

A Theology of Rest: Matthew 11:20-30

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Date: 14 January 2018

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[0 : 00] Join me please in your copy of God's Word, which I hope you have with you in Matthew's Gospel, chapter 11. Last week we talked about working diligently to the glory of God.

And as promised, and to set some balance to last week, this morning we're going to talk about rest. And as I was preparing this week, both to preach today and to go on this sabbatical, it was a very fitting topic for me, as this is probably one of the busiest weeks I've had.

And I've been suffering from a vicious head cold, as I know many of you all are. I've got a cough drop resting in the side. I've got a cough in my mouth right now, just in case I need it today.

It's been a fairly unrestful week, pushing for the hope of rest in a temporal sense.

So it's been a good thing for me to stop and to consider this week. I hope it'll serve you as well. I discovered in my studying this week that I find poetry rather restful.

[1 : 19] And so we'll see today there's quite a bit of poetry in my sermon notes. But the text for today is Matthew chapter 11, verses 20 through 30.

And before I read that for our benefit, let me remind you, beloved, that this is God's word to us. It was written for his glory and for our good.

We would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and obey its commands.

Beginning in verse 20 of Matthew chapter 11. Then Jesus began to denounce the cities where most of his mighty works had been done because they did not repent.

Woe to you, Chorazin. Woe to you, Bethsaida. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades.

[2 : 26] For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you.

At that time, Jesus declared, I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children.

Yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. 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. Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden. And I will give you rest.

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. For my yoke is easy. And my burden is light.

[3 : 27] In verse 28, Jesus extends to you and I a great invitation. Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden.

And I will give you rest. And this is such a great invitation for those who are weary.

I don't know if any of you feel that way this morning. Feel beat down by the world around you. This is such a good invitation for us for at least two reasons.

Firstly, Jesus' invitation is a great invitation because He offers us rest from our greatest problem. Jesus speaks such comforting words in the conclusion of our text. But not all of His words in this text are comforting.

[4 : 29] Recall how it began with denouncement and woes. Jesus publicly declared the wickedness of the unrepentant people of the cities of Chorazin and Bethsaida and Capernaum.

These were all Jewish cities in which, as Matthew here records for us, most of Jesus' miracles had been performed. Jesus' miracles accompanied His preaching to give validity to them.

Jesus coming onto the scene, speaking new things with authority, used signs to give validity to what it was He was saying.

And Jesus here juxtaposes their unbelief against how the Gentile cities of Tyre and Sidon and the ancient city of Sodom would have responded.

Had such miracles been performed amongst them. Now, lest we lose sight of what is most important here. The point that Jesus is making, it is He came with power and He preached a message.

[5 : 43] A message that these denounced cities did not respond to. Many in our day are seeking new signs, wanting some taste of the metaphysical in order to believe.

But God has given us His Son. We have, as miracles before us, the incarnation, and we have the resurrection.

We need nothing further. Look at what Jesus says just a chapter later in Matthew's Gospel. In Matthew chapter 12, beginning in verse 38.

Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered Him saying, Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you. They're saying, Do something miraculous for us so that we will believe.

But He answered them, An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to you except the sign of the prophet Jonah.

[6 : 55] For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it.

For they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. So we see in this little brief passage in Matthew chapter 12, of the incarnation, Jesus saying, Hello, I am here, I am before you.

The Son of Man, which is taken from Daniel, this was an Old Testament reference, He was understood in calling Himself this to be the Messiah, God made flesh, come to deliver His people. Behold, something greater than Jonah is here. The people of Nineveh listened to Jonah's preaching. They had no sign to accompany it.

They simply heard the call of the Lord and they repented and believed. We see also in this text the resurrection. So will the Son of Man, so will Christ be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

[8 : 10] And then what? He was raised three days later. So, what was the message that Jesus came to preach?

The message that He preached accompanied by signs? The message that He preached without signs? The message that He preaches to us today? Matthew chapter 4, verse 17.

Chapter 4, Jesus begins His ministry. In verse 17, Matthew records, This is the summary of what it is that Jesus taught.

Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. So He preached repentance. But what is repentance? Repentance is recognizing one's offense against a most holy God.

Feeling remorse for that offense. Not merely recognizing that it is an offense, but recognizing that we must feel something. We have a remorse for offending such a holy God.

[9 : 20] And seeking to satisfy the consequence of that offense. Apart from Christ, I am not okay, and you are not okay.

Romans 3, Paul says famously in verses 10-12. Here's the crux. The Lord wants us to sink in. Here we go. Romans chapter 3, verses 10-12. Paul says, None is righteous, no, not one. No one understands. No one seeks for God.

All have turned aside. Together, they have become worthless. No one does good. Not even one. And then later in chapter 3, verse 23.

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. All of us have not lived up to this high expectation of us, of holiness. Right? God intended for us to be His image bearers, to reflect Him in the world around us by keeping His good commands.

[10 : 27] And each and every one of us, right? From our federal head, Adam, all the way through to the babies being held in mom's arms this morning, have sinned against a most holy God.

And we are in need of repentance. Repentance begins with humility. Turn with me to Luke chapter 18.

Beginning in verse 9 and following. I like it when the biblical writers tell us why Jesus told the parable. Verse 9, Jesus also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous.

And don't we have so many around us in this day? You might find yourself in this place thinking that somehow, if there is a God and if there is an afterlife, that you can find the way to please Him on your own.

You can believe that you're good enough. Jesus speaks this parable to you. These that find themselves to be righteous and treat others with contempt.

[11 : 34] In verse 10, Two men went up into the temple to pray. One a Pharisee and the other a tax collector or publican, some of your translations may say.

The Pharisee would have been an outwardly righteous man, a practicer of all of the Jewish law. The tax collector or publican would have been seen as the most vile traitor to Israel, to God's people.

One who submitted himself to the Roman government and collected taxes on their behalf. Verse 11, The Pharisee standing by himself prayed thus, God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.

I fast twice a week. I give tithes of all that I get. But the tax collector standing far off would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast saying, God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.

[12 : 53] And so repentance begins with this kind of humility, right? A man not even willing to approach the temple, not willing to lift his eyes to heaven because he knew the offense he had given to God.

Isaac Watts, who was a late 17th, early 18th century hymnist, rather popular hymnist, wrote the following poem. I don't actually think there's music to this. Hint, hint, musicians.

He wrote this, Saints, at your heavenly Father's word, give up your comforts to the Lord. Behold how sinners disagree, the publican and Pharisee.

One doth his righteousness proclaim, the other owns his guilt and shame. This man at humble distance stands and cries for grace with lifted hands that boldly rises near the throne and talks of duties he has done.

The Lord, their different language knows and different answers he bestows. The humble soul with grace he crowns, whilst on the proud his anger frowns.

[14 : 10] Dear Father, let me never be joined with the boasting Pharisee. I have no merits of my own, but plead the sufferings of thy son.

Now we have sinned against an infinite God whose holiness is infinite, and therefore our offense against him is infinite, which is why we need the infinite sacrifice of Jesus Christ to satisfy the consequence of the offense.

We must humbly recognize our offense against God, feel remorse for it, but then find the remedy in Jesus. You see, friends, God expects perfection from us, but he extends to us that perfection in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Upon humble admission of our offense against God and our placing our faith in the saving work of Christ, God not only forgives us our sins, but also gives us Jesus' righteousness.

We take on his perfect life as he takes away our sin. This is a glorious truth that we can rest in.

[15 : 35] John Bunyan, if you're not familiar with, was a 17th century English pastor and writer. He was a preacher who preached without a license, which was necessary in those days, and therefore was imprisoned.

And in prison, with a copy of Fox's Book of Martyrs and his Bible, he wrote a wonderful work called Pilgrim's Progress. And if you are a follower of Jesus Christ, you must read your scripture first and Pilgrim's Progress second.

It will be nourishing to your soul to read this work. There are abridged versions, there are modern English versions. It is a work that you should pick up as it will serve you well.

The work is an allegory, and it begins with the writer, the narrator, I'm assuming Bunyan, falling asleep and having a dream. And he follows in this dream the main character named Christian.

And it's about his journey and then later his wife's journey to the celestial city. And Christian, at the beginning of this dream, finds himself with a heavy burden laid upon his back.

[16 : 46] If you find this illustrated, it's usually a big, ugly, bulging backpack strapped onto his back. And we come to understand that this is the weight of his sin. Right? He comes to have this burden because he's picked up a book.

And he's read from the book about this good king who has a high standard which he has not met. And so he sets off to find himself loosed of this burden.

I'm going to read just a brief bit to you from Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress. Now I saw in my dream that the highway which Christian was to go was fenced on either side with a wall.

And that wall was called salvation. Up this way, therefore, did burdened Christian run, but not without great difficulty because of the load on his back.

He ran thus till he came to a place somewhat ascending, and upon that place stood a cross, and a little below in the bottom a sepulcher.

[17 : 48] That's a grave. So I saw in my dream that just as Christian came up to the cross, his burden loosed from off his shoulders and fell from off his back and began to tumble.

And so continued to do until it came to the mouth of the sepulcher where it fell in and I saw it no more. Then was Christian glad and lightsome and said with a merry heart, he hath given me rest by his sorrow and life by his death.

And then he burst into a song, another poem for you this morning. Christian says, Thus far did I come laden with my sin, nor could aught ease the grief that I was in.

Till I came hither, what a place is this? Must here be the beginning of my bliss? Must here be the burden fall off my back? Must hear the strings that bound it to me crack?

Blessed cross, blessed sepulchral, blessed rather be the man that there was put to shame for me. So, Jesus extends to us a great invitation because he offers us rest from our greatest problem.

[19 : 07] And because we can rest eternally, we can rest temporally. Because our greatest problem has been alleviated. All the light and momentary problems we can rest from.

You and I do not have to labor to find ourselves approved before God. If you have placed saving faith in Jesus Christ, you are approved.

And now, any work that we do comes as a grateful outflow of what he has done for us. Becomes the natural thing we do because of who we are.

If God is pleased with you, you can and you should rest. Psalm 127 2 says this, It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil, for he gives to his beloved sleep.

God is not unaware of your human frailty and he intends rest for you in the very way that he created the world.

[20 : 24] He intended to set forth for us a pattern of six days of working and then what? A day of rest, that we would see that as created beings, we need to rest in our eternal security, that we can lay our heads down at night and know that we have satisfied our God.

The Puritans famously talked about recreating versus recreating, which is the actual root of that word, to take time to step back away from in order to be rejuvenated, for service to the Lord.

And I'll close this point out with the quote from Spurgeon that's on your bulletin. He said, rest time is not waste time. It is economy to gather fresh strength.

It is wisdom to take occasional furlough. In the long run, we shall do more by sometimes doing less, by doing those things that bring rejuvenation to us.

rest. So, Jesus' invitation is a great invitation because he's offering to us rest from our greatest problem. Secondly, Jesus' invitation is a great invitation because he offers us rest in the greatest person.

[21 : 47] Jesus invites us to come to him, all who labor and are heavy laden, and he will give us rest. Jesus makes some astounding claims about himself in this text.

If you look at verse 27, Jesus claims that he is the Son of God. This is not a new claim in Matthew's Gospel, but it is still an astounding one, all the same.

He says, 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.

He claims that he himself is the Son of God. Secondly, he claims that he possesses all authority.

Verse 27, all things have been handed over to me by my Father.

He says this elsewhere in Matthew as well. Chapter 28, verse 18, this is the beginning of what we call the Great Commission. Jesus says, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

[22 : 52] He also claims that he has the power to save. He says, no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

Previously, in the book of Matthew chapter 9, beginning in verse 1, we read, getting into a boat, he crossed over and came to his own city. And behold, some people brought to him a paralytic lying on a bed.

And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, take heart, my son, your sins are forgiven. And behold, some of the scribes said to themselves, this man is blaspheming.

This man is saying that he's God able to forgive sins. Yes, this is what Jesus was saying. Verse 4, but Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, why do you think evil in your hearts?

For which is easier to say your sins are forgiven or to say rise and walk? But that you may know the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. He then said to the paralytic, rise, pick up your bed and go home.

[23 : 59] And he rose and went home. When the crowd sought, they were afraid and they glorified God who had given such authority to men. It's the astounding thing that Jesus is saying that he has the power to forgive sin, that no one makes it to the Father.

No one can know the Father except by knowing the Son. John 14, 6. John records Jesus said, I am the way and the truth and the life.

No one comes to the Father except through me. Jesus makes some incredible claims in the Scripture. Peter, in a 1950 essay entitled, What Are We To Make of Jesus?

by C.S. Lewis, he said the following, In my opinion, the only person who can say that sort of thing, that he's the Son of God, is either God or a complete lunatic suffering from that form of delusion which undermines the whole mind of man.

If you think you are a poached egg, when you are not looking for a piece of toast to suit you, you may be sane. But if you think you are God, there is no chance for you.

[25 : 15] You catch that? Like, you'd be more sane to think that you're a poached egg. But if you think you are God, there is no chance for you. We may note in passing that he was never regarded as a mere moral teacher.

He did not produce that effect on any of the people who actually met him. He produced mainly three effects. You have to find yourself in one of these three places.

You're honest with the Jesus of the Bible. He produced mainly three effects. Hatred, terror, or adoration. There is no trace in the Bible of people expressing mild approval.

Jesus made astounding claims about himself. The son of God. People could only come to the father through him. He had the power to forgive sins. In fact, power over all things.

But Jesus makes a further and possibly more astounding claim in verse 29. He says, I am gentle and lowly in heart.

[26 : 26] As we think about coming to Jesus for rest, this is incredible. Jesus is not unable to sympathize with us in our weakness. Having become fully men, he experienced your pain and he experienced your exhaustion.

Jesus grew tired, John 4, 6, and got thirsty, John 19, 28, and hungry, Matthew 4, 2. He became physically weak, Matthew 4, 11, Luke 23, 26, Hebrews 4, 15.

He suffered just as we suffer and more so to the point of the cross. The writer of Hebrews says in Hebrews 4, 15, For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

beloved, you can go to Jesus with all of your hurts and all of your struggles, and you will find with Jesus Christ no condemnation, you don't have to bear guilt before him.

He says, come to me, you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Even as we work to see the kingdom of God fully realized, Jesus promises.

[27 : 56] And this was such a good meditation for my soul this week as I'm thinking about taking my hands off of this church for a month, which is something I've never done before, just fully removing myself from my involvement in it.

And some of you who know me well know that I can be a bit controlling. Jesus says in Luke 12, 32, fear not, little flock, flock, for it is your father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

I think wrongly I have this idea that the kingdom, I must go take it, right? That I have to get out and I have to work so hard that I gain the kingdom, right?

