

# How to Find Rest (Matthew 11:20-30)

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Preacher: James Murray

[ 0 : 0 0 ] On again. And speaking this morning of the yoke and taking that off, I want to then take us to the New Testament where Christ shows that. You know, from Isaiah to Matthew where Christ is showing and talking about that yoke, taking off what responsibility is not ours and taking on what responsibility is. So our reading this morning, beginning in verse 20. Then he began to denounce the cities where most of his mighty works had been done because they did not repent.

Woe to you, Corazán! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you.

At that time, Jesus declared, I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. And no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chose to reveal to him or reveal him. Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. Let's pray.

Amen. Our Father in heaven, help us understand these words which many of us have heard from the time we were children, but maybe never taken seriously. Help us understand them, and then help us truly believe them in our hearts, and then help us live that out in all of our daily life, in our walk with you before others. All for your glory, in Jesus' name. Amen.

[ 3 : 0 2 ] Amen. So nothing takes away peace like taking on responsibility that isn't yours.

I don't know if it's maybe just the eldest child syndrome in me. If you've known the stereotype, the eldest child is duty, duty, duty, duty, duty. I have things to do. I have things to get done. Why aren't you used to doing what they told you to do? Slap. Or maybe that was just the experience of me being the eldest. Take on duty. Sometimes, not rightfully so. Growing up, my family was a bit all over the place, to put it lightly. You could put the EastEnders soundtrack into our family, and it would be quite fitting. And so because of that, I took on a lot more responsibility for my two younger brothers than I was meant to, or I should have. But eldest child syndrome, I saw it as my responsibility.

They're my younger brothers. I'll make sure I protect them. I'll make sure I watch over them, you know, etc., etc., etc. And all that does, did to my teenage years, was make me really, really angry, quite depressed. I only realized that now looking back. And even lonely.

Nothing takes away your peace like taking on responsibility that isn't yours. And unfortunately for us, and for all of humanity, legalism is our natural go-to.

[ 4 : 5 8 ] That's our natural position, the natural default position of sinful man. Now we know that looking back at like the Pharisees, we go, oh, they were very legalistic. Yes, tithing your mint and your cume and all the rest. We'll go, yes, they were very legalistic. But it is the natural human condition of sinful man to revert back to legalism. Because legalism is essentially, it's making ourselves gods. It's making ourselves gods. It's shouldering an authority that we were never meant to have.

Jesus was dealing with that in his age. And the gospel still deals with it today. And if you want a, what would you call it, a cultural moment of that, you just have to look at what's called, was it cancel

culture out of the woke mentality. You can go back 10 years in someone's Twitter or Facebook post to find one thing that was acceptable to say 10 years ago, but isn't acceptable to say now. And then your life's over, your life's ruined. We live very much by legalism in our day and age. You can do no wrong. Legalism is essentially, you can't put one foot out of the wrong. You must be perfect. You must say the right thing, do the right thing, and never be in the wrong.

And therefore never say sorry, because sorry means you're in the wrong. But this is something we were never meant to have. This is something we were never meant to take on.

And that is why Jesus' passage here is so special. It is so unique. You will not find this in any other, I don't even need to say religion, philosophy or worldview. One that's filled with grace and mercy and peace from those who have power. So this is a passage which has been greatly helpful to me because I always want to turn back to legalism. I'll walk out this door, I'll come up here, wherever I go, I'll want to do the right thing and be perfect. Not for honoring God, but just I don't want to step out of line. I want to be good and probably for all sinful reasons. So let's see how Jesus actually deals with this. He says, come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Firstly, notice Jesus' invitation. Who's it to? It's not to a thing. It's not to a philosophy.

It's not to a worldview. Although that comes, it's to a person. It's to a person. It's saying, come to Jesus. It's not saying, come to how I think about this or this issue. It's saying, come to me.

[ 8 : 12 ] To the very real, live person of Jesus. And then it's not even an open-ended. This isn't even an invitation to everyone. Sometimes we, or maybe just growing up in Northern Ireland, you see placards everywhere.

I think the reason we have so many car crashes in Northern Ireland is because in every lamppost going around windy country roads is there's kneeled up somewhere, some Bible verse. Usually it's repent and you shall live or something like that and takes your eyes off the road.

But this here, come to me, all of you who are weary and heavy burdened. It's almost thrown out like, oh, it is for everyone. But it's not. It's not. All of those who are self-righteous, all of those who think, ah, I'm in the right. I'm good. The Pharisees would have rejected this. Come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened. Oh, no, no, no. I'm not weary and burdened. No, no, no. I've got it all together. I'm a Pharisee. Translate that to today's culture however you wish. There's always going to be the people who believe that they are righteous, that they are right and never wrong.

But this is specifically to those who have missed the mark, to those who have missed the mark. The Pharisees, to give them their dues, they started with good intentions.

I don't know how often you hear that. They actually started with good intentions. Their intentions was they saw the history of the Old Testament Israel and said, okay, so our problem is we always wander away from the law. So we're going to put extra rules around the law to make sure everyone's hemmed in and doesn't get outside of it so Israel doesn't get destroyed again.

[ 10 : 18 ] Even today, those who act self-righteously, their intentions in the beginning can be good. And that's one way I have to learn to love them. Sometimes I can look at the world and just simply go, I'm writing those guys off. Righteous guys have nothing to do with them. But their intentions could be in the right place, although their ultimate end is wrong.

But the Pharisees and even some of those today who are acting self-righteously, they don't actually bring freedom. They don't actually bring freedom. They end up crushing everyone around them.

They end up hurting the people at the bottom and hurting those who are already most vulnerable.

The Pharisees, in wanting to protect Israel, ended up destroying Israel. I can think of, I don't know how many good intentions that has been brought through government in 200 years. I'll give you one random example. There was a window tax. And you'll notice this in Scotland.

I think that was 1850. When the window tax was brought in, it was basically, how do we make taxes so that we're not taxing the poor people too much and we're taxing the rich people who had lots of windows more? And they thought a window tax would be a great idea. So what did the poor people do?

And you'll see the results of this around Edinburgh. They filled up windows. So they had to pay less taxes. And that less led to scurvy. It led to vitamin D deficiencies in every way. It was terrible.

[ 12 : 08 ] It's not like we get much light in Scotland anyway. Stuff that can be set out to be good, if it's not based in the reality of the human condition, will end up just crushing us. Humans cannot keep the law perfectly, as the Pharisees so wished.

It crushed the people. Humans today cannot keep all these other rules and regulations, and it crushes us. Jesus is doing the exact opposite. He doesn't want to crush us. He wants to liberate us.

As I said this morning, one of the things that Isaiah mentions again and again is they are under slavery. You were under slavery. But now, under God, you've freed him. That's the point. And here's the same.

Personally, I constantly, I don't even need someone else to crush me. The biggest critic that you could ever find is in my own head. I know when I've broken God's law a hundred times.

I know when I've done wrong. I know when even my best intentions. If I really look at it and I start to really hone in and go, man, there's self-interest even in that.

I can repeat the same sin again and again. And the little judge in my own head doesn't say, Christ died even for that. It says, boy, James, why can't you get it right? Why can't you just wise up and walk straight?

[13:53] I really don't need anyone else in the world to act, to put their righteousness and crush me with it. The only little judge inside my head will do that for me. And I don't know if you've ever felt similar to my condition of just constantly feeling criticism in your own mind, going, Jesus died for you. Why don't you live like it? God loves you. So why are you still returning to your own sins? Why are you still doing this? Why are you still thinking that way? Why is this my immediate reaction? All we end up doing is crushing ourselves more and more because we're shouldering a responsibility. We're trying to do something that isn't even in our capability.

And this is why I want you and me to hear Christ's invitation. Come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. I will give you rest.

But then verse 29, it says something, I don't know, seems contradicting. So he talks about rest and then he says, take up my yoke. Take up my yoke and learn from me. Now you heard me talk about yoke this morning. You saw it come up in Isaiah 9 and the yoke meant slavery. It meant oppression. It meant crushing down of people. But yoke is also a thing. And I'm sure many of you will have heard this before and many of you will have seen it. A yoke is what is put on a horse to plow a field. A yoke is a tool of labor. It's not exactly light. If you've ever lifted one of those things that they put in old shower horses, they are sturdy. They are strong. They're made of dense, hard wood.

But in putting on this yoke, you will find rest. It seems contradicting, doesn't it? We're to take off one yoke that's meant to be beating us into the ground and we're meant to put on another one that's meant to give us rest. So what is this yoke? And he says, take up my yoke and learn from me.

Learn from me. It's imitating Jesus. We're meant to learn his pattern of life, his values, what he placed importance on. Everything that Jesus thought about, we are to think about. Every way Jesus reacted, that's what we are to turn around and react like. We're meant to copy him. We're not meant to invent something new. We're simply meant to replicate Jesus. That's what a disciple is. To spend time around someone so much that you start to act like them. A silly example is my two boys spending too much time around me that they start to have drawings on their arms that are tattoos. You would have seen them this morning. My eldest son had a pterodactyl on his arm and my other son had a cupcake.

[17:18] He likes cakes. He's a deep fella. But simply imitating the one you love. And I take that as a sign of endearment that they love me. Sometimes I wonder why. But that's what it's meant to be.

As we spend more time around Jesus, as we start to see what he sees as beautiful, as good. I don't mean just as first child syndrome. It's what we're meant to do, duty. I mean, they're genuinely attractive ways to live. They're the best ways to live, not just for us. And this is what one of the things I want you to take home and become confident by. The way Jesus says to live and the way God has laid it out, even Leviticus and Deuteronomy, is the best and most flourishing way for humanity to live. Not just us in our wee Christian bubble. I mean humanity. This will lead to the most flourishing, the most freedom, with some restraint. That's the difference. That is possible for us.

Hence why, through Christendom, you had the most freedom throughout the world. You had the most reformation since Christendom started to take what it was in the Bible and think seriously.

But to bring us back to Jesus, to be around him, we need to see him as genuinely something that is beautiful, as a painting as beautiful. And you bring someone, say for example, one of my favourite paintings is Van Gogh, The Starry Night. I don't know why, I just really like it. I love how the colours all meld together and their beautiful blues and the bright whites.

And I could sit there and look at it and go, that's really pretty. I love starry, beautiful nights. And so I don't hold that up. I go, here, here, here. What do you think of this picture?

It's beautiful, isn't it? The same is with Jesus. We bring someone to a leader who's actually beautiful, that you would want to spend time around. Because Jesus says of himself, because I am

lowly and humble in heart. Lowly and humble or gentle and lowly.

[ 19 : 41 ] Jesus isn't someone to come and crush you with demands. Sometimes we make that Jesus. I certainly can make that Jesus. Jesus says you must live with joy. Seems really contradictory. You must live with peace. Yeah, I'm definitely doing something wrong there. But that's how it goes in my head. James, you must live with joy and peace. Okay, be joyful. And I have a greater frown in my face. But Jesus spent time. He spends 30 years growing before ministry. Before actually going out and preaching. He had friends. He ate. He took time. In fact, Jesus didn't go very far. He spent much of his ministry around the same region, Sea of Galilee. Which is, as we said this morning, a no-name place. It's the Styx. Back home we would call it Kulshiland.

Over here, I think it's Trictors. You know, it's, really? There? Yeah, Jesus spent all his time there. Big metropolis, Jerusalem. Ah, no, I'll stay up here. Go down a few times.

Diane Langberg, a brilliant Christian writer, she writes, if numbers, growth, and fame were God's measures, then Jesus would be a failure. Likeness to Christ is not measured by such external things, but by the extent to which a person's character bears fruit that resembles the fruit of the Spirit. Not by numbers, but by kindness. Not by fame, but by humility and self-control.

One of the things that was always placed on my generation, which I'm unhappy to say as a millennial, is we were always told, you're going to change the world. You're going to change the world. You're going to go out, and you're going to be great, and it's going to be awesome, and then you reach 32, and you go, I haven't done any of that. It's a terrible burden to actually put in the child. You're going to change the world. Dear goodness, I hope not. That requires an awful lot of work. But Jesus would never say that. He would say, come with me. Come imitate me. Come follow my pattern of life. Not the rat race that's out there. Not seeking numbers. But seeking being principled and genuinely loving the one who saved us. Finally, we're not finding. In doing this, in following Jesus, he offers a promise. And it's a promise you're not going to find out in the world too much. You will find rest for your souls.

That is, well, that's offered today. It's offered from a can of Coca-Cola to the next iPhone. I don't know how a new iPhone would bring you rest, but our peace. But these things are offered, and they're empty. Every worldview wants to bring you peace. If you see someone who's went down the road to Buddhism or any of the other religions, usually they're seeking peace. They're seeking rest for wearied souls. We live in an age where mental health is on par with physical health. And it should be. We should treat a person holistically. And that is a good thing. We've become aware of our mental health. But ultimately, in a lot of the things, we're putting plasters on gaping wounds. Because our problem isn't just in our heads or even in our bodies, but our very souls.

[ 24 : 03 ] Often that we're estranged from God. And even when we've been brought close by Jesus, we can still feel estrangement from God. We can start to think, well, maybe God doesn't love me now because I did this. Or here's one. Maybe my car is acting up because I have acted in a certain way.

Maybe things aren't going right for me because I'm not being as faithful as I could. I start to put all these things into my life. And then I read about Jesus and I go, that's not how Jesus operated.

That's not how Jesus operated. Verse 30 says, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light. When you come to Jesus, it's not that we've got absolute freedom to do anything we want.

That would defeat the purpose, as we all know. That would lead to complete anarchy. We would never trust the rule of law. We would let everything go nuts. That's not going to keep order. It's certainly not going to love our neighbor. We are to take on a yoke. We are to become, as Paul says, bond servants. We are to become servants, even slaves to Jesus. We're to take his mark.

As slaves would have got branded in the Roman Empire or tattooed with *doulos* on them, meaning slaves. We are to become Christ's. We are to become Christ's servant, his slave. We find freedom.

[ 25 : 54 ] Just like this morning, whenever we give all of authority to Jesus and he bears it, we find our freedom in it. Now the word easy here doesn't mean it's almost a bad translation, but everyone keeps using it. Easy means easy.

It means, more rightly, it's fit for purpose or it's useful. It's fit for purpose. For example, marriage. I have heard it time and time again because I got married when I was 22.

I said, James, why would you do that? Why would you do that? Or my dad acts sure it's just a bit of paper. No, no, it's not. And in fact, psychology will come to back me up. It is the best environment for children to be raised. It's the safest environment. It gives them the most mental security.

All the way. It's just boundlessly good. The Sabbath. That's a harder one. I do remember growing up when shops weren't open on Sunday, except we local small shops and that was only part of the day.

It's not just Lewis this happened. But it wasn't until I went over to Germany where some states in Germany still keep a Sabbath law.

[ 27 : 23 ] But it's not for any religious reasons. It's to protect the worker. It's to protect the people to make sure every Sunday they have a day where their physical bodies rest.

As Jesus said, the Sabbath is made for man, not for God. We need it. See, they're useful. They're genuinely useful. They're good for all of humanity.

They're not just religious rules. They're good for our very beings, who we are as humans, as creatures. For example, when Noah, my middle child, and he looks all sweet as pie with his curly wild hair, but he is headstrong. He is something headstrong.

And if he says no, I'm in for a long fight. And I can make it longer by fighting. Or I can do what Jesus says and do something that's really counter-cultural and not be a prideful father and come along going, he should respect me as his father, which I really want to do.

And go, he should respect me, like a two, now three-year-old would know what respect is. But when I come beside him and I actually condescend to him, for example, one time he was in a fit, I sit beside him on the stairs and say, Noah, what's wrong?

[ 28 : 49 ] And I let him explain himself and go, Noah, you're upset and mommy will die. And he goes, through all tears. Okay. If I actually imitate Jesus, his ways are useful.

His ways are fit for purpose. They actually help us in our daily life. The law is truly a light for our feet.

Scripture is truly a light for our life. Forgiveness, loving our neighbor, all these things are now backed up by psychology, by the secular world.

Even gratefulness, having a disposition of gratefulness. If you go to a counselor for mental health, they will tell you to practice gratefulness. Every morning, wake up and open a book and write down what five things you're grateful for.

Psychology has shown that that's, makes people just change their disposition, their outlook in life. And there's something Jesus says, yeah, you're meant to be grateful.

[ 29 : 54 ] Even kindness. And even used in a bad way. This is a shocking story, but it's a true one. World War II, there was a Nazi officer.

He was brought in, and he was in charge of getting information out of people. When he was there, he was shocked to hear all the screams and all the torture going on in our rooms.

And so, what does he do? He acts in the kindest way possible. Bringing them in home-baked goods, bringing them in tea and coffee, actually asking how they are about their life.

And he builds up trust with them. And through that, they actually let slip information because they build up trust. Now, that's obviously using something in another way, but even interrogation, those interrogation techniques are now taught in the world round.

Can you imagine that? Interrogation where kindness is actually the best method. And in business, servant leadership, one we have heard in the Christian world for years is now a business model in the secular world.

[ 31 : 12 ] God's ways are good. Not just for you and me, but for the entire world. And you can even get secular science to back you up on this. Lastly, lastly, I'll end here.

Jesus is lowly and humble. There was never a person that ever experienced Jesus and was put off. Peter denied him.

Denied him. To witnesses, to many witnesses, and Jesus still accepted him. The woman at the well, who everyone else rejected, Jesus showed kindness and graciousness to.

Thomas, doubting his existence when everyone else believed. Mercy and grace. Paul, who persecuted the church, on a list of sins, killing people of the faith you now belong to, has to be up there at the top.

What does Jesus do? Forgives them. Gentile women, tax collectors, traitors, traitors to his own people, all experienced Jesus' gentleness, humility, and humbleness.

[ 32 : 35 ] How often have we done a disservice to Jesus by thinking that he is harsh, that he's mean, or that he wouldn't accept us now because of the sin that's in our hearts, the sin that will linger there often until we meet him in glory.

Jesus knew this from before the world was founded, from before the foundations of the world, and he chose to set his love on you and me.

There's not one thing any of us could do that is ever going to change that. Shall we ever doubt that our sin is greater than the blood Jesus spilled for us?

Nothing can separate us. Nothing can separate us. So we should go in peace and joy knowing that one, our sins are forgiven, that God will never reject us.

Even now, even to our dying day, he secured us. And two, his ways are good. They're not laws to beat us or others.

[ 33 : 56 ] They're laws to encourage. They are things to bring out the best in every member of the human race. So we should have confidence in that.

So come to Jesus as gentle and lowly who will never leave you and trust in his ways as strong enough and as wise enough to guide us in a very dark and confusing world.

Let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, please help us trust you.

Please help us trust you and see you in the right light as loving and kind. Help us remember that Jesus is your perfect embodiment.

that he reflects you not just in your glory and power but also in your likeness in your very attitude and emotions.

[ 35 : 06 ] Please help us keep in mind that you love us beyond measure and you chose to set that love on us before the foundations of the world and even if the foundations of the world shake and crumble that love will never depart from us.

Help us respond in kind, Lord and love you as we are loved. In Jesus' name. Amen.