

Rest For Your Soul

Imagine a device that could be attached to your head, and transmit your thoughts and your emotions onto a loudspeaker. Imagine also that the more restless and unsettled your thoughts were, the machine would translate that into extra volume. If that machine was placed on you and switched on, what would we hear?

Sad to say, for many, many people, the sounds would be almost deafening, because of the turmoil and unrest in their hearts and minds...

- Anxious thoughts – worries, fears or vulnerability, fears of uncertainty. Gut-wrenching questions of ‘what if? What if?
- Discouraged thoughts. Thoughts of defeat, of ‘I will never have that’ or ‘it will never work out for me,’ hopelessness, self-pity.
- Angry thoughts. Thoughts of frustration – why didn’t it go my way? Thwarted goals and demands not met, and a burning anger, feelings of hurt.
- Thoughts of bitterness and hatred. Mulling over past wounds, considering the injustice of them, a seething contempt, a rage and desire for revenge.
- Thoughts of lust and greed – wanting illicit pleasures, coveting what you know you cannot, or should not, or will not, have.
- Thoughts of guilt and shame – remorse over sin, embarrassment, thoughts of covering it up, of secrecy.
- Thoughts of responsibility – to-do lists, strategies of what must still be done.
- Thoughts of habits that enslave you, obsessions and rituals that continue to call you.
- Thoughts of entertainment and recreation – the call of TV and movies and music and media and sport and computer games and the internet calling you to come away from the world.

A heart like this is restless. It is not enjoying life. It is in turmoil, tossed to and fro. There is no peace, only confusion, chaos and ultimately despair. A mind like this is often characterised by some or several of the following: depression, boredom, listlessness and dullness, irritability, phobias and irrational fears, panic attacks, withdrawal, compulsive behaviour.

And when our souls are like this, it is not too long that our bodies take the strain as well. While these can be caused by other things, when the soul is not at rest, it is not uncommon to see the following physical effects: muscular tensions, headaches, insomnia, heart palpitations, digestive problems, ulcers, cramps, continual fatigue.

This is not a life of rest. Now, hear the words of Jesus Christ.

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Matthew 11:28-30

Christ offers rest. What does this rest entail?

To hearts that are feeling this way, Christ's word are like water in the desert: "I will give you rest." Again in **Matthew 11:29** we read, "*You shall find rest for your souls.*" To hearts that are overburdened, wearied, toiling and exhausted, there can't be a more promising statement. What a promise! 'I will, definitely, no doubt, not subject to any other conditions – I will infallibly, absolutely, give you rest.'

But what does He mean by rest? Does He mean an easy life? Well, it can't mean that, because the Bible tells us the life of a believer involves much toil and hard work. Does He mean He will remove the responsibilities and problems in our lives? No, God grows us not by removing our responsibilities, but by teaching us how to deal with them in a way that pleases Him. Does He mean He will be like a sedative; He will calm our nerves when they are really frazzled? Well, He means a lot more than that.

He means He will be to us the very thing we are looking for in all our restless and sometimes sinful activities. He will be to us – contentment. He will be to us – meaning and fulfilment. He will be to us satisfaction. He will be to us peace. He will be to us, happiness, delight. Our souls will find their appointed end in Him. They cease striving and struggling because He is what we are looking for. And so we experience the opposite of being fatigued and over-exhausted and overburdened.

We find in Christ – in who He is to us – a life of refreshment, and strength, and hope, and new vigour. He is saying, 'thirsty souls will find water in me, hungry souls will find bread in me, tired souls will find refreshment, renewal and strength in me.' Your heart, soul, mind and body will be able to relax and release, and be at peace in Him.

Doesn't that sound inviting? To have a state of heart that is at peace. Not fretting, striving, frustrated, angry, disillusioned, coveting. A heart at peace – satisfied, content, glad, refreshed and ready to face every day with new vigour. Ready to face the same problems, responsibilities, difficulties, adversities with a heart of steady calmness and security, optimism and assurance, confidence and hope.

So when we hear this offer of rest, we must ask: **what is the condition to obtaining Christ's rest?**

Jesus put it very plainly: 'Come to Me.' Notice, He didn't say, 'Do for me,' but simply 'come.'+ There are only two things you can do with your burdens – come to Jesus, or go from Jesus. You can come to Jesus for His way, or you can go your own way. You can come to Him for His strength, or you can go in your own strength. You can come to Him for His wisdom, or you can go in your wisdom. You can come to Him for His grace, or you can go in your flesh. You can come to Him to know and love Him, or you can go and seek to love yourself alone.

Why?

You might say, why should I come to Jesus with my life, why should I come to Him for how to live? There are many things out there promising rest, aren't there? More money promises rest. The perfect husband or wife promises rest. A healthy body promises rest. Success promises rest.

Prestige, respect and admiration from others promises rest. Entertainment promises rest. Adventure and travel promise rest.

Why then should we turn away from these things, and come to Jesus and believe His promise of rest? Well, He gives us two reasons.

1) Because He is meek and lowly in heart

The rest of the world attracts you with its bragging promises, its flashy ads, its airbrushed pictures. Jesus is the very opposite. He stands there, meek and humble, lovingly, gently offering you the very thing you are seeking. No bright lights, no flashy billboard, just a simple humble invitation. That alone should get our attention.

But then consider the character of Jesus. His meekness and humility is like a magnet to the heart that is truly seeking rest. Here is a Man you can truly turn to. Here is Jesus, the King of the Universe, with all power in His hand, but He veils and covers that power. He does not strike down His enemies. He does not dazzle those who doubt Him with thunderbolts. He does not destroy His detractors. Instead, when Jerusalem has rejected Him, He prays for it. When a Samaritan village rejects Him, and His disciples want to call down fire on it, Jesus says, "I did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them."

When dying on the cross, and being taunted, there He is, praying, "*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do*" (**Luke 24:34**). A Saviour like this pardons people – you can come to Him if you have sinned. That's why His promise is so inviting. You can cease trying to justify yourself, to escape from your sin, to minimise it, compare it with others, deny it, or run from it. This man knows all about your sin and will forgive it. When the woman caught in adultery was brought to Jesus, He said to her accusers, "*Let he who is without sin, cast the first stone*" (**John 8:7**).

He pardons people. But see Him also walking for three years with doubting Thomas and denying Peter, and vain James and John, and ignorant Andrew. He is patient with people. He does not blow up at the disciples for their foolishness or failure to understand. If you have failed again and again, if you have turned away from Jesus, or doubted His power to help you, or doubted His rest, His meekness calls you back again. He is patient. He knows your condition. You can come to Him if you have failed again and again.

But see also who this Son of God spends His time with. Royalty? The socially upwardly mobile? No, we find Jesus in the homes of tax-collectors and sinners. We find Him speaking to a Samaritan woman. We find Him allowing an adulterous woman to wash his feet with tears. We find him taking children into His arms. His meekness makes him approachable.

It does not matter what your status is as far as income, or education, or social standing. However low you might be, Jesus will stoop down to meet you. No one need fear that Jesus is too high for them. Jesus touched lepers – the untouchables. Jesus loved to heal the outcasts – the maimed, the blind, the lame, the demon-possessed. He loved to teach the poor, as well as the rich. That is why the Bible says, 'The common people heard Him gladly.'

2) Because it is not a heavy yoke. It is good, well-fitted, easy and light

The remedy of Jesus is not going to burden you further. Some people take on the burden of religion seeking rest. They find themselves even more burdened. Some take on the burden of morality. They are more exhausted than when they began. Some take on the remedy of philosophy and human learning and wisdom, and like Solomon, find themselves more despairing and burdened than before they knew those things. Some take on the burden of working harder, believing that success and financial prosperity will lighten the load. But instead, the load ends up heavier.

But Jesus says, 'my yoke – the remedy I have, the thing I will ask you to wear – is not grievous and burdensome.' He tells us in verse 30, 'my yoke – what I will ask you to do, is easy, and my burden is light'. Jesus is not contrasting the yoke of sin with *no* yoke; He is contrasting the yoke of sin with *His* yoke.

The word for *easy* is best thought of as good, kind, gracious, gentle. It can actually mean 'well-fitting.' What I will ask you to wear will be perfectly fitted to your abilities and strengths and personality. The world doesn't care about your strengths and individualities. But Jesus does. The hairs on your head are numbered. And what He asks you to do and be in life is perfectly crafted and suited to who you are, and how He has made you.

The Christian life is not easy. But in one sense, it is never as heavy as the life of sin. It is not a burden as heavy as the life lived trying to please self, for self, in the power of self. Life lived for Christ and in Christ is tailor-made for you. It will not overburden you beyond your limits, nor will it bore you and be beneath your abilities.

So coming to Jesus to live life the way He says is inviting because of who He is, and because of what He says life will be like under Him. Perfectly fitted. Light to carry with Him carrying the load with you.

How do I come to Jesus and obtain this rest He promises?

1. Admit you are heavy-laden

The major obstacle preventing most people from coming to Christ is pride. It insists, "I'm OK. I can handle it. I'm not a sissy. I'm not a weakling. If others can handle the stress, so can I. I am not overburdened. I can make it." And the strain shows. The body begins to cave in. The mind begins to cave in.

The first step to coming to Christ is to admit you have a problem. Admit your sin. Admit you have lived life outside of His Law, and it is not working. Admit you are cracking under the strain. Jesus' offer is only for those who admit they are spiritually and mentally exhausted and overburdened.

2. Take His Yoke: 'take My yoke upon you'

What was a yoke? It was most often a shaped wooden instrument placed over the head of an animal or animals to control them, or to use them in ploughing, or to link them together. The idea is one of submission. To take Christ's yoke is to allow Him to place His Word over you and so completely control you – lead and guide you as He pleases.

Jesus is saying, 'bow to my Lordship. Take me as your Lord, the One who rules your life, the One you live for, the One you live to please, the One you follow, the One you look to for wisdom and guidance and peace and meaning and joy. Willingly place your neck under My yoke.'

"But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things which I say? Whoever comes to Me, and hears My sayings and does them, I will show you whom he is like. He is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently against that house, and could not shake it, for it was founded on the rock. But he who heard and did nothing is like a man who built a house on the earth without a foundation, against which the stream beat vehemently; and immediately it fell. And the ruin of that house was great."

Luke 6:46-49

By "hears my sayings" here, Jesus means, those who listen to His Word. Meekness is being willing to be governed.

Pride fights. Pride wants to gain or regain control over life. Pride fights our limitations and restrictions. Pride says, 'I will not,' 'I must have,' 'I don't have to,' 'I won't let that happen' or even 'I can't take any more of this.' Pride is self-asserting, self-protecting, self-promoting, self-confident. Therefore pride is either not under the yoke of Jesus, or chafing around the neck and very uncomfortable. But salvation bows to His lordship, and sanctification bows to His lordship.

3. Learn His character: 'learn of Me'

Once we have surrendered to Him, and continue to surrender to Him, the goal is to imitate Him. Our goal is Christlikeness. When we hear and follow His Word, we will become like Him. His life was not one of unrest.

He will not quarrel nor cry out, nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets. A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench, till He sends forth justice to victory...

Mat 12:19-20

In particular, we want to imitate His humility. Because humility is perfect rest. As the South African writer and pastor Andrew Murray put it:

"Humility is perfect quietness of heart. It is for me to have no trouble; never to be fretted or vexed or irritated or sore or disappointed. It is... to wonder at nothing that is done to me, to feel nothing done against me. It is to be at rest when nobody praises me and when I am blamed or despised. The humble man feels no jealousy or envy. He can praise God when others are preferred and blessed before him. He can bear to hear others praised while he is forgotten because... he has received the spirit of Jesus, who pleased not Himself, and who sought not His own honour. Therefore, in putting on the Lord Jesus

Christ he has put on the heart of compassion, kindness, meekness, longsuffering and humility."

The reason for our unrest is because of how we are handling life. Pride is the unbearable burden. Consider, for contrast, a reversed version of that verse: "Avoid Me, all ye who labour and are heavy laden, and I will deny you rest. Refuse My yoke upon you and reject me, and you will find unrest in Your soul."

Rather, we need to come to a place of dependence, submission, lowliness toward God, and a place of deference and submission toward man. This is His rest. Consider His beautiful life lived through us, through His death and resurrection. It is a life of rest.