

## Jesus, Rest for our Souls

Like most women in my season of life, I'm busy. Exceedingly busy. At the end of most days when Tye comes in from work and I'm finishing getting dinner on the table, Tye always asks how the day has gone. I respond with highlights then more times than not, the final phrase is something like "I'm tired...it's been a long day".

I love the passage Kim shared about salvation being a gift rather than something we earn ourselves...and how in the very next verse it says we are his workmanship created "**for** good works that we should walk in them". Such a powerful passage yet it presents a challenge to me: Where does my 'doing' fit in the free gift of salvation? I have always wrestled with this and want you all to know that the contribution I make today is not from a place of 'having arrived'. Not by any means. Rather, it is from the place of revisiting the Cross and the Promises of God over and over and clinging to them...knowing that this struggle is very real and persistent for me.

The popular voices of women leaders of our current society do not generally help. From blogs to Tweets to popular books promising success if you just follow a prescribed plan...we are bombarded with 'me' centered, works driven self-help advice that promises much but ultimately reveals itself to be shallow and empty....and exhausting. A treadmill with a huge mirror in front, leading nowhere.

What the books don't tell you is there will always be a sequel. Rest actually never comes except for that very brief, fleeting window in which a goal is met, only to realize there are now new ones needed and 'the next steps' to get there. Then the message becomes: 'Stretch it, Girl, that was just the beginning! There is more...new, amazing goals YOU can accomplish'. There is always a Volume 2 it would seem...then when those volumes are expended, new books with new strategies will follow the same pattern. Updates and polish on the same me oriented message.

In this popular mindset, we are in the driver's seat of our lives...the "God is my Co-pilot" mindset of the 80's repackaged for modern consumption. It is not about God's plan but our carefully crafted, bulleted and implemented plan for success driven by our own ingenuity and determination. This is not new.

It begs the question: Who is getting the glory and focus in this mindset? God becomes an appendage to our self focus and self reliance and those promoting this worldview seem to only encourage acknowledging God's plan when it is aligned with our own and suites our individual goals. In essence it is saying God's plan, purposes and work are simply not enough to give us peace and actually be sufficient...we need more.

Let's do a little comparison. Popular takes say: "Set goals and let nothing distract you from achieving them". God says: "Deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me". Worldly wisdom says: "Set boundaries from people and circumstances that distract you or add toxicity to your life". Scripture says: "Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the Law of Christ". Pop culture says: "Find your inner strength and believe in yourself, you are enough"...while Jesus says: "I am the vine, you are the branches, apart from me you can do **nothing**." One view elevates self and thus it is self who gets the glory and boasting rights. The other centralizes Jesus and He receives all the glory. In this truth is the only way we can echo the words of Paul to "boast in Christ alone".

There was a writer many years ago that had a far better take than many of our contemporary voices. His name: St. Augustine. Here was his take:

“You made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless, until they find their rest in You.”

Can't we see this in the world today? A relentless restlessness. A collective inability to be satisfied and at peace with ourselves, others, and the world around us because ultimately we are not at peace with our Creator as the all sufficient, Sovereign Lord of our lives who has a plan He promises to bring to completion.

For the next few minutes, I'd like to focus on scripture that offers the precious promises of a rest that is available to the people of God. It is a rest available because He is enough and He already has done enough. Our first passage is Matt. 11 beginning in verse 25. We will be referencing several passages in fleshing out what this rest offers, looks like and practically means for our daily lives, so grab a Bible or your phone and let's dig in. Matthew 11:25:

At that time Jesus declared, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Come to me, all 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.”

“All who labor and are heavy laden”. That is every single one of us. No matter the season of our lives. From those just beginning adulthood and trying to figure out education/vocation to those in the trenches of raising a family to those of us welcoming grandchildren and learning to navigate the autumn season of life...each of us in our individual ways are laboring and heavy laden. Jesus gives us rest. But how? Isn't a yoke an instrument of labor? Let's make a mental picture...an ox in a yoke. It does not wear a yoke while resting but while laboring. This is significant. The rest of Jesus is not inactivity but available to us in the working, stresses and daily busyness of life. The very next phrase is “and learn from me”. The word “learn” in this text is the verb form of disciple. It is the yoke of discipleship.

Yet He goes on to say that this particular yoke is easy and our burden is actually light. How can this be? It is not because he expects less of us, but because He himself bears our burdens and He himself who is at work in and through us, doing his work of conforming us more and more into his image. The word we use for this process is sanctification. We stand, because he makes us stand. The Shepherd of our souls is not a taskmaster but as he describes himself ‘gentle and humble in heart’.

Did you notice at the beginning of this passage that this truth is hidden from some? It is hidden from “the wise and understanding” of the world. Does that sound familiar? We need to ask ourselves why these voices of the ‘wise and understanding’ by the world's standards can at times appear attractive to us if we are not practicing discernment. What should captivate us is the promises the Lord offers...like in this very passage of rest for our souls.

The ‘wise and understanding’ of Jesus's day did the same thing. One group of such people were the Pharisees. They would bind heavy requirements on others that they could not bear themselves. Jesus describes them in words that pull no punches such as in

Matthew 23:4 They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear,<sup>[a]</sup> and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger.

We contrast the heavy burden of the Pharisees and contemporary voices of the 'wise and understanding' to the "light burden" of Jesus.

This is actually not a brand new idea. God has always offered rest to his people. There is a similar passage in the story of Moses when God called his people, Israel, to leave Sinai and they were afraid and finding it very hard to trust the Lord. Moses intercedes for the people and asks God who He will send to help him lead this people. He needed to hear from the Lord. God responds with these words in Exodus 33:14:

"And he said, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."

(This is the passage where Moses then asks to actually see the glory of God and God allows him after tucking him safely in the cleft of the rock.)

I fixate on the words of God "My \*presence\* will go with you..." Just like God provided his very presence as the means of rest for Moses and his people, He now provides rest to us through the presence of His Spirit. In the yoke of discipleship we are not laboring alone. Ever. Let's think back to a promise Jesus gave in John 14 to send The Helper:

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you." "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. "

In contrast to the self-focus motivational messaging we hear today, Jesus promises we will never be alone, because we cannot make it alone. We were never meant to. This is why we are able to rest. This is why Jesus can say his burden is 'light'. We have Help. With every aspect of our yoke of discipleship, there is the Helper working in and through us to bring about the Father's will in our sanctification. The constant Presence of God with and in us...hard at work, assuring us we are never alone...that we are His and by Him we cry out "Abba, Father", giving us the deep peace that offers true rest. In Him alone.

It is also worth noting that in our rest, Jesus never promised life will run smoothly and we will have less problems and challenges. He actually promised the opposite in the same book of John a couple chapters over in chapter 16:33 saying:

"I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

In the thick of managing demanding children, tight schedules, limited budgets, the call that places one more demand on you when you are already barely treading water...in those very overwhelming moments we are not alone. We have his Spirit, Our Helper hard at work in us. This is tremendously powerful and encouraging on a very practical level.

Most of you know at least some about my theological past. As Pastor Jim says, "Bad theology hurts people". I can attest to this as truth. I grew up with a theology that clearly and emphatically says, "Jesus plus obedience = salvation". Our salvation was not in Christ alone but a mixture of the work of Christ

and our own obedience. I want to testify today to the power of the true Gospel message that proclaims boldly "Salvation is by Christ Alone, start to finish".

It troubled me deeply from an early age that I could never peg how much was required for me to be at peace and able to rest in my salvation. No one could tell me. I was even taught you could not know you were saved until Judgement Day...it was presumptuous to assume you were actually saved! If you ask folks still in this type of mindset the question: "If you died today where would you go?" they will sigh deeply, look very grave and say to the effect, "Heaven,....I hope (Gulp)"...and there would always be that tone of doubt in the answer. Never real peace with the Lord, therefore never true rest.

I used to answer this way. Imagine growing up insecure that if you were to pass away, Hell might actually be the eternity you would receive no matter how hard you were trying because you simply did not obey 'enough'. This really was my reality. It plagued my mom, my sister and myself. None in our family had real peace and rest because we had no security found in Christ alone.

The first time I can look back and see God beginning a long process of opening my eyes was as a Camp Counselor at a Christian Youth Camp the summer of 1996. I was 20 years old. I was plagued with wanting assurance of my salvation. A couple of kind and sympathetic pastors studied with me one evening after dinner for hours. I remember one pastor making me read aloud from the book of Romans and asking what the words meant. He was trying to force me to see scripture without the lenses I was wearing for so long. He was challenging but in a very kind, pastoral, loving way. I thank God for his patience in working with me.

When he had me read this scripture "There is therefore no condemnation in Christ Jesus" he had me stop, think and process that passage in light of a true relationship with Jesus in contrast to the 'rule keeping' religiosity I was defining as the basis for being 'in Christ'. When the light bulb finally went on, my eyes filled with tears and I literally felt as if a concrete slab were lifted from my back. My response was to say, "But that's too good to be true! I can actually know I'm saved? Even when I mess up and sin and can't seem to conquer things?? My salvation is secure?? That just seems too good to be true".

His eyes filled with tears probably seeing he was finally getting through to me and he just said, "You can know it's true because it is promise of God. Listen and cleave to his voice and words and in them you will find the security that does seem too good to be true. It is true and it is GOOD and this is why the Gospel means The GOOD news".

After hours, we realized we needed to call it a night and a terrible storm was blowing outside...a classic Texas T-storm...thunder, lightning and heavy rain. I kid you not. I look back and think, God really created a perfect environment for me that night to 'bring home the truth of rest and peace in Him alone'.

The irony was that, in spite of dangerous weather that would cause distress for normal people... for the first time in my entire life, I felt an overwhelming peace in my soul. I never had felt so 'at rest' and confident in where I would go should that storm literally blow me away. I walked back to my cabin, lay down, smiled and slept soundly despite the storm going on all around me. I remember thinking, "Man, I hope this cabin doesn't blow away...but if it does, I know where I'm going. He is enough."

I would slip back into old patterns and legalism and it would take many years for God to work me completely out of the bad theology I was given over a lifetime but it all really began that night with the first step of knowing that Jesus is enough and my salvation and security and confidence rest in Him

alone. The peace and rest in my soul were the products of being taught the Gospel with nothing added to it. Interestingly my physical body was able to rest and sleep even in a terrible storm due to the deep peace I was experiencing for the first time in the Lord Jesus. I thought I knew Jesus my whole life. What I did not fully embrace was his all sufficiency. Until this was pointed out to me by an older and wiser person, I could not see beyond my huge blindspot nor could I ever find that peace my soul longed for so deeply.

So, how do we apply the truths we are discussing that rest is provided in Christ? First, our actions begin in our hearts and minds. We must be so rooted and convicted in the truth of his promise that HE is enough and that HE provides rest for our souls, that HE gives us the Holy Spirit to be with us forever...so firmly rooted in this truth, that it affects our daily thinking. When we are in the thick of stress and daily grind instead of our minds going right to: "I have to do this....or If I don't get \_\_\_\_\_ done....." or "I'm so tired and spent"....instead our mind can be filled with reassurance such as reminders like "This is so hard, but I'm not alone. God hears my every cry. He will provide. He is at work. He is enough. Help me, Lord".

The convictions we have will change our thought patterns which in turn will change our behaviors. It is not a "3 Step Plan to Resting in Jesus". It is simply knowing his promises, holding to them tightly and letting that truth transform our minds, hearts and as a fruit, our actions and daily living. We do not have to listen to the voices of 'the wise and understanding'. We have his voice that says:

"Come to me, all 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."

Reflection Questions:

1. How do you experience the yoke of Christ in your daily life? How does this lead to rest?
2. How is the presence of the Holy Spirit related to our rest?
3. What contrasts do you see as most striking between biblical "rest in Christ alone" and the popular messages we are fed? How can we avoid listening to the voices of the 'wise and learned' that will continually come and go in our world of social media, print, and pop culture?
4. How could someone misunderstand the rest we have in Christ?
5. What are practical ways that we experience the rest of Jesus in the hectic busyness of daily life? What passage of scripture stands out from today that can help you in the hectic grind ahead?