

Sermon Sunday, October 28th 2018

Biblical Rest: Matthew 11:28-30

By Ryan Perry

Scripture:

Matthew 11:28–30

[28] Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. [29] Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. [30] For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Let's Pray

Introduction:

According to a CNBC news report from this past August, a gallop poll of nearly 7,500 American employees found that 23 percent reported they were either often or always experiencing symptoms of burnout. Additionally another 44 percent reported that they were sometimes or occasionally experiencing these symptoms.

This term "burnout" was first coined by American psychologist Herbert Freudenberger in the 1970, and originally referred to the stress and exhaustion felt by those in "helping" professions like doctors and nurses.

However, in recent decades it has been applied to all people within any and all forms of work within our society.

Another survey done last year by the National Safety Council revealed that 97 percent of Americans say they have at least one of the nine leading risks factors for fatigue. Seventy-six percent of workers say they feel tired at work, 53 percent feel less productive, and 44 percent have trouble focusing.

When we put these statistics together we begin to realize that the average American is often feeling fatigued, overwhelmed, and is experiencing some form of burnout.

And many of us can nod in agreement because we are either experiencing or have experienced these same symptoms within our own lives.

In fact these issues are so prevalent within our culture that they account for an estimated 125-190 billion dollars in healthcare spending each year, and it is a contributing factor to the high rate of mental illness in our culture that affects almost 44.7 million people, according to the National Institute of Mental Health.

So what are the answers to this epidemic that seems to plague us and our society as a whole?

It might be easy to conclude from these statistics that we just need more time for relaxation, leisure, and vacations.

But the interesting thing is that we live in a time when the average American spends 5.5-6 hours a day in leisure activities. Three of those hours, on average, are usually spent watching TV.

Secondly, according to a 2017 article in Forbes, the average family spent 10-15% of their annual income on vacations. Do the math: if you make \$50,000 that between \$5000 and \$7500 a year on vacations.

All of this to say that I don't think our problem is not enough free time or vacation time.

Instead I believe that our problem is a worship problem. **We have been led to believe that the real rest that only Jesus can provide is somehow found elsewhere besides Him.**

If we make enough money, if we have enough vacations, if we get enough me time, if we didn't have family strife, if our boss wasn't such a tyrant, if the job demands weren't so taxing, if our kids were more well behaved then we could really recharge and actually rest.

But when we look to the Bible and what our God and Savior says about rest it is interesting that none of these things are included as requirements for rest.

So then what does God actually say about how we find rest?

This morning as we look at Jesus words in Matthew 11:28-30 I believe there are three main things Jesus wants us to learn about real rest.

- 1. We find rest by believing in Jesus (V. 28)**
- 2. We find rest by following Jesus (V. 29)**
- 3. We find rest as we receive gladness from Jesus (V. 30)**

Now I will say up front that I do believe physical rest is important. As long as we are in the flesh we have a need, at times, to rest our bodies and minds. We need proper sleep, nutrition, and exercise, and it is good and right to Sabbath (rest).

However, I believe that a right view and application of physical rest can only happen when we first understand how God, through Christ, has called us to find rest for our weary souls in him.

And it is my hope this morning that you will take seriously what Jesus says about rest, and begin to experience a rest and gladness within your souls that only he can provide.

- 1. We find rest by believing in Jesus (V. 28)**

[28] Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

As we look at the word “Come” we need to understand that Jesus often connects it with the word “believe”. He says in John 7:37-38:

*[37] On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, “If anyone thirsts, let him **come to me** and drink. [38] Whoever **believes in me**, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’”*

Or in John 6:35 Jesus says:

*[35] Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever **comes** to me shall not hunger, and whoever **believes** in me shall never thirst.*

So when Jesus invites people to come him, he is inviting them to believe in him. **But who is Jesus calling to come and believe?**

He is calling those who labor and are heavy laden. Or as the NIV translates it “*all you who are weary and burdened.*”

Jesus is calling people who are tired, exhausted, burdened, and probably burned out.

In this context it is Jews who are being burdened by the Pharisee’s and religious leaders who are continually adding laws to God’s law and are telling people that they need to obey them perfectly in order to be saved.

Jesus referred to these religious leaders in Matthew 23:2-4 when he said:

[2] “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat, [3] so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice. [4] They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger.

The Pharisees were burdening people with rules about tithing, the Sabbath, eating food, and even circumcision that were made up rules that God never created. **And they were making these rules necessary for salvation.**

But instead of calling people to keep a bunch of rules in order to be saved, Jesus is calling them (and us) to come and believe in him.

To believe that he is the one that can give us life, he is the one who makes us right with God, **and he is the one and only one who can give us the present and eternal rest that we so badly desire and need.**

Here at LEFC we have fought hard against this idea that we would call legalism. That somehow we can do something to earn favor with Christ, or that we have a role in achieving our salvation. **But that doesn't mean this verse doesn't apply to us.**

We all have burdens that we are carrying. Some of us have financial burdens, family burdens, medical burdens, work burdens, emotional burdens, sin burdens, etc... that weigh our souls down. **They can press on us so hard at times that it feels like we can't even breathe.**

And we carry them as if somehow the weight of those situations is our responsibility alone. We say we believe Jesus, yet we don't trust that he is actually going to do something.

But Jesus tells us to come to him...and he will give us rest. **The implication of that verse is that he will take the weight of those burden off of us.** As Peter writes in 1 Peter 5:6-7:

[6] Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, [7] casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

Now this doesn't necessarily mean he will perfectly fix all of our situations. In fact our burdens in this life might just get worse. It also doesn't necessarily mean he will give us physical rest, though that is important at times.

Instead Jesus is saying, in spite of your circumstances look to me and put your full hope in me.

Realize that you can't save yourself, realize that I am sovereign and greater than your biggest burdens, and give all of your worries, anxieties, and strivings over to me.

When you do this I will take the weight of your burdens off of your soul, and I will give you an inner soul rest, both in the present and forever.

This is where our desire for rest starts; in a simple but profound invitation **to come, believe, hope, and trust** in Jesus alone as our Sovereign God, as our savior, and ultimately as our rest.

2. We find rest by following Jesus (V. 29)

[29] Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

As I mentioned in the first point, this idea of "come" is closely connected with the word "believe." **But Jesus doesn't mean for us to have a mere intellectual belief in him.**

Instead according to verse 29 our belief and trust in him should cause us to **become learners, servants, followers and disciples of Christ.**

The term “yoke” which is commonly a bar that is put across cattle for carrying or plowing heavy loads is also associated with servitude (being a servant).

We see in Jeremiah 28:11 that it is negatively referring to being servants or slaves of a conquering king or nation:

[11] And Hananiah spoke in the presence of all the people, saying, “Thus says the LORD: Even so will I break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon from the neck of all the nations within two years.” But Jeremiah the prophet went his way.

And Paul writing in Galatians 5:1 also uses it in a negative sense when he says: *[1] For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery (the law)."*

But when Jesus says, “*take my yoke upon you,*” he is not calling us to serve a tyrannical king and he is not calling us to a lifeless and dead obedience to some law that can’t save us.

Instead the yoke that we take upon ourselves when we believe in Christ is a yoke of freedom. As Galatians 5:1 says: “*For freedom Christ has set us free...*”

We are free from the requirements of the law, we are free from the bondage of sin, and we are free from the weight of the burdens that once felt crushing to our souls.

But that doesn’t mean that we are free to do whatever we want, and it surely isn’t a license to be lazy. That’s not the purpose of our freedom and that doesn’t truly bring rest to our souls.

If laziness brought rest to our souls there would be a lot restful and happy people out there, but the truth is there isn’t.

But we are now free to live for Christ and serve him in such a way that we are willing, to pour our lives out for him, even to the point of death.

Look at what Jesus says to the disciple’s just one chapter earlier in Matthew 10:37-39:

[37] Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. [38] And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. [39] Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

The purpose of our freedom in Christ is that we would take his yoke upon ourselves and become his disciples. This involves pouring our lives out in service to him who humbly and willingly gave his life for us.

This isn't hard, joyless service to some slave driver, but instead it is joy-filled, life giving and rest giving work that we do in response to our God, our Savior, our Master and friend who, as he says is, "gentle and lowly of heart."

Yet, I know that our immediate response to this is try to lessen what Jesus saying or we try to come up with reasons why we need some sort of rest, other than what Jesus is offering.

We say things like:

"I get that we are supposed to pour our lives out for Jesus, but I'm and introvert so I need by me time to rest and recharge.

"I get what Jesus is saying about rest, but I can't really rest unless I get away (i.e. vacation)."

Three that I often use:

"I understand my need to rest in Christ, but I can't really do that unless I get to exercise."

"I can't really rest unless I get enough reading time."

"I can't really rest when the kids are around."

One that many of us have probably said:

"I can't really rest right now because I have too many things going on in my life."

Or we do this thing where we talk about **balance**.

We say things like, "yep, we need to serve Jesus, but we got to be careful that we don't give too much, because we need to rest and take care of ourselves....**we need balance.**"

Really!?! Is that what Jesus said to the disciples?

No. He said,

[38] And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. [39] Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

Luke 14:33:

[33] So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

Or as God through Paul says in Romans 12:1:

[1] I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

This isn't balance. This isn't giving a little to Jesus and then I get my much deserved rest. **This is, we get the rest our weary souls need by pouring our lives and our moments out in service to Christ.**

As Paul writes in Philippians 3:13-14:

*[13] Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and **straining forward** to what lies ahead, [14] I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

Paul gave his life away to and for Christ and in so doing he was able to write one chapter later in Philippians 4:11-13:

[11] Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. [12] I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. [13] I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Paul believed Christ and as a result poured out his life for Christ, and in so doing he found an abundant and everlasting contentment, peace, and rest for his soul.

Now, am I denouncing or speaking against physical rest? No. Physical rest is important.

But if we all are honest with ourselves, having enough time for physical rest isn't our problem. **I know that's not my problem.**

The problem that you and I often have is that we have made something besides Christ, and a life well lived for him the **object of our rest**...and as a result, we are continually in a place where our souls and bodies continue to be wearied, burdened and stressed.

We have bought into the lie that somehow this world can give us rest, and yet we continue to be like the masses who are often on the verge of burnout.

We have been worshipping our physical comfort or at least the pursuit of it, only to be in a place where we are consistently uncomfortable and unrested.

But Jesus clearly tells us to come, believe in him, give him our burdens, learn from him, be his disciples, pour our lives out in service to him, and then, and only then, will we find real rest for our weary souls.

Does this mean hard work on our part as his disciples? Yes it does. Does it mean that we might have to sacrifice our fleshly desire for an overabundance of self-centered me time that we often crave? Yes it does.

But Jesus assures us that his yoke and his burden are something that we want to bear for he says they are easy and light and therefore will produce gladness, joy, and rest.

3. We find rest as we receive gladness from Jesus (V. 30)

[30] For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

In contrast to the many legalistic burdens that the religious leaders would impose on people Jesus is now giving his disciples relief by saying that his yoke, his burden, his commands, his way of life are **easy and light**.

Based on the original Greek these words “easy” and “light” are better summed up as good, pleasant, and sweet.

This means that, living for Christ and pouring ourselves out in service to him is good, pleasant, sweet, joyful, and gladdening to our souls.

As the Westminster Catechism says:

Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.

Do you want to live out your chief purpose which includes enjoying and resting in God? Then you must be willing to come to Christ, and pour out your life for his purposes.

Nothing else will satisfy you, nothing else will give you life, and nothing else will give you the rest you so badly desire.

So I encourage us to examine ourselves this morning and ask these questions. What lies have we been believing about rest? Where have we been putting our hope for rest? Do we actually believe that Jesus will give us rest? Are we willing to pour our lives out for Christ to get it?

If our hope for rest is in anything besides coming to Christ and a living for him then I am here to tell you that it won’t produce the rest and gladness you so desire.

But if we come to Christ, believe in Christ, and what he did for us on the cross, and as a result pour ourselves out for him, than he will give us that present and everlasting rest that we all want and need.

Let’s Pray.