

The Disciple's Rest

by John Henry Jowett

The sermon emphasizes the importance of rest in the Christian life, particularly for the Church, and encourages believers to come unto the Lord and learn of Him for rest and conquest.

Scripture: Psalm 23:2, Psalm 37:7, Psalm 46:10, Psalm 62:1, Isaiah 26:3, Matthew 11:28, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Philippians 4:7, Hebrews 4:9

Topics: "Spiritual Rest", "Gods Presence"

Description

John Henry Jowett preaches on the invitation of Jesus to come to Him for rest, emphasizing that this rest is a gift of grace, not earned through toil or culture. He explains that while the rest is immediate, it is also a continuous discovery as we learn from Jesus. Jowett highlights the importance of the Church embracing a restful disposition in the midst of the world's restlessness, urging believers to find strength and assurance in the restful realization of the Lord's presence and the wealth and power of their allies in grace and circumstances.

Transcript

"Come unto Me all ye that labour 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 ye shall find rest unto your souls." Matt. 11:28,29.

"I will give you rest." Give! This kind of rest is always a gift; it is never earned. It is not the emolument of toil; it is the dowry of grace. It is not the prize of endeavour, its birth precedes endeavour, and is indeed the spring and secret of it. It is not the perquisite of culture, for between it and culture there is no necessary and inevitable communion. It broods in strange and illiterate places, untouched by scholastic and academic refinement, but it abides also in cultured souls which have been chastened by the manifold ministry of the schools. It is not a work, but a fruit; not the product of organization, but the sure and silent issue of a relationship. "Come unto Me, ... and I will give you rest."

But even the gift of rest does not disclose its unutterable contents in a day. It is an immediate gift, but it is also a continuous discovery. "Learn of Me, ... and ye shall find rest." Part of "the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him" lie in this wealthy gift of rest, and it is one of the frequent and delightful surprises of grace that we should repeatedly come upon new and unexpected veins of ore in this deep mine of "the peace of God which passeth all understanding." I say that the rest of the Lords is an immediate gift and a perpetual discovery. "Come unto Me, ... and I will give you rest." "Learn of Me ... and ye shall find rest unto your souls."

And so I am to speak to you of the riches of the Christian rest. Do you feel it to be an irrelevant note, an inappropriate theme, in the march and warfare of our times? Surely we need to speak of battlefields rather than of green pastures, and to hear the nerving call to struggle and duty rather than the soft and gentle wooings that call to rest! Our times demand the warrior's bugle-peal, and not the shepherd's pipe of peace! Ah, but, brethren, in this warfare the trumpeter himself is shorn of inspiration unless he have the gift of rest, and the warrior himself is rendered impotent unless he be possessed by the secret of the heavenly peace. The restless trumpeter ministers no thrill, and the perturbed warrior lacks the very genius of conquest. I know the feverish motions of our time, the restlessness of fruitless desire, the disturbing forebodings of anxiety, the busyness of the devil, the sleepless and perspiring activity of Mammon, the rush to be rich, the race to be happy, the craving for sensation, the immense impetus and speed characterizing every interest in our varied life, and added to all, the precipitate shedding of hoary forms and vestures, and the re-clothing of the thoughts of men in modern and more congenial attire. I know the general restlessness, the heated and consuming haste, and knowing them I proclaim that the secret of a successful antagonism must be sought in the profound restfulness of the Church. I do not wonder at the restlessness of the world, but I stand amazed at the restlessness of the Saviour's Church! We are encountering restlessness by restlessness, and on many sides we are suffering defeat. The antagonist ought to be of quite another order. The contendants must be restfulness versus rest, and the odds will be overwhelmingly on our side. Let me pause to make a few distinctions in order that my argument may not be misunderstood. We must distinguish between indolent passivity and active restfulness. I am not pleading for enervating easy, but for enabling and inspiring rest. Ease is an opiate; rest is a stimulant, say, rather a nutriment. Ease is the enemy of strength; rest is its hidden resource. I do not stand here, therefore, as the advocate of the couch, but as the advocate of restful and therefore invincible movement. Our scientists distinguish between motion and energy, and I could wish that some similar distinction might be transferred to the sphere of the Church. All activity is not influential. All speech is not persuasive. All supplication is not effective. The secret of effective supplication is a quiet faith. The secret of effective speech is a hidden assurance. The secret of triumphant warfare is a permanent peace. The essential and operative element in all fruitful activity is a deep and abiding rest. We must fight the prevalent restlessness by a sovereign peace. "Come unto Me, ... and I will give you rest."

Now, my brethren, I confess I miss this essential in the modern Church. How think you? Is the Church of our day characterized by that wealthy peace and rest which out to be the portion of all saved, forgiven and sanctified men and women? I confess that peace and rest are about the last grace I think about when I gaze upon the modern Church! The care-lines, and the wrinkles of worry and anxiety and uncertainty, and a general air of restlessness, seem to me almost as prevalent upon the countenance of the Church as upon the face of the world. The Church is not conspicuous by the smoothness of its brow! Everywhere I detect a certain strain, a certain fussy precipitancy, a certain trembling activity, a certain emasculating care. We look like men and women who are carrying more than we can bear, and who are attempting tasks that are quite beyond our strength. If I listen to our prevailing vocabulary, and note the words that are most in evidence, my impression of the general restlessness is only confirmed. The vocabulary is scriptural enough so far as it goes, but the real fertilizing terms are too much obscured or ignored. The great, hot, dry, words in the terminology are manifest enough: strive, fight, wrestle, oppose, work, war, do, endeavour; but those gracious, energizing words, lying there with the soft dews upon them: grace, rest, joy, quietness, assurance, the deep, generic words are not sufficiently honoured in our modern speech. I am calling for the resurrection of these domestic terms in order that the military terms may be revived. I am calling to peace for the sake of warfare. I am calling to rest for the sake of labour. I plead for a little more mysticism for the sake of our enthusiasms. I proclaim the sacredness and necessity of the cloister in

the soul, the necessity of a chamber of peace, and a center of calmness, a "heart at rest, when all without tumultuous seems." Rest is the secret of conquest, and it is to the Church therefore, and not to the world, that I primarily offer this evangel today: "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Now, when I look around upon the strained and wrinkled Church, moving often in the pallor of fear and uncertainty when she ought to exult in the pink of strength and assurance, I am impressed with certain primary lacks in her equipment. The strain frequently comes at the hill; not always so, perhaps not even commonly so, for perhaps it is true both of men and of Churches that the strain is not so much felt in the sharp and passing crisis as in the dull and jogging commonplace.

Perhaps there is more strain in the prolonged drudgery than in the sudden calamity. The dead level may try us more than the hill! "Because they have no changes they fear not God." But come the strain how it may, all strain is suggestive of inadequate resources; and the wrinkled, restless, careworn face of the Church makes it abundantly evident that the Church is not entering into the fullness of "the inheritance of the saints in light." What does the Church require if her strain and her paralyzing restlessness are to be removed?

She needs a more restful realization of her Lord's Presence. My brethren, we fight too much as soldiers whose leader is out of the field. We work too much as though our Exemplar were a dead Nazarene, instead of a living and immediate friend. We tear about with the aimless, pathetic wanderings of little chicks when the mother-bird is away. And so our life is strained and restless and uninspired, when it might be filled with a big and bracing contentment. We need the stimulating consciousness of a great and ever-present Companionship.

We know the stimulus of lofty companionship in other spheres and in smaller communions. We know the influence of Stevenson's companionship upon Mr. Barrie and Mr. Crockett. That companionship acted like a second literary conscience, restraining all careless and hasty work, but it also acted as an unflinching inspiration, quickening the very tissues of their minds and souls. It was a companionship that was not only like a great white throne of literary judgment, but a throne out of which there flowed, as there does out of every engaging personality, a river of water of life, vitalizing all who hold communion with it.

But when we lift up the relationship, and contemplate the great communion which we are all privileged to share in the companionship of the Lord, all similes tire and fall limp and ineffective, and leave the glory unexpressed! A restful realization of the Lord's companionship! That has been the characteristic of all men whose religious activity has been forceful, influential and fertile in the purposes of the kingdom. At the very heart of all their labours, in the very center of their stormiest days, there is a sphere of sure and restful intimacy with the Lord.

You know how close and intimate and calm such intimacy can be. I think of Samuel Rutherford. I think of the love-language which he uses in his communion with the Lord. Only the Song of Solomon can supply him with suitable expressions of holy passion wherewith to tell the story of his soul's devotion. When I read some of his words I almost feel as though I were eavesdropping, and had overheard two lovers in their gentle and wooing speech. It is a fashion of language not congenial to our time, but that is only because in our day we have almost ceased to cultivate the affections, and confine our education to the culture of the intellect and the conscience.

"We now make critics, not lovers," and the love-impassioned speech of Samuel Rutherford sounds to us like an alien tongue. Samuel Rutherford had a sweet and restful intimacy with his Lord, and therefore he was never idle, and never feared the coming day. I think of Jonathan Edwards, a man of greatly differing type from Samuel Rutherford, but also a man of multitudinous labours and of fearless persistence, and whose activities rested upon a sublime repose in the abiding sense of the reality and presence of his Lord.

His latest biographer declares that he had "an immediate vision of the spiritual universe as the reality of realities," that "in exploring its recesses and in pondering its relations he did so as native and to the manner born," and that perhaps next to the Apostle John he exercised the surest and most intimate familiarity with things unseen. I think of David Hill, and I am conscious of the sweet and gracious perfume which was ever rising from his full and ever-moving life. At the heart of this busy worker was the restful lover; he moved about in assured and certain warfare because his soul was ever feasting in love-companionship with his Lord.

I like this sentence of his: "What a thrill it gives me to meet with one who has fallen in love with Jesus!" Ah, but that is the speech of a lover, who is himself in love with the Lord. It is the thrill of sympathetic vibrations; it is the thrill of one who is already in love with the lover, and who delights to see the Lover come to His own. David Hill's sort of warfare finds its explanation in the lover's thrill, and in the lover's thrill has its secret in the lover's rest.

But why should I keep upon these high planes of renowned and prominent personalities? Get a man who is restfully intimate with his Lord, and you have a man whose force is tremendous! Such men move in apparent ease, but it is the ease that is linked with the infinite, it is the very rest of God. They may be engaged in apparent trifles, but even in the doing of the trifles there emerges the health-giving currents of the Kingdom of God. Listen to James Smetham: "I was at the leaders' meeting last night.

There was the superintendent. There was a gardener, a baker, a cheesemonger, a postman and myself. We sat till near 10 p.m. Now what were the topics? When is the juvenile missionary meeting to be? When the society tea-meeting? How best to distribute the poor money, &c.?" Here were these unknown and unlettered men, engaged in apparently trivial business, but resting in the Lord, and pouring forth from their rest-possessed souls spiritual energy which to James Smetham is like "healthy air," and "send me home," he says, "as last night, cured to the core, so fresh, so calm, so delivered from all my fears and troubles."

The man who is sure and restful in the conscious companionship of his Lord has about him the strainlessness and inevitableness of the ocean tide, and gives off bracing influence like God's fresh and wondrous sea. "Then had Thy peace been like a river, and thy righteousness like the waves of the sea." Let us become restfully sure of God, and we shall meet the battalions of the evil one unstrained and undismayed. "Hold the fort, for I am coming!" The doctrine is pernicious, and fills the life with strain, and fear, and uncertainty!

"For I am coming!" "The Lord of Hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge." Let the Church rest in her Lord, and she will become terrible as an army with banners. "Come unto Me, ... and I will give you rest."

What does the Church need if her strain and her wrinkles are to be removed? She needs a more restful realization of the wealth and power of her allies. We too often face our foes with the shiver of fear, and with the pallor of expected defeat. We too often manifest the symptoms of panic, instead of marching out in orderly array with the restful assurance of conquest. The hosts of evil are even now organizing their

forces in threatening and terrific mass. Are our wrinkles increasing?

Is our fear intensifying our strain, and are we possessed by a great uncertainty? Why, brethren, if we were conscious of our resources, and recognized our co-operative allies, we should more frequently put the Doxology at the beginning of our programmes, and our hearts would sing of victory even before the conflict began! It is all a matter of being more restfully conscious of the allies that fight on our side. Paul was a great hand at numbering up his friends, and so great was the company that he always felt his side was overwhelming!

He periodically reviews the co-operative forces, and invariably marches on with a more impassioned Doxology. Think of our resources in grace. You cannot turn to any of the epistles of the great Apostle without feeling how immense and immediate is his conception of his helpmeets in grace. Grace runs through all his arguments. It is allied with all his counsel. It bathes all his ethical ideals. It flows like a river close by the highway of his life, winding with all his windings, and remaining in inseparable companionship.

But my figure is altogether ineffective. Paul's conception of life was not that of road and river- the common highway of duty with its associated refreshment of grace. Grace was to Paul an all-enveloping atmosphere, a defensive and oxygenating air, which braced and nourished his own spirit, and wasted and consumed his foes. "The abundant grace"! "The riches of His grace"! "The exceeding riches of His grace"! I can never recall Paul's conception of grace without thinking of broad, full rivers when the snows have melted on the heights, of brimming springtides, and of overwhelming and submerging floods.

"Where sin abounded grace did much more abound"! And, brethren, these glorious resources of grace are ours, our allies in the work, and march, and conflict of our times. Don't you think that if she realized them, the Church would lose here wrinkles and her strain, and would move in the strength and the assurance of a glorious rest? I like the dream of Josephine Butler's, when her life passed into deep shadow, amid many frowning and threatening besetments: "I thought I was lying flat, with a restful feeling, on a smooth, still sea, a boundless ocean, with no limit or shore on any side.

It was strong and held me up, and there was light and sunshine all around me. And I heard a voice say, 'Such is the grace of God!'" Let the Church even dimly realize the force of this tremendous ally, and she will move with a strength and quietness which will give her the secret of perpetual conquest.

And think of our allies in circumstances! Devilry has not the unimpeded run of the field. Somewhere in the field, let me rather say everywhere in the field, there is hidden the Divine Antagonist. The apparent is not the fundamental. The immediate trend does not represent the final issue. The roistering adversary runs up against Almighty God, and all his feverish schemes are turned a-gley. It is marvelous to watch the terrific twist given to circumstances by the compulsion of an unseen and mysterious hand. "The things that happened unto me have turned out rather unto the progress of the Gospel." So sings the Apostle Paul, and the experience has become so familiar to him that now, in the days of his great besetments, he always quietly and confidently awaits the action of the mighty, secret pressure which changes the temporary misfortune into permanent advantage. "I know that even this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Christ Jesus." How can a man with that persuasion be shaken with panic? How can he fight and labour in any spirit but the restful optimism of a triumphant hope? Do not let us quake before circumstances, or lapse into unbelieving restlessness and strain. The secret of circumstance belongeth unto God. The unseen drift is with us. The nature of things is on our side. "Thou

shalt be in league with the stones of the field." The universal yearning of the material world corroborates the purpose of our advance. "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth" in profoundest sympathy with the evolution and "manifestation of the children of God." The planet itself is pledged against the devil. "The stars is their courses fought against Sisera." "They that be with us are more than they that be against us." "And Elijah prayed, and said, Lord, I pray Thee, open his eyes that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire." Our allies are everywhere and anywhere! Why should our faces be strained? Why should we toil in restless fear? Why should the Church be wrinkled like the world? "Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself for it, ... that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing."

And let me add one closing word. I think the Church needs a more restful disposition in the ministry of prayer. I am amazed at the want of restfulness in our communion with the Lord! I do not speak of our unnecessary loudness, but of the feverish uncertainty, the strained and painful clutch and cleaving, the perspiring pleading which is half-suggestive of unbelief. Let me say it in great reverence, and not in a spirit of idle and careless criticism, when I listen to some prayers I find it difficult to realize that we are speaking to the One who said, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with Me." Our strained and restless prayers do not suggest the quiet opening of a door, they rather suggest a frenzied and fearful prisoner, hallooing to a God who has turned his back upon our door, and the sound of whose retreating footsteps is lessening in the far-away. We need a firmer and quieter assurance while we pray. Yes, even in our supplications it is needful to "rest in the Lord." Perhaps it would be a good thing for many of us in our praying seasons if we were to say less and to listen more. "I will hear what God the Lord will speak." Listening might bring restfulness where speech would only inflame us. It is not an insignificant thing that the marginal rendering of that lovely phrase, "Rest in the Lord"! is just this, "Be silent unto the Lord"! Perhaps we need a little more of the Quaker silence and receptiveness, and a little less of heated speech and aggression. At any rate, we must get the doubt-wrinkles out of our prayers, and in our speech with God we must manifest the assurance of a calm and fruitful faith.

I call you then to rest! Nay, the Master Himself is the caller: "Come unto Me," thou strained and care-worn Church, "Come unto Me," and I will distinguish thee from the world, for "I will give thee rest."

Drop Thy still dews of quietness,

Till all our strivings cease;

Take from our souls the strain and stress,

And let our ordered lives confess

The beauty of Thy peace.

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