Have you ever felt overwhelmed by life? Frustrated with people to the point of screaming? Become so tired you didn’t want to get out of bed? Of course you have. Because in a world broken by sin, confused inside by our own rationalizations of selfish attitudes, crushed by overwhelming obstacles and sorrowing from damaged relationships -- how can it not happen? Even the most positive thinkers, motivational speakers or dedicated believers disappear for a time as they become overwhelmed, frustrated and tired in a way that a vacation, day off or enjoyable activity won’t revive.

Jesus offers us encouragement even in these most overwhelming times. But many times that encouragement will look different than what we think would help at those times. Let’s look at this incredible promise and offer from our Lord Jesus Christ to EVERYONE of His followers! While the actual promise is in Matt 11:28-30, we are going to start with Jesus’ own frustrations that precede this.

PROPOSITION: Jesus offers the gift of rest and the way of rest through relationship & service to all who are burdened and weary.

I. Being overwhelmed and tired is going to happen “weary and burdened”

READ v 28. To be weary is to become tired from putting out effort and to be burdened is to feel overwhelmingly loaded down. Think of this in terms of a back-pack or package you are carrying. You start carrying that load because you think it will help you in some way – bring necessary supplies on the trail or bring home some purchase you loved. Of course that extra weight takes extra energy so as time passes you get tired. When we are tired, we need refreshment and rest. Now if you aren’t renewed, then the continual extra effort you have to put out to carry that extra load starts to become overwhelming. The tiredness turns to frustration, wanting to quit and wondering why you are even carrying this thing. Was Jesus every frustrated with efforts He was doing or burdens He was bearing?

A. Jesus was frustrated Matt 11:20-24 (16-19)

It is always good to read the verses before & after great promises like ours because it generally gives us a bigger picture of what God is saying. For sake of time, we are just going to look at the verses before. Starting with v 16 we definitely see some frustration rising up in Jesus.

Here He is frustrated with those who are never satisfied. John the Baptist did ministry one way – people complained. Jesus did it another way, and they still complained.

READ v 18-19. These people are never satisfied and that is frustrating! Those who regularly sacrifice to help others see this all the time! Someone will say, “you should have done it this way.” Then later, when you do it that way, they will say, “You should have done it the other way.” Notice this happens to the perfect Jesus. It’s becomes frustrating, draining and overwhelming – even for God incarnate!
In v 20-24, Jesus is frustrated with a lack of positive response. READ v 20-21. Jesus has put out most of His effort giving miraculous evidence to these towns and yet they haven’t responded by repenting. (By the way this is also a very strong indication that hell won’t be the same for everyone, just like heaven will not be enjoyed by all equally.)

B. This is a broken world with broken people
So Jesus is frustrated by a hard-hearted people who are never satisfied and by a self-satisfied group that wants Jesus’ efforts without listening to His message. If this happens to Jesus, how can it not happen to us? This is a broken world, filled with broken people so there is no way we won’t become overwhelmed & tired – weary and burdened.

C. Jesus humbly comes to the Father
So what does Jesus do? READ Matt 11:25-26. The phrase “at that time” intentionally connects this action of thanksgiving with His frustrations. Five times in v 25-27 Jesus refers to His relationship with God as Father. Jesus came in a certain way to His Father which goes on to give Him rest and rejuvenates Him to continue doing God’s work. If you can “feel” Jesus’ growing frustration, you can more clearly see what an odd place this is for thanksgiving. Yet by going back to reaffirm the wisdom of God’s plan allows Jesus to be rejuvenated in the midst of growing frustration as He comes humbly to the Father and reaffirms He wants to continue joining the Father in His work.

D. God is constantly drawing the unlikely
It is so special that God is constantly drawing the unlikely. READ v 25. It is not the popular, rich, privileged and intellectual that most turn in faith to Jesus, but those who are like little children – those who see their dependency on God and look to Him for direction in life. When I put articles in the bulletin about famous people and their reaction to Jesus – like football players this week, it is never to say, “You should believe in Christ because the famous do.” Rather I am pointing out an even bigger miracle since the privileged have the hardest time humbling themselves before God because they are so successful and popular. But since God is regularly drawing the unlikely there will be many times we miss what He is doing because we expect something different. The weariness and overwhelming burden of life in these cases actually comes from our false expectations.

II. We find genuine rest through Jesus

A. Rest comes through Jesus “I will give you rest”
It is in this context where Jesus Himself faced similar frustrating feelings inside that He gives ALL OF US this incredible offer – READ v 28-30. What we need is “rest” when we are tired, frustrated and overwhelmed. Notice the rest Jesus is talking about doesn’t come from time off, getting away or more sleep, although those are important.
disciplines God wants us to maintain in our lives — the rest we are offered comes through Jesus — through our personal relationship with Him, just like His rest came from His relationship with His heavenly Father. That rest comes in TWO distinct ways — as a gift in v 28 and as a result of serving Jesus in v 29. Let’s start with Jesus’ gift of rest in v 28. READ.

Clearly this rest comes through Jesus — it is a gift from Jesus that refreshes us and refocuses us back on God’s work in this world. Are you wearied with life’s burdens? Are you agitated inside trying to help someone that misuses your help? Jesus is where we will find our rest. Now, that takes a major reorientation in our thinking because naturally we want to either “do it ourselves” or “do it our way.” The way to rest is not just do more of this or less of that. In fact as we’ll see later, this rest doesn’t come from getting rid of all problems and ceasing to work — but the rest comes from a renewed strength and attitude as we humbly come to Jesus and join His work.

B. Jesus warmly invites us to His rest “Come to me all you”
Jesus invitation to His rest is incredibly warm and open to all. READ v 28. One might think after Jesus’ statements in v 25 that some have no chance. But Jesus makes it clear that His invitation is for ALL as long as they recognize their weariness, & burden and are willing to come to Jesus alone. The self-righteous, self-absorbed, & self-satisfied — or those who just want to live a life of power, ease or luxury — simply won’t come this way to Jesus. But the nobodies, tired, poor, down-trodden, and outcasts are much more likely — because they see their need and are willing to trust Jesus’ counter-cultural way for their answer.

C. Jesus only puts as much pressure as necessary “gentle & humble in heart”
To make sure you and I see the warmth of this invitation, Jesus describes Himself as “gentle and humble in heart” in v 29. The word gentle is the same word as “meek” in the beatitudes in Matt 5:5 we did a few weeks ago — it is strength under control. Being “humble in heart” means Jesus’ humbleness is at the core of His being — it is not just a show or outward response. Jesus willingly lowered Himself for us — He went from the glories in heaven to live a simple life on earth out of His love for us — so He could show us God’s way more clearly and provide a clear & just way for us to be forgiven for our wrongs.

Often when we hit those times when we are overwhelmingly weary and burdened, we don’t think God wants us around — let alone give us a gift. We don’t feel worthy, we feel we haven’t measured up, we feel we have let Jesus down. Hear the warmth of these words — “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened” — “for I am gentle and humble in heart.” Any pressure God brings is simply there because we won’t listen any other way.

D. We need rest for our soul “rest for your souls”
READ v 29. Notice that the rest we most need is for our soul, rather than just a release from our outward obligations. Why would this be? It sure does seem that simply sitting at the beach everyday with an unlimited expense account free from all obligations would be restful -- and warm! See how counter-cultural Jesus’ promise is? What takes away our inner peace – what keeps us up all night (besides noisy neighbors)?

- In the context here, it is the burden of trying to work one’s way to heaven and into God’s favor. We see that in the events right after these verses where the religious leaders had burdened the people with excessive rules about what God meant when He asked His followers to not work, but rest one day a week. When we take on the burden of trying to prove ourselves to God, we wear out quickly and it makes so many other things in life frustrating and overwhelming.
- The crushing burden of past sin can so overwhelm us deep inside that we become weary of living life – every responsibility feels like an awful burden. The guilt and shame overwhelm us. Only in Jesus will we find true forgiveness.
- Many are kept up at night by fears and worries. Instead of resting, we get up exhausted and tired. Those fears & worries come because we think we are in control and then find out we aren’t. Things aren’t going our way.
- And then there is the soul crushing that comes from feeling worthless & inadequate. Trying to ‘build ourselves up in our own strength’ only increases those feelings of worthlessness when problems overwhelm us.

The rest Jesus offers us is not a release from all obligations but a right relationship and favor with the eternal God Himself through Jesus. There is a deep peace, sense of well-being and shalom that comes from being in a good, loving relationship regardless of what is happening on the outside.

III. This rest is different from vacations, avoiding problems or running away.

So how does this look in our lives today? READ v 28-30.

A. What is involved in “come”? Matt 11:28

The first question we want to ask is what is involved with “Come – Come to me all you who are weary and burdened.” We’ve already seen that we are to picture this as a gracious invitation from Jesus in those times when we are overwhelmed, frustrated and want to quit. To come means you leave something and go to something else. Now I am not comparing us to dogs, BUT when you call a dog to “come”, they must leave what they were doing and come to you. The focus changes from what they were doing to what the Master wants. We need to leave our trying to earn our way to heaven, leave our sins, leave our worries, leave plans, leave even what we are feeling about ourselves – and come to Jesus to listen to Him. I don’t think there is an invitation to follow Jesus that is more personal and tender than this – and it is precisely when we feel inadequate, a failure, or a hopeless mess. This is where you let go and let God.
B. What is involved in “take my yoke upon you”?

Matt 11:29

Besides turning from where we are and literally coming into the presence of Jesus just as we are to listen, there is another part. **READ v 29a. So what is involved in taking Jesus’ yoke upon us?**

A “yoke” is an apparatus that went around the necks of two animals so they could pull a heavy load. **Wait a minute, the reason we are coming to Jesus is because we want to get rid of a heavy burden, not take on another one!** A yoke allows two to pull a load more easily. So the deep rest for our soul – that deep refreshing that rejuvenates us actually comes by taking on a burden BUT to do it WITH Jesus rather than doing it by ourselves. Jesus doesn’t promise escape from reality, but he promises the right equipment to deal with it. So, it is not the heavy yoke of the scribes and Pharisees or what others think, but the yoke of Jesus – joining Jesus in what He is doing.

We know that when we are literally wearing ourselves out with worry – for the world, for our country, for cultural problems or for a personal situation – we are NOT going to find real rest until we genuinely release that to Jesus. We leave trying to control things our self and come into Jesus’ presence, asking what He wants us to do for Him. Rest comes from obedience, from submission, for seeking first God’s Kingdom, from God’s will being done on earth as it is in heaven. Jesus’ rest includes refreshment that comes with forgiveness, renewal that comes with purposeful living, and rejuvenation that comes from serving the Lord!

Jesus doesn’t say take my condo spot in the Bahamas, my easy chair or my bed – those are definitely things of rest – but take my yoke – my work upon you. and as we will see in a moment, that work is the work of being a dedicated disciple of Jesus. This really answers the question people often have about what it means that we aren’t under the law. Some make it sound like we can do whatever we want. But Jesus’ requirements are no less stringent than those of the Jewish leaders in His day – in fact in many ways, Jesus’ call on our lives are even stronger as we are to deny self, take up His cross daily, endure hardship, love our enemy and glorify God in all we do! But we are doing it with Jesus to advance His work in this world and doing it with the empowerment of the Holy Spirit!

This echoes Jeremiah 6:16 “This is what the Lord says: ‘Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls.’ But you said, ‘We will not walk in it.’” The Lord offers that rest but we must come and learn from Jesus.

C. What is involved in “learn from me”?

Matt 11:29

**READ v 29. So what is involved in “learn from me”?** The word “learn” (mathete) here is from the same word that means disciple (mathêtês). A disciple is a lifelong learner. A disciple stands at the crossroads in life and asks – Lord what is the right way to go, not the easy or popular way. God has provided the local church with many...
examples of godly living and gifted teachers so we can learn from Jesus – learn both by example and by teaching. Americans just want to learn when there is a problem and they only want to learn enough to get out of their problem. If they don’t see how something is applicable right now than it can’t be important. But God is getting us ready right now for situations we won’t face for a decade. He alone knows what we need to learn, go through, and develop before that. We can be like the ancient Israelites and refuse to walk in God’s way or we can be lifetime learners – dedicated disciples who then will find rest in those very struggles that otherwise overwhelm us.

Now I don’t want this to happen to any here, but I know it will because we live in a broken world. Some of us will hear the words, “You have cancer” and it may even include “and there is nothing we can do about it.” Definitely overwhelming and burdensome! But God alone knew that before you did. God alone has brought people, teaching, ministry opportunities and struggles into our lives before that to give us the opportunity to learn what we need before that time so that cancer won’t weary and burden us to the place we want to give up. Please continue to be a lifetime learner – a growing disciple all your life, not just when you find it convenient. We encourage you to regularly do five things to be a dedicated disciple – balance these don’t try to do everything in all 5 areas: (1) regular participate in public worship – what we are doing now; (2) be involved with a smaller group of believers where you can ask questions, share victories & burdens and see God’s work in peoples’ lives – here that can be through a community group, adult Sunday School, Bible study, task group, prayer triplet or any other regular smaller gathering; (3) Take time to serve Jesus through the local church & area ministries; (4) witness to those around who do not know Jesus as God provides opportunities and (5) practice the spiritual disciplines like personal Bible reading, prayer, generosity, fasting, etc. The invitation to come to Jesus is an invitation to discipleship, that is, to follow him and His teaching.

D. How is Jesus’ yoke easy & His burden light? Matt 11:30

READ v 30. So how can Jesus’ yoke be easy and His burden be light when all the disciples were martyred except John and he was imprisoned. Jesus doesn’t call us to an easy life, but one of service. Discipleship demands nothing less than our whole life and self-denial. How can Jesus’ yoke be easy and His burden light? Because of the result. It is worth it.

So take Jesus up on it. How heavy is all that junk you’ve been carrying on your back? Has sexual immorality brought you rest? Has partying every weekend brought you rest? Has that perfect girl or guy brought you rest? Has your education brought you rest? Has climbing the corporate ladder brought you rest? Has any of that stuff you keep buying—the house, the car, the home entertainment center, the box of Twinkies—brought you rest? Following Christ is the hardest thing you will ever do. There’s a yoke—you must follow his rules. There is a burden we carry including persecutions, trials, & testings. But when we do come – and keep coming to Jesus, He brings the rest every human being longs for! Keep overcoming in the power of Jesus.