

Sermon for Sunday, September 28, 1975, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor
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"WHEN YOUR SPIRIT IS WILLING BUT YOUR FEET ARE TIRED"

St. Matthew 11:25-30

Text: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." --St. Matthew 11:28-29

Most of us want a better life. By that we do not necessarily mean better things or more things. No, what we really want is a better quality of life. We want better relationships with our children or a better marriage. We want a better relationship to God and we want life to have more meaning and purpose. We want to have a deep, inner joy that brings a sense of peace and contentment. And if we were asked if we were perfectly content with life, if life had fulfilled all our hopes and dreams, most of us would have to reply, "not completely".

In that sense, most of us, like the people to whom Jesus extended His invitation, "labor and are heavy laden". We are trying. We are trying to have better relationships. We are trying to find more peace and purpose in life. Indeed, our spirits are willing but we discover that our feet are getting tired.

Are your feet tired? Do you catch yourself saying, "If there were not so much pressure..." Or, "There are simply too many demands." Or, "There just aren't enough hours in the day." Or perhaps your tiredness comes from another direction. Maybe it isn't the demands and pressures, but it is the sense of tragedy, the sense of waste of life, the sense of hopelessness. You see, life sometimes seems to go all wrong. A loved one is snatched away by death; something you built your life on fails you; the things you worked and fought for elude you; or suddenly you find that you are by yourself--lonely, afraid, friendless. Yes, our feet get tired that way, too.

Jesus says, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, all you whose feet are tired, and I will give you rest." What's He talking about? What kind of rest does He mean? Well, I can think of some things the rest He is talking about doesn't mean. For example, it doesn't mean freedom from duty and responsibility. There came a time in my own life when I thought so. I thought I needed to be free of duty, free from responsibility for a while. But I quickly discovered that I was wrong. Off by myself, away from duty, I was lonely and not needed, and as quickly as I discovered it, I caught the first plane home. I read a story once of a man who had so much responsibility--and he longed to be free of it. His phone was always ringing, the mail always brought new duty, his desk was always cluttered with things he had to do, and there were always people clamoring for an appointment. How he longed to be free of duty! And then one night he had a dream. He came to his office and the waiting room was empty. In his office he found his desk clear of work. All morning his phone was silent, never ringing once. He heard the mailman come, but he had no mail. "What's wrong?" he cried. "What is this place?" "Didn't you know?" said the mailman. "This is hell."

Well, perhaps the rest Jesus is talking about is freedom from work, freedom from labor. But if that is so, why are so many of us reluctant to retire? And when we do, why are we so bored and why is it that time and time again I see a man retire and soon thereafter pass away--sometimes, I think, because of boredom, or a broken heart because he has lost the one thing that gave meaning to his existence. A

19th century poet put it this way, "Let me die, working. Still tackling plans unfinished, tasks undone! Clean to its end, swift may my race be run. No laggard steps, no faltering, no shirking; let me keep working!" No, true rest is not a rose without a thorn or service without a cross. Rest is not lack of obstacles or absence of challenge. Goethe in a little poem entitled, "True Rest", puts it this way: "Rest is not quitting the busy career; Rest is the fitting of self to one's sphere. 'Tis loving and serving the highest and best; 'Tis onward, unswerving, and this is true rest."

So rest is not something outward. It isn't freedom from duty and responsibility, it isn't freedom from work or freedom from the difficulties of life. Notice our text for this morning. Jesus says if we come to Him He will give us rest. Then He says this, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." Jesus is talking about "soul rest". He is talking about something inward. He is talking about how we respond to life within us.

Dr. Mayo of Mayo Clinic fame, tells us that one out of every two beds in the hospitals today is for those who are emotionally or mentally ill. It is true that life today--in spite of our modern achievement and inventions (or perhaps because of them?)--is much more complex and complicated than it was even 25 years ago. Many of us are simply not equipped spiritually to meet the demands of life today. I think one reason that western movies have had a consistent appeal over the years is because they present life in a simple, uncomplicated form. Things are always black and white with no shades of grey. You have the good guys and the bad guys and the calvary arrives in the nick of time and the good guys win. When John Wayne takes his reigns in his teeth and a gun in each hand, you know that justice is about to triumph. But real life isn't that simple. In the face of the hard realities of life, many of us simply respond poorly inside. We labor and are heavy laden because inwardly we are handling life badly. Indeed, our feet are tired. We need "soul rest".

Sometimes we feel we are the victims of life. If we could change the outward circumstances of life, life would be different and better. Some of you may remember the classic film, "Rebel Without a Cause". In this movie James Dean portrayed in a moving way the confused young delinquent. But the real problem in the story revolves around the mother. She feels that changing the outward circumstances will solve their problems--a new home, a new community, a new beginning will solve their family problems. But the real problem is an inner problem. It is a problem of the soul. And no matter where they move or what they do, the inner problem goes with them. And, of course, that is exactly why our feet are tired--it is an inner problem and we can't run away from it.

Dr. Charles Allen tells the story of two women who had the same operation. One of them responded badly, became depressed and talked about the terrible thing that had happened to her and how she would never be able to take care of herself. Her condition worsened and in a few weeks she died. The other woman had children at home. Her concern was for them and she was eager to get back home to take care of them. In two weeks she was out to the hospital and home again. Each lady had responded differently to the same problem. It was not the outward circumstance that made the difference, it was the inward reaction.

Dr. Robert Ozment writes, "I am sure of one thing: man does not fail because life is hard; neither does man succeed because life is easy. The circumstances of life are beside the point. Man is driven to defeat and despair, or he climbs to peaks of joy and triumph because of his attitude toward life and his faith in God."

This brings me to the third thing I want to share with you this morning. First, it is not the outward circumstances that make our feet tired, but second, it is our inner response that make them tired. Now, notice thirdly that the only adequate way to have "soul rest" is in a relationship to Jesus. Jesus says, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden." And then He says, "I will give you rest." You know, it is sort of interesting how Jesus puts it. He says, "Take my yoke upon you..." Our young people may not know what a yoke is, but a yoke is a wooden instrument used to hook up oxen to a wagon or some other burden. What Jesus is saying is this: "Take the instrument I give you for pulling your load." Well, a lot of us are trying to pull our load with a lot of different things. But Jesus says if we take what He gives us to pull our load with, our feet won't be tired, we will have rest for our souls.

Well, what sort of yoke are you wearing this morning? All of us have to pull the load that life gives us--one way or another we have to pull it. So the real question is, what sort of gear are we hooked up with? And Jesus says that the only way to be hooked up so your feet won't get tired is with Him.

The rich young ruler came to Jesus and said, "What must I do to be saved?" That is, "How can I reorganize my outward circumstances and reshuffle my world to assure my salvation?" Jesus' answer is particularly striking. In effect, he says, "Quit worrying about external circumstances. In fact, get rid of them so they won't sidetrack you. Reorganize your life inwardly--come, follow me." And isn't that what many of us need--a life reorganized inwardly around Jesus?

Or look at the rich fool in the story Jesus told. He reorganized his outward life and circumstances. He tore down old barns and built bigger ones. And in the light of a world reorganized in his own terms he said, "Soul, take your ease." But it wasn't his outward life and circumstances that needed reorganizing, it was his soul. That night he discovered his feet were tired because the Lord said to him, "Fool, tonight your soul is required of you."

Do you remember the story of the Philippian jailer who had St. Paul in his prison. Apparently that prison and his job as jailer were the center of his life. When an earthquake came along and shook it to pieces--and when he was sure his prisoners were gone--he found his feet were very tired. He was on the point of taking his own life until Paul stopped him. In the recognition that his problem was really an internal one and a spiritual one, he cried out to St. Paul, "What must I do to be saved?" Paul told him that the only way to pull life's load was to reorganize his life around Jesus and hook up to Him. Then his burden would be light. Paul said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved." It is as simple as that.

Are your feet tired? A life reorganized with Jesus at the center is the way to pull your load.