

*At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. <sup>26</sup> Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.*

*<sup>27</sup> "All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.*

*<sup>28</sup> "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> 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. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:25-30)*

### **Jesus Gives Us Rest!**

Last week, I had a tough time getting to sleep on Saturday night. I maybe got three or four hours of sleep. Of course, I always do a better job up here on if I feel fresh and alert. When I don't, it's hard to remember what comes next. It's hard to focus and present a clear and meaningful message. Maybe it seems like I have trouble sleeping every week. Do you ever have trouble sleeping? What's work like the next day? It's pretty brutal, isn't it? We need to get enough rest. But being sleepy isn't the only kind of tiredness. Sometimes, we're bone tired because we've been doing physical work all day. Sometimes, we're exhausted by drama in our families or at the work place. Sometimes, we're just beaten down by disappointments and worries. For all those things, we need rest. But rest isn't always sleeping. It isn't always lying in the pool. Sometimes, rest is getting in the car and going someplace else and thinking about something else. Sometimes, it's spending time with people who love you – or just picking up the phone and talking to your best friend. Because there are different kinds of weariness, there are different kinds of rest. This morning, Jesus talks to us about the rest he gives us. It's what we need most in life. My friends, **Jesus gives us rest!**

#### **I.**

I remember my mom saying once, "I need to go to church. I can't get through the week without it." She was hinting at the point Jesus was making to us this morning. He says, **"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."** He goes on to call it "rest for your souls." He's making a connection here that even we Christians sometimes forget: to get through life here, to face all the physical and emotional and mental challenges of this life, we need spiritual strength. That only comes from him. **Jesus gives us rest for our souls!**

In 1943, a psychologist named Abraham Maslowe argued that humans have a hierarchy of needs. He meant that you have to take care of some things before you even want to take care of others. So if people are hungry or hurting or afraid, they can't pursue being loved or creative or well-educated. There is some truth to what he was saying. But it's not as simple as many people think. When I was studying for the ministry, I had a conversation once with a friend of my parents about doing foreign mission work. I was very focused on bringing the gospel to people who don't know Jesus. This friend, who was a Christian, argued that it's a waste of time to talk to people about Jesus when they're hungry or hurting or living in a refugee camp. They don't care about that stuff. They just want to eat and have medical care and a roof over their heads. But that's just not true. In fact, Jesus' whole point this morning is that rest for our souls can give us the strength to face the hurts and sorrows we encounter here.

I've seen it again and again. Knowing Jesus and his love enables us to trust God when we're hurting. I've stood next to dying Christians and watched them cling to Jesus, even when it was getting harder to breathe. I've seen Christians with shattered lives take comfort in the promises that Jesus makes, especially the promise that he's using all our hurts and sorrows to bring us to heaven. We human beings aren't just animals who need to eat and drink and satisfy our physical urges. God gave us minds. God gave us hearts. And God tied it all to our soul. The spiritual part of us gives life to our bodies and it touches all that we are and in turn it is touched by all that we experience. So a spiritual distress can cause us to lose our appetites or have sleepless nights. And an emotional hurt can cause a crisis of faith.

So Jesus gives us rest for our souls to bless our whole person. What is that rest? It's not a vacation. It's not sleeping in, as helpful as those things can be. Rest for our souls is nothing more or less than the gospel. It's Jesus' love applied to our lives. Rest for our souls begins with the understanding of where hurt comes from:

sin. My sin hurts me and makes my life harder. My sin hurts the people I love and their sin often hurts me. The sin of strangers often makes my life harder. Finally, sin in general has broken God's world and it causes hurt. The sin of Adam and Eve brought all disease and disaster into our lives. So when we talk about Jesus taking away our sin, we're talking finally about him solving all the problems of this life.

He does that. He does it finally in heaven and perfectly in the resurrection. But he also does it here. Jesus loves all Christians. He protects us. He walks with us and pays attention to what's happening to us. He knows the challenges we face. He listens to our prayers and gives us strength to face the hurts and sorrows. He answers our prayers, many times by taking care of whatever we're struggling with. On a deeper level, he promises that he decides what we have to face. He will only allow those things to come that he will turn into blessing for us. He sees the future and he leads us down paths that we never would have chosen. When life hurts, he sends pastors to us to remind us that he loves us. They point us to his cross where we see that love, because he died there for you and for me. They point us to the empty tomb where we see his power to rescue us, because he has already freed us from our own sin and death and the power of the devil. They pray with us and they urge us to trust in what he is doing. Trust the one who died and rose for you.

That is spiritual rest. It doesn't necessarily make our hurts and sorrows go away. The difference between this life and the next one is pain. Because there will be no sin in the life to come, we will never hurt again once we get there. But here, we have to hurt. Here, God uses pain and sorrow to teach us patience and steadfastness. He uses it to purify our faith in Christ. So we will all hurt here sometimes. But when we do, Jesus gives us rest for our souls. He comes to us with the gospel that says we are forgiven. We are loved. We will be cared for. That refreshes us. It gives us strength to go on. So come to Jesus when you're weary and burdened, come to Jesus who is gentle and humble in heart, and he will give you rest for your souls.

## II.

Now, that might seem a little complicated, but it really isn't. We're helpless and Jesus rescues us. We're sinners, and Jesus paid for us. We're dying and Jesus gives us life in heaven and he will raise us from the dead. We're in danger and Jesus protects us. It's a very simple plan. And you know it by heart. The truth is, that's all God sends me to tell you. When was the last time I told you something new and different? Because it is so simple and clear, some people find it to be unsatisfying. They want something deeper and more challenging, something that seems to make more sense in this world. But this is the message God gave us. And it works. **Jesus gives us rest through his love.**

The world is full of people who are too smart for Jesus. They go out and get their Ph.D.'s or they write books or they run companies and they have enormous success. They are truly brilliant individuals. Sadly, guys like that often are so full of themselves that they just can't buy a message that says we're nothing. We're weak and helpless. We're sinners who cannot get to heaven on our own, who cannot come up with a way to overcome human sin. You would think that smart guys like that would see how bad the world is and draw the right conclusion. But they're blinded by their own brilliance and they cheat themselves of the rest that Jesus gives us.

Jesus says today, **"I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children."** God judges the proud and the arrogant. If they think they're smarter than he is, he's willing to let them go their own way – at least until they have the kind of crisis that forces them to look for someone greater than they are. But God loves the humble – the people Jesus calls "little children" here. He reveals his love to them.

Which are we? Our culture values education and self-reliance, and so do I. Our culture values taking responsibility and creative thinking, and so do I. But it's really easy even for us Christians to fall into the kind of thinking that says we're smarter than God. I remember talking to a young man who had been raised as a Christian but who hadn't been to church in a long time. He was divorced and he was not following the lifestyle he had been taught in catechism class. When I pointed that out to him, he smiled and said, "I've never been one for following the rules." He's a very gifted man. He was baptized and confessed his faith at his confirmation and he heard the gospel. But when he wanted to sin, he was good at making excuses and justifying it. Isn't that true for all of us? We follow the rules that are easy for us. But when God says something that's hard, we come up with an excuse or we find a way to avoid thinking about it. We act like we're smarter than God who gave us the rules – his law.

What is the result? Pain and sorrow in this life. And finally, it could lead to the death of our faith and eternity in hell. We all have an Old Man, a sinful nature inside us that constantly strives to escape from our faith. So we all talk ourselves out of what God says sometimes. We're all guilty of that sin, to a greater or lesser degree. We all deserve God's punishment in hell.

But Jesus still lived for all of us. He was perfect in his faith for us. He had no sinful nature, so he lived the life we can't live. Then he died and paid for all the sin in our hearts. He died and paid for all the times we tried to outsmart God and justify our own sin. He died and paid and then he rose. He declared that we are forgiven, for every single sin. Then he gave us spiritual rest for all the days we wrestle with our sin and the sin of others. He gave us that comfort and strength to get through this life and reach heaven, where our own hearts will at last be perfect and we'll never sin again.

And he didn't wait for us to figure all that out. Jesus says, **"No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."** Jesus has chosen to reveal that comfort to you and me. We are children to God. Grown-ups don't like to be treated like children. We don't like having people tell us what to do. We don't like people acting like we're too stupid to understand. But compared to Jesus, we are children. We're kindergarteners looking at a world we can't understand and asking questions like, "Why is the sky blue?" Just like the physics of the answer to that question are beyond kindergartener's understanding, God is beyond our grasp. Forgiveness is an equation that no scientist can come up with. So God treats us like children: he tells us the answer. He gives it to us in terms that we can understand. And he tells us to trust him when it comes to the things that we can't ever grasp.

When you were little, were you afraid of the dark? Were you afraid of thunderstorms and loud noises? Who solved those problems for you? Mom and dad, right? They bought nightlights. They let you hide under their covers. They showed you that there was nothing in the closet or under the bed. Even if you were afraid when they walked of the bedroom, as long as they were in there, you knew the monsters under the bed couldn't hurt you, right? You didn't understand it all, but those parents made you feel safe and loved. You can't understand all that we face in this life. Why do people we love die? Why do we face terrible illnesses and physical pain? Why do we have financial disasters and lose jobs? We can't see our lives the way that Jesus does. We can't always know the eternal good that God is doing through those things. But Jesus knows. He promises that he will take care of it all. He promises that he will love us and use all those things to get us home to heaven. He promises that he will be with us every step of the way. Those promises give us rest for our souls. That rest gives us strength to face each day that we live in this broken and dying world. Come and find rest for your souls. Amen.