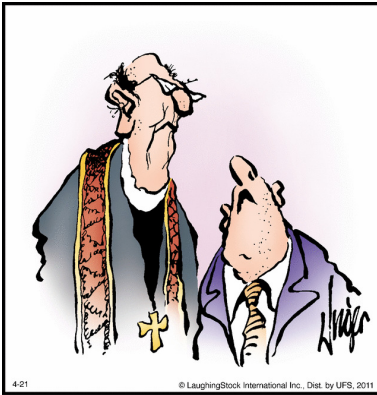


Come to Me & Rest

Matthew 11:16-30

It may be a little dangerous for a preacher to advertise his sermon as “Come unto me and rest” as it has not been unknown for people to take a little rest during a sermon. As the cartoons show it is a well recognised phenomena, but this is simply because it is a reality.



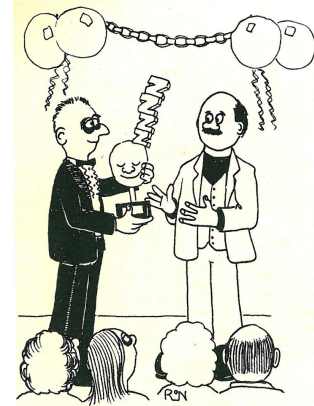
“Sorry I left during your sermon.
I was sleepwalking.”

There is a long tradition of people falling asleep in sermons. In Acts 20 Paul, and at this point I quote, “talked on and on” so that one Eutychus fell into such a deep sleep that he fell out of a third floor window and thus need to be raised from the dead. I have even heard one preacher confess to falling asleep in his own sermon.

Well I hope you will feel rested after this sermon. However not because you have

had a little shut eye, but because we will all have had our eyes opened afresh to a wonderful invitation which Jesus offers us. An offer which if pay close attention will not only bring us rest, but bring us to a better understanding of how we are to live as well as the majesty of Jesus.

So stay awake for this one.



*Ian was named preacher of the year
at the insomniacs' gala dinner.*

REST

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”

Thus said Jesus, and they are wonderful and beautiful words whichh we could profitably spend a long time pondering it and reflecting upon it.

Firstly we should note the width of the offer, it is open to all, an open invitation, come one and come all. There is only qualification. That we be weary, and who isn't?

What are the things that might be making people weary and what are their heavy burdens? It doesn't take long to start making a list.

Others expectation

It could be expectations of us, how people expect us to behave. In religious thinking this is called legalism, and it does seem to have been a problem in first century Judaism. The very next chapter highlights the problem when Jesus and his disciples get themselves into trouble as they deal with human need but not in the way the religious authorities appreciate.

Jesus would later in the Gospel speak of the way in which the religious leaders put heavy burdens on others and not lift a finger to help. (Matt 23:4)

The problem of legalism has never been far away from the Christian church either. Many of us may have grown up with understandings of things that Christians did and didn't do ranging from dancing, card playing, Sunday shopping, eating fish on Friday, Church every Sunday and so on. Living up to these expectations, working out how good we have to be, can be a very heavy burden and make us weary. As Paul discovered and described in Romans 7, we can't live up to those standards.

Jesus continually mixed with those who didn't fit religious expectations and had meals with them and befriended them and called them to follow him. He didn't wait them to come up to his standards he just welcomed them. It is this Jesus who says to all "Come to me and find rest".

Other burdens

It may be our own expectations and the way that we have not lived up to them that may make us weary as we carry the burden of guilt. Yet the Jesus who says come to me is the one who demonstrated forgiveness to others, even to those who were crucifying him. In his forgiveness we can find rest and lay down our burden

We might be burdened by whether we have any real value. Jesus said that even the hairs on our head are numbered, we can rest in the value we have before God.

We may be burdened by worries, yet Jesus reminds us not to worry but to trust in God's provision and in his care.

It may be grief, but in the resurrection there is the hope of a world with no more tears.

We may simply be tired and it is good to remember that Christianity is not a religion of works, what we have to do, but one of rest, trusting in what Jesus has done, and we can rest in that.

Biblical Theology of Rest

But we can go a bit deeper than this however. As Jesus uses the word "rest" he would have been well aware that he was using a loaded theological term. To understand this we need to do a bit of biblical theology.

As I am sure that we all know in the biblical creation account after 6 days of heavy creating God comes to the ends of his labour and he rests. Now the interesting thing is that the 7th day doesn't actually end which suggests that the stories of the Garden of Eden which follow are part of creation being at rest. Or to put it another way the purpose of creation was to be at rest with everything in its right place, operating as it should. Rest then biblically is not so much kicking back and doing nothing, but things being as God intended them to be, being God's people in God's place.

This is picked up in the Exodus narratives and in Psalm 95 where getting to the Promised Land is pictured as being at rest, when the Kingdom of Israel is at its peak it is described as being at rest.

In the book of Hebrews this idea of rest is picked up and reminds us that there is still a rest for us to enter into, as way of talking about the new creation.

Jesus then as he offers people rest is doing far more than giving them a break, he is saying that he can give them what they were created for. He is offering them salvation in the fullest possible sense, to be God's children in God's world.

Rather than striving to be something other than who we are, in Jesus we are freed to be the people God intended us to be, looking forward to the new creation where everything will be at rest.

This helps us to understand why Jesus can go on to talk about a yoke, which sounds like there is still work to be done. Biblically rest is not about taking a break or being stationary but rather living life as God intended in the way that God intended it and not wearying ourselves by working against it. Rest is not about indolence but living with significance and hope. It does mean we can take a break from trying to work out what life is all about and getting on with living it properly.

Coming? Repenting of ourselves

This is the wonderful invitation of Jesus, rest from guilt, expectations, worry and living the life we were made for. Who wouldn't want this?

The most obvious answer would be those who don't think they need it. If we will not admit that we are in need of rest then we will not come to Jesus. If we think that we are doing quite alright by ourselves then we will not come, for coming means admitting we can't do it ourselves. Calvin put it this way. "Failure makes us fit to receive his

grace” If we are to come to the promised rest we need to wake up to ourselves and understand our need of this rest.

COME TO ME

The other way that may need to repent is of our view of Jesus. For this extraordinary offer, this magnificent, awe inspiring invitation, a summons to life in all its fullness does not come by coming to God as we may expect, but by coming to Jesus.

The more we look at what is said here the more outrageous it seems to be. Jesus about taking his yoke: no Jewish Rabbi would speak of taking “my yoke” but rather “the yoke of the Torah, or the Law” Interestingly they also taught that this was the way to rest. Jesus is then claiming that not just his teaching but who he is more important than the Law.

He has said as much with the astounding statement that all things have been given to him by the Father, and that he is the way in which people will come to understand who the Father is, for he is the Son.

This claim by a Galilean teacher can be hard to hear. Compare Socrates statement “If you will take my advice, you will think very little of Socrates and much more of the truth.” Jesus is saying if you want to more of the truth, think about me.

Some will of course find this offensive, not believing that this could be true of Jesus, or of anyone really. But this invitation is not given by the Jesus that we want, but the Jesus that there is.

Matthew 11

In part this is what the rest of Matthew 11 is about. The chapter has started with John the Baptist asking if Jesus really is the one who is to come to which Jesus has responded by saying look at the evidence of the healings, the miracles and the teaching.

He then looks at how people rejected John the Baptist because he was too serious, and now they are rejecting him because he likes to party, and with the wrong people.

Finally he looks at the cities in which he did his miracles who refused to accept him, if they reject the one who is the path to the new creation it can only go badly for you.

The whole chapter then is about who Jesus is and whether we can keep looking for the one we want, or deal with the Jesus who is.

Repentance about Jesus and Ourselves

So coming to Jesus, if we are to receive the rest that he offers may mean repenting of our preconceived ideas about Jesus, or even our ideas about God and accept Jesus for who he is.

Notice that Jesus has said that it is not those who think of themselves as wise and learned who have understood his teaching, rather it is hidden from them. It is those who consider themselves little children who have grasped this message or rest. If we consider that we are wise and intelligent, have got it all together it takes quite a step to trust in another, to trust in his way and who he says he is, we are much more likely to trust in ourselves. If we are to come to Jesus we have to repent of such self reliance and self importance.

There is encouragement to take this self denying step by looking at Jesus' ministry, in his teaching but most importantly in his death and resurrection. These all back up his claims, and that he has the power to deliver on his promise. He got up from resting in the grave so that we could know that we can truly rest in him.

REST

Now before I give it a rest a couple of last things should be said.

For whilst Jesus promises rest, and it is something that many here have experienced in the forgiveness of sins, or meaning in life, in renewed relationships and

so on, the promise is not one of an easy life. We do not yet live in the new creation so things will at times be difficult, and living the way that Jesus calls to as we listen to him is not always easy.

But the image of the yoke, whilst it may sound like hard work does mean that Jesus is there with us, and he is gentle and humble of heart. He does not look at us in our struggle as grumpy policeman, or the woman in the nanny state adverts that have started to appear in the papers, but rather one who is with us encouraging us to go on.

Lastly when we come to Jesus and find rest in him, it does mean that we should continue to rest in him. In that sense we should be stationary. In the difficulties of life where else would we go? He is not a rest stop on our spiritual journey, rather he is our final resting place, both now and into his glorious future.

So let us hear his gracious invitation and come.

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”