

Christ, Our Only Rest

by Edward Manning

The sermon emphasizes the importance of finding rest in Christ, and highlights the causes of our restlessness, such as our forgetfulness of the condition for rest and our choice of a false happiness.

Scripture: Psalm 37:4, Psalm 51:10, Matthew 5:3, Matthew 11:28, Luke 10:41, 1 John 1:9

Topics: "Christian Rest", "Spiritual Freedom"

Description

Edward Manning preaches about the compassionate invitation of Jesus to those who are burdened and weary, offering rest and peace to their souls. He emphasizes the need to come to Jesus, learn from Him, and take on His yoke to find true rest and forgiveness. Manning highlights the struggles faced by both sinners and those burdened by worldly cares, pointing out that true happiness and fulfillment can only be found in Christ. He urges the congregation to choose a life devoted to Christ boldly and persevere in their commitment, promising that in Him they will find ultimate freedom, strength, and happiness.

Transcript

"Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me: for I am meek and lowly in heart: and you shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Matthew 11:28-30.

With these gracious promises our blessed Lord drew to Him the people who were toiling and struggling with the burdens of this saddened and sinful world. He beheld not only sinners, but many a good man wearying himself in vain. Among those to whom He spoke, He saw, besides those that were heavy laden with their own sins, many who were burdened with evil traditions and unmeaning customs, who were fainting under the yoke which had been laid upon them as a schoolmaster to bring them unto Christ.

He promised them rest, if they would come, and learn, and take on them His yoke- that is, if they would obey and follow Him, if they would believe and be like Him. Many there were, as Andrew and Levi, who gave up their former ways, and all that they had, and made the trial, and found the promise true. They found rest in forgiveness and a quiet mind, in a heart chastened to a holy calm, and in the hope of their Master's kingdom. Now what He promised them when He was seen by men on earth, He has both promised and fulfilled, ever since from heaven.

By His unseen Spirit He has ever been in the world--pleading, drawing, persuading men to take His easy yoke. This He has done by His Church in all the earth. Among all nations He has gone, offering rest to

every weary soul. Who can tell what has ever been the ineffable yearning of the heathen world; what tumultuous cries of spiritual sorrow have been heard in the ears of God? There has ever been among them the voice of conscience, and the sting of guilt, and the fears of defenseless purity, and the remorse of conscious sin.

Without a doubt, among the myriads of eternal beings who thronged the face of the earth at Christ's coming, there were tens of thousands who felt higher and purer aspirations, who sighed and strove for light and truth in the dark and stifling bondage of heathenism. And to these, in due season, Christ in His Church went preaching, as "to spirits in prison," bringing the balm of meekness, and the peace of a lowly heart. When they heard Him, they were drawn to Him by an irresistible persuasion.

They had found what in darkness they longed for--and all the needs and miseries of their being clung to His healing touch. They were "refreshed with the multitude of peace." And not only so, but within the Church itself, and to this day, Christ ever calls, in these soft, persuasive words, "Come unto me, all you that are weary and heavy laden." It is not only among the unregenerate spirits of men, but among those also who have been born again by His gracious working, that He finds toiling and burdened hearts.

As He stands in the midst of His Church, and beholds our daily life, and all the hurrying to and fro of weary and restless spirits, He sees and pities our blind infirmities: for many are His by baptism, who have never deeply learned of Him; many know him in word, who have never borne His yoke; many have seemed to draw near, who have found no rest unto their souls. For instance, He sees among us the very same kinds of men as among the Jews--sinners "laden with sins"--men conscious of guilt, hating the sin for its after-agonies, but yielding to its momentary bait.

The throes and torments of Christian men are worse even than the terrors of the heathen or the Jew. For Christians know of life and immortality: to them Tophet and Gehenna are no parables, but well-known and horrible realities. No tongue of man can tell the scourge, and fear, and suffocating burden of guilt seen in the light of an illuminated conscience. And this is all around us, among baptized men. It is the cause of their stubbornness in sin, because it is the root of their despair.

But, besides these, there are men of a worldly heart, who weary themselves day and night in the round of gain or selfishness, "lading themselves with thick clay;" early and late full of care--with furrowed brows and withered hearts; wearing a false cheerfulness, being sick in their inmost soul. This world fairly frets such a man's heart through and through; to him the world is overgrown, and all its cares are swollen to an unnatural greatness. He has no sight of the unseen world, to check and balance the visible world; and therefore to him this world is all things.

Hence come foolish choices, and inordinate cravings, and bitter disappointments. I am not speaking of men who are so greedy of gold as to pass into a proverb; but of a common sample of men, whose aim in life is to gain no more than an ordinary measure of wealth, or to rise, as they say, to fitting places of dignity and power. If you could read the inner life of such men, you would, find their minds wound up to an incessant and unrelieved stretch, which is ever at the highest pitch.

At last it makes them weary of themselves, and they break down in bitterness or imbecility. There is also all the aching of disappointment, and the irritation of rivalry, and the fear of discontentment, and the foresight of unpitied falls; and well is it if there is not also the hidden smouldering of an angry jealousy, and the wincing soreness, which ambitious and envious minds feel at the very name of a successful neighbor. What burden heavier than this dead world bound about the heart of man? what yoke more galling than a

restless, craving spirit?

And, once more; there are others who are not less truly laboring in vain, though they know it not: I mean, those that are making personal happiness their aim in life. There are many who ply this unprofitable, disappointing trade. I am not speaking of sensualists, or empty-hearted followers of this vain-glorious world; but of grave and thoughtful people, whose theory of life is the pursuit of individual happiness. They look forward, as a matter of course, to certain great acts and stages of life, as to things predetermined by a customary law.

Oftentimes, indeed, their aims and desires are very reasonable; sometimes sadly commonplace. They choose out, for instance, some of life's purer fountains, running through a broken cistern, at which to slake their thirst to be happy. There is something lacking--something without which their being is not full. They take, it may be, many ways of meeting this craving of their hearts; but diverse as are their schemes, their aim is all one--they have a predominant desire to be happy, and to choose their own happiness; and therefore they are full of disappointments, perpetually wounded on some side, which they have laid bare to the arrows of life.

The treacherous reed is ever running up into the hand that leans on it. They are ever giving hostages, as it were, to this changeful world, and ever losing their dearest pledges; and so they toil on, trying to rear up a happiness around them, which is ever dropping piecemeal, and, at last, is swept away by some chastening stroke; and then, no wiser than before, they set themselves, with a bruised and chafing heart, to weave the same entanglements again. From what has been said, it follows plainly: First, that all our unrest and weariness is in and of ourselves.

It is either the slavery of some tyrannous sin, or the scourge of an impenitent memory, or the indulgence of some fretful, implacable temper, or some self-flattering and sensitive vanity, some repining discontent at what we are, or some impotent straining after what God has not willed us to be, or some hungering for an earthly happiness, with all the chill and faintness of heart which arises from the ever-present consciousness that what we crave for, even though we had it, would fail to satisfy.

Besides all these, the weary recurrence of night and day, laboriously spent in toiling on towards an end they never reach--these, I say, and only these, or such like, make men weary and desolate. If they would only burst through this thralldom of indulged faults, or break the spell of this cheating, benumbing world, they would soon find rest to their souls. But so long as they run on in the ring of evil or vain desires, God will not give them rest; no, if He would give it, they would soon barter it away for some exciting pleasure.

Once more; we may learn that it is only in Jesus that we can find rest; that is, it is only by learning of Him, yielding ourselves up to Him, and living for Him, that we can find release from the causes of our disquiet, or rest for the deep cravings of an immortal being. The main and original fault in all our toiling after rest is this: we forget that peace with God, and the purification of our own nature, is the absolute condition to our ever reaching it. Here men stumble on the very threshold; and, here it is that Christ will have us make the first step.

"Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart." The first step to rest is, to have forgiveness in the blood-shedding of Christ, and to have His mind renewed in us. It is thus that we are delivered from ourselves. Even though men should gain all they labor after, yet without this, happiness would be as far off as ever; it would fly before them as the horizon, which they are ever following after, but never reach. In the very midst of success, the bitterness of the fallen nature would rise to the surface, and

taint all the joy.

How uneasily does a cheerful look sit upon the face of the happiest worldly man! how soon it fades, and the settled aspect of uncertainty return and overcast his brow! There is a worm that dies not, at the root of all--a "sorrow of the world," which "works death." It is only the virtue that goes out from Christ that can disinfect us of our natural sadness. Nothing but a devout life of repentance and self-discipline at the foot of His cross can avail to free us from ourselves.

Seek, then, forgiveness, and the gift of a broken heart. Ask of Him the words of peace--"Your sins be forgiven you;" and the words of purity--"I will; be clean." He will lay on you that sweet yoke, of which He spoke in the mountain: Blessed are the poor in spirit, the mourners, the meek, the hungry and thirsty for righteousness, the merciful, the poor, the peacemakers, the persecuted. He will change your inward soul by His purifying breath. As you fall down before Him, He will lift upon you the light of His countenance, which transfigures all on whom it falls into the likeness of Himself.

Be sure that in Him only can the deep cravings of our immortal being find enough to really satisfy them. He has so made man's heart for Himself, that it is ever restless until it finds rest in Him. This is the master-key to all earthly disappointments. Men choose a false, cheating happiness, instead of a true one. They choose things which have nothing akin to their immortal nature. All earthly things are too lifeless and dull for the heart of spiritual beings. Something higher and purer, more intimate and searching, is needed for a regenerate man: for only a part, and that the lower, of his reasonable being is affected by the fullest earthly happiness; and when men have chosen even the best of earthly things, the purest and highest--such as intellectual employments, or domestic happiness--they find it variable and fleeting.

It wears dull, or soon changes to a cloyed satiety. There is an ever-springing care, and a chilling anxiety, which pierces through all such happiness at its best. Even when God is not forgotten, it is not enough; and without Him it is all an exciting and empty dream. Oh that men would learn of the Psalmist! "Delight yourself in the Lord; and He shall give you the desires of your heart." It is not for man to choose happiness as the end of life--but God: to delight in God, and then none of his desires shall fail.

As they are all laid up in God, so he has them all fulfilled. If it be good for him to be happy, he shall have happiness; if not, it is happiness to him to lack what God in love withholds. But God would have all men happy. As He has no pleasure in the death of a sinner, so He has none in people's sadness. He would have you to be happy, but not in your way. The time and the manner He reserves in His own power. Happiness is not a thing inherited by the rich alone--the poorest may have it better; nor is it only for those who have many and dear friends about them--the loneliest may have it in a deeper, though a severer measure; for happiness is an inward boon; it is shed abroad secretly in the heart by the love of Christ.

Those who have chosen Him, above all others have chosen well. He is enough, though they hardly feel it: though their affections crave about, like a flickering flame, for nearer and palpable things. Therefore let us choose boldly. Some choice you must have. Even the most wavering have a preference, which to them is equal to a choice. A thousand other forms beckon to us with promises of rest; but only He can give it. Choose rather to sit at His feet than to be at ease, or rich, or high, or prosperous, or full of bright earthly hopes.

Yes, choose rather to sit in loneliness before Him, than to dwell in the happiest throng where He holds the second place. Life is very short; and the world to come already dawns upon us. Brethren, choose boldly a life devoted to Christ. Be His above all; be His only. Hear the Church saying, "My Beloved is mine, and I

am His." The world holds you but by a thread; you may snap it in twain, and in the settled though hidden purpose of your soul take on you His yoke forever. And having chosen boldly, make good your choice with perseverance.

Many a time your heart will hanker for what it once promised itself to possess. Many a time you will almost fear to walk alone in the way "which is desert." It will seem strange, singular, and solitary. It may be, you will have seasons of a faint will--at times all but consent to revoke your choice, and unbind your resolution. But this is not your trial only. It is common to all who devote themselves greatly. Only be steadfast, and you shall breathe more freely, and poise yourselves more steadily on the heaving flood of this unstable world.

The more devoted you are to Him, the more absolutely free shall you be from all agitations and irritations--the safer, the stronger, the happier. True, a devoted life is a demanding one. But there is a severity in the perfection of bliss. It is severe because perfect, as God is awesome in His perfection. Fear not to give up what the world counts dearest, that you may wear His yoke in secret. Live in lowly well-doing; in works of alms and prayer, of charity and spiritual mercy.

Better to be so under a vow to Him, than to be free to choose this world's alluring hopes. Brethren, are you happy now? If not, why not? Why, but because you are hankering after something on a lower level of devotion. Something below Christ is your aim in life. You are restless because you have not reached it; or now that you have it in your hands, you find it cannot satisfy your heart. "Martha, Martha, you are careful and cumbered about many things. But one thing is needful; and Mary has chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her."

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