

Rest for the Weary
Matthew 11:25-30

One thing that often characterizes our lives is weariness. We become weary for many different reasons:

- **Busyness.** We go non-stop from the time we get up until the head hits the pillow at night. We can become physically and emotionally weary.
- **Conflict.** You might have exchanged harsh words and had sharp disagreements with family and friends. Depending on your temperament, having an unresolved conflict might be the most burdensome thing in your life right now.
- **Uncertainty.** Uncertainty about finances, career, or your health can be draining. Sometimes we'd rather hear bad news than no news. Uncertainty can be oppressive and wearying.
- **Sin.** Our own sinful habits are among the most wearying burdens. While sin has its "passing pleasures" (Hebrews 11:25), ultimately our sin weighs us down and consumes our vitality. This is true whether we're talking about sins of the tongue or sensuality or anger. In Psalm 32 David said that when he kept silent about his sin "God's hand was heavy upon" him; his "vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer."

Can you identify what makes you weary? Do you know what burdens you are carrying around these?

There is no shortage of advice about how to get rid of weariness: get more sleep; exercise more; take a vacation; "let your hair down" and enjoy life more. There is a place for each of those things. But Jesus offers a very distinct remedy to weariness. In Matthew 11:28 Jesus said, "Come to Me all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." Jesus promises that He will give rest to weary people. We will see that this rest is a byproduct of discipleship, actually living as a student of Jesus.

What He says is very counter-intuitive, IF you've never experienced it. If you've never followed Jesus, you might think that spiritual effort will wear you out, not give you rest. Just the thought of being a "serious Christian" might make you tired. You might think that following Jesus would be exhausting.

It is true that being a disciple of Jesus is demanding and rigorous. Being a disciple of Jesus is not a hobby or something to dabble in whenever you feel like it; being a disciple of Jesus involves your entire life. I can understand how a person might think that something as rigorous as living as a disciple would run you into the ground.

But Jesus teaches very clearly that ***a life of discipleship is a life of rest.*** I'd like to invite you to think carefully with me about Jesus' teaching in Matthew 11. Even though this may be a familiar passage to you, I would encourage you to hear Jesus' offer afresh and to trust Him to give you the rest He promises. This week and next we are going to examine Jesus' offer to give rest to the weary.

Context. Matthew 11 describes how Jesus went to various cities in Israel, teaching and preaching, performing miracles and casting out demons. A few people believed and became disciples, but most rejected Jesus even though He did many miracles in their towns. Jesus made the memorable statement that if the miracles done in Capernaum had been done in Sodom, that city “would have remained to this day”; they would have repented, but not the people in Jesus’ day.

Jesus reveals the Father to the humble. (Matthew 11:25-27) These verses record a prayer of Jesus. This is a prayer He prayed in response to the fact that some accepted and others rejected Him.

25 At that time Jesus said, “I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants.

“These things” is a reference to the realities of the Kingdom, especially how His miracles confirmed that He was the promised Messiah. As the previous paragraph explains, most people in the towns He visited were unmoved by Jesus’ miracles.

Instead of saying, “Some people accepted the Kingdom and others rejected it,” Jesus expresses the response of people in terms of what God did or didn’t do. He said to His heavenly Father, “**You have hidden** these things from the wise and intelligent and **have revealed** them to infants.” Interestingly, Jesus doesn’t imply that God was being arbitrary in His hiding or revealing. God responded to their heart attitudes: He hid the truth from the “wise and intelligent” (the proud); He revealed the truth to “infants” (the humble, those with a childlike faith). The contrast is not between smart people and dumb people or between old people and young people. The contrast is between those who are proud and self-sufficient and those who are humble and teachable. (See 1 Corinthians 1:18-31.)

As the Lord of heaven and earth, God had the authority to hide “these things” from some and to reveal them to others. Notice in verse 26 how Jesus affirmed that this was God’s good, thoughtful plan all along.

26 “Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight.

Jesus always agreed with His heavenly Father. He didn’t find fault with the way God worked; He praised God that He hid “these things” from the proud and revealed them to the humble. In verse 27 Jesus makes claims about His unique relationship with God the Father. Specifically Jesus claims that knowledge of God flows exclusively through Him.

27 “All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.

Jesus makes four statements here. First, Jesus has been given “all things” - meaning all authority - by His Father. Second, Jesus said that “no one knows the Son except the

Father.” The Father alone knew Jesus’ true identity as His one and only Son; the Father alone understood what Jesus had done in laying aside His heavenly prerogatives in becoming one of us. Third, Jesus said, “nor does anyone know the Father except the Son.” Jesus alone had an unmediated, flawless knowledge of God.

Fourth, because Jesus alone knows the Father, the only other people who know the Father are those “to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.” In John 1 we are told that “no one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.” This is one of the core things that Jesus does: He revealed the Father to people.

When I came to Christ at age 20, the idea of God as my “Father” made very little sense to me. My relationship with my earthly father was fairly distant. I didn’t have an intuitive understanding of what it meant to relate to God as my heavenly Father. One of the sweetest things that Jesus has done (and is doing) for me is to reveal the Father to me. I am increasingly convinced that God is a good heavenly Father - One who actually wants to spend time with me (who actually can’t get enough of me) and One who isn’t angry at me and embarrassed by me. I can’t fully describe what this does for me, but it’s a core aspect of my life now.

The reality that ***Jesus reveals the Father to the humble*** prepares us to hear His offer of rest for the weary. The rest that Jesus offers is not unrelated to His ministry of revealing the Father to those who are humble.

Jesus offers rest to those who become His disciples. (Matthew 11:28-30) In light of Jesus’ unique relationship with the Father and in light of His willingness to reveal the Father to the humble, Jesus makes this offer to whoever can hear it:

28 “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.

Jesus invites the weary and heavy-laden to come directly to Him. As we talked about earlier, many different things can be wearying burdens: unresolved circumstances, sinful habits, busyness, etc. But there’s another type of burden that is quite common. The gospel of Matthew stresses how the Pharisees weighed people down with their religious/spiritual regulations. In Matthew 23:4, for example, we read:

4 “They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men’s shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger.

The Pharisees were Jewish teachers in the first century who interpreted the Law for everybody else. They interpreted commands such as “Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy” by giving very detailed regulations concerning what you could and couldn’t do on the Sabbath. By the time they were done explaining how to remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy, every ounce of joy had been squeezed out and replaced with burdensome regulations. Walking humbly with God had become an exhausting system of do’s and don’ts. That certainly wasn’t God’s design in the old covenant, but that’s what it had become in the first century.

In our day, Christianity can become something similar. Instead of a joyful, life-giving relationship with Jesus, being a Christian can **seem like** an oppressive system of rules and obligations. No doubt some of us in this room this morning experience Christianity this way; just the thought of reading your Bible, praying, giving to the poor, and living at peace with others in the body of Christ seems overwhelming (or impossible).

Whatever your burdens, notice what Jesus is offering here. He is not merely offering free advice or a set of principles to follow; He is offering a relationship in which He will impart rest. In verse 29 Jesus explains that this rest is a byproduct of discipleship, of learning from Him how to live one's life.

29 "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.

A yoke was put on the back of an animal to pull a heavy load. If you put on a yoke, you were about to exert yourself. Jews in the first century sometimes spoke of "the yoke of the Law." If you took up the yoke of the Law, you committed yourself to learning and following the Law with all of its demands. Here Jesus says "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me." The command is to commit yourself to following Jesus and learning how to live out His teachings. The noun form of the word translated "learn" is the common word for disciple (a learner or pupil). Jesus is saying, "If you are weighed down with all sorts of burdens, become My disciple and learn from Me about the Faith; learn how to live your life."

You should take great comfort when Jesus adds, "for I am gentle and humble in heart." Following Jesus won't crush you because He is gentle at the core of His being. Jesus won't "use" you and throw you away because He is humble in heart. He doesn't merely look out for His own personal interests. He really does care about you and what you are experiencing in your life.

The last line of verse 29 ("and you will find rest for your souls") is a quotation from Jeremiah 6:16. As is often the case, the original context of this verse in Jeremiah gives us insight into why Jesus quoted it here. Jeremiah 6 is a chapter that describes the judgment coming against Jerusalem because the people - from the least to the greatest - had abandoned the Lord and His ways. In verse 15 God said that "they did not even know how to blush"; they found nothing shameful about the sins they openly committed. Nevertheless, God made this invitation in verse 16:

16 Thus says the Lord, "Stand by the ways and see and ask for the ancient paths,
Where the good way is, and walk in it;
And you will find rest for your souls.
But they said, 'We will not walk in it.'

If the people were open to another way of living, they could seek and ask for it. This way of living is called "the ancient paths" because it was the time-tested way of walking with God: full submission to Him and His will, walking by faith, believing in His power and

goodness, etc. This way of living is also called “the good way” as opposed to the bad/evil way. Those who seek and find this way of life **and walk in it** can expect this result: “And you will find rest for your souls.” Those who know about this way of life but don’t live it out will experience turmoil and frustration and exhaustion. But those who walk in it will find rest for their souls. A life of obedience is a life of rest. Sadly, however, they said, “We will not walk in it.”

Jesus quoted from Jeremiah 6:16, saying that those who live as **His** disciples will also find rest for their souls (as opposed to turmoil and frustration and exhaustion). Jesus doesn’t say how quickly we will experience this rest. If you begin living as a disciple, you may very well experience a type of rest and wholeness almost immediately. But sometimes our experience of rest comes after we have been learning from Jesus over a period of time. Remember that rest is the byproduct of being a disciple.

Next week we’ll return to this passage and deal with verse 30 in some detail. But for now notice what Jesus says:

30 “For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

Properly understood, living out the teachings of Jesus is not only “doable” but pleasant. His yoke is easy (better: good/kind). And His “burden” is light; it gives you life instead of making you weary. Next week we’ll consider some specific demands of discipleship and see how this is true.

This morning I want you to consider three questions that might start you down the path of experiencing Jesus’ rest.

Questions for the Weary (based on Matthew 11:25-30)

1. What are the burdens you are carrying? What are the specific things that are making you weary in soul?

I’ve already mentioned some common burdens. Today’s passage urges us to bring our burdens to Jesus. The more specifically you understand your burdens, the more intentionally you’ll be able to do that (through prayer, Scripture reading, and conversation).

The past few weeks I have noticed a growing anxiety within myself. I can feel it when I slow down and become still. The source of my anxiety is not obvious to me. And so I am asking God to show me why I’m anxious. I believe that this is a burden I should bring to Jesus (because it has made me weary).

2. Are you apprenticed to Jesus? Are you committed to learning from Him in relation to the burdens you are carrying? Are you humble or do you come to Jesus as a know-it-all?

This is a strategic question to ask because the promise of rest is contingent on our discipleship. Jesus promises that if we take His yoke upon ourselves and learn from Him, **then** we will find rest for our souls. I'm asking whether or not - on a heart level - you are apprenticed to Jesus.

It is possible to attend church for years and not be a disciple of Jesus. You can have a sense of religious obligation without actually learning from Jesus how to live differently. The invitation is to become a disciple/student who has a growing experiential knowledge about living in this world. If you have never trusted in Jesus, accepting that His death on the cross paid for your sin, that is the place to start. You become a disciple of Jesus by faith.

If you are already a believer, you commit yourself to discipleship by saying, "Jesus, because You are Head of the Church and because You are Lord I submit myself to You and Your word. Teach me how to respond to this burden I am carrying. . ." Of course, we submit to Jesus in this way by abiding in Him and by letting His word abide in us. I need to learn from Jesus how to address my anxiety. You may need to learn from Him how to avoid the temptation that introduces turmoil into your life. There's a big difference between merely trying harder and living as a disciple of Jesus.

Since rest for our souls is the byproduct of discipleship, we need to make sure we are living as disciples/students of Jesus.

3. What is Jesus revealing to you about His Father? How does this knowledge address your weariness?

I ask this question because Jesus uniquely reveals the Father to those who come to Him in humility. That knowledge of God gives you "grace and peace" (2 Peter 1:2). If you read the gospels, you will notice that Jesus' teaching flows from His knowledge of the Father. In Matthew 5:9, Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." Did you notice what He reveals about God? God is a peacemaker. There is blessing in imitating God, in cultivating the family resemblance. The knowledge of God changes the way we live our lives. Knowing God is refreshing and life-giving; a true, experiential knowledge of God gives rest to the weary.

This week I would encourage you to spend time pondering this passage. You might actually want to memorize it so that you can review it throughout the day. Notice your burdens; bring them to Jesus; as a disciple, learn from Him (experience His gentle, humble ways), and you will find rest for your soul.