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Entering Into Rest

by T. Austin-Sparks

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Reading: Heb. 3:7-19; 4:1-7; Exodus 3:8.

"We who have believed do enter into rest." The apostle makes it perfectly clear that it is possible to fail to enter into God's rest, even after we have come to the Lord. His words, as we know, in this letter to the Hebrews, and similar words addressed to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians chapter 10, are addressed to believers. They are words to Christians. The apostle by them very strongly emphasised the peril of failing, after all, even although we are the Lord's people, to enter into rest.

In Exodus 3:8 the Lord is speaking to Moses before the exodus, and He brings the whole of His purpose together in a single statement, "I am come down... to bring them up out of that land (Egypt) unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey." There is no gap of forty years between the two halves of the statement to bring them out and to bring them in. God made no provision whatever for a generation to die in the wilderness. That was never in His plan. His thought was just one complete thought, to bring them out of Egypt and to bring them into the good land. Yet six hundred thousand came out of Egypt, and two of the six hundred thousand went into the land. Of that first nation, six hundred thousand strong, only two entered into the full purpose of God.

The apostle takes hold of that, and in effect, he says, "There may be a great many who come to the Lord, who become the Lord's people, but it may be that very few of them come into the Lord's full purpose for them, and that full purpose is represented by these words: enter into rest". That is God's full purpose for His people.

That is a very solemn thought, and a very impressive suggestion, that there may be a whole generation of men and women on this earth who are the Lord's people, and yet a mere handful of them know God's full purpose; for this is not a future purpose, it is a present purpose. We must not think of this entering into rest as related to our passing from this world to heaven. We must not think of it as something which belongs to a future time in the purpose of God, for the apostle says, "We who have believed do enter into rest". "There remains therefore a rest to the people of God." The rest is here, now. God has ceased from His works. He has finished His works, and it is God's rest, not ours, into which we are to enter. It is present. The comparison may be something like this: six hundred thousand calling the Lord their Lord, being related to the Lord, and two entering into God's full purpose. That is a tremendous difference.

It is not for us to judge among the Lord's people today, but we take what the Bible says. It may be like that. The same word was addressed to the Corinthians and to the Hebrew believers; it may be addressed to the people of God today. What God is saying is this: there is a rest for the people of God which is God's full thought, desire, and will for them; there is a full purpose of God for His people now, and yet multitudes who are the Lord's people may not be in His full purpose. That is simply what the Word says. Whether we are in it or not remains for us to know in our own hearts, but it is quite certain that this is the Word of the Lord to us and to all His own today.

During the forty years in the wilderness after the first part of God's statement was fulfilled, bringing them out, or having brought them out of Egypt, there was much religious activity. There were many acts of worship, there was the learning of spiritual lessons through failure and through suffering, there was a great deal of association with Divine things, but there was no real entering upon the purpose for which they had been chosen, and for which they had been brought out of Egypt. We must see that there is a big difference between coming out of Egypt, coming out of the world, coming out of the kingdom of Satan, and coming under the Kingship, the government of God; between much activity in a religious way, acts of worship, professions of devotion, learning lessons by failure and suffering, and our entering upon the real purpose for which we have been chosen, and for which the Lord has redeemed us.

Do we see the difference? Today multitudes of the Lord's people are in the "much activity", the acts of worship, the professed devotion, the learning of lessons through failure and suffering; but how many are really engaged in the Divine purpose for which they have been redeemed? You can see quite clearly the difference between the life of that generation in the wilderness, and the life of the next generation in the land. The one in the wilderness was simply going round in a circle, and it was shut up to the learning of these lessons by failure and suffering, shut up to the much activity in a religious way. The other in the land was a mighty, glorious going on in a full Divine purpose of establishing a Kingdom of Divine glory and government, the overthrowing of evil powers, the bringing into use for fruitful purposes of all the resources of the land, the being a people in full satisfaction, in full victory, as a glorious testimony to the Lord. You cannot look upon the wilderness life as anything like a glorious testimony to the Lord. Whenever you read the story of the wilderness in the Scriptures (and it is recounted many times) it is always a story marked by God's disappointment and man's disappointment. It is a tragic story. When you get to the land it is another story, a story of victory following victory, of glory following glory, of enrichment and wealth ever increasing, of fruitfulness and turning everything to account, so that it is all a testimony to the glory and faithfulness and goodness and fulness of the Lord Himself. That is God's purpose. It is a great business, a glorious business; whereas the wilderness is long-drawn-out dissatisfaction on every side, a story of weakness, defeat, failure and disappointment. Yet they are the Lord's people.

What does this mean? What does it mean to us, and to all the Lord's people? It means this: that before all else there must be spiritual position, as represented by the land. The first thing is our spiritual relation to Christ. It is not our salvation, it is not our devotion to the Lord, it is not our work for the Lord, but it is our rest in Christ. It is rest from spiritual as well as temporal anxiety, rest from all our efforts, rest from all our works. This "being in the land" - or, in the language of that which is its counterpart, this "being in Christ" - is not merely a kind of spiritual location. We must not think of this merely in the terms of geography. When we speak of position we must remember that this position is not just location, it is a condition, a spiritual state. It is a living, inward fellowship with a living Person. Let us emphasise each of those words. It is a *living inward fellowship* with a living Person.

You may come into a place, and it would be quite right for you to say, "I am in this place." That is your location, that is the position into which you have come, but that is not what is meant by entering into rest in Christ. You come into a location, and that is your position; it is quite true that you are there, but that place is not a living thing, all that is in that place is not living. You may come into a room, but the furniture of that room means nothing to you in the matter of spiritual illumination, life, power, ministry; you are simply in a place. Entering into Christ is a living inward fellowship with a living Person. Everything in Christ is living and active, not passive. It has meaning and value. Those meanings and those values are living, they operate, they are working things. Come there, and you find you have come into a realm where things are happening, things are moving, things are taking place; you come into a realm where changes are made in you. You have touched a whole realm of living realities.

The first essential to this is to see Christ by the Holy Spirit. It is necessary for God to reveal Christ to us, and in us, by His Holy Spirit, so that Christ according to God's mind, God's estimate of Him, God's value of Him, all that God sees Christ to be and to mean, God's view of Him is given to us by the Holy Spirit.

That may sound very simple and very ordinary, but if you for a moment remember what it has meant to those who have seen Him by revelation of the Holy Spirit, you will see that it is no simple and ordinary thing. There was a proposition which this world in all its forces could never have solved, that proposition, that problem, was Saul of Tarsus. Here is a man of tremendous natural driving force, a man who dominates every situation into which he comes, a man who will trample everything under his feet and make it serve him, and make himself its master. Here is a man who will allow no one who does not agree with him to occupy an equal place with him, he will crush them. Here is a man who is finally settled in his own convictions that he is right, and no one dare challenge those convictions; he will not believe that anybody who holds another view can be right. Here is a man in whom this is born, it is in his blood, and a great deal more than that makes Saul of Tarsus. No argument, suffering, imprisonment or force of man would have changed him. There is nothing that would have changed or broken Saul of Tarsus. He would have died, given up his life in the battle for his own position, nothing would have altered it. But he was changed, he was altered; all that self-strength was broken. He was changed from being the master, the despot, the dictator, to being the minister of Jesus Christ, the bondsman of Jesus Christ, the prisoner of the Lord, to serve and to pour himself out in humble, selfless service to the meanest and poorest of God's children. What a mighty change, which no power on earth could have brought about. What was it that did that? God revealed Jesus Christ in him. It was the revelation of Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit that did it. He saw Jesus from God's viewpoint.

Saul of Tarsus is but one of a great number who have seen the Lord and have been changed altogether. So we see that the first essential to entering into rest, into God's full purpose, is to see

Jesus by the Holy Spirit, and until we have seen Jesus by the Holy Spirit we cannot enter into rest, nor can we enter into God's full thought and purpose which lies behind our redemption.

That which goes alongside of that seeing, that revelation, is a faith stand in Christ, a deliberate and definite act by which we stand into Christ for all God's purpose, to see and to believe; but the belief or the faith is an active thing, in which we surrender and abandon ourselves to that One whom we have seen.

That is the need, and such a seeing of the Lord Himself must come sooner or later. With many it has been after years, it has been after a wilderness. It is not because the Lord did not will it earlier, but because of the persistent, strong assertion of the flesh, there has been no real surrender. There has been religious activity, professed devotion, acts of worship, many things in relation to the Lord, but no real inward brokenness, yieldedness, surrender to the Lord - still personal interests govern even our service, work, or devotion in some way or other - and so the revelation is delayed.

It can only come when we come to an end of ourselves, but when it comes, faith acts, and faith takes this position: From this time onward, from this moment for ever, Christ is my all; my life, my strength, my wisdom, my righteousness, my love, my joy, my rest, my meekness; Christ is everything for spirit, mind and body; Christ the energy of my brain, Christ the illumination of my heart, Christ the strength of my will, Christ the very life of my body. It is an utterness of Christ. Thus do we enter into rest, "*Not* I (even for God, even for service, ministry, or even devotion) *but* Christ". Christ the devotion to God in me, Christ the works of God in me and through me, Christ the purpose of God in view; all that ever is in me and through me comes out of Christ and is by way of faith in Christ. "That life", said Paul, "which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me."

That is the position, and that brings rest, that brings us into rest in Christ. It brings us into the place where God's purpose can really be entered upon, where the enemy is cast out, overcome, where the riches of Christ are known and turned to account, where the real testimony to the glory and fullness of God in Christ is established. That is the way.

Then comes the need for abiding in Christ, for it is not that we, having come into Christ and into rest in Christ, just automatically remain there. There is a need for abiding in Christ. The danger is that as we go on we may become occupied with the truth, or the truths, the doctrine or the teaching. We may become taken up with the ministry - and what a snare ministry is! There has got to be so much ministry fulfilled; we have so many meetings to take, and that means so many addresses or sermons to deliver, to prepare. There are all sorts of things related to the ministry, and we become taken up with the ministry, and the ministry becomes our main business, the business which occupies us. The work of the Lord may engross us. We have come into the truth, the ministry and the work. And then the truth, the ministry, the work of the Lord become the things with which we are occupied, and the danger is that we may cease to be occupied with the Lord Himself. It is the tragedy of thousands of servants of the Lord.

Some of us know a little about the workings of Christian service. We have been on the committees and boards of Missionary Societies, and one of the things which has been a cause of great distress to us was the shallow, superficial, poor spiritual life of the missionaries out on the mission field. And when we have enquired and have spoken to the missionaries when they have come home they have said, "We have no time for prayer, Bible study, or spiritual fellowship in the things of the Lord; the Lord's work takes all our time. We have so many meetings and classes, so many things to attend to in the work of the Lord that we have no time to be alone with the Lord. That is impossible." They

have lost their rest, their joy. It is a terrible thing when the Lord's work, as it is called, is so organised and developed, that the workers have no time to be alone with the Lord. That is a trick of the devil.

So you find these poor people breaking down spiritually, mentally, physically and morally, or becoming so poor spiritually that they really have not got sufficient of the Lord to satisfy their own hearts. They are dissatisfied and disappointed people, and they have nothing to give to others of Divine riches. That is not being in the Land, that is not the fulness of Christ. It is just possible for us to be so taken up, even with truth, with doctrine, with teaching, with ministry, with work, with the things of the Lord, that we lose the Lord Himself. Life is by abiding in Christ.

There is a tremendous need, an absolutely essential thing which is indispensable to every child of God, and that is a place of quietness and detachment in their lives for personal communion with the Lord. Everything ought to be made to bend, to yield to that. You and I ought to have in our lives a time and a place for leaving the work, the ministry, the people, the teaching, to be alone with the Lord. We must have it. It is necessary to have our time and our place in life alone with the Lord. The drive on us becomes so terrible that very often in our quiet times it is almost impossible to get away from our responsibility.

I used to attend conferences, and always did so with my congregation in view, to get my notebook full of things that I could take back to my own people. So all the while I had my responsibility with me, I had my congregation in view, my ministry, my work, I never got away from it. Every book I read, and every address I listened to, and everything in life was to pass on to others, for my work's sake, and my own heart was starved. I was not growing in a knowledge of the Lord Himself. That sort of thing is all wrong.

That is why we said at the beginning that the first thing is our spiritual relationship with the Lord. Everything else comes out of that. Do we want light? Do we want revelation? What do we want it for? Do we want it for ministry, for public purposes? Or do we want it that the Lord may be able to have His testimony in us as well as in others through us, that the Lord may be glorified? That kind of light and revelation comes out of our own heart fellowship with the Lord, out of a spiritual position, our personal communion with the Lord, our own enjoyment of the Lord. It must come out of our walk with the Lord, otherwise it is simply something that we are using. We might just as well go to a shop and get something to read to other people. It is not ours, it never came to us, it does not belong to us. All the light that others receive through us must come by our own walk with the Lord, out of our own spiritual lives. The same relates to everything else; our ministry, our service, our work for the Lord. It must not be some system of activity into which we have come. It must be proceeding from our walk with the Lord.

I read recently in a book on the life of a great servant of God, whose name would be known to many, of the big change that came. He was a very able, scholarly, trained man who, before ever he came into the fuller knowledge of Christ as His life and his all, was a man who had a great sphere of ministry. This is what he said: "Before I knew the fulness of Christ I had to preach two sermons at least every week, and those two sermons took me nearly the whole week to prepare, and just to finish them off I had to spend three hours on them. Now I am in endless ministries; ministries of the Word continually, sometimes many times in a day, and every day of the week. Now I am editing several papers, and writing most of the articles myself. Now I am ministering to the Lord's people in many ways, to the sick, and the suffering, and a great work which has developed rests, in a sense, upon my shoulders. But it is all a delight, it is all with such ease, there is no strain or burden. It is all in joy, and I have no difficulty; and the secret is I have come to discover Christ as my life for spirit, soul and body, Christ the very life of my brain to carry me on."

That is just what we are talking about. Everything must come out of our knowledge of the Lord, everything must come out of our walk with the Lord, but if we have entered into rest, if we have come into Christ as God's fulness, for us things will be different, much more can be done, and it will be done without the strain and burden, the care and the anxiety that work costs when it is done as out from ourselves. This glorious, full, blessed Christ, with all knowledge, strength, wisdom and grace is in us. We are in Him, but faith must hold fast to Him, must abide in Him, must take Him and draw upon Him every moment, and there must be no coming out to draw upon ourselves, to put forth our own energies of any kind, to assert ourselves in mind, heart, or will, spirit, soul or body. It must be Christ, and we must abide in Christ.