

The Rest Jesus Gives

Jesus wants us to have rest. He tells us to come to him so that we would have rest. In Matthew 11:28-29 Jesus says, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 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."

The rest Jesus wants us to have is more than the simple cessation of our normal weekday work. Jesus does want us to take a weekly break from our normal labors. He tells us that the Sabbath was made for man (Mark 2:27). Yet, the rest Jesus wants for us is more than simply not clocking in at the office. The rest Jesus wants for us is described in Matthew 11:29 as rest for our souls. Our soul is the deepest, most fundamental, part of who we are. So, the rest Jesus desires for us is not only rest for our body and mind, but rest for what Leon Morris calls "the center of our being."

This is the rest we all long for. It is the peace that stills our anxious thoughts. The relief that casts away the dark clouds of depression. It is the consolation the world cannot give us. It is the quiet shalom that comes from

living in communion with God. R. V. G. Tasker, in his commentary, says that by rest Jesus is referring to "relief from such crushing burdens as crippling anxiety, the sense of frustration and futility, and the misery of a sin-laden conscience." The rest Jesus desires for us to have is not a superficial rest. Not simply the rest of a holiday, but the rest that flows down to the deepest crevices of our being meeting our greatest needs. Richard Lenksi describes it as "freedom from every strain and burden, being without worry, fear, or distress." It's a giant exhale, a load lifted, refreshment where and how we need refreshment most.

And what do we have to do to have it? Simply come to Jesus, take his yoke upon us, and learn from him. A yoke was placed on an ox so that it could carry a load. So, Jesus is speaking of himself and his teaching metaphorically as a yoke. Jesus is saying that for our souls to have rest we must come under his mastery, carrying the weight of himself and his teaching. Jesus is also contrasting himself and his teaching with that of the Scribes and Pharisees. The Scribes and Pharisees burdened people with com-

Rest

In this issue we focus on the idea of rest, from God's perspective.



"We find no rest for our weary bones unless we cling to the Word of Grace."

-Martin Luther

"You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You."

-Augustine

"Be still, and know that I am God."

-Psalm 46:10

"For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God..."

-Heb. 4:8-9

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

-Mt. 11:28-29

mands that were like heavy loads hoisted upon their backs. Jesus says in Matthew 23:4, "They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders." The Scribes and Pharisees, the teachers of God's Law, were task-masters. They did not provide relief for the sinner, but only further burdened the sinner with a to-do list that could never be achieved.

(Continued on Page 2)

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(Continued from Page 1)

Even without the additional commands of the Scribes and Pharisees, God's Law is a burden for the sinner. The Law is a load we simply cannot bear. In Acts 15 the early church met together to discern whether or not non-Jewish believers in Jesus needed to be circumcised in order to be saved. In Acts 15:10, Peter asks those who demanded circumcision in accordance to God's Law for salvation, "Why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?" Peter describes the Law as a yoke that their fathers, nor they, nor anyone in sin, can bear. God's Law is good, and many of commands of the Scribes and Pharisees were wise, but for sinners like you and me to have rest we need more than commands. Simply being charged to "do this" and "don't do that" cannot free us from the guilt of breaking God's Law. No, only Jesus can free us from our guilt and satisfy our longing for rest.

So, when Jesus describes himself and his teaching as a yoke, He is intentionally contrasting himself with the Scribes and Pharisees and the taxing weight of the Law. In Matthew 11:30 Jesus says, "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light." In being Jesus' disciples we are not weighed down but lightened. Jesus' language here is ironic. The load of Jesus is not an additional weight but a relief from all weight. It's the alleviation of all burden, in particular the burden of the Law. Through our faith in Jesus we have been set free from the Law. In Jesus, God's grace has been richly lavished upon us. God's grace is the yoke of Jesus. Jesus' yoke is God's undeserved favor of us. Jesus' yoke is his own perfect obedience being counted to us. Jesus' yoke is his death for our sin and his resurrection for our eternal life being counted to us. In Acts 15

Peter goes on and speaks of God's salvation of grace in contrast with the burden of the Law. Peter says in Acts 15:11, "We believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will." What good news! We are saved from the condemnation we deserve through the grace of the Lord Jesus. What relief - what great rest this gives to our souls!

-Matt Peery

Rest Is Best

"This is what the sovereign Lord, the Holy one of Israel says: 'In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it'." (Isaiah 30:15)

The passage from Isaiah quoted above is a stark reminder of my own foolishness with regard to my relationship with Christ. Isaiah is telling the Israelites that rest and repentance is what is needed. Seeking God is a necessity, more than anything else. Isaiah is clear that quiet trust in God is strength, "...but you would have none of it." Oh how that hurts when I read that particular part of the scripture. I read it and I think about how often I try to get busy and figure out the problem before spending time alone in prayer with my "Sovereign Lord." I am a worry wart. What if my health fails? What if I can't pay the bills this month? I just can't seem to let God have the issues plaguing my life at the moment.

So as the scripture points out so clearly, my condition requires rest and repentance. Again, I repent and again, God is faithful! He doesn't grow weary of me. I am so thankful that the "Holy One of Israel" is willing to forgive me through his son Jesus! The rest that Jesus provides for me at this moment is a sigh of relief, I feel light and free. I am allowed to begin again. My life isn't over

because I mess everything up!
Praise God my relationship with the Lord is not based upon my perfection! It's based on Him, it's all Him and what He has already done! I can rest knowing I do not have to be perfect. I repent and finally rest!

Thanks be to God that through Jesus, I am resting under the cover of His perfection!

-Mary Malone

From the Hymn Be Still, My Soul

Be still, my soul: the Lord is on thy side.

Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain.

Leave to thy God to order and provide;

In every change, He faithful will remain.

Be still, my soul: thy best, thy heav'nly Friend

Through thorny ways leads to a joyful end.

The Seventh Day

Blessing and rest, delight in everything

Sustained by your strong love and richly blest,

This is the gift you give, the day you bring

Blessing and rest.

This is indeed the 'gladness of the best',

From first lines in the east where linnets sing,

To where the last light lingers in the west,

You lift the cares to which I used to cling,

As you yourself descend to be my guest

And show me how to find in everything

Blessing and rest.

-Malcolm Guite

Rest for Our Souls

Matthew 11:28-29 (ESV) says, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 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."

Do you find that we sometimes yearn for this rest for our souls? Every moment seems to be filled with multiple things that need to be done, phone calls to make, text and emails to answer, the list goes on. I fondly remember as a child visiting my grandparents during summer break. They were up at sunrise and worked a full day. Yet, when supper was finished, usually around 7pm, they would sit outside and enjoy their time together quietly talking, reading, studying, or visiting with neighbors until the sun went down so they could go to bed.

This sounds very foreign to us today. And, in fact it is. Few people enjoy this luxury in the U.S. Even when we have the option to spend 'free time' together, we are more likely to be watching TV or scrolling on our phones.

We are blessed to say that in Ghana, at least those who are middle age and older still take the time to enjoy relaxing - doing nothing more than having quiet conversations with family and friends, reading or studying while listening to the crickets. Cell phones have been put away for the day; they discuss with each other what happened in their lives today and what they expect tomorrow to bring.

We stay encouraged in how God is always working in our lives to give us opportunities to "find rest for our souls". We observe and try to emulate the people of Ghana who have never abandoned a lifestyle of hard work and then daily rest. They have never accepted a lifestyle of constant busyness and full calendars, but just an acceptance of turning off the phone and the calendar for a few hours each evening, trusting that God can run this world without us at least until we wake up in the morning.

-Bonnie Parker

Give it a Rest

Stop it! Quit that! Cease and Desist! Don't do that! Give it a rest!

We've heard that phrase, "Give it a rest!" and others like it probably a million times. The idea clearly is to stop something, and hopefully move on to doing something better.

At the beginning of time, when God created all things, he "gave it a rest" after it was complete, and He called it "Good." His rest was a sign of the goodness and perfection of what He created, including mankind - the pinnacle of His creation. The seventh Sabbath day of creation week was an example that we should follow, and was created for the benefit of mankind to reveal the glory of God. As Jesus explained in Mark 2:27-28, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath."

On Sinai, God gave commandments to Israel through Moses, the fourth of which was to, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.... For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy." (Exodus 20:8-11) The whole of creation was at the time of creation "Good" in God's sight, including the day of rest.

Yes, God's works are good and perfect, but what about the works of mankind? God searches our hearts, and finds that we are lacking, as He says in Jeremiah 17:9-10, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? 'I the LORD search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds.'" And as the Apostle Paul quoted from the Psalms in Romans 3:10-11, "As it is written: 'None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God.'" What are the natural works of mankind? Sin! What would it be good for us to "Give it a rest!" from? Our sin. This is explained in the book of Hebrews, using the ancient nation of Israel as a lesson for us to learn

from. When God brought Israel out of Egypt, as a nation they fell into sin, even to the point of worshiping idols, utterly rejecting God. In Hebrews 4:4-11, we read, "For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: 'And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.' And again in this passage he said, 'They shall not enter my rest.' Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, again he appoints a certain day, 'Today,' saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.' For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience." If we enter God's rest from our sinful "works" then we are free to do works of righteousness in Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath, rather than our own works of disobedience.

In Matthew 12, Jesus criticized the religious leaders for their hyper vigilance to "observe the Sabbath" yet they missed the importance of resting from their own works, then relying on the works of God. Jesus tells them in verses 11-12 when they asked if it is lawful to heal on the Sabbath, "He said to them, 'Which one of you who has a sheep, if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more value is a man than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.'"

When is that Sabbath rest, which is dedicated to God's goodness? Only on the seventh day? No, our Sabbath rest is every day, as we live every day free from the burden of sin. We therefore do not need to continue carrying the burden of sin since Jesus carried it for us, so we can "give it a rest!" Take encouragement from these words of Jesus, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Mat 11:28)

-Joe Council

Q&A with Chuck Cook

Q: Rest sounds good, but many people find it hard to actually rest. Why is this? What is it about our hearts that resists rest?

The “Why is it hard to rest” question is a broad one and probably needs a bit of qualification lest I end up wrongly burdening someone about their lack of rest. For instance, a mother of young children, or a spouse or child who has become a full-time caretaker for their loved one, or someone having to work 2 jobs to make ends meet is probably not going to get a lot of opportunities for rest. This is simply to recognize that there are seasons in our lives that faithful obedience and sacrificial love will require more of us; rest becomes something we long for but just aren’t able to fully enjoy. So, for those in these types of circumstances I wouldn’t see their hearts resistant to rest.

With that said, generally speaking, there may be a number of factors for why we may find it hard to properly rest. Certainly the culture in which we live, the background of our raising and examples of our parents/families, or even just the natural temperament of our personalities can play a role in how we view and interact with the idea of rest. Many of us have been rightly taught to see the value of hard work. Plus, as those made in the image of the God who works (Gen 1), we feel a sense of wholeness or fittingness when we are active and productive. These things are good and right. The problem is that they aren’t the whole story. We are prone to overemphases and imbalances. We forget that we are also made to rest (Gen 2:1,2).

Our hearts may resist rest because we may (wrongly) view it as a threat to our value of work and our sense of identity/worth connected to it. We may resist rest because it reminds us of our creatureliness. That is, rest says to us that we do not possess infinite energy/vitality, and that the world will keep going without our activity. And, we may resist rest because we fear what others may think of us. We wonder if others will think less of us for our rhythms and seasons of rest.

Q: How is God’s grace in Christ connected to our rest?

Boy, I suppose there could be a number of approaches to this question; but, since this is an interview (not a book) and since I’m no expert, let me try to keep it simple.

Despite all the mess we have made, burdens we create and carry, work we can’t achieve, and guilt we have acquired (all of which land us in unrest), God loves us!! He has loved us so much that he has come to us in Christ to fix the mess, lift the burden, accomplish the work, and remove the guilt. The soul-restoring, righteousness-achieving, sin-forgiving, guilt-removing cross of Christ and his life-giving resurrection invite us to the comprehensive rest we long for. By faith and repentance we are united to the “rest” that Christ is. His invitation remains, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 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” (Matt. 11:28-30).

Q: Some have said we live in an age of distraction. Distraction is not always bad, but how can distraction keep us from truly resting?

Because of our fallenness we can take any good and legitimate thing and misuse or abuse it. I suppose distraction could become a hindrance to rest if we are turning to that distraction more than we are trusting in the Lord and seeking to cultivate our relationship with him. When distractions become our remedy or refuge rather than a gift of relief/refreshment to be stewarded then we’re probably getting out of kilter. And, thereby, we actually compound the problem: we miss the opportunity to truly rest and we get the added burden of guilt, shame, or regret for having squandered the opportunity.

Q: Technology certainly doesn’t help. What pastoral word would you give to those who have a hard time turning away from the screens?

Let me start with a necessary caveat/disclaimer: I’m not a trained

counselor, therapist, psychologist, or expert. So, I am not speaking to addictions, but rather, to the real struggle of not being enslaved to our screens.

And here, I think we need that liberating, rest-giving word of the gospel: There is abundant forgiveness in Christ for the misuses and abuses of our screens (Ps 130; 1 John 1:5-9), and there is the real, daily, indwelling power of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:1-15; Eph 5:15-18) available to each of us so that we don’t have to be a slave to anything (1 Cor. 6:12). We are pardoned and empowered! But please don’t misunderstand: the power that the Spirit gives involves our effort, diligence, and sanctified common sense (see the whole book of Proverbs). So, we prayerfully (because we are dependent on God) take practical steps like turn it off, hand it over, trade it in for a “dumb phone” or landline, change a routine, introduce a new experience in its place (walking, jogging, biking, playing catch, family games, rocking on the front porch, writing a letter, journaling, reading, meditating, building relationships, volunteering,... the list really could be endless). Again, more could be said but maybe this at least gets the juices flowing.

Q: What would you say to those who feel guilty about taking time to rest?

Well, I guess I would ask them “Why?” It seems to me that identifying why they feel guilty could help determine what to say. They may have some false sense of guilt that needs to be countered with grace and truth. They may have a wrong view of rest or of God (by teaching, example, or instinct) and need help understanding biblical rest and God’s nature. They may be struggling with pride or fear of what others think and that would need to be dealt with. Ultimately, though, I’d want to encourage them to discover afresh that rest is a beautiful gift from our compassionate Creator who knows our frame (Ps 103:13-14; 127:2), from Christ the good Shepherd who restores our souls through redeeming cruciform-love (Ps 23:1-3; Jn 10:10-11,27-30), and from the Spirit who comes to indwell us as Comforter/Counselor (Jn 14:16, 26-27).

A Prayer for Peace

Lord, your people have always lived in a culture of hate, chaos, and ultimately war. Our rebellious and sinful nature results in warring against you, your kingdom, and its rule and reign.

But when we receive you as Savior, we make peace with you. We surrender our will to yours, and humble ourselves to follow. That decision puts us at odds with this world but at peace with you. The result is that we no longer fit in the world.

As your children, we long for peace, harmony, and love for one another. But the world seeks to dominate, exterminate, and remove any vestige of your love for them.

While we are broken that our peace-making efforts seem far too often to end in persecution, rejection, and ultimately martyrdom, we press forward by loving our enemies, as you have instructed.

We do so precisely because we are your people. You have called us to be peace makers. And though the results of our efforts may end in conflict and separation, we press forward by loving others into your kingdom.

We do so because peace is a byproduct of a faith in the hope that Jesus gives us. Because of the resurrection of Jesus, we know that all things are in Your hands.

And so we trust in your sovereign will to play out in our lives in both small and large ways. And that, through it all, we will be an instrument of your peace in a broken, chaotic, hate-filled world.

In Jesus name I pray, Amen.

-Philip Simcosky

Sabbath-Work

(An Excerpt)

“And on the same day was the sabbath.” — John v. 9.

OUR Divine Master healed men every day of the week; from the first day even to the close of the seventh day, he went about doing good, and healing all manner of diseases. The

healing virtue did not flow from him occasionally, but perpetually. It was not like that famous pool which was only now and then touched with the angel’s wing, and so made salutary to the sick folk lying around; but whoever stepped into the pool of Christ’s mercy found healing at any hour of the day or night.

Still, it is worthy of notice that the Lord Jesus frequently made the Sabbath to be a high day of grace and blessing. There was, I suppose, something about that day that led him more specially to display his great power upon it; or, probably, he felt bound to meet the superstition of the Pharisees, and he met it by a flood-tide of mercy upon that day to the sons of men. I have read to you the records of six notable miracles which were worked by our Lord upon the Sabbath-day. I need not read them again, but I will just remind you that those miracles comprised the casting out of a devil in the synagogue, the healing of a man whose hand was withered, the lifting up of a woman who had been bound by infirmity for eighteen years, the instantaneous cure of the dread disease of dropsy, the recovering of a man who had been afflicted with palsy for thirty-eight years so that he could not stir, and the opening of the eyes of one who was born blind; — six notable miracles to render the Sabbath-day most famous as a day of the display of Christ’s power.

The Sabbath was a day of rest, and Christ did not break his rest by his miracles; for he was God, so it was rest to him to do good. You remember how, when he spoke to the woman of Samaria at the well of Sychar, he told his disciples that it was his meat and drink to be dealing out mercy to her. He was refreshed by what, to others, might have been wearisome; and, assuredly, whenever the Lord Jesus wrought a deed of mercy, it was rest to his heart. And, moreover, it was giving rest to others. To those who had been afflicted so long, what rest his miracles brought! To that poor

daughter of Abraham, who had been bound eighteen years, what rest it was once more to straighten herself and to stand upright, and to glorify God for the marvellous miracle that had been wrought. And the man who had been bedridden for thirty-eight years, what a time of merciful rest that Sabbath was for him! To take up his bed and walk, was to be made truly to rest; not for all that long period had he enjoyed such rest as he did on that memorable Sabbath when Christ healed him.

So, then, viewing the Lord Jesus Christ as Divine, I say that he committed no breach of the rest of God. He first enjoyed it himself by working the miracle, and then he spread the influence of that rest upon those who were helped by him. Viewing him also in his condescending capacity as the God-man, in the form of the servant of men, he did not break the day of rest, for his healing was a form of holy ministry. He was preaching sermons while he was healing the sick, — and the best sort of sermons, too, sermons that must strike and be remembered, for men could see them with their eyes as well as hear them with their ears.

I am going very briefly to refer to these cures of Christ, in the fond hope that he will transfer from the seventh to the first day of the week the glory which he put upon his ancient Sabbath. I need not say in the “hope” that he will do it, as though it were a new thing, for he has done it all through the Christian era. I suppose that there have been more souls born to God on the last day of the week than on all the other days of the week. Certainly, this day, on which Christ rose from the grave, has been the time of the resurrection of ten thousand times ten thousand; and when we have met together, on this first day of the week, to sing hymns and to pray, in the name of Jesus, and to talk of his great love and of all that came of it, he has been specially present with us, and he has wrought wondrous miracles of mercy many and many a time. May he do so among us now!

-C.H. Spurgeon, February 18, 1883