

July 9, 2017

Matthew 11:25-30: ***“Rest for the Weary!”***

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Why do some of God's children seem to have such unhappy and miserable lives? A good person to ask would be Naomi, the mother-in-law of Ruth. Do you remember some of the details of her life in the Old Testament?

In the days when the judges ruled, there was a severe famine in Israel. A man of Bethlehem in Judah named Elimelech went into the country of Moab, along with his wife Naomi, and his two sons Mahlon and Chilion, and remained there. But Elimelech died and Naomi was left with her two sons. These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other was Ruth. They lived there about ten years, and both Mahlon and Chilion died, so that Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband.

Having heard that there was food in Israel, she decided to return. She had left with an empty stomach, and now she would return with an empty heart. She left with a husband and two sons; she returned with Ruth, one of her daughters-in-law, a Moabite woman. The book of Ruth states:

So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. And when they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them. And the women said, "Is this Naomi?" (In other words, she looked horrible) She said to them, "Do not call me Naomi (Gracious); call me Mara (Bitter), for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went away full, and the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi, when the LORD has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me (Ruth 1:19-21)?"

It isn't that hard for any of us to understand Naomi's bitterness. All she could see was her past sufferings and sorrows. She was weary and heavy burdened. And it seemed like even God was against her. Jon Bloom writes:

Deep soul weariness: We all experience it, though in different ways and for different reasons. Sometimes we can point to a significant factor, but often we can't. Our weariness results from the cumulative, multilayered intersections of life's complexities, bodily frailties, emotional heartbreaks, and the consequences of sin. It surpasses understanding. Because our burdens are not simple, they are not relieved by simplistic platitudes ("Cheer up! Things are bound to turn around!").

Life in a fallen creation is a hard life. It doesn't matter whether you have it all, or have very little (or what you feel is nothing) - bottom line is this: when you do not see, or you question, or put off to the side the loving heart of God and the final destination he has in mind, life is or will be weary and burdensome in one way or another. Combine that with an ever increasing understanding of God's law that offers no relief, but only shows sin and the impossibility of saving the self, and you end up with nothing but self-destruction in various forms. Satan and his demons are always working along with his unbelieving children and our own sinful natures. All come together to either say "eat, drink, be merry and forget about it," or "see, God hates you and nothing can be done to relieve your weariness and burden!"

However, our text teaches us that a simple promise can relieve weariness and the most complex burdens imaginable - even death and hell - provided that the truth has been revealed, the facts given, and the Holy Spirit has touched us in order that we may believe that the one who has made the promise is really able to carry out what has been promised. Indeed! Into our weariness and many burdens our Savior steps in and simply points us to himself: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest!" Again, Jon Bloom writes:

The simplicity of Jesus' promise is both striking and refreshing. Jesus doesn't offer us a four-fold path to peace-giving enlightenment, like the Buddha did. He doesn't give us five pillars of peace through submission as Islam does. Nor does he give us "10 Ways to Relieve Your Weariness," which we pragmatic, self-help-oriented 21st century Americans are so drawn to. Unique to anyone else in human history, Jesus simply offers himself as the universal solution to all that burdens us.

It makes perfect sense if you understand that there is nothing to give except for the giving of the one who forever is and made it all. Consider, in the first place, that what he made, he made as a revelation of himself to us, and thereby illustrated the relationship that he would have with us for all eternity. And when we rebelled against all of that in the garden, what else would there be for God to give other than his Son to save us, who is the very image of himself and his everything without beginning and end?

If the spilling of our blood, as our bodies die and rot because of sin, is to be reversed, then what else is there to change it other than the spilling of the blood and the offering of the body of the one who is stronger than death, who is without beginning and end, who is perfect in every way? If, because of sin, bodies must die and blood is to be spilled, and with that souls must be punished, then it makes sense that the Son of God would assume bodily flesh in order to die and furthermore offer holy, innocent, precious blood to restore us. It makes sense that the eternal Word and his perfect life in a body like ours, but without sin, might endure the punishment for our sin in order that we might escape.

The Word of the Father became flesh and dwelt in this fallen world to take the fall unto himself and undo sin, forgive it, and be the medicine of immortality. What other medicine could there be to eat and drink except for that which is, in essence, pure life? He who is life - Jesus of Nazareth - must permeate and penetrate every aspect of our being, whether it be physical or spiritual in order for us to live forever. And this he does for us in the means of grace by faith, until the day that he takes all that is mortal, puts it to final death, and brings his immortality to light, even as it now shines in our hearts by faith, and will one day glorify us through and through without end!

This is what Jesus means when he says "Come to Me!" Where else is there to go? If we would have our lives restored forever, only the one who is eternal life can connect himself to us that we may receive it. If we would have love, then the revelation of love must make himself clearly known to us, that we may truly know him and never be lonely again. If you would have all that is good, then the one who is essentially good, and has made all good things, must be in you and you in him. Again, Jesus says "Come to Me!" and rightly so! "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest!"

With that, we now come back to Naomi and the rest of the story. Naomi labored and was heavy laden, as we have already pointed out. For all practical purposes, she had lost everything. Who would restore what was lost and alleviate her weariness and burden with rest? The answer: a kinsman-redeemer by the name of Boaz. You see, a kinsman-redeemer is a picture that foreshadowed Jesus Christ. They came to the aid of their blood relatives who had suffered loss, they restored God's gifts, granted relief, and served as a protector of widows. It says in the book of Ruth:

So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife. And he went in to her, and the LORD gave her conception, and she bore a son. Then the women said to Naomi, "Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel! He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age, for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has given birth to him." Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her lap and became his nurse. And the women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, "A son has been born to Naomi." They named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David (Ruth 4:13-17).

Not only is Boaz a picture of Jesus who gives relief to Ruth and Naomi, but the child that is born to Ruth, and is even called the son of Naomi, is more than an ordinary baby. He is the ancestor of the Savior Jesus Christ, according to his human nature. All of this is the restoration of life and Naomi's "nourishment" in her old age! Powerful stuff isn't it? The whole account of Ruth and Naomi can be summed up in the words of Jesus, "Come to Me and I will give you Rest!"

Like Naomi, we sometimes are also inclined to bitterness. When we look backward at deaths in the family, loss of a job, failure in school or rejection by a loved one, you name it, it becomes rather easy to blame God for our weariness and burdens that are simply the result of this fallen, world. However, it is the Lord Jesus Christ, and only him, that can restore all that is lost, relieve our burdens, grant rest for our souls, and take us to our final destination. We can look at the past, God knows the future. We must not forget, our heavenly Father already knows the story of our life. But above all, he has graciously seen to it that through Jesus Christ it has a happy ending - in heaven - where every tear is wiped away from our eyes!

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott