

Rest for the Weary and Burdened

Matthew 11:20-30

Key verse: 11:28

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”

Today, Jesus teaches how to find rest for our souls. People really need rest. For example, Central Park was designed so New Yorkers can rest from the busy, chaotic and hectic city life. But did you know that God himself is the designer of rest? When God made the world, he set aside the 7th day to rest from his work, and later set aside a Sabbath Day of rest for the people of Israel. Finally, when Jesus came, he promised rest to all who come to him. I pray that through this passage we may come to Jesus with our tiredness and heavy burden and find rest for our souls.

I. Three Galilean towns (20-26)

Most of the 3 years of Jesus’ public ministry occurred near the Sea of Galilee, around the towns of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum. During his Galilean ministry, Jesus shared the good news of the kingdom of God while healing the sick and driving out demons, and huge crowds of people came. Most churches today would love to be as popular, but Jesus was not happy with it. Let’s read verse 20, **“Then Jesus began to denounce the towns in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent.”**

Although Jesus was popular, he was badly misunderstood. When he fed a crowd of 5,000 with 5 loaves and 2 fish in Galilee, they wanted to make him king by force so they would have a never-ending supply of bread. Then Jesus said he was the bread from heaven to give life to the world, but they thought it was a hard teaching and grumbled against him (John 6:41). People were only interested in miracles and didn’t want to listen to what Jesus had to say. They were most privileged with Jesus in their midst, but they became like spoiled kids who want more, but don’t want to listen to their parents. They became proud because Jesus was there, took him for granted and tried to get as much as they could from him.

Jesus compared the 3 Galilean towns to 3 cities known for their wickedness: Tyre, Sidon and Sodom. Tyre and Sidon were prosperous centers of commerce on the Mediterranean Sea, and were called out by Old Testament prophets for idol worship, pride and corruption (Isa 23, Ezk 26, 28). Genesis 19 records the destruction of Sodom due to violence and immorality. But Jesus said that Tyre, Sidon and Sodom were better than the Galilean towns because they would have

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repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes if they had seen Jesus' miracles, and they would fare better on judgment day than the Galilean towns. It is because those cities would not have taken Jesus for granted. Spiritually speaking, they were like underprivileged kids who appreciate any mercy they get. Later Jesus visited Tyre and Sidon and met a Canaanite woman who pleaded for mercy and said, **"Lord, even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table."** (Mt 15:26) Jesus was moved by her humble faith and healed her daughter.

Jesus' warning is very serious. In fact, those 3 Galilean towns do not even exist today. We should take them as a lesson to not take Jesus for granted. Although idolatry, violence and sexual perversion are serious, the worst sin is ungrateful self-righteousness. People of the church and those who have received much blessing should be the most thankful, humble and repentant people. Jesus said in Luke 12:48, **"From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked."** Has God blessed you? If so, please don't take Jesus and the blessings of God for granted, but repent, be thankful and find out how to be obedient with what he has given you.

Look at verse 25. **"At that time Jesus said, 'I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do.'"** Jesus was disappointed with many people, but he was also thankful for the work the Father was doing in others. God's work is always going on, and I have seen it here recently while visiting a few ministries. Praise God! Also these days Christianity is growing in North Korea even though they suffer much, while faith is declining in prosperous places. Why does God hide things from the privileged, the wise and the learned? Because they tend to become proud. But knowing God is only grace- social status and education does not help and little children-like people can accept it. So Jesus said, **"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."** (Mt 5:1) He also said, **"Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."** (Mt 18:3) God reveals himself to the poor in spirit, the broken and the humble, according to his mysterious sovereign will.

I was proud because I thought I was wise and learned as one who attended Northwestern University. I was a proud American because America is a great country and I have an ancestor who was an officer in the American Revolution. I

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was proud of my atheism and thought religion is a crutch for stupid people. I never said it, but I believed that all of the blessings and privileges I had, and all the good things my parents gave me were things that I was entitled to and deserved. But when I flunked out of college, I realized that I wasn't so great after all and I was really fortunate. I also began to consider the possibility that God exists. When I was poor in spirit, God revealed his grace powerfully through Bible study. I saw that he loved me in spite of my sins. I became a Christian and have remained one by his grace. God has blessed our nation, our church and each of us so much. May God help us to truly appreciate God's great mercy and humbly repent before him.

II. Come to Jesus for Rest (27-28)

Look at verse 27. **“All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”** In this verse Jesus makes an extraordinary claim: that he is the unique Son of God. Jesus repeatedly shared this message, and it is the distinctive message of the Christian faith throughout history. Jesus was not a mere man like Confucius or Socrates, he is the Son of God who brought the revelation of God to us. John 1:18 says, **“No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.”** Jesus is not a mythological figure. The gospel accounts testify to him, and within a few decades of his death, he is mentioned by Jewish and Roman historians as well as Christian writers. The best evidence about Jesus being the Son of God is his resurrection from the dead. While no mortal man can save us, Jesus the Son of God does.

Then Jesus gave a wonderful promise. Let's read verse 28. **“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”**

What is it that makes us weary and burdened? According to a recent study, money and work are the things that make people most stressed out. All these things weigh on us, but an underlying factor this study did not consider is sin. Sin causes people to consider money to be the most important thing like an idol, and to worry endlessly about their job. Sin causes conflict, makes us too proud to listen, and to even hate someone. The Bible says that we are slaves of sin. Slavery is evil; God abhors it as he did when the Israelites were forcibly exploited under the control of the Egyptians. Slavery to sin is at least as tragic, and no amount of money or fame can release people from it. Countless people from all walks of life have been

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destroyed by drug and alcohol abuse. Others, in spite of their achievements, fall into corruption and violence. Adultery has destroyed many families. The heavy burden of sin causes instability in our communities, unrest in our world and ultimately God's righteous judgment.

But God made a way to give us rest from our heavy burden. He did it by sending Jesus to take the burden upon himself. Jesus wept in prayer in Gethsemane. He did not want to take the burden of suffering and death, but in agonizing prayer submitted to it for you and me. He was betrayed, beaten, and mocked for us. Finally, he carried our burden of sin on the cross, crying out **“My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?”** He was forsaken so that we may not be. Isaiah predicted it 700 years before: **“But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”** (Isa 53:5-6). God sent Jesus to carry our burden of sins and completely break the curse of sin so that we might have true rest and peace.

Christ opened the door to freedom from sin but we need to make a decision to leave bondage, as the Israelites left slavery in Egypt. Many people have noble desires but can't leave their slavery. Augustine had noble desires as a youth but uttered this famous prayer: “Lord, grant me purity, but not right now.” Then he pursued his lust, had a son by one of his mistresses, and said, “the more I gave in to lust, the more it developed in to a habit, and when I failed to check the habit it became a necessity. These were all the links in the chain that had me enslaved.” Finally, he decided to be done with sin once and for all, based on Romans 13:14, **...Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.** He left his sin, Jesus took his burden and gave him strength to overcome. And Augustine became one of the most influential pastors and writers in history who wrote, “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”

We can rest in Jesus because he restores our relationship with God, and we know that he loves us so much. As a little child is happy and secure around his parents, so we are with Jesus. The happiest people I ever met were a group of 6 young missionaries who were packed into a two bedroom apartment. They had little money and were strangers in a foreign country. Although they were well

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educated, they simply believed in Jesus with child-like faith. They frequently laughed like they did not have a care in the world and several times they told me that they were married to Jesus. Thank God that Jesus is the one who really satisfies the longings of our soul and give us true happiness, peace and joy. Although this world may be complicated, may God give us simple and childlike trust in Jesus and his love.

III. Take Jesus' yoke (29-30)

Look at verses 29-30. **“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”** Jesus offers to exchange the heavy yoke of sin for his yoke. A yoke is a wooden crosspiece that is fastened over the neck of animals and attached to what they pull. A yoke symbolizes work. How can work give us rest? When God made paradise, according to Genesis, one essential element of happiness was the blessing of meaningful work as the noble steward of creation. Then sin entered the world, and work was no longer a blessing but a curse to only toil for food and then die. But Jesus restores us so that work is a blessing again, and we can bring God's blessing to all people. So after Jesus was raised, he gave the Great Commission, **“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.”** (Mk 16:15) This is God's restoration of our purpose. People can experience the forgiveness of sins through the gospel. Preaching the gospel also involves social justice- so over the years Christians have built schools and hospitals, fed the poor, cared for orphans, and helped the oppressed while sharing the gospel of peace all over the world. May God help us to preach this gospel and overcome the anger and hatred among people today by promoting God's love.

Many people think that doing God's work is very difficult and only for super-apostles. But they are wrong- Jesus said his yoke is easy and his burden is light. It is because when we take Jesus' yoke, we find that we no longer labor by ourselves but he is there with us doing the hard work, helping us through the Holy Spirit. When Jesus commissioned his disciples he said, **“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”** (Mt 28:20b) Jesus helps us every step along the way. When we abide in him, his strength helps us move forward.

Jesus said that the way to practically take his yoke is by learning from his gentle and humble heart. The late Dr. Samuel Lee used to cite three essential qualities of a servant of God: 1) humbleness, 2) humbleness and 3) humbleness.

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But although it seems that humble people are run over by the arrogant who have their own selfish agenda, when we learn humbleness from Jesus we can be a blessing to others as Jesus was, and God takes care of us. In Matthew 23:12 Jesus said, **“For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”** When we learn Jesus’ gentle and humble heart, we experience God’s mysterious grace and rest in many ways.

Do you know what the best kind of rest is? The best rest is the rest one gets after accomplishing something. Last year, the Cubs felt a kind of rest after working hard through 178 games in the season and 108 years of prior futility to win the World Series. God had an even greater sense of accomplishment after creating all things in 6 days and resting on the 7th day, admiring his beautiful and awesome creation. We also can experience that deep rest and sense of accomplishment by coming to Jesus and taking his yoke. When we do work for the glory of God, we find meaning in our jobs, at home and in the church. Then we are happy with what we are doing. Not only that, but at the end of our days we can rest knowing we did the best thing. Finally on the last day, God will say, **“Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!”** (Mt 25:21).

At one time I thought rest meant more sleep, watching more TV and playing on the computer. But when I slept 12 hours per day and tried to relax, I only became more tired. Then when I came to Jesus and took his yoke, Jesus helped me to find rest in his love and also I could actually begin to see the blessing of a yoke of hard work. I experienced a few times that working hard for God’s glory gives true joy and satisfaction. I also began to learn from Jesus’ gentle and humble heart. So 15 years ago I took the annual key verse, **“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus...”** (Phil 2:5) and have not changed it since. Over this time, gradually something miraculous happened. I think that probably for most of my life, I was fighting with people more or less constantly and was always agitated in my heart. But as I learned Jesus’ gentle and humble heart, I realized the other day that I am not fighting anyone any more, and I have peace and joy. Although I still have a long way to go, Jesus helped me learn from him to strive to be a blessing, and he has graciously helped so much. I can say that learning from gentle and humble Jesus is a joyful life, and Jesus has been there with me, encouraging, guiding and carrying all weariness and burdens.

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Thank God that we don't have to labor under the heavy burden of sin, toiling meaninglessly in the world. Praise God that Jesus came to take our burden upon himself and to give us his easy yoke of blessed and meaningful work. Let's come to Jesus and learn from his gentle and humble heart. May God grant you deep rest and make you a source of rest for people around you. May Jesus be with you.