

I Need a Vacation

Mark 6:30-34 (NIV84)

³⁰ The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. ³¹ Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." ³² So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. ³³ But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. ³⁴ When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.

The disciples have just gotten back from being sent out by Jesus to preach, teach, and heal. They can't wait to debrief with Jesus, tell him all that happened. However, they couldn't because so many people were coming and going to Jesus and the disciples that "they did not even have a chance to eat." (verse 31)

Have you had those days when you have been so busy that you haven't even had a chance to sit down and eat? For parents with kids at home, there is a stream of requests. Mommy, Daddy, can you help me find this toy? Can you help me put this together? Can you get down the crayons? Mommy, Daddy, I'm hungry. Can you get me a snack? Mommy, Daddy, I want you to come downstairs with me. And all of these requests are asked right when you are either in the middle of a project or in the middle of preparing food for the ones who are demanding all the other things at the same time, saying nothing of all that you need to get done around the house. It's a lot of work to be home and take care of the kids.

Then there's work outside the home. Some days it seems as if the interruptions will never end. Somebody needs you to get this job done immediately so that they can move ahead with their work. Some else comes in to check with you on the status of the other projects. Others come over to you just to shoot the breeze. E-mail after e-mail pop up that deserve your immediate attention. All the while there is all the work that you still have to get done. Maybe you work through your lunch break and come home late missing supper just to get it done.

When your day to day life is filled with so much busy-ness, we all reach that point when we utter the words, "I need a vacation." You need to get away. You need some time to yourself.

God knows that you need a vacation, rest from the daily grind. He knew his disciples needed it. Without any of the disciples asking for it, Jesus beckoned them to stop what they were doing and created time for them to rest. "'Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.' So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place." (verses 31-32) The disciples and Jesus had a little reprieve on a mountainside, away from the busy-ness of their gospel ministry. They ate. They shared stories. They probably prayed. They found a quiet place and got some rest.

Our bodies need rest. God had set that pattern of needing rest already on the seventh day in the history of the world when he himself let all creation rest. He later commanded a day of rest: Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but on the seventh day you shall not do any work. Even the word "Sabbath" means rest. God made a purposeful day for all people to find a quiet place and get some rest.

I know I feel that need to rest myself. I am an introvert, someone who is often reflective of their own thoughts and minimizes their interactions with others in order to recharge the ol' batteries. I enjoy being a pastor, and the best part of being a pastor is sharing God's Word with people and being with God's people. But I will tell you that typically after a day full of being with and talking to people, I am wiped out. I'm mentally and emotionally exhausted. I need a vacation, time to be in a quiet place and get some rest.

So, it was without any reservation or shame, that I bought this t-shirt. It perfectly reflects what I need after a day of much busy-ness. What I really like about this shirt is that in a very subtle way it shows what the point of God-given rest is. You are recharging your batteries, so to speak, so that you can get back out there and do more.

Jesus purposefully has the disciples step back and come with him to a quiet place and get some rest to prepare them for what was about to happen next. We are told, "Many who saw [Jesus and the disciples] leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them." (verse 33) Jesus looked up and saw a large crowd. Their brief reprieve of rest and quiet time was over.

I wonder, when they saw the large crowd, did the faces of the disciples fall. Did smiles disappear and the noise of laughing suddenly stop? Did lounging and relaxing turn to getting up and tightening their belts? Did one of them joke say, "Can we get back in the boat and sail to the other side again?" Did Peter say to Jesus, "You got this one."?

When we get that much needed rest, the temptation is to do all that we can to keep resting by doing as little as possible. Sunday night rolls, and the weekend smile disappears and you lament that you have to get back to work in the morning. This temptation to always return and keep up this state of resting and relaxing, this can become our goal, our focus in life. Why do I put up with working through the week? So that I can get to the weekend? Do I do the bare minimum in taking care of the kids, in putting in my hours at work just so that I can get back to doing what I want to do, to get back to finding a quiet place and getting rest?

If our focus in life is how to always return to vacation, to resting in our quiet places, we neglect and despise our God-given vocation – our responsibilities and work. We cast aside our vocation for vacation, turning down God-given work in favor of doing nothing. God has prepared work for us in all our various vocations or callings. Whether you are a husband or wife, father or mother, son or daughter, employee or student, God has given you responsibilities that he wants you to carry out to the best of your ability. When you only give these responsibilities your bare minimum attention and effort so that we can get back to resting, you are shirking off and avoiding what God has called you to do.

Finding a quiet place and getting rest is not the end all and be all of life. It's meant to be a temporary thing in order to recharge us for more work. Those vacations, those introvert moments, those times when you do find a quiet place and get some rest, are meant to be the benches on the hike of life. On a hiking trail, benches are strategically placed to give you a moment to sit down and rest if you need it. The bench is not there to stop you from hiking; it's meant to give you a moment of recharge, of rest, so that you can then continue on your hike. Getting to the bench is not the goal of the hike; it's a temporary rejuvenation to keep you pressing on toward your goal.

When Jesus saw that large crowd that had followed them to their quiet place, "he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things." (verse 34) Although we don't know the exact content of Jesus' teaching from that particular day, we do know that Jesus beckoned people to him for rest. "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28) He did this even though it meant he had to give up his quiet time resting. Jesus saw that this crowd needed rest - not just physical, but spiritual rest. Their spiritual leaders had given them no rest as a shepherd, a pastor, should. They were like sheep without a shepherd. So Jesus went back to work.

In order to give them rest, he taught about their sin, how they were motivated by their physical needs while missing the rest that God had provided for their souls. Jesus pointed to himself as the only true and eternal rest. He had come to give them rest from their guilty and troubled consciences that gave them sleepless nights, tossing and turning while it accused them of not doing enough for God, pointing out that their priorities in life were selfish, always looking how they could avoid work in order to have rest. Jesus worked for them right then and there, giving up his rest, so that they would have something better than earthly rest.

Jesus has done the same for us. He has worked for God even when we shirked off our God-given responsibilities in the name of finding a quiet place and getting rest. When we were focused on how to extend our vacation, Jesus left his vacation early to get back to work and shepherd these sheep without a shepherd. By his constant work, he fulfilled his calling to God. He worked perfectly in our place so that we would have rest from our sins, so that we would have an inheritance of rest in heaven.

The rest that Jesus gives prepares us to go back to work to faithfully fulfill our God-given duties. Those moments when we do find that quiet place and get rest recharge us for the work that still remains. Mom, the kids are still there. They still need your care, your love, and your providence. Dad, your weekends are not your own. You have children who need to learn from you, learn how a Christian man ought to act, and, most importantly, have you teach them about their God and Savior. At work, there is always more to be done. You don't do it for the paycheck to get the RV and take the weekend getaway. You do your job because God has called you to be faithful in all that you do, because it brings him glory when you work to the best of your ability. God gives us vacations to carry on in our vocations.

Just as Jesus and his disciples did, take moments to find a quiet place and get some rest. Take your introvert days, but take them to be ready to get back to work, to recharge so that you can serve the Lord in your particular vocation to the best of your ability. As long as you are here on earth, God has work for you to do. Work for the Lord while it is day knowing that your rest is coming. Jesus has labored for you, gifting you the best vacation package ever: rest in heaven that lasts forever. Amen.