

Resting in the Freedom of the Lord

7-31-11

Jesus said: “**Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest**” in *Matthew 11:28*. In verse 30, He goes on to say “My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.” How is it that Jesus talks about being “yoked” and carrying “burdens” in the same breath where He talks about giving us rest? Understanding this paradox is one of the keys to learning to walk in the fullness of the freedom of the Lord. “If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed” (*John 8:36*).

The first Biblical mention of “rest” is found on the seventh day of creation, when the Lord rested from all the work of creation (*Gen. 2:2*). The Hebrew root for the word rest is *savah*, which means “to be full or satisfied”, or to “have enough of.” The word “seven” is rooted in this same word, and the meaning of the number seven throughout Scripture is “fullness” or “completion.” Somehow resting in the Lord, especially on the seventh day, is connected with having a sense of fullness or completion. Certainly, on a personal level, it is easier to rest when we experience the satisfaction of having done a good week’s work and our stomachs are full. But what does this mean spiritually speaking?

Old Testament teachings about the Sabbath are instructive. The Sabbath (*Shabbat*, in Hebrew, also rooted in the word *savah*) was set apart as holy by the Lord. It is the very first thing God made holy, before the Tabernacle, the Psalms or the Bible itself! Jewish tradition holds that God established a sanctuary in time—the Sabbath—even before He gave Moses instructions to build the sanctuary in space, the tabernacle. If there’s one thing we all could benefit from today, surely is experiencing a sanctuary in time!

Keeping the Sabbath became the Fourth Commandment, part of the *moral* law rather than the religious or ritual laws God gave Moses. This points to deeper meaning connected with our ability to live morally effective lives. Can it be that without rest we fall short of becoming proper vessels for God’s grace to permeate His Creation? *Exodus 31:13* and *16* tell us the Sabbath was to be a sign for all generations and a perpetual covenant, something not to be ignored! Failure to keep the Sabbath was punishable by death. God was saying that failure to observe the appointed rest in Him will lead to death rather than eternal life.

Jesus expanded the meaning of the Sabbath, as He did with so many Old Testament traditions. Often He appeared to break Sabbath rules, as when he gleaned grain for food with his disciples on the Sabbath because they were hungry (*Mark 2:23*), or when he healed a blind man with His spittle (*John 9*), or healed a paralytic and instructed Him to pick up his mat and carry it (*John 5:7*). All of these involved apparent infractions of rabbinical prohibitions for working on the Sabbath, but note that exceptions to these rules are recorded in the Talmud which suggest Jesus was not so much breaking the rules as he was challenging narrow-minded interpretations of what was prohibited. Remember, He said He had not come to destroy the Law but to fulfill it. *Matt. 5:17*.

Jesus taught us that the Sabbath was made for man, and the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath (*Mark 2:27-28*). God did not establish the Sabbath to be a burden for us, but a blessing. Jesus, Himself, is the sovereign of the rest God has made available to us.

Hebrews 4:1-11 lifts our understanding of the Sabbath to a whole new level. Quoting *Psalms 95* (which is read every Sabbath by religious Jews), the author of *Hebrews* writes: “there remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His.” The key to entering this rest is to cease from our works, mix the Word of God with faith (*Heb 4:2*), and not harden our hearts when we hear the Word. “**Today**, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts” (*Heb 4:7*, quoting *Psalms 95:8*, which continue: “as in the rebellion, as in the day of trial in the wilderness.”) To insist on doing things our own way, without listening to God, without mixing faith with God’s Word, is as the sin of rebellion which leads to death in the wilderness rather than entry into God’s Promised Land of milk, honey and rest!

We are to rest in the Lord **today**, every day! Resting in the Lord is tapping into God’s purposes in real time. This requires learning to sense a living connection with God through Jesus, also in real time. It requires development of our spiritual faculties of perception, which comes by practice (*Heb 5:14*). The process of resting in the Lord begins the day we are born again, but never ends as we learn to hear, trust and obey God more and more. Out of the fullness of this walk comes deep satisfaction and a sense of completion of who we are meant to be, which is the ultimate Sabbath rest! Resting in the Lord enables us to carry burdens lightly, yoked to Jesus, as His Kingdom increases throughout the earth Today, each day.