

Finding Rest in Christ Alone

Matthew 11:28-30

A friend sent me this through e-mail:

YES, I'M TIRED

For years I've blamed it on middle age, lack of vitamins, lack of exercise, pesticides; preservatives, air pollution, saccharin, obesity, French fries, aluminum in the deodorant, wax buildup in the ears and other modern maladies that make you wonder if life is worth living.

But I've discovered these are not the reasons!

I'm tired because I'm overworked.

The population of this country is 240 million. 85 million are retired. That leaves 155 million to do all the work. 100 million are in school or children.

That leaves 55 million to do all the work. 8 million are unemployed.

25 million work for governments. That leaves 22 million to do all the work.

5 million are soldiers, police or firefighters. There are 3.18 million in hospitals.

There are 12 million people in prisons. That leaves 2 million to do all the work.

1.8 million are on vacation and 19,998 are on disability.

That leaves two people to do all the work.

You and me.

And you're sitting around reading this.

No wonder I'm so tired!

The Memorial Day weekend signals for many people the beginning of summer, and summer quite often brings vacations. According to the dictionary, a vacation is: “*a period of suspension of work, study, or other activity, usually used for rest, recreation, or travel.*” Doesn’t that sound great? But many times people come back from vacations feeling more tired than when they left.

There are a lot of things that make us *tired*. But what is it that *wearies* us? We might tend to think of all the things we have to do that make us tired, but I’m not talking about “*tired*”—I’m talking about “*weary*.” I’m talking about the kind of weariness that goes deeper than physical exhaustion and is not relieved by a good night’s rest. I’m talking about the kind of weariness with icy fingers stronger than anything you’ve ever experienced, that reaches into your heart and soul and squeezes the life and joy out of you.

Disappointment and discouragement are two things that cause us to grow weary almost faster than anything else. Hypocrisy, loneliness, broken trust, difficult relationships, worldly pleasure—even just the realities of life—all cause us to grow weary. There may be echoes from our past that continue to bounce around in our souls, and the result is that we are soul weary. There may be ongoing strife or uncertainty in our present lives that saps us of any inner resources we may have had, so that our souls feel worn and exhausted. We get weary from trying to carry all the things life heaps on us. Soul exhaustion sets in when we attempt to carry things we were not meant to carry.

One man, thinking about getting older, realized that the way he was feeling had much more to do with weariness than age: He wrote, *“I feel so much like a loose tooth from life ...; just dangling on some gum tissue...one good yank and BOOM, there I am, meeting the tooth fairy in person. There isn’t anything physically wrong with me but an immense soul weariness.”* (posted on www.thatmark.com) Many people feel the exact same way.

If physical weariness is remedied by resting the body, then the cure for soul weariness is to be found in resting the soul. How do we do that? Jesus told us, *Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.*

Psalm 119:28 tells us that sorrow can cause weariness: *My soul is weary with sorrow; strengthen me according to your word.* That’s the idea behind the word that Jesus used in Matthew 11:28. The word “weary” there means “to labor,” or “to be tired,” but it can also mean “to lose heart, to be discouraged.”

In the Scriptures, we learn that we can put down that burden of worry, that burden of anger and resentment, that burden of shame and guilt. Those are yokes that chafe and rub and blister. But God’s promise in Jeremiah 31:25 is *I will refresh the weary and satisfy the faint.*

And in Psalm 62 we read, *Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken. My salvation and my honor depend on God; he is my mighty rock, my refuge. Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge.* (Psalm 62:5-8)

It sure sounds good, doesn’t it? Almost like an illusive dream. How can we find rest for our souls? The Scripture passage before us today tells us the ways.

1 First, we find rest by coming to Jesus, v. 28

Jesus said, “*Come to me,*” and we most often look at this as an invitation. But a closer look at what Jesus actually said reveals that this was not an invitation at all—it was a command. The form of the word used here indicates a sense of urgency, as in “Come now!”

Look at who He commands. He says, *All you who are weary and burdened.* Pay attention to this: the command is not for anybody and everybody—it’s only for those who are *weary and burdened.* But doesn’t that include everybody? Doesn’t everyone have problems and burdens they carry? Well, sure, but not everyone has been carrying them long enough to realize that they are soul-weary. Not everyone has reached the point where he is ready to surrender that burden and find rest by coming to Jesus.

When Jesus said “*all*” He used a word meaning “everything and anything.” Do you realize what that means? That means that anything—literally *anything!*—which burdens you, anything that weighs you down, anything that sickens your soul, you are not just invited, you are *commanded* to take it to Jesus! It’s not just an invitation to accept or decline, and it’s not restricted to a few major problems. Everything and anything.

And Jesus tells us that when we come to Him with every burden of our lives, He will give us *rest.* Now *that’s* an interesting word, and looking at it closer reveals some astounding secrets. In Greek literature, this word was used to describe someone trying to open a door that is stuck. He tugs and pulls, until suddenly, the door flies open. Or it was used to describe the release of prisoner from chains, or the release from debt. But always it had the idea of something that happens suddenly. In fact, even the verb tense of this word used in Matthew 11:28 tells us that this is not something that happens out there in the future when we’ve worked hard enough, but something that happens right now.

He tells us to come to Him with any burden that we may be carrying, and He’ll help us carry it. You’ve been tugging and pulling on that closed door in your life for so long that you wonder if you’ll ever get it open. Come to Him, and He’ll solve it. The chains have had you shackled for so long you’ve come to believe that they are part of your body. Come to Him, and He’ll release you. Come to Him, and He’ll give you rest.

2 Second, we find rest by submitting to Jesus, v. 29

Then Jesus says in verse 29, *Take my yoke upon you*. The “yoke” was a wooden piece especially designed to fit across the shoulders of a pair of oxen, used for pulling a plow or a cart or wagon of some sort. When a farmer had a young ox he wanted to break in to the plow, he would usually pair him up with an older, stronger, more experienced ox. There would be a special yoke made, one that would fit those two oxen in particular, and it would be designed in such a way that the older, stronger ox took most of the load. In fact, as a carpenter, Jesus may have built several of these Himself.

The farmer didn’t just go around behind the barn and pick up an old yoke that had been lying there. If he could afford it, he would have a new one made to fit those two oxen in particular. If he could not afford it, he would pad the shoulders of the younger ox so that it would not chafe or rub him. He would “fit” the yoke to the ox.

In fact, in verse 30 Jesus said that His *yoke is easy*. Take a closer look. The Greek word means “good for a particular purpose,” or “well-fitting.” Today, we might say “tailor-made.” In Ephesians 4:32 we are told to *Be kind to one another*, and the word “kind” there is the same word for “easy” here. It can also mean “sweet and pleasant,” so if you put those two verses together, Jesus tells us that His yoke is “sweet and pleasant,” and that we are to be that way toward each other.

There is one fact about a yoke that is lying right on the surface, and we might not even see it. A yoke is never made for just one ox. A yoke was designed to connect two oxen together, to harness the power of both of them. What causes so much of our soul-weariness is that we are pulling loads we are not meant to carry, with yokes of our own design, and we find that instead of moving forward we are struggling against obstacles that seem to have no solution. We are attempting to do it all ourselves, instead of submitting to the yoke Jesus commands us to take up.

Here is another obvious fact that might be overlooked. A yoke was designed to pull a load in a *forward* direction. So much of our lives is spent in spinning our wheels, trying to live up to others’ expectations, running around in frenzied circles, when Jesus already has offered us what we need to move forward in our lives.

Christ’s prescription for rest is not to take the yoke from us and say “Go lie down in the shade.” His solution is that we exchange the yoke we’ve been wearing for the one He has tailor-made to fit our lives. We are not told that we need more time

at play. We are not told that we need to take a vacation. We are not told that we need more sleep. What we *are* told is that we need the yoke. We might feel that we need a good soft bed, or a hammock under a shade tree, but Christ says that we need the yoke.

3 Third, we find rest by learning from Jesus, v. 29

Jesus said, *Take my yoke upon you and learn from me.* We're talking about becoming His disciples here. We have tried everything else. We have educated ourselves on nearly every topic there is, and still we have no rest. We have made technological and medical advances, and still we have no rest. We have been able to accomplish things people only a generation ago could not even imagine, and still we have no rest. Why not try it His way for a change?

The word “*learn*” Jesus used here means “to understand something as a result of learning it.” It's not just to know something, but to understand it. In other words, Jesus is telling us that the best way to find rest for our souls is to learn from Him in a way that we understand His claims on our lives.

A Chinese boy who wanted to learn about jade went to study with a talented old teacher. The teacher put a piece of the stone into the boy's hand and told him to hold it tight. Then the old man began to talk of philosophy, men, women, the sun, and almost everything under it. After an hour he took back the stone and sent the boy home. The procedure was repeated for weeks. The boy became frustrated—when would he be told about jade?—but he was too polite to interrupt his venerable teacher. Then one day when the old man put a stone into his hands, the boy cried out instantly, “That's not jade!”

Jesus commands us to learn from Him, to allow Him and His way of life to become such a part of our lives and who we are, that we instantly know His heart. The result is that we will *find rest* for our souls, the rest we've been searching for, the rest we need, the rest that makes every burden light, the rest that changes our entire lives.

I saw this fleshed out one morning. My home at the time was on a lake, and I frequently would get up early and go outside. I was standing there looking at the lake, as I did almost every morning, when I noticed something small moving around in frantic circles out in the water. When I focused on it (this was before I had had any coffee!) I realized that it was a baby duck which had somehow become separated from its mother. It was obvious that this duckling was in a state of panic, swimming around in tight little circles.

But then I saw Momma. She was far out in the middle of the lake, and I found myself wondering how could I help that little duckling know where his Momma is? But there was no need for worry. With a single “quack!” Momma called the little one, and the baby wasted no time in half-swimming, half-flying in a bee-line to Momma.

Momma saw the frenzied, panicked circles of her baby, and she said, “Come!” And once that duckling got to Momma, all the panic ceased. Jesus looks at us and says, “Come!” and if we’ll stop our worry, hustle and panic long enough to go straight to Him, we’ll discover that soul rest we’ve been needing and for which you have been searching for so long.

There are many people who are quite willing to *come* to Jesus, and many have. Not so many have *submitted* to Jesus. Even fewer still have *learned* from Him. And that is why there are so few today who know what soul rest is from personal experience.

Do you have it today? You can experience this wonderful soul rest as your very own. Come to Him! Submit to Him! Learn from Him! He’ll give you rest such as you never knew existed.