

Jesus Gives Rest

July 6, 2014

Matthew 11:25-30

The story is told of a lady who became very angry at her pastor. When she finally caught up with him, she said, "I called you all morning on Tuesday and you never did answer." The minister said, "I'm sorry Madam, but Tuesday is my day off."

"Your day off", she said very self-righteously. "I'll have you know that the devil never takes a day off". The minister replied, "you are absolutely right my dear, and I suppose that if I did the same thing, I would become just like him."

You may have seen the bumper sticker that says, "Jesus Is Coming – Look Busy." As you have often heard me say before, there is a difference between "church work" and the work of the church. Sometimes we confuse being busy with working for God. We forget that not only did Jesus say go and preach, he also said come and rest.

Once a great revival was taking place after Jesus had sent out the twelve disciples. People were repenting, demons were driven out, and sick people were anointed with oil and were healed. People were coming from all over the place and Jesus and the disciples did not even have time to eat. It's interesting that Jesus did not extend the revival for two weeks, instead He told the disciples, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."

Jesus considers our health and well-being to be vitally important if we are to be effective in his service. Too many people pay a heavy price with their families, their health, and their well-being in search of some goal. When they obtain it, they realize the price is too high.

I once had a man tell me, that when his marriage started to interfere with his devotion to his job, he knew he needed to get out of the marriage. How do our minds get so messed up that things, and power, and money mean more to us than those who deserve our love and affection?

Jesus had more energy than we could dream of having, yet Jesus was smart enough to realize that He needed to take some time to rest. He would often go to the hills alone to meet God and be refreshed. His rest didn't always come from lying in a bed. That's only part of what we need. His rest came from and through a regular fresh encounter with God. And Jesus wants us to know that He has rest stops planned for our lives.

Jesus is speaking in our gospel lesson for today, and in the 28th verse He begins with the word "COME". Come to me. If we want rest and peace of mind, we have to take action. We must be willing to let something else either wait, or learn to do without it altogether.

Jesus has said for us to come to him. What do you say about a dog who when you say, "Come", looks up at you and then puts his head back down, not moving the rest of his body. This is how a lot of people respond to God. They hear the call, but don't think it's worth the effort to get up and see why the call was given.

Jesus said, "Come to me". If we desire rest, we can't come to the first thing that looks like a solution. The destination of our movement has to be toward and to Jesus the Christ. The Bible tells us to fix our eyes upon Jesus and put away any sin and anything else that would cause us to look somewhere else. Jesus is the only true place for us to find rest, because everything else is going to pass away.

Jesus goes on to qualify who is eligible to come to him. He says, "Come to me all who are weary and burdened". Jesus' invitation is only extended to those who realize that they need help.

Have you ever tried to help a little child get dressed only to be told by the child, "Stop! Let me do it by myself." You go ahead and let the child do it. Five minutes later you see shoes on the wrong feet, buttons uneven, tags, and hair that looks a mess. That's what we must look like to God if we're not following Jesus' teachings --a mess.

Jesus did not come to help people who could do it all themselves.

Notice that Jesus does not put a limit on what kind of burdens we need to have, or how large the burden has to be. All that's needed is a recognition of burden, a heartache, or a pain. They come in all forms. Marital problems. Children in trouble with school or the law. Burdens of loneliness. Burdens of taking care of sick relatives. Burdens for the church. Burdens of disappointment, of rejection, of death, of addictions. Burdens of not knowing which way to turn next.

We know that life can be very hard and difficult. But these are the very burdens that Jesus wants us to bring to Him, so that He can share the load and give us strength to overcome. Jesus is always on the lookout for hurting people. People who are bold enough to admit-- Lord I need some help. I cannot carry these problems alone.

Jesus goes on to say, "I will give." Notice that Jesus did not say, I might, or I'll probably, or I'll think about it. No, my friends, Jesus said, "I will give you." He could not have been any more definite. Jesus said "I will give you rest". Jesus is offering refreshment of soul, peace for the mind and strength for the body.

People are looking everywhere for that thing that's going to give them genuine, lasting satisfaction. It's not found in being young again, it's not found in having and hoarding money, it's not found in being popular, or in the many other worldly things that people often go for in their search for meaning in life.

The prophet Isaiah wrote that "God will keep in perfect peace, those whose mind are stayed on Him." The psalmist put it this way. "Great peace have those who love Your law, O God." You see, the peace that Jesus gives us is a peace that's not based on our circumstances. It is based on the fact that he is who he says He is.

Jesus also didn't say, I'll sell you some rest. Some people think God's gifts are for sale. Here's \$10, pray for God's help for me. God is not after our money for its own sake. God is after us and our allegiance to Him. When our allegiance is to God, we're willing to give Him whatever He asks of us.

God asks us, "Why do you work so hard for that which does not satisfy?" Many people think, if I just got that car, that dress, that house, that mink, that ring, that boyfriend, that girlfriend, that raise, then I'll really be happy. You get it and you discover, you're still the same old you, but now it's something else that you have just got to have.

Our society feeds on our lust for more, and the advertisers tell us this is what we must have. Everything is new and improved. Does that mean last year's product was really old and worthless? It is all a delusion.

Ask a poor person what he wants, and he may say, a million dollars. Ask most millionaires what they want, and they'll probably say a few more million. But we don't need money to receive God's peace and rest. We couldn't buy it if we had all the money in the world, because God will only give it away. God delights in doing good for His people.

The verb "will give" in our gospel passage is in the Greek perfect tense. This indicates that Jesus is not talking about a distant prospect, but that the rest will take place immediately. God has rest waiting for us and ready to give it, but we must be willing to come to Jesus to get it.

Part of the secret is to begin to get our priorities in life in order. We all say we'd like to spend time with God, but do we really want to or is that the religious thing to say. All too often we choose to hang on to our thousand and one busy activities rather than drop any of them to try and squeeze Jesus in somewhere.

Now notice that Jesus says when we come to him we are to take his yoke. Everybody has some kind of a yoke. A yoke is what the oxen were hooked up to for service in the field and to help guide them.

For us our yokes are those things which determine where we choose to place our priorities and how much of a load we're willing to carry. Our yoke is determined either by Christ or by ourselves.

If we want to be and try to be our own masters, then because of our human nature, our sinful nature, we are going to put in things that will lead to our own separation from God regardless of how well intentioned we may be.

Sometimes, we do not want to voluntarily take the yoke of Jesus. We would prefer for him to grab us, tie us down, and force it around us to make us do his will. But you see forced service is Satan's method. When Satan addicts you to something, he forces you to follow him. There are a lot of people who want to do right, but Satan's yoke is so powerful that they cannot free themselves from their addictions.

Jesus is not going to force his yoke on us. He's not going to make us do right. He's not going to force us to take His rest. No - the only thing that will put on Jesus' yoke is our love for Him, the only thing that will keep it on is love for Him, and the only way to be glad it's on is to have love for Him.

Jesus said it like this, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments;" and it follows that if you don't you won't. Jesus' yoke is there for us to take. Whether we will take it and let Him call the shots is completely left up to us.

Jesus says, "Take my yoke and learn from me." How many of us can honestly say we make the most of our opportunities to learn from Christ? The tragedy for most folks is that we don't make learning the word of God a high priority in our lives. We can name all the major actors in the soaps, the shows, and the movies. Yet how many of us can name all the major prophets of the Old Testament, much less the minor prophets?

I think appropriate questions for each one of us to ask is: What more than anything else keeps you out of formal Bible Study or from studying the Word on your own? And do you think Jesus is really happy with that choice for your life.

One of the ways to learn from Jesus is to take His yoke through surrendering our desires for ourselves to the will of God. Many people use the term, "fight the Devil" as a euphemism for wrestling with the evil influences we encounter in life. And, I suppose it's a pretty good expression, since I think most of us understand "the Devil" to be not a being with horns and a tail and a pitchfork, but the force of evil that is ever-present in the world.

So then how do we "fight the devil?" We don't do it by calling him names and rebuking Him in the name of Jesus. James says the only way to fight the devil successfully is by submitting to the will of God.

We have all seen the abbreviation WWJD, standing for "What would Jesus do." Supposedly we are supposed to ask how Jesus would act in a given situation.

I admit that I think that's sort of gimmicky. I don't think the question is, "What would Jesus do" but rather we should be asking, how is it that Jesus wants me to respond in this situation." Sadly, though, we don't ask this question nearly enough, and too many of us don't bother to ask it all.

Jesus goes on to say, for I am gentle and lowly in heart. Our God is not like Pharaoh, trying to squeeze every drop of blood out of us that he can get. God does not carry a whip saying shape up or ship out. When we give Jesus the chance, we will very quickly discover that nobody loves us like Jesus does.

Jesus will be gentle with us as He lightens our burdens.

You see Jesus listens to us, encourages us, and shares our sorrows. Jesus says, "you will find rest for your souls." It's not the person who looks at Jesus from afar that finds rest and peace. It is in taking Jesus' yoke, entering His service, and learning about Him, that we can find rest.

Notice, the idea expressed is that you will not have to go out looking for rest, the promise is that it will come to you. It's waiting with Jesus. We don't have to constantly be searching. Can we trust God to let go of some things in our lives, and see what He'll do in the interim.

Jesus says, "for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light". A lot of people don't believe these words of Jesus. "No way is being a Christian easy. Look at all the things I'm giving up. There are so many rules to follow."

I have a question for you; and if you don't remember anything else this morning, please think about this. I have to ask: What law have we received from God that was not ultimately for our own good?

Think of an area of sin in your life that you wish was not sin. Would the world be a better place if God said, okay, that's no longer sin, everybody can go ahead and do it?

Let's suppose you were on the committee to scale the last 6 of the 10 commandments down to 3 to reduce the amount of sin in the world. Which one is going to make our lives better by getting rid of it?

Jesus said that his burden and his yoke are light and easy. It doesn't mean that the life of a Christian is going to be a piece of cake. Of course, troubles are going to come in this world whether you live in the presidential palace or in a cardboard box on skid row. Life is going to have its problems.

"The devil" will attempt to throw more on us that we are able to bear. But when the rains of life are pouring in on us, that's not the time to be searching for a solid foundation.

Chances are, at that point we will settle for the first thing to come along. If it's not Jesus, we'll be settling for what will likely be future disaster.

Hard times will come. It is far better to have Jesus to walk with us, than for us to try to walk it alone. We need to be able to say with confidence, as the Psalmist said, "The Lord is my Shepherd; even though I walk through the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for you are with me."

The Lord wants to be each of our Shepherds this morning. Are we willing to come to Him to find His rest?