

Good morning. I've been trying to do a series on the promises of God, but between Father's Day and a couple of other sermons that God was putting on my heart, it's been sort of a stutter start to the series. I figure God's leading trumps my planning every time, so today, after 5 or 6 weeks, we're up to the third message in the series on the promises of God...

I heard the story about a pet store delivery truck going down the road. At every stop light he came to, the driver would run to the back of the truck, grab a 2x4 and start beating on the side of the truck. Nobody could figure out why, so finally somebody asked him, "What are you doing?" He said, "This is only a 1-ton truck and I'm carrying 2 tons of canaries, so I've got to keep 1 ton of them in the air all the time."

Now, that's a picture that reflects too many people's lives today. Many of us are working hard trying to keep a lot of things "up in the air" so that they won't come crashing down. And sadly, that's where too many people are stuck. They don't know any other way to live. So, they get stuck in unhealthy relationships; or unhealthy habits; or unhealthy

grief; or unhealthy anger. They try to stay one step ahead of the bill collector, or the last lie they told, or that person they're trying so hard to hide that "secret" part of their life from. How do we get "unstuck?"

Please stand with me if your able, for the reading of today's scripture from Matthew 11:28-29. (READ)

The promise of rest for those who labor...what a comforting thought. Sometimes I'm the poster child for getting so busy doing stuff for God that I forget why I'm doing it. When that happens, the things I'm doing become a chore rather than the blessing that they are supposed to be (and are when my focus is right). Between regular ministry type stuff and all of the other stuff I do at the church or in the community, it's always so good to be able to sit down in my easy chair after a long day, and then finally, at night, to lay down in my bed and go to sleep. In truth, I'm usually dozing in my easy chair and drooling all over myself long before I make it to bed, but I didn't want that picture haunting you.

The word, 'rest', is another one of those words that have a lot of meaning and we express it in so many ways. I looked

in my Thesaurus and this is just some of what I found for the word 'rest'...

Sleep, slumber, doze, repose, lie down, let down, ease off, recuperate, rest up, take a break, take a load off, lean, recline, relax, unbend, settle down, dream, drowse, take it easy, be comfortable, stretch out, nap, nod, snooze and chill out... Man desperately seeks to find this peace.

In this verse of Matthew, Jesus is saying to us...come to me and let me help you find this peace you're looking for...let me give you some rest and some peace for your life. And all He is asking us to do is to believe in Him... and to Trust in Him.

Man has, through the ages, desperately looked for this inner peace that will give him some rest from the world he lives in. He urgently needs to find something to believe in that will give him the rest he must have to continue to exist in a world that is sick and lost...a world that doesn't know what to believe in.

The word "rest" is used in several different ways in the Bible in order to show us the value of what God is offering us. Just

like He offered the invitation to “Come to Me”... He is offering us His Peace, also.

In Genesis, God rested after the creation, not because He was tired but because He was finished. However, He knows that we need to rest... He knows that after a good labor is done, that there should be a time of rest and restoration...a time of strengthening and recuperation. God’s rest is there for us...but we need to take advantage of it...we need to trust that He will give it to us.

But did you know we could miss it? Just like the Israelites. They missed their chance at God’s promised rest. In Number 13 and 14, we read about them. These chapters tell how the children of Israel came to the borders of the Promised Land, how they sent out scouts to spy out the land, how ten of the twelve scouts came back with the verdict that it was a good land, but the difficulties of entering it were too great, how only Caleb and Joshua were for going forth in the strength of the Lord, and then how the people hearkened to the advice of the faithless, and how the result was that this generation

was prevented forever from entering into the rest and the peace of the Promised Land.

They did not trust the Lord to bring them through the difficulties that lay ahead of them and therefore they never enjoyed the rest that could have been theirs in that Promised Land.

The Allstate Insurance Company has a catchy slogan. In their advertisements, they claim, “You’re in good hands with Allstate”. This statement attracts people, because inside every human being is the need and desire for security. People want their houses, cars and especially their lives to be protected. They want to rest, secure in the belief that someone will take care of them and theirs.

God has promised us rest and security. He has said that no one can snatch any of His sheep out of His hand. This is a powerful illustration of the rest and peace and security that God has promised... the picture of each believer resting in the hands of the Heavenly Father.

There was a time when we were not in God's hands...when we didn't believe...when we didn't know the Peace of God. For those who refuse to submit to the Good Shepherd, they stand outside the safety of His sheep pen. People who want to take over their own lives and live as they please, rather than living as God wants them to live. Like rebellious sheep, people have, through the ages, looked at the illusion of greener pastures, only to find that they have alienated themselves from God, walked the wrong path and lost the blessings that might have been theirs through Jesus. Their lives have become troubled and lonely...without foundation or anchor...without rest or peace.

When we respond to Jesus Christ in faith, God begins a great work within us. He says, "I am the door; if anyone enters by Me, he shall go in and out and find pasture" ...green pastures where there is rest and security... peace and love.

Are you willing to put yourselves in God's hands?

It's like the party of inexperienced mountain climbers when they came to a wide crevasse that had to be crossed if they

were going to reach the top. Their guide jumped over expertly. Reaching back, he asked each member of the climbing party to give him his hand. One man came repeatedly to the edge, and each time he retreated. Finally, the guide reached for the man's hand once more and said, "For thirty years I've been helping men and women across this gap, and I've never let one go yet."

God is reaching out for us, too, asking us to make that leap of faith...that leap from living life on our own...anxious, rebellious and lonely...to a life of security, protection and resting in His hands. He hasn't let one go yet!

Matthew 11 verse 28 promises us so much...listen to it again in the King James... "Come unto Me, those who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." But there is more to this passage than just rest and security...there is still an active element in our rest... God does not put a person in his hands just to save them...he intends to use that person. Don't forget that you're not only saved, you are called. We have the invitation...we have the command to labor for Christ...with the promise that if we do, we will come into

God's rest....in order to become restored for further service in His Kingdom.

It's like the Parable of the Fig Tree. In Luke 13: 6-9, it says, "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard. He came looking for fruit on it and did not find it. He said to the keeper of the vineyard, 'Look you – for the last three years I have been coming and looking for fruit on this fig tree, and did not find any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the ground?'

'Lord', he answered him, 'let it be this year too, until I dig round about it and fertilize it, and see if it bears fruit in the coming year.'

The parable teaches us that uselessness invites disaster. When the Lord, our Savior, saves us into the Rest and Peace of God, it is to be restored and revived. But what then? The question becomes, 'What use are we in this world?' Are we supposed to draw the strength and nourishment from the soil of God's garden and produce nothing in return? This was precisely the sin of the fig tree. Its owner came to it three

times looking for fruit and found none. He was ready to cut it down.

In God's Kingdom, we can be assured that God continues to give us chances... to a point. We have a chance to produce the fruit that our Lord is seeking...the souls of men and women. But how many chances will we get if we don't do our part? I don't know, but I don't want to push my luck when it comes to honoring and pleasing God.

The Hymn, Blessed Assurance, written by a blind woman, Fanny Crosby, expresses this understanding of resting in the love of our Savior and making His Story our own...

"Perfect submission, all is at rest;

I in my Savior am happy and blest,

Watching and waiting, looking above,

Filled with his goodness, lost in his love.

This is my story, this is my song,

Praising my Savior all the day long...

Are we filled with His goodness...are we waiting and watching...have we made His story our song? We need to submit and find that all is at rest when we praise our Savior all the day long.

Scripture says;

“Talk about (his commandments) when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.” When you can do this...keeping your Savior with you “all the day long”, you will find rest and God’s peace and you will want to “sing His praises”

So, what’s the labor that we’ve been called to? God wants us to be just like Him...loving and caring... He want us to labor, showing the fruits of the spirit through our daily living...in our moment by moment living, so others can see the influence of the Christian Way and see that it is acceptable and honorable. He has given us the commission to go out

and spread the Word... His Word... His promises of love, and hope, and peace.

So, we have this great promise of peace, but what gets in our way of accepting it?

This is God's invitation: "I will make your life easier; lighten your load; give you relief. You will have release; rest; rejuvenation. Give me control of your life and watch what I do."

Why would anybody turn that down? Yet maybe some of you have heard this before and you've never acted on it. It's like having an unopened gift. What causes us to procrastinate about giving our problems to God and delay surrendering our lives to His care and control?

1. The first hinderance is pride.

PR 18:12 "Before his destruction a man's heart is proud . . ."

Maybe you're not ready to give control of your life to Christ because you're thinking, "I'm doing pretty well on my own."

Well, if you're not facing any problems just wait a while, because if you're calling the shots, it is inevitable, your pride

with catch up with you. You just need a greater dose of pain. And God will allow it to get your attention and show you that you don't have it as together as you think you do. I pray that he does get your attention and turn up the heat to the point that you realize you need to give Him control and accept the gift of salvation he has offered you through his son Jesus. Someday it will be too late, and we never know when that day will be. Reality is that we don't have a guarantee of the next 5 seconds, so now is the time to act.

2. A second thing that gets in the way of giving control to God is guilt.

Psalm 40:12 "For troubles without number surround me, my sins have overtaken me, and I cannot see."

Maybe you're thinking, "Do you know how many times I've made a promise to God and broke it? I'm embarrassed to ask God for help. You don't know all I've done wrong. I couldn't go to God and ask for help." ...You're dead wrong... YOU don't know how many times I have made a promise to God and broke it. YOU don't all the things I have done wrong, But God still forgave me and He still forgives me again pretty

much daily... often multiple times a day. There's no sin God can't forgive. Don't let pride or guilt keep you from taking this step. He wants to forgive your guilt.

3. The third hinderance to giving God control is fear.

We're often afraid of what we might have to give up.

A guy falls off a cliff, and on the way down, he grabs a branch. It's foggy, and he has difficulty seeing. He's hanging on for dear life. He cries, "Somebody help!" He hears God's voice, "This is the Lord, trust Me, let go and I'll catch you." He thinks he's hearing things, so he asks, "Is anybody else there?" Again, he hears God's voice, "This is the Lord, trust Me, let go and I'll catch you." He finally decides to let go and trust God and when he does, the fog disappears to reveal that he is only 2 feet from the ground.

4. A fourth obstacle, closely related to fear, is loss of control. You may say, "I don't want anybody controlling me." But you're being controlled all the time. Right now, you're letting pride, or guilt or fear control you. And so there you

are, your life's gone "over a cliff" and you're holding on. You need to let go and give God control.

If you've been afraid to open your life to the care and control of Christ because you'll have to give up something, don't worry about what He might have you give up. Think instead, of what you have to gain.

It is obvious what kind of life develops out of trying to get your own way all the time: a stinking accumulation of mental and emotional garbage; frenzied and joyless grabs for happiness; trinket gods; magic-show religion; paranoid loneliness; cutthroat competition; all-consuming-yet-never-satisfied wants; a brutal temper; an inability to love or be loved; divided homes and divided lives; small-minded and lopsided pursuits; the vicious habit of depersonalizing everyone into a rival; uncontrolled and uncontrollable addictions;... I could go on . . . But what happens when we live God's way? He brings gifts into our lives, much the same way that fruit appears in an orchard - things like affection for others, exuberance about life, serenity. We develop a willingness to stick with things, a

sense of compassion in our heart, and a desire to love people and use things instead of using people and loving things. We find ourselves involved in loyal commitments, not needing to force our way in life, able to arrange and direct our energies wisely.

5. A fifth hinderance is worry.

I heard an interesting comment the other day that I really had to stop and think about. Someone said, “We worry because we confuse decision-making with problem-solving”.

Let me explain that with this example:

In 1963 JFK announced, “We’re going to put a man on the moon by the end of the decade.” That was the decision. Had all the problems been solved? No. If you confuse decision-making with problem solving, you will never make a decision. You make the decision, then solve the problems. Kennedy said, “We’re going to go to the moon,” then it was up to NASA to solve the problems.

Likewise, you need to make the decision to give Christ control of your life, knowing He’ll guide you in working on

the problems of your life afterward. But the good thing is, God always has the plan in place before the problem arises. Once you decide to give your life to Christ's care and control, you don't have to figure everything out, you simply need to learn how to follow Him and trust Him.

The Christian life is a decision followed by a process. We need to decide to give care and control of our life to Christ.

In World War II, the Marines used the same strategy each time in retaking the Pacific from the Japanese. It worked every time. First, they'd go to an island and pelt it with bombs. That was the softening up period. Next, the Marines would establish a beachhead, maybe only 20 yards deep and 200 yards wide, but they would establish a presence on the island. Now, had they completely liberated the island? No. They had just established a presence. From there they fought battles. Sometimes they'd move forward and sometimes they'd get pushed back. But everybody knew that, once they'd established a beachhead, total liberation of the island was inevitable. And in the history of WWII, once the Marines had landed and established a beachhead, they

never lost an island. It was just a matter of time before that island would be set free.

Philippians 1:6 says, "he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" - That's God's promise to you and me.

Where are you today? Some of you may in the softening up period. All kinds of bombs are going off in your life that are sending fragments everywhere in your life. Don't let pride or guilt or fear or worry keep you from making the decision you need to make. Give your life to Christ's care and control. Let Him establish His presence in your life. Then follow His leading and start experiencing freedom.

What might it mean for you to give your life to Christ's care and control today? Some of you may need to accept God's Son as your Savior. Some of you may need to accept God's Word as your standard for living. Some of you may need to accept God's will as your strategy for life. Some of you may need to accept God's power as your strength.

As we saw earlier, Matthew 11: 28-29 promises, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”

Well, now is the time to come. As we sing the closing songs, the altar is open. Come to God with whatever baggage you may be carrying and leave it at His feet. Take on the yoke that Jesus has offered. The burden will be lighter, the journey easier, and the destination infinitely better... Come now.