

The Divine Gift of Rest

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[0:00] Thank you for your praise, Richard. Can you hear me okay?! Or it's been a rough Monday and you finish the day with, depending on what side of the bridge you're on, a glass of wine or a chamomile tea.

Or it's been a hectic week with meetings, family, work, church, and by Saturday you just need a good day trip to the coast.

Or even a hectic year and you need a good week's holiday. I'm sure we have all been in such scenarios.

And the cup of tea or the week's holiday is often just about enough.

It gets us back on track, re-energized, re-focused, and off we go.

[1:49] Well, it's good to know that as we journey with the Lord, as we follow through life in the footsteps of Jesus, as we follow through the hurdles and burdles of life, it's good to know that he plans in for us times of rest and restoration.

Just look with me at the precious first three verses of Acts chapter 21.

Acts chapter 21. Acts chapter 21.

Which reads, After we had torn ourselves away from them, their friends who wanted them to stay, we put out to sea and sailed straight to Kos.

The next day we went to Rhodes, and from there to Patara. We found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, went on board and set sail.

[3:49] After sighting Cyprus and passing to the south of it, we sailed to Syria. We sailed to Syria. We landed at Tyre, where our ship was to unload its cargo.

The first three verses. So, what exactly is going on here?

Why start the chapter as so? Well, chapters 15 through 20, heavily detailed the missionary journeys.

And we spent a couple of weeks detailing the highlights of the missionary journeys. And noting the significant changes those journeys brought to the church.

And indeed, brought to the whole world. And they were times of, times of real, real, busy, busy mayhem.

[5:09] There was little rest. Right from the start, they were sabotaged by sorcerers, accused of all sorts by the authorities, mocked and persecuted by the religious, arrested, imprisoned, court-martialed.

There was mobs, riots, intellectual debates, councils called, internal fallouts, all back and forth, back and forth, back and forth, and over and over and over, again and again and again and again. All topped off with deeply emotional goodbyes. To the point where Luke describes it as we were having to tear away from those we loved.

The crumbs. It's exhausting just thinking about everything in those five chapters. And so, how lovely, how really, really, really lovely when finally all Luke has to be able to tell us is, is, is, we then had a little Mediterranean cruise.

It was break time, so we rested up. I love it. Luke was a, he was a writer of the details.

[6:52] He was an adventurer. He loved to write about the big, courageous side of the journey. But here, he now finds all he can really say is, after so much work, after so much toil, God give us rest.

And so, for a little time, the details all come away, way, way, way down. He says, we sealed the course.

We went to Rhodes. And there we were on, on top deck, sailing away when we started Cyprus. And we passed the south of it. It was beautiful.

I can see Paul on board after years of hard, hard, hard work, relaxing. Oh, there's Cyprus, by the way, as we go past. There's all of God's beautiful creation.

And here I am, just enjoying it, top deck, looking at it, a well-deserved break indeed.

[8:09] Folk, God is in the business of giving us rest. And when we live life following in the footsteps of Jesus, we need go at Jesus' pace, which includes such times of rest.

Rest and restoration. Because for indeed, that is what Paul was doing here. He was simply, very simply, walking in the footsteps of Jesus.

And on that note, following in the footsteps of Jesus, what else does that include?

Well, how about carrying one's cross? You see, Luke and Paul may have been enjoying such rest here, but they for sure had big plans ahead.

And in fact, they knew with clarity the next season would be met with more mayhem, more busy work.

[9:42] and it becomes very clear that the holiday is just about over. They're in verse 10 of that same chapter, chapter 21.

Verse 10. And just before we do that, actually, verse 8 there.

Verse 8. They had been with Philip, who had four unmarried daughters. And as said, Luke is a writer of details.

So why does Luke detail this, these four unmarried daughters? Well, it would perhaps appear because for all the hardships and mayhem of life that we face as we follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

That he wants to remind us the Lord has a plan. And the plan is actively being fulfilled.

[11:01] It's being fulfilled as we live this very day. And so he is pointing back to the famous jewel prophecy.

In those last days, as the day of the Lord arrives, I will pour my spirit on all people.

Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. And so he is saying to us, don't give up.

His plan is on. And so as you strive through this life, following in the footsteps of Jesus and dealing with the difficulties of life, be assured of this, he is fulfilling his word.

He is on his way. The prophecies are being fulfilled. So be of good courage. You will need it.

Because as Luke next tells us, back to verse 10, after we had been there a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea.

[12:22] Coming over to us, he took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it, and said, the Holy Spirit says, in this way, the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and hand him over to the Gentiles.

So, God himself, through Holy Spirit, tells Paul that in Jerusalem he will be taken, imprisoned, handed over.

Sounds familiar, doesn't it? Luke 18, verse 31, if you're able to jump to it one second. Luke 18, verse 31.

Jesus took the twelve aside and told them, we are going up to Jerusalem and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled.

He will be delivered over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him, and spit on him. They will flog him and kill him. On the third day he will rise again.

[14:17] Amen. Amen. Amen. Jesus, of course, as God, didn't need a prophecy.

He was able to declare and say so his very self. And the other point here was Jesus was indeed setting out for Jerusalem in full knowledge, in full understanding that when he got there, the authorities would arrest, mock, bait, and kill him.

And Jesus went. Jesus went because he had purposely decided that he wanted to die for the sins of humanity.

So he was more than pleased to take up his cross to save us. And so Paul, here in Acts, he's confused and he's upset that his fellow companions in the gospel would even consider trying to talk

him out of it.

Verse 12, back in Acts 21, verse 12. when we heard this, that Paul was going to Jerusalem, we and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem.

[15:58] Then Paul answered, why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am not only ready to be bound, but also die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.

Jesus. Paul knows exactly what Jesus done for him. He knows exactly the life he has been saved from.

He knows who and what he would have been if it wasn't for Jesus. And so he is plain and clear. I hear you saying I'll be arrested, friends. I hear you warning me of what awaits me in Jerusalem, friends. I hear you saying they will hurt me just as they hurt Jesus.

They will take me just as they took Jesus. And so he says, unlike Jesus, I'm on my way. Unlike Jesus, I'm on my way.

[17:07] amazing, isn't it? I love it. What a remarkable example of what it truly means to be fully given over to Jesus.

This is what it truly means to carry your cross. Which, when we follow in the footsteps of Jesus, is the core pinnacle of all that we do.

another passage from Luke tells us that Jesus said to his disciples, whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.

To take up a cross meant to carry one's own cross to the place of crucifixion. Now, many Galileans had been killed that way by the Romans.

And so, we know it was the very method that Jesus would soon face. So, with this incredible yet daunting word picture, Jesus presented a clear and challenging description of the Christian life.

[18:34] being his disciple means putting aside selfish desires, shouldering one's cross and following him.

It requires our recommitment to serve him each and every day. It is simple, yet it's very demanding. for the original twelve disciples, this meant literal suffering and death. For believers today, it may mean the same.

Though whether or not we die for our faith, it still means understanding that we belong to him and that we live to serve his purposes and not our own.

Consider this. Do you, myself as well, think of your relationship with God primarily in terms of what's in it for you?

[19:49] Which, let's be honest, is considerable for us all. Good church life, friends, good social life, easier access for weddings, something just to fill a void, all sorts of little things come from a good church life.

Or, do you think of your relationship with God solely in terms of what you can do for God?

If you are truly, truly making your relationship with God about serving his kingdom, then yes, you are carrying your cross.

And if you are struggling to know what exactly you can do for him, well, it's rather simple. What skills, resources, abilities, qualifications has God already given you?

Well, use him for his kingdom. Though sometimes it may be more about saying what hobbies, social life, work, interests, do I invest my time and energy into?

[21:13] As we've heard today already, God is up for rest and restoration. God is up for hobbies and interests. They are a gift to the disciple for rest.

But such hobbies and interests need be seen as exactly just that, rest and restoration. So perhaps the question then needs to be, are my hobbies, my social life, my interests giving me rest once or twice a week?

Or am I doing so much social life and hobbies that actually that's my life and I don't really serve the kingdom because I'm doing that instead? It should be the other way about.

They should be giving you rest and restoration and energy to serve the kingdom. Are you willing to deny yourself, take up your cross daily and follow him in and with every single part of your life?

Because anything else is not full on carrying your cross discipleship but is merely superficial lip service.

[22:31] For indeed Jesus said, this is very important, this is very important, whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it.

And then he says, what good is it for someone to gain the whole world and yet forfeit their very self? And then he says, whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the son of man will be ashamed of them when he comes in the glory of the father and the angels.

What does that last bit really mean? do you? If you're one of those quietish, a bit too embarrassed to talk about Jesus Christians, then Jesus will be embarrassed of you also.

Something to ponder at home, but it's very serious. I'm going to take it serious. Because if this present life is most important to us, then we will do everything to protect it.

we will not want to endanger our safety, our health, our comfort. By contrast, if following Jesus is most important, then we may indeed find ourselves in unsafe, unhealthy, and uncomfortable places.

[24:01] We may risk death, but we will not fear it, because we know that Jesus will raise us to eternal life. Be aware of this. Nothing, nothing material can compensate for the loss of your eternal life.

This life on earth cannot outweigh losing eternal life. Jesus' disciples are to use their lives on earth, not merely to please themselves, but to serve God and others.

So, the apostle Paul followed in the footsteps of Jesus and off to Jerusalem he went.

And by the end of these chapters, chapter 22, he is indeed beaten. He's arrested. And I wonder, I wonder as Paul spent the night locked in the barracks, did he think back to that day sailing past Cyprus and thank God for those beautiful, God-given, God-blessed memories.

and then on awakening the next morning with court marshalling on the way, was he thankful in his prayers that morning that he had had a lovely time of rest, cruising the Mediterranean, and had really equipped him for this court case and for all the events ahead, all the events of chapter 23 forward.

[25:53] I reckon he thanked God that he had been restored, refreshed, revived for the next hard season because God purposely gave him rest in the middle of it.

we are indeed called to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. Following in the footsteps of Jesus isn't always easy, but it is the greatest.

You need work at it, persevere, and God will look after you, his worker, and so when he arranges, calls, and guides, rest and restoration, take it, enjoy it, just make sure you have done some good service to be worthy of the rest, and then let it refresh you and restore you for another season of service.

And Wester Hills Baptist Church together, let's together help and enable each other to carry our crosses. talk to your brothers and sisters about how they can help you and how you can help them carry the cross.

Look for ways a brother or sister needs your help and find time to be together and rest with each other. And so let's help each other truly follow in the footsteps steps of Jesus.

[27:35] Let's pray. Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we come and mark your words here.

twofold the hard work of the hard working disciple that you call us to be.

People who are courageous and are not ashamed of you, are not ashamed to be associated with you on this earth, alongside the rest that you give and enable.

thank you for all of our hobbies and all of our leisure times. Thank you for those gifts and may we use them to energise us for kingdom work.

And to send us foreflooded from here to really follow in your footsteps to carry the cross and for the rest of this Sunday, rest and know your peace.

[28:46] In Jesus' name, Amen. If you're able to stand, please do, for he will hold me fast. If you're able to join us for a light, bit of restful time this evening at six, it would be lovely to see you there.

Do remember if you can take away a bunch of quiz flowers and give them to friends and colleagues and family members, that would be very, very, very helpful indeed. And I believe in a moment the children will come in with some flowers for the ladies, so wait for your flower ladies and the Lord bless you and the Lord keep you and the Lord make his face shine upon you.

The Lord be gracious to you. The Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.
the Holy Thank you.

Thank you.

[30:49] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.