

Date: November 26-27, 2022

Title: *Rest for the Weary*

Scripture: Matthew 11:28-29

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One of the things I often say as we begin this portion of our time together is there's nowhere I'd rather be or it's great to be together. And this weekend it's true in the sense that there is nowhere I'd rather be. And it's also true because I just love when we have families come and bring their children.

And this year, at all of our different campuses throughout the year, there have been over 100 children that have come to be baptized or dedicated. And so, I just want to commend you on taking the command to be fruitful and multiply. Seriously and just say, how cool is that? As a church we've had 100 new kids from biological growth be a part of just adding to the church family.

And if you're around today, in part because you're a friend or a family of one of the kids, what we're doing here this weekend is pretty typical. There's some singing. It's often called worship, where people will sing or make affirmation with their voices about something they think is true. And then we'll take some time and usually have scripture read, and then I or somebody else will stand up and talk about it and try to apply it to our lives. And so that's what I hope to do here today, specifically as we move into what is a fairly busy time of year.

So, would you just join me in prayer? Father, I ask today as we're gathered, that you would speak to each of us wherever we're coming from, whatever our week or month has brought. God, I pray that my words would reflect your word in content, tone, and emphasis. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Let me ask you a question. Are any of you tired? Some of you may say, well, I'm tired because we've had company for four days, and we've had lots of food. And so, yes, I'm tired. Or, I'm tired because we had a drive and we had to go somewhere. And some of us are tired because when we look at the calendar between now and the end of the year, we recognize that there are not a lot of spaces in the calendar.

In fact, I would guess those very few people when I ask the question, are any of you tired said, no, I'm so good that it would be criminal to give me coffee because I am just so awake, so alive, that I don't need anything. Almost 20 years ago, Richard Swenson wrote a book called *Margin*, and it was about how to preserve margin in our lives for the things that matter.

And at the beginning of the book and remember, this is almost 20 years ago, he said, we're addicted to speed. And he said the reason that we're addicted to speed is because of the way that we name things. He says we send packages by FedEx. We make calls on something called Sprint. We balance our books in Quicken and we schedule our lives in Day Runner.

Now, that's 20 years ago. I doubt any of you have Day Runner now. It's Outlook. It doesn't have the speed name in it. But isn't it interesting that even 20 years ago or so we were thinking, how can I do more things more quickly? And now some people swim in Speedos. He didn't say that. I just threw that in to make sure you were still paying attention.

In fact, thinking back a few years, about 15 years ago, when the Bluetooth thing first came out and people would have the little Bluetooth thing in their ears. I remember one time in a public restroom and, you know, if you haven't been a man in a public restroom, let me give you a little bit of culturing on this.

There's kind of some unspoken ethics when you walk in. One is you always leave a space between two. You always look straight ahead and you don't talk to the guys until you get to the sink. If you don't know them, then it's allowed to speak at the sink, but not here.

And so, I'm standing here. This guy comes in and he says, hey, how's it going? I didn't realize he had the little Bluetooth thing in the other ear. And he says, hey, what are you doing right now? Now, at the time, that felt completely weird to me. How does this guy think that he can't take 5 minutes or 2 minutes, whatever it took him to get off the phone and not talk to somebody while he's in a public restroom?

But you know what's even weirder? 15 years later, that's not that odd. People multitask all the time and use their devices to say, how quickly can I do everything? I saw an ad for I think it was Peloton, and they were showing these people getting up early and working out. And Peloton might be a great thing, but the whole idea of the ad was you are chiseled and you can achieve more if you get up earlier and work harder than everybody else. And there's a little piece of me that likes that because I want to think if I get up earlier, I can look like that.

If I spend a little more time with my family, my family will maybe be happier or more fulfilled. If I work a little harder then maybe there will be better results in my work. And we just keep adding this sense of if I just do a little more. And so, when we come to the topic of weariness or tiredness, I don't think it's just a schedule thing.

And here's why I say this. Jesus, in the verses that we read, when he talks about being weary, I don't think he's just saying we're weary from having too much to do, but we're weary from soul fatigue because he says, I will give you rest in your souls. And the reason that we have soul fatigue is not that we have too much to do, but it's because we're demanding too much from the things we do into our souls so that we feel like we have to do too much.

And what that means is that for some of us, the reason we're weary isn't that we don't get up earlier and work out harder and do more and squeeze more into our lives. The reason we're weary is that we're saying, if I can just get to the next thing, if I can just get through this season, if I can just navigate this, if I can just hold on through the holidays, if I can just keep the marriage or the home together, if I can just please the investors long enough, if I can get into this school, if he or she will say yes, and we just keep saying, maybe then I will feel a sense of well-being or a sense of goodness in my life.

And here's the challenge with soul fatigue, is it doesn't get solved by simply managing our schedules better, by putting a few more boundaries in our lives, or by taking a better vacation than we have taken in the past. Because you'll put new boundaries in new time management systems, you'll take a vacation, and yet you'll still find yourself a few weeks later in the same place of depletion, saying, I don't know if I have enough left in the tank to keep going.

By the way, do you know the difference between a vacation and a trip? A vacation is when you go without kids. A trip is when you take your kids. And here's what happens when we're fatigued in our soul, we find it hard to have deep and meaningful conversations with the people that matter to us because we're always trying to get to the next thing.

We find it hard to feel deeply, whether it be joy or compassion, and we find it difficult to worship and to give God any space in our lives because we're saying, I'm just so tired. I just need to get through this next thing. And Jesus addresses this and this is Matthew 11 verses 28 through 30.

But here's what Jesus says. He says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

So, Jesus gives us an assessment of this symptom or this sickness I'm going to call soul fatigue by talking about being weary and burdened. And then he gives us a solution, and his solution is caught up in three different imperatives. He says, come to me and take up my yoke. And he says, learn from me. And so, let's just talk about the condition for a moment. This idea of being fatigued and the word weary is a word that means to be weary from working to the point of exhaustion.

Now, again, I'm trying to make a case here that Jesus isn't just saying that we work too hard, and that's why we're weary. But we're weary because we're trying to get from the things that we're doing, something that that thing can't totally give us. So, what some of us will do is we'll have success in one area of our lives and then we'll say, well, now I need to work hard in another area to bring about success.

And what we're trying to do is to get that thing, whether it be the work or health or family, to tell us that somehow, we're okay, that we're accepted, and we end up exhausted. Because what we're doing is we're chasing something and saying this thing will give me what it is that I'm really looking for the validation, the achievement, the appearance of something in my life that will make me feel good.

Just take maybe something simple like fitness. And fitness is a good goal, especially after January 1st. And what happens for some people is they'll say, if I can just be fit. And what happens is you work at it and you might have success. You might have success for decades. But here's what's true. Gravity always wins. And so, sooner or later, all of your efforts to say I'm going to stay fit, no matter what you do will be wearying efforts because you will not meet with success.

Take family, some people say, well, I get the fitness might not work or that career might be somewhat fickle because even if I have success in my career, someday I'll say, well, that was nice but was it everything that I thought it would be? And so, we put our attention sometimes into the family. But even if you do family perfectly and your family is happy and intact and great, do you know what happens to families?

Sooner or later, somebody dies. The mortality rate is 100%. That means even when that has been your thing and you've succeeded at it, it still has a sad ending. And so, the reason that we're weary sometimes is that we're looking to these things to say these are things that can give me satisfaction in some way.

Henri Nouwen wrote about this years ago. Here's what he said. He said, "The world in which I've grown up, is a world so full of scores and grades and statistics that consciously or unconsciously, I always try to make my measure against all the others.

Much sadness and gladness in my life flows directly from my comparing, and most, if not all, of this comparing, is a useless and terrible waste of energy.”

What's he say? I'm so used to scores and grades and statistics that I compare myself on every front, and it's a big waste of energy and time because it just leads me to something that I can't ultimately control. So, there's this weariness, and then there's this phrase burden. Some of the older translations say heavy-laden. And this is a phrase that shows that sometimes what we do is let outside demands come upon us and place a burden on us that we feel like we just can't keep carrying the weight forward.

And what happens is you may carry it for a season with better techniques and management and grit, but when you have a heavy enough burden long enough, sooner or later that burden grinds on us in such a way that it is devastating. And somebody explained to me the issue of microtrauma. And microtrauma is where you have not just one big trauma that leads to an incident, but hundreds if not thousands of little traumas. And then one day something seemingly innocuous happens, and the bigger event happens.

So, for example, somebody who maybe works laying bricks for decades is constantly bending over, straining his or her back. And then all of a sudden, one day when they're not even at work, they bend over to pick something up and their back all of a sudden seizes up.

Well, it isn't the moment where they just bent over. It's the hundreds of microtraumas. And what heavy burden does is it's when we just keep saying, well, I can just get through the next thing. And then the microtrauma builds up and we're heavy-laden. And there's a sense of soul fatigue because we have an external master that we're trying to please.

In some ways, this can happen religiously, too. In fact, the only other place where this word that's translated here burden is used in the New Testament is Luke 11:46, where Jesus is talking to religious leaders. And the reason this is significant is that what some people do is their burden moves from maybe wanting something in life to saying, well, if those things don't satisfy, then I'll do it with God.

And we start to all of a sudden bring God into our lives in such a way that God just becomes our new burden. That's what the religious leaders were doing. And so, there's a challenge or a difficulty that's diagnosed here by Jesus as being really soul fatigue.

But here's his solution. As I said, three imperatives. His first is where he says, come to me. And this is just a simple statement. And the reason that this is important is sometimes what we do is even if we diagnose the problem, we have the wrong solution. And the wrong solution is to say, well, if I can get better boundaries, if I can establish better priorities, if I can balance my schedule better, if I can just take care of a few things, or get a few things off my plate.

And the reason I say it's the wrong solution is that Jesus doesn't say if you're weary, if you're tired, figure out how to manage your time better. He doesn't say if you're weary and you're tired, just get rid of some things or say no more. Now those are good strategies to be employed. But that isn't what Jesus says here.

He doesn't say just simply figure out how to do more, more efficiently. What he says is, come to Jesus. And I think at the core of this is because coming to Jesus frees us in some ways from the desire or the need to say, I need this thing to give me ultimate validation, because when you come to Jesus, what you do is you come in faith because of Jesus' work on the cross on your behalf, on my behalf.

And when that becomes true for you, you can say it really doesn't matter whether or not all these other things add up because God has declared me right and loved because of what Jesus Christ has done. And when that is true in your heart and soul, you aren't going to the wrong solution, which is saying, how can I be tougher? How can I show more grit? How can I do more?

What you're doing instead is saying, I'm going to Jesus. And that really leads to the second phrase where he says, take up my yoke. And when Jesus says this, you might say, well, this feels really counterintuitive because if I'm already burdened, why would I want another yoke? Why would I want anything else in my life?

In fact, for some of us, maybe this is why church and religion feel like it's superfluous because we say, the last thing I need in this world is anything else telling me what to do or how to live or asking anything of me. I'm barely holding it together the way that it is. And yet this is exactly what Jesus says, he says, take up my yoke.

And the reason I think this is important is that we tend to have the wrong burden. A wrong approach is that we say, I just toughen up. I do more on less, but the wrong burden is really having the wrong master. A yoke was something that had this long wooden beam that would be tied to two different animals so that the animals would be able to pull this burden or this weight some distance.

William Barclay, who's written a few commentaries on the New Testament, says that there's a legend around Jesus. That when He was a carpenter he says one of the things he did was made the best fitting yokes for animals where he would actually custom make yokes for animals so that when you would put it on your animal, it wasn't just a stock yoke, but it was one that was made specifically for them.

And I haven't been able to find that anywhere else other than in his writing. So, I don't know if that's true, but it's kind of a cool thought that that's what Jesus may have been doing. And what he says here, and the point is the same either way because what he says is take up my yoke, because my yoke is light, my burden is not heavy, or my yoke basically works.

And what he's doing is he's saying that when you understand me as your master, that you're yoked to me instead of to another master saying, what I need is this other thing to tell me that I'm okay when you are yoked to me. Not only is it well-fitting to you, but it doesn't demand things that you weren't designed to do.

I realize that this flies in the face of some of our human potential teaching. Sometimes it's done in the church, even with the idea of somehow putting a verse on it and making it seem or sound spiritual. But this is actually how Jesus says that He'll give us rest for our souls, is to say, take up my yoke because my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

And then the third imperative or command here is he says, learn from me. And this points to the wrong assumption that sometimes we have because when he says, learn from me, he says, for I am gentle and humble of heart. And what often happens, whether you're a person of long faith or not a person of long faith, is we can tend to say, well, if I hitch my life to God or to Jesus and I make him my yoke, take his yoke on me, he's going to take me places I don't want to go. It will lead me to things I don't want.

So, when he says learn from me, I'm gentle and humble, what he's doing is he's saying, I want you to know that who I am is someone you can trust. In fact, this word for gentle here is the same word that's used earlier in Matthew five, what's known as the Sermon on the Mount, where he says, blessed are the meek or the humble, the gentle. Blessed are the meek. That's the same word.

So, what's he saying? He's saying I'm meek, I'm humble, I'm gentle, I am for you if you will. If you ever had the experience of someone just being for you, regardless of what you do or don't do. Sometimes it's a friend, sometimes it's a family member, and sometimes it's not. But if you've ever had someone who's just for you, meaning you

knew that whatever else was going on, whatever ways you let somebody down, they just wanted your best and would do whatever they could to bring about your best.

It is one of the sweetest experiences in life. You know what Jesus is doing here. In some ways, he's saying, I'm for you. I'm gentle and I'm humble. But our challenge is we sometimes don't want to believe it. Now I know some of us will say, well, I don't really need to yoke my life to Jesus. I don't need a master. I know you're talking about these other masters. I don't have a master.

But the great theologian Bob Dylan once said, you're going to have to serve somebody because sooner or later you will serve somebody in your life, you'll serve something. And Jesus is saying very clearly, I want you to know that when you serve me that I am for you.

Here's how Frederick Buechner wrote about this. He said, "We are children, perhaps, at the very moment when we know that it is as children that God loves us - not because we have deserved his love and not in spite of our undeserving; not because we try and not because we recognize the futility of our trying; but simply because he has chosen to love us. We are children because he is our father; and all of our efforts, fruitful and fruitless, to do good, to speak truth, to understand, are the efforts of children. And we are loved simply because we are his children."

I don't know how you come here today. If you feel a sense of soul fatigue, but if so, what I want to just simply say to you is it's a little bit like a bridge out sign on a road. Now, usually, when there's a bridge out sign, there's a big barricade as well that keeps you from going any further. But imagine there was a bridge out sign and you said, I know the solution to this is for me to go faster, better manage my time, better, curve better, before I get to the bridge out. That would be stupid.

And what happens when you and I say I'm tired and I'm weary and what I need to do is redouble my efforts to be more productive is we're missing the warning sign, the sign that's flashing at us saying the bridge is out and you aren't coming to Jesus. You're not taking his yoke. You're not trusting him. What you're doing instead is you're saying, if I can just navigate this a little better, a little more fully, then my life will be worthwhile.

And what we need instead is to come to Jesus to say, I will take your yoke, your burden, and I will learn who you are so that I will find rest for my soul. And this happens every age, every demographic, wherever you are, you can be weary from just saying, what I need is this instead of letting it be Jesus that is at the center of your life.

God, we ask today that you would help each one of us to not ignore the signs of soul fatigue if we've assessed it and we've always thought that religion would just add to it. God, I pray even at this moment we would see the beauty of coming to Jesus as our Savior and the fact that it's not about performing more for God, but letting Jesus' performance be enough that we could bring our sins to Him and experience salvation.

And God, if we're people who've had long experience of faith, and yet we find our soul fatigued, I pray that we would stop chaffing at your yoke and running to lesser masters with yokes that won't lead us where you intend to lead us, and we come to you and take your yoke and learn of your character in a fresh way. And we pray this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.