

Rest in Jesus Christ

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Preacher: Wong Yi Khen

[0 : 00] Now, I'm aware that as a church, you've been going through a series called Glorifying God in 2024. And I guess it's good to wrap it up before we're too far into 2024, since it's preparatory, right?

And today we're going to close off that series by looking at how we can glorify God through resting. Now, this might seem a little odd or out of place in this sermon series.

If you think to all the sermon titles that have come before, you know, plan, pursue, magnify, bless, show hospitality, rest.

But yes, rest, right? And today we're going to learn about biblical rest from a very famous passage, the kind of passage that you might find on fridge magnets and mugs.

The kind of passage that everybody loves. But the trouble with these kind of passages is sometimes we take them for granted and we end up not really exploring the full depth of what's being said.

[1 : 09] And you'll notice that actually in our text, Jesus says quite a bit in verses 25 to 27, before he even gets to 28, right? And verses 28 to 30 are what we really love, right?

We're like, we hit straight for it. But if you focus only on verses 28 to 30, it's kind of like going straight for dessert and forgetting everything else.

Okay, so let's not do that today. That's not healthy. Let's learn well. Let's look at all of the text. All right, so before we go ahead, let me pray for us.

Father, thank you for this privilege that we can gather together as your people, that we can look around and see your goodness to us, especially in your people gathered together, that in this life we do not walk alone.

Thank you also that you are with us, that Jesus, you give us many beautiful, assuring promises, and that you are with us.

[2 : 25] As we look at this text where you promise us rest, if we come to you, by your spirit, I pray that you will help us to learn well, help us to be teachable, and help us to leave here, not unchanged, but more worshipful, and more adoring of you, more rested in you, than when we first walked in.

And we commit our time to you, in Jesus' name. Amen. The official distance of a full marathon is 42.195 kilometers.

I'm no marathon runner, but my wife is, she loves running marathons, and I tell you, if you were to run a full marathon, you will definitely be sleeping very deeply after, and probably for quite long.

Now in one sense, this is simple cause and effect, right? You would have put yourself through a very high level of physical unrest over a prolonged period of time, which then leads you to also seek prolonged physical rest.

Now of course, there are limits to any analogy, but we can also apply this logic to begin thinking about our text. If Jesus offers us rest, that tells us that there's something we need rest from.

[4 : 01] And the rest we need is not simply of a physical nature. Jesus says we need rest for our souls. We need a rest that goes much deeper.

See, rest as biblically defined is to be at peace and to be secure. That's a really simple definition. And Jesus says, it's not just a superficial peace or superficial security, but it's one that goes all the way into our souls.

And Jesus says, you can find that in Him. Not only that you can find it in Him, but you can only find true rest in Him.

And that's what we're going to learn. So we're going to examine our passage under three headings. As you see in your bulletin, there should be an outline. Firstly, we'll see what it means to be people who find rest, and we'll see that in verses 25 and 26.

Then we'll focus very briefly on verse 27, about the condition of finding rest, and finally we will explore the relief of Jesus' rest.

[5 : 12] Okay? The people who find rest, the condition for finding rest, and the relief of Jesus' rest. So let's look at our first point, the people who find rest. Now it's important to note that our text today is not isolated from the rest of Matthew 11.

And Matthew's phrase in verse 25, at that time, makes that very clear. It's a part of, a follow-on from what has come before. But we'll deal with the surrounding context as we go through the sermon.

Alright? So, Jesus makes a declaration. He says, I thank you, I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children.

So we need to start by asking, what are, quote-unquote, these things that are hidden from some, but revealed to others? Well, all throughout Matthew, we have seen, you have seen, if you go through Matthew, the announcement of the coming of the kingdom of God.

First announced through John, and then through Jesus. And Jesus' mighty works, as we'll see even in the earlier part of chapter 11, are meant to show that He is the King of this kingdom.

[6 : 32] Who else can heal the sick with just a word? Who else can cast out demons? Who else can teach with unquestionable, unparalleled authority?

The King of the kingdom. That's who He is. And yet, while many people saw these works visibly, very few actually understood the significance of them.

If we look at verses 20 to 24, we read of Jesus actually pronouncing judgment on cities where most of His mighty works had been done, but they didn't repent.

And so, Jesus divides the people into two groups. One group, as we see in our text, He calls the wise and learned. Or other translations say, put it, the wise and understanding.

And the other group, He calls little children. But it's not what you expect. Those who get who Jesus is are called little children, and those who don't get it are called the wise and learned.

[7 : 46] Now, wouldn't you expect the wise and learned to get it? And wouldn't you expect the little children to have a bit more to go to understand?

But this is sarcasm. Who were the wise and learned? In verse 16, Jesus calls out the religious leaders of the day, like the Pharisees and teachers of the law, and He said, and these were the elites.

They were the educated and learned ones. Right? Education nowadays, we can't take it for granted. But these were the elite, the educated, the learned ones, and of all people, you would think that they would understand who Jesus is.

And yet, Jesus calls them a generation who are basically dead set, quite literally, dead set, on rejecting the truth about God's kingdom.

Whether it was proclaimed by John, whose ministry looked one way, or by Jesus, whose ministry looked another way. And the irony is more pronounced if you think about the fact that those who follow Jesus are uneducated Galilean fishermen from a backwater town.

[9 : 03] But these well-learned religious elites are consistently the ones who are most blind to Jesus' identity. To understand what this means, we have to ask what Jesus means by categorizing these two groups of people.

Is he saying that wisdom and understanding are bad things? Is he saying that learning too much theology is bad for you?

You know, should there be a yellow light? Is he saying that everyone who wants to follow him should unscrew their heads and stop asking questions? Is he saying that to follow him is to take a blind leap of faith?

Well, we've certainly heard many Christians who say that, haven't we? Why you ask so many questions? You're doubting your faith, is it? No. Here's the point.

And listen, Jesus is not talking about being childish. he's talking about being childlike. Jesus is not talking about being childish, he's talking about being childlike.

[10 : 22] And one commentator puts it like this, he says, children know they need help and instruction, so they listen. Now, I know that that isn't always the case with kids, all right?

I have nephews and nieces I know, and some of you in here, you're probably giggling because you're like, no, I'm still young enough to not completely get that I need instruction. But to a certain degree, children know that they need help.

They know that mom and dad, no more, are able to provide, and if no food, they won't eat, right? No mom and dad, no food. And mom and dad, no better, right? So ideally, this commentator says, a believer has a child's heart and an adult's head.

You see, the only legitimate posture before an infinitely, supremely wise, all-powerful, all-knowing God is a perpetual, child-like posture of receiving instruction and being teachable.

This is the posture of one who never stops acknowledging their need for help and instruction. And I want to speak to you if you're here and you're not a Christian.

[11 : 39] If you're considering Jesus, would you consider Jesus like a little child, even if that idea is just a little bit offensive right now? Again, the point is not to be childish and throw out rationality and unscrew your head.

But let me ask you, how open are you to considering that this infinitely powerful God might do things in a way that defies your own understanding, your own sensibilities?

Are you ready to accept that there is a God that we cannot see who is infinite, who might confine himself in a human form? Are you open to the truth that perhaps an infinite God might allow himself to be killed?

Are you ready to accept that you've been wrong about your life and what it's all about, even if you've been living this way for 70 years?

children know that they need instruction, they are teachable. Consider Jesus like a little child.

[12 : 57] And if you're a Christian here, let me make this really simple. Are you proud? Are you proud of the fact that you know more than the next person? Right, because you see, often pride is not just about ourselves.

Pride comes when we look at the person on our right and on our left. It's not just knowing a lot, it's knowing more than the next person. Do you think that you've got everything in order?

That you really don't need help from anyone, right, that you can come to church because the Bible commands it, but really you don't need the church and its members, right, if anything, they're lucky to have you. Is that you?

You see, proud people are not ready to receive Jesus' rest. It is the teachable ones, the childlike ones, the ones who say, I've really got nothing in the tank.

Jesus, help me. I really don't know anything apart from you. Jesus, help me. Childlike. But before we move on, let's deal with verse 26 very briefly.

[14 : 04] Jesus says, Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do. Now, what was the Father pleased to do? We see that it is the Father who hides the truth from the wise and learned it, but reveals it to the little children.

It is the Father's initiative. Now, there are some people who really dislike that the Bible teaches this, but it's really quite plain. And without delving into this topic in depth, let me just address one objection because I think it will be helpful in application.

You might be here and you might ask the question, Well, how do I know if I will see the truth about Jesus if it's the Father who hides or reveals it? How can I be responsible then?

Well, the Apostle Paul addresses a similar objection in Romans chapter 9 and if you want to find out more, you can go and read Romans chapter 9. Don't just stop at 9 and only start at 9, but Romans chapter 9 is where he really lays out the argument or you can speak to one of the elders here.

But the point is this. The point is not for us to try and guess who the Father has or will reveal the truth to because that is his prerogative.

[15 : 22] The point is not to try and guess even if it's about you. The question that is more pertinent to ask is, am I still openly considering Jesus?

Am I still teachable before Jesus? Am I still wanting to learn more about him? Am I still willing to be corrected by him? To know ultimately who sees and who doesn't is not our prerogative.

It is the Father's. But we can certainly learn to be like little children and ask the Father to reveal the truth to us. That is who is ready to receive the rest, the peace and soul security of Jesus that he is offering.

Proud people are not ready for Jesus' rest. But now let's look at point two, the condition for finding rest. And like I said, this is going to be a very brief point, but I thought I would treat this separately because I think this is really crucial.

We need to ask the question, why is Jesus the focal point of the Father's revelation and the only way to find rest?

[16 : 39] Why Jesus? Why is he so important? Why is he the only way? And there's one overarching point in verse 27 and it's this, Jesus is the Son of God who has all authority and is the only way to know God the Father.

Jesus is the Son of God who has all authority and is the only way to know God the Father. Let's look at the first big claim. Jesus says, all things have been committed to me by my Father.

All things. There is not one thing that is not Jesus. Everything that the Father has, Jesus has.

All authority that the Father has, Jesus has. And this includes authority over revealing of the Father and the Son of the truth and over salvation. There is no disconnect, there is no misalignment between the Father and the Son.

Their wills are in complete agreement. And what about Jesus' second big claim? 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.

[17 : 56] Jesus is saying that only the Father and the Son have unique and comprehensive knowledge of each other. Now, they do choose to reveal themselves to mankind.

The Bible tells us that if you look around, nature says something about the glory of God. And if you look in the scriptures, God reveals truth about himself to us.

God has to know the Father and the Son. And Jesus says, if you want to know the Father, you must know the Son.

Do you know the Son? But perhaps you're wondering, I thought this sermon was supposed to be about the rest that Jesus offers. Why do you keep telling me about Jesus' identity?

identity? Well, it matters because we shouldn't only know what is being offered, but who offers it. Please don't tell me that you would still stand for another five minutes listening to someone you think is a sleazy salesman.

[19 : 02] You'll walk away, right? The what matters, and the who matters. Because it wouldn't take much, would it, to imagine the religious elites questioning Jesus?

You know, Jesus, who do you think you are? On what basis are you pronouncing judgment on whole cities, calling people to repent, more than what John the Baptist did, by the way?

Why should we believe you? Even today, people might encounter Jesus in the Bible and raise similar doubts. How can Jesus claim to be the only way?

How can he claim to have all truth? On what basis, Jesus, do you say the things you do? Jesus is saying that he is God.

Look at the text. He's claimed to have all authority that God has. He's saying that he alone has a unique inner relationship with God the Father that no one else has. And if anyone wants to know God the Father, they must know God the Son.

[20 : 12] And this is why Jesus can speak and act with all authority because Jesus does not just speak and act on behalf of God.

He speaks and acts as God. There is no other or higher authority to refute him. But more directly related to finding rest, this also helps us understand how Jesus himself can issue the invitation of verse 28.

Because notice he doesn't just say, let me show you a way to find rest in God. He says, come to me for rest.

You see now why it is not just what is being offered, but who offers it? Because we realize they are really not all that different, the what and the who.

Jesus is not a signpost. He is the destination. But before we go on, let me just say something that might offend some people.

[21 : 21] Not because I love offending people, but I think it's necessary. Do you realize what this means? This means that you will not find true rest, this peace and security deep down in the soul anywhere else.

some of us here, we know in our heads that we should find rest in Jesus and if someone were to ask you on the street, where do you find your ultimate rest, you will know the right answer.

But in reality, you are looking to your money, you are looking to your family, to self-help books, to your job and its longevity, or to your health and its longevity.

security. And that is your peace. That is your security. That is the thing which, if it were to be jeopardized, would unravel your life.

And I want to say as gently as I can that you are wrong. Every single one of those things will leave you utterly disappointed.

[22 : 31] You will not find deep, soul-refreshing peace and security in any of those things. As we Malaysians well know now, the value of money can always be held hostage by a turbulent economy and inflation.

As Ben talked about just now, family members can let us down, can't they? Self-help books can keep you busy, but will never give you existential answers.

you can lose your job and that may not be up to you. Or what about when you retire? You default back to money.

Have I built up enough money? An unexpected diagnosis can shatter the illusion that good health lasts. Do you see how every single one of those things is fragile?

well, the only dependable rest must be the rest that God offers. And we can trust that the rest Jesus offers is true rest because he speaks to the Father's authority and he is God.

[23 : 43] His words must be trustworthy. And now, finally, and everyone thinks, finally, let's look at verses 28 to 30. Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Now, the first thing we see is that Jesus' rest is for the weary and burdened. Are you weary and burdened? Do you see how, like we mentioned, those who have a posture of pride cannot possibly be ready for Jesus' rest?

Because proud people do not readily acknowledge their weariness. They bite for a time, but they default to saying, I'll keep going. I've got what it takes.

I'll go by my own strength, thank you very much. But we need to be more specific. In this context, the people were being weary and burdened by what the religious leaders were doing.

[24 : 48] In their so-called wisdom, they went above and beyond the demands of the law and started adding their own man-made traditions to make absolutely very, very, very, very, very, very, very, very sure that nobody broke the law.

They added hundreds of additional laws to keep, and this burdened people greatly. Just think about approaching a junction that you know, but you see a stop sign five kilometers before the junction.

doesn't really make sense. You better bear that in mind for the next five kilometers. Now, it's not difficult to see, right, why living, having to bear in mind a thousand stipulations each day is burdensome.

And you see, in doing so, these religious leaders became blind, and you could say were leading other people to be blind to the one whom the law was pointing to.

Jesus walks among them and says, I am the one who fulfills the law, I am the long-awaited Messiah, and they can't see it. They make it all about their effort, not about God, not about God's salvation.

[26 : 04] And here is where we also begin to understand more deeply why Jesus says we need rest for our souls. Think about it.

Aren't we often like the religious elites? What are your additional measures? Can you honestly say that all the good deeds you do flow out of a completely worshipful heart?

Or is there just a small whisper that goes, oh yeah, look at me, I'm not all that bad, huh? Or when you sin, is your first response really to repent?

Do you say, yes, I've sinned, Lord, I repent, but forgive me because of what Christ has done? Maybe sometimes. But you see, that's the sort of thing we know we ought to do in our heads, but often it ends up being the sort of thing we wished was the thing we most naturally did.

And maybe did a little quicker as well. But we don't do it. What do we do instead? We make up for it. Suddenly we're very nice to people.

[27 : 18] Our smiles get bigger, our laughs get louder, our giving increases maybe. We offer to help around the house more often. What are we doing?

We are trying to prove our own righteousness. We're doing the same thing that the generation of religious leaders are doing. we are effectively denying our need for Jesus by insisting that our efforts are good enough to please God.

And think about it further. Why are we often so anxious and weary? You know, I come from KL where everyone is perpetually anxious and weary by work and traffic and everything.

And it's easy to think that here, you know, it's really not all as hectic as that. But that's not the end of anxiety and weariness. Because when the thing you're most worried about is your own righteousness, not only do you want to prove to yourself that you are a good or nice or moral person, or perhaps that you're a great parent and other people really should acknowledge that, you also fixate on how others view you.

Right? Suddenly a gentle piece of feedback is a personal attack, a simple comment at work becomes a colleague doubting your work ethic, a question from a spouse becomes a criticism.

[28 : 45] This is unrest of the soul. It is the loud, obvious, and jarring sin in our lives, but it is also the constant, unending hum of worry and anxiety in the background.

That small voice that can't stop whispering, could that person have misunderstood me? Did I phrase things just right? Have I shown enough gratitude to that person?

And it never lets us go. Unrest. The religious leaders thought that they could brute force the issue, introduce more laws. They were wrong.

We aren't too different, just keep trying. Well, we are exhausted. We are weary. We need rest. We need to give up on our own efforts and turn to Jesus.

And Jesus does offer us rest. But paradoxically, he offers us a yoke. You know what a yoke is? It was a wooden frame used in agriculture that joined two animals together to pull plows or other agricultural devices.

[29 : 57] It's used for work. Why is Jesus offering us rest by making us work? See, this is the principle. Biblical obedience to God's commands leads to rest.

Rest is not anti-obedience, nor is it passivity in this life. It is biblical obedience. You see, biblical commands and even the law are for our good.

They tell us how we ought to live in a way that pleases God without all the other stipulations and that leads to flourishing in this world. They aren't meant to wear us down, except that our problem is precisely that we fail in our obedience.

That's what sin is. But the additional traditions, the additional stipulations of religious leaders were wearying and burdensome because they weren't from God. And that's why it's not like there suddenly aren't any commands to follow under Jesus.

There are commands, that's why it's still a yoke, but Jesus says it's an easy and light one. And it's also not that Jesus demands a lower standard of morality. In fact, it seems like Jesus raises the bar.

[31 : 16] Just read the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 5, 21, 22, for example, you have heard it said to people long ago, you shall not murder and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment. But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment.

What about Matthew 5, 20? For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

It's not that Jesus is lowering the moral standard or bar in any way. Jesus says that his yoke is easy and his burden is light because his yoke is not about enforcing obedience to receive God's acceptance.

It is about receiving God's forgiveness and acceptance to empower our obedience. By Jesus' atoning work on the cross, we receive forgiveness for our failure to obey God's commands and therefore we can live without the fear and anxiety of trying to meet the standard.

We can obey God's commands and truly experience the rest and flourishing that they bring. The Christian life is one of joyful obedience.

[32 : 33] Christians are people who don't need to be forced to obey. We don't. And we shouldn't. And more than that, think about the language of the yoke.

Who are we yoked to? Are we alone? Jesus is giving us a picture of being yoked to him. And this is a great promise that as we live in this world, as we strive to obey him joyfully in the midst of a dark and troubled world, he will be right there with us.

And we can be reminded of Matthew 28 at the end where he says, all authority similarly, all authority has been given to me, all authority in heaven and earth, and surely I'll be with you to the end of the age.

Jesus is with us. He is right there with us. More than that, we're told to learn from him. Not only have we received grace for our disobedience, we have seen perfect obedience embodied and lived out for us in Jesus Christ.

And that's why elsewhere, Christian maturity is described as becoming increasingly Christ-like. You know, as we read the Gospels and as we read historical accounts of faithful Christians before us, we get a picture of what we are working towards.

[33 : 53] Not ultimately human beings, they are examples, but they point us to Jesus and they show us how obedience is beautiful. So, dear Christian, don't shun God's commands.

They are for our good. But acknowledge your failure to obey and lay down the burden of your striving. Lay down your measures. Stop trying to save yourself.

Receive the grace and forgiveness of Jesus and joyfully obey him. Not only in 2024, but to the end of your lives. But you know, maybe you're wondering, since Jesus' commands are not any easier than the law, we fail that one.

Won't we fail again? How do I know that Jesus' offer of forgiveness, grace, and rest will be open to me even when I fail in this life?

Even after I have put my faith in him and believed him and trust in him, I am inconsistent, I fail. How do I know that Jesus won't one day say, you know what, forget it.

[35 : 07] Even after all I've done, you still mess up. Will Jesus' grace and forgiveness last even amidst our failures? In Psalm 38, verse 4, we read this striking account of sin.

And King David writes of his sin, for my iniquities have gone over my head, it's a picture of being overwhelmed by sin, like a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me.

Whether you are a believer in Jesus Christ today, or whether you are not a Christian, isn't that a pretty good description of our sin?

That it is a heavy burden that is too heavy for us. Don't you wish that it was lifted? I want you to look back more than 2,000 years at a man walking on a lonely road to die.

His back is bent over by the burden of a wooden cross. He stumbles on his way because of the weight that he bears, and on the cross he dies. And some would say of Jesus' crucifixion that it was sheer gravity that killed him, which is how execution by the Roman cross worked, but we know that it was the gravity of our sin that killed Jesus.

[36 : 37] Jesus will not change his mind because he didn't just pay the price of our sin in some vague or incomplete way. He died for our sin.

He took our place. The burden of sin crushed us, but Jesus has lifted our burdens by taking them upon himself. And on the cross he hangs with that burden until he dies.

Do you see how this frees us and gives us rest? The burden is gone. The burden of sin has been taken off because it has been taken on by another.

We can rest in the work of Christ that saves us. We are free from the burden of sin, free from guilt, free to enjoy the rest that obedience to God's good commands bring. And this is true rest of the soul.

Acknowledge your failures, lay down your burdens, trust in Jesus, know the Father, find rest for your soul, obey God's good commands. And one day we will enter God's perfect and beautiful new creation that will far outshine anything in this world and any trouble we could possibly go through.

[37 : 51] rest for the soul. Let's pray. Father, thank you for your word that shows us that we are not, you did not leave us alone to live with our burden of sin, to live with our catastrophic failures, but also with the hum of anxiety knowledge that we fail and are inconsistent.

Thank you that you gave your son to die in our place, to take our burdens on him, the burden of our sin, and we are free.

And we have hope that will last to the end because Jesus didn't stay there, he rose again, and we follow him. we will see your glory face to face. Lord, we look forward to that day.

Help us to rest in your forgiveness and grace and joyfully obey you, not just in this year, but for all our lives. Help us by your spirit. We love you and we adore you.

In Jesus' name, Amen.