

### **OPENING ILLUSTRATION:**

When I entered into college, I knew that I wanted to do something purposeful with my summers. Not knowing what exactly to do, I continued to pay attention on campus and in my Christian circles of influence, until I caught wind of some Christian sports camps coming to town to interview for counselor roles. I applied to several and ended up getting a call from two of them and ended up sticking with a Christian sports camp in Branson, MO called Kanakuk. I would end up spending 3 of the next 4 summers there in various roles and developing relationships with those who worked there, or were my supervisors.

One of the things I loved about that place is not only did we get to minister to and hang out with the teens who came, but we also entered into a season of discipleship with the other adults on staff and began to be mentored by those on leadership. Each time together was refreshing and challenging. Many of the interactions and conversations with these men stuck with me, but as we talked about the invitation from Jesus to come to Him and gain eternal salvation in the process, my mentor and boss, Ward Wiebe, said something I will never forget. He said,

"You know, sometimes, I feel like a undercover Pharisee."

What he meant by that statement is that we often times find ourselves functioning like the Pharisee's: trying to fulfill the Law, striving for a "greater" position in the Kingdom, doing enough good to get in. And as we continued to talk and flesh out what he meant by that, I realized that I was, and still often am, guilty of that as well. Honestly, this doesn't always happen intentionally. I don't know about you, but I will frequently catch myself functioning in that way or having thoughts pop into my mind that fit this bill. And when we do this, we shrug off the invitation of Christ to come to Him, to take His yoke upon us, to learn from Him and to find rest for our souls. We say that we can do it ourselves... or that we aren't worthy enough for His sacrifice.

Today, we are going to look more deeply into what Jesus meant by finding rest for our souls. We are going to explore how a yoke could possibly be easy and a burden could be light. And we are going to challenge ourselves through Scripture to "Come to Him". I pray you'll lean in today and ask, "what is God inviting me into?" I can promise you that He is inviting you into true rest, and to put on an easy and light yoke. Let's pray.

### **VERSE READING:**

"and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." -Matthew 11:29b-30

### **INTRODUCTION:**

Today, we are wrapping up a three week series called "Come to Me." We have spent significant time looking at just what Jesus is calling us to when He calls us to Himself - and we know that this invitation is restful and light. That the One who is inviting us in is gentle and lowly in heart. He will not shy away from us or turn away in disgust; instead, He will welcome us in with compassion, meekness, and love.

I want to spend significant time today looking for deeply at the end of verse 29-30. I want to explore what Jesus truly means by "rest for your souls"; what He means by His yoke being easy and His burden light; and what our response should be to that knowledge.

### REST FOR YOUR SOULS:

How would you define rest? When you hear this term, where does your mind go? Often times we equate rest with laying in bed after a long, hard day and shutting our eyes. Maybe we associate rest with vegging on the couch and watching our favorite show... or even retreating to a secluded place and getting away from the noise of this world.

In this instance, the word "rest" here is the Greek word "**ἀνάπαυσις**" which means "**cessation from wearisome activity for the sake of rest.**"<sup>1</sup>

Before we keep going, we need to be reminded of what the religious atmosphere of that day was like. The Law was in place and the Jews were expected to keep all 613 of the laws that were stated in the Old Testament. And when they didn't keep it, because there was no way that fallen, sinful people could, they were expected to make amends with God by going to the Temple, sacrificing the required offerings, and trying not to sin more. Not only was this the atmosphere, but the Jewish leaders, such as the Pharisees, were tweaking and changing aspects of that Law to their ideology and therefore there was this never ending cycle. So again, and again, and again, these Jews had to come to the Temple to amend for the sin they committed, restudy the Law, learn the new aspects that were being asked of them by their leaders, and try their hardest to stay the course.

Can you imagine how exhausting this must have been? How tiring it was to try to earn your way towards being "good enough" for your relationship with God? Of course we can! Because we try to do it every day. It's our human nature. And not only that, but we also must be aware of the culture that we find ourselves in. One of achievement and drive and accomplishments and success and money and fame... it's a constant cycle of pursuit of the next thing. The approval of a boss or neighbor. The desire to be good enough.

So as Jesus is here offering those listening "rest for [their] souls", what He is really offering is rest through Himself from the wearisome activity of striving to uphold the Law. To do all the right things. To be good enough. Jesus is saying "if you come to Me, I will give you rest for your soul... because I have lived the perfect life, fulfilled the Law perfectly ("Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." -Matthew 5:17), and I am going to take your sin upon my shoulders when I die for you... and defeat it when I resurrect from the dead."

There's no need to strive for righteousness anymore! You were never going to be able to achieve it on your own. But someone who is gentle and lowly beacons for you to come to Him so He can give you rest for your souls. So what is stopping you?

### Aren't you tired?

Another aspect of Jesus using this term "rest" is to look at its usage in the Old Testament, specifically the Prophetic books. A couple instances that shed light on this usage can be found in Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Rest is often synonymous with the word "peace". What is interesting about this use of peace is

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<sup>1</sup> William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 69.

that it specifically is talking about peace and rest from a war and toil perspective. And while this was from a literal sense, this can also be used symbolically in our personal strife against God in our sin.

"For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot." -Romans 8:7

"but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." -Romans 5:8

We, in our flesh, in our sin, without Christ, striving for goodness on our own, are enemies of God. We are hostile against Him. We are sons of darkness and sons of disobedience. I don't want to lessen the extent of this because it makes the rest, or peace, that Jesus is offering here for our souls even that much more of a miracle.

"Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." -Romans 5:1

Through faith in Christ, and faith alone in Him, we have PEACE with God. The rest that Jesus offers for our soul is available to us. Not through our own righteousness.. not through our own striving.. not through our own sacrifices.. not through our own accomplishments.. but through Jesus. The rest that He offers is true peace for our souls through Jesus towards a God that is fully justified in hating our sin and fully holy in His separation of us in that sin.

This phrase "rest for your souls" is also Jesus calling back to Jeremiah 6:16,

"Thus says the Lord: 'Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls. But they said, 'We will not walk in it.'"

I find that our response, my response, is the response at the end of this verse...

"We will not walk in it."

Thinking back to what Kurt said a couple weeks ago, have you prayed about where you might be saying this in your life? "I have no need." "I can carry it on my own." "I am not worthy." "I did it again." "My pain is insignificant." "I don't trust the heart of Jesus." How in your life are you saying, "I will not walk in it."?

#### **FOR MY YOKE IS EASY AND MY BURDEN IS LIGHT:**

When I first read this statement, I had to look up what exactly a yoke was. It is a contraption that would link oxen together so that they could do farm work or pull something behind them. In the Old Testament Biblical times, a yoke was meant to signify oppression. In the New Testament, a yoke was commonly used to signify the obedience to the Law - it was something that Jewish people were to be proud of. While this yoke was not meant to be harsh, it quickly became harsh under the Pharisee oversight and tweaking of the Law. It became a burden. A heavy burden. One that no one could carry.

But Jesus' yoke was different. It was easy and His burden was light. The word for easy here can also be translated as "good" or "kind". His yoke was easy because it wasn't something that was burdensome and heavy to carry, like the Law had become, but because by taking on His yoke, you became tethered to Him and disciplined by Him. You accepted the following of a new Law - one that was encapsulated by loving the Lord your God with all of yourself and loving your neighbor as yourself. This yoke didn't point

at your shortcomings; it pointed you towards Jesus' character and encouraged you to draw near to the one who was gentle and lowly of heart... and learn from Him.

When we think about the concept of oxen being yoked to one another, often times, a younger oxen would be yoked to an older, more mature oxen, so that the younger oxen could be shown the way of doing things. When we yoke to Christ like He is prompting us to do, we submit to one that is more mature and experienced than us; one who has done it correctly; one who will lead us well. We submit to learning from Him and following closely to Him in our life.

The thing about this yoke though is we often can misuse it. We can forget about the promises and promptings of the One that we are yoked to... and then our yoke gets tiresome and our burden gets heavy. It's because we have begun to drift back to our natural tendency to try to do it all ourselves. We become the undercover Pharisee that we have been speaking out against - one who knows the right things, but is trying to achieve the goodness of God on our own.

When we look up and our yoke is tiresome and our burden is heavy, that must serve as an indicator that in some way we have stopped submitting something to Christ. We are trying to pull the yoke in the way we want, the way that is not good for us... and in that moment, Jesus very compassionately, meekly and full of grace redirects us down the right path.

Because our fleshly tendency is to act this way. But our Spirit-led tendency is to yoke with Christ and learn from Him. Imitate Him. Lead a life that points to Him and glorifies Him.

The step for some of you today is going to be to ask, "Is the yoke I'm wearing tiresome or easy? Is my burden heavy or light?" And if your answer is tiresome and heavy, you must submit to Him. And if your answer is easy and light, then continue to be faithful... and through that find rest for your soul.

#### **INDICTORS OF A RESTFUL, YOKED LIFE:**

And lastly, as we close today, I want to remind us that true rest in Jesus is not stagnant. It's not sitting around and staring at a wall. It's actively engaging in the life that Jesus is calling you to because of that rest through the yoke that you are attached to Him with. If you are resting under that yoke, here are some things that should be emitting from your life:

1. Joy
2. Peace
3. Hope
4. Fellowship
5. Obedience
6. Spiritual disciplines

Among other things. If you have taken your own yoke upon your shoulders, or have never accepted the yoke He offers, here are some things you might be regularly experiencing...

7. Fear/Anxiety/Worry
8. Anger
9. Judgement
10. Pride
11. Selfishness

## 12. Self-righteousness

Now let me make something very clear. I'm not saying that if you are experiencing the things I just listed that you're not a Christian, or less of a Christian than someone who isn't. These are a normal part of life and we will all experience these things as we battle our flesh. But these are all indicators to realign ourselves under the yoke of Christ and learn from Him. We must take this seriously... because we will never truly find rest without Him.

What would your life look like if you eagerly responded to the invitation of Christ to find rest for your soul under His yoke? And how would that radical life change translate to your family, friends, coworkers and neighbors? My thought is that Jesus would emit from us and people would be drawn to the only One who is able to offer rest from this tiresome world.