

10. Encouragement for the Journey

Sermon



Sunday, 12th July, 2020 – Glenda Bolitho



Words of Encouragement

Text: Matthew 11:28-30

Prayer:

Before I commence, let me pray.

*“May the words of my mouth and
the meditation of my heart,
be pleasing in Your sight,
O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.”*

Amen

Introduction:

Of all the great promises in the Bible, the words of our text contain one of the most precious. Jesus came into a labouring and heavy-laden world. People were struggling under the burden of sin, fear, insecurity and an empty, unsatisfying religion.

To the people of that day and to the people of our day, Jesus extended an invitation that is universal in its appeal, all-inclusive in its scope, positive in its promises, and eternal in its consequences. No one but a divine Saviour would or could make a promise like this.

The Invitation:

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”

Writing in “Our Daily Bread” Bible Reading Notes, Bill Crowder says, *“The rest Jesus offers is not simply found in the cessation of activity or the release of burdens. It is found in actively seeking his presence and his provision for our lives.”*

I experienced this most wonderfully in my own life when I was twelve years old, in Year 7 at School. I was confirmed at St. Matthew’s Anglican Church Sherwood that year. We were given a little book to follow and I loved hearing the beautiful prayers, readings and hymns. There were words in one prayer that I particularly loved. They were the words of our text today.

This invitation of Jesus’ is the most **extensive** invitation ever extended.

- The weary worker is invited to come to Christ. Faith in Christ actually brings a renewal of the vital energies of life.
- The weary worshipper is invited to come to Christ. Jesus was speaking to those who were burdened by empty (copious) religious observances. The Jews of Jesus’ day were suffering under a load of religious responsibilities laid on them by the priests, rabbis, scribes and Pharisees. Rest was relief from this burden.
- The weary worldly person is also invited to come to Christ. The world with all of its promised pleasures cannot bring the peace and joy that are offered to those who forsake the life of faithlessness and begin looking to God for guidance for help.

This invitation of Jesus’ is the most **inclusive** invitation ever extended.

- While innocent children are invited, the guilty sinner is also invited.
- The rich as well as the poor are included.
- The illiterate and the brilliant are both included.
- You and I are also included.

Jesus not only extends this invitation to those who are weary in active life, but to those who are weary in passive life. Whether your burden is physical, mental or spiritual, the Living Lord, who is to-day what He was yesterday, invites you to come.

The Promise:

- The privilege of being children of God (John 1:12)
- Forgiveness of sin (Luke 24:47)
- The power of God
- Provision for the future

“I will give you rest.” The rest Jesus promises is more wonderful than that which comes as the result of a good night’s sleep. He promises rest for the soul that can come only when a person is standing in a sure relationship with God.

This promise of rest includes **the privilege of being children of God**. In John 1:12 we read, *“Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”* The people to whom Jesus was speaking were struggling by legalistic methods to achieve a position of acceptance with God. Jesus promised adoption as a gift to those who would receive him into their hearts as Lord of their life.

This promise of rest **includes forgiveness of sins** (Luke 24:47) The people were labouring to atone for their own guilt. They were attempting to merit the favour of God. Jesus was proclaiming forgiveness as the gift of God to those who would repent and believe.

This promise of rest **includes the power of God**. Jesus was to make available to his disciples the inexhaustible resources of God for the living of fruitful lives. In the strength of this divine energy, they were to overcome the evil within and to resist the evil about them. With the power of God, they were to serve effectively doing God’s will.

This promise of rest **includes provisions for the future**. For the Christian, death need not be a tragedy. In many instances, when life has been full and complete, death need not be sad. It is but a doorway through which a child of God walks out of one room in God’s universe into the next room, where sin, suffering and separation are no more.

Take His Yoke:

In verse 29 Jesus says, *“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.”* Writing on this passage, Kerry Haynes says that Jesus illustrates the kind of relationship He wants to have with us by using a farming analogy. This analogy would have been very familiar to the people of his day. Jesus invites us to take His yoke. A yoke is a wooden frame that joins two animals together, usually oxen, who work in tandem to pull the plough through the fields. Christian discipleship is being in relationship with Jesus. Coming to Him, we allow ourselves to be metaphorically bound to Him. In Him we find our rest, for as Jesus points out himself, He is *“gentle and humble in heart”* (Mt 11:29). Jesus will lead us gently as we bind our lives to Him.

Both the Old and New Testaments speak of bringing our burdens to God. In Psalm 55:22 we read, *“Cast your cares on the Lord and He will sustain you.”* In the New Testament, 1 Peter 5:7 says *“Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you.”* Our son Ben brought this lovely plaque back for us when he attended the wedding of a friend in Mexico many years ago. Its beautifully printed in Spanish, but I know what it says as I can read the reference- 1 Pedro (Spanish for “Peter”) 5:7 *“Cast all your care on Him for he cares for you.”* It sits on the sideboard in our family room, and many are the times I’ve stood and read it and been reminded to take my worries to the Lord to be comforted and sustained by Him. Similarly, with the words from Philippians 4:4-7, *“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”* How often the words of both those texts have lifted me above my burdens and given me rest for my soul.

James Botts has written a charming vignette which beautifully illustrates this verse. It’s called, **“Rest for the Stressed”**.

A man once observed a farmer with his team of oxen ploughing the field. The man noticed that one of the animals seemed a lot bigger than the others, so he asked the farmer about it. The farmer replied, *“That older ox is the best one I’ve ever had; he knows his way around the field. The reason I put the younger one with him is so the older, more*

knowledgeable ox would teach him how to plough. If I didn't put them together, the younger one would never learn. By himself the younger ox would pull himself to sheer exhaustion, but together he learns to cooperate with and rest in the strength of the older ox."

And so, it is with us. We come to Jesus, we take his yoke, and we bind ourselves to Him and we do what the younger ox did. We learn from Jesus. The way of discipleship is to follow the Master, to become His apprentice. As Jesus said to his first disciples, *"Follow me"*, He says to us as well. The Apostle Paul once wrote, *"Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ"* (1Cor 11:1). Paul was able to say that because he had yoked himself to the Lord Jesus.

The Christian life is about binding ourselves to a person, Jesus our Saviour, who will help us to do God's will. The Zondervan commentary notes, *"As complicated as life may become, discipleship at heart simply means walking with Jesus in the real world and having Him teach us moment by moment how to live life his way"*.

Charles Stanley says, *"When we surrender the circumstances of our life to Him, he lifts us up and infuses our hearts with fresh hope and wisdom. Some situations are just too difficult for us to handle, but nothing is too great for Him. He promises to refresh our weary souls when we cry out to Him."*

Following Jesus brings rest for the stressed. Give Him your goals and aspirations, your relationships, your health. Find your life in Him.

Only Christ can take care of the past, provide for the present, and take care of the future at the same time. Come to him now. Take his yoke upon you lovingly, cheerfully and wholeheartedly.

Conclusion:

Let's draw to a close with a poem written almost 3,000 years ago, but still relevant to-day. You will find it in Isaiah 40:28-31.

*“Do you not know? Have you not heard?
The Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth.
He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one
can fathom.
He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the
weak.
Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and
fall;
But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow
weary,
They will walk and not be faint.”*

Prayer:

Let us pray: Lord, may we turn to you for our needed rest, and may we find our strength in you and in you alone. Help us to yoke ourselves to your son, Jesus Christ, for his load is light and his guidance gentle. In his name we pray.

Amen.

THE TENDER INVITATION

"Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest". (Mt. 11:28)

- Jesus, exceedingly sympathetic, and knowing the burdens and sorrows of man, extends rest to the weary and release from the bondage of sin.. *Heb. 4:14-16*
- As we read this invitation in its entirety it is seen to be two-fold in nature:
 - (1) Coming unto Christ, and then,
 - (2) Taking his yoke and learning of him.*(Mt. 11:28; 16:24-26)*

Reference Material:

The Zondervan 2008 Pastor's Manual – T T Crabtree
Craig Condon's "The Easiest Yoke We Can Carry" 2015
Kerry Haynes' "Rest For The Stressed" 2017
The New Bible Commentary Revised edited by D Guthrie