

Rest

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Preacher: Peter Whitting

[0 : 00] Okay, so we're reading from Matthew chapter 11 verse 25 and to Matthew chapter 12 verse 14 and that's page 977.

So Matthew 11 chapter 25. At that time Jesus said, At that time Jesus went through the cornfield on the Sabbath.

His disciples were hungry and began to pick some ears of corn and eat them. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, Look, your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath.

He answered, Haven't you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread, which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests.

Or haven't you read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple desecrate the day and yet are innocent? I tell you that the one greater than the temple is here.

[1 : 44] If you had known what these words mean, I desire mercy, not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the innocent. For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.

Going on from that place, he went into their synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, they asked him, Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?

He said to them, If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a man than a sheep?

Therefore, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath. Then he said to the man, Stretch out your hand.

So he stretched it out, and it was completely restored, just as sound as the other.

But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus. Thank you, Kate.

[2 : 41] I'm now going to invite Peter, Peter White, to come and join me. And I'm going to ask him a couple of questions, or I'm going to let him tell us a little bit about him.

How, who he is, what he does, who's in your family, maybe. And then maybe how, as a church, we can be praying for the church in Middleton.

And then I'm going to pray for him as he speaks to us. So, over to you, Peter. Thanks, Alex. I'm Peter Whitting.

It says here that I run a boat business, which is sort of true. We do have a connection with boats, but really the main business is fiberglass, which we sell the materials and we do some manufacturing as well, and that's in Middleton.

My wife is Miriam, and she is a cousin of Jill Smith, if you want to have a connection. And I have three kids, Bobby, Nathan, and Claire.

[3 : 49] Bobby is a good friend of Peter's, and you might know Nathan and Claire as well. So, my eldest is going to be 20 next week. And my youngest is 14.

So, yeah, I'm an elder in Middleton. There's three of us as elders. Andy Compton is the pastor. Colin Meikle and myself are elders. And we have a church, I think, very, very similar to yours. And we meet in the Middleton Park Hotel. But when I see the logistics of all that you're doing here, it's exactly the same for us, setting up and all the rest. We just have slightly more salubrious surroundings than you.

And so we meet there. In terms of prayer for Middleton, I was thinking, well, you might know Paul McFarland, Paul and Kate.

They have been with us for, or Paul has been with us for a few years acting as a worker with Andy, but they're now moving on to you all. So I think that leaves a bit of a hole for Middleton.

[4 : 59] So maybe that's something we could pray for, or you could pray for us, as Andy no longer has another worker with him. That would be something to pray for Andy as we continue to try and do outreach in the town and in the surrounding area.

So anyway, thanks for having me this morning. Thanks, Peter. So we'll just pray for Peter before he speaks to us. Lord, thank you for all that we have heard this morning.

And we pray now for Peter as he opens up your word to us. I pray that it would challenge us, change us, and transform us.

I pray that we would be people who know how to rest under the headship of Jesus.

Help us now to submit our lives and our hearts under your word. And bless Peter as he speaks to us. Give us ears to listen and hearts to hear.

[6 : 14] We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Thank you. Okay.

Sorry. Sorry. I'm going to put that here. Ah, I could do it then.

Ah, he was really testing me. Okay, thanks, Alex. Good. Okay. I'm all right now. The verse I want to look at is 28 to 30.

And the theme, as you know, is rest. Alex asked me what that would be. So that's why the theme of this morning has been unrest. And so I think some of you have been on holidays and some of you are away or some of you are not here away.

And I know that Johnny and Kirstie have gone on holidays. And you've been, you've been. I'm sure some of you are still looking forward to going on the holidays. I am. We're heading off to, down to the West Cork in 10 days' time.

[7 : 42] And I tell you, I am really looking forward to that. And I think, you know, holidays are things that should and usually do invigorate us and get us ready to face the pressures of normal life.

Because life is, you know, it's stressful. And we need these times of rest. As the saying goes, all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.

So this is something that we can all relate to. And it is how God has made us that we need times to be refreshed. Do you mind if I just drop this down a bit? Okay, that's fine.

And so when Jesus says, come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest, what's he alluding to?

Is he offering us a lie-in every morning, a weekend away, or a regular break? So this is what we want to just look at.

[8 : 45] And the reason I read the, or we read the passage before and right through to the end of verse 14 in chapter 12, it's just if you, that passage following, you notice how it's about the Sabbath.

And obviously there's a discussion about what you should and shouldn't do on the Sabbath. But what is really interesting is the final verse 14, the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus.

And so I suppose you've got this dichotomy of the Pharisees that have, they've been given this welcome, this offer to, this invitation to come to Jesus and rest, but they just turn the other way and just hope for us that we will, we will respond to this invitation and there'll be no part of us that's like the Pharisees that actually goes the opposite way.

So anyway, thank you for the opportunity to speak this morning and I just pray that God will bless us as we look at his word and may he encourage us to live lives to please and follow him.

So as we look at this invitation, which I think is a wonderful one, it just reminds me there's another invitation similar in John chapter 7, you might like to turn that, John 7, verse 37, John 7, 37, on the last and greatest day of the feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, if anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.

[10 : 29] Whoever believes in me, as the scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him. So we've got these two invitations that Jesus made.

One is to come and be filled if you're thirsty and the other is to get rest if you're weary and burdened. And both of these invitations have their roots in the Old Testament.

We can turn back to Isaiah 55 and this is the one that we're most familiar with. Isaiah 55, verses 1 to 3.

Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters. You who have no money, come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.

Why spend money on what is not bread and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me and eat what is good and your soul will delight in the richest affair.

[11 : 36] Give ear and come to me. Hear me that your soul may live. And then ones that are more specific to today's reading are in Jeremiah, Jeremiah 6 and verse 16.

And this one says, This is what the Lord says. Stand at the crossroads and look. Ask for the ancient paths.

Ask where the good way is and walk in it and you will find rest for your souls. And then the second one is in Exodus chapter 33 and it's where God says to Moses, verse 14, My presence will go with you and I will give you rest.

So as Jesus made this invitation, his listeners and especially the Pharisees who would have been very knowledgeable of their Bible, of their Torah, would have understood the significance of what Jesus was saying.

that Jesus here, when he makes this invitation, is identifying himself with the Old Testament God of Isaiah and Jeremiah and Moses.

[12 : 55] And as Jesus gives this invitation, he's basically claiming divinity. That God who made that invitation in Isaiah is the same as Jesus who was saying, Come to me and I will give you rest.

And if you look at the verses 25 to 27 of our reading, it says, At that time, Jesus said, I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you've hidden these things from the wise and learned and revealed them to little children.

Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure. All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

So, when Jesus addresses God as Father and claims to be Son, he is claiming divinity. But we won't look too much into that for now, because that's a whole different area.

So, I now want to have a look at what is it that Jesus is offering when he says, Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

[14 : 20] If you look up the dictionary, the definition of rest is to cease work or movement in order to relax, sleep, or recover strength.

So, the purpose of rest is to relax, sleep, or recover strength. And I think maybe the last bit, recovering strength, is probably what it's really about. In order for us to keep going on, we need to be recovering strength.

So, I want to have a look at the concept of rest in the Bible. And if we turn back to Genesis, it's where we'll start with the first reference to rest.

And of course, it's at the end of the creation account. Genesis chapter 1, verse 31, we have the completion of the six days of creation.

And God has been active in creating. And in verse 31, it says that God saw all that he had made and it was very good.

[15 : 31] And there was evening and there was morning the sixth day. So, we have the end of the sixth day and God is looking at all that he's made and it's very good. And it says, thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.

And by the seventh day, so that's the next day, God had finished his work. God had finished the work that he had been doing. So, on the seventh day, he rested from all his work.

And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

So, we see here that when God had completed his work of creating, first of all, he looks at it and he sees that it's good. So, he looks at his completed creation and he acknowledges this is very good. And I think this is something that we can relate to. It can be as simple as cutting the grass or finishing exams or baking a cake but you look at it and say, that's good, I'm happy with that, that is how I want it to be.

[16 : 44] And God has this sense of satisfaction and he's looking at this completed work and he now rests. So, this principle of rest is first demonstrated by God.

God has been active, he's busy and then he rests. So, in the context of hard work and in the fulfilling completion of a task, do you know what?

It's okay to take a breather and to rest. And I find that really encouraging that rest is actually something that's ordained by God and it's necessary for normal human functioning.

I remember years ago I was on an OM team, it was when I was a young Christian and it was my first experience of Christian work.

Those of you familiar with OM, maybe, I don't know whether anyone was on OM back in the 80s, but OM would have been quite an extreme sort of, you know, they worked you hard.

[17 : 49] And I remember being on the team and, you know, this is my first experience of Christian work of any sort and we arrived, we were on this team in France and we arrived at the home of a missionary family and I was quite amazed to see the family were heading off on holidays.

I thought, wow, so Christian missionaries, you know, Christian workers can go on holidays. That's good. Good. And I think if you know OM, you know what I mean when I say that.

But that was encouraging that it's okay to have holidays and even Christian workers can have holidays, but I think, you know, they do need it. They need it.

So you can pray for your pastor and the family as they go on holidays, that they'll be refreshed and able to come back revitalized for the work.

So, we've got this principle that rest is something that's part of normal human functioning. But God takes it further. If you move on to Exodus 20 and we have the Ten Commandments and the fourth commandment, of course, is the to keep the Sabbath day and Exodus 20, verse 4.

[19 : 15] Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God.

On it you shall not do any work, neither you nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day.

Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. So now not only have we got rest being a principle, but now it's actually a commandment that the Israelites were to work six days and they were to rest on the seventh day and the pattern that they took that from was that that's exactly what God had done in creation.

He'd created over six days and he rested on the seventh day. So that is why they were to do it. And it was a commandment. Not only is it that it's a good idea, but actually it is something that we should do because it works for us.

And has it ever occurred to you why we have a seven day week? Well, that's where it comes from. Because the seven day week has no astronomical reasoning.

[20 : 35] The reason I say that is, look, a year is the time it takes for the earth to go around the sun. A month is the time it takes for the moon to go around the earth. And a day, of course, is the time it takes for the earth to spin on its axis.

But a seven day week, there's no logical reason for a seven day week. And if you are interested, if you go online and look up the old farmer's almanac, it says in that no more logic supports seven days than say eight or five.

Yet the seven day week has resisted any and all attempt at change. So if you're interested in a little bit of history, the almanac goes on to say that atheistic revolutionaries tried unsuccessfully to get rid of the seven day week.

In 1793, the leaders of the French Revolution produced a new calendar and they divided it into three ten day decades, they called it. So a week of ten days.

It never caught on and Napoleon abandoned it in 1805. In 1929, the Soviet Union tried a five day week and there was one day of rest and the days of the week were named after colours and everybody was assigned a colour.

[21 : 54] So perhaps a husband might be yellow, so yellow was his day off and his wife, she'd be given green. So your day off was yellow and your day off was green.

So obviously it didn't really work for families and there was a lot of confusion. The plan was revised in 1932 to a six day week and instead of having colours they had numbers but by 1940 they gave up and now Russia is back on the seven day week.

And as the almanac said, the seven day week has resisted any and all attempt at change. So I just think that's really interesting. You know, God instituted, he said this is what you're to do, man has tried to change it, but what works is the seven day week.

And God knows best. And Psalm 103.14 says, for he knows how we are formed and he remembers that we are dust. rest. So the first point is that if we are finding that we are heavy and burdened, that we're weary and burdened, there's a practical note here, are we getting enough rest?

Maybe you need a holiday, maybe you need to stop and just get off. Maybe you haven't got a proper rest in your routine. obviously we can't always take off one day in seven and we can't always have the privilege of having Sunday off, but certainly the principle of getting rest is necessary for our proper functioning as a human being.

[23 : 39] So, moving on, a deeper rest, and this is something that we've already alluded to in that Psalm that Alex read, Psalm 62, and I think maybe we could turn to that because that's in my notes as well.

Psalm 62, and this is a rest of the soul, and Jesus says here, you will find rest for your souls. So, there's the physical sort of, I'll just take a day off, there's that type of rest, but there's also the deeper rest, rest for our souls.

And in Psalm 62, which we've already read, a wonderful Psalm, David says, my soul finds rest in God alone, my salvation, salvation, and salvation, and salvation.

He alone is my rock and my salvation. He is my fortress, I shall never be shaken. And then in verse 5, David then points the finger at himself and says to himself, find rest, O my soul, in God alone. My hope comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation. He is my fortress, I shall not be shaken.

[24 : 53] So Jesus says if we are to find rest for our souls, we are to take up his yoke. We are to take up a yoke upon us and we are to learn from him. I think we all know what a yoke is.

I know they're not used anymore, but obviously it was the way that the farmer used to get his oxen to do useful work. And the yoke would constrain the ox to do what the farmer wanted.

And so in this context, when Jesus says take my yoke upon you, there obviously is this context that we are to be obedient to God.

And 1 John 5 3 says, this is love for God to obey his commands. And he goes on to say, and his commands are not burdensome.

So this rest of soul that Jesus talks about is linked with obedience that we need to put God in the right place in our lives. We've already read that verse in Exodus.

[26 : 12] God says to Moses, my presence will go with you and I will give you rest. And when God spoke to Moses, the rest that they were looking forward to was the promised land.

And as you know, Moses didn't enter the promised land and the Israelites at that time didn't enter the promised land. And Deuteronomy 1.32 gives the reason why they didn't enter that land.

And it's simply this, you did not trust in the Lord your God. That's Deuteronomy 1.32. And Hebrews explains it more. Hebrews 3.18 says, to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed?

So we see that they were not able to enter because of their unbelief. So the Israelites didn't enter the promised land, didn't enter that rest because of their disobedience.

Joshua then was the next leader and Joshua was successful in bringing the Israelites into the promised land. And when God appointed Joshua, he said to him, be strong and courageous because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them.

[27 : 37] Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you. Do not turn from it to the right or the left that you might be successful wherever you go.

So God said to Joshua, be careful to be obedient. And if you're obedient, you will enter that rest in the promised land.

And of course, Joshua was successful. And Joshua brought the people into the promised land. And Joshua's words to the people were, remember the command that Moses, the servant of the Lord, gave you.

The Lord your God has given you rest and has granted you this land. So Joshua was very clear, guys, if you want to enter that rest, that promised land, be obedient to God.

And at the end, after the occupation of the land, we read in Joshua 21, 43, so the Lord gave Israel all the land he had sworn to give their forefathers, and they took possession of it and settled there.

[28 : 48] The Lord gave them rest on every side, just as he had sworn to their forefathers. So if you're a Christian this morning and you're looking for rest, this rest of the soul, you're not called to take up arms and invade the promised land and engage in battle with the Philistines or the Canaanites or the Amorites or the Amalekites or any other ites.

But we are called by Jesus to take up his yoke and learn from him. But the great thing about this yoke that Jesus gives us is that it's easy or not so much easy as it fits and it's comfortable.

I think what the word means is there's no hard edges, it doesn't press in and poke your spine or, you know, it's not constantly making you uncomfortable. It's a yoke that is, it fits.

But obviously it's also a yoke that keeps you going in a direction so you're not free to just head off wherever you want. And that's what it's like for the Christian that we are to be obedient to him.

But as we obey God, it's not burdensome, it's not tough and uncomfortable, it's not harsh. The word is, it's not harsh or hard or sharp or pressing, but it's comfortable, gracious and pleasant.

[30 : 16] That's what the word means. And the burden is light and easy to be born. So the invitation that Jesus gives us is a good one.

It's something that we can be encouraged about. It's not difficult. So how do we enter into this rest of God? If we're a Christian, the principle is the same.

Trust and obey. And in Acts 17, that famous sermon of Paul to the Athenians, to the Greeks, Paul says, God commands all men everywhere to repent.

So the command that goes out is you must repent, but the great thing is that as you repent, this is when you receive the rest of God. Psalm 32, maybe we could look at that, because this is a wonderful psalm which speaks of repentance and forgiveness and the rest of God that comes through that.

Psalm 32. Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.

[31 : 38] Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him, and in whose spirit is no deceit. So there's the blessing, and now we have a description of somebody who's resisting that.

When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me, my strength was sapped, as in the heat of summer.

So you've got this description of somebody who is not confessing their sins, who is not turning to God, not repenting, and there's like this physical oppression that they're receiving.

And then it says in verse 5, Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover up my iniquity. I said, I will confess my transgressions to the Lord.

And guess what? You forgave the guilt of my sin. And if you then go back to verse 1, blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.

[32 : 44] Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him, and in whose spirit is no deceit. So if as yet we've resisted Jesus' call on our lives, the invitation is to come to Jesus.

And where do we come? We come at the foot of the cross. we acknowledge our sin and we lay it on him. We thank him for taking the burden of our sin and paying the price so we can be forgiven.

We trust in him. John 3.16 For God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

and I think you could replace that eternal life with eternal rest. Rest in him. So are we trusting in Jesus in that way? Have we cast on him the heaviest of burdens our sin and found in him the rest of our soul?

That is peace with God. Just in closing I just want us to look at a couple of characters that you're probably very familiar with.

[34 : 05] It's in Luke chapter 10. Because let's just bring it home and see some people in the Bible who really demonstrate this experiencing God's rest.

And it's the account of Mary and Martha. And it's in Luke chapter 10 verses 39 to 41.

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him.

She had a sister called Mary who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said but Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and said and asked Lord don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself?

Tell her to help me. Martha, Martha the Lord answered you are worried and upset about many things but only one thing is needed.

[35 : 16] Mary has chosen what is better and it will not be taken away from her. So here we have these sisters and they're friends of Jesus and they're very different characters.

Martha is a doer and here she is she's busy preparing, she opens her home, she gets a meal ready and she's busy, busy, busy, busy but she's frustrated, she's not at rest, she's not at peace and she's frustrated because her sister isn't helping, her sister is sitting at Jesus' feet and she's listening to Jesus and Martha goes to Jesus and says, Jesus don't you care that I'm here on my own doing all this work for you?

Tell her to help me. And Jesus simply says, Martha, you're worried and upset about many things but you know what, your sister has made the right choice in this case.

The dishes can wait, the dinner can wait, you need to find rest in me. Mary's chosen what is better and it will not be taken away from her.

what I love about those two sisters is that later on there's another account of them and Jesus is again at their house and Martha is the one doing the preparations but there's no condemnation here because Martha is different to Mary and obviously this is not an excuse not to do the washing up young people or to help at home but there are times where we just need to sit at Jesus' feet and find rest and refreshment in him.

[37 : 17] So during this holiday season may God refresh us and more importantly may we find that rest of our souls in Jesus as we trust and obey him throughout the year.

Are we going to have a closing? So we've just a hymn that I'd like us to sing is when we walk with the Lord in the light of his word what a glory he sheds on his way I forget the words but we'll sing them now when we walk with the Lord.

Thanks. Thanks. Thanks. Thanks. Thanks.