

Rest

by Pastor Jim Strelan

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest (Matthew 11:28).

Read Matthew 11:16–19,25–30

In Papua New Guinea, the women would carry unbelievable loads on their backs in a *bilum* (pronounced ‘billum’). A bilum is what we would call a string bag. They would load up vegetables from their garden, maybe some firewood on top, and perhaps even a baby on top of that. Imagine the relief when, finally, they could unburden themselves of the load. Now they could have rest.

On a church frontage near where I lived is a wrought iron cross, and on that cross hangs a bilum. What a great illustration – burdens loaded onto the cross so there could be rest.

We know what it is to be weary and burdened. Lots of things are like a huge weight, pushing us down. Jesus offers rest. Come, he says, come to me, and I will give you rest.

In these verses, Jesus is especially referring to the burden of having to perform, meet standards and do all the right things to ensure God’s approval. And that is a burden that easily weighs down. Jesus is the ‘friend of tax collectors and sinners’ (verse 19). That was an accusation thrown at him, but it was also accurate. He comes to relieve the burden and give rest.

A Melanesian Pidgin term that applies well here is the phrase for peace: *bel isi*. ‘Bel’ is your stomach, where we feel things. We talk about having butterflies in our stomachs. We feel sick in the stomach when we are worried. And ‘isi’ means easy, relaxed, calm, at ease, at rest. Jesus encourages his hearers to not allow the burden of expectation to overwhelm them but to come to him, trust him and learn from him. He will give rest. Jesus will bring calm. He will ease anxious hearts.

And the new burden he gives is easy, and it is light. In Romans 13:8, the Apostle Paul tells us, ‘Be under obligation to no-one – the only obligation you have is to love one another’. There is rest for you when you relax in the gracious, accepting arms of Jesus and simply love. I sure need that, and I’m sure you do, too.

Jesus, it wears me out constantly trying to please you and feeling as though I’m not doing enough. Give me rest. Ease my burdens. I leave them at your cross. It is enough. Amen.

Pastor Jim is a retired pastor living on Brisbane Northside. He served in Papua New Guinea and as School Pastor in a number of schools and congregations with schools. He is married to Ruth and has three children and seven grandchildren and loves them all unconditionally. He loves to share the Gospel as simply and clearly as he can.

Source: [Lutheran Church of Australia \(lca.org.au\)](http://lca.org.au)