

Introduction

James Lowell Russell was a 19th century American romantic poet, one of the acclaimed *Fireside Poets*. He was a man of insight. He said things like **"At the devil's booth are all things sold. Each ounce of dross costs its ounce of gold"** and **"The foolish and the dead alone never change their opinion."** But he said one thing in particular that's the most insightful of all, **"Not failure, but low aim is crime."** That maxim of his has an inherent implication. We should aim high and that's what I'm going to preach about today – aiming high as followers of Jesus.

Weary and Heavy Laden

In verse 28, Jesus mentions those who **"come to"** Him. But let's stop for a moment and contemplate those who don't. That they don't means they don't arrange their day-to-day affairs around Him and His words. They take Him and His words into account in their thinking and acting infrequently if at all.

Two third generation non-Christians and I were talking when the subject of religion came up. During the course of our discussing it, I asked them, **"How many times during a typical day do you think about Jesus?"** To which they replied, **"Never unless someone mentions His name."** That necessarily means they don't take Him or His words into account in any of things they decide and do.

They may be extreme cases, but most people on planet earth aren't all that much unlike them. The fact is most routinely think and act in day-to-day life as if Jesus and His words are utterly irrelevant to them. They're **"apart from Him"** as we say it, in the most practical of terms.

But so what? Does it really matter? Does being apart from Jesus impact the nature and quality of their day-to-day lives? Sociologist Tony Campolo apparently thinks not. Referring to what he calls **"secularists,"** he writes, **"They are good people who seem to be gaining a certain fulfillment from their work and who seem to be enjoying life. They**

too need Jesus. But secularists are generally happy people."

That's a far cry though from how the Bible describes them. It pictures the life of those apart from Jesus as one of "**desolation.**" Note the terms He uses in verse 28. They are "**weary and heavy laden.**" Dallas Willard's description of the secular life far more accurately portrays it than Campolo's does. It's "**a life of crushing burdens, failures, and disappointments, a life caught in the toils of endless problems that are never resolved.**" Just look at the unending soap opera known as normal human life and you'll grasp what he means.

Not long ago, a 30 year-old fourth-year neurology resident became a You-Tube star for attacking an Uber driver. The driver called her out for trying to swipe a ride from another customer. She then went off on him by swearing at him and physically assaulting him. She was later placed on leave by her hospital and admitted she was "**ashamed.**"

That incident is reflective of those who don't come to Jesus. They're weary and heavy laden because they don't. For them, life is desolate and hard.

Rest for Your Souls

That kind of life contrasts sharply with the other kind Jesus mentions in verses 28-29. It's one of "**rest.**" He uses two words in verse 30 to define this "**rest**" more particularly, "**easy**" and "**light.**" Those words, together, convey a specific kind of life. It's one of ease, lightness, and power.

Consider the real life testimonies of two disciples of Jesus in that regard, which I'll relate in the first person. Years ago, when someone and I came to the only convenient parking spot in the lot and he took it, I was irritated. But when that happens now, I'm glad he takes it because I want him to have it and was going to give it to him anyway. Or years ago, I didn't want others to outshine me and envied them when they did. But now I want others to outshine me and rejoice when they do.

Those testimonies are enlightening. Notice that the experiences of

those disciples are entirely different now, better, than they were before. They now have **“rest.”** They have an ease, lightness, and power in those two aspects of day-to-day life, and countless others, that they didn't have before, which is precisely what Jesus depicts in our text. It's what He called **“abundant life”** in John 10:10.

Every sane person of course wants that kind of life. It appeals to us all. It's one that all of us desire and seek and the good news is that we can have it. We can have it *if* we **“come to Me (Jesus),”** verse 28.

In texts like Luke 14, He Himself defines coming to Him in terms of discipleship. We arrange our day-to-day affairs around being with Him, becoming like Him, and learning and doing all that He says. But I want to get more specific. We must do two things in particular in order to have the life of **“rest”** Jesus offers. Let's identify and examine both.

Believe

First, we must believe. We must believe that the words of Jesus about **“rest”** are real, true, and relevant.

Let me make a quick observation in that regard. Probably most Christians don't. They'd agree with the words of G.K. Chesterton, **“Christianity has not so much been tried and found wanting, as it has been found difficult and left untried.”** His comment reflects what most people, including Christians, believe. The life of **“rest”** in our text is immensely difficult, even impossible, to achieve.

The statements they make betray that belief of theirs. I think of familiar lines like **“We're only human,” “Christians aren't perfect; just forgiven,”** and **“to err is human”** to name a few. Those statements mirror what Christians believe. Desire and pursue the interests of others over our own. Rejoice when others outshine us. Love our enemies. Bless those who despitefully use us. Don't be anxious for our lives. Receive criticism with gratitude and joy. Be patient with the shortcomings of others. And on it goes. Most Christians believe Jesus doesn't really expect us to do those things because we can't. It's be

unrealistic and unreasonable of Him if He expect that.

How do we explain Him saying the things He did then?

Some years ago, several pastors and I were conversing about the radical things Jesus said, like blessing those who despitefully use us – spitting in our face for instance. One pastor stated in that regard that no one can do that, not sincerely at least. When I asked him why Jesus said it then, he replied: **“He was giving us ideal to shoot for knowing we’d never attain it.”** Many believe that or something like it. The words of Jesus are an ideal that we better ourselves by seeking. But we’re bound to fall glaringly short. They’re a hope or wish of His more than they are a statement about the substance of our lives.

That’s one explanation. Another is that His words aren’t for us here and now. They were for another **“dispensation,”** like the Apostolic Age of the 1st century. Or they’re for the age to come, which is our eternal life in heaven with God. But they aren’t for here and now.

Many Christians believe that, but they’re wrong. Jesus’ offer of **“rest”** is such an appealing one. We all know that we’d be far better off and the world a far better place if others and we had it, which leads me to an observation. Notice the where and when of it. It’s here and now. He offers it in the midst of our day-to-day life with all of its challenges, problems, and pains. We desire and seek **“rest”** in that life and Jesus offers it to us. We can have it here and now.

But we can have it only if we believe we can. Our beliefs are the rails upon which our lives run. They direct what we decide and do. So, if we believe Jesus’ words about **“rest”** are unreal, untrue, and irrelevant, we most certainly won’t do the second thing that rest requires of us. If we firmly believe that they’re real, true, and relevant, we most likely will. This first thing – believing – is the basis of the second thing.

Prepare

That second thing is preparing. We prepare so that we can live with ease, lightness, and power in the moments of challenge.

An analogy helps explain this. Suppose a person who doesn't run suddenly decides to run a marathon, 26.2 miles, *next week*. He obviously wouldn't be able to. He'd never finish it because one has to train for a marathon. Most marathon training plans range from 12 to 20 weeks – longer for non-runners. They're comprised of four primary elements: (1) Base mileage; (2) The long run; (3) Speed work; and (4) Rest and recovery. One cannot succeed in the moment of challenge, the marathon, unless he has prepared for it.

What's true of marathons is true of all sports and almost all other endeavors, including the life of "**rest**" Jesus offers us.

Many Christians have a flawed strategy in that regard. Think about some of those moments of challenge in life. Our competitor outshines us. Our in-law criticizes us. Our enemy spits in our face. Our employer fires us. Our surgeon diagnoses us with cancer. The strategy of many Christians is to try to think, feel, and act with ease, lightness, and power at that very moment, without preparing for it. But they can't, any more than one can run the marathon without preparing for it.

If we want rest in the moments of challenge, we must prepare for them. A runner prepares for the moment of challenge, the marathon. He does so by living an overall kind of life that trains his mind and body to run it. It's the same for disciples of Jesus. We prepare for the moments of challenge, like blessing those who spitefully use us. We do so by living an overall kind of life that trains our minds and bodies to do that.

What is that overall kind of life? It's one of routinely directing our minds and bodies to Jesus and His kingdom at hand. We devote ourselves to practices in day-to-day life that effectively engage Him and it. We can do that even if we have hectic schedules that demand great expenditures of energy and time. We just have to learn how. *The Power to Live* study under the *Disciples 'R' Us* tab of our church's website will assist you in learning how. It identifies and thoroughly explains the practices that enable Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, to give us rest.

That last statement is a critical one. We can't conjure up rest on

our own or force it to happen. It's a condition or state Jesus "**gives**" to quote verse 28. He produces it in us through the ministry and work of the Holy Spirit. But we have a part to play. It's to give Him something to work with, which we do by preparing as I just explained it.

Conclusion

Those then are the two things we must do to have the "**rest**" Jesus offers. In the context of discipleship to Him, we believe His offer of it is real, true, and relevant. We also prepare for the moments of challenge by living an overall kind of life of engaging Him and His kingdom.

Now, in verse 29, Jesus implies what the foundation of doing both of those things is. By foundation, I mean what compels and enables us to believe and prepare. He declares, "**Learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart.**" Those words reveal what I believe is our first priority as disciples of His. It's to build a purposeful, objective, and thorough vision of Him. We learn everything we can about Him. We recognize in detail when we do that He is the greatest and best. He is absolutely and utterly lovely and competent. That's our vision of Him, which is the foundation of believing and preparing. It compels and enables us to aim high in other words.

Sadly, many Christians don't. They aim low instead. They adhere to the proposition that we're "**just forgiven.**" That's their vision, just forgiven. Their destiny? The life of unrest that goes along with it.

But it isn't ours. Our vision is "**rest.**" We believe and prepare as best we can, leaving the result to Jesus because it's His responsibility. Grasp that! Our responsibility is the effort – to believe and prepare as best as we can. His responsibility is the result – "**rest.**"

Knowing that we aren't responsible for the result, we don't fear failure, at all. In our thinking and acting, we adhere to James Lowell Russell's maxim instead, "**not failure, but low aim is crime.**" Doing so in turn infuses us with confidence. As a result, we desire and seek the life of "**rest**" that Jesus offers. We aim high in other words!