



“Lost?”

Hebrews 4

by Pastor Tim Dodson
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1 For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins. 2 He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness. 3 Because of this he is required as for the people, so also for himself, to offer sacrifices for sins. 4 And no man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was. 5 So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, but it was He who said to Him: "You are My Son, Today I have begotten You." 6 As He also says in another place: "You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek"; 7 who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, 8 though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. 9 And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, 10 called by God as High Priest "according to the order of Melchizedek," 11 of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. 12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. 13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. 14 But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

Emperor penguins, known as the heaviest and tallest of all penguins, in wild nature can only be found in Antarctica where they are used to dealing with an incredibly harsh environment, with windchills reaching -76°F. Therefore, people in Australia couldn't believe their eyes a couple of weeks ago when one such penguin found its way to a beach more than 2,000 miles from its icy home.

Surfer Aaron Fowler was among the first ones to spot the penguin that has since been nicknamed Gus. Aaron was certainly surprised when he first spotted the penguin. In the beginning, he thought it was just another seabird, but then Gus kept coming closer to the shore and it was clear he was way too big.

“This penguin was just like straight out of a documentary, it was perfect and was making all the penguin noises,” Aaron recalled of the remarkable moment. “It was kind of funny, like as he came out of the water he went to do a tummy slide, like I guess he’s used to on the ice, and he just did a kind of faceplant in the sand and shook all the sand off and looked a bit shocked. It wasn’t until we got home and we googled it that we realized this never happens,” he added.

When we were in chapter 3 of this letter, the writer was addressing the issue of “entering the rest” that was, *and is*, ordained for God's true children. Despite the argument and debate by churches, denominations and theologians, one cannot herein dispute that this event...this occurrence, is indeed a “secondary experience” in the Christian journey.

The book of Hebrews continually repeats this idea of a “rest,” *once again*...a seemingly secondary experience post-salvation. It is crucial that we have a handle on exactly what the author is saying. Because if we miss this understanding, we can either lose out on one of the great riches of God for His people, or we could slide off the doctrinal road out into the rough.

The account of Israel's exit from Egypt has a profound side illustration. For spiritually speaking, Egypt is a picture of the world and all of its subsequent trappings. God...in both Egypt and in our world, did all the heavy lifting in our rescue. Our part was to merely be obedient and actually get up and leave. One would think such would be simply a no brainer and effectively an automatic response to an incredible offer of freedom, but alas, *not so much*.

Chapter 3 focused on Israel's failure to trust God at the border of Canaan. As a result, an entire generation was condemned to wander the desert rather than enter the Promised Land. The point made in chapter 3 is that disobedience led to a loss of inheritance. It *was not* and *is not* about the loss of salvation—Israel was not sent back to Egypt! Rather, they missed out on the greater blessings...the awesome experiences that God wanted...*that He still wants*...to share with His kids. This principle is not unique to this passage or even to Hebrews. It is found elsewhere in the New Testament also, where **peace with God** leading to salvation (Romans 5:1) is not the same as **peace of God** which comes by obedience (Philippians 4:6–8). It is also seen in the promise of Christ to save all who come to Him in faith (John 6:39–40), even as He offers *greater rewards* to those who “hold fast” to their faith (Revelation 2:26–27).

The real problem for Israel at Canaan was a failure to obey God, due to fear. According to the writer of Hebrews, God only rested when He had completed His creative work (Hebrews 4:3–4). Israel only forfeited their rest in Canaan when they failed to complete the tasks given them by God (Hebrews 4:6). So, in a very literal sense, the “rest” offered by God is not about relaxation or leisure. It is about the rewards which come once we have “rested from”, or “completed” the works we are assigned (Hebrews 4:9–10). This means saved Christians ought to make every effort to obey God while we still can (Hebrews 4:11).

We have learned thus far that there exists a certain “experience” ...one described as a “rest” for the people of God, both in the days of Moses as well as now. As we touched upon last time we were together on this subject, there were—there ARE—those that have come “out of Egypt”, out of the world and out of bondage, *...representing their salvation* ...but have failed to “follow through” and move into a place of knowing, understanding, and experiencing God's outpouring. They fail to ever come to a place where their creative calling is within view. They never understand, *we might say*, just what they were saved for! Certainly, our redemption out of sin—its power, its guilt, and its penalty—brings glory to the Savior. There is no arguing that. But beyond that, is there some other reason for it all? Or is it all over the day we walk out of Egypt? So now what? Wait to die? Why then is such an event described as a “**new birth?**” Is our salvation experience the grand finale of our Christianity or a catalyst to move us forward to someplace else?

I can't imagine anyone today arguing contrary...Christian or not, that individually and corporately, humanity needs that rest. The world today is in turmoil. Indeed we have more stuff, more entertainment, more distractions, and more creature comforts than ever before in history and yet our rates of depression are skyrocketing and prescriptions for mood-altering drugs have increased 400% since the late '80's. A new study reports antidepressant prescriptions for young adults and teens increased by nearly 64% since 2020. Sadly,

those who count themselves Christians are generally right in the thick of things. Our sexual abuses, porn use, divorce rates, financial crisis and depression statistics, rival the world's. It's the "dirty little secret" that's really not so secret at all. Christians fighting other Christians...openly expressing their hatred. They gossip and lie against each other and refuse to seek peace with one another. We are most often as consumed and controlled by career, family relationships, and personal plans as those outside the family of God. We are as unwilling to exercise restraint in every area of our lives as those that have never professed Christ. We may indeed be born again...I cannot prove that one way or another *..though I would tend to have a strong opinion...* but for sure we need peace. We need this "rest."

Once again...when Israel was rescued out of Egypt, they really had no significant part in their rescue. There were no weekend classes on "avoiding the plagues" or pop quizzes on "Red Sea crossings without a boat". They just had to respond to what God was doing. God did everything at this point; they merely had to not get in his way.

This is essentially our redemption today. God has done all the work in our salvation and brought us the offer. We—and they—are really nothing more than bystanders in the act of redemption, the fans in the bleachers applauding the miraculous advance of the offensive line. We're the people cheering the parting of the Red Sea before them, like the crescendo of the epic scene in a Scorsese film. None of what occurred *to us* had anything to do *with us*, any more than it was the case with Israel coming out of Egypt. All of the mind-bending, miraculous stuff in salvation was done because God loves us. He wanted to...and it ultimately brought Him glory!

Ironically though, many of us quickly grew accustomed to God waiting upon us and giving us stuff for free. And we soon latched onto this as a philosophy of faith and made it a doctrinal life position and operational stance. We liked God giving us stuff and covering our back side, and now are so entrenched in the idea that it is "all God," that getting our hands dirty for God and kingdom is repulsive and any attempt to move us from our entrenched position is met with cries of "legalism." Yet today, *as verse 6 attests*, there is a place of being and living that "remains that some must enter it"...meaning this requires some action and movement on my part. **Those to whom it was first preached did not enter because of disobedience...**

Ultimately, the people came to the gate of the Promised Land, and for the first time in a long time they had to actually act in order to move on. No, this wasn't some cosmic "bait and switch." By now they would have understood that they had indeed been rescued, and they now had to decide whether they loved God for it, or whether they just appreciated the lift. Had the Word, *like it has for so many of us*, "failed to profit them?" Had they, *have we*, "fallen short" of the goal? Verse 4 reminds us that those who failed to act at this critical point in their lives would not "enter His rest" even though, as the verse says, His "works were finished from the foundation of the world." The price of redemption has been paid. Now we are able to hitch a ride out of Egypt, but gang: *where are we going?*

Furthermore, just as the Israelites so long ago, many of us too have come close enough to literally reach out and touch the goal, and yet we might as well have missed it by a mile. By then we too knew the facts. We knew what the Word instructed, and we knew the promises it made. And yet our faith was never actionable. We never believed enough to **move** according to it all. The "beatings" we endured in Egypt stopped, but we have never known the healing of our wounds that only can happen in the land of promise. The power of Satan has been broken in our lives, but without follow-through we have never known wholeness. We aren't bound anymore to a slave master, but we still don't know freedom and restoration. Like a surgery half completed, the cancer has been removed, but we are walking around with a large gaping wound because we never were sewn shut and thus never healed. And to further the analogy, now we are very susceptible to every spiritual infection that

happens by, and, as 2 Peter 2:20 tells it, "...after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning." Heb 12:13 reminds us to "make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed."

Many times, I have witnessed men and women apparently redeemed from a life of sin, that were ultimately taken out by their bitterness and anger, by spiritual infections, because they were never really healed to begin with. People who had been redeemed from various bondages and slaveries in Egypt, only to eventually fall victim to their own pride. Lost in their unwillingness to hear correction and direction as they stood at the shore of the River Jordan. These were people who had been forgiven for the most distasteful crimes and yet they never followed through to lock the door behind them, to bury that sin in the deepest ocean. So they lived out the rest of their lives out of Egypt, but still lost in the wilderness. Languishing in their lack of direction. Staggering in the mundane repetitions of life in this world.

Jesus too tried to paint the picture in Mark 2:21, saying, "*No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; or else the new piece pulls away from the old, and the tear is made worse.*" Instead of getting a whole new coat, there was a feeble and misguided attempt to patch up the old one with a little Jesus. But in the end, the scripture tells us that the "tear is made worse." You might be saying, "Ya, but I still have my coat, man!" And I answer you by saying, "Yes. Yes, you do. And that's my point. You still have your old coat." The "old man" who is supposed to be dead is, in fact, still very much alive in you.

Our passage entreats us to "*be diligent to be sure to enter that rest.*" **Diligent.** Everyone who has ever fallen victim to this predicament and woken up to their state will look back over their shoulder and will acknowledge that it was here that they failed...it was at this point that they stumbled. They failed to be "diligent." As the old saying goes, "You can't start the next chapter of your life if you keep re-reading the last one." Diligent is an everyday action. It continues on constantly.

Some time ago, I spoke about the spiritual "Peter Pan Syndrome", a spiritual ailment that inflicts those who fail to move on, fail to grow up, fail to actually leave their old life. It's a messy situation, with all sorts of shameful attributes. How many of us are still spiritually living in our parents' basement because we can't seem to grow up? Still living for self. Still lazy. Still offering up excuses for being caught with our hand in the cookie jar. Still throwing tantrums. Still playing with the things of the world. Still clinging to the "glory days" of our youth before we were rescued from Egypt.

Our text tells us that even **God** rested. Really? I mean it's not like God gets tired. He's not up there "walking it off." So what's that all about? God finished what He was doing with creation and He moved on. Even God came to a point where He said, "There, that's enough of that. Let's move on." There came a time where He desired to plug it in and see it all work.

Many of us came out of Egypt but tried to bring everything with us. We loaded up the truck with all of our possessions and attempted to tote it along. **We wanted our stuff; we just wanted a different setting to live it out.** A warmer climate. A bigger house. And that is not Christianity, gang. We don't just add Jesus to the life we had in Egypt. Moses didn't go there to try to make their life a "little easier." He didn't just bring the Promised Land to them. They were undeniably in bondage! They had to move. They had to walk away from it all and go to another place that God had for them. But so very many of them "hardened their hearts" (vs 7). Nothing that could be said was going to find root and survive because they were no longer listening. Very little can be done for such a person at that point short of just praying for them. Because now people try to talk to you and you bite

back. You engage the things of the world with priority over the Bride of Christ. You have grown bloated in the luxury of Egypt. You're dying, man, ... you just don't know it yet.

Why? Why all of this? I mean, why wouldn't the children of Israel want what was being offered, enough to cross over? One reason was because they rightfully knew there was going to be work and there were going to be battles. That no doubt sounded like a real hassle, especially time-consuming, kinda scary, and they simply didn't believe all the promises that God had made. They didn't believe it would all work out the way God promised. And many of you think the same way today: "*Sounds risky. Sounds expensive. I could lose a lot.*" Yes, you could. Yes, **you will**. And that's the point! It's the "giving up of all the old stuff for new and better stuff."

*"...Hmmm... I would have to get up off this couch and engage the enemy. Sounds like there could be sweating involved. I would have to give up the comfort and safety I have built around me and start taking risks. I would have to surrender a lot of my plans and wants in this life for an unknown destination. I would have to allow myself to be led. No... I know where I'm going, and it's **this** way. No, wait a minute...it's **THIS** way."*

And you're off to spend a lifetime going around in circles in the desert. You're off to a beach 2000 miles from your destination taking a faceplant in the sand and wondering where the heck you are..."

It's interesting that in that story, there is absolutely no record of any one of them, not one out of tens of thousands, that one morning woke up and said, "*That's it. No more. I don't care about the cost or the risk. I'm going over.*" Why? Because the fact is we will do just about anything to achieve what we believe to be safety. We will live a complete life of gray and never take any kind of risk as long as we can think we are safe. But the irony is...and if you are truly born again you know this, **you never are**. Death came and had no problem finding every one of them in the wilderness. No one stayed safe. No one dodged the bullet. They all still died, but now they died bored and empty.

You see, God's Word was not mixed with faith by those who heard it. I mean, they knew what God had said, what He had promised. And likely it wasn't that they didn't believe God could do it; they had already seen His hand played out. It was probably because they didn't believe **they** could do it. After all, there were "giants in the land." There were "walled cities." How in the world were they going to take these guys? But you see, they missed the point. **THEY** weren't going to take those guys; **GOD WAS**. Faith isn't about what you can do. It's about trusting Him to do what He does! It's about what **HE** can do in them and through them.

"Let us hold fast to our confession..." I wish sometimes that I had a tape recorder to memorialize the things I have heard from the mouths of people over my years as pastor here. The praise of God and the testimony to His personal grace and love. And yet still, ...some how and some where... so many eventually sat it all down. All of it now just cluttering the shores of the River Jordan. All the praises, the promises, and the tears of joy.

The writer began this chapter with a warning: "*Let us fear that any of us have come short*" of the goal. That's pretty extreme language, isn't it? Fear. Let us **fear**. Indeed. For the possibility of this occurring in our lives should make us cringe in fear because the cost is eternal.

Ga 5:7 "*You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?*"

Chapter 4 of Hebrews speaks of a guy named Joshua. The one who eventually led Israel into Canaan. According to Hebrews chapter 4, God gives those who obey Him everything needed to accomplish their assigned tasks. Joshua obeyed God and found Christ was on his side—literally (Joshua 5:13–15). Unlike those who fell into disbelief, Joshua exemplified the ultimate results of confident faith.

Penguins are naturally found in Antarctica where they are used to dealing with incredibly harsh environments, with windchills reaching -76°F . This is the sweet spot for them, *because their penguins*. We can be found naturally living in God's promised land...where we are used to dealing with incredibly harsh environments of giants, walled cities and attacks from our enemies. This is **our** sweet spot. Because we are children of the king...