

ELUSIVE REST

(Sermon Summary)

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Sunday Morning, 4th September 2022

Reading: Isaiah 30:8-17. (v15)

Isaiah 30:15 contains a rich promise. It is the same as our Saviour offers in Matthew 11:28-30. It is something precious for the soul, an inner peace that expresses itself in real life and in the real world. Yet how many find it?

The context in Isaiah 30 is one of rebellion and refusal to ask for what is promised. In Matthew 11, the context is also one of opposition and refusal. In Isaiah 30:9 they do not hear and in v10 they say 'No' to the things of God. They despise the word of God (v12) and do the opposite of what it says to them (v16). The promise of rest seems elusive but that is because of our hard hearts. We are not willing (Luke 13:34) just as the people in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. There is so great a promise, yet we are, in our hearts, drawn back to Egypt.

1. What is promised here?

God is the one who is making the promises we have before us in this passage. We are told that in returning to Him there is rest, stability, and quietness. And this is to be found in a time of crisis. It is an inward state of the soul that manifests itself when it really matters. We are not to lose our heads and go back to Egypt.

It does not mean that we are to be passive or withdraw into a strange sense of piety where we desensitize ourselves to our circumstances and the world around us. It is not some passionless serenity. It is something we are promised can be our present reality in the midst of a busy and full life. It is something of immense value when there are crises and trials. It is not a feeling as such but it still something that is felt in the soul. It is a strength we have, and it also produces joy.

This rest, quiet and confidence in the soul gives us stability. It is there in the very depths of the soul, in the real you and me, at the heart of who we are, what we believe, what we are convinced of. It comes to the surface in our decision-making during times of trial.

What is in our soul? Is it peace and rest? Or turmoil and confusion? It is a holy confidence? How assured are we and firm in our hold upon divine truth?

2. Being persuaded.

People believe things, more than they realise, and these things run deep in their souls. People might die for causes, for ideas, for family and for neighbours. People go to prison for that they believe in and what is important for them and defines who they are at heart. Things make sense for them, in some fundamental sense, and enable them to live out these convictions.

Yet, for people in the world, there is often something missing, even in their convictions. They might need alcohol, or drugs or sexual pleasure to support them in holding on to their convictions and living by them. People who have been noble in so many ways in public office have led immoral lives privately. People may have a religion that they are ready to die for, but it has to be animated by violence and promises of sexual gratification in the after-life.

These convictions might come at great cost to one's fellow man, as in the case of a jihadist. Atheists are comfortable with aborting babies or advising that any with a baby that is disabled having almost a moral obligation to abort that child. Humanists claim to be free-thinkers but are often agitated, angry people who are rude and insulting of people who disagree with them. They do not have peace and rest in their souls.

3. Only God can give rest.

The deepest and most fulfilling truth of all is the truth about the reality of the true God. His character revealed to us in the Bible, especially as seen in the Person and ministry of the Lord Jesus, is truth that changes the whole nature of life. We understand ourselves differently in the light of His word. Christ's love and mercy, seen on the cross, constitutes the deepest and most meaningful revelation we can ever receive and forms true and stable convictions in the depth of our being. Here, our guilt is answered, and we are shown the true remedy and relief for our souls. We are granted an inner security and peace. We are able to make better decisions and be less subject to fear and the pressures of others upon us. We are able to make better judgments, act more responsibly, and evaluate situations and people better.

We need to be convinced that we are loved of God and that we are secure in that love. We have to be convinced that we will be raised on the last day and that our sins are atoned for. With this ruling in the heart, then we have quiet, rest and confidence when the evil day comes. Calamities and crises come but we are able to remain assured of the love of God and the purposes of God for us. That is when we see that our anchor holds. We can be like Peter, sleeping peacefully on the eve of his execution (Act 12). We are

like Stephen when martyred (Acts 7) and like the apostle Paul, able to survey the possibility of his death calmly.

We would do well to take to heart the prayers of Ephesians 1:15-19 and 3:14-19. For the results of those prayers is immensely practical and is seen in the very trials of life that we are subject to.