

ON FIRE OR BURNED OUT?

The Third Sunday after Pentecost

3 July Anno Domini 2011

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Matthew 11:25–30

At that time Jesus declared, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. 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.”

Grace, peace and mercy from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. AMEN

Have you ever felt burned out over something? Perhaps you’ve been burned-out over work. You’ve been pushing hard for a long time, the results are less than you hoped for, and you’re just sick and tired of the whole thing and want to run off to some warm, tropical island or whatever your idea of “paradise” might be. Or maybe you’re just burned-out on life. You can’t seem to muster the enthusiasm for much of anything, and even the fun stuff just seems kind of mundane. Been there, done that.

What about religion? Have you have been burned out on religion? It happens all the time, more often than you might think. People burn out on religion. They may start out all ablaze, on fire for the Lord, but at some point it just kind of settles into a dull glow and eventual burn-out.

Back in the 19th century, people noticed an interesting phenomenon after the years of revival and what they called the great “awakening.” Burn-out! They even referred to the areas where this was happening as the “burned over” districts, as though a religious wildfire had raced through the area and burned the population out on religion. I wonder whether we are not on the brink of such a thing today. After a couple of decades of entertainment based Christianity and huge mega-churches entertaining mega-crowds, and all the purpose-driven, success-oriented church we’ve had, I wouldn’t be surprised to find people who are just plain burned out on religion. Maybe they are even burned out on God.

Burn-out is the result of the Law grinding us down to nothing, driving us to sheer despair. It’s actually the proper work of the Law, according to the apostle Paul. The Law takes sin in the flesh and makes it utterly sinful beyond measure. It amplifies sin. And it makes the sinner despair about his or her own righteousness. You wind up like Paul saying, ***“Oh wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?”***

The fact is that Law without Gospel, commandments without forgiveness, results in religious burn out. You know God wants the Law perfectly kept. You can’t keep the Law, no matter how hard you try, and the harder you try, the less of the Law you keep. And so you decide, “The heck with all this religion. I’ll just live my life as I please, and hope for the best. Try not to hurt anyone, mind my own business, be nice to animals, recycle paper, plastic, and aluminum, drive a hybrid, and give to charities. Beyond that forget it, because I’m sick and tired of dos I can’t do, and don’ts I can’t stop from doing.

I’ve met people like that. Some of them grew up in a Christian homes, they were dragged church as kids. Some came to church later, on their own, and it was fun for a while. They were

enthusiastic about studying the Bible and witnessing to people and giving their life to the Lord's work. And when the reality of their sinful condition took hold, and they got a good, hard look in the mirror of the law, and their victorious life didn't look all that victorious any more, and their purpose-driven life lost all its purpose, and their "I decided to follow Jesus" moment seemed like something less than permanent, and their whole religious house of cards came tumbling to the ground like the walls of Jericho.

What do you do when the things you do are the very things you hate, and the things you want to do you don't do? What do you do when you find, as the apostle Paul did, that whenever you want to do good, evil lies close at hand? And what do you do when your mind delights in the law of God and truly wants to serve it, and yet your flesh simply refuses to cooperate. What do you do when a spiritual war wages within you?

The answer from today's Gospel reading is this: You come to Jesus. Hear that invitation and take it to heart. **"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."** Jesus wants us to come to Him, that's why He came to us, born of the Virgin. That's why He comes to us through the Word and the sacraments. He wants us to come to Him with our burdens, our burn outs, all the heavy lifting we try to do. He wants to give us rest. A Sabbath's rest!

It seems so basic, doesn't it? So simple. Come to Jesus, trust in Jesus, let Jesus shoulder your burdens. And yet we refuse to believe it, refuse to trust it, and so we burden ourselves unnecessarily. Christ bore your sins on the cross; so why are you trying to bear them for yourself? Christ bore the burden of your shame and guilt in His death; so why are you trying to hold on to these things? So many people burn out on Christianity simply because they have never heard a plain word of Gospel, genuine 100%, 24 karat good news, that Jesus is the Savior of sinners. Not good, commandment-keeping, pious saints but actual flesh and blood sinners. Time and time again I hear it, whenever I meet someone and they discover that I'm a pastor, the first thing they want to talk about are the rules. They don't go to church because there are "too many rules" to follow and they can't follow them. There are a huge number of people out there who hear the word "repent" and they think it means "straighten up your life." Get your act together. Clean up your own mess. Pull yourself up by your boot straps.

And you wonder why there are so many religious burnouts in our day? Just tune in to the religious programs on TV and listen, it's enough to drive you to despair if not atheism.

No wonder Jesus prayed to His Father and said, **"I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children."** Little children trust the words you say to them. You say, "The moon is made of green cheese," and they believe it. You say, "Santa Claus is coming to town," and they believe that. When you speak Biblical truths and say, "This is my body; this is my blood," and they say, "ewwww!" They believe it, they believe what they hear.

"Come to me, and I will give you rest." Take those words to heart. They're from Jesus, the One who knows the Father and received all authority in heaven and on earth from the Father and who died and rose from the dead. His Word is sure. **"Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me."** You're not walking alone when you come to Jesus. He walks with you. He's bound to you with His yoke. He walks with you like a couple of oxen yoked together pulling the plow. And that yoke of His is not two tons of commandments on top of the ones Moses gave you. His yoke is easy and His burden is light. It's easy and light because He bears the burden for you; He shoulders the heavy load, and you just walk along with Him like a little kid walking next to his older, bigger brother. Jesus carries the load; you don't. You get to walk along with Him.

Come to Jesus. He is gentle and humble of heart. He isn't an overbearing deity demanding sacrifices. He's the Savior, the Shepherd, the Redeemer. His interest is not in what you can do for

Him, but in what He can do for you. He wants you to come to Him with your burdens, with your cares, with your sorrows, with your brokenness, your lostness, with your doubting and with your sins. He wants it all! He wants everything that you carry around every day, every hour, every minute, every second. He wants it under the yoke of His cross where your burdens are shouldered by Him.

Come to Jesus. Come to Jesus in His Word, and hear what He has to say to you. He wants to reveal the hidden things of faith that the wise and the religiously smart won't get. Listen to Him the way a child listens, trusting, holding on to those words that are Spirit and life and faith-creating and faith-sustaining.

Come to Jesus in Baptism. You are baptized but once, and once is all you need when the Triune God acts in His Name. Yet Baptism has a daily effect in our lives. It's like a bank account you can draw on freely whenever you wish. Holy Absolution is like that ATM machine that lets you draw money from your account whenever you need it. Confessing our sins and hearing the word of forgiveness, we are once again immersed in that cleansing water that restores and renews and refreshes our wearied souls weighed down by sin and guilt and shame.

Come to Jesus in His Supper. He wants to refresh you in a most unique way, giving you living bread, His body, and the wine of gladness, His blood. These things seem so ordinary to the eye and so difficult for the intellectual to grasp. For the world it seems ludicrous that a bit of bread and a sip of wine on a Sunday morning can mean anything for the burdens of the week, yet Jesus says "Come to me." He knows what's good for our souls. And coming to Him here we find that refreshment that can't be found anywhere else in this world.

The apostle Paul, looking at his life of tension between the old and the new, between his renewed mind and his old Adam, simply says at the end of it all, "***Wretched man that I am!***" And if that's all we have, we are destined for burnout. The good news this morning, and every day, is that we have been delivered from this body of death by the body of Jesus given into death for us, raised from the tomb for us, reigning from the right hand of the Father, for us. For through Jesus comes true refreshment and renewal. In Jesus you have all your sins forgiven and life everlasting. So know without a doubt by His (·̄·) blood all your sins are forgiven in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. In Jesus name and for Jesus sake, amen and amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.
AMEN