The Man Left Half Dead by the Roadside

We are all looking for rest. We work all week and wait for the weekend. We work all year and wait for our holiday. We tell ourselves that when we have a bigger house, more money or fewer worries, we will at last be at peace. And yet we often come back from holiday just as tired. The body has rested, but the soul has not.

That is because the heaviest weariness is not of the body but of the heart. We are worn out by quarrels, by the grudges we have carried for years, by the worry of not falling behind others, by the desire always to be right, by the thought of the person who wronged us. Many do not even know what they are looking for. They simply feel an emptiness that nothing fills, and they move from one thing to the next, hoping the next one will bring them peace.

The Bible describes this condition very well. It says that the heart of the person who lives far from God is "But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt." (Isaiah 57:20). You may have a beautiful house by the sea, but if the sea within you is in a storm, you have no rest.

Two worlds

The Bible speaks of two ways of living. It calls one "things on the earth" and the other "things above". When we hear "things on the earth", we think of money and possessions. But the Bible is thinking above all of what goes on in the heart.

In the world we live in, everyone knows the rules. From childhood you are taught to defend yourself, to pay people back in the same coin, not to let anyone walk all over you. You judge others quickly and yourself slowly. For your own mistakes you always find an excuse; for those of others, none. You remember who has wronged you. You want to have the last word.

In God's world, the rules are different. Jesus said, "Love your enemies" and "But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful." (Luke 6:35-36). He did not merely say that we should not hate those who do us harm, but that we should do them good. He also said: "Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven:" (Luke 6:37). And He asked us to love the other person "as ourselves", that is, to judge them with the same leniency with which we judge ourselves.

At first sight these rules seem impossible and even unfair. But look at what each one brings. The grudge you hold against someone weighs on you, not on them. The desire for revenge is never satisfied. The concern to be right keeps you constantly tense. This world promises peace but demands an endless struggle. God's world seems to ask a great deal, but it gives rest.

A man fallen by the roadside

Jesus once told a simple story. A man was travelling along a lonely road; he was attacked by robbers, stripped, beaten and left half dead. Two very religious men came along the road. They saw him and went on their way. They did him no harm; they simply passed by. Then a stranger came by, from a despised people. When he saw him, he had compassion on him. He stopped, bound up his wounds, took him to an inn and paid for his care (Luke 10:30-35).

The story shows very clearly the difference between the two worlds. All three saw the same man. The first two saw trouble to keep away from. The third saw a man to lift up. In our world it is normal to walk on by. In God's world, you stop.

The invitation

Jesus did not only speak about rest; He also offered it: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30).

The yoke was the piece of wood placed on the necks of oxen so that they could pull the plough together. It seems strange to promise rest and then give a yoke. But every person already carries a yoke: the yoke of pride, of resentment, of fear, of the desire always to come first. That is the heavy yoke. Jesus invites us to lay it down and take His, which is light.

And He tells us what to learn from Him: meekness and humility. Meekness does not mean weakness. Jesus had all power, but He did not use it to strike. When He was mocked, He did not answer with mockery. The proud heart always feels under attack; it compares itself, defends itself and grows angry. The humble heart has nothing left to defend, and that is why it can be at peace. Pride brings war into the soul; humility brings peace.

Many people believe that peace comes only after death. That is why at funerals we say "Rest in peace". But Jesus speaks of a rest that begins now, in the midst of life, even in the midst of the storm. Once, on the sea, His disciples were afraid they would drown, while He was sleeping peacefully in the boat (Mark 4:38). This is the peace He gives: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." (John 14:27).

Long before, a prophet expressed the same invitation in a few words: "Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein." (Jeremiah 6:16). Rest does not come from changing the place where we live, but from changing the way we live. The invitation is for anyone: to try the way of Jesus, to forgive, to stop beside the one who has fallen, to lay down the yoke of pride. And there, on that road, to find the rest they have been looking for all their life.

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