

Matthew 11:1-6, 25-30

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[0 : 00] So let's now read. We're going to read from Matthew chapter 11. We're going to read from verse 1 to 6 and then verse 25 to 30.

So let's hear these words of God together. After Jesus had finished instructing his 12 disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in the towns of Galilee.

When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples to ask him, Are you the one who is to come or should we expect someone else?

Jesus replied, Go back and report to John what you hear and see. The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.

Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me. And then at verse 25, At that time Jesus said, Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

[1 : 39] Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Amen. This is God's word, a word that reveals to us the heart of Jesus, maybe the surprising heart of Jesus.

Here is the one time in the Gospels, Jesus reveals his core, his heart, that inner part of himself that drives what he does and who he is. And what does he say? He says, I am gentle and humble in heart.

Having just claimed once again to be the centre of God's revelation, what shines through is his gracious invitation and his mercy.

Goes against expectations. And when we think of people with great power, we tend to think of those who are untouchable, those who stand above it all.

[2 : 45] Maybe we've seen that in a boss or we recognise it in a politician. And this presentation of Jesus' own character goes against maybe the caricatures of God that we can build up.

A God who is angry and judgmental. A God who is uncaring. A God who, while he may love us, in a sense he puts up with us.

You know, he loves his children but he's disappointed and grudgingly puts up with us. And it's not at all the picture that Jesus presents to us.

And so here is hope for us today from Jesus. There is in this an invitation from Jesus for all of us today who are weary, who are downtrodden, who are suffering in any kind of way.

And here is Jesus' heart for all sufferers, for all sinners. Presenting himself as the one who can give hope and rest and life.

[3 : 58] So let's think about his words together. First of all, let's think about that invitation of Jesus in verse 28. We read, come to me. Now this is a bold and unique statement when we get under the surface.

Unlike any other religious teacher, Jesus isn't saying, go to God to find rest. Jesus is saying, come to me. And that ties in with the self-portrait that Jesus has been painting of himself in Matthew chapter 11.

So we read of John the Baptist who had been sent to prepare the way for Jesus. Now he's in prison and he just wants to make sure, is Jesus the Messiah?

And Jesus gives that reassurance, making clear to John, yes, I am the Messiah. I have come doing the works of God with the authority of God. But did you notice how he proves that?

He proves it in that he shows that as Messiah, he comes for those who are typically excluded. Those who would typically be forgotten and marginalised.

[5 : 05] Those who would be regarded as unclean. He comes for the weak, the vulnerable, the poor. For the blind, the lame, the leper, the deaf, the dead, the poor.

Jesus turns power on its head because he uses all the power and authority that he has from God as God for the weak.

And to extend mercy. Rebecca McLaughlin has written an excellent book called *Confronting Christianity*. Which has been really helpful actually in preparing for our big questions series coming up next week.

And she tells in that book the story of a genetics professor in Cornell University who was a convert from Hinduism. And he began to explore other world faiths and eventually came to explore Christianity.

And he talked about finding the power inversion of Jesus compelling compared to superhero Krishna. Jesus had all power but he used it to extend mercy to others.

[6 : 20] It's the pattern of Jesus' life. It's the plan of God. Jesus left heaven and came born in an unimportant town. Born to a poor family, to a teenage mother, to a people, the Jewish people who were oppressed by the Romans.

And in Jesus' mission he would carry that out by saving people through suffering. Though he is the son of God with all power, he would bear shame and suffer and die to forgive sin and to give new life.

The son of God enters into our suffering. And Jesus also gives us a portrait of himself in the prayer that he makes to his father just before this invitation.

He makes plain in that prayer that the way to God, the way to know God is not through human wisdom. There are things hidden from the wise and learned and revealed to little children.

The kingdom of God isn't about human intellect, human endeavour and achievement. The kingdom of God involves seeing and trusting that Jesus is Lord and King.

[7 : 40] Jesus will say he has all knowledge. He is the one who knows and reveals the father. He alone can do that. There are other teachers of the law in Jesus' day who claim that they do that, but they don't.

Jesus will say that he is the father's representative on the earth. All things have been committed to Jesus the son by the father.

So he stands in the closest possible relationship to God. And it's this one who says, come to me. It's a wonderfully loaded statement.

Come to the one who is God's appointed saviour. The one who is the son of God, who reveals God to us, reveals the way of salvation in and through himself.

But this one, he doesn't fold his arms when he sees suffering. Nor does he hire a team of bodyguards to keep people at arm's length so he can glide on through life.

[8 : 47] Nor does he claim for himself a life of luxury and ease. No, this is the Jesus of Isaiah's prophecy.

In Isaiah 53, we read of the suffering servant. And Jesus, as it were, he bundles up the whole range of human misery within that sickness, sorrow, sin, guilt, suffering and death.

And he takes it as he becomes one of us and he carries it to the cross. So that we understand it is the nail scarred hands of the son of God that beckon us.

Come to me. Come home to the father. So it's a wonderful invitation and it's an invitation that comes from the heart of Jesus.

So let's think briefly about the heart of Jesus as it's displayed for us here. Two ways that Jesus lays bare his heart for us. One, in who he offers himself to.

[9 : 52] So again, verse 28. Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened. That's all without exception. Every weak, downtrodden, frustrated, anxious, despairing person among us.

We need to hear this invitation from Jesus. And notice that Jesus doesn't say, you can come to me once you've cleaned yourself up. You can come to me once you've sorted yourself out and made yourself respectable and dealt with your burdens.

No, it's our burden that qualifies us to come to him. He is the one who offers to carry the burdens, not that we would deal with it ourselves. Now, this would have been particularly good news for the listeners in Jesus' own day.

The weary of Jesus' day, in particular, were those who stood under the teaching of the religious leaders and the Pharisees.

You know, you get that controversy and conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees. So these Pharisees, Jesus said, were laying heavy burdens on the people and they themselves weren't willing to lift a finger to help.

[11 : 03] We get a sense of what they were like even in the next chapter, Matthew 12. These Pharisees would judge the disciples for eating grain on the Sabbath. They would judge Jesus for showing mercy and healing someone on the Sabbath.

They were people who piled rule upon rule, law upon law, upon the people to say, if you want to get to God, you need to follow our rules and our standards. And so the people were weary from extra layers of law, human law of do and do and do.

To follow that way was to follow an exhausting path from a misguided leader heading nowhere.

Makes me think of the time, ironically enough, a theology professor was leading a group of us on a short hike.

We'd already gone up a mountain. We're coming back down. Mounted is a hill, really. It was just a hill. And he decided he could find an alternative way for us. Fine, let's do that. It was a nice day.

[12 : 11] Then a couple of hours later, the clouds opened and it's torrential rain. And hours later, about like forever, there was that sense among the group, are we ever getting home?

He just didn't know the way. We'd chosen the wrong guide. Jesus teaches a different way to the way of the Pharisees. Not the way of do, do, do.

His is the way of grace. His is the way of it is done. Our trust and our hope rests on the work of Jesus in his perfect life and his sacrificial death to pay for our sin.

Not on our own ability to please God. And Jesus leads us on a different path. In fact, Jesus will say, I am the way, the truth and the life.

No one comes to the Father except through me. His is the way. He is the life. He is the one that we must come to to have that freedom of knowing and enjoying life with God.

[13 : 14] What makes you weary today? All of us will have different answers to that question. Maybe for some of us, we're weary from trying to prove ourselves.

That might be in the context of religion or it might be in your family or your workplace, in your educational setting. You might be weary from a weight of responsibility at family or at work.

You may be weary because of the trials of life. Perhaps sorrow and grief has come. To all of us who are weary, the invitation from Jesus holds true.

Come to me. Come to me. And find rest and find peace and find life. Come to Jesus. Now he also shows us his heart in how he describes his own heart.

In verse 29 he says, Take my yoke upon you and learn from me. For I am gentle and humble in heart. Having just said, I am the centre of God's revelation.

[14 : 25] You cannot know God the Father unless you know me, the Son of God. Now he says, I'm gentle and humble. What did that look like in Jesus' life? It looked like Jesus willingly taking the low place.

As we're told in Philippians 2, he left the glory of heaven to come to the earth. To become one of us, to take the form of a servant.

And to go so low that he would die in our place for our sins on the cross. Jesus' most natural posture is not the raised fist of anger.

Not the pointed finger of judgment. It's the open arms of gracious, generous, gentle welcome.

And this is not Jesus putting on a show. This is not a politician or a leader grabbing a photo op.

[15 : 28] You know, here's me, just one with the people. Jesus really is gentle and humble. He's saying this is core to who I am. This is core to my mission. We have this wonderful truth placed together that Jesus is glorious God, revelation of God.

And he is accessible and approachable. We have Jesus saying, I love to welcome sinners and sufferers.

It was the pattern of his life then on earth. And he is the same Jesus in heaven. The same heart for sinners and sufferers today. So to come to Jesus is to have in heaven a friend who is with you and for you.

It's the heart of Jesus. And again, tied up to his heart and tied up to his invitation, there comes the promise of Jesus. We can see two aspects to this promise.

He promises that if we come to him, my yoke is easy. Now, the yoke, it was a shoulder beam used when ploughing a field.

[16 : 44] You would put it across a couple of oxen so that they could plough, use the plough to get nice straight furrows. And that became then an imagery of working, but also an image for service.

Jesus said, come to me, take my yoke and learn from me. He's inviting us to himself to be a follower, to be a disciple, which is to be a learner of Jesus.

But also to be a servant of Jesus. Now, he says, my yoke is easy. Is that easy? Well, on the one hand, maybe we'd want to say, no, it's not easy.

Because Jesus certainly isn't less demanding, for example, in the ethic that he presents. You know, while the religious leaders created all kinds of human rules, Jesus went back to the Ten Commandments.

But he didn't just say, don't murder. He also thought about our thought lives and thought about our motives. And say, even if you're angry, you're breaking that commandment. So his ethics are certainly not less demanding.

[17 : 59] And he would also speak about the call to be a learner, a call to be a disciple, as a call to carry our cross daily, to be willing to die to self. So that's not easy.

But on the other hand, his yoke is easy compared to what the Pharisees were offering. So the yoke was also an image of the law, taking up the yoke of the law.

And for the Pharisees, they made that a really heavy burden because they'd added all these extra laws. Jesus replaces that with, come to me. Jesus, it reminds us that grace, God's free and loving kindness, comes before law and obedience.

And that Jesus himself supplies the grace and the strength that we need for a life of obedience. And indeed, we partner with Jesus. He walks beside us as we seek to live for him.

So that's easier. There's also a new basis for obedience, that basis of love.

[19 : 10] Jesus, who summarised the Old Testament law, saying it calls us to love the Lord our God with our heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love our neighbour as ourselves.

But that obedience is fuelled by, empowered by the love of God that comes to us in Jesus.

And as we receive that self-giving, sacrificial love of Jesus, dying in our place, taking our sin and guilt, going under the just judgment of God in our place, then love for Jesus becomes easy.

So obeying Jesus is much easier because we've got this love in our heart, much easier than your do-it-yourself religion of try, try, try.

And you're trying to prove yourself to God. So Jesus promises, my yoke is easy. And he also promises, I will give you rest.

[20 : 12] And this is more than just a stopping of work. He says in verse 29, you will find rest for your souls. Here's the promise of deep soul rest. And here again, this is connecting to Jesus' identity as the Son of God.

Because in the Bible, it's God who gives rest. We go back to the beginning of creation, Genesis 1 and 2, we find God on day 6 of creation making people, Adam and Eve.

And then on day 7, God rests and God invites Adam and Eve to spend their first full day in this wonderful paradise, grace, enjoying Sabbath rest, having that freedom to enjoy and worship God in his world, made to enter into and to enjoy true rest of life in relationship with God.

So that life of following Jesus, yes, it brings work, absolutely. We work at obedience, we work to love and serve others, but there's also wonderful rest attached.

Rest knowing that our salvation, our life, our eternal life rests on the work of Jesus and not mine. So our identity and our hope is secure and out of that, we can rest and we can work.

[21 : 37] Knowing Jesus, we can also rest from the guilt of sin. Knowing that Jesus' work has secured my forgiveness.

So I can confess my sin freely, knowing that I have been freely forgiven. So there is rest for a guilty conscience.

And there is the rest of being brought into the limits that we were made to live within. Made to live under God's rule, to enjoy life with him, to enjoy his blessing.

And there is rest when we come under those limits. So Jesus offers us good news.

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. To the burned out and the stressed out, to the struggling and the weary and worried, Jesus invites you to rest as he invites you to himself.

[22 : 49] Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you. Amen. Amen. Amen.