

Sermon Series: “10 Words from Jesus on Sharing the Faith”

“#6 Learn: The Way to Rest”

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Where is your place of rest? E.g., I recall years ago, going back to the 1980s as I recall, the New Orleans Saints had a quarterback Richard Todd who had pulled out a victory for us in the closing minutes of a game; he was asked how he could maintain his calm and composure during the final drive, and I recall him saying that he thought of his farm in Tennessee and that gave him a certain peace through which he was able to perform. Is there a place where you find a special peace and rest come over you? E.g., for me it is a place in Lake Junaluska, North Carolina, where there is a United Methodist residential and conference center; overlooking the lake is a place called the Susanna Wesley Garden, and you can sit in a chair at the top of the inclined garden and take in a gorgeous view of the lake and mountains as well as the beauty of the garden itself; many a time I have felt the Lord’s presence and rest there. You may have a similar place— at a beach, mountain retreat, hotel on expansive grounds. Wouldn’t it be nice to have that same peace and rest within us, so that we would not have to drive or fly hundreds of miles away to get to it? Well, beloved, Jesus knows how we can have such a rest.

READ Matthew 11:28-30 (p. 12)

CONTEXT: Jesus has just thanked the Lord that He had hidden the truths of the gospel from the wise and intelligent and revealed them to those who are spiritual infants, those with no social status. Jesus shared that all revelation was given to Him by the Father, and no one knows the Son but the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son desires to reveal Him.

READ v 28. “Jesus’ invitation is remarkable in at least two respects: it is basically unlimited and it comes with a dear and precious promise. Cf. Exodus 33:12-14; Psalm 95:11; Hebrews 3:16-4:11.” There is a tradition in the New Testament that the Jews did not fully enter God’s rest that He had for them in the promised land because they were disobedient to Him. In Hebrews 3:16-4:11 the writer states that God said to them that they would not enter His rest because of their disobedience to Him in the wilderness, and the quote there is from Psalm 95:11, which refers to the incident at Meribah where the wilderness-wandering Israelites were extremely thirsty and complained to Moses that they were about to die. In fact, Moses pleaded with God to act, because the people were about to stone him! God did act— He told Moses to strike a rock and fresh water would come out. The writer of Hebrews said that the promise of rest has now been fulfilled in Jesus— people could enter a period of rest and refreshment before God. We know what it is like to desire a time of rest after a hard time of work. E.g., I recall after the Ice Bowl game from December 31, 1967, when it was -13 degrees Fahrenheit, where the Green Bay Packers beat the Dallas Cowboys to earn a trip to the second Super Bowl, Vince Lombardi, as he did after all home game wins, held a party in his basement, and it was very relaxing being with family and friends— social warmth and physical warmth! We know what it is like to unwind like that! And we as Christians can experience that rest now, and it will be fulfilled eternity. And this opportunity for rest is open to an unlimited number of

people—to those who are weary and carrying heavy burdens. To the Jews this was a special promise in the Old Testament! In Isaiah 2:2 we read, “In days to come the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it.” When the Church reflects this open invitation, it is truly glorious. E.g., last week Kaylor and Debby Grimm and Cheryl Strauss raised, through your generosity, over \$300 to help Hurricane Ida victims! And you have given generously to the Nathaniel Langford family. E.g., I recall the S.P.A. Ladies Bible Study making sandwiches and at lunch time going under the Pontchartrain Expressway and delivering them and waters to the homeless in the name of Christ.

READ vv 29-30. “This invitation is followed up with two unexpected commands involving a yoke and learning. Cf. Jeremiah 2:10; 6:16; Lamentations 3:27; Matthew 5:20. Please note Sirach 6:24-25,28— ‘Put your feet into her [Wisdom’s] fetters, and your neck into her collar. Bend your shoulders and carry her, and do not fret under her bonds. . . For at last you will find the rest she gives, and she will be changed into joy for you’ (ca. 200 BC).” About 30 years ago Professor Graham Stanton wrote a scholarly article on this passage asking the question whether this passage was all about rest, and his answer was no—it was a call to strong obedient discipleship and finding rest in the midst of this. Please notice the passage I cite in the Sermon Notes from Sirach that has a very similar theme of taking on God’s rest through taking on a yoke and obeying Wisdom/the law, and one will find that Wisdom gives. How is this possible—taking on a yoke and learning from Jesus leading to *rest*? After all, Jesus’ had some strenuous commands to obedience. READ 5:20; 10:37-39. At least two points come to mind. First, living life the way it was meant to be lived has built in it a peace from right order. E.g., have you ever played a game where the rules were not obeyed? I recall scoring a baseball game for postgrads against an oil company, and I had

scored the game a way that the other team did not agree, and they were jumping around and fiercely angry, and I went over what I had with what their score keeper had, and we settled the differences— but I was a bit shaken by the result of that game not being conducted the way others thought it should be. Life, lived unjustly and wrongly, promiscuously and wildly, will lead to chaos, not rest. Second, living our lives surrendered to Jesus brings naturally a peace that passes all understanding, as Paul says in Philippians 4, a letter Paul writes as he is awaiting the decision whether he is freed or executed. This affects not only life and death matters, but also every day decisions. Jesus says that His yoke is “easy” in the NRSV translation, and the Greek word for it is *χρηστός*, which means “kind”, “good”. There is a kindness to Jesus’ yoke, because He goes with us in the path of discipleship, with all of its heavy demands; His grace and mercy make the difference. E.g., I recall trying to make a decision of how to handle my day off when I was really tired and needing a rest, and I felt like the Lord wanted me to do something that involved my going out of town early in the morning to be there for a friend in need, and I decided to pray about it, and I said I could not do this on my own strength, but His, if He wanted me to do it, and He did it through me.

“Our world desperately wants what Jesus offers here, but is, in general, equally hesitant by what is required to get it. Are we ready to accept this invitation?” The world’s peace and rest is temporary and superficial. E.g., Lombardi was known for the end of his after-game parties becoming tense and stern toward the end. Why? He started to realize he had to prepare for the next week’s game. The Christian knows God will help him or her handle whatever is ahead, and experiences that peace and rest in the midst of obedience. This is seen in the way Paul handles prison and the expectation of a possible execution in the letter he writes to the Philippians; toward the end of that letter he tells his readers not to be anxious for anything, “but in everything by prayer and supplication with

thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (vv 6-7). This is the type of lasting peace and rest our Lord can give. So, will you and I accept His invitation?