

BELPRES CHURCH

The Invitation

Matthew 11:25-12:13

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I want to welcome those of you who are joining us online. Thank you for joining us. And those of you here in this room, it's great to see you. I want to start with a question. How many of you like to be invited to things? Depends on what it is, right? If someone says, "I have Diamond Club seats for a baseball game, do you want come?" That's a good invitation. Baseball game, I'll be there. But then there's things like a time my wife and I were in Hawaii and someone stopped us on the street and invited us to a free luau. Free food and Hawaiian culture, a free luau. All they asked in return was that we would go to one little tiny meeting. You so know where this is going. So we very naively went to this very long, very boring, very high pressure meeting all about the glories of buying into a timeshare arrangement. I was in Hawaii and I'm thinking, this is stupid. I'm wasting my time here.

Well, Jesus has an invitation for you and it's the good kind of invitation, not the bad kind, to be restored to mental, emotional, and spiritual strength. And the biblical word for being restored to strength is Sabbath. Sabbath is not a legalistic obligation. It's not a long list of things I can't do on the Sabbath. Sabbath is connecting to God, relationships, and things we delight in because joy and celebration is part of this, to be restored to mental, emotional, and spiritual strength. And not just restored to sit around and do nothing. No, no, no, no, restored so that we can be the students, the worker, the parent, the friend that God created us to be. And when we participate with him in Sabbath, when we do that, he gives us power, power to change the world through him, power to be the people he's created us to be. Sabbath is about receiving spiritual power from Jesus.

And I believe, if we Sabbath with him, we will be different people and we will be a different church walking more in his power and in his authority. And one of the places Jesus gives us this invitation is in Matthew chapter 11. And he says, "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, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light." So let me take this one word or phrase at a time to really understand what Jesus is inviting us into. First word "come". That's an invitation word. And not to a timeshare presentation. It's a personal invitation. And one of the great things about a personal invitation is it means somebody wants to be with you.

Jesus is God in human form. He could be hanging out. There's trillions of galaxies he could be hanging out in and he wants to hang out with you. And that just feels good. Come where? To me. The Bible says, "Better is one day in your courts than 1,000 elsewhere." And I don't know about you, but I am really good at going to the 1,000 elsewheres rather than to Jesus. So much of how we try to be restored or cope or deal with our lives is about escaping to one of those 1,000 elsewheres. Scrolling through social media to just numb out or binge-watching or video games or vacations. And some of those things are good things and sometimes we really do need to escape, but Sabbath is not about escape. It's about being restored to strength.

Now, some of you, you may have lots of time. You may have all kinds of days where you have nothing to do, but are you being restored? Because Sabbath is different than a day off and only Jesus can really restore us. So he says, "Come to me." He doesn't say, come to my teachings. He doesn't say, come to my rules. He doesn't say, come to my theology. He says, "Come to me," because when we connect with him and experience his presence, we can stop all our frantic striving. Because we realize that we don't always have to get the A-plus. Maybe sometimes we do, but not always. We don't always have to kill it on that project at work. We don't have to be the most popular person ever to have worth or value.

I saw a meme recently that plays off the saying, "This isn't my first rodeo," which means I know how to do this. I've done it before. This isn't my first rodeo. Well, the meme said, "I didn't realize I had to know everything by my second rodeo." That seems like a very low number of rodeos, and I think that gives us a pressure we feel to succeed and achieve. And achievement is a really good thing. Achievement is good unless we don't think we're valuable without it. The God of the universe thought you were valuable enough to die to pay the price for your sins. That's your worth. That's your value. When we come to him, we experience that. And that can never be taken away. Success can always be taken away. Our looks will be taken away. Although, I don't know, I think I get more handsome as the years go by. But for all y'all, our looks will definitely be taken away.

Relationships, money, all the things we look to give us a sense of worth and value, they can all be taken away. But Jesus' love for you will never die, which is why he can restore us better than all the vacations in the world could ever do. "Come to me, all you." And just in case you're wondering in the original text, which was in Greek, what the Greek word there means, it means all, and that includes you. "But pastor, no. You don't know the things I've done. You don't know the things I do that nobody knows about." No.

Come to me all. That includes you. Sometimes maybe we don't feel like we're included in invitations because maybe growing up we got left out of a lot of invitations or maybe still do. No, Jesus says, "This is for you all. Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened." And those are two different things.

Sometimes we're just weary, tired, exhausted from work or school or obligations. Other times though we carry burdens, grief over the loss of a loved one, fear of losing a job or relationship, financial problems, health problems, relationship problems. Those are burdens. And Jesus says, "You've got burdens? You've got problems? Give them to me." Now that raises the question, okay, how do I do that? How do I actually connect with Jesus in a way where I actually feel his presence and not like I'm just talking to the air? Well, let me give you some suggestions. I find music, whether it's hymns or Christian music, I find that helps me a lot to connect with Jesus. So I listen to that. When I pray, I always just picture Jesus right next to me because he is. And I just talk normally like I would to a friend.

And then I listen for maybe those thoughts or a picture or a song lyric or a Bible verse or a memory that might pop into my head that might be Jesus speaking to me. On really bad days, my prayer life could accurately be described as whining in Jesus' presence. I just sit there and whine, but he's right there. Sometimes I think physical gestures help. So sometimes if I'm feeling very burdened, I'll picture whatever my problem is or whatever it is I'm worried about, and I'll just picture it holding it in my hands, and I'll go like this to Jesus, "This is your problem. You deal with it. What do you want to do with it?" And when I do that, I don't always feel Jesus' presence every single time, but often I will feel those burdens lift. "Come to me, all y'all who are weary and burdened, and I will give, "notice give, we don't have to earn this, we don't have to strive for this, this is a gift, "I will give you rest."

And in the original text, which was in Greek, the original Greek word there for rest, it actually literally means to stop, stop doing something and rest. And in its noun form, it's related to the Greek word for child or someone on the lower rung of a ladder, so maybe a low-level employee versus a supervisor or a manager. And so, one of the nuances here in this verse in the original Greek is stop worrying about this. Stop carrying this burden. Stop because this is above my pay grade. Stop carrying a problem or a burden or worrying about something that is above my pay grade. So I'm just going to give this to Jesus so I can stop fretting about it and be restored to strength to become more like Jesus and do the things he did and be like him and change other people's lives and with him heal the world.

And in English, the word rest, also, it's the first part of the word restored. That's the name of our sermon series, Restored. But the first part of that word is rest. You can't be restored unless you rest. Rest is also the first part of the word restaurant, which is a place we go to, to eat, to get new energy, to be restored. You also see it in the word restroom. Not

sure what that means, but I find it interesting. And now you're going to spend the rest of the sermon trying to figure out. What does that mean? "Come to me, all y'all, who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you." I grew up in farm country. A yoke, it's a bar you use to hook two animals together so that they can work together. And so it's often seen as a symbol of burden or work or putting a heavy load on someone.

And I think the reason Jesus picks this word is because in his time the religious leaders of the day had turned following God into a burdensome yoke of all kinds of rules about all kinds of things, including Sabbath. They had 613 rules all about things you could not do on the Sabbath day. That's a lot of things you can't do on the Sabbath day, including silly things like you couldn't throw a toothpick into the fire because that was considered work. So you couldn't do that on a Sabbath. And right after the verses that we're looking at right here, the very next thing that happens is Jesus gets in trouble with the religious leaders because his disciples pick some grain to eat on the Sabbath because they're hungry, and then he heals someone on the Sabbath, both of which were considered work. And so he gets in trouble. Never read a text without the context.

And the context of these verses is they lead into two stories about Jesus getting in trouble with the religious leaders for violating one of the 613 rules about Sabbath. But Jesus said, "The Sabbath was made for people, not people for the Sabbath." The religious leaders had turned the gift of Sabbath into this heavy yoke of legalistic rules, a burden. They'd turned the offer to go to Diamond Club seats to a baseball game into a timeshare presentation. But the whole point of a yoke is not to make the work harder, but to make it easier. The field is easier to plow if you have two animals rather than one. That's why Jesus says, "Take my yoke upon you, not the yoke of religion. Be in relationship with me. Learn from me. Be my disciple." Disciple just means someone who is learning from Jesus to be like Jesus.

Now, it's important, notice there's still a yoke. To take on Jesus' yoke means to do what he says to do. It means to follow him. But make no mistake. Make no mistake. Our choice is not whether or not we have a yoke. Oh, you're yoked to something. You're yoked to something, achievement, yoked to a relationship without which you don't think you can be happy, yoked to pleasing others, yoked to how you look, yoked to money. We will be yoked to something. The question is, who's yoke? Jesus says, "Take on my yoke. Not your boss's yoke, not the yoke of social expectations or trying to be liked by everyone, take my yolk from my yoke, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light." And that image of two animals yoked together to pull the load, that's what Jesus wants us to see. What he's saying is, "You are not alone. You're there with all your worries, your problems, your things, your issues."

And Jesus says, "Here. Yoke yourself to me. I will pull this load with you, and yoked to me, you can do anything. You can do anything. You can do anything when you're yoked

to me." That's Sabbath. See, all those other yokes are like a timeshare presentation. They say they're for us, they say they're free, but really they want something from us. Netflix is designed to get your time, your attention, your money. A little bit of social media is fine, but be aware, every single one of those platforms is designed to make you and me an addict so we have to use it carefully. They say they're for us, but really they're taking something from us. They're depleting us, which is why they don't really restore us. But not Jesus. Jesus is powerful. Jesus is strong. And here in this text, Jesus says, "I am gentle and humble of heart," and part of being humble means he's not in this for himself. He's in it for you. He's focused on you, not him.

"Take on relationship with me," he says, "and you will find rest. What kind of rest? Just like rest from a good nap? Way better. Way deeper. You will find rest unto your souls. You will be restored to the person I made you to be, to do the things I've called you to do. And together, you and I will change the world if you Sabbath in me to get spiritual strength from me." My oldest daughter lives in Florida, and she came home for Christmas, and when she walked in the door, she had not even set her suitcase down and she said, "Do you want to ask me about my life?" She was very charming about it and I said, "Well, yeah, but why don't you set your suitcase down and why don't we go into the kitchen?" And so she did, and we went to the kitchen and two minutes later she said, "Do you want to ask me about my life now?" And I said, "What do you want to tell us?" And so she said, "I'm in a relationship."

And I said, "A relationship or a situationship?" Because some of the guys she's dated, it's been a little situationship. And she said, "No. A relationship." And so I immediately said, "What's his name? What's his name?" And she told me, and right in front of her, I immediately started to cyber-stalk him on Instagram, look up, what are his pictures? Who's this guy? What's he like? He'd only posted like 10 pictures, so I couldn't actually figure out who he was. Well, a few weeks ago, we visited her in Florida and I was really eager to meet the boyfriend, which we did. And I really liked him. She told me that he'd asked her out for Valentine's Day, he brought her roses, and he wrote a really nice card and all these romantic things that I don't do for my own wife, but I like that he did it for her.

And I was like, "I love this guy. I love this guy." Why? Because he was focused on her. Because now the point of that story is you just need to know. My daughter's in a relationship. I just want you to know. Yay! But the other point, the real point is, as eager as Holly was to tell us about her life, that's how eager we are to be known. And as eager as I was to hear all about it and know who this boyfriend was, that's how eager Jesus is to be with you. He is focused on you. And he says, "Come to me because I want to hang out with you. And what's that you're carrying? It looks heavy. Here. Let me help. Let me come alongside of you and you will be restored all the way through bone deep down to your soul."

Now, as we have been saying these last couple of weeks, everything in our culture works against Sabbath. Everything in our culture pushes against it, so it's hard to do. So the action step is not just immediately go out there and have Sabbath. You can't do that all at once. So we're going to do this with building blocks, just step at a time. And the last two weeks we said, "Just get prepared." This week's action step is the word I mentioned earlier, the Greek word for the word rest, which is to stop. What's one thing, just pick one, [inaudible 00:17:21], just what's one thing you can stop for a whole day this week? And use that time instead to connect with Jesus, family, friends, activities that restore you. And on this slide, we've made a few suggestions. You may have other ideas of your own.

For a whole day, stop work, homework, errands, chores, anything that causes you to hustle. Or maybe you want to stop technology of some kind, screens, news, email, social media, scrolling. Or maybe stop shopping, overspending, consumerism for a day. You may have other ideas for you, one day this week to stop something and be restored. There's a woman in our church whose husband died a number of years ago two months before Christmas. And as Christmas approached, she was working really hard to make it normal. She'd invited her adult children and her extended family over for Christmas Eve dinner. And she said she kept from breaking down completely by just staying busy with all the preparations, basically exhausting herself. One of the thousands of elsewherees she was running to was just activity and preparation and busyness to cope with the grief of losing her husband.

Well, on the morning of Christmas Eve, she was exhausted, but she forced herself out of bed and went to get the groceries for the meal that night. And at the store, she was standing in line in the checkout line and she started to sob uncontrollably. Right there, just started to cry. I'll pick the story up in her words. This is what she said. She said, "I felt this heavy darkness come over me. All I wanted to do was go home and go to bed for the rest of the day, maybe forever. So after making everyone in the store very uncomfortable with my crying, I got in my car and drove home asking God how in the world I could get through the day, let alone the rest of my life. And then the strangest thing happened. As I approached the gas station where I always get my gas, I heard a voice in my head and felt a tug that I needed to stop and get gas.

"Well, that was the last thing I wanted to do. I was on my way to bed and the gas tank was over halfway full. And I remember thinking, this is ridiculous. I don't need gas. But the nudge kept getting stronger. So I pulled in, mumbling under my breath how stupid this was, put my credit card in the pump, and for the only time in my life the machine said there was something wrong with my card and I'd have to go into the office. All I could think was, I don't want to be here in the first place. Whose joke is this? I went inside and there was a woman I'd never seen before or since. She took my card, told me that the pump would work. So I went out and filled my tank.

And when I went back in to get my card, she touched my hand in a way that made me stop," there's that word, "in a way that made me stop and looked at me like no one has ever looked at me straight into my soul and she said, 'Someone loves you so much,' and smiled the most heavenly smile I'd ever seen. I suddenly felt that overwhelming physical feeling of darkness begin to lift and Jesus love flow into me as I choked out a tearful thank you and left. But when I got home, I did not go to bed. I was energized and looking forward to my time with family and friends to celebrate Christ's birth. I was able to let go of my to-do list, stop striving frantically to try to make Christmas perfect, and instead focus on Jesus and my family. And we had a very special Christmas as we all held close. And remembered our times with my husband.

"I never saw that woman before or ever again. And that gas station is usually closed that hour of the morning so it was weird that it was even open. I know Jesus took me to that gas station to meet a messenger that he'd sent to let me know that I was loved and would never have to face my pain alone. He was always with me." That's Sabbath. She was running to busyness to escape her burdens and her grief, but Jesus invited her through a stranger to come to him, experience his love in a way that eased her pain. He put his yoke around her and said, "Hey, this burden, it's too much for you. Let me help you carry this," which helped her stop all the frantic efforts to make Christmas perfect, and instead spend a day with him and family and be restored and strengthened. That's Sabbath. So this week, stop something and use that time that you'd have spent on that thing connecting with Jesus or relationships or activities that delight you so that you can be restored down to your soul and given spiritual power from on high.

To close, I'm going to read this passage again, but this time I'm going to read it using the paraphrase that's in the message version of this text because sometimes fresh language helps us hear it differently. So listen again, this is Jesus' invitation to you. "Are you tired, worn out, burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me. Watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. And I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you will learn to live freely and lightly." That is Jesus' invitation to you. So will you RSVP? Jesus, only you can make it. So our rest, ultimate rest has to be in you.

So Lord, this week help us to identify something that we cannot do for a whole day, and instead use that time connecting with you and relationships and activities that restore us. Jesus, help us to do that. Help us to be people that Sabbath well with you so that we are rested and not hassled, so that we are at peace, not in conflict with ourselves and with others. And so that we have power from you to be who you call us to be and do what you call us to do. Lord, we lay all of it down at your feet because we know that you are a friend in whom we can confide, and we know that you help us carry every burden. So we give it all to you, Jesus, in your name. Amen.

Discussion Questions:

Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.

Opening Question: Looking back to last week's sermon and scripture... How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions: Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do you think Jesus means when he says his yoke is easy and his burden is light? Does his yoke seem easy and light to you or not? Explain.
- How would you describe Jesus' understanding of sabbath in Matthew 11:25-30? How would you describe the Pharisees' view of sabbath in chapter 12:1-13? Are there any similarities? What are the differences, and how do those differences inform your practice of sabbath?

Sermon Reflection Questions: Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- What is one thing you can stop for one day this week to be restored by Jesus?
- Sabbath can move us from *restlessness* to *restfulness* in Jesus. Scott shared that listening to Christian hymns, picturing Jesus sitting next to him, and talking to him like he's having a conversation with a friend is how he connects with Jesus. What are some things that work for you?

Closing Question and Application: Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

Closing group prayer: Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.

This week's Sabbath practices:

What's one thing you can STOP for Sabbath?

- Work, homework, errands, chores. Anything that leads you to "hustle."
- Technology, screens, news, email, social media. Scrolling.
- Shopping, overspending, consumerism.