*DAILY DEVOTIONAL*

January 23 - 28

“Restful Prayer”

**Monday, January 23 Matthew 11:25-30**

*“I will give you rest”*

 The yoke was the wooden frame joining two animals (usually oxen) for pulling heavy loads; this image was used metaphorically to describe one individual’s subjection to another. Jesus’ yoke – a metaphor for discipleship to him – promises rest from the weariness and burden of religious regulation and human oppression, because it is commitment to him. His disciples learn directly from him, and their rest will be in him as he offers them his authoritative revelation of God’s truth. His yoke will bring true learning.

 The yoke of discipleship also brings rest because Jesus is “gentle and humble in heart.” Jesus exemplifies the very characteristics his disciples are called to display as members of the kingdom of heaven – gentleness and humility. Jesus has come gently, preaching and teaching the good news of the arrival of the kingdom of heaven, and in humble human form he has brought healing to sin-sick humanity. This is the ultimate rest for which we all long, the eternal sense of ultimate well-being in our relationship with God and with one another.

*I receive your yoke, Lord, so you may teach me how to live life your way. Amen.*

**Tuesday, January 24 Romans 8:26-30**

*“We don’t know what we should pray for”*

 Paul says there are times when we are unable to ask correctly or even know what we should ask. This experience seems to be close to that of Jesus when he prayed “Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour?” (John 12:27). The sense of uncertainty was only momentary for Jesus but for us may be extensive and troublesome. But there is comfort in knowing that even the unspoken prayer of the unformed opinion springing from the uninformed mind is valid when prompted by the Spirit who steps in and invests our sigh with significance and our tears with meaning.

 Moreover, the One “who searches the heart” – a title both charming and chilling depending on what is going on in the heart – knows what the Spirit is doing in his ministry of praying for us. God puts his approval upon the Spirit’s prayer because it is line with the will of God. Living in the Spirit, therefore, introduces us to a relationship of intimacy with the Father as we depend on the Spirit to take our prayers, weak as they often are, before the Father.

*I praise you, Holy Spirit, for knowing exactly what to pray for me. Amen.*

**Wednesday, January 25 Exodus 33:12-17**

*“I will give you rest”*

 The conversation between God and Moses takes place after the Israelites have committed the terrible sin of worshiping the golden calf while Moses was on the mountain receiving from God the commandments written in stone. As a result of their disobedience, God has withdrawn his presence from them. In these verses, Moses pleads with God to go with his people as they continue their journey to the Promised Land. God says, “I will go with you, Moses.” Moses replies, “Yes, but what about the people? Will your presence be with them?”

 At first, God doesn’t answer Moses’ question. He promises to give Moses rest and that everything will work out well for Moses. So, Moses makes his point a second time, pleading with God not to abandon his people in the wilderness but to forgive them and to resume his presence with them so they can continue their journey together. Moses asks not only rest for himself but for all the people, in spite of their sinful behavior. The conversation concludes by God’s promising to do as Moses asks.

*You give me rest, Lord, even when I don’t deserve it. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONAL*

January 23 - 28

“Restful Prayer”

**Thursday, January 26 Psalm 4:1-8**

*“You alone, O Lord, will keep me safe”*

 To see God’s face is to be in his presence. When he hides his face, he cloaks his presence, and humans experience the terrible limitations of their own meager power in dealing with life’s destructive possibilities. When God’s face shines on them, humans experience the benefit and joy that his presence brings. Here the heart of the psalmist is contrasted with the heart of the opponents. Whereas their hearts are filled with fear and rebellious plotting, the psalmist lays claim to a heart filled with joy from God.

 The psalmist’s confidence in God is demonstrated by the ability to lie down and go to sleep peacefully even in the face of difficulty. In contrast, the opponents are pictured lying wakefully and are counseled to use their time reflecting on their misdeeds. The cause for the psalmist’s relaxation is clear: God is the source of his sense of security. The use of the emphatic “you alone” is intended to point out the opponent’s rebellious pursuit of false gods. God *alone* is the true source of safety and peace. He *alone* will keep the psalmist safe.

*Because you are in charge, Lord, I can sleep peacefully at night. Amen.*

**Friday, January 27 Philippians 4:6-7**

*“You will experience God’s peace”*

 Anxiety, in the popular use of the term, is a common experience. Worry, confusion, pressures of daily life, uncertainty about the future – the list goes on – are all aspects of anxiety. In the way Paul uses the term, and the way we most often experience it, anxiety is the futile, frustrating, debilitating attempt to bear the burdens of life and especially of the future, ourselves, alone. The Christian answer to anxiety is confident prayer which invites God’s involvement and results in “the peace of God which surpasses all understanding.”

 Paul’s offer of prayer is not an easy solution; it is not a magic formula, a quick bedtime or morning prayer that somehow puts up a protective shield against life’s difficulties. Paul is talking about the serious business of bringing our lives before God, admitting our dependence upon God, and placing our lives in his hands to be used as he wills. The opposite of anxiety is peace. Not the absence of inner and outward struggle, but God’s peace, giving us hope and confidence to carry on faithfully when the burdens are heavy and the pathway rough.

*I am not in this alone, Lord, for you are with me and give me peace. Amen.*

**Saturday, January 28 Hebrews 4:9-13**

*“Sabbath-rest for the people of God”*

 Our culture is characterized by activity. The fast-paced, problem-prone, project-oriented existence many of us live resists the spiritual life, pushing away recognition of God’s voice with its invitation to rest. We face endless “To Do” lists for work, home, family, and even for our spiritual life, and these add a weight to our souls from which we find little respite even in a good night’s sleep. As a result, we sacrifice the important for the urgent, including the importance of our relationship with God and one another.

 The passage confronts us with the condition of spiritual fatigue, which results from trying to earn our way to God by doing good works. To lack God’s promised rest means to be spiritually spinning one’s wheels. True rest is found only in a right relationship with the person of God, and that comes only by faith, not by works. The rest spoken of in these verses is his rest for his people. It is rest found in rightly relating to God through faith and obedience to his Word. Our call is not to do work for God; our call is to belong to God.

*My soul is restless, Lord, until it finds its rest in you. Amen.*