

Take Time To Rest

So let me first say in the reading today, you might be close to 100. You might not. Don't take it personally. It was just an observation by the writer about how miraculous what God was going to do. I heard the big sigh in the congregation; I just had to reply to that with the word of hope and faith, that even though we may be as good as dead, and we're all gradually moving in that direction anyways. We serve a mighty God. We serve an awesome God.

One of the wonderful things I want to reflect with you on today is God loves us so much and cares about us so much that he's inviting us to take time in our lives to rest in him. Over the past few weeks, I've had a series on 'Take Time. It doesn't seem like a series because it hasn't been week after week. So many wonderful things going on, but this is the end of that series. It is entitled, 'Take Time To Rest'. In our world today, we value so much activity in busyness and doing a lot of different things. That is part of our life that is part of the reality that we live. Let me submit to you that one of the greatest things you and I can do is to take time to rest and be before the Lord that some of the greatest things we will ever accomplish in life will be after a season of rest in him.

James Smith shares in his wonderful book, 'The Good and Beautiful God'; the number one enemy of Christian formation today is exhaustion. We are living beyond our means financially, physically and spiritually as well. As a result one of the primary activities of human life is being neglected, that of sleep. According to numerous studies, the average person needs approximately eight hours of sleep a night. Our bodies and souls are unified; neglecting our bodies impedes our spiritual growth. If our bodies are not sufficiently rested, our energies will be diminished and her ability to pray, read the Bible, and enter solitude will be minimized. James goes on to share on some of the tips for good sleep.

- Go to bed the same time each night.
- Eat early.
- No caffeine around that time of day.
- Engage in calm activities before you're ready to go to bed.

These are just some little pointers that can make a big difference in one's ability to sleep and rest.

In the gospel lesson today, I invite you to turn with me there; I'm just going to focus in on a couple of verses. Toward the end of Matthew 11, actually look at Matthew 11:28 to 30. In this particular section of Scripture, Jesus encourages us to rest. He begins in a very interesting way. He says to me, he says to all of us, to come unto me, first of all, come to him. It is an invitation that Jesus is issuing to you and I. One of the first things I want to ask is here today is, are we saying yes to that invitation? You know the reality is as Jesus says to you and me, come to me. Yes, he says that to us a lot during the day, whether we realize it or not. There are moments during your day my day where, if we slow down for just a moment, we would be able to hear the Holy Spirit say to us, come away with me. Have some time in quiet, in prayer... be in the word. That tug of the spirit to spend some time in devotion and to be with God. Are you saying yes to that? Are you listening to that voice? And very simply one of the ways that you'll know that that's happening is, you'll actually be spending time each day being with the Lord in prayer and devotion and in experiencing that.

Jesus invites us; first of all, if we are to experience the rest he wants to give us, to come to him, because he's the one that will give it to us. Are you saying yes to that invitation? Come into me all you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens, burdens of sin and sorrow. Things that you try to forget and ignore or put down and they just seem to spring up with even more energy and life. The burden of legalism; feeling like you have all of these things you need to do and you need to fulfill in order to please other people in your life in order to measure up in order to be all that you can be in the face of other people. Sickness. May be physically, mentally or emotionally. All of these different things. And so many others can be worrisome or burdensome to us and we carry them. You know the reality is that part of being a human being is to go through trial in life. It is to have burdens. It is to, at times, have sickness, it is to go through struggle. That's all part of being a human being. The sad part is that for many of us, we get so used to carrying burdens that that's all we know. We think that that is the normal way to live life. I would submit to you that it is not. There are seasons of that but there also should be much more seasons of incredible rest. Seasons of wonderful healing. Seasons of incredible refreshment. Can anybody say vacation right?

I ask you and me here today what wearies or burns you? Who wearies or burns you? It might be in some ways yourself and the demands you put on yourself. It might be another person. It might be your finances. It might be something that happened a long time ago or just yesterday. It might be that situation that has a hold of you and you've tried to shake it loose but it just will not let go. It might be in a word, your life right now. Jesus says to you and to me, come in to me all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest. Sounds like a deal to me. I will give you rest. It is interesting when you read the Greek on this particular phrase; it carries with it the idea of procuring something. And it is talking about rest like as a commodity. It's almost like you go to the store and you say, I want to buy some rest. That's what Jesus is talking about in this particular verse. I will give you rest. I will give you this substance, this reality, this restoration, this refreshment, this releasing of your burdens, and what wearies you. This is what I will give you freely and graciously, for I am gentle and humble of heart. I love that, don't you? You know again, let me just take a little bit of a bunny trail right now, for those of you whose image of God you grew up with a God who is judgmental, you're waiting for God to throw the next lightning bolt and you your you think that God is waiting for you to do the next thing wrong so that he can mess up your life even more. Let me just share with you another image of God and it's here in the Scripture. For I am gentle and humble of heart. That's Jesus. That's who your God is. Or at least who your God can be: gentle, humble, loving, caring, in your corner, wanting to take your burdens and giving you rest. Wanting to take your hatred and your anger and the things you struggle with and give you love, peace and joy. It sounds like a great deal to me! As some of you are saying, "Father Joe, it sounds like a great deal to me too, but I don't know if I want to do it today." Why not today? Why not today? How's that working for you up to this point so far? How is your life working for you? Yeah that's what I thought for some of you at least. So why not trade it in for a different life, a new life, a life that is renewed, a life that is refreshed, a life that is restored, and a life that is transformed. As you and I give our Lord the burdens and the struggles of our life, as we give them to him and entrust them to him, there's a change that happens. There's an exchange that happens. It's like going to this incredible store. You don't have to spend your money. But what you do is you go up to the counter and you say, "Here I am Joe and I want to give you my burdens. I want to give you this person that's really been bugging me. I want to give you my anxiety. I'm giving you all of this and what are you going to give me?" "I am going to give you rest and to give you peace, to give you love." What a

deal! What a deal! Take my yoke upon you and learn from me. This word yoke, the yoke is actually something that was laid on the broad four head or neck of an animal, with cords attached to it and the burden that the animal was carrying. The yoke was actually form fitted for the shoulders to prevent rubbing the flesh raw, which would cause serious sores. To receive Christ's yoke for us is to submit ourselves to the burdens and the duties that Christ has uniquely given us. That phrase, 'My yoke is easy and my burden is light' easy and the Greek chrestos, chrestos, not Cheerios. Chrestos means well fitted. Do you realize that the yoke that Jesus has for you, the life that Jesus has for you, the duties that Jesus has for you, the relationships that Jesus has for you, will fit you perfectly. If they don't at first, don't worry. Pulling the yoke with Jesus will form and shape you over time to adjust to the calling that he has for your life. But we need to surrender to that what he has for that.

There is another thing I like to share with you about this yoke, not only is it form fitted specifically for your life. The yoke that Jesus has for you, take my yoke upon you and learn for me, the yoke that he has for you is just for you. It is not for me, thank God. You don't have my yoke, thank God. Right? You have your own yoke! It's form fitted just for you. There's something else about this yoke that, I believe the Scripture doesn't say this, but I believe this. I believe it's a tandem yoke. I'm in one of the parts of the yoke, just like you are for your own yoke. And guess who's in the other slot... Jesus. Jesus is in the other slot, hallelujah! He's over there ready to teach you. Us being ready to learn from him helping us to know how to handle this person or the situation. Keep your mouth shut. Maybe share this. Pray about it. And then that way we can begin to learn from him. He can begin to teach us about how to carry the yoke of life that he has given us. I believe that many Christians are carrying burdens that are not from God. Burdens of sin, burdens of guilt, burdens of condemnation. Look at that cross. The cross of nails. In a moment, later on, if you're not too busy, if you want to take a little break after the service, you have my permission to come up here and take a look at this cross of nails. These are all nails. I've never seen a cross like this before. You know what this reminds me of? It reminds me of the three nails that went into Jesus's body for my sins. You what, I've struggled a lot over my life with sins of condemnation and guilt. Not just being able to let it go. One day the Lord said to me, "You know what Joe? Look at my cross. I died on the cross for your sins. I went through a horrible, torturous death for those sins. I was beaten for them. I rose triumphant from the grave over them. So why don't you receive my mercy and forgiveness. Why don't you stop beating yourself up? It is not going to do you any good anyways. Let me just say to you that you can beat yourself up all you want. You can feel condemned. It does nothing for your sins. It just makes you more deeply into your prison that you are in. Rather these sins belong on the cross of Christ, that's where they got nailed." You and I need to receive the mercy. We need to receive the joy so that when you confess your sins, when you let go of these burdens and the things that are wearing you, guess what you should feel? Joy! Release. Forgiven. And guess what happened when I heard that word I heard from God and I actually began to receive it? I said, "You know what? You're right." Yeah the Lord is usually right, thank you Pat. The Lord is usually right. He is. It only took me about 50 years to get a clue on this one. We need to let the burden of our sin go and the condemnation and the guilt from anyone or anything, and let it be on the cross of Jesus. Let us receive his mercy and forgiveness that we might be free, joyful and happy. When you come up from your knees in confession, you should be filled with joy. You should be saying to yourself the same thing as Jesus is saying after that confession. What sin? As far as the east is from the west, he doesn't remember it after you confess that it's gone. So it should be for you to. The burden of sin and bad choices we carry them. Rebellion... God says, "Up", you go down. God says, "Left", you go right. God says, "Yes", you say, "No." That

rebellion in our hearts causes a wall to be between God and I and a yoke that we carry that is not from him. We need to get rid of our yoke. You need to get rid of your yoke and receive the yoke that Christ has uniquely for you. How do you do that? How do you make that step today? How do you begin to move from, "Oh my God, I don't know if I can keep on going or not. Father Joe, you don't know the burden that I carry. If I let this burden go, I don't know what I'm going to do anyways! I'm not going to have anything to complain about! I'm not gonna know how to live!"

Get up. Throw the yoke off that you've been carrying. That's your yoke. Jesus has not given it to you. He has not given it to you. You are busy complaining to God, "God, my life is so burdened. I can't believe about this person in my life. I can't believe all this stuff I'm dealing with. I can't believe I'm having to carry this on my shoulders." If Jesus could speak to you, I believe he is speaking from me to you right now and he's saying, "I didn't give you that burden." I want you to give that burden to me. I want you to give that person to me. Hello. I want you to pray about that situation. Pray about that person and receive my peace and let me begin to lift you up so you can walk in peace and watch what I'm going to do. Different way to live. Different way to walk. Different kind of yoke. So how do we begin to do this? It's as simple as saying, "Jesus, I surrender to you today. To your will and the yoke that you have for my life, which first begins means you can take your yoke off. I hope today is you come up to communion figuratively. I hope this whole altar area just fully your yokes. Just leave them there at the altar. Let them go. Let the burdens go. Let the worries go. All the things that you are carrying go. Leave them at the altar. They are not yours. Give them to God and then pray in faith. Jesus, I want this yoke that Father Joe is talking about, that you shared with us in your word, I want a yoke that is easy and a burden that is light. I want that. I want you.

Do you desire that today? Are you open to beginning to slow down and to begin to listen to Jesus about what this means for your life in the coming weeks? The change that will bring for you; the way you respond to things differently, and actually resting. Being restored. Not having to get that extra kick of caffeine in the morning so you can just get out of bed, but waking up restored, renewed, and ready to go in the Lord. Let us pray and let us be open to this moment in our lives of giving to Jesus the burdens that we carry and receiving his yoke which is easy in his burden which is light.

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