

## Perfect Rest - Matthew 11:16-30

**Introduction:** Several years ago a commercial aired showing a man driving a Jeep while competing with a flock of geese flying south and then later he was seen driving the Jeep against a school of salmon swimming upstream to get home. It was a good representation of just how versatile the Jeep is in tackling tough conditions. But the commercial also serves to remind us of just how difficult it can be sometimes to just keep our heads above water, to keep the bills paid, to keep the family happy and together. Sometimes, we have to fight just to keep our sanity!

Some people fight against God. He's trying to call them out of the bondage of sin, and they're fighting to stay locked up! Some people fight to try to make it to heaven on their own. No wonder there are so many who are seeking a way out of the rat race. By the way, there are two problems with that term: First, if it's a race, than what's the prize? Second, even if you win, you're still a rat! No wonder so many tired people who need a rest.

Even Christians are not immune. Christians can get weary trying to fight the spiritual battles in their lives. We fight temptations. We fight feelings of self-sufficiency, doubt, confusion, sorrow, and sin. Sometimes, in our effort to grow in the Christian life, we add burdens and weights God never intended. The Pharisees did this when they kept adding rules to the law of God. They made serving God something that was very tiring. God never intended service to Him to be a duty that wears us out, but rather a privilege that perks us up.

This morning I want to focus on the concept of rest. More specifically, I want to focus on the perfect rest that can be found in Jesus. In order to understand what Jesus means when He says, "*Come to Me...and I will give you rest,*" we need to first understand the concept of unrest in the Bible. We begin with:

### 1. An Illustration of Unrest (16-24)

In vs. 16-24, Jesus illustrates the concept of unrest in the sin of unbelief. He had just had an encounter with some of John's disciples over John's honest doubts concerning Jesus as Messiah. He assured them that He was who He said He was, and that John had nothing to worry about.

Then He turned to the crowd and explained to them how great a man John was, and how great they could be in God's kingdom if they would only believe.

Unfortunately, despite all the preaching and miracles Jesus had done among the Jewish people, for the most part, they had rejected Him. Many folks simply would not believe in Him.

So, as a result, in vs. 20-24, Jesus has some tough words for these unbelieving and rebellious people. He's

shown them His love and compassion, and His grace and mercy, but now, because of their unbelief, and their unwillingness to accept the truth and His offer of salvation, He has some rather harsh and uncompromising words.

Now listen to me very closely. Here's the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. The sin of unbelief is the only sin that will keep a person out of heaven. Not murder, not lust, not stealing, not suicide, but unbelief. If you never believe in Christ as your Savior, God cannot save you. Jesus said in **John 3:36 (NIV)** *"Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him."* The reason Jesus is talking so tough here is because He wants the people to understand the consequences of their unbelief. He calls attention to the deadly duo of unbelief: Criticism and indifference. Let's look at what He says about:

**A. Criticism (16-19).** Jesus asks a rhetorical question in vs. 16: *"To what can I compare this generation?"* Now, He's not asking them to answer, because He's going to answer. And the answer was that this generation of unbelievers was like children playing in the marketplace, playing pretend games. And you know how kids can be sometimes? Some kids don't play fair. Some kids want to spoil everybody else's fun.

When I was in High School, I got involved in an Intramural Basketball League for students who weren't involved in the prep league. In one game, this one guy must have thought he was playing football instead of basketball because he got mad at someone on the other team and tackled him right there on the court. I thought the ref was going to have to throw a flag for unnecessary roughness!

Well, that's sort of what Jesus was referring to. Back then, the popular children's games were games like pretend wedding and pretend funeral. They'd pretend to be like the adults and play wedding and play funeral, and go through the motions of both. Jesus was saying that this generation's unbelief and their resulting actions looked like children playing these games. While some kids played the wedding game (played the flute and danced), others wanted to spoil it for others by playing the funeral game (sang a dirge and mourned) and visa-versa.

The point He was making is: If you are not a believer, and want to find fault, you will. And unbelievers tend to never be satisfied, no matter what is being done. Sometimes it sounds like they are in the auto business. Because all you hear from them is *"That preacher auto visit more. He auto tone it down. The deacons auto mind their own business. The choir auto quit singing them slow songs."*

The words and actions of the critics can spoil the fun for everyone else. And Jesus said that this generation

was acting like children and making it difficult for everyone else to receive the truth that Jesus was preaching with their spoil-sport attitudes.

Then, to emphasize the point, Jesus also said that they were being hypocritical. To illustrate, He said that John had come “*neither eating or drinking,*” meaning that his lifestyle was different from the normal Jewish life, and because they didn’t like his message, the unbelieving Jews accused him of having a demon. But Jesus came “*eating and drinking,*” meaning He lived a normal Jewish lifestyle, and those same unbelieving Jews called Him a “*glutton and a drunkard,*” and accused Him of being a friend of sinners. Well, they were half right. He was a friend of sinners, but He never participated in their sin.

The point is; these unbelieving Jews were the epitome of the phrase, “*the pot calling the kettle black.*” Because of their unbelief and hypocrisy, they criticized Jesus, and anyone who stood for righteousness and truth. They couldn’t understand it or explain it, so they criticized it. Next, let’s look at the other deadly part of unbelief:

**B. Indifference (20-24).** Jesus pointed out another part of unbelief by singling out some cities for their wickedness. Some of these cities (Chorazen, Bethsaida, and Capernaum) were cities in which Jesus had ministered and performed many of His miracles, while others; (Tyre, Sidon, Sodom, and Gomorra) were cities which were known for their wickedness. Now you would expect Jesus to condemn and rebuke the wickedness of the people of the latter cities, but He had an even stronger rebuke for the wickedness of the former. He said that it would be “*more bearable*” for the unreached Gentile cities of Tyre, Sidon, Sodom and Gomorra, “*on the day of judgment*” than it would for the cities in which Jesus had Himself ministered.

Why? The people of these cities had been witnesses of the power of God. They heard the truth and the way to righteousness, but were indifferent to it. They had heard, but walked away unchanged. It was as if Jesus made no difference in their lives.

The sin of unbelief will manifest itself in criticism and indifference, and Jesus is saying that it is a deadly sin because it is the only sin that will keep a person out of heaven.

In the remaining verses of this chapter, Jesus begins to talk about how the people could find rest.

## **2. An Invitation to Rest (25-30)**

Vs. 25 begins with the statement, “*At that time Jesus said...*” Obviously, someone in the crowd had objected to what Jesus was saying. We don’t know why, but Jesus had a response, and it was in the form of a prayer and an invitation.

His prayer was one of thanksgiving that at least some people had received His word, and had believed. At least a few had understood and accepted the gospel as the truth. At least some believed in Him as God's Son and the Messiah.

Then in vs. 28, Jesus offers an invitation. He offered to those who were weary of the struggle with sin of unbelief to come and find rest. He offered to those who were weary of the spiritual struggles of battling Satan to come and find that perfect rest. His invitation is three-fold. First, Jesus says to the unbeliever,

**A. Come to Me (28).** Jesus' invitation is simple, yet challenging. Jesus says, "*Come to Me*" because He is the only way people will find the rest they seek. The only way to see if Jesus is really who He says He is, is by coming and putting Him to the test. In saying "*Come to Me*," Jesus is saying:

- If you're tired of being hungry, come to me because I'm the bread of life.
- If you're tired of being thirsty, come to me because I'm the living water.
- If you're tired of being lost, come to me because I am the way.
- If you're tired of being confused, come to me because I am the truth.
- If you're tired of being in darkness, come to me because I am the light.
- If you're tired of not knowing where you'll spend eternity come to me because I am the resurrection and the life.

Jesus is saying, if you're tired of battling all these things, come to me and I'll give you rest. Don't go to the lawyer, or the counselor, or the bartender, or the drug peddler, come to me. They can't help you like I can. I'll take care of you. Then, He says after you come to me:

**B. Walk with Me (29).** Jesus says, "*Take My yoke upon you.*" The yoke refers to a harness worn by a team of oxen. Everyone knew that two animals which were yoked together could produce more work than one alone. But if the two oxen yoked together were fighting against each other, nothing would get done. The yoke then would be a burden and a hindrance. It would be a heavy yoke.

Jesus was saying that the yoke of unbelief these people had been under was heavy and confining. It was causing them undue stress. His invitation was for them to take off that heavy yoke and put on His light yoke. It was an invitation to walk with Him in peace and harmony; to serve alongside Him in a productive and meaningful work. And in doing so, you'll find rest.

How can you find rest in work? Well, it's like the difference between doing a job you hate and doing a job you enjoy. You might put forth the same effort on both, but at the end of the day, the enjoyable job doesn't

leave you feeling wiped-out. Instead, you feel relaxed and at peace.

If your burden's too heavy, it may be because it's one of your own making. Maybe it's not Jesus' yoke, but your yoke. Jesus invites you to take His yoke. Then it becomes a labor of love and not of drudgery.

Finally, Jesus invites the weary to not only come to me and walk with me, but also:

**C. Learn of Me (29).** He invites the weary and burdened ones to His classroom of instruction to listen to Him. He invites us to get to know Him, His wisdom, His compassion, His care, His forgiveness.

You know, a lot of people before they get saved, think of following Jesus as hard and unreasonable. They think of God as an ole scrooge who wants to take away all their fun.

But I haven't met anyone who has been saved to think of it in that way. When someone is saved, and they begin to learn of Jesus, they don't think of service to Him as too demanding or too restrictive at all. In fact, they find it liberating and refreshing.

**Conclusion:** That's what Jesus is saying still today. He's inviting everyone who is weary and burdened down with care to come to Him, to walk with Him, and learn of Him, and when you do, you'll find rest. You won't feel so uneasy and so confused, and so worried about your life. When you come to Jesus, He'll make you so secure, you can lay down at night and sleep peacefully, knowing that when your life is over on this side of eternity, there's a perfect peace and a perfect rest waiting for you on the other side.