

## Series: Embracing a Radical Faith

VBC

Pastor John Johnson

Matthew 11:28-30

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### “God’s Invitation to Rest”

I love the words of Anna Quindlen this time of year—  
“Summer is coming—I can feel it in the air. Downtime, where we become ourselves, looking into the middle distance, kicking at the curb, lying on the grass or sitting on the stoop and staring at the tedious blue of the summer sky, exploring the inside of our heads...doing nothing in order to do our best thinking”-  
Anna Quindlen

But Jesus had the best word for rest—Matt 11:28-30

- there are three things that Jesus says about rest—

#### **1-REST IS A DESPERATE NEED**

- that Jesus gave this invitation suggests He saw a tired world

A) People who were weary, tired, stressed—overwhelmed, facing the pressures of life

B) People weighted down with more than they could carry-life had become a grind

- there were lots of reasons in this context—

1) the weight of a religious system that stacked one religious rule and regulation on top of another

- Jesus described its leaders as those who “tie up heavy loads that are hard to carry—but they themselves aren’t willing to lift a finger”-  
23:4

2) the weariness of living under Roman domination

- Israel went 400 years w/o a vacation under Pharaoh—and exchanged their identity as persons for units
- Herod built seven palaces for himself—not to mention mammoth projects-aqueducts, roads, fountains, temples
- and Israel again became a system of units

Things haven't changed much--our world is still a place where rest is a desperate need

1-people tired from a life of meaninglessness—eyes glazed over, ears dulled by endeavors that make no ultimate sense

2-people tired from the constant demands, expectations—the incessant schedule

- rest has become a hit and run casualty on the road to success

3-lives weary of ongoing grief-Ps 69:3-“I am weary from my crying”

- some carry the weight of an ongoing sadness

4-there us the weariness of information overload-“much study wearies the body”-Ecc. 12:12

- there is an endless universe of knowledge that compels us to stay online, checking our latest hits on e-harmony, the latest offer from Kindle, the latest post
- overcrowding the cranium with flak

5-some are weary from ongoing conflict, fighting-“my eyes grow old because of my enemies”-Ps 6:7

- life with a spouse, a kid, a parent is draining

6-there is a tiredness that even comes from doing good—Paul could see this and encouraged the Galatians-“Be not weary in well doing”-Gal 6:9

7-a fatigue that comes from anxiety

- fed by the constant news of fires and floods and terrorists and economic woes

8-the exhaustion of over connection

- thanks in part to technology that has made it both possible to stay constantly plugged in
- time and distance no longer provide buffers; former boundaries are gone
- we have made it easy for one to always be on-
- the phone is vibrating, a text message is coming in, e-mails are piling up—and we're too tired for what really matters
- “we gather impressions but have no experiences, collect acquaintances but have no friends”-D.T. Niles

9-the weariness of constant want

- every day is a new onslaught of messages telling us to buy—that now is the lowest price of the season

10-the weariness to constantly perform

- we're only as good as our last product, last paper, last piece of art, last sermon, last innovation
- (reading the story of Howard Schultz and Starbucks wears me out—the constant need to satisfy shareholders, customers—outthink the competition)
- this isn't the way it is supposed to be!
- someone give us rest—this is what Jesus is saying—

**2-REST IS WHAT WE FIND IN GOD**

- throughout Scripture—we find that rest is what He does—what He offers, honors
- even what He commands-Heb 4:11-be diligent to enter into My rest
- 11:28 tells us—if you want the actual experience of rest—it begins with accepting His invitation to come to Him—wherein He promises to give rest...

A) Sometimes it is a TIME OUT

- He does that at times-takes us out of the action
- did this with the disciples-Mk 6:31-"Come away by yourselves to a remote place and rest a while"
- there are times when one must unstring the bow before an inner drought of the soul takes hold
- Usher warns--"the inability to pause has a way of shrinking people—fuzzing the fine lines of balance"
- but what Jesus is offering in this passage is something more substantive

B) A Rest that is MORE THAN A TIME OUT-IT IS AN ONGOING WAY OF LIFE

- a rest we were designed to enter into and live
- a rest for the soul that is an alternative to life as it is with all of its burdens
- life as God intended in His kingdom
- but how do we find such rest?

**3-REST COMES ONLY WHEN WE GET UNDER HIS YOKE**

- the language Jesus uses makes little sense on the surface
- for a yoke is a work instrument
- like saying—come—take My shovel, My pick ax

- rest by its very definition implies freedom from work
- freedom from restraint--from movement, activity, labor
- “a state characterized by minimal function, motionless inactivity”- Webster
- it would make more sense if Jesus said—“Take up My mattress, My hammock and let us escape”
- instead, Jesus uses “yoke”—a wooden bar or frame attached to an animal in order for it to pull a load
- enable a master to confine, control, direct, force his will
- as a metaphor—it is almost always used to speak of something oppressive—forcibly put on
- God warned Israel that if it refused to listen to His voice—“an iron yoke will be placed on your neck until you are destroyed”-Dt 28:48
- Jeremiah wore a yoke as a sign of what life would soon be like under the Babylonians
- Peter, at the Jerusalem council—“Why are you testing God by putting on the disciples necks a yoke we have not been able to bear?”
- yet in this passage—yoke actually speaks of something liberating—this severe connection is a gift

1-for under His yoke, in His harness, we learn things about Him-He is gentle, humble of heart

2-we discover that what we assumed would be a burden is actually light and actually kind

3-that what we thought would exhaust us actually leads us to what we have been looking for—replenishment, restoration for our souls

How is this so?

A-His yoke constrains us to walk in HIS PEACE

- a flourishing, a wholeness
- and unyokes us from the yoke of worry
- we can cast every care upon Him-I Pet 5:7
- He promises to provide our needs-Phil 4:19
- He gives us the strength for every challenge-Isa 41:10
- He takes on our sins—and does battle with sin—which is aimed to violate shalom, spoil our peace
- we begin to rest emotionally and mentally from things that cause stress, restlessness

B-His yoke constrains us to walk at HIS PACE

- His cadence, His tempo
- and unyokes us from the yoke of hurry and flurry-and life generally out of control

C-His yoke constrains us to walk according to HIS RHYTHM

- and unyokes us from the yoke of always living at high tide
- frees us from losing sense of proportion
- brains going loopy
- under His yoke, He insists on high tide/low tide
- on/off open/closed
- time in the field—time in the barn—which we need
- “Over connectivity can leave us with bits and pieces of everything rather than experiencing the full substance of anything”-Barton
- the silence and solitude of low tide give God’s Spirit time and space to do His deep work
- in such a way His word infiltrates our souls, messes with our wills, disturbs our assumptions, confronts us, chases away our anxieties, and restores our hearts

D-His yoke constrains us to submit to HIS IMPORTANCE

- and unyokes us from the yoke of self-importance
- believing we always have to be on top of things, always performing, always competing
- under His yoke—we see with greater clarity the limits of our humanness
- we learn that He is infinite and we are finite
- we see the need for trust
- that each day is about stepping into His will—not ours

E-His yoke constrains us to walk within HIS GRACE

- and unyokes us from the yoke of dis-grace
- from working to earn approval, demonstrate worth
- from “this is what you have to do to earn My love” to this is what I done so that you can live within My love
- He rests us from a work underneath our work we really need rest from

F-His yoke constrains us to walk according to HIS TIME

- and unyokes us from the yoke of our time
- we tend to live under chronos—calendar, day timer, schedule—that is always consuming, demanding, driving us
- under God’s yoke—time becomes more about kairos moments
- shifts from ‘what time is it?’ to ‘what is this time for?’

CONCLUSION

Spencer—walks-the harness became a game—what he wanted most he also at times ran from

- but he eventually submitted—because it gave him what he wanted most—a certain rest
- it’s the same with Jesus
- sometimes we—the church—need this most

- we can easily—if we are not careful—leave more weighted down this before we walked in
- live on a treadmill of good deeds—as if it is some badge of honor—missing this rest that is part of His kingdom
- ARE YOU EXPERIENCING HIS REST?