

Rest in Troubled Times

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 30 September 2018

Preacher: Alan Barts

[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. Thank you so much for being here. It's an absolutely gorgeous day, and so thank you so much for being here. If this is your first time, I'd like to extend a special welcome to you. I'd like to also welcome my mom and stepfather, as well as my dad, and a special guest. We have Dr. Hadley and his wife, Sarah, from First Baptist Church.

He recently retired from there, so thank you so much for being here today, sir. Yeah, as Jesse said, we've been going through a series. Typically, we preach through books of the Bible, and a few weeks ago, we finished up in 1 John, and then we started, took a time out and paused and said we needed to preach on something that we feel is really important, and that is rest that we really struggle to accomplish in these days and times. But before I get that, I would like to just say thank you to all of you guys and gals who went out and impacted our communities over the past few weeks with Hurricane Florence. And just to give you just a brief synopsis of what happened, you know, you recognize we're a multi-site church. There are four sites, not only here in Havelock, but Moorhead, City, Beaufort, and Swansboro. And collectively, through those four sites, we sent out multiple teams of guys and gals who went out with chainsaws and tarps and food and everything else.

So over the four sites in our communities, we impacted, and I say that either we gutted their home through the flooding, we cut trees off their homes, or we put tarps up, we secured their properties, if you will. 524 homes we impacted as a church. And on top of that, we fed almost 2,500 families were fed during that time. So just thank you so much. It's great. We not only believe that we are called to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, the good news, if you will, but we are to come here and make our communities better. We are to impact our communities, not only a spiritual way, but a physical way. So thank you so much for doing that. That is incredible. So like I said, we are finishing up the series on rest. And this one, I think, could not have landed on a better Sunday. I'm not sure when this was prepared, Jesse, how months ago we thought this was going to happen. But the title of this sermon is Finding Rest in Troubled Times. Finding Rest in Troubled Times. It is so good to be back together. I certainly have missed having like a normal life. And for many of us in the room, if not most of us, the new normal is abnormal. I've been looking forward to today because I knew we would all be together again. And I knew, again, this would be like a normal service. You know, last week we had the tables out and we had a very abbreviated sermon and series and, sorry, church service. But today is like, we're back. So if you knew, like I said, we typically preach through books of the Bible, but on occasion we push pause and teach on particular subject matter that is pertinent or important.

And over the past few weeks, we've been in the series on rest. And like I said, on the onset of this series a couple of weeks ago, we've been trying to teach on this subject for about a year. But because we are so busy, we haven't found the time. How's that for leading by example? Yeah. But over the past couple of weeks that the storm came in and now clean up and recovery are in full swing. I have wondered how many of us feel rested. And I'm not talking about the rest you feel coming off a two-week vacation in the Virgin Islands. I'm not sure how practical or realistic that would be during this time. Not to mention many of you would think this guy has lost touch with reality.

[3 : 35] But just to give you a glimpse into my reality and where we're coming from, I started a new job this past week, which that's stressful. We had to move out of our home. We have a month-old baby.

We have seven puppies that are five weeks old. We're dealing with the reality of major repairs on our home, dealing with the insurance company, etc., etc., I'm sure many of you are in the same boat as we are. But I'm not sharing this so you will have sympathy or feel pity for me and my family.

We're good. We're taken care of. Everything is kosher, other than a few lovely discussions between Shelly and myself. We're good. I'm sharing this because I know God is in control, and He knew this was going to happen, and He knows what will happen.

Matthew 6, 26 says, Look at the birds of the air. They neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? There are times when trials sweep into our lives, and we feel that rest isn't an option. Probably the majority of us feel that is the truth today.

Some of us are enduring dark days. Many of us have lost a lot, if not all, of our personal possessions. Maybe you're like me and my family having to live somewhere else. Who knows how long that's going to be?

Because your homes have been damaged to the point of it not being safe to live there. Even if it's not that bad, you may feel burdens beyond capacity by the repairs that need to be done and the need all around you. Where could there possibly be rest during a season like this where so many have been impacted in such a devastating fashion?

[5 : 21] Many of you were actually in a season like this before Florence came around. You may have just gotten news of cancer or some other serious health issue. You could have lost a close loved one.

You could be behind financially. What does rest look like in the middle of those kind of days?

Ultimately, we have to believe that rest is possible even in these moments because Jesus told us that the weary and heavily burdened could come to him for rest.

Matthew 11, 28 through 30 says, 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.

For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. It's one thing for us to find rest when circumstances are basically normal or going our way, but there's nothing supernatural about that.

Nothing special about feeling peace when your life is put together, your bank account is full, and you're relaxing on the beach with a cold drink in your hand. And that's easy to feel peace in those times. But it's rest possible when the storms come, when the waters rise, when the power's out.

[6 : 35] Excuse me. That reminds me of a great little story of when we were without power for a week due to Florence. So I have a generator, but it's about 25 years old.

And let's just say it burns a little oil. So generators, if you don't know, they have a low oil shutoff that will stop the engine. It's a good thing, because if your oil ran out, then your generator would burn up, and you would have no electricity, period.

So mine, unfortunately, would usually shut off somewhere around 3 in the morning. And just to give you a little bit of context, seven years ago, my wife was very much pregnant with our son, Liam, when Hurricane Irene hit.

And a few days before that, I had went out and bought a little window unit air conditioner, knowing I had a generator, and knowing that it would run that air conditioner. And we were going to be cool.

We may not have power, but we were going to be cool in our room.

So I had that window unit, and we were good to go. The problem is, we now have five kids, and three dogs, and a newborn, and those kind of things.

[7 : 36] So we had, all of us were sleeping in our bedroom. Kids' mattresses on the floor, pack and play for my two-year-old Ainsley, bassinet for the newborn Turner, and again, the three dogs, all in mine and Shelly's bedroom.

That's a lot of body heat for one bedroom, you know what I mean? I could, when that thing shut off, it would wake me up, because the air conditioner was right beside here. It would wake me up, and I would just sit there, saying, praise God, may it remain cool.

Lord help me. I could feel the temperature rising, and I would just lie there, and of course it didn't.

So I would put my headlamp on, and my shorts, and go out and fill the generator with oil.

Sometimes the spark plug would be fouled, so much oil, I had to fix that, at three in the morning. Fill it with gas, and finally after getting the generator up and running, I would be hot and sweaty, and smell like gas and oil.

So I'd either have to take a cold shower, which would wake me up, or use baby wipes to wipe down, at three in the morning. I had a neighbor ask me, about the third day after we had power, he's like, have you changed the oil in your generator, and you know you're supposed to change the oil, every three or four days.

[8 : 43] I was like, yeah, I change it every day. Anyway, yeah. Does rest, does it come when you get the news, that the worst has happened?

If the rest we find in Christ, is something extraordinary, something beyond what we can provide for ourselves, by simply making enough money, or having good health, then it has to mean rest and peace is possible, especially during the dark moments.

I'm going to say that again. If the rest we find in Christ, is something extraordinary, something beyond what we can provide for ourselves, by simply making enough money, or having good health, then it has to mean rest and peace is possible, especially during the dark moments.

I want us to read a psalm together that may give voice to where some of us are this morning. And even if you or I aren't personally feeling this way, this is where much of our community is and where we certainly may be in the near future.

We're going to read Psalm 13 together. Maybe. Maybe not. I'll read it. Psalm 13. Is it there? All right.

[9 : 56] How long, O Lord, will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day?

How long shall my enemy be exalted over me? Consider and answer me, O Lord my God. Light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death. Lest my enemy say, I have prevailed over him.

Lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken. But I have trusted in your steadfast love. My heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord because he has dealt bountifully with me.

The first half of this psalm is something called a lament or a passionate expression of grief or sorrow. Some of us didn't know we were allowed to talk this way about or to God.

Certainly some of us never have or would be willing to admit we have. As a result, when peace feels far, when things are falling apart, some of us feel like we have to be fake.

[11 : 02] If that is you this morning, I beg you to stop. Stop being fake. This, this right here, this is a safe place where you can be real.

We have all experienced loss due to this storm or other struggles of this world. Please be real with each other and more importantly with God. Together we can make it. When we function with a gospel-centered mentality, the trials and storms of this life are easier to walk through.

Be real. So the first step in finding rest in God during storms, suffering, and trials is to be honest with where you are and take your genuine self to God.

Let me give you a hint. God is big enough and honestly desires for you to be real with him too. The very presence of such prayers in scripture is a witness to his understanding.

He knows how men speak when they are desperate. It's a quote by Derek Kidner, a well-known British Old Testament commentator. The very fact that this is in the Bible means God, first, understands our feelings of desperation, and second, that he wants to hear from us, even when what we're feeling is anger and despair.

[12 : 13] Jesus had feelings of desperation. He knew his purpose in life was to be the perfect sacrifice, to bridge the gap between God and mankind created by sin. Yet he still struggled with walking through the act.

Matthew 26, 38 through 44 goes like this. Then he said to them, This is Jesus speaking to his disciples. My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Remain here and watch with me.

And going a little farther, he fell on his face and prayed, saying, My father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will. And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping.

And he said to Peter, So, could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

It's very key right there. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. Again for the second time he went away and prayed, My father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.

[13 : 13] And again he found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. So, leaving them again, the third time, He went away and prayed for the third time, Saying the same words again.

Jesus Christ understands where you are right now. This time of desperation. This time of lack of rest. Three times Jesus was begging God to find another way.

And yet three times Jesus reminded himself that God is in control. And his plans are higher than our plans. And his ways are much better than our plans. Even though this trial would cost Jesus his life, He was able to find peace in the midst of his greatest trial.

Just to give you a little context about the psalm, The author of this psalm is the well-known character And one of the great heroes of the Bible found in the Old Testament, David. Arguably and widely accepted as the greatest king of Israel, David is described in the Bible as a man after God's own heart.

Champion of the famous story of David and Goliath. Known to have killed lions and bears with simple weapons, Including his own hands, To protect his sheep, For he was a shepherd before becoming king.

[14 : 22] But in this passage, David says he feels forgotten. That it feels like the enemy is winning. Life is falling apart. Some of us look at our neighborhoods.

We look at Havelock. We look at Newport, Newburn, Trenton, etc. Other communities. We may feel those things too. Like we have been forgotten. But here's the beautiful thing about this psalm.

Don't miss this. Even though David is feeling all these ways, He is still praying. This is a prayer. This psalm is a prayer. This chapter is a prayer written by David.

He is being real with God. His heavenly father. The creator of the universe. He's not putting his happy face on and saying, I'm fine. Hey God. Looks like my enemy is kicking my backside.

And I feel like I may die at any moment. But I'm okay. You know? God is good all the time. And all the time, God is good. Praise Jesus. Hallelujah. Amen. Right? Who's done that?

[15 : 20] That's right. Let's be real. I just told you to be real. All right. Another example of someone being real with God is found in a book halfway through the Old Testament. It is a very intense book.

If you've never read the book of Job, read it. We see this with Job, a man who lost everything, whose family was killed, and his house collapsed from the storm, all the while suffering from a painful disease.

Through all his suffering, Job never stopped praying. Yes, he complained, but he complained to God. He screamed and yelled, but he did it in God's presence. No matter how much in agony he was, he continued to address God.

He kept seeking Him. And in the end, God said Job triumphed. Not because it was all fine, not because Job's heart and motives were always right, but because Job's doggedness in seeking the face and presence of God meant that the suffering did not drive him away from God, but toward him.

That's a quote from Tim Keller. Even when your prayer sounds like a desperate howl, bring that howl to God. He is a safe place, and He actually wants to meet you in the middle of it.

[16 : 28] In the muck and mire of your current situation. So that's the first thing in this song that we all need to take home today. David, he brought his honest, pure, desperate self to God.

It's something we should all emulate today. The second thing he does is just as important. He vents his true feelings, yes, but then he returns to truths that are bigger than his feelings.

We must return to truths that are bigger than our feelings. We need both of these. Some of us are really bad at the first thing. We're in denial when hurt comes.

We strike it off. We're not honest about where we are. But some of us need to grow in the second part because our feelings are not the end of the story.

God's truth and the reality of who He is is a bigger story. So we have to come to the truth. We have to look at it, remember it. Verses 5 and 6 of Psalm 13 says, But I have trusted in your steadfast love.

[17 : 31] My heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord because He has dealt bountifully with me. It doesn't seem like halfway through writing this psalm, David's circumstances suddenly turned around.

And he didn't write the first page, you know, get up, leave, fix all his problems, and then come back and write the second part. No, no, he didn't do that. David is wrestling to remind his heart of truth, leading himself to the truth of God's steadfast love.

The way some of us try to rest in hard times is just by escaping and trying to forget. And the proverbial stick your head in the sand kind of thing. You know, distract ourselves or even numb ourselves.

The way of the world to find rest in trials is forget and escape, immerse yourself in work or hobbies, develop, you know, substance abuse, lean on substance abuse, alcohol, drugs, those kind of things.

Isolate yourself from others that care. That's what the world does. It's probably what some of us do. I certainly have done some of these things. I certainly have isolated myself from others.

[18 : 35] In the past, I certainly have abused alcohol to escape things, no doubt about that. But children of God rest in hard times by remembering. We remember. We remember the steadfast love of God.

We remember the gift of salvation by the sacrifice of Jesus. And we remember the hope we have to spend eternity with Jesus forever and ever. The hope we have that one day there will be no more hurt, no more pain, no more hunger, no more disease, no more death.

Death and the grave have been defeated. And we can stand firm on the truth that Jesus rules and reigns forever. Listen to me. We still live in a fallen world.

And rest in trials doesn't come as easy. This isn't for wimps. Rest is warfare. It's an active pursuit of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the truth that he presents.

Ephesians 6, 13 says, Therefore, take up the whole armor of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day and having done all to stand firm. You don't reference armor and think of walking through the tulips kind of thing, right?

[19 : 46] Yeah. Peace can be a struggle. You have to take hold of your heart that is grasping at all kinds of false things for rest and remind your heart, no, rest isn't found there.

True peace won't come from the perfect house, from a full bank account, from the absence of storms. It comes from God himself. And no matter what we lose, even if we lose our houses, if we are in Christ, then no loss can take the steadfast love of God away from us.

Amen? We've got to come back to that truth even when we aren't feeling it. We come to God not just for instant inspiration and uplift. We show up and we remind ourselves of who he is, of his steadfast love, of his salvation.

Wrestle with our hearts until we enter the rest of God. So in response today, if you're here and you're not yet a Christian, first of all, thank you so much for being here.

I want to say that yes, all people have trials and difficult times during life. Yes. Just because Jesus is a phenomenal Lord and Savior and the creator of the universe, that doesn't exclude Christians or disciples of Christ from experiencing hard times.

[21 : 02] In fact, Jesus says that we can expect these things. The difference is that we have or should have a different perspective. We have hope and faith that our God is a good, gracious, and kind God that loves and cares for us and will always be with us even during the most difficult situations imaginable.

We have a hope that one day all of these struggles will be gone and we get to spend eternity in perfection. When that perspective is at the forefront of your mind, then when the trials come, they seem not so difficult after all.

We have peace and rest when chaos abounds. They are still real. It's just not as overwhelming as for those whose hope is found in material things.

I would love the opportunity to talk more with you after the service about what it looks like to be a follower of Christ. I promise you, I promise you that decision will be the best decision of your life. If you're like many of us, if you're here and you're already a Christian, my hope is that this reminds you that being a follower of Christ doesn't mean you have to maintain a perception of perfection. When trials come, when the storms of life come, it's okay to pray a prayer of lament, a passion expression of grief.

[22 : 23] God longs to know the real you even when you are struggling and having doubt. He is a big God. He can handle whatever you need to vent about. Our responsibility is to remind ourselves of the steadfast love of God, His sacrifice which paved the way for our salvation.

To remind our hearts of all the times when He has been faithful, where He has come through and all hope was lost. God knows the struggles you and I are having today and He longs for you and I to ask for help and depend on Him for all, not some, all of our needs.

If He takes care of the birds, how much more will He take care of His own sons and daughters?

How much do you long, how much do you long to take care of your kids, your own kids, to protect them, to clothe them, to feed them, to provide for them?

God is the ultimate parent and He longs to take care of His kids. So we're going to respond by taking communion here in just a couple minutes. There are communion stations set up around the room.

This represents the ultimate picture of God's love, the love of Christ on the cross, His body and His blood, the remembrance, where the Son of God Himself entered the greatest storm and lost His peace, bore our sins.

[23 : 43] His enemies prevailed over Him. The first half of Psalm 13 was never more true than for Christ on the cross.

And because He took the sorrows of the first half of this psalm, we can pray the end of the psalm in faith. We can wrestle with our hearts until we enter the rest of the steadfast love of God.

Crown Him the Son of God before the worlds began and ye who tread where He hath trod, crown Him the Son of Man who every grief hath known that wrings the human breast and takes and bears them for His own that all in Him may rest.

Dear God, You are an amazing God. You love us when we certainly did not love You. You love us when we fail You. You love us when we react in anger.

You love us when we're fake. God, I pray that today we would change, that our lives would be forever changed, that we would come to You in the real passionate truth of who we are right where we are and know with confidence that You will meet us, that You love us, and that we have the truths of the steadfast love of God, the salvation that we have, the path to eternal hope to spend eternity with You.

[25 : 11] God, I pray that those truths will ring in our hearts and our souls and our minds for not only this moment but for the days and weeks and months to come that we have been bought with a price, that we are Your sons and daughters and we can stand firm on that forever and ever and ever.

May You be glorified, God, and everything that we say and do and think from this point forward. In Your name we pray. Amen.