

The Superiority of Christ's Rest Part I

a sermon in the series
Hebrews: An Epistle of Encouragement

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Hebrews 4:1-11

Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it. For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. For he spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all his works. And in this place again, If they shall enter into my rest. Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief: Again, he limiteth a certain day, saying in David, To day, after so long a time; as it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. For if Jesus had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day. There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.

Religion and rest are polar opposites. Religion will work you to death. It will wear you out. In fact the more you try to gain peace from religion, the more disturbed you become. The harder you try at trying to be good at religion, the more exhausted you will be. There is no rest in religion. However, if rest is what you want, a rest from that inner cry for peace, then I will be the bearer of good news to you. I will be to you as one bearing a message announcing a millionaire's windfall is yours.

Isn't it true we long for a rest from the turmoil of our hectic and hurried society? We all long for that beach side cottage with no phones or that mountain cabin where at night the only lights you see are the myriad stars above. We want what is now considered at a premium in our society, rest and relaxation. There is so much to do and so little time to do it. But as much as we want rest and relaxation, there are a good many souls today who want to be free from the turmoil of the internal. You know what I am talking about. That constant churning of dissatisfaction on the inside that gnaws away at your contentment and tells you that something is simply not right. The turmoil of the internal is the absence of peace on the inside that leaves you feeling lonely in a crowd. The turmoil of the inside will not let you go. It will not relent, it will not stop. It hounds you like a tiger stalking its prey. I am no medical expert, but I do think that many of the illnesses and maladies that people are afflicted with are a result of a lack of spiritual rest and contentment.

Would you listen and find rest for yourselves this morning? I will tell you about the cure if you will listen and only believe. Our text cries out the remedy like a village crier who has been given the news that a vaccination has been found that will save an epidemic plagued village. That is how good this news is. Our text cries out rest to the weary! Rest to the restless! Rest is to be found, and it is found in Jesus. Our text sings, "There is joy to the joyless, for Christ has been made our joy." It shouts out, "Come and leave your home remedies they will do you no good. Come to Jesus alone and find rest."

Our text today Hebrews chapter four verses one through eleven, speaks of the superiority of Christ's rest. This is one of the most perplexing texts in the book of Hebrews. Probably the reason is because this text lends itself to a lot of preconceived baggage. Preconceived baggage is things that you thought you knew that you transpose upon the text. Quite frankly I have bounced back and forth all over this text over the years trying to understand what it means. I am sure there are some of you scholars out there who are chuckling on the inside and saying poor fool if he would have just asked me, I could have told him. But it has been good that I have wrestled with this passage because I think I have come to an understanding by the help of God.

In order for us to understand the kind of rest that the author is illustrating here, we need to do a little bit of background information. I hope that you will bear with me for the next few moments and listen intently because if you don't grasp these next six points you will not understand what the writer is trying to say in verses one through eleven.

First we need to actually go back to the whole theme of this book, because the whole theme of this book is Jesus and His superiority. The book is about how Jesus is far better than Judaism and all that Judaism contained, its prophets, including Moses. Secondly, you should remember that the audience is a persecuted Jewish church. They had experienced defectors. Several of their members had gone back into Judaism to avoid persecution. The third thing I want you to remember to help us understand this fourth chapter is that some were contemplating leaving in order to avoid persecution. The author of Hebrews is aiming this fourth chapter at this group.

Fourthly, one of the problems many have with this passage is that they have transferred to this passage the idea that Canaan or "the Promised Land" represents heaven. But, ladies and gentlemen, I challenge you to get your concordances and scan them. Run the references and you will find no Biblical evidence that the land of Israel is a type of heaven, or is heaven ever referred to as Israel. Heaven is sometimes called Mt. Zion or the New Jerusalem. But never is heaven compared to the Promised Land or Canaan or Beulah Land. I know many of you probably like that song, "Beulah Land" that Squire Parsons wrote. I hate to burst your bubble, but it is not Scriptural. Nowhere in the Bible does the Bible call heaven "Beulah Land." Although, it makes a nice song, it is not in the Bible. If I bring to this text the idea that the Promised Land is a type of heaven, I am going to miss what the writer of Hebrews is saying.

Fifthly, there is no Biblical evidence that Israel's crossing the Jordan River into the Promised Land is a type of heaven either. How many times have you heard and sung about, crossing Jordan.

Perhaps you remember the song, "On Jordan's Stormy Banks." I remember singing that as a boy. The song makes the allegory of crossing Jordan River as crossing over the river of death into heaven. But again there is no Scripture that even hints that death is like crossing Jordan into the Promised Land. That is something that men have invented. It is a good illustration and I am not against the illustration. But you can't bring it to bear upon Hebrews chapter four. It will distort your interpretation.

Sixth and lastly, let's answer the question, what does entering the Promised Land symbolize? Entering the Promised Land is a type of entering into Christ and His rest. That is what this writer is saying. All he is doing by bringing up the children of Israel and their inability to enter into the Promised Land is illustrating a type of people who are not able to enter into the rest of Jesus Christ.

The writer of our epistle of encouragement begins the third chapter proving to these Jews they have not settled for less or been sold a bill of goods. Jesus is superior, and He is especially superior to the Jewish hero, Moses. In Hebrews chapter three and the sixth verse it says "But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end." In other words, those who are saved are those who persevere. Those who persevere are those who are saved. The reason for him to preach in this manner is because he couldn't see their hearts, no more than any of us can see each other's heart. The church or churches to whom the author of Hebrews writes look like they are saved. They act like they are saved, they talk like they are saved, but on the inside some of them are wrestling with their profession of faith. His words are aimed to this group. In essence he saying, "If you have truly been saved, you will hold your faith to the end."

I am sure there were several in that church who were looking at these people who had defected and gone back to Judaism. They were thinking how could this be? How could they have done this because the apostles have told us if you are genuinely saved you were eternally secure in Christ? Are they lost, or just acting like they are? Therefore, one of the purposes of this book is to give confidence to the truly converted and assure them of genuine salvation.

The text also serves a warning to all, whether they are saved or only professing salvation without genuine faith. He is encouraging those who are really saved to persevere in faith in Christ. That is what Hebrews chapter three and verse seven through verse eleven is about.

Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost saith, To day if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness: When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years. Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do alway err in [their] heart; and they have not known my ways. So I sware in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest.)

The writer of Hebrews uses Israel, who was called God's people, as an example of not persevering in faith. They followed Moses out of Egypt. But leaving Egypt and its bondage did not mean

they would actually enter in to the rest that God had promised. They, in fact, did not enter that rest because they were always erring in their heart. They didn't really love God. They were rebels. Verse twelve says as much, "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God." This was the problem, they failed to really trust God. Thus the author says to his congregation, "You may have left the world, which Egypt is certainly a type of —the bondage of sin. You may have made a break from the world by being numbered among God's people, but that does not mean you have entered into rest yet." He says in verse fourteen of chapter three, "For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end." In other words, those who have become partakers of Christ are those who have placed their faith or their confidence in Christ. They maintain faith in Christ.

In verses sixteen through nineteen of chapter three, the writer expresses the concept that not all that left Egypt, left Egypt in their hearts. They may have come out of Egypt, but Egypt remained in them.

For some, when they had heard, did provoke: howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by Moses. But with whom was he grieved forty years? [was it] not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief. (Hebrews 3:16-19)

The point is very clear to the author of our epistle. These people may have left with Moses, they may have left the land of Egypt, but they grieved the heart of God because they refused to believe Him. And because they refused to believe Him, they could not experience His rest. The rest is not the Promised Land; the Promised Land is a type of the rest that God had promised. The Promised Land illustrates the rest of Christ. The rest that they could not enter into is Christ.

An important question that should be asked, what about those who did believe God, did they enter His rest? In verse sixteen the writer makes a distinction. He says, "For some, when they had heard, did provoke: howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by Moses." Not all that were of Israel had "evil hearts of unbelief." Only those who were unbelieving were deprived the rest, but those who persevered in faith entered the rest of God, for example, Joshua and Caleb. According to the Bible these two men had a "different spirit." Therefore, they were allowed into the rest. Should these two be denied the rest of God because of the unbelief of others? I think not.

Let us proceed now to chapter four and verse one.

Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. (Hebrews 4:1)

I want to make four observations from this verse. The first is that a promise remains to enter the rest of Christ. In other words, because of the majority of Israel in chapter three and verse nineteen didn't get into the rest of Christ, the door didn't close with their failure to get in. There is still a promise left of this rest.

Secondly, look carefully and note the words, “his rest.” Do you see the words? The Promised Land was not the rest, but it represented the rest of Jesus Christ. Many modern Christians have so divided the Old and New Testaments that there is such a discontinuity between the two that grace is never in the Old and law is never in the New. This is a hermeneutic that is clearly false to the integrity of the unity of the Scriptures. Every word of the Old Testament points to one person and He is Jesus. Jesus is in the Old Testament as He is in the New Testament. Often He is in the Old Testament in types and shadows, but He is there nonetheless. The rest that was for those who left Egypt is the same rest for any who would trust Christ today.

The third observation is that the writer says they should fear for the reason that some have appeared to not enter in. He is now talking about that church to which he is writing, not wandering Israel in the wilderness. He says, “let us fear.” Note the pronoun “us” which would include the writer. But what should the writer and the audience be afraid of? The answer is, “lest any of you should seem to come short of it.” Was the writer afraid that he personally was going to come short of the rest that was in Christ? No, because he was already experiencing it. You are not afraid of not getting that which you already have. He was saying that he and every member of the congregation to whom he was writing should be afraid for those of their number who have appeared not to have entered into rest. Those who are struggling and not resting in the peace that justification by faith brings are the “they” whom they should have been fearful for.

It is the responsibility of a local church to pray and labor that all within its borders should be converted. We believe in a regenerate membership, which means all who are members are to have a living and dynamic relationship with Christ. Any person, who does not have Christ, should not have membership in the church. And any of our number who we may have earlier thought to be in Christ but now appear to be outside the ark of God’s grace we should exercise fear for and do all possible to provoke them to repent and trust.

Fourthly and very close to the above observation, the author of Hebrews did not fear that he personally had not entered into the rest. He knew he had entered into the rest of Christ. His fear was for those who appeared as if they may not have entered rest. This is extremely important. These warnings do not prevent assurance of salvation for those who have entered the rest of God. If anything, the warnings strengthen them and encourage perseverance.

As we put this all together it is important to see that the Gospel is not a new gospel. The Gospel was preached in the Old Testament also. Verse two.

For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard [it]. (Hebrews 4:2)

The same gospel that was preached unto us was preached unto them, that is, the children of Israel under the leadership of Moses. God had promised the people, called Israel, a rest in Christ. But they refused it. Therefore, the rest that was offered was more than a promised land. What God had offered the children of Israel was a rest that is accomplished by believing in the Gospel.

You question and say, “But the gospel didn’t come until Jesus came.” Not so, the Gospel is in Genesis chapter three and verse fifteen, “her seed . . . shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” That is the first proclamation of the Gospel. The difference with the Old Testament and the New Testament is, they looked forward to a Messiah, we look back. Just as we look forward to what the Bible says is His second coming, they looked forward to His first coming. It is the same Gospel. The understanding was not all there since they didn’t have the fullness of the gospel explained. But what they heard and knew were the elements of the same Gospel.

Their problem was not in a lack of information about the Gospel but rather that they didn’t hear. It was the same problem with the Jews of Jesus’ day. He spoke openly and plainly about the Gospel. Yet His generation did not understand, anymore than did their forefathers. They had “ears, but did not hear.” They refused to listen with faith. This problem of the lack of “faith hearing” is not just a problem relegated to history but is our problem as well. When you hear the Word of God and you don’t mix your hearing with trust in what God has said, then that truth will actually harden your heart. That is what happened to the children of Israel during the days of Moses and during the days of Jesus, and it is happening now.

In the third verse the writer says,

For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. (Hebrews 4:3)

This is not a futuristic rest in heaven. He states clearly that those who have believed “do enter into rest.” There are many who want to maintain that this is still talking about our heavenly rest. But I do not think so.

This is probably the most difficult verse to understand in the whole text. Grammatically it doesn’t make sense. Let me tell you what I believe the writer is doing. Knowing his audience is a Jewish audience that has come out of the Old Testament law; he has to make certain clarifications. When he starts talking that their forefathers did not have rest under Moses and that there is no rest except in Christ, they are going to stop and say “Jews did have rest. They had the Sabbath rest.”

One day out of seven was the Sabbath. God gave the children of Israel the Sabbath as a sign of the covenant that He had made through Moses with them. It was for rest. It typified the rest of God after the work of creation during the first week. His Jewish audience could have resisted and said, “Wait a minute, we had Sabbath rest. It was the rest of God. Just as He rested on the seventh day, so do we.” But there is another argument they could also present and that is they also had rest under Joshua. It was Joshua who brought them into the Promised Land. Not only did they have the Sabbath’s rest, they also had the rest of Canaan under the leadership of Joshua, and they occupied the land. That was rest. That is the Jewish theology. The Jewish people rested in the leadership of Joshua occupying the land and in their weekly Sabbath. That was rest sufficient.

Whoever the writer is, he is going to answer these objections. He says in verse four, quoting Genesis chapter two and verse two about the Sabbath rest,

For he spake in a certain place of the seventh [day] on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all his works. (Hebrews 4:4)

Now notice his rebuttal in verses five and six to the idea that the weekly sabbath was the rest that God promised.

And in this [place] again, If they shall enter into my rest. Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief: (Hebrews 4:5-6)

He is saying in effect, “If it was the Sabbath rest that I am referring to then why does the Bible say there is still a rest and that they could not get into it because of unbelief?” Every Jew practiced the Sabbath. In fact they were very diligent in their practice of it. If you picked up sticks on the Sabbath, they would stone you. By the time the Pharisees had come along they had really added several new restrictions and regulations. Every good Jew practiced the Sabbath. Therefore, our writer is saying that the promised rest could not have been the weekly Sabbath. “It remaineth that some must enter there in.” If the weekly Sabbath was the promised rest, why would God have sworn they would not enter into His rest?

Verses seven and eight show the land of Canaan under the leadership of Joshua isn't the promised rest either.

Again, he limiteth a certain day, saying in David, To day, after so long a time; as it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. For if Jesus had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day. (Hebrews 4:7-8)

In the King James Version you have in verse eight the word, “Jesus.” It is not speaking of Jesus our Lord, but it is referring to “Joshua.” The Greek word for “Joshua” is translated into the English as “Jesus.” In other words, “Jesus” was the Greek mode of writing “Joshua.” Jesus’ Hebrew name was “Joshua” or “Hosheah.” The name means, “God is my salvation.”

The writer is referring to Joshua, and it is proven in the text. The writer is quoting from David who says there still remains a rest and warns the people of his day not to harden their hearts. The writer then asks the question, “For if Jesus (Joshua) had given them rest, then would David have spoken of another day? Since David lived a thousand years before Christ, the writer could not be meaning Jesus our Lord. Therefore, his argument is if Joshua by occupying the land of Canaan was the rest that we are promised, why would God raise up David hundreds of years later and say there is still a rest? Why would David warn about hardening the heart like their forefathers? There is still something else out there and it's called a rest.

He concludes the argument and says in verse nine,

There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. (Hebrews 4:9)

What is the nature of the promised rest? Verse ten supplies us with the answer. It is the rest of Jesus Christ from His finished work of redemption. This verse I believe is the key that will unlock the meaning of the text.

For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God [did] from his. (Hebrews 4:10)

The writer is not saying in verse ten that the believer enters the into a seventh day rest where no work is done. Again, this is not referring to heaven or the rest of eternity. Neither is he making reference to any Christian. He is talking about the Lord Jesus. The pronouns “he” and “his” in this text is the same person. Why do I say this person is Jesus? The first reason is the rest that this person has entered is like God’s rest. What was God’s rest on the seventh day like? Truly God did not stop working on the seventh day. He simply finished His creative work. We wrongly think God rested on the seventh day to mean God did not do anything. God superintended and sustained all that He had created. He watched over and protected His creation and that is a form of work. To say that He rested on the seventh day simply means that He ceased His creative works and basically He stepped back and looked at it and He was refreshed by what He had done. The truth is God does not need rest. The Bible says He does not “sleep” or “slumber.” He doesn’t go on vacation nor does He need rest and relaxation. Therefore, the rest that he is referring to here is God’s creative work being finished and brought to completion.

In viewing God’s rest from the Genesis account it becomes plain that God took pleasure in His creative works and saw that they were good. His rest was a delight in what He had created. If this is talking about us believers entering into our rest in heaven, I must ask, who of us can look back upon our works with complete satisfaction? Will our lives lived on earth be a source of delight and contribute to a sense of rest in heaven? Will any of us take pleasure in our own good works? I don’t believe a single one of us will be able to do so. When we get to heaven our perception of righteousness will be heightened, and I doubt seriously we will see our works to be as good as we now think them to be. In heaven we will realize that everything we did that was considered “good” was by the grace of God and not of ourselves. We will take pleasure in the God who worked in us and produced whatever works of righteousness that can be attributed to us.

Therefore I cannot help but think that this person of verse ten is someone other than a believer in heaven. This has to be somebody who did something who in himself could look back and say, “Yes what I did is good.” I only know one who can make such a pronouncement and rest in His own works and His name is Jesus the Christ. Our Lord Jesus at the moment of His death cried out, “It is finished.” The work of bearing the holy justice against the sin of the elect of God was complete. Finished! Done!

Our Lord has conquered sin, death, and hell, and your pardon is complete. The debt has been paid. The payment was paid in full when he breathed His last tortured breath and said, "Father unto thy hands I commend my spirit." The resurrection of Christ acknowledged that God had accepted the payment. Therefore, my confidence is not in me, but in my Christ who paid it all for me. He is my rest. When He finished His work of redemption, there was nothing left undone. Like God the Father, who on the seventh day rested from His creative works, Jesus has finished His redemptive work. It is complete, and He looks back on it and says it is very good. Jesus is resting right now. He is entered into His rest from His redemptive work.

Throughout the Old Testament the predicted Messiah is referred to as rest. Isaiah, in chapter twenty-eight and verse twelve of the book bearing his name, wrote, "This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear." Isaiah knew this theology well. He knew what the author of the book of Hebrews wrote hundreds of years later that the Messiah was the promised rest to Israel. Jesus was a rest offered to the Israel in the wilderness, and they would not hear it. The Israel of Isaiah's day was still rebellious. They also refused to hear God and refused to rest in Christ. So Isaiah said in verse sixteen of Isaiah twenty-eight,

Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner [stone], a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste." (Isaiah 28:16)

The words "make haste" in the Hebrew literally says "to not be disturbed." When you are always running, hurrying, hasting, there is a lack of peace. Isaiah is referring to the peace and rest that is in Christ. Christ is the "corner stone." He that believes in Jesus will not be disturbed, he will have rest. There will be peace for the person that believes.

Sir, the peace you want is not in your religiosity, it is in Christ! Jesus, Himself, said, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28)

Another reason I know this has got to be Jesus in Hebrews chapter four and verse ten is because every time he talks about the believer's rest that Israel rejected, he speaks of them in the plural. He uses the plural second and third pronouns, "us," "we," and "them." But here in verse ten the pronoun is in the singular, it is "he."

The writer summarizes his rebuttal and argumentation in verse eleven.

Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief. (Hebrews 4:11)

That is an interesting term and I don't have time to get into that. But you don't labor to rest. He must be writing to people who have not yet rested. Once you rest, you know you have rested and you do not labor to rest. Thus, he is saying strive to enter Christ, for in Christ is the desired rest. Jesus said that labor and work was for entering into Him, not resting in Him. He said,

“Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.” (Luke 13:24). Here again the writer uses the personal pronoun in the second person plural, “us.” “Let us labor . . .” We have already answered that. This must be the employment of the “editorial we.” In verse one of this same fourth chapter the writer has demonstrated that he did not fear his own coming short of the rest of God. Therefore, we cannot see how we can make anything out of the use of the word “us.”

We can conclude this section of the message by summarizing the argument of the author. The promised rest of God is not a Sabbath rest or rest in a promised land, but the rest of God is the rest of knowing and experiencing the rest of salvation that is in Christ Jesus. That rest is the rest that Christ is currently enjoying. He is at rest from the work of redemption. It is finished. There is nothing to be added or done. When a man or woman believes in Christ and what He has accomplished for their redemption, the peace of God settles their troubled heart. The war with God is over and rest ensues. Do you know this kind of rest that the writer of Hebrews speaks of? Put your trust in Christ’s work of redemption and cease your labors of trying to be good enough. Your only labor should be in seeking Christ and believing in Him. “This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.” (John 6:29).

That is the background information for my message, and now on to the actual body of my sermon.

First, let’s address some key questions. Let’s begin with the crucial question of how could one begin and then not finish? How could the children of Israel have left Egypt, acknowledged God, and not entered the promised rest? How could they have not finished the race? The answer to this question will provide us with the same answer to the question, how can anybody today profess faith in Christ, and not finish the race? How is that possible?

Everybody that left Egypt under the leadership of Moses died in the wilderness, except two men, Joshua and Caleb and all who were alive and under the age of twenty. How could these people be called the people of God and in the end not be saved? You must understand there are two types of religious sinners and that is what these people were. They were religious sinners. The first type of religious sinner is those who carry the world in their hearts. We shall call them a worldly professor of faith. The majority of Israel was such. You have heard the old slogan, “You can take the boy out of the country, but you can’t take the country out of the boy.” They had left Egypt, but Egypt had never left them. Every time they started having problems and difficulties what did they say and want to do? Here is an example of what they would do, in Numbers chapter eleven and verses four and five, they would always cry for Egypt.

And the mixt multitude that [was] among them fell a lusting: and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat? (Numbers 11:5)

We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick (Numbers 11:4).

“Oh Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions and the garlic, oh we can still taste it! Moses, since you brought us out here we haven’t had anything good to eat. We’re missing momma’s cooking, because momma doesn’t have the old ingredients of Egypt.” Can’t you hear them? They left Egypt, but Egypt had never left them.

There are a lot of people who are in churches today who have professed faith in Christ, and they seemingly have changed. They may not do some of the old things they did, but the world is still in them. They have not left the world because they carry it in their hearts. They have only changed certain behaviors so that they may escape the eternal consequences of God’s wrath. But in their hearts they still love the world from which they have come. They would go back if they thought they could without penalty.

There is a second type of religious sinner and he is the most dangerous, the pious professor. These are sinners who have a keen interest in religion and in the things of God. Some in Israel died because they were so worldly and so in love with Egypt that God killed them. But there were others God killed who didn’t want to go back to Egypt, they wanted to establish their own religion of God based upon their fleshly lusts. For example, the sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu. They offered a strange fire to God and God killed them on the spot. Their offering was what their fleshly knowledge had devised.

Now listen carefully, there are many, and I think some of you in this room, who accept the challenge of religion. Your flesh gets excited about it, because it is a challenge to your flesh. The desire of our flesh is to be in control and to be able to accomplish something that will call attention to us. Many today look at religion and say, “I think I could do that, I think I can earn heaven.” They accept the challenge of religion and they perform it in order to satisfy this desire to be acknowledged. They have done something that others find hard to do. Am I describing you? Would you go through the elaborate appearance of serving God if there was no recognition of your efforts? How do you know if I am describing you? The writer of Hebrews is saying the main evidence of a true believer is rest in Christ. He or she has rested from their labors of the flesh trying to gain the approval of God and others. They have placed their trust in the labors of Jesus, and in Him they find sweet rest. They have the security of a spouse in the arms of their mate knowing that blessed assurance of unconditional love.

There is no rest in the pious professor. They say all the right things and do all the right things. But on the inside there is no rest. Have you ever slept and you get up the next morning and you are still tired? You really didn’t get rested. But thank God that most nights you go to bed and you get up refreshed. You had a good night’s sleep. There are many people who profess faith in Christ, and it is like they go to bed and turn and toss, roll and struggle, but when they wake up in the morning, they are not rested. There is still something on the inside that refuses to stop crying, no contentment, no peace, and no well-being. Oh, but there is that one who lays his head upon the pillow of Christ, upon the bed of his salvation, who, when he closes his eyes, he finds perfect rest and wakes refreshed.

Saturday morning a week ago I received a phone call about 10:30 am from a friend of ours that many of you know, Eli Shetler. Eli called me and said, "Brother Michael, I have a problem and I really need to talk to someone. My pastor is out of town. Would you have a few moments?"

We were getting ready to step out the door, but I said, "Yes, I do."

Eli said, "The other day when I was with you, I was sharing with you that I was struggling over some things and I want to tell you what I was struggling over. I am struggling over my salvation."

Now many of you know Eli. Never would you find as good a man. He was faithful to go every Sunday afternoon to the rehabilitation center, witnessing and praying with those who would attend the Bible study. He appeared to be a very meek man.

Eli continued, "I want to run this by you and see what you think. I think I got saved two months ago."

I said, "Before you tell me about it, do tell me about when you first thought you got saved. Let me ask you one question about it. Can you tell me that at that experience several years ago when you had been thinking you were saved, you literally knew you had rested in the work of Jesus Christ?"

He answered and said, "No, I didn't. I have never had any rest." I then instructed him to tell me about his most recent experience. Eli said, "Well, our pastor is getting ready to go through the book of Romans. So I got my Bible out and I started reading one Sunday afternoon through the book of Romans. By the time I got to the fourth chapter, my heart began to beat so hard. What I was reading was describing me. You got to understand, I thought I had to have some kind of crisis experience, this big dramatic conversion like Paul on the road to Damascus. Since that has never happened to me, it got me to thinking. One of the things I thought about was I never felt guilty or really bad about my sins. I never really felt like I was a bad sinner. But as I was reading that text, God began to show me that I was all of that and more. I kept reading and it says that we are justified by faith. The thought came to me, that means I have got to trust and rely upon what God said about my sin and me. When I did that, I got this feeling of peace and rest."

After he finished describing what had happened, I said, "Eli, it sounds like to me you got saved two months ago." Then I asked him this question "Eli, are you going to tell me all those times you drove four hours a Sunday, one hour here and an hour back and again that night, to attend church here at Oak Grove that you were not a Christian? Are you saying all those times you went down to Mayfield and worked in that rehab telling others about Jesus that you yourself didn't know Jesus? Are you telling me after all the tapes and books you have read because you appeared to be so hungry for God's Word, that you were dead spiritually? Are you going to tell me all that wasn't genuine?"

He answered, "I am ashamed to tell you, but I was doing all that so people could know how much I know about God. There has always been something in me, being raised Amish, about the things of God. I wanted to do good. I wanted to please God, but not because God would be glorified, but because Eli would be promoted."

Dear friends, there is something about the flesh that will seize religion as a means of expressing itself. That is exactly what Eli was saying. He was saying that he loved to learn because learning made him feel important. He could take what he learned and show someone else what he knew about God's Word. Eli went on to remind me of a passage that I quoted to you as recently as last Sunday evening. It is First Corinthians chapter eight and verse one, "Knowledge puffeth up, but charity (love) edifies all."

Eli is an example of a man, who, as far as I was concerned, was saved and on his way to heaven. But if he had died over two months ago, he would have split hell wide open, according to his own testimony. The reason is he never had entered the rest of Jesus Christ. How frightening to think that maybe some of you are were Eli was. That is why this writer begins this fourth chapter and says, "Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it."

Today, I ask you this one final question? Are you sure you have entered into rest? Does that mean if you answer yes that you have always felt at rest since coming to Christ? No. My question is this, have you ever rested in Christ and Christ alone? The next message will be how that rest can be disturbed. But although it may be disturbed, you never lose it permanently. I am asking you have you ever rested in Christ? Like sleeping at night and getting up refreshed versus sleeping all night and waking up tired. Has there been a ceasing of the inner turmoil and contentment has come? Contentment not in your religiosity, but in what He has done, and in Him personally? If you have, then you have entered into His rest and you are His. If you haven't, you are still searching and still wandering in a wilderness. Be afraid my dear friend. Be afraid, "Lest the promise being left of you and you not apprehend it, that is, come short of perfect rest." Amen.