

The Rest of God • Hebrews 4:9-11

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *Ignac Semmelweis*

1. In 1847, Dr. Semmelweis, was working in a hospital in Vienna, Austria
2. There was an epidemic of fever among women who had just given birth with many of their babies dying.
3. He noticed that many of the physicians who delivered these babies had just come from attending to someone else in the hospital who was ill with an infectious disease.
4. He reasoned that there might be some contamination on their hands that was being passed to these women and their newborns.
5. So he did a test and suggested the physicians wash their hands with a solution of chloride and lime prior to delivering the babies.
6. The incidence of fever dropped and the mortality rate of the infants improved dramatically.
7. Dr. Semmelweis and his supporters then embarked on a campaign to get all doctors to wash their hands prior to seeing a patient.
8. The reaction of the medical community was scorn and ridicule!
9. How dare this upstart suggest that something as simple as washing hands could improve the quality of treatment they – the learned men of science – gave their patients!
10. Why it was absurd!
11. Semmelweis went to his grave a broken man, his ideas unaccepted by his peers.
12. But today, we realize Semmelweis knew something others *could* not or *would* not see, to their own peril and at the cost of the suffering of hundreds of thousands.

B. *The Writer of Hebrews*

1. The writer of Hebrews was a first century Dr. Semmelweis.
2. Not that he tried to get people to wash their hands – but he knew something that was crucial and tried to awaken others to it.
3. He wrote about something incredibly important and urged his readers to listen to it with careful attention because to ignore it is perilous and leads to needless sorrow and suffering.

4. We find his urgent plea in chapter 4 . . .

II. TEXT

A. Vs. 9-11

9There remains therefore a rest for the people of God.

10For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God *did* from His.

11Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.

1. The writer speaks here about a “rest”
 - a. three times in three verses he mentions it.
 - b. in fact, it’s the subject of all of chapter 4.
2. In v. 9, he says there’s a rest for God’s people.
3. In v. 10 he describes what this rest is, then in v. 11 he urges his readers to press in to it.
4. So, we have to ask the big question – just *what* is he referring to?
 - a. what is the rest of God?
 - b. what is this thing that is so crucial, so critical it occupies an entire chapter and receives such fervent attention?
 - c. he seems to almost agonize over his readers response as he urges them to not come short of it!
 - d. WHAT IS THE REST OF GOD?
5. The rest of God is the place of abiding trust in God as God.
[Repeat]
6. Here’s how the author explains it . . .

B. The Example of Ancient Israel

1. God brought Israel out of slavery in Egypt.
2. He led them through the wilderness in a pillar of fire and smoke.
3. The entire way He provided for them with miracle bread and water.
4. When backed up against the Red Sea with their enemies pressing in behind them to wipe them out – He parted the Sea and rescued them.
5. a year and a half after the Exodus, they finally found themselves at a place called Kadesh Barnea, at the border of the Promised Land

- which was their destination.
6. It was there that the Israelites faced their moment of truth – Kadesh Barnea was that generation’s crucial moment.
 - a. for 18 months they had seen God’s faithfulness
 - b. on a daily basis they’d been confronted with His power and love
 - c. time and again they’d seen dramatic evidences of His presence among them to give them victory against overwhelming odds.
 - d. but now, as they stood at the very edge of the Promise, they balked!
 7. What was their failure at Kadesh Barnea? Unbelief!
 - a. they chose to NOT believe God would go with them to take possession of the Promise
 - b. when the spies reported that there were giants in the land who lived in fortified cities like Jericho –
 - c. they weighed their own military prowess against the challenge and figured they came up short
 - d. so they decided to avoid the conflict altogether.
 - e. what they failed to factor in to their calculations was God, who had made it abundantly clear to them time and again –
 - f. He would fight for them and help them to overcome all their adversaries.
 8. You know what happened –
 - a. they spent the next 38 years wandering around the Sinai peninsula until all the adults who had come out of Egypt died off – that whole generation of unbelief
 - b. it was their children who crossed over the Jordan River and entered in under the leadership of Joshua, Moses’ successor.
 9. So then, did *they* enter in? Was that God’s rest?
 10. The writer says “No.”
 - a. even this second generation who entered Canaan did not enter God’s rest.
 - b. why? because they never fully took possession of the land.
 - c. rather than defeating and dispossessing the Canaanites, they compromised with them and settled down among them.
 - d. this proved lethal as the infection of idolatry began to contaminate the people of God.
 - e. this eventually resulted in the Israelites being defeated in battle and carried away captive to foreign lands.

11. The writer speaks of this in v. 8 . . .

8For if Joshua had given them rest, then He would not afterward have spoken of another day.

12. In the end, Canaan, the Promise LAND was NOT the promised REST.

13. Why? Again, because of unbelief.

- a. instead of believing God and pressing forward to remove the presence of the Canaanites, they just became content to settle down with them.
- b. once again, unbelief barred the way and set the stage for endless strife and struggle

14. But here in v. 8, the writer reminds his readers that 500 years *after* the Exodus, when Jews were enjoying the height of their occupation of Israel, King David, who ushered in the nation's golden era, looked back at the failure of their forefathers at Kadesh Barnea and drew an urgent *lesson* from it

15. That lesson is found in Psalm 95 which the writer of Hebrews quotes again and again in chapters 3 & 4

16. David's point in Psalm 95 was this -

- a. God is calling His people in to a special place that has nothing to do with land
- b. it's a *spiritual* place, a posture and attitude of the heart that transcends what nation or city a person is standing in –
- c. and what circumstances or challenges might lie before him or her.
- d. It's the place of abiding trust in God as God –
- e. that He is who He says He is and will do what He has said He will do.

17. The Promised Land *would have been* the Promised Rest IF the people had taken God at His word and in simple abiding trust, entered in, dispossessed the Canaanites and laid hold of the land.

18. In fact, there were 2 of that original group from Egypt who *did* believe God and *wanted* to enter in at Kadesh Barnea.

- a. while 10 of the 12 spies that had been sent gave a negative report and discouraged the people with news about how fierce and overwhelming the obstacles were
- b. the other 2, Joshua and Caleb, were gung ho and ready to go in.

- c. they were dismayed and perplexed by the unbelief of the rest of the people!
- d. in their minds, God's command to enter was the iron-clad guarantee of His presence and power to give them victory.
- e. in their hearts, the land was already theirs; all they had to do was go in and take it!
- f. they alone of that entire generation survived to enter in.
- g. and you gotta' love Caleb . . .
 - 1) while Joshua became the leader of the nation,
 - 2) Caleb, one of his generals, asked for permission to go take the toughest location in Canaan – Hebron
 - 3) it was well known as the headquarters of the biggest and gnarliest giants
 - 4) the Canaanite fortress there was the most formidable
 - 5) but Caleb – 85 years old, said to Joshua – “Give me Hebron!”
 - 6) Joshua, probably with a twinkle in his eye as he remembered back some 40 years, said, “Go for it!”
 - 7) this was their chance to prove to the nation that they had been right 40 years before
 - 8) so in his senior years, Caleb attacked Hebron, defeated the giants, demolished their fortress and built himself a home.

C. V. 9

1. As the writer of Hebrews applies this to his readers, he says in v. 9 –

⁹There remains therefore a rest for the people of God.

2. The rest God has for His people isn't a piece of geography or merely 1 day a week.
3. There's another rest God intends His people to enjoy, 24-7.
4. That rest is described in v. 10 . . .

D. V. 10

¹⁰For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God *did* from His.

1. The rest of the believer is *modeled* on God's rest after the creation.

2. The believer has ceased from his works just as God ceased from His.
3. By “works,” the author means *self-effort*; our attempt to create self-righteousness.
4. It’s our labor to enter a place of acceptance before God built by our own strength and goodness.
5. In Genesis we read that God created the world in 6 days, then rested on the 7th – the Sabbath day.
 - a. does that mean that God became *inactive*;
 - b. that He labored like the dickens for 6 grueling days, then collapsed in exhaustion and remains motionless?
 - c. not at all! God is *still* active – intensely so.
 - d. but His activity now is fundamentally different from the work of creation.
 - e. God is no longer creating, rather He is maintaining the creation, governing it, overseeing it and steering it towards its great climax.
 - f. in other words – His activity today flows from His completed work; it’s part of His rest.
6. The rest of God, the rest He holds forth and promises to His people is similar.
7. It means to cease from our efforts at *creating* our own salvation, our own standing before God, and instead looking to Christ *alone* as the basis of our salvation.
 - a. it means to trust that when Jesus died on the cross, He paid for every single sin we ever *have* and ever *will* commit.
 - b. it means to believe that Jesus’ resurrection provides the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives to create a while new life within us.
 - c. the rest of God is living in that place where we look to and trust Christ completely – w/o hesitation or reservation.

E. Putting It All Together

1. Let’s put this all together now and see what this passage teaches us today . . .
2. Remember once more the situation this letter was dealing with.
3. Jewish Christians were being pressured to revert to the Judaism of their past.

4. The writer's whole argument was that the Gospel of Christ is *superior* to the Judaism it completes and fulfills.
5. He wants his readers to see themselves just like their ancestors at Kadesh Barnea some 1500 years before.
6. They are faced with the crucial choice of believing God and entering in to the Promise He holds out to them, *or* falling away through unbelief.
7. They could revert to Judaism and live a life based on their *own efforts at being right with God* – or- they could cling to the Gospel and put their trust in Christ and rest in His atoning sacrifice.
8. That is how we enter God's rest.
 - a. just as for the people of old –
 - b. rest comes when, and only when, we come to an abiding trust in God as God.
 - c. that He is all He says He is and will do all He has said He will do.
 - d. we can only know peace when we have ceased from our own efforts and cast ourselves completely and without reservation on Him.
9. Jesus once told the disciples that unless one enters the Kingdom of God *like a little child*, they cannot enter at all {Matt. 18:2}
 - a. what Jesus was speaking of was the unquestioning faith and trust of a small child
 - b. a little boy or girl trusts mom or dad w/o hesitation
 - 1) they take it for granted that they will be there
 - 2) that they will provide food and shelter and clothing
 - 3) a young child isn't sophisticated enough to realize that their parent may in fact not be trustworthy
 - 4) nature teaches a small child to depend on his or her parents for the very substance of life
 - c. that's the way God wants us to come to Him, and until we do, we will never know rest for we will always revert back to trusting and depending on ourselves.
10. Many years ago, I was working with one of my sons to teach him to swim.
 - a. he was just getting used to the water and so we played this game of him jumping to me from the side of the pool
 - b. I started right next to the edge, and he would jump into my

- arms, then I would swoosh him down in to the water up to his chest – this was all accompanied by a lot of laughter
- c. then I backed up a step, but I was still within reach of his arms and so he quickly jumped once more, and again we went down into the water
 - d. another step back – and this time there was a little bit longer pause before he jumped.
 - e. I stayed there for several dunkings and after that first one, he hesitated not at all but giggled and laughed and we had a ball.
 - f. then I took another step back, and again the initial hesitation, until I proved that when he jumped, I would always catch him.
 - g. with every step back, that first jump was not attended by his giggles – there was a certain amount of fear – until he was once more shown that I would catch him!
 - h. then the delight returned and he became even more thrilled as he realized he was jumping further and further – overcoming his fears and becoming more at home in the water.
 - i. but finally, there came a point at which he decided I was too far away.
 - j. I knew better – I could still easily catch him and bear him up out of the water – but he stopped looking at my ability and thought only of his own.
 - k. nothing had changed really – but he came to a place where his trust in me as a loving and caring father faltered –
 - l. and with the failure of his trust in me, so ended the joy of being in the pool.
11. My brothers and sisters in Christ, God has saved us and delivered us from bondage to sin
- a. He's led us and taught us about Himself and shown Himself to be utterly trustworthy
 - b. He's provided for us time and again – He's never, ever let us down.
 - c. He's always been there to catch us.
 - d. and yet, it seems we still struggle with this issue of trusting Him.

F. The Solution

1. Let me share with you the solution – **Die!**

2. That's right, you heard me – We need to *die*.
3. Jesus said it this way – “If anyone wants to come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me.”
 - a. by taking up the cross, he didn't mean putting on a necklace
 - b. a cross was used for one thing in that day – to die on
 - c. it was equivalent to a hangman's noose or an electric chair.
 - d. that would make an interesting piece of jewelry today wouldn't it; a noose, or a little electric chair hanging around your neck
4. Jesus was saying that the pre-requisite to following Him is to *die to self* and throw ones self completely on Him.
5. Paul put it this way in Galatians 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

- a. see what He is saying?
- b. Paul is saying that he's entered the place of rest the writer of Hebrews is talking about
- c. Paul as Paul himself is dead
- d. the life that he now experiences is Christ living through him because by faith he has *reckoned* himself dead and a new life energized by the Lord has taken over.
- e. how often did Paul *reckon* this – how often did he have to renew this personal apprehension of rest?
- f. daily! Just as Jesus said “If anyone wants to come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross *daily*, and follow me.”

G. The Struggle

1. Here's the struggle we all face:
2. When we first come to Christ, the Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin, we realize we are lost and that Jesus Christ is the remedy.
3. We hear the message that He died on the cross for our sins and rose again from the dead to give us new life and we respond in faith – we believe, and by God's good grace, we're saved!
4. Then we begin to grow in our walk and relationship with the Lord.
 - a. like the nation of Israel at the foot of Mt. Sinai, we learn about the nature and character of God

- b. we discover what His will is and the basic principles of the spiritual life.
- c. then, slowly but surely, that part of our minds that is yet un-renewed begins to resurface and push the old agenda *self*
- d. only this time it wears a clever and subtle mask of religion
- e. we start thinking things like –
 - 1) God would love me more if I just was more dedicated.
 - 2) God could use me more if I would only read and pray more.
- f. then it gets more dark, more negative and a little voice suggests –
 - 1) God is unhappy with you because you’re spiritually lazy.
 - 2) If you would just try harder, God would see your effort and at least He’d get off your case.
- 5. Friends, those are all lies – lies told by us by our flesh which wants desperately to reassert self-effort and a works-based relationship with God.
- 6. But there is no peace in that – no rest!
- 7. How could there be?
- 8. You see, if our standing, our relationship with God is based on what we do, on our works, how can we ever know we’ve done ENOUGH?
 - a. we can’t!
 - b. so there is never any peace, never one moment to rest because we always have to be on the treadmill working out our own salvation
- 9. But if our relationship with God is based solely and only on what He’s done, on what Christ did at the Cross – then we can have utter confidence because Jesus said – “It is finished!”

III. CONCLUSION

A. *Leaving Today*

1. Look at v. 11 . . .

11 Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.

2. Ancient Israel missed out because of unbelief – and a foolish

unbelief at that!

3. But really, if we miss out on the rest God desires for His people, we are even more foolish than they.
4. Sure they had the Exodus, the plagues, the Red Sea, manna, water, a pillar of fire to prove to them the power and presence of God.
5. But you and I have an even greater sign of God's power and presence – THE CROSS!
6. Friends – let us not come short of all Christ died to make possible for us.
7. As the author says here – let's be diligent, let's invest every ounce of energy we have to make sure we've entered into the place of abiding trust in God as God – Our GOD!