

## **Intro**

Jesus promises rest for our souls when we come to him. Is that your experience? Some still struggle with rest even after trusting in Jesus. Sometimes this unrest is a result of legalism we experience in Christian churches.

Legalism = seeking to find acceptance with God through my performance...and legalism often comes in the form of extra-biblical manmade rules that have to be kept

- Legalism we might find in Christian churches: unmarried girls can't attend college and need to live with their parents until they find a mate; women can't wear pants & men must wear suits; no tattoos or body piercings; no music with a beat (rock, rap, r & b, country, jazz, pop); no movie theatres; no movies other than G or PG; no doing anything other than spiritual disciplines like Bible reading, prayer, fasting, evangelism, and church activities, because anything else is failure to redeem the time, etc.
- 6 days a week; rationale for pawning all video games

We suffer when unnecessary burdens are placed on us. Our disturbed conscience worries about the wrong things. And failure to keep manmade rules brings unnecessary guilt while true matters of the heart like pride and humility are left neglected.

Legalism results in an inward Christianity focused on my own purity to the neglect of fellow believers and evangelism. Focusing on what we can't do can lead to neglect of what we're called to do! And legalism divides us from fellow believers who don't keep such a rigorous standard. I can't fellowship with a person who watches that sort of movie, or a person who dresses like that in the sanctuary. When I'm convinced seminary students aren't allowed to play video games how does that affect my opinion of a student down the hall with an Xbox?

Is this the rest Jesus promised? Let's look at Matthew 11:20-30...

## **READ PASSAGE**

## **PRAY**

## **Body**

### **Passage Focus**

FCF: rejection of divine revelation; weariness from unnecessary religious demands

Grace given: warning about the seriousness of rejecting God's revelation; rest

### **BIG IDEA:**

**Repentance brings rest.**

**Rebuke...Rest**

### **Setting**

Jesus speaking to the crowds (11:7)

Speaks about John → Notes the general rejection of John the Baptist and himself → rebukes cities that rejected him → responds to the present rejection with spontaneous praise of the Father → calls to crowds to respond and follow him

### **Point 1: Rebuke (11:20-24)**

#### **Explanation**

Jesus had done mighty works:

**Matthew 4:23-24** And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. <sup>24</sup> So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them.

**Matthew 11:5** the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them.

But they failed to respond to Jesus. Jesus rebuked specific cities *“because they did not repent.”*

- 1) Jesus compares the cities of his day (Chorazin, Bethsaida, Capernaum) with wicked cities of the past (Tyre and Sidon, Sodom)
- 2) Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum were privileged to witness Jesus’ mighty works whereas Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom were not
- 3) If Tyre and Sidon had been privileged with witnessing Jesus’ mighty works they would have repented; if Sodom witnessed Jesus’ works, it would still exist (assumes repentance for Sodom)
- 4) If these wicked cities would have repented because of Jesus’ works, how awful is the failure to repent in Jesus’ day?
- 5) Greater punishment for greater revelation; greater revelation = greater culpability
- 6) Jesus warns about the severity of the consequences for their unbelief to provoke repentance

#### **Repentance**

Repentance = u-turn. Repentance = change of mind about God and sin.

#### **Illustration**

PNS yearly video about hearing loss: hearing loss is permanent → loud machinery causes hearing loss (grinding wheels, etc.) → loud music causes hearing loss → hearing loss affects quality of life → responded to that information resolving to never experience hearing loss again → no more loud music = music only loud enough to hear → never went on a submarine without ear plugs already in → ear plugs in whenever I mow the lawn or snow blow or use any loud equipment → not a public service announcement for hearing loss, but an example of how repentance works → I watched a message that changed my mind about the importance of hearing loss which resulted in new behavior opposite to my prior practice (u-turn)

- Belief led to action

- Trusting the message led to action
- Trust drives the u-turn and change of mind
- Faith grounds repentance
- Repentance is an act of faith (the righteous live by faith and this includes repentance)

Repentance is intimately tied to faith: a new understanding of God and sin leads to a new response to God and sin. Think of repentance as a changed stance towards God. Repentance assumes faith. No one undergoes a change of mind and u-turn without trusting the gospel message. The mind is changed because of trust. The behavior changes because of trust. Repentance is rooted in faith!

### **Greater culpability**

Scripture teaches there is greater condemnation where greater revelation exists. All who fail to respond to God with repentance will suffer eternal (unending) punishment in hell. Elsewhere Jesus compares hell with weeping (sorrow) and gnashing of teeth (fright). What Jesus is saying is that the punishment for some will be worse than the punishment for others. Those unbelievers raised in Christian homes or those who attended Christian churches for years without actually repenting or those who heard the gospel over and over from a Christian friend but never embraced Jesus. When Jesus returns, these will suffer greater punishment than those who never heard the gospel or had minimal encounters with Christians.

Greater punishment for unheeded revelation = repent now!

### **Point 2: Rest (11:25-30)**

#### **Explanation**

Present rejection prompts Jesus to praise the Father. Why? Because the Father has *“hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children.”*

- “these things” = kingdom realities like Jesus is the Messiah and rejecting the Son is equivalent to rejecting the Father
- “wise and understanding” = those who are self-sufficient and prideful; those who think they understand well enough without Jesus’ teaching
- “little children” = those who are humble and willing to be taught; those who know they lack in understanding and need Jesus’ teaching
- the Father was pleased to reveal and conceal (11:26).

*All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. (11:27)*

- *All things have been handed over to me by my Father,* = the Father has delegated authority to the Son
- *and no one knows the Son except the Father,* = the intimate relationship between the Son and the Father is unique...the Father knows Jesus as he truly is...in order to know Jesus the Father must reveal him to us
- *and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.* = the Son knows the Father as he truly is, and in order to know the Father the Son must choose to reveal the Father to us

### **Summary**

- 1) The Father is pleased to reveal divine mysteries to the humble and conceal divine mysteries from the proud
- 2) If we know the Father, it's because the Son has chosen to reveal him to us

## 11:28-30

After spontaneously praising the Father, Jesus calls the crowds to follow him. Let's dissect one of the greatest evangelistic passages in Scripture...

*"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."* (11:28)

Jesus issues a command ("come to me") with a promise ("I will give you rest"). Jesus is saying, "Following me will bring you the rest you desire." Jesus has a particular sort of person in mind. All who labor speaks of someone who is worn out from hard work. And heavy laden speaks of someone who is carrying a burden.

What labor and what burden does Jesus have in mind? Likely the burdens placed on them by the scribes and the Pharisees.

### Pharisee burdens

- Added requirements to the law to ensure that the law wouldn't be broken.
- Examples include Sabbath restrictions like how many letters could be written and erased, how long a distance a person could walk, prohibitions like trapping a deer and starting or extinguishing a fire.
- The same goes with purity and tithing laws. Like straining wine to ensure unclean insects were not present (see Matt 23:24).
- These were manmade burdens added to God's law that made obedience harder than it already was.
- The result was exasperated people who had to live with burdens they couldn't bear or escape from.

The people were worn out by the Pharisees' regulations. On top of God's law itself which needs to be kept, the people were taught to keep the Pharisees' rules. Despite their best efforts, the burden remained. No rest. No cleansed conscience. Only reminders of failure to keep their requirements perfectly. A burden to great to bear. With no hope of relief.

This burden need not be limited to the Pharisees' manmade rules. There was the burden of keeping God's law, the burden of Roman oppression, and burdens from daily life like struggling to find work or physical ailments.

But Jesus promises rest. Jesus issues more commands with a promise:

*"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."* (11:29)

Jesus gives two instructions. Take my yoke and learn from me. And he appeals to his nature. He's gentle = he's not abusive. He's here to do you good, not harm. And he's lowly = he's not here to assert his divine rights, or to obtain personal gain. He's here to serve you.

Yoke = a harness put on oxen to join them for the purpose of pulling a load...later it was a harness put on slaves that signified subjection

While a physical yoke was a burden and a weight to bear, Jesus' yoke served a different purpose. Taking Jesus' yoke results in *"rest for your souls."* Why? *"For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light"* (11:30). While carrying the burdens of Pharisaical extra-biblical rules, keeping God's law without fail, and life's struggles in general results in an exasperated person who is worn out, taking Jesus' burden results in a soul at

rest. Jesus' yoke = taking on the burden of being Jesus' disciple. When we trust Jesus and change our stance towards him (repentance), we take on a burden, but this burden brings rest to our worn out soul. **Repentance brings rest.** Jesus wants to teach us a new way.

### Application

The assumption is that following Jesus inevitably results in a soul at rest. It's like what we saw in Hebrews 9: a cleansed conscience no longer troubled by dead works is freed up to serve God. When we trust Jesus we receive pardon and we're free from guilt. We're no longer afraid of God's punishment. We know we fall short, but we're still accepted despite our failure. We have no need to appease God or earn forgiveness. Instead we're free to live for God with confidence we're forgiven and loved. That Jesus took the burden of our sins away when he died on the cross for us. Fully accepted and free from the burden of keeping the law perfectly, we have peace with God. Striving to do the impossible, appeasing God through our own efforts, is over. We are free to live for God as a response to his pardon. We follow Jesus because we love him. Our soul is at rest.

The ideal is we recognize the weight of our sins and see our need for God's pardon. We come to Jesus for forgiveness of sins on the basis of his finished work on the cross. At that point, our conscience is cleansed and our soul finds rest. We no longer have to strive after God's acceptance on the basis of our performance. Fully confident of God's acceptance and aware of our need for divine enablement, we serve God as a response to his love in the strength he supplies through his Spirit. Our conscience is cleansed and we're no longer troubled by manmade regulations. We work from the acceptance we've received rather than working for acceptance we wish to gain.

If this isn't your Christian experience, there's something wrong with your spiritual method. Maybe you're consistent in Scripture reading, prayer, and local church service, but this soul rest still alludes you. You still fear God isn't pleased with your performance. There's more you could do. You're not faithful enough. You still think you need to do something to obtain God's approval. How can this be?

- 1) You're not resting in the finished work of Christ...deep down you believe there's something you need to do to earn your pardon and God's approval...you're serving God to gain his approval rather than out of love for Jesus
- 2) You've equated faithfulness with obeying manmade regulations...you're struggling to keep a number of rules God never intended...since the Spirit isn't helping you to do what God never intended, you're in a place of futility and frustration
- 3) You've set unrealistic expectations for yourself...you're a limited, finite person...you can't do everything...you're limited in time and energy...this is why there is a local church body...we each contribute to the common good of the local church in different ways...each of us serve our purpose and together our church functions as God intends

→ a good rule of thumb is to fulfill the unique callings we have as individuals well (we'll start from young to old): obeying parents; loving siblings; doing our schoolwork; being a friend; evangelism; doing our job well; serving in the local church (trustee, worship team, fellowship committee, encouraging and caring for others); being a good neighbor; being a good citizen; discipling our children; loving our spouse; caring for older relatives; advising and encouraging grown children; discipling grandchildren

→ what callings do you have today?

→ God doesn't expect us to do everything, but he does expect us to fulfill some purposes...this is Jesus' burden for us...if the burden we think we have from Jesus is truly impossible for us to do, that burden is not from Jesus...Jesus' burden is light...he doesn't overload us like the Pharisees did to the crowds...his burden is doable, and he helps us do it

The Christian life ≠ impossible expectations. The local church shouldn't = a never ending burden.

- Taking on more than Jesus requires ≠ Jesus' yoke
- 1) Rest = cleansed conscience
- 2) Rest = Jesus doesn't overburden us
- 3) Rest = Jesus helps us/enables us to do what he commands
- 4) Rest ≠ sit around and do nothing
- 5) Rest ≠ no difficulties in life
- 6) If you're trusting Jesus but you're not experiencing rest, contact me

## **Conclusion**

### **Repentance brings rest.**

We've seen **rebuke**. Greater exposure to the gospel results in greater punishment if we refuse to repent.

We've seen **rest**. When we repent, when we change our stance towards Jesus, we find rest. Jesus says, "Come to me with your sins and find pardon. Trust me, I'm gentle and lowly. I care about your well-being. Trust in my finished work on the cross, not your own efforts. Embrace my teaching. In me, you'll find rest for your soul."