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## The Rest and the Courage of Faith

*by T. Austin-Sparks*

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Reading: Heb 4:9, 3:19; Joshua 14:6-14.

I am sure it will sound to many of you like going a long way back and going out into a very broad realm when I say that we Christians are being constantly confronted with and challenged by our Christianity. Many of us have not really entered into Christianity yet. What do I mean?

Well, for one thing, the very door into true Christianity is the door of rest, the rest of faith. The very simple way in which the Lord put it in His appeal was - "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). That was to a multitude, and those words are usually employed in Gospel messages to the unsaved. The meaning of the Lord in using those words is given to us here in the letter to the Hebrews, a very much deeper and fuller meaning than is generally recognised in the usage of the simple invitation "Come unto Me and I will give you rest". There is something that we have to hear, to detect, in the statement - "There remaineth therefore a sabbath rest for the people of God".

### **A Present Entering Into Rest**

If you look at the context, the meaning is something into which the people of God had not entered. "They were not able to enter in because of unbelief" (Heb. 3:19). They could not enter in. Who were they? - the people of God. It is still the people of God for whom the rest remaineth. Do not let us put

that into the future, that is not the meaning at all; that afterward, when we get Home to glory, then we will arrive at the Sabbath day rest, we will enter into rest. It is not something for the tombstone - he or she entered into rest. It is something which remains now as a present thing for the people of God, not in death, but in life. The rest remaineth.

You will not think me too elementary, for you know in your heart, as well as I do in mine, that this matter of heart rest, the rest of faith, is a live question continually, it is coming up all the time. One of the things which is lacking in so many of us is this rest, or, to put it the other way, the things which characterise us so much are fret, anxiety, uncertainty, and all those things which are just the opposite of calm assurance, quiet confidence, the spirit and attitude and atmosphere which says all the time, Don't worry, don't fret, it is all right. One thing our great enemy is always trying to do is to disturb that, destroy that, rob us of that, churn us up, fret us, drive us, harass us, anything to rob us of our rest or to prevent us from entering into rest.

It is the rest *of faith*, not just the rest of passivity, indifference, carelessness. There is all the difference between carelessness and carefreeness. There remaineth, there is still to be had, there still obtains, there still exists, there is still preserved a rest for the people of God - *for the people of God*. We have no right to go to the unsaved and bid them come to Christ and find rest until and unless we ourselves know that rest. Our testimony and our ministry is jeopardised; weakened, limited and discredited if we are not ourselves in rest; and this is the object of the enemy's activity in this matter - to discredit us by taking from us that very birthright of our union with Him Who is never perturbed, never anxious, never in doubt as to the issue, the One Who reigns. You see, rest is the practical outworking of our belief that He is Lord, and the very Lordship of Christ is struck at by the unrest of the people of God.

The rest of faith must be our position; not only in the great matter of justification, though if it is not settled here, it will not be settled anywhere. Oh, the enemy is striking at that, even with the people of God; he is ever seeking to undercut that; in some way to raise again the question of justification, of being just with God in our standing, in our acceptance - not yet fully and finally in our state, only in Christ; that is, not as finally perfect in ourselves, but in that union on the ground of what He is. The enemy never ceases to try to undercut that, and his methods are countless and very persistent and very forceful. The rest of faith in that, but also in a hundred and one other ways in the practical things of everyday life; things which are not in our power to arrange, secure, settle and bring to pass. Every day brings hundreds of ways in which there is the opportunity to stand into the rest of faith, into that faith in the Lord which brings rest. So subtle are the ways of the enemy that he will even tell us that that is too small a thing with which to trouble the Lord; that is a mere incident, why take that to the Lord? He has bigger and more important things than that on hand! Why try to make the Lord your errand-boy (I say that reverently) just to do all the little things you want done? If in this the testimony is preserved in rest, then it is a big thing to the Lord, not a little thing. If in this matter the Lord's glory stands to suffer, then it is a very big thing. It may be an incident in daily life, yes, in many, many ways every day, you and I can so lose our poise and our rest and our quiet confidence as to lose out spiritually, and the Lord lose much, so that it is proved that somewhere faith has been lacking, and with it the rest has gone. That is one side. It is a challenge to us, a real challenge.

### **The Necessity For Faith**

"We see that they were not able to enter in because of unbelief". *Not able* - paralysing, disqualifying, incapacitating unbelief. That means that the sooner we face this whole question and, as far as

possible, get it settled, the better. For thirty-eight years Israel was simply locked up, held up, and went round and round, so to speak, on this one question as to whether they were going to believe God. It arose, let me say again, on all kinds of matters. It arose on physical matters, for a life in that wilderness was a great proposition physically. The Lord did not change the physical conditions. He called for a change in the people themselves first; the physical conditions were settled when He had got the change inside them. When the matter of faith in Him was settled, then the Lord dealt with the physical. The question arose in the circumstantial, the emotional, the intellectual, the volitional realms; the challenge was made along all those lines in numerous ways. You can take all their experiences and see how each one was a peculiar form of the challenge to faith, and the challenge was changing almost daily in its aspect, its form, but it was the same challenge. It came along every kind of line and the Lord never changed it, never prevented it, never allowed the whole set of conditions to be altered, but always focused on one point. The thing that matters is the inner man, and not until the issue was settled there, did the Lord deal with all the other things.

Well, that is very comprehensive. Do not think that it is necessarily such-and-such things that account for our condition. These may be contributing factors, they may be very testing, may bear upon us very heavily. Physical matters - yes, they do press, they do make the situation exceedingly difficult, they do make a difference. Circumstances in which we have to live our lives, they do make a lot of difference, they make the situation exceedingly difficult. We say, If only the Lord would deal with this physical matter or these circumstances or this something else! It is all due to that, that is the cause of it, the reason for it. That is our way of reasoning, but it is not the Lord's thought at all. The thing is deeper down than that, and it is simply a matter of believing God; resolute faith, confidence in God. The Lord is trying to get us out of our variable and varying soul life where we are at the mercy of all our feelings, thoughts and reasonings and all that kind of thing, into a realm where, in spirit, we are steadfast. That is the point upon which it is all fixed in the Psalm. "Their heart was not steadfast with Him" (Psa. 78:37), and around that the whole of their forty years is gathered. The key to this is spiritual; tested by every other line, every other means, it is a spiritual matter ultimately. To be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inward man (Eph. 3:16) is the answer to it all. The other may then give way; at least, we shall gain ascendancy over the other if it is not removed.

### **Faith In God The Secret Of Courage**

Come back to the word in Joshua. Of that first generation, only two men got out of that soul realm - Joshua and Caleb. They triumphed in and over that realm. They triumphed in that realm first, and then the Lord brought them out, but the fact that it was the rest of faith which was the secret of their triumph while they were in it is brought so beautifully, magnificently, to light in this fourteenth chapter of Joshua. I think this is fine. Caleb, one of the two, comes to Joshua. He is an old man now, but still living by faith in the position which he took up with the Lord years before. He took up that position when he went as one of the spies and when the great majority, the overwhelming majority, brought their evil report. They looked at God through their circumstances; these two men looked at their circumstances through God; it made all the difference. Caleb took up that position of looking at everything through God, and he is still living in that position; and now, as an old man, he comes to Joshua, and, while all the other people are being given their inheritance in nice, easy, prosperous positions "where every prospect pleases", Caleb says, Give me this mountain where the giants are, and cities great and walled up; this hilly country; give me this mountain!

Oh, dear friends, there is a lot to be said about that, but I am going to be content with this now as following up this challenge to my heart and to yours. What are you looking for? - an easy inheritance, a nice, workable cabbage-patch, something that is going to respond to your touch immediately and give you satisfaction? Are you looking for the flourishing land? The faith which brought Joshua and Caleb into rest of heart before they came into the rest of the land was this kind of faith - Give me a tough proposition! Here is a situation full of difficulties, full of threatenings, full of adversities; why, it is almost an appalling prospect, yet nevertheless give me a chance there! You see the challenge. Do difficulties appall you or do they at once present a great opportunity for the Lord? "It may be that the Lord... as the Lord spake." How are we facing the big difficulties? - and there are difficulties! there are problems! and these mountains seem to pile up upon one another as we go on. Sometimes it seems an impossible outlook and prospect, a hopeless situation. Perhaps for our own lives individually for some reason within ourselves or outside of ourselves, or for the work to which we are called, the ministry, the testimony that is laid upon us, it seems so utterly hopeless, the mountain is impossible. Well, what about it? Is it - Give me this mountain! Nothing but a real faith in God can take things on like that, and say - All right, it is difficult, there is no doubt about it, it is an appalling prospect naturally, a hopeless outlook, nevertheless let us take it on in the Name of the Lord; it may be that the Lord... *The Lord* - looking at the mountain through the Lord, and not at the Lord through the mountain.

I think that is the kind of faith that we need, that brings into rest. A mountain - yes, it is a mountain right enough, a physical mountain, a circumstantial mountain, a mountain of outlook in the work. Naturally we would do the right thing, the wise, common sense thing if we said, No, we are not going to touch that! But faith says, I am not going to try and skirt that mountain, I am not going to turn my back on it and run away; give me this mountain! I want that faith, you want it. It is not just our natural courage, our bulldog nature, our pugnacity that will do it. We know quite well that we have nothing; if left to ourselves, we had better quit. But the Lord is challenging us, and Caleb does come up as a rebuke to us. At the end of a long life when we might think that now is the time for him to be given a very nice little garden and a lodge somewhere where the work was easy and he could take his rest - no, he says, Give me this mount wherein are the giants, the walled cities; give me this mountain! His *choice* was a difficulty, because it was an opportunity for the Lord.

Probably we shall very soon be brought up against what we have been saying in very practical ways, but let us have dealings with the Lord on this. We are going to have to face what will be naturally appalling difficulties, within and without, taking the very heart out of us, but oh, for this quiet, restful assurance and confidence in our God which says, Give me this mountain as an opportunity for proving the Lord!

And Caleb got it - and it was Hebron, and that is another story; a very long story is Hebron. I leave you to look that up, for Hebron has a wonderful place in the purposes of God. David was first crowned king in Hebron before he was crowned in Jerusalem. Hebron means 'fellowship'. There is a great inheritance bound up with Hebron. Hebron is secured to men and to women of this kind of faith which says, I am not wanting to escape from my difficulty and get out of my hard way; let me take it in the Lord's strength and give the Lord an opportunity to show that He can do what is naturally impossible. The Lord give us that faith!