**Shelter-In-Grace**

**Part 5**

**Finding Refuge in REST**

**Matthew 11:28-30**

Hello Calvary family! Turn in your Bibles to Matthew 11. So grateful to be with you today as we dive in to the FIFTH and FINAL week of our series *SHELTER IN GRACE*. We’ve talked about finding refuge in…

* *Union*
* *Forgiveness*
* *Righteousness*
* *Acceptance*

And today, we conclude with something that might feel like the most foreign concept in your life…and that would be Christ’s invitation to enjoy *REST* in Him.

A few short years ago, I was really excited about smartwatches. Kim bought me the first gen Apple watch. After a few months of being “hyper-connected” and dealing with “phantom vibrations,” I got rid of it. I want to look at my screens and deal with interruptions *LESS*frequently, NOT MORE.

Sometimes I’d wear the smartwatch to bed. Most of my life I’d NEVER wear a watch to bed, but nowadays, these smartwatches connect to apps on our smartphones that are designed to track info about us, EVEN WHILE WE’RE ASLEEP.

So, when I’d wear my smartwatch to bed, it would give me a “sleep score” when I woke up in the morning. And the score was supposedly based on my heartrate and my movements throughout the night.

The score that got recorded was from 0-100. And the sleep score was always accompanied by a word indicating the quality of sleep such as “fair” or “good” or “poor” or “excellent.” Now, I don’t really know how accurate it was, but it’s amazing to think that a little computer connected to the pulse on my wrist could actually offer me an evaluation of how I was sleeping…how much REST I was getting…at night.

And the ironic thing is that sometimes it stressed me out, because I’m a competitive person by nature. So, when I’d wake up and see a sleep score of “72” with the word “fair” next to it…I’d think, *“Fair? How’s a score of 72 considered fair? That was a C-minus when I was in school!”*

And then, if I’d dwell on it too long, I’d start worrying that I’m not sleeping properly…or that I need more rest…or whatever. And ironically, the very thing that was supposed to be monitoring my REST actually began producing UNREST in my soul!

As we reflect upon the past few months here in America, we’ve seen plenty of *UNREST*, haven’t we? We’ve seen…

* A deadly virus spread around the globe
* A volatile stock market and economic uncertainty
* Civil unrest in the wake of ongoing social and racial and political tensions…

And as I was reflecting on these recent trials and tribulations here in America, it struck me that we’re living in a world not unlike the early church of the first century Roman Empire. Let me quickly give you some context before we read our theme text.

For the early Christians, due to a lack of hygiene and basic medical technology, the average life expectancy was about 35 if you include the high infant mortality rate in that figure. And even without that rate, for those who lived past their births…the average age was under 50.

In Judaism, with the exception of the ruling class, the average family lived in dire poverty mostly supported by uncertain, feast-or-famine jobs like fishing, agriculture and selling basic textiles. With few exceptions, there was rarely a sense of being able to truly get ahead.

And as for civil unrest, the Roman Empire had placed everyone under a virtual police state known as Pax Romana…which was a *forced peace* under the threat of extreme consequence if you stepped out of line.

For centuries the nation of Israel had lived under foreign occupation going all the way back to the Assyrians and Babylonians. And by the time of Jesus, they’d had *enough* of the oppression…and were crying out for a Messiah to heal their wounds and to right the wrongs that had been committed against them.

To make matters worse, when you became a believer or a follower of the Way, even your Jewish community abandoned you. You lost your status in the community, your job, and most of the time, you even lost your family.

So, this is the culture that Jesus stepped into. It’s the world He traded Heaven for when He took on human flesh. And most of the Jews rejected Him as their Messiah because He didn’t fit the mold they wanted or expected.

The OT was filled with prophecies about the coming Messiah. Many prophecies spoke of a *ruling and reigning* King who’d establish an everlasting Kingdom and bring peace & prosperity to God’s oppressed people. Notice, establish or set up His Kingdom…not pick a political party.

There were other prophecies about how this same Messiah would be humble and meek, like a suffering servant who’d eventually give His life over to His enemies.

And the average Jewish believer couldn’t really reconcile these two job descriptions. How in the world can the same Messiah be someone who *suffers and dies*….and at the same time…*rules and reigns* over Israel’s enemies?

So, because of this confusion - this apparent contradiction - the Jewish teachers focused on the “ruling and reigning” Messiah, while largely ignoring the “suffering and dying” Messiah. They didn’t want a meek and mild Savior. They wanted THE MAN!

They wanted a superhero to rescue them from their political enemies and restore the nation to something even better than the old “glory days” under King David…

So, when Jesus comes with a message of…

* Servanthood over supremacy
* Meekness over militance
* Truth over tyranny
* Love over law…

…the Jewish people aren’t ready to receive that. They don’t want a Messiah who’s the illegitimate child of a peasant girl from Nazareth. And yet, as Jesus looks upon the crowded streets of Jerusalem, He weeps bitterly over the plight of His people, seeing them as sheep without a shepherd.

So, knowing their true need…Jesus makes this incredible promise to ANYONE wishing to take Him up on the offer. He says in Matthew chapter 11:28-30, our theme passage:

**Matthew 11:28-30 “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.”**

I don’t know what kind of UNREST you’re dealing with today. But I know it can come in various forms. Perhaps you’re experiencing…

* ***Relational Unrest*** – the kind of turmoil in which one or more significant people in your life are at odds with you or betrayed you or rejected you, and you’re growing weary or angry or frustrated.
* ***Financial Unrest*** – the type of strife that keeps you tossing and turning at night, wondering how you’ll pay the bills, much less get ahead for the future.
* ***Mental or Emotional Unrest*** – the feeling like you’re about to lose control because of fear, anxiety, depression or some other invisible enemy.
* ***Spiritual Unrest*** – the insecurity you face when you just aren’t able to believe that God’s opinion of you is unshakably good, and that He’s *for you* and not against you, no matter the circumstances of life.

The list could go on, but you get the picture. UNREST comes in all shapes and sizes, in all stages and seasons of life. And before you know it, it can suck the life out of you in so many ways.

But as we close this *Shelter in Grace* series today— I have good news for you! Nearly too good to be true!

* The *first thing* you need to know is that you aren’t alone in these struggles.
* And the *second thing* you need to know is that Jesus has already bought and paid for the solution to these struggles.

During this series someone commented online: *“Good message, BUT what does the gospel have to do with what’s going on in the world right now?”*

To that comment I simply respond: “Sir, it has EVERYTHING to do with what’s going on right now! The gospel is *THE* answer.

* It’s heaven’s cure for the world’s woes.
* It’s the power of God in the middle of what’s going on right now.
* It raises the dead and heals the broken.
* It gives strength to the weary and wings to the feeble.
* It’s Jesus!

One pastor has rightly said that *“The most important thing about your psychology is your theology.”* In other words, when your mind’s filled with untrue thoughts about God or yourself…it dramatically impacts the way you experience life and process reality across the board.

The truth is that we, as American Christians, aren’t very good at experiencing and enjoying the REST we’ve been given in Christ. We struggle with it…and this is why we need real gospel-centered relationships, and a local church, like Calvary, and Gospel Circles – constantly reminding us of the REST that we’re to live in!

People shouldn’t come to church to hear sermons that voice the pastor’s opinions about politics, psychology, economics, or even religion. They should instead come to be reminded of the truth of the gospel—the answer. Again, when your mind’s filled with untrue thoughts about God or yourself…it dramatically impacts the way you experience life and process reality across the board. The gospel is the truth that sets you free!

So, what does it mean to find REFUGE in rest? I want to share three BIG ideas with you that’ll transform the way you experience life beginning right this minute, if you’ll simply believe it and receive it!

**You Find Refuge in His Rest When…**

1. **You AGREE with God about the “*It is Finished*” GOSPEL**

There’s a word the Bible uses for “agreeing with God.” Do you know what word it is? It’s the word “confession.” It literally means “to agree with,” or “to speak the same thing as.” Confession literally means “agreeing with God.”

Most of us have no problem agreeing with God about our sin – or whatever we perceive to be wrong with us. But we often have a VERY difficult time agreeing with God about what He says is *right with us! We have no problem agreeing with who we WERE in Adam. But we often have a difficult time agreeing with God about who we ARE in Christ.*

When I was growing up, usually whenever I heard the word “confession,” it was connected to something NEGATIVE. It was always connected to my SIN.

* Did you confess your sins today?
* Do you have any un-confessed sin in your life?
* Have you confessed in order to be forgiven?

Confession was all about a *transaction* that repeatedly needed to take place between me and God. It was the only way to feel as though I could stay “right with God.”

But as we’ve already learned throughout this series – there’s only ONE thing that makes us right with God, and it’s actually not a thing, but a Person.

Jesus Christ alone is who makes you right with God. And this “rightness” with God is a permanent reality…and NOT something you can fall in or out of based upon your recent track record or whether you’ve confessed enough sins.

Listen, I’m all for confessing our sinful behavior to God. Because I always want to walk in conscious agreement with Him. If I’ve wronged another person or been harboring an attitude that dishonors God or fails to bring Him glory, I want to agree with Him that I’m better than that! I want to agree that I’m now a new creation and that walking in sin is no longer fitting for me. I’m no longer compatible with the old way of life!

But confession of sin is NOT about getting little doses of forgiveness over and over again! Forgiveness happened once-for-all-of-my-sins at the cross! So, under the NC, confession of sin isn’t about forgiveness. It’s about humility. It’s about walking in conscious alignment with God. It’s about telling God, “Father, You were right, and I was wrong.”

But guess what? God wants you to agree with Him about a whole lot more than just your sin! He wants you to agree with Him about everything we’ve been looking at in this series so far! He wants you to agree with Him about…

* Your UNION with Him, even when the circumstances of life make you feel distant
* Your FORGIVENESS in Him, even when the decisions you’ve made make you feel dirty
* Your RIGHTEOUSNESS in Him, even when you feel condemned or accused
* Your ACCEPTANCE in Him, even when you feel unworthy or undesirable

And this is what it means to agree with God about the “It is Finished” Gospel! Sadly, a vast majority of people believe in an unfinished Gospel. In other words, a “Jesus-plus” worldview! And it’s very dangerous, because it has Jesus in it, so it feels safe enough to embrace. You know what I’m talking about? It’s…

* Jesus PLUS my best effort
* Jesus PLUS water baptism
* Jesus PLUS confession of sin
* Jesus PLUS confirmation
* Jesus PLUS rules and rituals
* Jesus PLUS the Law of Moses
* Jesus PLUS blah…blah…blah

And over time, what we begin to discover about those partial Gospels is that they have NO power to produce REST in our lives! They only produce UNREST! There’s always more to be done in settling the issue about the real status of our relationship with God! The correct equation is Jesus PLUS nothing equals EVERYTHING!

Only when we agree with God about the “It is finished” Gospel will we begin to truly experience the REST for our souls that Jesus promised in Matthew 11, our theme verses. And this leads into a second discovery for finding refuge in REST, which is when…

1. **You CHOOSE to make your thought-life obedient to CHRIST**

**In 2 Corinthians 10:5**, Paul wrote that, ***“We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ”***

This is all about the battleground of our minds. Satan has already lost the war. He’s lost the battle for our spirits. We’ve been crucified with Christ and raised to new life with Him at a spiritual level. Our human spirits are forever united with the Holy Spirit and are heaven-ready at this very moment.

When our spirits are transferred from earth to heaven, there will be no improvements needed. No polishing or refurbishing. Jesus has already perfected our spirits!

Satan knows this, and he understands that the only way He can bring defeat into our lives is by lying to us…and getting us to self-destruct by believing and obeying things that aren’t true about God, ourselves and others.

So *“taking every thought captive and making it obedient to Christ”* is about identifying the lies we believe – and subjecting those lies to the truth of the Gospel. It’s about exchanging old thinking for new thinking…and false thinking for true thinking.

I know believers in my own life who are paralyzed by the lies of the enemy because they’re allowing the lies of a de-fanged, de-clawed lion named Lucifer to wreak havoc in the battleground of their minds!

Taking thoughts captive and surrendering them to the truth of Christ’s obedience on the cross is a choice we can make and must make every day. It’s a habit we can develop and must develop by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Almost every time I’m feeling anxious, or depressed, or angry, or lustful, or greedy or you name it…I can usually trace those feelings back toward some fundamental lie that I’m believing about God or myself or others. For example:

* When I’m anxious, I’m usually not trusting what God’s said true about my future.
* When I’m depressed, I’m usually not trusting what God’s said true about my past.
* When I’m angry, I’m usually not trusting what God’s said true about my present.
* When I’m lustful, I’m usually not believing that God’s provision for me is perfect.
* When I’m greedy, I’m usually not choosing to be thankful for what I’ve already been blessed with.

You can try this and see for yourself how true it is that when we allow lies to run freely in the corridors of our unrenewed minds for too long, it produces unrest and weariness that Jesus promised we wouldn’t have to live with in a relationship with Him!

And finally, you can take refuge in rest when…

1. **You SUBMIT to His way of growth rather than the WORLD’S**

This ultimately circles all the way back around to where we started in this series: with the Vine and the branches.

Remember…branches can’t and don’t produce anything of themselves. But when you look at many of the discipleship strategies and models championed among Christians today, it’s a breeding-ground for soulful UNREST! It’s totally insane!

Real productivity comes from an attitude of REST. Listen to what the Apostle Paul said about the nature of productivity in His life. You could easily say, from a human perspective, that Paul was the most “productive” Christian ever to live. He was certainly a branch that bore incredible fruit.

In the context of Colossians 1, Paul’s talking about how he was so diligent to train people up to maturity in the faith. But listen to how Paul himself describes that reality:

**Colossians 1:29 “To this end I strenuously contend with *all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me*.”**

In another passage, Paul’s telling the Corinthian believers about how thankful he is for the mighty things God’s done in and through his life. And as he’s reflecting on his unlikely ascension from a Christ-hating Pharisee to a Christ-proclaiming Apostle, he says this:

**1 Corinthians 15:10 “But whatever I am now, it is all because God poured out his special favor on me—and not without results. For I have worked harder than any of the other apostles; *yet it was not I but God who was working through me by his grace*.”**

Listen… a lot of times you’ll hear people criticize those of us who seek to declare and demonstrate the Gospel of grace. And one of the biggest false-assumptions people make is that we don’t care enough about holy living…that we don’t take discipleship seriously enough…that we aren’t calling people to be radical enough for Jesus.

And the irony of this allegation…the falsehood behind this assumption…is the idea that there’s ANY other power to be relied upon for spiritual maturity outside of the grace of God! As Paul put it…the grace of God IS the fuel that supplies every ounce of fruit we’ll ever bear in this life! Let me say that again…*the grace of God IS the fuel that supplies every ounce of fruit we’ll ever bear in this life!* We start with grace and continue in grace. It’s grace from first to last.

Think of it this way… Can you imagine a fleet of F-16 fighter jets on an aircraft carrier…beautiful planes that cost about $30 million apiece…state-of-the-art war-crafts designed to overpower military enemies through the air…

…can you imagine that instead of filling those $30m jets with highly refined, military-grade jet fuel, one day somebody brings in a big tank of “87-grade regular” from Costco?

What would you expect to happen to the functionality of those jets? Do you think you’d get the kind of precision and productivity from those jets that you’d get if they were running on the proper fuel? Of course not!

You’d be surprised if they could even make it safely off the aircraft carrier! No matter how beautiful and well-put-together those planes looked on the outside, they’d be *sputtering and mal-functioning* like crazy if they were attempting to run on a cheap, sub-grade alternative to the jet-fuel they’re designed for.

And that’s exactly what’s happening in the Church today! God has this vast, amazing fleet of state-of-the-art vessels who are made-in-His-image. FYI…I’m talking about YOU! And yet, well-meaning preachers are trying to fill them with a cheap, sub-grade alternative to the highly refined, absolutely pure and powerful, precision-fuel of God’s grace! By the way…next week we begin a new series called GOSPEL-FUELED JOY: A Collection of Talks from Philippians. We’re going verse by verse through Philippians. I’m not sure how long it’ll take…but it’s going to be life-changing!

And in the cockpits of our lives, we’ve got warning-lights of depression flashing. Sirens of anxiety blasting. Hazard-warnings of anger sounding off like crazy. And it’s all connected to the fact that we’re designed to run on the jet-fuel of God’s grace, but we’re filling our tanks with 87-grade regular…full of impurities that reduce the Good News to merely “mediocre news” at best!

Much of what’s sold as “the gospel” is an inferior substitute for the real thing. We must not be fooled by cheap knockoffs any longer! And there’s an easy way to distinguish the authentic from the counterfeit. The true gospel is 100% goodnews. There’s no bad news in the good news. If the gospel you’ve bought into makes you feel insecure, anxious, guilty, shameful and condemned, then it’s no good. Discard it before it kills you!

The foundational path toward maturity – the path of real discipleship and growth – the path of real sanctification and holiness wasn’t designed to be corrupted or fueled by a Gospel riddled with impurity! And we’ll never experience the soul-rest Jesus promised us if we aren’t experiencing growth from a place of absolute confidence in His all-sufficient grace!

***Confidence in His grace is what leads us into the experience of His rest.***

And I’ll close with this. The author of Hebrews says it so well. The author’s using the ancient Israelites as an example of not entering into the rest of the Promised Land. And the author says it was because they disobeyed the Lord’s command to simply trust Him – to walk by faith in the grace-based promises He made.

And the author’s using this physical scenario as an illustration for us to understand what happens to many believers today on a spiritual or emotional level. The author says that we fail to experience the REST that God has for us…that Jesus promised us…

**Hebrews 4:11a “Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest…”**

Some versions say, “Therefore, struggle” to enter that rest. And this is powerful, because the author’s making an admission that perhaps the most important and difficult thing we’ll ever “do” as believers is to choose to truly REST in the finished work of Christ.

Choosing to rest rather than strive in our own efforts is unnatural to the flesh. The flesh always wants to prove its own worthiness. The flesh always wants to prop itself up by its own merits. The flesh always wants to make a Pharisee out of us…putting us under a legalistic, transactional relationship with God whereby our performance merits His blessing.

So, as we conclude this series…we each have a decision to make: Will we choose to submit to God’s way of growth, or will we keep hanging on to the world’s way? The former brings REST…while the latter brings UNREST. The former is TRYING…while the latter is TRUSTING. The former is GRACE…while the latter is DO IT YOURSELF.

I don’t know about you…but I choose God’s way. I choose to find refuge in union. Refuge in total forgiveness. Refuge in righteousness. Refuge in divine acceptance. And refuge in REST! During this series I hope you’ve decided to Shelter in Grace.

In fact, let’s declare it together today. **Today’s Confession: Today I choose to find refuge in the REST that Jesus promises me.**