

## “REST FOR THE WEARY”

Matthew 11:25-30

There are many personal invitations from God in Scripture. The invitation to worship: **“Come, let us bow down in worship; let us kneel before the LORD our Maker,”** Psalm 95:6. The invitation to call upon God when we are in trouble: **“Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor Me,”** Psalm 50:15. The invitation to turn to God for forgiveness: **“‘Come now, let us reason together,’ says the LORD. ‘Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow,’”** Isaiah 1:18. The invitation to **“repent and believe the good news,”** Mark 1:15. The invitation to **“approach the throne of grace with confidence,”** Hebrews 4:16. The invitation to **“cast your anxiety on Him because He cares for you,”** 1 Peter 5:7.

Yet of all God’s invitations, I can think of none more personal, powerful, or precious than the invitation of Jesus Christ in today’s text, Matthew 11:25-30, **“At that time Jesus answered and said, ‘I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight. All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him. Come to Me, all you 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.’”**

Labor means hard work. To be heavy laden means to be weighed down. It’s interesting to see how the Bible uses these two words—LABOR and HEAVY LADEN—in other contexts. For example, Acts 27:10 uses the same Greek word for **“heavy laden”** to describe the heavy cargo of a sailing ship. And Luke 5 uses the same Greek word for **“labor”** to describe how the Lord’s disciples toiled all night without catching a single fish. On the following day, when Jesus told the disciples to put out into deep water and let down their nets for a catch, Simon Peter answered, **“Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything,”** Luke 5:5.

We can almost see and hear the disciples on that fishless fishing expedition, can’t we? Peter may have said, “Let’s try this spot.” After a few hours, John may have said, “Aw, this place is no good. Let’s go over there.” And who knows? Twelve disciples may have meant twelve different fishing locations. They no doubt rowed and rowed and rowed. They repeatedly lowered and raised the nets. And as the night wore

on, they grew more weary, sweaty, and frustrated by the lack of results. I've had a few jobs like that. Haven't you?

Of course, Jesus wasn't talking about the cargo of a ship or the hard, frustrating work of commercial fishing when He said **"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden."** However, these images—a ship's cargo; a long night of frustrating fishing—graphically illustrate the way we often go through life.

How many of us at this moment are carrying around problems like the heavy cargo of a sailing ship; sinking lower and lower into frustration and weariness? How many of us at this moment are laboring at something without seeing any results? Laboring to save a troubled marriage. Laboring to beat an addiction. Laboring to reconcile estranged family members. Laboring to live with severe pain. Laboring to find a better job amid mountains of bills. Laboring to resist temptation. Laboring to be free of remorse and guilt. Laboring to carry out a personal or congregational ministry.

In Romans 7 Paul describes another type of hard labor that often leaves us worn out and frustrated; namely, The War Within, the war between our Old and New Natures; the sincere desire to please God and the reality of repeatedly failing to do so. Listen closely, and you will actually hear the frustration in Paul's words: **"I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing."** And then in frustration he cries out, **"What a wretched man I am!"** And his experience is our experience.

Significantly, the Greek word translated as **"labor"** in today's text comes from another Greek word that means "to strike or beat." I say significantly, because to this very day we speak of the way in which life's labors and heavy burdens "beat us up" and "beat us down." Isn't that true? How many expressions do we have that convey this very feeling? "I'm ready to throw in the towel." "I'm at the end of my rope." "I'm just a bundle of nerves." "I'm at my wits' end." "I give up." "I'm done." "I've had it." "I can't take this anymore."

And if you've ever felt this way, you're not alone. Consider Elijah. Elijah was one of the greatest prophets of God. His very name expressed confidence. EL-I-YAH in Hebrew means "My God is Jehovah." And in the name and power of Jehovah Elijah fiercely resisted the wickedness of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. At God's command, he prayed for drought and drought came. He prayed for rain and rain fell in torrents. On Mount Carmel, he defeated eight hundred and fifty false prophets of Baal. Yet, at a low point in his life, when feeling weary and heavy-laden, he slumped beneath a juniper

tree in the desert and pleaded with God to end his life. **“I have had enough LORD,”** he said. **“Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors,”** 1 Kings 19:4.

And there’s another heavy burden we’ve not yet mentioned: The burden that people place on their own shoulders when they believe they can save themselves. Jesus used this same word, HEAVY LADEN, to describe the manner in which the religious leaders of Israel were burdening people with made-up additions to the Mosaic Law. **“And you experts in the law,”** Jesus said in Luke 11:46, **“woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift a finger to help them.”** Many religious leaders still do the same today; still impose the same horrible, unbearable burdens when they teach, in direct opposition to Scripture, that people are saved by human deeds instead of relying solely upon God’s grace in Jesus Christ.

**“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,”** Matthew 11:28. Tell me, after everything we’ve just said about the labors and heavy burdens and weariness of life, doesn’t this invitation of Jesus sound wonderful? In fact, isn’t this invitation of Jesus exactly what you’ve been waiting for? But what type of rest did Jesus mean? Bodily rest? Spiritual rest? I’d like to suggest that Jesus meant both.

That spiritual rest is the emphasis of our text is obvious from the Savior’s words in Matthew 11:29, **“And you will find rest for your souls”**—that deep, inner part of our being that cannot be reached or rejuvenated with Ambien or Lunestra or eight hours of uninterrupted sleep. That deep, inner part of our being that can only be satisfied and set at rest by Jesus Christ. What did the psalmist say? He didn’t say, ‘My soul thirsts for Gatorade or a strong cup of Maxwell House.’ He said, **“My soul thirsts for God, for the living God,”** Psalm 42:2.

Yet, while the emphasis of our text is clearly on spiritual rest, I believe Jesus would also want us to include bodily or physical rest. Why do I say this? I say this because bodily rest is intimately connected to spiritual rest. Isn’t that true? If you are tossing and turning on the inside, I can all but guarantee that you are tossing and turning in your bed.

We’ve all had this type of conversation with a spouse or parent or friend. They say, “Well, good morning, Sunshine!” You offer a weak and dismal, “Yeah, sure, whatever. Morning.” They say: “Oh, that doesn’t sound good. Are you feeling okay? You look tired.” You say, “Do I now? Well, for your information, I am tired.” They say, “Didn’t you sleep well?” You say, “No, I did not.” They say, “Why not?” And you say, “I have too much on my mind.” Consider that statement for a moment: “I have too

much on my mind.” Isn’t that just another way of saying “I was heavy laden;” that things are “weighing heavily on my mind?” I was in bed for eight hours, yes; but I wasn’t sleeping. What was I doing? I was laboring.

Did you know that there are over 2,800 sleep-disorder centers in the United States; that these sleep centers generate more than \$4.4 billion in revenue annually; that each year more than forty-three million prescriptions are written for sleep-inducing pharmaceuticals, contributing yet another \$3 billion in revenue? Apparently, getting a good night’s sleep is not only problematic for millions; it is also a booming, lucrative business.

I’m not suggesting that turning to Jesus Christ is a magic cure for insomnia. However, I am simply asking, “If we truly gave our burdens and fears and worries to the Lord instead of chewing and chewing them like a piece of worn-out, tasteless gum—wouldn’t we sleep better at night? To think otherwise is to ignore the words of Psalm 4: **“I will lie down and sleep in peace, because You alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.”**

Are you laboring and heavy laden? Are you weary and seeking rest? Look no farther than today’s text. In it, Jesus uses three important verbs—each in the IMPERATIVE mode—to teach us where to find true rest and how to keep it. An imperative verb is a verb with an exclamation point. The imperatives are: **“Come to Me,”** verse 28; **“Take My yoke;”** verse 29; and in the same verse, **“Learn from Me.”** Come. Take. Learn.

**The first imperative of Jesus: “Come to me.”** Why is coming to Jesus Christ for rest so urgent and so important? Dear friend, if you are truly weary of soul; if you are weary deep down to the very fiber of your being; if you are frustrated by all the disappointments and uncertainties of your life, you won’t find true rest in anything or anyone else other than Jesus Christ. You won’t.

There are scores of Bible passages I could cite, but two will suffice. Jesus said in John 14:6, **“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”** In John 15 Jesus used this vivid illustration of a vine and its branches. **“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing,”** John 15:5.

No one attains true rest and true peace apart from Jesus Christ. Like it or not, accept it or not, this is the certain and exclusive claim of Scripture: If you want to be saved, Jesus is not a way but the only way. If you want forgiveness, Jesus is not a way but the only way. If you want to “lose the weight” of problems and burdens, Jesus is

not a way but the only way. If you want true rest, Jesus is not a way but the only way. Any other means of finding rest—whether fame, fortune, relationships, careers, narcotics, alcohol; the many recommendations of the worldly wise and prudent—are but temporary at best and destructive at worst.

And there are many such worldly recommendations. If you own a computer and have internet service, go to a search engine and type in the phrase “How to Find Inner Peace.” You’ll find millions of websites with different suggestions. The Bible has but one and it is an imperative: **“If you want rest, come to Jesus.”**

**The second imperative of Jesus: “Take my yoke upon you.”** If “come to me” is a verb of invitation, then “take my yoke” is a verb of application. Why application?

We know where to find the answers, but we often don’t take the answers to heart. We hear the words of Jesus, **“Come to me for rest,”** but we don’t always apply them. Why? I’m not certain. Perhaps our first inclination is to look for rest on our own. Perhaps another reason is that too often the word of God may seem insignificant or weak when compared to the magnitude of our burdens and problems. Jesus is fine for Sunday school and little children; but not for adults who live in a grown-up world of terrorism and wars and divorce and disease and bankruptcies and foreclosures.

It was precisely this type of grown-up pretentiousness that Jesus opposed when He said, **“I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes.”** The Greek word translated as “babes” can mean infants or little children; but it can also mean childlike. Notice, I said childlike, not childishness. It’s when we come to Jesus with the trust of a little child, ignoring sight and living by faith; knowing that He loves us, knowing that He has saved us, knowing that He will never leave us or forsake us or allow our trust in Him to see even one instance of disappointment—then and there we realize the promise of entering into God’s rest.

**“Take My yoke upon you,”** Jesus said. **“Wear it. Use it. Apply it.** For **“My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”** The word translated as “easy” more literally means “well fitting.” At the time of Jesus, Jewish rabbis used the phrase “take my yoke” to mean “become my disciple.” In other words, Jesus is saying, “Don’t just come to Me. Follow Me. Live life through Me. You’ll find that My yoke, My instruction, My love perfectly fits your every need.”

**And the third and final imperative of Jesus: “Learn from Me.”** To translate more literally, **“Go on learning from Me.”**

If you could name one thing more than any other that wearies, worries, frightens, and robs you of sound sleep, wouldn't it be uncertainty? All those "what-if" questions? What if I get sick? What if I die? What if I lose my job or retirement? What if can't pay my bills? The list is endless. And at the heart of this endless list is the all-too-frequent assumption that God is sleeping or unaware of our problems or could care less about our labors or burdens.; or worse, that God is out to "get" us—as if the Almighty were nothing more than a mean schoolboy pulling the wings off of flies.

Can you understand then why Jesus said **"Learn from Me?"** Why Jesus said immediately prior to His blessed invitation to rest, **"No one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him?"**

In Jesus Christ, we have the fullest revelation of WHO God is and WHAT God is like. He is the God who loved us enough to sacrifice his Son, Jesus Christ, for us. When we view the world this way, through the sacrifice of Jesus, we know without question that the same God will meet all of our needs in Christ.

Dear friend, if today you are laboring or heavy laden or weary, will you not heed the personal invitation of Christ to come to Him, partake of Him, learn of Him, and so obtain true rest? The outcome is certain. **"I will give you rest,"** said Jesus. **"You will find rest for your souls."**

The Lutheran hymnal contains no less than five hymns based on today's text: #149, 277, 281, 456, and 513. Having heard this text again, perhaps we can all appreciate why there are so many hymns, so many lyrics, and so much praise. May this be our concluding thought and our bed-time prayer:

"I heard the voice of Jesus say, 'Come unto Me and rest;  
Lay down, thou weary one, lay down thy head upon My breast.'  
I came to Jesus as I was, weary and worn and sad;  
I found in Him a resting-place, and He has made me glad."