

Using the word picture of the Israelites who wandered in the wilderness circling the same mountain until they died, last week we spent some intense time studying the implications of choosing to live in the wilderness of the “religion” of Christianity. As we discovered, life in the wilderness is often not all that bad. God leads you, provides for you, and defends you; and you even get to serve Him and sacrifice for Him, and so on. And for the vast majority of people this is the life that they choose. However, there are a couple of big problems with this choice. First of all, that life is founded on unbelief and rebellion. Second, God actually makes Himself an enemy to all those who do not believe; for without faith it is impossible to please God.

Sure they are His sons and daughters and He does all His God “stuff” on their behalf; but, His mercy notwithstanding, He vows that they will never enter into His rest—never! They will always be wandering the mountain wondering why the promises of peace, rest, joy, and God’s agape love are never realized in their life.

Sure, they get to experience God as God, but practically they don’t know Him as their Dad. They get to experience Jesus’ mercy, provision, and forgiveness, but they never get to know the person of Jesus Christ and experience Jesus in a very personal, intimate and tangible way. They never get to truly share in Him or partner with Him in the things of this life.

The sad reality is that far too many believers have chosen to spend their life in unbelief and just wander in the wilderness. They have become content in this life—complacent even. They live their life struggling to make it through the drama of this world and they never really get it that they don’t belong here. They never really understand that they are spiritual beings who have been sent into the

world by God to live as His supernatural ambassadors. However, in the desert of unbelief it is impossible to disconnect from this physical world and so they are constantly tossed to and fro by the daily churn.

That is why in our passage last week, the Lord said: "Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts," and then He repeated Himself; which just means that He is deadly serious. He means what He says. And this is a strong admonition to you and me; an admonition which gives us a clear understanding of how God works. He never forces us to follow Him. He never forces us to believe. But He is always faithful to His Word and He will honor our individual choice to live by fear instead of by faith. He will always let us make that choice but He pleads with us to choose Him.

***Hebrews 4:1-3***

Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened. For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said, "As I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest,'" although his works were finished from the foundation of the world.

The good news is that the story of the Israelites wandering in the wilderness is being used as a word picture (a potent one for sure) but it is not a perfect parallel to our lives. Even though you may have spent far too much time wandering in the wilderness the promise of entering into His rest still stands. You are here tonight

because God wants you to know that it is possible to experience Him in a very real and tangible way. He wants you to have the same experience of intimacy and rest that David did, which we find expressed so beautifully in the 63<sup>rd</sup> Psalm:

“My soul thirsts for you; my whole body longs for you.” “Your unfailing love is better than life itself.” “You satisfy me more than the richest feast.” “I lie awake thinking of you, meditating on you through the night. Because you are my helper, I sing for joy in the shadow of your wings. I cling to you; your strong right hand holds me securely.”

And what always makes me marvel is the fact that David penned those words when his life was a mess. He was being hunted by Saul and living in caves. Yet, none of that mattered. He knew His God, He loved His God, and He experienced His God even when he was not getting, in the physical, what he wanted. That is what the Spirit wants for you and me.

The Spirit tells us that we should fear—literally fear—over the possibility that some of you (or even one of you) might **not** experience God in this way. For those of us who do believe and have entered the Promised Land, we should be deeply concerned for those who are afraid of entering the Promised Land because of what they will have to face in their lives. We should therefore be covering them with prayer, asking the Lord to have mercy over their lives, and daily exhorting them to believe—helping them know why they can trust themselves to God.

In the Greek, this phrase “failed to have reached it” is in the perfect tense which means that this failure that the Spirit talks about is a fruit of a prior choice.

In this case, a choice a person makes to not believe who Jesus is to them and who they are to Him; a choice which continually impacts their ability to share in Jesus and experience Him as a person. Therefore, if you do not live by faith and trust yourself to Jesus in the deepest recesses of your soul, then your failure is inevitable no matter how hard you white knuckle your Christian experience and try to do Christianity right.

Like the Israelites, the good news has been preached to us. Now, I am not just talking about the promise of Heaven and our forgiveness of sins; I am talking about our complete salvation. Salvation from who we are in the flesh, salvation from the generational sin which has been passed down to every one of us, salvation from the wounds and the damage that has occurred in our lives, salvation from the dysfunctional coping mechanisms that we have learned, salvation from our old habits and addictions, salvation from religion and its unrelenting demands, salvation from the power and domination of the spirits of darkness who rule the domain of men, and salvation from our old sinful nature and the selfishness that has ruled and controlled our lives.

But like the Israelites who had every reason of practical proof to trust that God was going to give them the Promised Land and yet chose to live in unbelief, this good news for the most part has been ignored by the majority of Christians. We have the proof. We have experienced the cleansing of our souls as a result of the forgiveness of our sins and we have experienced the invasion of the Holy Spirit into our lives; but the message of our great salvation, for most people, has not been united with faith. As such, too many of the amazing truths in the Bible have largely become spiritual rhetoric and are not the very substance of our lives and the conviction of our souls.

In the Greek the word we have translated “united” derives from the idea of how the body mixes the intake of food with the necessary digestive juices in order for the body to be able to absorb the nutrients and thereby be a benefit to the body. With this definition there is also an implication that if the body does not function in the way it is supposed to function, a person will not digest their food appropriately and will end up sick and maybe even dead.

So the idea here is that the Logos or the Word that was preached to them was not mixed with faith—it was not mixed with their willingness to bet their lives on that Word. Therefore, it was simply unable to benefit them and worse than that it made it impossible for them to enter God’s rest which is why they just wandered in the wilderness until they died.

Understanding this helped me make sense of why the word “united” is in the perfect passive tense. Remember our study from last week. With the exception of Joshua and Caleb, the Israelites never knew God in any personalized sort of way. He was God but He was not “*their*” God. Does that make sense to you? You see, unbelief was their way of life. Their unbelief was not just a one time in the moment fearful decision while they were looking out over the Jordan River at the huge walls of Jericho; rather, unbelief defined their relationship with God and defined how they dealt with God in the deepest recesses of their soul.

It seems that despite all that He had done for them and all that He had communicated, they never trusted that He was their Father, their Dad, or their lover. For some bizarre reason they were always expecting Him to just let them starve to death, let them die of thirst, and let their enemies conquer them. They honestly seemed to believe that God orchestrated one of the most incredible

deliverances of all time (their escape from Egypt) just to mock them and shame them before all the other nations.

I know that many of us feel the same way when we look at what is happening in our lives and see things through the eyes of the physical and not through our spiritual eyes. And, we act pretty much the same way as the Israelites. We literally believe that God toys with us and mocks us just to see if we will do it right. Sure, like the Israelites the reasons for our complaints are somewhat understandable. After all, they were thirsty and there was no water in sight; “hello,” they were living in the desert. Personally, I know what that feeling is like; but I also know that those feelings are not founded on truth but on wrong belief and unbelief. Those complaints never take into account the fact that God knows all things and as already made provision for their needs (and often times even for their wants).

After all, look at the amazing word that was preached to them in ***Deuteronomy 1:20-21***: "I said to you, 'You have come to the hill country of the Amorites which the Lord our God is about to give us. 'See, the Lord your God has placed the land before you; go up, take possession, as the Lord, the God of your fathers, has spoken to you. Do not fear or be dismayed.'

The land was theirs for the taking and God fully intended to give it to them. Still, this word turned poisonous in their souls because they did not have the faith to digest it into their being. Their unbelief damaged their digestive processes, so to speak, and the word just lingered and lingered and was never able to benefit them.

This same thing happens to us. This great salvation that has been preached to us is mind-numbing. We have been delivered from the fear of death. God has

helped us even though He never helped the fallen angels. He has taken away our sin and He has lifted us up in glory and honor far above the rest of God's creation. He has promised us His rest and victory over all the enemies that lie within our Promised Land; yet, in far too many believers this good word lingers in unbelief and therefore provides no benefit. In fact, it has the opposite effect and seems to poison their souls and bring further discontent as people actually expect God to just work His magic, make all things better, and bring them His peace regardless of what they do. But as we have learned God requires mutuality in His relationships; He will do His part if only we believe.

I love the way it says that we who have believed enter that rest. In the same way He swore in His wrath that those who do not live by faith will not enter into His rest, He also guarantees that those who are willing to live by faith will experience His rest. It is a guarantee backed by the authority of His name. Sure it is a process to conquer the Promised Land and vanquish all the enemies, but He promises to go before us and He says that He will give us the Land—it is ours!

So those who choose to believe in God and chose to live in this great salvation, those who chose to cross over the Jordan River (which we will explain soon enough), get to know His rest although (or nevertheless) His works were finished from the foundation of the world.

Now that is a strange comment, don't you think? I stared at this for a long time trying to understand why the Spirit included this statement right at this spot in the discourse. The best I can conclude is that this is one of those places where we find that man's choice (which is made real time by each individual) and God's work of pre-destination intersect.

This phrase “His works were finished” carries with it the idea that the Spirit is addressing all of God’s works, not just the works of creation. So, all His children have been invited to venture into the Promised Land and come into His rest. But, as it says in **4:6**, it remains for some to enter it. In other words, those who were chosen by God prior to the time that the Lord finished His work and rested are those who on their own volition choose to not live in unbelief. Both are true.

***Hebrews 4:4-10***

For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: “And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.” And again in this passage he said “They shall [not] enter my rest.” Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, again he appoints a certain day, “Today,” saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.” For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.

The “somewhere” that is referenced is found in **Genesis 2:2** and refers to the creation story. As we know, God took 6-days to create all things and to finish all His work and on the 7<sup>th</sup> day He rested from His labors; He literally ceased from the exertion of His might and took a Sabbath rest. Experiencing this form of “rest” is the carrot that is hanging out in front of our lives. According to this passage, there



are actually two experiences of rest available to those who, by faith, believe and enter into and possess their Promised Land. The Lord wants us to both rest from our labors and enjoy our Sabbath.

Verse **8**, “if Joshua had given them rest,” refers to a cessation of striving and labor which implies that our bodies can literally be at rest and we can experience the blessedness of peace. The word used for rest is “*katapauo*.” Then in Verse **9**, “there remains a Sabbath rest,” refers to a spiritual rest of the soul where both the body and the soul are united in this peace. The word used is “*sabbatismos*”

So the Spirit speaks of our ability to enter into the same kind of rest that God did when He rested from His works. This is a powerful, powerful promise and the imagery used is beyond anything that this world has to offer. God’s rest can be our rest and oh how sublime and magnificent that rest must be. This promise of rest can be realized in the heart of every child of God who is willing to believe. By this I mean that it will be the experience of those who refuse to let their circumstances and their emotions determine their reality and instead choose to let what they know to be true about Jesus and who they are to Jesus form their reality.

Now it is sad reality that there are those who will never experience this rest. There are some believers whose hearts are evil and unbelieving and are always turning away from the living God (**3:12**). However, since the pathway to His rest **remains** open, the Spirit tells us: “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.” The “today” of 3,000 years ago when David wrote is our today. The promise that David referenced is for you and me. It does not matter if you have so far been unwilling to take Him at His word; **today** you can repent and be willing.

***Hebrews 4:11-13***

Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Praise Jesus! We do not have to walk the path of those who lived during the Exodus where all but 2 failed to enter into the Promised Land. Today, the Spirit is pleading with us to believe Him, to believe what God has said about us, to believe who we are in Him, and to choose to live according to those truths—literally to make all our decisions as though God’s truth is “our truth.” This phrase “let us strive” can also be translated, “let us be expedient or diligent to enter that rest.” The Spirit does not want anyone to fall into the same sort of disobedience of unbelief. We must be diligent to know as much as we can about God so we can know why we can believe and why it is safe to trust Him.

I always thought that it was weird the way **4:12**, which is so epic, shows up in the middle of this discourse on our entering the Lord’s rest. For the longest time I did not understand why it was placed right there. Besides, this verse is often quoted and used independent of its context so I assume others have also been a bit confused. But now that I better understand the metaphors in Chapters 3 and 4

and have gained somewhat of a handle on what it practically means for us to enter into and take possession of the Land, this epic verse makes perfect sense.

Let's go back to our discussion about the corridor of our soul because that is where this verse comes alive. If you remember the diagram [chart 1], every closed door represents a different area in your life where Jesus does not have possession of the land and where He is not free to go in and have fellowship with you. It is a place in your life where you do not believe that He will be for you who He says He will be and so you keep Him out of that room and instead depend upon yourself to be your own little "g" god. It is kind of a **Revelation 3:14-22** experience.

Now, behind each door are the enemies that live in the land. Depending upon the reasons why we felt the need to shut the door (depending on the extent of the damage and the depth of the wounds from people in our lives that were the "cause" behind our choosing to not trust ourselves to God), those enemies may be giants who live in huge fortified cities or they may be slightly armed inhabitants living in open villages. But either way, they are squatters in the Land that rightfully belongs to Jesus; and He wants them to go.

So let me get away from this metaphor and get down to brass tactics. Because of the wounds which we have occurred in our life at the hands of other people and at the hands of the world's system, we have developed all these reasons why we are not willing to trust ourselves fully to Jesus. And somewhere in the back of our mind (which for most of us here has now worked its way up to the front of our minds), we are angry at God for allowing the damage and the pain into our lives. We feel that if He was not dependable enough to protect us from harm in the past then there is no reason why we should trust Him now.

And this is all the doubt that the enemy needs. The enemy preys on our pain and he fills our mind with all sorts of reasons why we cannot trust God and should instead trust ourselves. As a result, we begin to prioritize the voice of the enemy in our life over the voice of the Lord and our hearts become hardened by the deceitfulness of sin—by the lies that tell us that God cannot be trusted.

This is why Paul says in ***Ephesians 6:12-13*** that our battle is not against flesh and blood (in other words, it is not against the people who have damaged and hurt us), but it is against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. People can hurt us for sure, but the enemy's lies can bury us and be the reason why we spend years and years wandering around in the wilderness of unbelief. The point I am trying to make is that our true battle in terms of spiritual health and victory is not against the people in our lives, but it is against the forces of wickedness that were the voice of inspiration behind the people who caused us such great pain.

In addition, Paul says in ***2 Corinthians 10:3-6***: "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ."

What I find fascinating about this verse is that it gives us insight both into the manner in which we are to fight and what it is we are too fight. First of all, with regard to the manner in which we fight, the Bible speaks about only one offensive weapon that we are to use in our battle against the dark forces. According to

***Ephesians 6:17*** this weapon is the Word of God. And with regard to the actual fight, we are to use the Word of God not to fight the demons but to fight their lies. Armed with the Word of God we are able to destroy fortresses of wrong belief and every lofty thought that raises itself up against the true knowledge of Jesus Christ. In other words, we are to use the Word to fight against every thought that says that Jesus cannot be trusted and must not be trusted.

The Word of God exposes the lie and frees us from the power and control of the enemy so we can take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. You see, no matter how much damage we have incurred, no matter how many lies we have allowed ourselves to believe, no matter how much power the strong man that lives in our rooms possesses, the Word of God can bring us victory. We can take each area of of wrong belief and every thought of unbelief and hold those thoughts captives while we compare them to the truth of who God is and who we are to God. Then by the power of the Spirit of God we can choose to let the Word of God be the ultimate authority in our lives and thereby vanquish the lies.

The Word is so powerful that even when we don't want it to work it still does its thing; it is living and active! Those of you who have been sitting through these teachings know what I mean. Having been exposed to the living Word you have felt it start to do its work and you have felt it press on those rooms in your heart where Jesus wants to dwell. And once it starts its work it does not leave you alone but it constantly bothers you and reminds you that you are listening to lies and are not trusting Jesus. Each of you knows far too well what I am talking about.

I love the description of how it works. The Word actually pierces to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow. This means that it is so precise that it is

able to expose all the lies and each area of wrong belief in our lives. Nothing is hidden from its sight. It does not matter whether the wrong belief derives from a legitimate wound, from a lie spoken by the enemy, or just from our own arrogant musings about life and spirituality, it cuts through it all and reveals the true intentions within our heart.

The Word of God goes down into the area of our deepest pain and deepest longings and shows us why we can trust ourselves to Jesus, why He is safe, and why we are really bad at playing the role of god. The Word shows us all the places where we have not **considered** Jesus—all those places where we feign our allegiance to Him but really we just want Him to do what we want Him to do. The Word even reveals all those hidden corners of selfishness and stubbornness within our soul that demands that He perform for us or else we will take our ball and go home to play by ourselves.

The Word reveals all things and while it can make the finest dissections in our thoughts, attitudes, and beliefs, if necessary, it can also be extremely violent as by its power it creates all manner of separation. The **power** of the Word of God is beyond amazing and to me that is quite comforting. Especially when I consider the fact that some of my doors have been closed for so long and I have habitually protected myself for years upon years that I may not even be in touch with what I feel must less understand the doubt and unbelief that churns deep within my soul. I need that devastating power; I need God to tear away and separate what is from the Spirit and what is from my own soul as I am too deceived to know the difference.

I am thankful no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account. He knows it all; He sees it all; and He is willing to help us see it so we can choose to abandon our wrong belief and unbelief and trust ourselves to Jesus despite what is happening in our life and despite all the things that we don't understand.

With that said, let's get back to this notion of God's rest. We cannot rest as long as enemies possess the land. We may get moments of rest here or there, but not the kind of rest that God talks about. Therefore, God wants us to turn to Him. If we ask He will reveal to us all the rooms in our soul where the doors are closed as He wants us to choose to open those doors and let the **Word of God** into those dark places to do its powerful and amazing work. But, remember, He wants in but He will not force Himself.

If we let the **Word** in, He will show us the truth about who He is and who we are to Him. He will show us why He allowed us to be hurt and why it was a great act of love. He will teach us to trust Him in our today even though we do not like what He is taking us through. I can see some of you squirming. I know that you cannot even fathom how the hurt that was inflicted upon you could have been an act of love. But that's ok. He will show you.

And once you are armed with that truth, He will want you to use it to completely decimate and destroy all the enemies in those rooms. Everything must be committed to the ban, so to speak, and be eliminated. In the same way that Joshua's army was instructed to kill every man, woman and child who did not belong in the land, you must do the same. It will be your sacrifice—your freewill offering to God. Letting the Word of God have authority over the lies you have

believed will be the way that you cleanse your rooms and make them ready for Jesus to dwell.

God wants every lie to which we have listened to be exposed to the truth. He wants every deception to be revealed. He wants every dark secret corner of wrong belief and unbelief to come to the forefront of our minds so we can choose to believe the truth and expel the enemies from our land. For with every room in which we believe the truth about God we **will** experience His rest. And this is not just another metaphor. We will literally find rest in our bones and it will be experienced in our physical bodies. Just look at a parallel passage in Proverbs 3.

***Proverbs 3:5-8***

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your body and refreshment to your bones.

If you choose to trust in the Lord with all your heart, if you choose to stop relying on your own understanding, if you let the Word of God do its work of dissection within your soul, He will not only bring healing to each and every wound but He will bring refreshment to your body. You will physically know the rest of God; for His rest will be your rest.

And, eventually, the battles with the enemies will be won and your rooms will be filled with the Spirit of God His holiness will overtake you and your Sabbath will



be complete. Yes, there is a wonderful place of rest that is available to each and every believer who chooses to let God be their God. Peace and rest will be a certain and pleasing fruit of your being filled with the Spirit of God.

In closing, I want to get back this idea of crossing the Jordan River and entering the Promised Land as it ties into that passage in **Proverbs 3**. I believe that crossing the Jordan River is a metaphor for fearing the Lord. Crossing the Jordan is that time when you decide that since only God is good and all else is evil that you must have God in every part of your life. **Proverbs 8:13** says that the fear of the Lord is to hate all evil. Thus, crossing over is when you decide that you hate all those areas in your heart that do not belong to God, that you hate all those areas that are rooted in unbelief, that you hate those enemies who possess the land, and that you hate all the lies that they have told you about God and about yourself ever since you were just a baby.

I want to encourage you all cross over. It is where true friendship with God is experienced. In fact, **friendship** with the Lord is reserved for those who fear Him and with them He will share the secrets of His covenant (**Psalm 25:14**). The fear of the Lord is the pathway to knowing Jesus as a **person** and experiencing not just His rest but all of His other marvelous promises as well.

Keep in mind that the Lord gave the Israelites land they had not worked for, cities they did not build, and vineyards and olive groves for food that they did not plant (**Joshua 24:13**). In fact, every promise of the Lord came true, not a single one had failed (**Joshua 23:14**). He will do the same for you.

Our God can be trusted because He always does what He says. Sure His will may be different than our will but that is the essence of letting God be God and

trusting that in His love He does what He knows is best for our lives. We simply do not know those things. We are definitely arrogant enough to think we know what is best; but, remember, unless we are completely surrendered to God, our hearts have been hardened by the deceitfulness of sin and always lead us astray.

It's time to set aside our arrogance, it's time to give up our unbelief, and it's time to choose to let the Word of God have its rightful place in our lives. It's time to believe that He is a good God and that we are not. It's time to trust in His love. Today if you hear his voice do not harden your hearts.

Let's Pray