

New Beginnings

Matthew 11:28-29

I. Introduction

- A. Religion is a killer. It makes a person tired. Every single religion in world history, outside of Christianity, is dependent upon the effort of its individual adherents to make them right with God.**
- B. If you are going to find “salvation” or “enlightenment” within Islam, Hinduism Buddhism or any other religion then you are going to work for it and work very, very hard to achieve it.**
- C. Unfortunately, this kind of thinking has seeped into a lot of what passes for orthodox Christianity. **It does so with a line of thinking that goes something like this, “You are saved by God’s grace through your faith in Jesus and His work on the Cross. Now that you are saved, go and make sure you live a life of good works to make sure God stays happy with you and you stay saved.”****
- D. We may not voice such thoughts but if you look at many believers their “walk with God” resembles more of a job than joy. Their right standing with God seems more**

dependent upon their will power than any relationship with Jesus.

- E. There are a lot of people who are still striving and desperately trying to earn what Jesus gave them on the Cross...salvation and right standing with God.
- F. Are you working hard to keep God off your back? Do you feel like you are just one step ahead of the paddle on the derriere?
- G. Are you like Martin Luther who pictured God holding him by a string over the pit of hell, waiting for an opportunity to to cut said string with the scissors which He held in His other hand?
- H. How do you picture the relationship between yourself and God? Why? The answer is the difference between life, death, joy, despair, peace and war within.**
- I. We tend to complicate our life and our relationship with God is no stranger to such complications. **And because of this there are many, perhaps even most, believers in Christ, actual Christians, who are walking wounded, tired and miserable.**

J. These are the folks who love God and are desperate for intimacy with Him but can't seem to find the right formula to make that happen. They work hard, pray long and work their hearts out in vain attempts to garner God's favor, power and reward.

K. They are the holy exhausted among us and it is high time for such folks to get some rest. And that is the word Jesus speaks to all of us this morning in Matthew 11. Come to me and get some rest!

I. Come to Me

A. Jesus says "Come to Me" but who is He talking to? Not everybody. This is a word to a specific group of people within the sound of His voice. He was talking to those who labor and are heavy laden. The people Jesus called out to were those living under the burden of the pharisees and their schemes of how to be pleasing to God.

B. The Pharisees had developed a system of 613 laws, 365 negative commands and 248 positive laws...By the time Christ came it had produced a heartless, cold, and

arrogant brand of righteousness. As such, it contained at least ten tragic flaws. (1) New laws continually need to be invented for new situations. (2) Accountability to God is replaced by accountability to men. (3) It reduces a person's ability to personally discern. (4) It creates a judgmental spirit. (5) The Pharisees confused personal preferences with divine law. (6) It produces inconsistencies. (7) It created a false standard of righteousness. (8) It became a burden to the Jews. (9) It was strictly external. (10) It was rejected by Christ.

C. The labor referred to all of the legalistic effort on the part of the religious who were attempting to find God's favor through their activity and rule keeping.

D. The modern equivalent to this would be those who keep a list of do's and don'ts and believe it is on the basis of their moral goodness that they find relationship and favor with God.

E. If your religion feels like a job...hard labor...you're doing something terribly wrong and Jesus says come on over to me and let's fix the problem.

F. Legalism is a heavy load and it will weigh you down terribly.

G. I was talking to me cardiologist one afternoon after my annual stress test...we began to talk about my desire to jog like I did in my early 30's. I told him of how in awe I was of those who could run great differences, doing half and full marathons. To which he replied, "They can do what seems amazing to you because they are not lugging around the extra 40 pounds which you take with you on each mile you jog."

H. When you carry a burden it makes you tired, slows you down and in many cases makes the ordinary faith filled life of believers around you seem extraordinary. If we will shed the legalism for a relationship with God by faith alone we will become part of the extraordinary as well.

I. I cannot imagine running a half marathon but if 222 pound James could become 182 pound James I could begin to see possibility.

J. As long as we are depending upon legalism and self as a formula for our relationship and right standing with God we will be exhausted.

K. You and I don't have to stay this way. We don't have to live out of a heart of obligation and remain weary. There is a better way...

I. The Way

A. Early Christians were said to be "followers of the way." This was just the early vernacular for those who followed Christ.

He is the *way*, truth and life!

B. If we become followers of Jesus He will show us a different way of living from the religious ideas born in the theories and philosophies of man.

C. Come to Jesus, He will give you rest...when you take up His yoke and follow Him...

D. This seems to be a contradiction on the surface...We are supposed to find rest by putting on a yoke? How is this possible? Well we Americans believe this because we are not farmers and we even those who are have likely never farmed with oxen.

E. In that day and time the yoke had a place for the head of two animals to occupy. They would each put their head

into the yoke so that they could pull the plow or wagon to which the plow or wagon was connected.

F. Jesus is saying, come put your head in the yoke which I already occupy...I will pull the cart...I will pull the plow... you can rest and simply enjoy walking with me while I do the work.

G. Jesus doesn't want or need our help to do the work...He simply wants us to stay His presence...have a relationship with Him and enjoy being a part of the work He is doing.

H. Does this sound like your life in Christ? Are you walking with Jesus while He does the heavy lifting? Are you enjoying His presence and the work He is doing with and through you? OR are you languishing in the idea that you have to do the plowing? That you have a lot to do for Jesus and the work is hard?

I. Learn

A. When we take the yoke of Jesus we become His...It is the moment of salvation when we give our life to Jesus and enter into His life.

- B. **From that moment on we are disciples.** This is what Jesus was saying to the heavy laden...come be one of my disciples...and **when you do this you will learn who I am... and upon learning this you will see my character and purposes for you**
- C. **Gentle and Humble** — Jesus is gentle and humble...He is kind, loving and has our best interest in mind...He has come down to us so that we may be raised up...He is doing the work to lift us up to Himself...He does the work!
- D. **Rest** — Cessation of labor...the work is stopped
- E. Jesus is crying out to these people...His heart breaks for them...He sees they are burdened down with legalism... attempting to find God through themselves
- F. **He cries out, “come learn who I am!” Come discover the character of the God you strive to meet...and when you do you will realize I love you and intend to do what you cannot do for yourself...bring you up to God and make you a part of my life...allow you to be a part of what I am doing in the world in which you live.**

I. Conclusion

- A. Our life in Christ should never feel like a burden. It should be a joy. **The problem today is too many pulpits and people in the pew have fallen victim to moral deism and legalism.**

The belief that God is simply about making you moral and it is by your morality that you have relationship with Him.

- B. One of my favorite stories comes from a man who was a youth worker many years ago in an ethnic community, he attended a church that had Scandinavian roots. Being a rather forward-looking and creative young man, he decided he would show the youth group a missionary film. We're talking simple, safe, black-and-white religious-oriented movie. That film projector hadn't been off an hour before a group of the leaders in the church called him in and asked him about what he had done. They asked, "Did you show the young people a film?" In all honesty he responded, "Well, yeah, I did." "We don't like that," they replied. Without trying to be argumentative, the youth worker reasoned, "Well, I remember that at the last missionary conference, our church showed slides--" One of the church officers put his hand up signaling him**

to cease talking. Then, in these words, he emphatically explained the conflict: "If it's still, fine. If it moves, sin!" You can show slides, but when they start movin', you're gettin' into sin.

- C. How many have been turned away and lost because they believed Christianity to be nothing more than the moral opinions of men
- D. Some will ask...are you preaching lawlessness? Are you saying we can simply pray a prayer, confess to have faith in Jesus and live however we want from that confession until we face God in Heaven?**
- E. I have never known anyone who genuinely received Christ as Savior who lacked desire to follow Him and live a life that is pleasing to Him. A life pleasing to God is one lived by faith...walking with Him...in His Yoke...**
- F. If you are walking with Jesus...with your head in His yoke...you are not going to stray into wilderness and find yourself in sin and trouble.**
- G. We do what we do, we are moral and righteous because we love God and walk with Him by faith.