

CHRIST'S GIFT OF REST

Text: Matthew 11:28-30

Key Word: Rest

Key Thought: We Need Jesus in Our Lives to Find Rest for Our Soul

The impact of this invitation to enter a time of rest is better understood when we become aware of its context in time. It was a time in history when the world was in a major upheaval. Jesus surely chose the "fullness of time" to bring forth this message.

RELIGIOUS CHAOS

Faith was at a point of decay. Religion could no longer satisfy the hunger within the souls of people. Worship was reduced to rituals. Pride had lifted its ugly head. The love of God had been replaced by the lust for recognition and power. The leaders of Judaism were recognized as being *"the blind leading the blind."*

SOCIAL CONCERN

The natural outcome of an unstable foundation of faith has always been a carelessness of life. Suicides were on the increase. Racism was acceptable within the upper stratus of society. A Roman system that resembled "apartheid" was firmly established. Riots were commonly seen in the market places and public squares.

POLITICAL CORRUPTION

Rome ruled with an iron fist. Taxes were levied on imports, exports, housing, education, roads, walls, gates, public baths, and everything bought and sold. Materialism so gripped the heart of the Roman leaders that even murder was not too high a price to pay for advancement.

MORAL COLLAPSE

A solid marriage was abnormal. Abortion, euthanasia, and infanticide were increasing. Their so called "works of art" depicted many forms of sexual activity. Cheating, lying, and violence were all upheld as a means to an end for Roman.

It was within this context that Jesus made His appeal. His immediate hearers were 70 (72) disciples who were returning from a successful mission to this society. Further context can be found in Luke 10. The disciples were returning with great joy because they had overcome the works of the devil. They were excited and yet perhaps physically exhausted. It was to these disciples that these words were first spoken. Yet, this invitation is not limited to them alone.

We must also enter into this rest. Many people are asking the question of how they can find rest for their body and souls. According to this text there are 3 ways to receive Christ's gift of rest.

I. BY ENTERING TOWARD HIM
II. THROUGH EXCHANGE WITH HIM
III. THROUGH EDUCATION FROM HIM

I. BY ENTERING TOWARD HIM

A. Which Has Direction - "Come Unto Me"

What was there in Christ that made Him think that He could gain and maintain disciples? Many leaders had come before Him and their groups had scattered. The book of Acts 5 notes that both Judas the Galilean and Theudas had followers who dispersed after they were slain.

Isaiah said,

*"He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,
nothing in His appearance that we should desire
him."*

Isaiah 53:2b

Yet God also used Isaiah to pen the following words,

*"Come, all who are thirsty . . . Why spend money on
what is not bread, and your labour on what does
not satisfy."*

Isaiah 55:1a, 2a

The reason Jesus knew that men would heed His words is that He was offering eternal rewards to all. He would never turn away a true seeker. Only He could offer an overabundance of bread to the hungry; life-giving water to the thirsty; and eternal rest to the weary. Anyone who heeded His words could cry out along with the Psalmist.

*"Be at rest once more, O my soul, for the LORD has
been good to you."*

Psalms 116:7

I. BY ENTERING TOWARD HIM (Contd.)

A. Which Has Direction - "Come Unto Me" (Contd)

Christ's disciples had sincerely ENTERED into a new walk with Him. Many had left their homes, businesses, and families to follow Jesus. Yet it appears that Jesus had to stress that they continue to focus their attention toward Him and not on the works that they would do through Him. If they had maintained a daily relationship with Him there would have been no reason for Jesus to say to them "*Come unto me.*"

B. Which Has A Duty - "I Will Give You Rest"

Those who have come before Christ have sensed that He was legally bound; He was obliged to perform His duty toward them. His word had to be upheld. He never squandered His duties.

"All things have been committed to me by my Father."

Matthew 11:27

It is not only the Son but also our Father who became involved in offering us rest. Everything Jesus said and did was in complete unity with the purpose of the Father. God always works to fulfil His Word.

"Therefore since the promise of entering his rest still remains, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it."

Hebrews 4:1

It is our duty to enter into the rest that God offers.

"For we who have believed do enter that rest."

Hebrews 4:3

If we enter to the present rest we can be assured that we will also enter into the final Sabbath rest.

"There remains, then, a Sabbath rest for the people of God."

Hebrews 4:9

There is no doubt that God has placed Himself in such a position that it has become **His duty** to offer us rest.

II. THROUGH EXCHANGE WITH HIM

Consider for a moment how these disciples must have appeared before Christ. They were full of exuberance outwardly and yet bearing the weight of ministry inwardly. We can often feel like them wondering what we must do to enter into the rest that God has offered us. Is there something else we must consider? Yes!

A. Which Must Have a Determination - "Take my yoke upon you"

It is not just enough to come before God and focus our attention upon His desire to offer us rest. We also need to exchange our weight of labour for His burden.

Jewish literature represented a yoke as the sum-total of obligations which, according to their teaching, a person must take upon himself. There were many yokes including **The Yoke of the Torah, the Yoke of the Commandments, and the Yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven.**

Why would Jesus demand that they take on another yoke? We often paint a mental picture that is somewhat similar to the account described in the Synoptic Gospels when Jesus said to His disciples,

"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."

Matthew 16:24

What benefit could possibly be gained by taking up another cross? Who needs another yoke? Perhaps there is a bit of misunderstanding in the teaching of Jesus. A yoke often suggests hardship demanded upon a beast of burden by a merciless master.

B. Which Must Have A Distinction - "For my yoke is easy and my burden is light"

A yoke was a wooden frame placed upon an animal or a person's back in order to evenly distribute the load of burden. In this manner equal proportions of weight could be disbursed to those in the yoke. It could also be adjusted in a manner as to cause more stress on one side than the other. To make the task delightful not only must the yoke be light, it must also be carefully adjusted.

Jesus said,

"My yoke is easy (well adjusted) and my burden is light."

Matthew 11:29

II. THROUGH EXCHANGE WITH HIM (Contd.)

B. Which Has A Distinction - "For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Contd.)

Jesus was not warped in His teaching of discipleship. He knew there would be a cost to serve Him. He does not lead as a master behind us with a whip to beat our backs. Instead, He makes Himself available to be yoked together with us. **He carries not only His part of the weight but also a great deal of ours.** His yoke is more than just easy - it is good, helpful, kind, and profitable.

We need to consider the example our Lord gave to us when He became burdened and weary. He never maintained that state of weariness. He found the source of strength and rest in His Father.

Jesus said to His disciples,

"I have food to eat that you know nothing about."

John 4:32

*** In Matthew 14 Jesus was told of the beheading of John the Baptist. He entered a ship and sailed to a solitary place. Multitudes followed Him along the shore until He landed. In His grief and weariness He ministered healing to the sick. He then performed the miracle of feeding the 5,000.

He then told His disciples to get into the ship and sail to the other side while He dismissed the crowd.

He then went and rested in prayer. His disciples were also weary and yet there is no mention of them spending time in prayer. They were sent into a storm and were becoming even more weary as they attempted to battle the waves and the wind. Their experience as fishermen was of no help to them.

Jesus having gained strength and rest from being in the presence of His Father was able to walk on the very waves that were tossing His disciples about. He not only walked upon them, He took authority over the wind causing it to cease. ***

II. THROUGH EXCHANGE WITH HIM (Contd.)

B. Which Has A Distinction - "For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Contd.)

To many Christians see prayer as an unnecessary yoke to take upon themselves. There is no doubt that many things we do for God will exhaust some of our energy. Prayer is a different kind of work. But when we link up to His yoke He will give us much more than He will take.

Isaiah the prophet said,

*"He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.
30. Even youths grow tired and weary and young men stumble and fall;
31. but those who hope in the LORD will renew (exchange) their strength, they will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."*

Isaiah 40:29-31

There is one other way to receive rest from God.

III. THROUGH EDUCATION FROM HIM

The final pivot of Christ's teaching is a critical link to receiving a sustained rest with God. Many of us have experienced seasons of rest but few have walked in a consistency of it.

A. Which Has No Fixed Duration - "Learn"

If you had the opportunity to apply at the Bible College of Jesus Christ would you? All we would have to do is pay the tuition (home, family, job etc), purchase your book and come with sandals and a coat. How long would you attend? The only way to realistically answer that would be to acquire a copy of the courses. Jesus would probably sum up the courses by saying,

"Learn from (of) me."

Matthew 11:29

The more knowledge we gain about God the more we realize how little we really know. Just when we think we know it all He is able to uncover another whole realm of truth. To be in this school for a lifetime doesn't appear to be an offer for a time of rest.

III. THROUGH EDUCATION FROM HIM (Contd.)

A. Which Has No Fixed Duration - "Learn" (Contd.)

It's interesting that we derive our word for "**school**" from a Greek word meaning "**leisure**." It was not to say that their schools were a breeze but rather that the philosophy of teaching was different than most schools today. It was more upon a practical level with an abundance of opportunity for discussion, questions and answers. Once we better understand our master teacher we will be able to understand how to experience a life of rest. **Jesus never meant to have His disciples exhausted through ministry.**

B. Which Has Diversity - "Learn from me, for I am gentle (meek) and humble (lowly) in heart"

Most men would have found it difficult to remain humble if they had the knowledge and teaching capabilities of Christ. His educational example was unique. He never strove against others to become great. This attitude of heart needed to be conferred to His disciples. They could easily fall into the pit of pride and then have to spend a lifetime of ministry striving to get out.

"Pride and grace dwelt never in one place."

Scottish Proverb

"Pride is the master sin of the Devil"

Edwin H. Chapin

Great miracles had been performed at the hands of the disciples. They needed to learn the example of Christ lest they would fall into state of striving to outdo one another. It would create a life of restlessness.

Late in Jesus' ministry the sons of Zebedee (James and John) strove for a place of prominence within the future kingdom of God. Jesus had to again emphasize this teaching of humility.

"whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,

44. and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.

45. For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Mark 10:43-45

III. THROUGH EDUCATION FROM HIM (Contd.)

B. Which Has Diversity - "Learn from me, for I am gentle (meek) and humble (lowly) in heart" (Contd.)

*** During our first year in Bible College we became dissatisfied and restless. We blamed it upon the new environment we were in. Our past ministries had to be laid aside because of the new demands of homework assignments. It was during a pity-party with another couple that the Lord taught us a very important lesson.

Through the gift of prophecy the word came that "**Your joy will come through serving others.**" This truth meant more than just exhausting our energy on behalf of others. It was our attitude towards ministry that was being challenged by God. Humility and gentleness were sadly lacking. ***

We can all start off in ministry with a surge of strength. The determining factor of how we finish the race is whether we follow the teaching and example of Christ. **Rest can never be experienced apart from clothing ourselves in Christ's example of humility.**

*** Professor Agassiz, a great naturalist and instructor at Harvard's College was about to take his students into the country for a field trip. The students were advised to stay close to their professor.

"Stay with him; he has much to tell you; he will show you something beautiful every minute. Stay with him, do not wander from him." ***

Can you say that you are experiencing the rest of God in your daily life? You can improve a great deal by following the patterns set out in this portion of Scripture. Would you care to re-establish some priorities in your life?

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Date: Dec 20/15 (Christmas)

Place: FCA

Time: 10:30 Am

Song: What Child is This? - D, Cm

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Matthew 11:27; Hebrews 4:1; Hebrews 4:3; Hebrews 4:9

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