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© I. Chris Imoisili, E-mail : imoisilic@hotmail.com ; imoisilic@gmail.com

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A DAY IN CHRIST'S RESTHOUSE!

Today's Text: Matt. 11: 25-30

Extracts:

At that time, Jesus answered and said, "... Come to Me, all you who labour 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" [Matt. 11: 28-30]

From February to November 2008, The Program on Public Values at Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut, USA, surveyed 54,461 adults for its American Religious Identification Survey.¹ The findings published in a report have a margin of error of plus or minus 0.5 percentage points. That means that we can rely on the results of the survey because the likelihood that the results were obtained by chance is only one in a hundred.

A significant finding is that the percentage of Christians in America has dropped from 86% in 1990 to 76% in 2008, and 15% now say they have no religion at all, up from 8.2% in 1990. Organized religion is playing less of a role, with a slight increase in interest in new religious movements, such as Scientology, Wicca and Santeria. Interestingly, growth in Eastern religions, such as Buddhism, has slowed while the percentage of Pentecostals has remained steady (at 3.5%) since 1990, in spite of their audacious form of Christian worship that includes speaking in tongues and working of miracles.

The results of that survey suggest that people have a hunger for contentment which neither secular values nor organized religion has met. As the global economic crisis gets worse, that hunger is going to get worse. So where is the solution going to come from? If you had to visit a place called 'Peace of Mind,' would you rather stay in a 5-star hotel or in Christ's Resthouse?

This week's study will assist you to make the wise decision.

¹ Story based on The Associated Press report of Sunday, March 8, 2009, "More Americans say they have no religion," www.msnbc.com/id/29585222/?GTI=43001

1. Where do you rest during your journey through life?

Imagine yourself on a long journey from home, hoping to return in due course. You have no idea for how long you will be away but you desire and plan to return home. Therefore, you do not know all that you may need along the way, apart from a few essentials. Since you may not know anybody to stay with, you are likely to select motels or hotels that you can afford or where there are vacancies. Sooner or later, you may run out of money, unless you have the opportunity or meet the statutory requirements to work. What then do you do at that stage? How will you cope with the stress that may follow?

Here on earth, we all are on a life-journey. We know that we came from somewhere (eternity?) but only some of us know where they are going. Some believe that there is a hereafter (a return to eternity) but others believe everything ends here. No matter what you believe, we are all on a journey. No matter how well we run or fly, we are bound to encounter delays, failures or obstacles. Right now, you may find yourself dealing with one issue or more. The economic crisis has put you on the unemployment line and there is no respite. Perhaps since you graduated from college a few years ago, you have not been lucky with the first job. Perhaps you have been comfortable all your life until recently after your life-savings were wiped out when your bank failed or your investor scammed you. You knew a dear one in that recent plane crash or road accident and you have no idea how you can deal with the loss without help. You have been married for over ten years and your doctor has finally confirmed that you cannot have your own baby except by adoption. Your pastor that led you to Christ, that you have looked up to as your spiritual mentor, has just been shot and killed by a gun man. Where do you go from there?

When we are in trouble, we tend to listen to any, if not every advice. In the end, we may wind up in one or several of the following rest houses:

a) *On the street*

The street is home for the destitute, such as beggars and the homeless, or gang members. You may have been evicted from your home for inability to pay your rent or mortgage, and now live in your car or in a cabin by the bus or train station. You are forced to live on charity or criminal loot from passers-by. You face the hardships of the weather, the uncertainty of people's generosity or the regular raids of law or city officials who worry more about the beauty of their town than the squalid conditions of your circumstances.

Who do you cry to in such circumstances? Bad weather (cold or heat, rain or snow) does not discriminate in favour of the destitute. Charity is seasonal (depending on your benefactors' payday or religious disposition to giving). Some governments provide shelters where the destitute can

find food and a place to sleep or rehabilitation centres where they can be trained. Those are temporary measures, and it is not easy to get a place when there are so many people for the few openings. Nevertheless, it is not every government that cares and most of them cannot afford to care! Unless help can come from a reliable source, a person on the street will remain troubled and heavy laden. Therefore, the street cannot provide a lasting rest house.

b) *In guesthouses*

A guest house (also called hotel or motel) is where people on a journey can stay temporarily for a fee. While there, guests get served and waited upon by staff. Guests eat and drink what they want. They do not make their beds and, in fact, their beddings are changed on a daily basis. In general, the lure of guesthouses is the comfort as well as protection that they promise their guests. Where people will spend their personal money, they will worry more about cost than comfort

Some of us pass through life as guests of others, such as parents, siblings, friends or even the government. Benefactors provide for our food and clothing as well as pay our school fees. However, when it is time to pay our bills, such as an ordinary “thank you!” or caring for our parents in their old age, or paying due taxes on our earnings, we are not there! Sooner than later, we get paid back in our coins and we begin to reap what we have sown! Law breakers go to jail. The selfish wastes his/her possessions and returns to poverty. The proud finds that life is nothing but vanity. They become unhappy and heavy laden. There is no dependable rest house in guesthouses.

The Prodigal Son is a good example [Lk 15: 11-24]. The younger son of a rich father, he collected his inheritance in advance and went to a far country. There, he wasted his possessions by living prodigally. Soon after, a severe famine came to that land and he found himself in want. Luckily for him, he obtained a work permit through a citizen of that country who hired him to take care of his swine (pigs). Do you know how strong and bad is the smell of pig pens? Among the pigs, the young man starved because nobody would even give him anything to eat, not even pig-food! He had moved from his father’s guesthouse to a shelter in a foreign country. He was troubled. He was heavy laden. He knew that he had to find his way back to his father if he wanted to be comforted.

c) *In your own house*

Most of us value our independence. As soon as possible, we would rather live by ourselves than depend on others. We demonstrate it when we rent or lease or buy our homes. That is a good step to take, except that we tend

to carry it too far. For example, some people see independence as an opportunity to avenge all the perceived “ill treatments” that they had received from others in the past, especially parents or guardians. Some people build cocoons of selfishness around themselves. Some people use it as an opportunity for religious and moral freedom. In the end, they remove themselves from the spiritual umbrella of protection that they had enjoyed before now.

According to an African proverb, never throw away the ladder with which you have climbed up because you may need it on your way down! You could lose your job and need the help of those you are now despising. Your cherished home could go into foreclosure because you have defaulted on your mortgage payments and you may need that room in your parents’ home once more. That new religious movement that you have followed against all advice may turn out to be a cult more interested in your goods (material contributions) than your good. If you have excluded God during your pursuit of independence, to whom will you run now that you are in trouble? God has said, “Those who honour Me I will honour, and those who despise Me shall be lightly esteemed” [1 Sam. 2: 30]. Therefore, self-aggrandizement cannot give you the rest that lasts.

d) *In your church*

The Psalmist says, “I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go into the house of the Lord’” [Ps. 122: 1]. The house of God is called the church. It is a place where people gather together to worship Him. It is a congregation of those who share the same faith in God and His Christ. Therefore, a person in distress can find solace by going to his/her pastor for prayers and counseling. That is why the word of God says, “Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord, and the prayer of faith will heal the sick, and the Lord will raise him up” [Jam. 5: 14-15].

As the bride of Christ [Eph. 5: 22-27], the church is the right place for the distressed to run to for comfort. Unfortunately, most of us tend to equate the church with a specific denomination or building. If that were the case, many of us would stop going to church! That may in part explain why the number of professing Christians in America has dropped, as per the survey that we had earlier cited. Many church leaders are pursuing their own interests, not God’s. They have turned the house of prayer into a den of thieves [Mk 11: 17]! Therefore, we may have to dig deeper or search further for the true source of our sustenance in time of trouble.

In deed, we are on a life-journey that leads somewhere. Many people do not know and do not care. That is why they tend to rely on worldly or esoteric wisdom

when they are in distress. But believers are pilgrims here on earth [Ps. 119: 19], citizens of heaven [Phil. 3: 20] and ambassadors of Christ on earth [2 Cor. 5: 20]. An embassy in another country is the territorial extension of the country it represents. That is why ambassadors enjoy diplomatic immunity. It follows that, as ambassadors of Christ, we are *entitled* to His cushioning in dealing with the troubles and distresses that we pass through here on earth. Let us hear from the Lord Himself on the matter.

2. Christ's resthouse is it!

In this week's study, Jesus encourages all who are troubled and heavy laden to come to Him and He will give them rest because His yoke upon them is easy and His burden is light [Matt. 11: 28, 30]. Jesus has the credibility to make this promise. He enjoys His Father's absolute confidence as His only begotten Son. He died for our sins and is currently seated on His Father's right hand in heaven, making intercessions for us [Heb. 8: 1; 1 Jn 2: 1]. He will soon return to earth to judge the living and the dead, and of His kingdom, there shall be no end. He is a man who can sympathize (feel for us) and empathize (by feeling as we do) [Heb. 4: 15]. Therefore, He is someone that we can listen to for perfect peace and rest.

Let us pay attention to His terms:

a) *What Christ offers*

Jesus said to those who "labour and are heavy laden" [Matt. 11: 28, 30]:

Come to Me... and I will give you rest... For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.

You can have an idea of what a yoke put on animals looks like from the picture below. Yokes link together a team of bullocks to pull the plow that the farmer uses to till the ground for planting. By working together, the animals reduce the overall burden on each one of them.



Source: Bow yokes on a bullock team,
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yoke>

Jesus has preached the gospel to the poor, healed the brokenhearted and the sick, and proclaimed liberty to the captives and the oppressed [Lk 4: 18]. He has given us beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning and the

garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness [Is. 61: 3]. All that Jesus has asked you is to simply tag along while He does all the work since the battle is the Lord's!

b) *What Christ expects from you*

There are a few conditions that we must fulfill in order to use His resthouse. He says [v. 29]:

Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lonely in heart and you will find rest for your souls.

Just as the bullock is harnessed by the yoke, you must be prepared to do exactly as Jesus asks you to do. You are not worthy of Him if you do not take up your cross to follow after Him [Matt. 10: 38]. You cannot call Him Lord if you do not obey Him [Lk 6: 46]. You must love God with all your heart, soul and mind, and your neighbours as yourself [Matt. 22: 37-39]. You can only be a true leader through service and humility, not by lording it over others [Jn 13: 12-15]. In deed, *Christ's resthouse is for true labourers in the Lord's vineyard!*

3. Conclusion: A day in the Lord's resthouse

The clearest measure of human success is peace of mind. Everything else is transient and mere vanity. Only God can give peace of mind, the type that surpasses human understanding [Phil. 4: 7]. Jesus has assured, "In Me you may have peace; in the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world!" [Jn 16: 33].

Your selfishness cannot give you peace of mind. Worldly wisdom or religion cannot sustain you in times of distress. But, if you can spend just one day in Christ's resthouse, you will never want to leave. Here is the good news. You are free to live there for the rest of your life!