



Rest for Your Soul

Matthew 11:16-30 | J. Austin Becton | June 26, 2016

Our restlessness can be the result of complicating life – simple as that. In our pursuit to find that perfect balance in life, we formulate theories about how all the little details of life are supposed to work. They are often subtle and beginning to emerge as we ask question like: How many hours should I work in a week? How much sleep do I need to get? How much technology should I use? When can I have my devices on? When should they be off? How often should I take off for personal days or vacations? What’s the right balance of family, work, and church? *These questions do need to be asked*, however they are often answered with a false theory of life in place. **By theory of life I simply mean a system of ideas and convictions which explains and justifies the way live, interact, and make decisions.** In our case this morning, our theory of life often aims for balance based personal problem solving, pragmatic tinkering, and the resources and reason of Self. In turn we enslave ourselves to our complicated theories of life. We shoulder the work and the burden to keep things balanced. Most of us have grabbed life by the horns, taken over the reins, and sit in the driver’s seat. We have a plan for everything. For want to do and accomplish with our lives. A plan for to buy a house, a plan for marriage, a plan for all the experiences we want to have in life, a plan for children, a plan for our career, and of course plans for how big our bank account needs to be to retire well, and then the plan for what we will do when we retire. And, we wonder why we are so restless? This morning I want us to dig deeper into our unrest. At the root of our unrest sits our struggle to believe in the gospel. Rather than believing in the truth and promises of God in Christ, we readily put our faith in our own resources and reasoning. Our text in the Gospel of St. Matthew will bring to light our struggle, call us into repentance for our unbelief, and give us assurance and comfort in the promised rest of Christ. It’s my prayer this morning that the Holy Spirit will draw each of our hearts away from seeking our own theory of life into restful repentance and faith in the Jesus, the Lord of Rest.

Our Struggle with Belief

“But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their playmates, ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.’ For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners’” (Matt. 11:16-19a). The comparison is cleverly chosen since the “game of funerals” recalls the stern Baptist, while the merrier game suggests the less rigid conduct of Jesus. On one hand, John led a life of self-denial, like the holy ascetics of many traditions. But, people had found that hard to take. So much so they misinterpreted him as self-abusive and demon possessed. On the other hand, Jesus was seen celebrating, attending parties, turning water into wine, feasting with his friends, family, followers, and even sinners – a real, present manifestation of God’s lavish, generous love and forgiveness. But, people too had found that too easy to be true. So people accused him of being a glutton and drunkard, “a friend of sinners.” As John and Jesus delivered the same message, the message of the in-breaking of God’s kingdom on earth through Jesus Christ. The rejection of their contrasting methods attested to the fact that it was the message itself that was being rejected – the message of the gospel – the Good News of Jesus Christ. One commentator speaks of this situation as the “[...] comfortable evasion of God’s urgent claim.” They did not want to reckon with this message – it confronted and unsettled their theory of life. They had dedicated their lives to the law and the study of it and its nuances – they knew how to follow it precisely. This “new” way was far too untested and unclear. Just as it is today, people hate to be challenged. Whether by someone who points them to a different sort of life or, by one who shows that God is breaking into their present reality and way of life offering a new, superior – or fuller –life. So, rather than coming face-to-face with the gospel message that John and Jesus were preaching, they slandered them, questioned and doubted their message, and hung on to their own theories of life – putting faith in themselves and their wisdom, the creation, rather than the Creator they become blind to who this man, Jesus, standing before them, truly was. Perhaps the question we need to be asking ourselves this morning is, what is blinding you from the gospel? From seeing Christ before you? Consider with me, what theory of life do you cling to? Do you find yourself restless when people, things, or situations press up against your theory of how things should go? What do you hold to in those situations that keeps you from coming face-to-face with Christ? You see, the theories of life to which we restlessly cling are a reflection of our lack of belief in the gospel of Christ. There is something deep within us that wants to have life figured out. To some degree, it is



probably because we feel and see the unrest of this life all around us day after day. The anxiety of our co-workers, our own nagging stress, the unstoppable wheel of production and consumption. But, rather than pursuing Christ we pursue these “comfortable evasions of God” in our lives. We look to lesser things – ourselves, our own reasoning and resources. And so, we judge and look through the rigorous Baptist and silently look down on the playful Messiah because they press up against our theory of life. Maybe you have bought into false theories such as your value is derived from your career, a top student, or an respectable parent, or rest is found in a vacation or down time, or that knowing God comes from your intent study and knowing your theology frontwards and backwards. Could it actually be the enslavement to our theory of life which creates our unrest? Might it be that what we think will disrupt our theory of life most might actually instead calm the waters of our unrest? Jesus continues, “[Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds](#)” (Matt. 11:19b). In this imagery, both John and Jesus are displayed as emissaries of God’s wisdom. And, essentially Jesus is saying, “by their fruits you will know them!” In other words, “our message will be confirmed in the lives of those who follow and believe.” Our lives bleed out what is most holy...If it is mere achievement and success, you will be driven and motivated by success – people become a commodity or tools, and life hinges on the next promotion or raise or business venture. If it is acceptance, you will wake and go to bed consumed by people’s thoughts of you – relationships become a way of feeling better about yourself (or worse depending on the circumstances) and your worth hinges on each positive or negative comment. If it is intelligence or ability to appear “right”, then anything that shows us as ignorant or wrong must be discredited or a least minimized. We can’t be wrong because our life hinges on our knowledge. Maybe you find yourself getting “heated” in conversations where you aren’t “winning,” or you cut people off when they are agreeing with you view. Let me ask you this...what might our lives bleed out if the gospel, Christ, was what we hinged upon?

A Call to Repentance

These “[Woe to you \[...\]](#)!”, though perhaps some of the most sobering and serious words of Jesus, weren’t grim cries of vengeance and doom, but calls of warning and compassion. He was sad about the fate they are bringing upon themselves. They had rejected the gospel – the Good News – for lesser things. Choosing to find rest in their false theories of life over the promises of God in Christ Jesus. His cry was one of loving counsel – speaking the truth in love. He desired that they all would turn from their misguided, comfortable evasions of him into repentance and faith in him. You see, their vision of the kingdom of God and coming messiah was one of war and revolution. Metal and blood. The messiah was to return to crush the opposing nations, to destroy any enemies of the children of Israel. He was to be a victorious warrior. Instead...Jesus, the self-declared messiah, was eating, drinking, and being merry. He was saying crazy things like “blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven...blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth...blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy.” They had been so caught up in their own theories and speculations of how the kingdom was going to come that they were blinded to the messiah himself. They were unable to fathom anything else other than what they had been able to think up themselves. And so, John and Jesus were offering a last chance to embrace a different kingdom vision. But, the people couldn’t see it and in turn they didn’t want it. They were too caught up in how it disrupted their way of life and arming themselves with any excuse: “He’s a demon! He’s a glutton and a drunkard!” to evade what was being preached. Let’s not come up with excuses, but grab a hold of God’s kingdom vision this morning! Don’t make Sunday an optional day of reflection on how God has provided for you, what Christ has done, and how you can give thanks to him. To cultivate true rest, make Sunday gatherings a priority. This might mean going for a walk when your out of town, visiting another church, leading your family in devotions – try not to overshadow the rest of the day with work and productivity. If God supplies all good things, then it’s an act of faith to rest in him and say, “God does the work, I will worship and trust him!” Don’t approach Sunday’s as - sleep in, hurry to church, respond in the moment, then your real rest begins when you leave. Instead, wake up early enough to be organized not just for yourself but for the saints and the city. Come engaged. Look and listen for the Spirit’s voice. Some couples even go to lunch right after the gathering in order to discuss what the Spirit might have been speaking to them. Do we dedicate time to remember who Christ is in you, your City Group, the Church, and our city. Think about what you can take with you into the week to ground your identity in him? We have an American Military war chest of excuses for avoiding personal devotion times. Why is it so challenging for us to have daily communion with the Lord? Whether it’s our own sinful nature or it’s Satan fighting against us. The Holy Spirit has empowered us to push back. If you say you don’t have time...I challenge to take inventory of



your week this week, note the moments of silence, the moments when you walk to get a water or cup of coffee, the moments when the kids are down for their nap. Those are just opportunities to get more stuff done or to do nothing; those are moments to commune with the Lord. Don't beat yourself up because you didn't have time to read the Bible for an hour and pray for three. If you like outdoors and being outside let those be times that you allow God's creation to speak to you his wonderful truths and to remind you of his awesome care for you. If you get frustrated with praying because you don't feel like you know what to say – there are prayer books and devotionals that will literally give you words to pray. Just because you didn't think up the words doesn't mean they aren't an overflow from your heart! Christ is saying this morning, stop giving me excuses, stop trying to figure out your way... Repent and open your eyes to me so that you may see who I truly am. [“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” \(Rom. 8:1\)](#). Repentance isn't about condemnation about it's about hope. It's about turning from those things that blinds us in this life and turning to the one who peels the scales from our eyes so that we might walk in newness of life. Repentance calls for a change of direction in the whole of our life. Jesus is calling for a total revolution in the way you live – a change in our whole direction – turning away from sin and unbelief and towards Christ. He pulls you away from your faulty and broken theories of life and gives us the present and future promise of new life – rest in him. Might we all come before the throne of mercy this morning in humble repentance where Jesus sits and proclaims the promise that transcends all our feeble theories of life.

The Promise of Rest

[“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 \[...\]’” \(Matt. 11:25\)](#).

In those days, there was a long tradition of Torah study and piety. It was believed, that the people who dedicated themselves to a life of learning the law and teasing out its finer points were the ones who would become wise and would truly know God. In Jesus days, being the “wise and understanding” was put out of reach for most people as being a famed musician would be today – at least for me.

Jesus was not making wisdom or intelligence a negative here; nor are we to understand that all wise or intelligent people are automatically excluded from his insight. Just as, to be an infant or less intelligent is not actually being commended. N.T Wright says, [“Jesus sliced through all that with a stroke. \[He\] declared: you just need to be a little child. Jesus had come to know his father the way a son does: not by studying books about him, but by living in his presence, listening for his voice, and learning from him as an apprentice does from a master, by watching and imitating. And he was now discovering that the wise and learned were getting nowhere, and that the ‘little people’—the poor, the sinners, the tax-collectors, ordinary folk—were discovering more of God, simply by following him, Jesus, than the learned specialists who declared that what he was doing didn't fit with their complicated theories.”](#) The point is this, the gospel of Christ cuts across our human valuations. The wisdom our Lord asks for does not come from study of books, theories on life, and speculations of the heavenly, however sacred and helpful they may be, but rather from personal abandonment unto him, The Lord of Rest. And so Jesus declares, [“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” \(Matt. 11:28-30\)](#). Jesus clearly did not escape the hard life, but he could experience rest in its midst. Just as he, we are not promised freedom from work, hardship, illness, or even suffering, but we are promised rest in the midst of it – a sustaining grace so that we are not crushed or driven to despair (2 Cor. 4:8–9) – a soulful rest – not just physical rest, but one that invigorates our entire being. The hope and rest which he offers, springs from his own inner character, his gentleness and warmth to all who turn to him, weighed down by burdens moral, physical, emotional, financial or whatever. Have you've burdened by consistent nagging that you don't have life figured out? By the realities of a fallen world which has driven you to overwork or overplay, never really finding the right balance? By the constant temptation to judge those that press up against your theory of life? Whatever it might be, Christ is saying to you this morning, “Give it up your theories of life! Abandon them! Come to me! Trust in me! Live in my presence, listen to my voice, and learn from me, watch me, and imitate me. I will give you rest!” Actually, the original text is better understood as, “Come to me and I will rest you.” He's proclaiming, “I am your rest! He wants to lift the yoke you've been trying to carry for so long off from your shoulders and give you rest in him. Will you put your faith in him and believe this morning?

“Come to me and I will rest you!”