

DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

JANUARY 2026 | MATTHEW 11:28

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Matthew 11:28, ESV

THE RESTING HEART

If you have paid any attention to the recent studies that measure stress, you know the evidence shows that we are living in a highly anxious time with the whole populace experiencing massive stress problems. The pharmaceutical industry has jumped into this problem with excitement at the possibility of huge profits. Even after massive doses of various prescriptions, the numbers still reveal the crisis. The side effects of some of the medications create more stress. So, the question arises, Does the Bible give any hope of getting this under control? And the answer is **yes**.

Ever since the choice of Adam and Eve to disregard God's word, humans have been stressed by living outside the order in which they were designed to fit. Made

for constant fellowship with God, we have been alienated and beset with fear, shame, and self-obsession. Made in the image of God, the worker-human instinctively believes that there is something we can do to solve the problem caused by sin. The results reveal thousands of religions that seek to appease an angry god or please a needy god. We seem to work harder in our attempts to make up for our sinfulness in religious ritual and behavioral regulations than we have ever worked to subdue the earth as commissioned by God. Religious works can have Christian orientation, or Muslim, or Hindu, or any other identified religion. The Bible calls them all, "dead works." They serve to addict us more to efforts of self-improvement and will-power.

But it is interesting that the Bible tells us about God's desire for us to "rest." The New Testament book of Hebrews delves into this with great insight and clear warnings. It was written to Jewish people who had heard the gospel of Jesus and believed in Him. They were being pressured and persecuted by the Jewish community who rejected them from the fellowship if, in fact, they were singularly loyal to Jesus and His church. The constant plea was for them to believe in Jesus but also retain their Jewish identity and loyalty to the old covenant. The author of Hebrews is clear: It is Jesus alone who is Lord or Jesus is rejected. There could be no mixing. He uses the experiences of Old Testament Israel because their journey was a shadow of the substance that had been fulfilled in Jesus. They had been rescued from a terrible slavery in Egypt by God in miraculous ways. Several plagues had come upon Egypt at God's command. The descendants of Abraham had watched a series of miracles that shouted God's kindness and power. The Red Sea parted. Bread fell from heaven. Water ran out of a rock. A cloud of Glory guided them. Armies fell at their feet. Yet they complained and refused to simply believe that God had given them the land of rest. It just seemed too good to be true. The obstacles looked too great for their strength. The task was too big. They wanted to go back to Egypt even though their work was hard and their diet was sparse. God was insulted that they would not trust Him after all this

time and the many ways He had shown Himself faithful to His promise. So, God swore in an oath that He would let that generation die in the wilderness and raise up another generation who would believe Him and thus take the land they had been offered. He shows that rejecting pure grace is more heinous than breaking the Old Testament Law.

There are many parallels of Israel's response to God's offer of grace and the brand of Christianity that is common today. First, they still treated the Old Testament as final authority in their ethics without interpreting it in light of the fuller revelation of the New Testament where Jesus is revealed as the last word on all things. Israel in the flesh was still considered the people of God. The Law was still to be followed. Jesus was necessary for the atonement, but daily living was governed by a mixture of the New Testament and the Old Testament. Second, they viewed the promises made in the Old Testament as only partially fulfilled. Most of them were postponed until a late date when Jesus would restore Israel as a nation. Third, there was confusion of the true identity of the people of God on earth. Were Israelites God's people by virtue of their blood line? Were they higher in standing with God than believing Gentiles. What are the identity markers for God's people? Are there two distinct groups or one? Fourth, the rest that Moses, Joshua, and David spoke about was only possible

after the last coming of Jesus in the distant future. Does all of this sound familiar? The truth of Scripture is that there are several levels of rest in the biblical story. Moses offered the weary assembly in the wilderness a rest from their wars with neighboring enemies. They were given the land that had been promised. They could build homes, communities, and reflect the divine order of life as prescribed in their covenant. They were offered rest in the land as a gift. God was present and ready to fight for them. They concluded that they couldn't do it. Joshua then took Moses' place and led the nation into the land itself. Yet they still refused to receive by faith the rest that was offered. Later, King David offered the nation the rest of a kingdom that ruled over the land. They continued to yield to false gods and trust their own resources. All of the leaders spoke of a coming day when the rest would be greater and fuller than the shadows they offered. That day came when Jesus did all the work required for humans to be reconciled fully to God. This time was called "today." Just as when Moses called his day "today" and Joshua called his "today" and David exhorted them to act decisively "today," the revelation given determined the judgment rendered. Because the Israelites rejected the exhortations of "today" in their time, they lost their land, temple, and dignity. The last "today" arrived in Jesus, the full and final word, and the judgment of rejecting that revelation is severe. Yet embracing it

means access to the full and final rest that is offered to true believers - the very life of Jesus.

Jesus is the final high priest who presented the perfect, non-flawed sacrifice. He entered the ultimate holy place Himself as the final payment for sin. God accepted His offer, and Jesus declared: "It is finished." The work was done. Jesus began a new creation and did everything necessary to launch it and then He cried, "It is finished." Just as God had rested from creation when the work was done, the rest that results from the work Jesus accomplished is the shared life of the living Christ. We share His rest, His honor, His future, His love, His faithfulness, and His hope. There is no need for any more sacrifices, a temple, or priests. To offer such is to insult the work of Christ and to sin against grace. The blood of the Lamb of God has made all other sacrificial blood a stench. Trying to go back to a former "today" is the height of unbelief, and it means there is no rest to be had.

Hebrews tells us that we are deeply deceived as to our need for Christ's work. We need the word of God, which is precise and severe, to examine us. He reveals those areas of perversion that only a perfect high priest can fix (see *Hebrews 4:11-13*). But how are we to know if we truly believe the good news of Jesus' finished work or if we are like the multitude in the wilderness and in the temple

who said they believed but didn't? There are some obvious symptoms of a restless heart as well as symptoms of the heart at rest. The restless heart sees people as a bother rather than as an object of serving love. Trouble is viewed as an intruder and resented. There is no appreciation of suffering as God's way of revealing His glory to us. The restless heart finds Scripture either boring or confusing. Bibles are left unread or used as weapons to prove one's rightness (see *Isaiah 28:10-13*). Also, the restless heart is fearful of new vistas with God. It had rather have the routine of slavery than the risk of faith.

On the other hand, the heart at rest sees people as fellow image-bearers of God to be treated with dignity and love. The heart at rest knows that God is not dethroned when suffering arrives. It rises in confidence in access to the throne of grace to find mercy and help in time of need: "*Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need*" (Hebrews 4:16, ESV). True believing produces a bold approach to the throne of grace. The true believer with a heart at rest is aware of having nothing to offer. The word of God has exposed us. There is not one particle of righteousness with which to bargain with God. We come to Him with nothing but need. Mercy has but one plea. If we come with something in our hand, we come to make a deal. But there are no deals. The work is done. God delights to show mercy. He refuses

to bargain with the self-righteous sinner. Believers at rest storm the throne of grace confident that the God who gave Himself will gladly give grace to the true believer.

*Not the labors of my hands
Can fulfill thy law's command
Could my zeal no respite know
Could my tears forever flow
All for sin could not atone
Thou must save and thou alone.
(Rock of Ages by Augustus Montague
Toplady)*

We in Christ have ceased from our work because He is finished. Now we walk, work, and worship from our gracious position of rest in Jesus who invites the weary to come to him and gives us true rest.