

Introduction

One summer a number of years ago, we were visiting family in hot and sweltering Georgia. We intended on returning home to Kentucky the next day. That evening a strong storm blew up and knocked out power to my parents-in-law's house. That meant no air-conditioning. It was hot and muggy as it will be after a thunderstorm. There was little hope that the power would be restored soon. And we realized that if we waited to leave until the next morning, we wouldn't get any sleep. So we decided to leave right then and drive the 8 hours or so through the night. It was a smooth and uneventful trip until it was about 5 am, and we were 20 minutes from home. My head started bobbing. I entered this state of absolute misery. I was exhausted and couldn't keep my head up for long at a time and was constantly wrestling to stay awake. I would squeeze the steering wheel hard and harder, turn the radio up, roll down the window. But I was miserable. We did make it home safely but that is one of the longest stretches of that kind of misery in my life. You know what I am talking about, don't you?

When Jesus surveyed the multitudes that were following him around, he observed that the people were in this kind of miserable state of fatigue spiritually. They were trying hard to be right with God. The Pharisees were heaping up heavy loads and placing them on their backs. They were weary and heavily burdened. Mercifully, Jesus offered them rest.

[Read Text; Pray]

Jesus says of himself here that he is gentle and lowly in heart. The sovereign of the universe is kind and compassionate. And he issues that kind of invitation to the multitudes surrounding him. I want you to consider with me three aspects of the call of Jesus this morning.

I. Jesus Calls Out to All to Come.

A. Jesus has just emphasized his authority. He is sovereign even over the choice to whom to reveal the Father. "All things have been handed over to

me by my Father," said Jesus. It sounds like what he said to the disciples right before he ascended into heaven. As he gave the great commission, he asserted that "all authority in heaven and on earth" had been given him. It was on that basis that he commanded his disciples to go into all the world and to preach the gospel to the entire creation.

Here he is also extending himself to reach out and draw people to follow him and to experience the good things he has to give to them. To most people authority means having the opportunity to get what you want from people. By nature human beings use authority to get what they want. They lord it over others like Pharaoh lorded it over the Israelites when they were living in Egypt in the days after Joseph died. The Israelites became Pharaoh's workforce to build cities in Egypt. Jesus pointed out that this is the way it is with the people of the world. People use authority to exercise their wills over others. But this is not the way it is with Jesus. Out of the authority granted him, he desires to serve others by rescuing them from their plight.

B. Rescue is what Jesus is about, then, when he says to those around him, "Come to me." His manner is urgent. There is something here that we will not notice without some knowledge of the original language. Writing in Greek, Matthew uses a word form here which expresses urgency and intensity. It is more than just a command or a gentle invitation. It is a sharp, sudden, emotional address which cries out for sudden action because time is of the essence.

I enjoyed my time last week down in the South. Everything was green and lush. Spring was in full gear, and the temperatures reflected it. Most days the high was near 80 degrees. It was a rude welcome when we arrived back in Milwaukee on Tuesday morning and the temperature was near 40. But there is more to the character of the South than warm temperatures in the spring. In the south, when you encounter a friend out in public, you stop and have a conversation. And as you wind it up to get on about your business, you will often hear one person say to the other, "Y'all come and see us now." I don't think most Southerners really think about what they are saying when they say this. If you actually did show up at their house, it would probably surprise them. For most southerners, this saying is just a

casual, kind, and endearing way to end a conversation: "Y'all come and see us now."

The spirit with which Jesus says, "come," here in Matthew 11 is quite different. Rather than a casual conclusion to a friendly conversation, this is more of a warning cry. It is the cry of a parent to his child who has wandered out onto a busy street. "Come here now!" Jesus reflects a tender heart in these words but there is nothing casual or laid back about his invitation. It is earnest. It is urgent. It is somewhat alarmed. That is because there is nothing casual or relaxed about the situation in which the people of the world find themselves before God and before His Son.

C. Jesus highlights the situation in his call to come. He specifically calls out those who labor and who are heavy laden. There is nothing casual or relaxed about being exhausted and tired and weighed down. Jesus knew by experience what it meant to be physically exhausted. When Jesus stopped in Samaria and sat by the well where he asked the Samaritan woman for a drink of water, John tells us he had been "wearied" from his journey. The Israelites also knew the experience of fatigue. Pharaoh, as the king taskmaster in Egypt, along with the Egyptians in general, ruthlessly made them work as slaves and made their lives bitter with hard service. Strong was the cry of misery coming up from the Israelites. They languished in weariness under the powerful hands of their Egyptian masters. Such is the condition of human beings spiritually due to our sin.

And such is our condition as we try to overcome our sin and its guilt in our own power and striving. In his epistle to the Romans, the Apostle Paul describes the natural human condition as enslavement to sin. And the outcome of our enslavement is death. Paul recounts his own struggle to live in obedience and says that evil lies close at hand. In the frustration of the wearying condition, he cries out, "wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from this body of death?" He feels the misery and he languishes, longing for freedom.

D. To people like this, who feel the weight and burden of sin, who long to be set free, Jesus says, "Come! Come here! Right now, come to me."

1. Maybe you feel the weight and burden of your sins at this very moment. You should wait no longer. Jesus is speaking to you. He is saying, "Come! Come to me! Right now! Come!" You simply need to believe in him and cast yourself upon him. He calls you to himself to give you the relief for which your soul longs.

2. Most here this morning are able to give thanks that one day in the past, you inwardly heard the voice of Jesus urging you to come, and you came, and you are so thankful that he chose to reveal himself to you. Me, too. For us Jesus is a model. Like him we need to call out to anyone who will listen. We need to urge them to come to Christ. We need to cultivate in our hearts the compassion of Jesus. We need to see the world in the mess it is in. All around us people are spiritually exhausted. They are heavy-laden. Under the weight of their guilt they are seeking escape. They seek it through a deeper plunge into sin and self-satisfaction. They lash out at those who represent the truth which exposes their guilt, but they are simply trying to cover up the misery, just like we once did.

It is pride and smugness that turns a cold shoulder to a sinful and hurting world. Jesus had just denounced the cities in which most of his works had been done. Their exposure to greater opportunity increased their offense to God and increased their guilt. But after making that fact known, Jesus kindly and urgently and graciously calls them to come. And we should bear this same intent. Undaunted by the haters and rejecters we must not cease to kindly, compassionately, and persistently call the exhausted and heavy-burdened to come. "Come to Jesus."

II. Jesus Gives Rest to those Who Come.

A. "Come to me," says Jesus, "and I will give you rest." I already mentioned the fatigue of Jesus when he stopped by the well in Samaria. There he met a woman and asked her for a drink of water. He then used the occasion to tell the woman about a type of water he was able to provide which if you drank of it you would never be thirsty again. He was speaking to her about the satisfaction of soul provided by eternal life. Jesus was a master of the use of every day experiences and common objects to teach deep and spiritual truths. God has been working that way from the beginning of time.

People who knew their Bibles would be very mindful of the creation account. For six days God worked. On the seventh he rested to enjoy the beauty and goodness of his creation. That rest was interrupted by the fall of humanity into sin. When God came to save Israel out of their bondage in Egypt, he instituted the observance of the Sabbath. It was to be a day of rest on which the normal course of work performed on the other 6 days was to be interrupted in favor of rest. The Sabbath was prescribed to be observed on the final day of the week. This became the sign of the covenant between the Lord and the nation. They were to keep his Sabbaths just as they were to bring regular sacrifices and just as they were to observe the rite of circumcision. The weekly Sabbath rest was augmented by special Sabbath observances when the people were not to work. Then there is the entrance into the promised land. This was to be a "rest" for the people. Because of their hard hearts, however, they were turned away to wander in the wilderness. The Lord said of them, "they shall not enter my rest." The Jews of Jesus' day would have been familiar with all these things. They would have been called to mind as Jesus speaks urgently and earnestly, "Come, right now, right here to me, and I will give you REST."

You and I too need to grasp what he is saying. For one thing, he is re-asserting his deity. The rest offered by the Lord God is rest offered by Jesus in Jesus. That he gives the rest of God shows he is God. And it is given in Jesus. For another thing, he is saying that if you want to enter into the true rest to which all of the Sabbath observances point, you will come to him. Jesus is revealing himself as the fulfillment to which all Sabbaths point. He is where you may find real and lasting rest.

Paul instructed the Galatians that the law became a school master, a tutor, a guardian, to lead us to Christ (Galatians 3:24). Paul told the Colossians that food regulations and ceremonies and festivals and Sabbaths are but a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ (Colossians 2:16-17). That is precisely what Jesus is saying here as well. I am your Sabbath. Come to me and I will give you rest. Your souls find rest in me.

B. And what is this rest that Jesus provides?

Again, let's look back to the Old Testament. In Deuteronomy 5 we encounter a repetition of the Ten Commandments. And in regard to the command to keep the Sabbath holy, there is commentary. In the commentary, the Lord explains why he prescribed the Sabbath. He commands that the people work 6 days and rest on the seventh. He says, "You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore, the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day." The reason for the keeping of the Sabbath day was to remember that the people had been slaves. They had been under the dominion and power of Egypt. They had been in misery. They labored to exhaustion and were heavy laden. When they cried out to Pharaoh that the burden was more than they could handle, he simply increased his demand. There was no hope for Israel outside of the Lord.

But God brought them out. He gave them rest from the tyranny. He brought relief from the insurmountable demands. He brought them out of Egypt. The Lord became their Sabbath. And this is why they were to observe one day in seven. And this is part of the explanation for why it was one of the Ten Commands. Central to the worship of God was the recognition and remembrance that God had brought them out of slavery and into rest. It was a physical slavery to physical demands, but it is emblematic of the fundamental slavery that binds every human being by nature. And that is the slavery to sin. And so the fundamental Sabbath, the truest rest to which Sabbath rest points is the removal of sin from a position of power and authority and oppression and death in a person's life.

When Jesus says, "Come to me and I will give you rest," he is speaking of being redeemed from sin. He is speaking of being freed from guilt. He is speaking of being brought out from under the tyranny of Satan's realm. He is speaking of coming to experience the removal of darkness. He is speaking of re-entering the rest of God where there is fellowship with God and the joy of serving him. So Jesus is speaking first of a right-here and a right-now reality. If you will come to Jesus, if you will turn from your sin and yourself and believe on him, you will enter into the rest of forgiveness. You will enter into the relief and soul-restoring awareness of the fact that there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

In other words, if you believe in Christ Jesus, the wrath of God does not abide on you and you have eternal life in him.

Just as Jesus brought healing to the sick, he brings spiritual healing to the sinner. As he brings physical sight to the blind, he brings spiritual sight to the spiritually blind. Just as he cleansed the physical leper, he cleanses the spiritual leper. And so he is the Sabbath. He is rest to the soul that is wearied by the weight and burden of sin.

One more thing is that the Sabbath rest which Jesus promises is not just here and now but also there and then. Ultimately the Sabbath is fulfilled in the new heavens and the new earth. That is when the fullness of rest will be enjoyed eternally. The Sabbath rest at creation that was interrupted by the Fall into sin will be resumed without a threat of further interruption.

C. Now how is it that Jesus is able to provide this rest?

Well, it is the cross of course. That is where he who knew no sin became sin in our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

But I want you to soak up some of the beauty of the Bible this morning. The opposite of rest is what? Unrest. And the reason why Jesus is able to give rest to anyone who comes to him is because he experienced the unrest we deserve in our place. What is the experience of the utmost of unrest? It is hell. That is where the worm does not die and there is no REST day or night. And Jesus endured that unrest for those who will come to him so that they can truly enter into his rest.

Psalm 22 is clearly messianic. It powerfully points us to the Messiah. Specifically, it points us to the suffering of Messiah. Jesus himself draws our attention to this psalm because he quoted from it while he was on the cross. Here are the first two verses of the psalm:

My God, My God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry to you by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no REST.

There is a wealth of meaning in those words, "My God my God why have you forsaken me?" In this cry Jesus is declaring that his soul is at the height of unrest in that moment. And this from the lips of him who said, "Come to me and I will give YOU rest." WITHOUT Jesus' enduring unrest for his soul, there would be NO rest for your soul and mine. It was his work on the cross that makes Jesus the fulfillment to which the practice of observing the Sabbath pointed for all those years.

When Jesus says, "Come to me," he means to come to him as the one who procures rest for the soul as well as the one who gives that rest of soul to those who believe in him, who find their rest in him, who cease from striving for approval with God on the basis of their own works and rely only and completely on Christ.

I cannot make you believe in Jesus. All I can do is what Jesus did here in Matthew 11. I can call you to come. I can call you to see that without Jesus you are at unrest, but there is rest to be had in him. Come. Come now! Come to Christ! Even those who believe, come! Don't wallow in the weight and burden of your sins and disobedience. Get up and come afresh to Jesus to receive rest for your soul.

III. Jesus Provides a Yoke for Those Who Come.

A. He says, "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me." A yoke implies a load. There is a load to be carried. There are works to do, responsibilities to be borne. Jesus is talking about discipleship. "Learn from me."

For Jesus, rest does not mean no work and no responsibility. Coming to him does not mean inactivity. Rest for your soul is not idleness, but in fact, hard work. Remember, the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life. Following Jesus means denying self and taking up your cross. Diligence and obedience are written all over the pages of the New Testament. Paul says we will be a slave of sin or slaves of righteousness. Paul refers to himself as a bondslave of Christ. He has no rights of his own. He does not belong to himself. He belongs to Christ. I repeat, coming to Jesus for rest does not mean taking it easy in life and in the pursuit of holiness. It really means great effort being poured out to please and glorify Christ.

B. So then, how is it that Jesus says, "My yoke is easy and my burden is light"? There are three main answers to that question.

1. What Jesus requires of his disciples is all for their good. Jesus is not a slave driver like Pharaoh whose heartless desire is to squeeze the life out of his servants. No, Jesus's yoke puts life into his servants. What he requires of us are the very things we need to experience true rest of soul. We are not looking for rest from all bodily activity but rest for our souls. When we are submitted to God and his will for our lives, we will know true and unshakable peace.

2. Hard work is easier when you are well-rested. When you are rested you are ready to serve. If you come to Jesus for rest, you will be strengthened to take his yoke upon you. The strength will come from him and in this way his burden will be light. The point is when you come to Jesus for rest, you have got it. Now your obedience, your yoke-bearing, is not in order to achieve rest, not in order to achieve right standing with God. No, your obedience grows out of the right standing Christ has achieved for you. And that makes it easy. That makes it manageable in the power that he supplies.

3. When you serve one who truly loves you and whom you love, the serving is easy. In loving compassion, the God of the universe calls out, "come to me for rest." The God of the universe is not like Pharaoh. He is kind. He is gentle. He is humble of heart. There is affection and compassion from his heart to the hearts of those he calls and especially for those who in fact come. This relationship makes serving him easy.

Remember the love of Jacob for Rachel the daughter of Laban? In the Old Testament Laban was the father of two daughters Leah and Rachel. Jacob had fled his home and came to the household of Laban where he met and fell in love with Rachel and desired to marry her. So Laban made a deal with Jacob. In order to earn the right to marry Rachel, Jacob would serve Laban for seven years. Genesis 29:20 says, "So, Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed but a few days because of the love he had for her."

Marriage is not easy, but genuine love in a marriage makes the experience a delight and the days fly. This summer Melissa and I will have been married for 32 years. It seems but days to me because of the joy we have together. Even so when you love Jesus and you know his love for you, serving him is easy and his burden becomes light. It is restful service.

Conclusion

The choice put before each of us could not be more stark. On the one hand, Jesus sets before us exhausting labor in an impossible pursuit which leads to an eternity of unrest. On the other hand, he sets himself before us as our rest and submission to whom results in ongoing and eternal rest. A choice is demanded. But hear his tender voice calling: "Come!" Come now! Come to me now! You who are on the verge of an eternity of unrest, FLEE!! To me!! Now!!

Harden not your hearts. Do not fail to enter his rest. Why would you say no to Christ?