

BTCS - Hope Is Here: Week 1
Hope for the Weary

Scripture: Matthew 11:28-30 / Galatians 6:2

Write Up: We were created by God to live with a healthy cadence in life. However, far too many of us are living without margin in every area of our lives. We fill our calendars. We can't say no. We live with a harmful drive to achieve. We have lost hope that it will slow down anytime soon. Jesus offers us such a gift in saying that he has come to give us rest. This rest is found in a grace that does not demand that we jump through all the hoops or get everything right. The rest that Jesus offers is an unmerited favor for anyone who comes to Him. This grace is best experienced in community. We can learn from Jesus as we learn from one another. When we do Church with one another, we lift one another up, we protect one another's boundaries, and we carry one another's burdens.

Think: I don't have to live each day so exhausted by simply trying to keep up. I can allow others to help me.

Feel: I am a human being and not a human doing. I am loved by God and that is enough.

Do: Practice saying "no" and receive the grace of God while investing in relationships to make you healthy.

Sermon:

I want to welcome everyone on this Back to Church Sunday. Today, there are churches all over the country that are making an intentional effort to invite their communities to join them for worship. Coming off a year when many churches have not been able to worship in person the way they would like to, an invitation to get back to church is such a powerful opportunity. The church is made up of its people. It is not about a building; it is about a collection of individuals who have trusted Jesus with their lives and choose to support one another in the journey. When we come together like this, we find hope. We find a hope that empowers us to overcome anything life can throw at us. So welcome to church today. You are a part of something bigger than yourself, and you are here for a reason.

Today we begin a brand-new series called Hope Is Here. I would argue that the greatest need we have in our lives, after the year we have experienced, is a sense that there is hope in the world. Some of us have experienced great loss this year, and it has been troubling. This year has caused some of us to doubt our faith and the things we used to hold tightly. Some of us feel broken because of the pain in our country and in our world. Can we all just agree that we are in need of hope?

Story: It reminds me of a story about a man attending a little league baseball game. The little children were all on the field or in the dugout, playing their hearts out. It was only the first inning, and the score was already 16 – 0. One team was losing in a landslide. The man walked up to the dugout of the losing team and asked one little boy if he was discouraged by the score. Had he lost hope? The little boy looked at him, a little puzzled, and said, “Why would I be discouraged? We haven’t even gotten up to bat yet. There is always hope!”

That is one way to look at the challenges that we face in life. The Church throughout history has had the audacity to have hope in the face of trouble. It stems from the victory of the resurrected Jesus Christ. When things looked the darkest for Jesus, as he hung on the cross, he knew it was far from over. The tomb would not be the end, he would defeat death and come back to life. With this as the Church’s backdrop, there is always reason for hope.

In the Gospels, Jesus was always offering hope to those around him. Whether it was a crippling disease, an oppressive government, a physical or spiritual hunger, or an evil attack, Jesus would meet people right where they were. The characters in the scriptures knew that if Jesus is here, then hope is here.

POINT #1 – LIFE IS HARD

There are times when we are in need of a reminder that there is hope. Life’s circumstances have a way of leaving us hopeless. I would argue that there is nothing in life that can steal our hope more than when we find ourselves weary, tired, or worn out. I would imagine that there are many in the room/online today who know exactly what this feels like. Waiting for a diagnosis, paying off bills, saving a marriage, enduring Covid-19, and trying to grow spiritually. It is times like this when we feel like we cannot keep going and all we want to do is give up.

It’s like the famous NFL coach Vince Lombardi once said, “*Fatigue makes cowards of us all.*”

Jesus was aware of the tendency of people to shoulder heavy burdens and for this to cause them to lose hope. Jesus spoke to his followers about John the Baptist’s faithfulness in the midst of prison and the questions he was asking about Jesus’ identity. He was losing hope about whether or not Jesus was indeed the Messiah, and if his work had been in vain. In light of this, Jesus speaks these words.

READ Matthew 11:28-30

Jesus is doing a couple of things here in this passage.

First, he is acknowledging that life is heavy. We live life without margin. We are hard on ourselves. We work hard to keep up with others around us and we get weary. Jesus is normalizing this for us. We should not feel bad when we feel crushed by burdens. We should not feel like a failure. When we do, we often shy away from going to God for help, and we avoid being vulnerable with others as well. But Jesus tells us that if we are weary, we should come to Him. It is an invitation.

Second, Jesus offers us a solution. He tells us to exchange our yoke for another. A yoke is a wooden harness that a farmer would attach to livestock to plow a field or to pull a cart. The yoke would help keep the livestock safe as they worked and would help the animal submit to the farmer. There were some people in Jesus' audience who were submitting to a way of life that was law-based and was hard to live up to. It was religious and legalistic. It was performance-based and driven by the need to succeed.

The yoke he was offering was one of grace, mercy, compassion, and love. One yoke causes people to become weary. The other causes people to find peace. He invites us to remove whatever yokes we have had around our necks and to place his yoke upon us, because it is easy, it is light, and it will give us rest.

POINT #2 – IS YOUR YOKE CRUSHING OR LIFEGIVING

Jesus offers hope for the weary by reminding us that our value is not found in how well we hold it together when things get tough or how we compare to the people around us. Our value comes from the love that he has for us and the grace he gives.

To access the rest of this sermon and the rest of the four-week sermon series, download the BTCS Hope is Here Church Kit – visit BacktoChurch.com