very way in which man lived.

God said to Adam, "Because thou hast ... eaten of the tree, ... cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee.; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread..." (Gen 3:17-19).

Now, instead of being focused on God, Adam would be almost completely occupied with his own survival. He *must* eat to live, and the ground has been cursed. Whereas before, the ground brought forth abundantly, it would now need to be worked. Adam would no longer have the kind of freedom to fellowship with God that he once did. Rather than sweet communion, sorrow, sweat and survival are the sure results of sin.

This curse on the ground has served an important purpose throughout history. God has used it to communicate. Concerning the nation of Israel, for example: when the nation was obedient, God blessed with rain and the "increase of the land" (Lev 26:4); when the nation was disobedient, the land would be "cursed" (Deut 28:18; see also Zech 14:16-21).

they follow me" John 10:27

In effect, as Israel desired fellowship with God, the curse on the ground (i.e. the curse of Gen 3:17) was eased in order to facilitate that desire by allowing time for it: "And I will walk among you..." (Lev 26:12; compare Gen 3:8). In contrast, as Israel rejected God, God would withhold the rain and bring disease and many other things (Deut 28:15-68) to discipline Israel for their disobedience - to get their attention and drive them back toward Himself.

Israel would learn (just as Adam must have learned after he disobeyed) that concern for survival greatly hinders a man from enjoying a relationship with God. When men don't desire fellowship with God, God often gives them exactly what they want (Rom 1:18-28).

OT Sabbath Rest

Through varying the curse on the ground, God has shown that He will allow man to fellowship with Him, but it is through the Law given to Israel, His redeemed people, that He shows that He actually *desires* that fellowship.

"Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, ... For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day ..." (Ex 20:9-11; Ex 31:17; 35:2).

Because of the curse on the ground, mankind was required to work in order to survive. This was all-encompassing. It applied to every nation and every family. But God, after establishing a special relationship with the nation of Israel, gave them the Law of the Sabbath. There was now one group of people on earth for whom God desired "rest" from that necessity of work.

The Sabbath was not given so that the people of God would have time for their hobbies. It was not given for self-indulgence (Isa 58:13-14). But, it was also not a time where *nothing* was to be done.

The reason for the Sabbath day was so that the Israelites would have a time when they would not worry about their survival. As a result, they would be perfectly free to fellowship with God, their Redeemer. Concerning the *day of atonement*, God says, "ye shall

"Come unto me all ye that labour

afflict your souls, and do no work at all, ... it shall be a sabbath of rest unto you..." (Lev 16:29-31). Here Israel would assemble at the house of God in contrition.

For example, in the Sinai wilderness, a double portion of manna was given on the sixth day (Ex 16:5). The implication is that the people would have no worry for their survival on the Sabbath; therefore, no hindrance to fellowship with God. On the Sabbath day, Israel was free to fellowship with God much as Adam once was.

When Adam was hungry, he simply took from a tree and ate. When an Israelite was hungry on the Sabbath, he drew from God's sixth day provision and ate.

Over the centuries, the nation of Israel lost God's intended purpose for the Sabbath (Mark 2:27-28). The Lord Jesus points out on one occasion that the priests of the temple work on the Sabbath as they do every other day of the week, and are blameless (Mat 12:5). The same law that says an Israelite is not to work, commands the priests to continue working - in expressing the nation's fellowship with God (Num. 28:9-10).

On another occasion, the Lord Jesus points out that when a male child is born, the child is circumcised on the eighth day even when that day falls on the Sabbath (John 7:22; Lev 12:3). These things were work. The key therefore, to understanding God's true purpose for the Sabbath is through examining, not what work was forbidden, but rather what "work" was commanded or allowed on the Sabbath day.

Worshipping and serving God were *right* to do on the Sabbath day. God met all the physical needs of the people prior to the Sabbath in order to free them from the curse of work which for six days demanded their full attention. The seventh day was to be for "rest."

Through commanding that no "work" should be done on the Sabbath, God guaranteed that every Israelite would have time for God, if he so desired it. By the Sabbath laws (day and year, see Lev 25:4), God showed His own desire for their service and their worship: in other words, their fellowship. Concerning a restored Israel of the future, God says, "...from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me..." (Isa 66:23). And again, "the people of the land shall worship ... before the Lord in the sabbaths" (Ezek 46:3-4).

and are heavy laden,

Israel was once promised that they would enter "unto a land flowing with milk and honey" (Ex 3:8;17). As that name implies, this land would bring forth its "fruit" abundantly (Num 13:26-27). Therefore, after God's people took the land, they would not have a concern for their survival.

Through the great fertility of that land God would provide for their needs. Consequently, they would have great freedom to give to God the fellowship He desired of them. God would give them rest (Psalm 95:11).

NT Sabbath Rest

Today, man is once again exhorted by God to enter into His rest (Heb 4:10-11). But, as has been shown, this rest is meant to facilitate fellowship with God, never self-indulgence (Rom 6:1-2).

In addition, God does not give His rest indiscriminately. Israel had been redeemed. They were already in a relationship with God when His rest was offered.

God had done all the work in establishing a relationship with Adam and He did all the work in establishing a relationship with Israel. Israel had done nothing to merit this relationship; it was a gift. Today, once again the promise of rest is given only to the redeemed: those who have been bought out of the slavery of sin by the precious blood of Christ (1 Pet 1:19).

To the believer it is not the ceasing of physical work that the "rest" of the Old Testament illustrates. Rather, what has ceased are the futile works meant to establish a relationship with God. It is the believer's concern for his eternal "survival" that has ended.

The fear of death should never again divert his attention from fellowship with God through the Lord Jesus Christ, his redeemer. It is exactly this "fear of death" that keeps men in the bondage of religious works and rituals (Heb 2:14, 15). But believers lean on the fact that through the *finished* "work" of Christ alone, their rela-

and I will give you rest... and ye shall

tionship with God has been firmly established; they have entered into "His rest."

There are two types of rest. With one you rest because of your work. In other words, you're tired from a hard day's work so you rest in order to build more energy to continue working.

In the other type of rest, you rest *from* you're work when the job is finished. Since there is no more work to do, your rest is in contentment.

The latter is God's rest. He rested on the seventh day after six days of creating (working). Everything was "very good" and "the heavens and the earth were finished." There was no more to do. As Hebrews 4:4 says, "God did rest the seventh day *from* all His works." This kind of rest God calls "My rest" (Heb. 4:5).

Now, the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ is told, "There remaineth therefore a rest [Greek - "sabbatismos" - keeping of a sabbath] to the people of God" (Heb. 4:9). Since Christ has offered "one sacrifice for sins forever," we are told to enter into "His rest" - ceasing *from* our works as God did from His (Heb. 4:10).

So then as God rested on the seventh day and sought to enjoy His relationship with man, so too should every believer in Christ Jesus the Lord desire to enjoy this same relationship: his relationship with his God.

God's rest then is not a reference to heaven. To be sure, heaven will one day facilitate the rest God desires for His people in a way heretofore unknown. Because sorrows and pains will have ceased, there will never be a distraction from enjoying real fellowship with the Creator.

God's rest begins at the moment of salvation. It is then that a person is placed in the "garden" immediately *after* the "work" has been entirely accomplished by God. As it was in Adam's case, so also it is in the born again believer: God alone has established the relationship, and now it is simply to be enjoyed through our worship and prayer and service.

Of course God never forced Israel to remain close, and in time, they drifted. They became carnal through enjoying God's physical blessings while at the same time ignoring the One who blessed them. They no longer desired fellowship with God.

find rest unto your souls" Matt. 11:28,29

As a result and according to God's promise, He hardened the curse on their land (Deut 28, 31:20-32:43, 32:37-38). In time He allowed foreign invaders to take that land and eventually the nation of Israel was scattered altogether.

But though many centuries of discipline have elapsed, that nation has remained chosen of God. The relationship God "worked" to establish with Israel still exists (Rom 9-11).

Likewise, the believer is in a permanent relationship with God through Christ. He is eternally secure (Rom 8:33-39). He is never, however, *forced* to fellowship with God; he is never *forced* to enjoy his relationship with his Creator and Redeemer.

Just as Israel (without being forced) was free to bring burnt offerings in worship to God during times of rest, so it is with a believer today: one who has entered "into that rest" (Heb 4:11). "By Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His Name" (Heb 13:15).

Every true believer should be seeking that same companionship and fellowship with his Savior that his Savior desires of him (Joh 14:3): to worship Him (Heb 13:15); to know Him and His rest (Mat 11:28-30); to learn of His ways (1 Cor 4:17); to grow in obedience to Him (1 Pet 1:2-16); to seek His wisdom (Col 1:9-11); and to serve Him selflessly (Rom 12:1).

By faith alone one enters into God's rest. But once there, we must not abuse it through complacency, apathy, or carnality as did Israel. It is God's desire for men, not simply that they should be saved, but that they should walk closely with Him and know Him, through the person of the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph 1:3:7-12).

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Chronicle #8 of 'The Christian Life' series continues to look at principles of the life that pleases God

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Entering into God's Rest

There is a "rest" into which God desires man to enter. But this "rest" is not comparable to the types of physical rest so often enjoyed by man. God's rest is not a *time* where all thought is eternally set aside and replaced with amusement. It is not a *place* where "good" people eternally enjoy their favorite hobbies. And it is certainly not the ceasing of all conscious thought. Not surprisingly, these views prevail in the world today.

Even Christians sometimes paint a picture of God's promise of rest in these terms, saying in essence, that God's rest is sitting peacefully in heaven under the shade of a willow tree with nothing to do but blissfully sigh for all eternity. And this, it is said, will come as a reward for having faith.

As if heaven and comfort were the goal, one often hears: "Just believe in Jesus and you'll go to heaven"; or, "Trust in Jesus, and when you die you'll go to heaven, and all your problems will disappear."