

SERMON THOUGHTS ABRIDGED **Matthew 11:23-30****SEARCHING FOR REST IN ADVENT**

And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for you.

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.

True or False--Christmas is a good time? I do hope everyone here would agree with that! I think most other people would agree with that too, whether they celebrate what Christmas is **really** about or not. Why are Christmas and a good time desirable? Because it provides a break, a breath of fresh air. There are a lot of uncertainties in life, a lot of unknowns, a lot concerns, a lot of frustrations. Everyone has to deal with those worries somehow. Is it in God's way, or in your own way?

In the verses preceding our text, Jesus was talking about the way people received both John the Baptist and Himself. The message of both was peace, security, cleansing, healing from God through repentance for sin and the good news of forgiveness by faith. But many rejected both John and Jesus, finding fault with both. John and his "Repent and be baptized" were criticized because John lived like some sort of "nut," you could say. Out there in the wilderness, eating locusts, and wild honey, wearing a rough and very unfashionable garment of camel's hair with a leather strap (surely, not a fancy belt like we think of) around his waist. The same critics also found fault with Jesus, because He did not follow the extra religious rules regarding eat and drink which the leaders had added to the Old Testament. He associated with "unclean" people like tax collectors and sinners who were a blight on society. These critics disdained the peace and the rest Jesus came to bring us.

With their disdain against Him in mind, Jesus began to rebuke those who had no use for God's rest. He specifically mentioned the city of Capernaum, a prosperous city on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, where Jesus had made His headquarters, rather than Nazareth. It was at Capernaum that Jesus had called Peter and partners to be fishers of men after He miraculously had granted them the great catch of fish. It was at Capernaum that Jesus had healed Peter's mother-in-law from a fever, had driven a demon out of a man, had healed the crippled man let down through the opening in the flat roof by his four friends. It was at Capernaum where Jesus had raised Jairus' daughter back to life. Many hours of teaching had been spent at Capernaum, one time even teaching from a boat while the people were crowded on shore. By and large Capernaum and its leaders had gone their own way. In its prosperity and in its self-sufficiency, Capernaum sought "rest" in its own way, apart from God and from Christ. Their doom would be horrific, even worse than the Old Testament city of Sodom, a city given to homosexuality, which God destroyed with fire and brimstone. Capernaum's doom would be **worse** because of the many opportunities it had ignored, pushing Jesus out of their lives, pursuing its own way and its own Rest.

Are you seeking Rest today? What are you laboring under? Sickness, some sickness, any sickness? (not just **the** sickness). High blood pressure? Arthritis? Skin disorders? Nervous tension? Anxiety? Vision? Hearing? Increasing age? Death drawing nearer? Or is it disorders of the season—wary from shopping, from planning get-togethers, from mailing greetings, from lining up food. Or is it just, like always, that no matter how hard you work, the work is never done—whether you're a rancher or a homemaker, a farmer or a pastor, a retiree or parent with young children. Do you come to God's house just to be entertained, or for a diversion, or for a place to have some peace and quiet to "meditate"? Or have you come to God's house like little children seeking rest

from their work. There are no sophisticated classes being held here to teach you how to manage this or that avenue of life, wealth, retirement, bill-paying. What is offered you here is the childlike message of God's rest and peace for oppressed and burdened sinners. A rest and a peace you can't get or discover for yourself. It's God's gift to you. The Father reveals the Son, and the Son reveals the Father to us. Your loving, merciful, care-giving Father!

How often does one have to invite a child to stop working after sending them out to work? How often do you have to say to a youngster, "Stop a minute, I have some treats for you"? Once.

So it is with Advent. So it is with Jesus. Come to Me all you who are sweaty and burdened, worn from the stuff of sinful lives in a sinful world. Come here, and I will give you rest! Let Me, Jesus, proclaim loudly and clearly to your guilty soul and your regret-filled conscience that I have come to set you free. The sins that haunt you are forgiven. The demons that lure you to return, and many times successfully, can be fought through Me. Don't sell out. Don't give up. You aren't going to be perfect in this life, but I have forgiveness, a clean sheet, and new life. Come and I give you rest. Fight on, as a noble warrior of the Kingdom of Heaven. With My help, treasure the peace you have, and fight on. *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.*

Satan wants to take all peace, joy, and rest out of your heart each day and at Christmas. He will not give up. So don't expect this to be the perfect Christmas season. Satan will keep hammering away at you and knocking you down, even when you have the best of intentions. All too often you and your sinful flesh are all too willing for his shortcuts. In Advent as at any time you become your own worst enemy.

Take Jesus' yoke upon you. Not the yolk of an egg! but the yoke that is put on animals to pull a wagon, or a plow, or more. By definition a yoke is not for one but for two. It joins two beasts together so together they can use their strength to pull—actually to push on the yoke—so as to pull what ever is behind. Jesus tells us to take His yoke upon us. You are yoked together with Jesus. No wonder it's easy and light and rest-giving! He does the work, and you and I are just walking along beside, safe in His labor. In Him we have rest. Peace and forgiveness before the Father in heaven. Security in this life that is so filled with uncertainties. Eternal rest and escape from death and the grave itself. Do you think of death more often with all the sickness around?

During Advent come to God's House and to God's Word for Rest. You have the most helpful Friend. It's sort of like Chopper and Yakky from the old 1960's cartoons. You're covered. You're safe. Realize your safety in Jesus this Advent season. Then when Christmas Day comes, or when the End of the World comes, you really have something special to celebrate—REST—not just another hectic day.

So be it! Amen!

Pastor Kanzenbach ---