

The Christ-centred life

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 09 August 2026

Preacher: James Ross

[0:00] Now, perhaps we can turn together in our Bibles to Matthew chapter 11. That's on page 977. We are going to read from chapter 11, verse 25 to chapter 12, verse 14.

And maybe just to say at this point as well, that shortly after the end of the service, we'll take a few minutes to pray together sometime around 6.

6.40. So if you want to stick around, we'll pray here. That'd be much appreciated, especially as we think about inviting other people to church, as we think about, as Roddy was praying, the mission of God's people in our city and society.

But here we are in Matthew chapter 11 from verse 25. Let's again hear the Word of God. At that time, Jesus said, At that time, Jesus went through the cornfields. On the Sabbath, his disciples were hungry and began to pick some ears of corn and eat them.

When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, Look, your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath. He answered, Haven't you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry?

[2:02] He entered the house of God and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread, which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests. Or haven't you read in the Sabbath duty in the Sabbath, the Sabbath, and yet are innocent.

I tell you that something greater than the temple is here. If you had known what these words mean, I desire mercy, not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the innocent.

For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath. Going on from that place, he went into their synagogue and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Looking for a reason to bring charges against Jesus, they asked him, Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?

He said to them, If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a person than a sheep?

Therefore, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath. Then he said to the man, Stretch out your hand. So he stretched it out and it was completely restored, just as sound as the other.

[3:13] But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus. Amen. So we're thinking this evening as we get back into Matthew's Gospel about the Christ-centered life.

But just as we get to our text, and as we place it in the context of where we are as a church, imagine a conversation with a friend or a family member this week, and the conversation turns in such a way that it leads to an invitation.

Hey, would you like to try church with us this week or next? If there was a follow-up question, why? How would we answer?

I want to suggest there's three excellent answers to that question here in chapters 11 and 12 of Matthew's Gospel. We might invite someone to come and try church because it's in church and in God's Word and in worship, where we can discover how to have relationship with God.

And that's hugely important. We also discover, as we gather around God's Word to hear His voice, here's how to find true rest and true peace in our lives.

[4:31] And we know so many people who are looking for that. That's a great answer. Or we might be led to say, well, you come to church so that you can discover Jesus and you can find about His mercy and the compassion of God.

There's wonderful answers in here. And notice that all of them involve knowing Jesus and a life that makes Him central. Every one of us, we have a control center.

There will always be someone or something that is providing our sense of drive in our life, that gives us our sense of purpose. It's where we look to to find our security, our hope, and our joy.

And what we discover with Jesus as He comes on the mission of God into this world is He makes the unique and the bold claim that what each of us need to do is to make Him central if we are to experience the life with God that we were made for.

So this chapter reminds us that Jesus is calling us, God is calling us to the Christ-centered life. But as we look at this text, we also see that running in the background, there's another way of life.

[5:44] There's the way of life of the Pharisees. And what becomes clear by the end of our reading, we heard it, they are getting together to want to kill Jesus. The Pharisees are rejecting Jesus in favor of their own way to live, strict law-keeping to find salvation.

And in this passage and in many others in Matthew's gospel, Jesus will lovingly confront those false alternatives that would make something else central.

And so one thing that Jesus would want to do for us this evening is to expose where perhaps we come to rely on other things than Jesus. Perhaps it's a job or a family.

Perhaps it's even our religious performance. And He wants to strip those away so that He might have in our lives the central place.

And so this evening we're going to hear Jesus calling us to the Christ-centered life. And we'll also be at the same time comparing and contrasting with another way of life.

[6:49] To see which is better and why. And to recognize as we think about the Christ-centered life, this is what Jesus invites His people, His church, to experience and to enjoy day after day.

And this is what He sends us out to invite others into. Not into religion as such, but into a wonderful life where we know Jesus as our Savior and our friend and our Lord.

We invite people so that they too might discover relationship with God and rest from God and the mercy of God that we find in Jesus. So let's have a look at each of these things in turn.

First of all, recognize what Jesus says. That He gives us relationship with God. If you look at chapter 11 verses 25 to 27, we hear Jesus say remarkable things about Himself.

And I suppose the foundation of a Christ-centered life begins here. It begins with believing what Jesus says about Himself. So as Jesus announces, I am the center of God's revelation.

[8:08] That I alone can introduce you to God the Father. We need to take Him on trust. To understand this is no small claim.

When we hear Jesus write, we hear Him saying, if you and I, if we want to connect with God, we need to go through Jesus. If we are to discover who God truly is, then we need to look no further than Jesus.

If we want to hear God speak and reveal Himself, then we need to listen to Jesus. So He's making huge claims about Himself in these words.

So look with me at Jesus' logic as we consider His words and His claim. So look at verse 25 and 26, where God the Father, Jesus is saying, God the Father conceals and reveals according to His will. Listen to Jesus. I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because You've hidden these things from the wise and learned and revealed them to little children.

[9:19] Yes, Father, for this is what You were pleased to do. God's pleasure to conceal and to reveal. Now the context for this section is that we've just been told earlier in Matthew's gospel, Jesus was active in a number of towns and cities.

They saw miracles, but they have not repented. And we're meeting Pharisees, and they've listened to Jesus, and they've seen His miracles, but they have not responded in faith.

But we also know Jesus has disciples, He has followers, so others have turned in faith. And the point of that is this, that we cannot understand God or enter into true relationship with God by our own efforts.

It's not our church attending, or our Bible reading, or our study of good theology that is the basis of knowing God. What Jesus says, and what we need, is for God to reveal Himself to us.

And He invites us to have a childlike trust that's willing to be taught by Jesus so that we might know by God's grace, God the Father.

[10:37] He continues, beginning of verse 27, by making the recognition that Jesus comes with the Father's full authority. Look again at Jesus' words.

All things have been committed to me by my Father. He is the Father's representative on the earth. He is the Father's approved agent. Whenever we see Jesus act, He is acting with the Father's power and authority. When we see Jesus' love, we understand this reveals to us the Father's loving heart.

He perfectly represents God to us in the world. And that includes the right that Jesus has to our worship, to our trust, to our obedience.

The logic continues. Look with me at verse 27. No one knows the Son except the Father. To put it another way, only God the Father truly understands Jesus.

[11:47] It takes God to know God. There is a level of mystery that only God can fully comprehend.

How is it that Jesus can be one and the same time fully human and fully divine? How is it that the immortal God can take on mortal flesh?

How can the eternal enter history? How is it that Jesus, the Word of God, becomes flesh and made His dwelling among us so that we see the glory of God in this man who was born of the Virgin?

Only God fully knows God. So there are more books and more films and more podcasts and more videos about Jesus than any other figure in human history.

But the best of minds will only ever scratch the surface. And so when Jesus says no one knows the Son except the Father, this calls for our humility.

[12:57] But doesn't it also call us to hunger that as God's people we would want to know God better.

We will never know Him fully but we can know Him more. Jesus continues, continuing in verse 27, no one knows the Father except the Son.

So this is the flip side of what He's just said, only Jesus fully understands God the Father. Now do we sense how bold Jesus' claim is here?

Here is Jesus walking on this earth and saying, I alone can reveal the truth about God. I know God completely.

No other human teacher would dare to make this kind of claim. While the best of human minds have often grappled with the great things of God and we have wonderful theology that's come from great minds, only Jesus knows the Father completely and intimately.

[14:12] Jesus uniquely calls God His Abba Father and wonderfully as adopted children we get to call God Father but Jesus has a special relationship.

He is the eternal Son of the Father. So again, Jesus is helping us to see that in a world full of opinions about God, Jesus cuts through them all as He says, I alone know God fully and absolutely come to me to know God.

And that's where He goes next. No one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him. Jesus alone can fully reveal the Father to us and recognize that Jesus came to reveal the Father to us.

The one who enjoys perfect relationship with His Father, the one who has enjoyed eternal fellowship with the Father, He has come to introduce us to His Father.

That when we have faith in Jesus, we now have direct access to God's throne room to know the King of the universe as our loving Father in heaven.

[15:37] So Jesus in these few short words is making remarkable claims of Himself. He is unique. He has direct, perfect, personal knowledge of God and He is the perfect, personal revelation of God to the world.

He is the end of human speculation and the climax of God's revelation. But the point of all that He says, why it matters, is that it means we can know God.

We can know God as our Father. That we can enjoy life in right relationship with God. That all the disharmony, all the disintegration that we're so aware of, caused so often by our own human pride, our own rebellion, that that can be fixed.

That by God's grace, we can share life with the eternal God. That by God's grace, we get to pray and know God as our Father.

And that's a wonderful privilege for God's people and it's the start of our mission as a church. That our mission is to announce that in Jesus, God is calling people back to Himself, to the end of wandering, back into covenant relationship, so that by faith, we and others can enjoy relationship with God.

[17:14] And we, as the people of God, can invite others, join us to know this relationship that means so much to us. You can know God as Father too. So Jesus comes to give us relationship with God, His Father.

Father. Secondly, what we learn about the Christ-centered life, why our life needs to be centered on Christ. Here's the second reason. It's because Jesus gives us rest.

Look at the beginning of verse 28. Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. A recent book written by a Korean philosopher based in Germany called the Burnout Society.

It really drills down on the reality that the modern mantras that we hear so often of define yourself, of be whatever you want to be, of manifest and make it happen, while for a tiny fraction of the population that may get them somewhere, for the vast majority it is proving exhausting and it's led directly to greater amounts of anxiety and depression and feelings of hopelessness.

People are being told, you can do whatever you set your mind to and then, so often, we discover, well, we just can't. And rather, we're pushing and pushing and it feels like we're pushing against a brick wall and we do that for long enough and it leads to a whole generation feeling hopeless and worthless.

[18:49] And importantly, as we still hear that voice, so many people never able to rest, never able to feel content.

Things were different in Jesus' day but at the same time not so different. If you are part of Jewish society as Jesus was, that society was led by the Pharisees.

So much of religious life and political life and moral, ethical life was governed by these Pharisees. And these Pharisees were pushing people towards salvation by their own religion and by their self-effort which is always a recipe for exhaustion and insecurity.

That to try and safeguard God's laws, they added lots and lots and lots of additional human rules. pushing people onto this exhausting rollercoaster ride of a sense of momentary pride if they are having a good day and they manage to keep the laws but so often despair when they couldn't reach the standards the Pharisees were setting for other people.

I wonder when we come to Jesus' words do we identify with some of his sense of life simply being exhausting of self-effort being exhausting perhaps we realize for ourselves for people in our circles what's needed almost more than anything is that sense of peace and the capacity to rest.

[20:34] Let's listen in to what Jesus says next and listen in verse 28 to how he begins and again this is radical come to me Jesus says.

He doesn't say go to God this is a direct invitation and a remarkable claim I can offer you rest and it's remarkable because the Jewish people know and Jesus knows that in the Bible rest is a gift from God.

We could go back to creation God created in six days day seven was a day of rest God rested to enjoy his creation he invited Adam and Eve to rest to enjoy their creation and to worship their God or we can think about what God did for the people in the story of the Exodus from being slaves where they could never rest to enjoying life with God where they had weekly rest where they would eventually go to the promised land which was the place of rest.

Another significant theme in the Old Testament the theme of exile and then the return home.

Having been judged because they turned away from God turned towards false gods there was this promise that God would restore people back to their land and to the rest of God and you turn to the end of the Bible and still rest is there there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God.

The imagery of new creation involves resting and feasting in God's presence in God's perfect world so rest is a precious gift from God and here is Jesus on his kingdom mission and by God's grace he is inviting us to know rest and a particular kind of rest to rest from trying to be self righteous and instead to rest in his perfect righteousness because who is Jesus speaking to?

[22:44] Look with me again at verse 28 he is speaking to those who are weary and burdened and in Jesus' day those who are weary and burdened were those who are under the laws of the Pharisees.

Listen to Jesus in Matthew 23 verse 4 this is what he says about the Pharisees he says they tie up heavy cumbersome loads and put them on other people's shoulders but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.

So the system of the Pharisees well it was an absolute lie and it was so destructive but the path to God they were saying it comes through ritual and religion and rule keeping and so people were weary and burdened and then Jesus comes and there's this wonderful contrast and wonderful promise come to me I'll give you rest.

Jesus our saviour he promises to carry us he promises to lift the crushing burdens off people's backs he promises to give freedom and rest as we experience and rest in the grace of God he offers us deep and lasting rest peace with God peace in our hearts because Jesus has come ultimately to remove the heavy burden of sin off our backs to end our slavery to sin and to show us that we don't need to try and keep the law to deal with that sin because that was never the law's purpose so he's inviting us into rest but maybe you then wonder why in verse 29 he moves to an image of working verse 29 take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart and you'll find rest for your souls for my yoke is easy and my burden is light how can we rest if we take a yoke what's Jesus talking about there well to think about the literal yoke

Jesus lived in a farming society so he'd be used to seeing a couple of oxen yoked together with a harness over the pair of shoulders so that they could work together to plow a field but Jesus was also familiar with a bar mitzvah when a Jewish young person became a man came of age there would be a promise given along these lines where the young man says I promise to yoke myself to the law of God and do we hear what Jesus is doing here when Jesus is saying take my yoke and learn from me he is inviting us to partner in life with Jesus to a life of discipleship not trying to figure out our own way to please God not trying to figure out our own way to do life but to partner in life with Jesus and that's rest because there's freedom because now we're living the way

[25:56] God made us to live but he's also inviting us to show loyalty and commitment to him to find rest in enjoying life with God because we have submitted to Jesus the son and there is a freedom in this because Jesus shows us his heart he's not a harsh taskmaster like the Pharisees rather and this is the only time Jesus describes his own heart he says I am gentle and humble in heart and he gives us the deepest rest rest for our souls Jesus has come on a mission to give us rest by giving us God's salvation and Jesus will do that by himself going under the weight of the law and all of its demands and he will be truly and perfectly obedient at every point of his life in our place as our representative and he will also willingly take the punishment for our law breaking as our substitute he will satisfy the demands of God's law giving up his life as a sacrifice to death so that we might be forgiven and have freedom and have life and rest knowing we live enjoying relationship and love from God because as we are trusting in Jesus alone for salvation it allows us to rest deeply so when we sin as

Christians and we do sin we know that we don't need to anxiously doubt does God love me am I really saved no we're trusting in Jesus and we know that his work is finished and so again we confess our sin but we rest as we trust there is rest as we build our life around Jesus because we don't need to be comparing ourselves with others all the time so much of modern life is comparison and competition and Jesus gives us the security to rest It's wonderful we are free to be unimportant and unnoticed by the world because we know we are loved by God and we are seen by Jesus so as we learn to look away from ourselves and to look to Jesus and center our life on him he gives us relationship where we know God as father and he gives us the deep rest that our hearts and lives and souls really need one last thing about the

Christ centered life we have here and it's this that Jesus shows us mercy that's the message of those first 14 verses of chapter 12 but just to step away from the text for a moment in 18th century England we've been in 18th century England a lot today I know but there was a revival of Christianity and one of the striking things that social historians and church historians noticed was that over the time this revival that happened so more and more people being active in social change so it's at this period that William Wilberforce was working in parliament for the abolition of slavery it was at the same time that Lord Shaftesbury was working for better working conditions it was the same time that Christians like Elizabeth Fry and John Howard were working for prison reform down in England and it reveals a principle that as

Christians receive and are transformed by the mercy of God we are then moved to show mercy to others that as God's grace comes to us and changes us that it creates a channel where that mercy flows from us and we put the mercy of God on display in the world the Christian church has always been designed by God to be a contrast community Israel was to stand out from the nations the church is to stand out from the society it finds itself in and here we see from Jesus we can stand out and be a light to the nations in part by the mercy we show the compassion we offer the kindness that we extend and the source behind it the force behind it isn't in our own hearts isn't in our own capacity to summon up mercy it's in Jesus

Christ himself and what we see when we look at Jesus is a life on earth marked by deep mercy towards sinners and sufferers so let's look really briefly at this little section so and remember the Pharisees so let's bring them out of the shadows for a moment so they have been and they continue to challenge Jesus on his law keeping and remember they're not challenging him on are you keeping the law of God rather is Jesus keeping the laws of the Pharisees because they have made their own rules to justify themselves and it's turned them into a very narrow people a very harsh and judgmental people and it's led them ultimately to turn against Jesus and so they are dominating as we said religious!

[31:41] and social life there's this two of them here first few verses of chapter 12 Jesus disciples are hungry on the Sabbath and so they go and they get some corn they rub the corn together so they can get something to eat and the Pharisees jump on this hey you're working on the Sabbath and then later on in the synagogue from verse 9 onwards here comes a man with a shriveled hand and they want to test Jesus will Jesus work on Sunday by showing mercy because they've decided basically unless it's a life or death situation don't show mercy because that could be work can you imagine how miserable and anxious and self righteous and despairing this society could be controlled by this kind of justify yourself by law keeping attitude and then here comes

Jesus and he bursts onto the scene and immediately people flocked him this is a new message this is a new mission this is a new way of life because Jesus reveals the heart of God look what Jesus says in verse 7 if you had known what these words mean I desire mercy not sacrifice you would not condemn the innocent mercy lies at the heart of the mission of Jesus because God's heart is a merciful one so Jesus will respond to the critics human need hunger it trumps your ritual and your rules the priests need to worship on the Sabbath when there's many more offerings coming in that trumps regulations about work mercy over sacrifice and then in verses 9 to 14 we see him apply the truth as he shows mercy in this healing miracle and

Jesus replies to his opponents look at verse 11 and verse 12 if you had a sheep and it fell into a pit on the Sabbath you take hold of it how much more valuable is a person than a sheep therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath there's that hypocrisy at the heart of their religion but Jesus exposes it it's good to show mercy to an animal how much more valuable people are therefore it is right to show mercy to a person every day of the week a Sabbath day is a good day as we look at Jesus and as the church builds its life on Jesus we discover that the kingdom of God the community of Christ it is shaped by God's mercy so that we might in our own way in our own day showcase God's mercy in the world it's no wonder when you read the gospels the weak the marginalized those who felt guilty and oppressed they flocked to

Jesus to receive this mercy and grace and it's wonderful for us to remember you when we invite people come and try church with us what are we inviting people into well we want them to discover a people within this place who love Jesus and love other people a people who have received mercy so much that it flows from us and is shared within us a people drawn into relationship with God through faith in Jesus resting in a secure salvation enjoying God's mercy that gives us a freedom and a delight to invite other people to experience it for themselves with Jesus we have the power and the motivation to practice this kind of mercy in our everyday lives to let it shape our relationship our capacity to be patient and forgiving and welcoming to others it has the ability to shape and influence our work that we work to bless others to practice kindness over competition can change our mindset as we consider all the mercy that

God has shown us in Jesus gratitude trumps grumbling we prioritize enjoying God and his gospel and in ways that mark us out as the people of Jesus so Jesus invited people to a Christ centered life and we who are his people we invite others to the Christ centered life also so what we do when we experience anything good from the most trivial the new restaurant or the new book so we do it as we come to discover and discover again the wonder of Jesus the son of God and the savior of the world as we believe that he is God's revelation to the world we come to enjoy him deeply and then we go to invite others into relationship with God through faith in Jesus rest from God through the rescue of

[37:27] Jesus and mercy from God knowing the compassionate heart of Jesus let's pray together Lord our God we are so thankful for Jesus and his life as we discover it in the gospels we thank you that Jesus is the one who can bring us into relationship with the living God we know so many people who are spiritual and who are longing for something more than just this life and we pray that they would come to know Jesus and find the joy of real relationship with the real and living God we

thank you that Jesus has come to give us deep rest we don't need to prove ourselves and justify ourselves and try and be better than the next person that we can rest in your love and rest in your salvation Lord we pray for those who are anxiously striving those who feel worthless and desperate we pray that so many would come to discover rest in

Jesus and Lord we thank you for his mercy for his mercy to meet physical needs and to meet spiritual needs we thank you for our experience of the mercy of God through Jesus and we pray that you would enable us to show mercy to one another and to the people who live and work around us and Lord we pray that you would be pleased to bring people into our church life here to experience the goodness and the glory grace of God in Jesus for themselves and we pray in Jesus name Amen