

What Rest Does Jesus Promise?

Scripture: Matthew 11

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Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. (11:28)

Just as man's part in salvation is to come humbly, it is also to **come** in faith. Although finite minds cannot fully comprehend the truth, divine grace and human faith are inseparable in salvation. God sovereignly provides salvation, which includes the fact that man must give himself to the Lord Jesus Christ in commitment before it becomes effective. Jesus said, "All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me," and then immediately added, "and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out" (John 6:37).

Salvation is not through a creed, a church, a ritual, a pastor, a priest, or any other such human means-but through Jesus Christ, who said, **Come to Me**. To **come** is to believe to the point of submitting to His lordship. "I am the bread of life," Jesus declared; "he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst" (John 6:35). *Comes* and *believes* are parallel just as are *hunger* and *thirst*. Coming to Christ is believing in Him, which results in no longer hungering and thirsting. Other biblical synonyms for believing in Christ include confessing Him, receiving Him, eating and drinking Him, and hearing Him.

Peter declared, "Of Him [Jesus Christ] all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins" (Acts 10:43). And the Lord Himself said, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; that whoever believes may in Him have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:14–16).

All who are indicates a condition that already exists. Those whom Jesus invites to Himself are those who already **are weary and heavy-laden**. Although this aspect of Jesus' invitation is mentioned after faith ("Come to Me"), chronologically it precedes faith, referring to the repentance that drives the humble, seeking person to Christ for salvation.

Kopiaō (to grow **weary**, or "to labor") carries the idea of working to the point of utter exhaustion. John uses the term to describe Jesus' fatigue when He and the disciples reached Sychar after a long, hot journey from Jerusalem (John 4:6).

Weary translates a present active participle and refers figuratively to arduous toil in seeking to please God and know the way of salvation. Jesus calls to Himself everyone who is exhausted from trying to find and please God in his own resources. Jesus invites the person who is wearied from his vain search for truth through human wisdom, who is exhausted from trying to earn salvation, and who has despaired of achieving God's standard of righteousness by his own efforts.

Heavy-laden translates a perfect passive participle, indicating that at some time in the past a great load was dumped on the wearied person. Whereas **weary** refers to the internal exhaustion caused by seeking divine truth through human wisdom, **heavy-laden** suggests the external burdens caused by the futile efforts of works righteousness.

In Jesus' day, the rabbinical teachings had become so massive, demanding, and all-encompassing that they prescribed standards and formulas for virtually every human activity. It was all but impossible even to learn all the traditions, and was completely impossible to keep them all. Jesus spoke of the heavy loads of religious tradition that the scribes and Pharisees laid on the people's shoulders (Matt. 23:4); and at the Jerusalem Council, Peter noted that the Judaizers were trying to saddle Christianity with the same man-made "yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear" (Acts 15:10).

Although the term itself is not used in the text, Jesus gives a call to repent, to turn away from the self-centered and works-centered life and come to Him. The person who is **weary and heavy-laden** despairs of his own ability to please God. He comes to the end of his own resources and turns to Christ. Desperation is a part of true salvation, because a person does not come to Christ as long as he has confidence in himself. To repent is to make a 180-degree turn from the burden of the old life to the restfulness of the new.

Repentance was the theme of John the Baptist's preaching (Matt. 3:2) and the starting point of the preaching of Jesus (4:17), Peter (Acts 2:38; 3:19; cf. 5:31), and Paul (17:30; 20:21; cf. 2 Tim. 2:25). The person who humbly receives God's revelation of Himself and His way of salvation, who turns from the unbearable burden of his sin and self-effort, and who comes to Christ empty-handed is the only person God will save.

Anapauo (to **give ... rest**) means to refresh or revive, as from labor or a long journey. Jesus promises spiritual **rest** to everyone who comes to Him in repentance and humble faith.

God's **rest** is a common Old Testament theme. The Lord warned Israel, "Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as in the day of Massah in the wilderness; when your fathers tested Me, they tried Me, though they had seen My work. ... Therefore I swore in My anger, truly they shall not enter into My rest" (Ps. 95:7-9, 11). After quoting that passage, the writer of Hebrews warns those who make a pretense of faith in Christ but have not really trusted Him: "Take care, brethren, lest there should be in

any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in failing away from the living God” (Heb. 3:12). To intellectually acknowledge Christ’s deity and lordship is a dangerous thing if it does not lead to true faith, because it gives a person the false confidence of belonging to Christ.

In the time of the early church many Jews were attracted to the gospel and outwardly identified themselves with the church. But for fear of being unsynagogued, ostracized from the worship and ceremonies of Judaism, some of them did not truly receive Christ as saving Lord. They went part way to Him but stopped before full commitment. “As a result” of such superficial allegiance, John says, “many of His disciples withdrew, and were not walking with Him anymore” (John 6:66). Consequently they would not enter God’s rest, that is, His salvation, because they still possessed “an evil, unbelieving heart” (Heb. 3:11–12).

Just as those Israelites who rebelled against Moses in the wilderness were denied entrance into the Promised Land because of unbelief, so those who refuse to fully trust in Christ are denied entrance into God’s kingdom rest of salvation for the same reason (v. 19). “Therefore, let us fear lest, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you should seem to have come short of it. For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard. For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said, ‘As I swore in My wrath, they shall not enter My rest’ ” (4:1–3).

The dictionary gives several definitions of rest that remarkably parallel the spiritual **rest** God offers those who trust in His Son. First, the dictionary describes rest as cessation from action, motion, labor, or exertion. In a similar way, to enter God’s rest is to cease from all efforts at self-help in trying to earn salvation. Second, rest is described as freedom from that which wearies or disturbs. Again we see the spiritual parallel of God’s giving His children freedom from the cares and burdens that rob them of peace and joy.

Third, the dictionary defines rest as something that is fixed and settled. Similarly, to be in God’s rest is to have the wonderful assurance that our eternal destiny is secure in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. It is to be freed from the uncertainties of running from philosophy to philosophy, from religion to religion, from guru to guru, hoping somehow and somewhere to discover truth, peace, happiness, and eternal life.

Fourth, rest is defined as being confident and trustful. When we enter God’s rest we are given the assurance that “He who began a good work in [us] will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 1:6). Finally, the dictionary describes rest as leaning, reposing, or depending on. As children of God, we can depend with utter certainty that our heavenly Father will “supply all [our] needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:19).

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