

²⁵ 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. ²⁶ Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure. ²⁷ “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. ²⁸ “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ 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. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

In our text, Jesus offers rest to all those who are weary and burdened. He is not talking about the person who has just put in a twelve-hour shift. He is talking about people who have been carrying a heavy load in their souls. Let me offer two case studies that describe someone who is “weary and burdened.”

A man grew up with a competitive nature. He was driven to be the best in everything that he did, and he found out that if he worked hard enough, he could be the best. He trained hard for every sport and always started on every team he ever played on. He was even good enough to get a college scholarship. He worked hard in the classroom as well. At his work, no one came to work earlier than he did and no one left later. Ten years into his marriage, his wife divorced him, taking their two children with her. It hit him hard, but he just decided to work harder. Yet he never seemed to achieve what he wanted. Sometimes, he was tempted to just quit it all and run. His soul was restless and all the success in the world didn’t change that. What was he missing? Did I mention that he never had time for church? Sitting in a pew on Sunday and doing nothing was just painful for him.

There was a single mother who was a faithful member of her church. She was involved in almost everything. She taught Sunday school and worked with the youth. She helped plan events. But in her mind and heart it never seemed to be enough. You see, when she was just a teenager, she got pregnant out of marriage. When she told her parents, her mother looked into her eyes and said, “I am ashamed of you.” Those words burned their way into her memory and her conscience, and she worked as hard as she could to try to wipe away that shame. Only, it was never enough. What was she missing?

People carry burdens they don’t have to carry. We carry the burdens of sins that stick like sticky glue to our lives. We struggle in our life of repentance. We wish we could just get past our sins and they would go away ... but they keep coming back, don’t they? We carry the burdens of sins in our past which caused us shame. Do you think Peter ever stopped remembering that he denied Jesus while Jesus was on trial? Do you think that David ever really “forgave himself” for the adultery he committed and that he had his friend and faithful soldier murdered to cover it up? What’s your story? What is the burden in your life?

Jesus says, **“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”** Let’s hear what Jesus says and better understand this invitation that he gives us today.

REST FOR THE WEARY!

What is this “rest” that Jesus is talking about? The Jews had a word for “rest.” The word was “Sabbath.” We should go back all the way to the Garden of Eden to understand this word. God created the world in six days. After the first day of creation, it says, “And there was evening and morning – the first day.” Every day ends with that same phrase.

Then in the beginning of Genesis 2 God tells us what happened on the seventh day. It says he rested from all of his labors. That doesn’t mean God took a nap. God stopped creating and started to enjoy his creation – especially the children he created, Adam and Eve. And it does not say, “And there was evening and morning, the seventh day.” That day was never going to end. Every day would be a day of rest for God and his children. Every day Adam and Eve would work in the garden and gather their food. It was not really work, because there were no weeds or plant diseases or droughts. And in the cool of the evening God came and walked and talked with children.

There wasn’t any shame in the garden. There was no terror of God in the garden – not until Adam and Eve broke God’s command and ate the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden. Now there was shame and they tried to cover themselves with leaves to hide their shame. Now there was terror in their hearts because they sinned against God – and they hid from God in the garden, hoping that he would not find them. Now there was toil and pain and suffering. Adam would work from sunup to sundown and eat his food with the sweat of his brow. Now Eve would suffer in bearing her children, and she would experience the sorrow of seeing her children die.

But the LORD came to them in the garden. He did not come to destroy them but to save them and to give them hope. He told them that someday he would send a Savior who would destroy the work of the devil and crush his head. In the process, this Savior, the seed of the woman, would suffer. The devil would strike his heel. With this simple promise, God gave Adam and Eve hope. He created faith in their hearts. And he gave them rest for their souls. God was no longer a terror to them but their friend and Savior. It is the promise of the gospel that gives God’s people rest.

So God set aside a day in the Old Testament and called it the “Sabbath” day. He told his people not to do any work that day. He never meant it as a day where people would make up a bunch of rules about doing this and not doing that. He just wanted people to take the day off and remember that God wanted to spend some time with his people, and he wanted them to spend some time with him. He wanted them to remember the promise he gave them to send a Savior to rescue them from their sins. He wanted them to think ahead to the day when he would take them to heaven and give them eternal rest.

God never meant the “Sabbath rest” to be something God’s people just experienced on that one day. It is something we can experience every day. That’s what the passage from Hebrews is telling us. **“It still remains that some will enter that rest, and those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in, because of their disobedience. Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it ‘Today’, when a long time later he spoke through David, as was said before: ‘Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.’”**⁸ For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. ⁹**There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God.**” (Hebrews 4:7-9) There is a Sabbath-rest for God’s people. There is a way to be restored to God’s family again. It doesn’t happen by just observing the day, but by listening to the gospel and believing it. **“Today, if you hear his voice!”** Then every day is a Sabbath day for you!

Jesus is teaching us the same in our text. **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. ²⁶Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure."** Some people don't get it, do they? The scientist looks to solve the mystery of the universe by building a nuclear collider and trying to discover the origin of the universe. Does it help him solve the unrest in his heart? No. The philosopher thinks and thinks and thinks until his brain is nearly empty, hoping to come up with the meaning of life. Does he solve the unrest in his heart? No. The mystic contemplates his navel or repeats a phrase over and over and over again, hoping that he will find inner peace. Does he find it? No. The child sings, "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so." Does he find peace and rest in his heart? Yes. God has hidden these things from the wise and revealed them to little children.

Sometimes our sinful nature gets in the way of our understanding this. We think if we just pray harder and harder and harder, then we will find peace. We think if we just overcome that one sin in our lives, we will find peace. Of course there is always another sin to take that one's place, even if we do somehow manage to get on top of it. You find rest for your souls, not because you pray harder or repent better. You cannot find it in yourself. You will only find it in Jesus.

And sometimes people give us bad advice and mislead us. Have you ever heard someone say, "You have to learn how to forgive yourself?" I want you to think about that for a moment. If I get angry and slap you in the face and I feel bad about that, I can make myself feel better if I just forgive myself. That doesn't work, does it? I need to know that the person I wronged has forgiven me. It is the same with our sins. I don't have to learn how to forgive myself. I have to learn that God has forgiven me.

Jesus says, **"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."** Let's go back to the Garden of Eden for a moment. Adam and Eve could not forgive themselves. They saw only anger in God's face after they fell into sin. They were looking at God through their shame and their guilt, and they did not have a clue that God could or would forgive them. God had to come to them. God had to give them hope. God had to show them that he would forgive their sins through the Savior that he would send.

If you want to have peace with God, if you want to know that God has forgiven your sins, if you want to find rest for your souls, then you can discover this only in Jesus, because God has revealed himself to you in Jesus. The writer to the Hebrews put it this way. **"In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being."**

So listen to Jesus beautiful invitation to you this morning. **"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."** How can you come to Jesus? You cannot come to Jesus any more than Adam and Eve could come to God in the garden. Your sins separate you from God, as it did them. Your sins create terror and shame in your hearts so that you tremble when you think of God. Your sins even make it hard for you to pray, because you do not feel that you have the right to step before the throne of God. You've lost

your child-like innocence, and you are terrified in the same way that Adam and Eve were terrified. Instead of confessing their sins, they made excuses and blamed each other. You do the same things, don't you? You would prefer not to own up to your sin, so you blame your parents or your spouse or the circumstances of your life. Only when Adam and Eve heard God speak his promise did their hearts change and the fear gave way to faith and trust.

"Come ... and learn from me, and you will find rest for your souls," Jesus says. You can come to Jesus, because Jesus invites you, and his words carry with them a power that only the Gospel can carry. The more you listen to Jesus and learn about Jesus and from Jesus, the more you can set the burdens of life aside and find rest for your souls. You can come to Jesus, because Jesus has invited you to come to him.

So come to Jesus and listen to his word and learn from him and you will find rest for your souls. You don't have to medicate to forget our sins. You don't have to figure out a way to forgive yourself. Jesus has already done that. He tells you in his Word that your sin is forgiven completely. Remember what the writer to the Hebrews said? "Today, if you hear his voice." Every day you can find rest for your souls by listening to Jesus speak to you in his Word.

He also comes to you and speaks to you through the visible word – the sacrament of the Lord's Supper – as well. "This is my body, which is given for you.... This is my blood which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of your sins." You don't have to talk to yourself to convince yourself that you are forgiven. Listen to Jesus and you will find rest for your souls.

Finally, Jesus says, **"For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."** The burden Jesus lays on us is the burden of living a godly life for his sake. This is not a heavy burden for two reasons. First, by faith in Jesus, keeping God's commandments is a joy and delight. Before, when you saw a commandment of God, you said in your sinful heart, "Do I have to?" Now, in your new man because your sins are forgiven, you say, "I want to."

Second, Jesus says we are yoked together with him. A yoke is what oxen wear to pull a heavy load. Very often the farmer will team up a strong ox with a smaller, younger one, so that the more mature ox can lead the younger. Tell me, if we are joined together with Jesus, who do you think is going to do the heavy lifting? It will be Jesus, won't it? That's why his yoke is easy and his burden is light.

Friends, there is enough hardship and work in this life that we don't have to add to the burden by carrying a load of shame and guilt. "Come to me," Jesus says, "and I will give you rest." Amen.