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The Reach of Jesus

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Matthew 11:25 - 30

I don't know about you, but I get tired of struggling. The good news/bad news is I know I'm not alone. Many people struggle spiritually—and their problems aren't solved by preaching God's Word, commitments to Christ, being filled with the Spirit, or the sacraments. If that's you, you tend to go in one of two directions: toward futility and loss of confidence in God's power; or toward phoniness and covering your problems with a veneer of Scripture and busyness. But either way, it's pain. It's unrest. And this pain manifests itself in "over-extended" patterns of living: We OVERwork, OVEReat, OVERcommit, OVERspend, OVERspiritualize, OVERobsess about love and sex. We live on the edge. We must face the reality of our pain-filled past in order to proceed in a healthy way.

You have a choice. No matter how agitated you are, you can choose to open yourself up to God's love and healing power through the Holy Spirit. You can ask the Holy Spirit to gently bring the truth about your past to light and "*the truth will set you free.*" (John 8:32).

The interesting thing when you begin reading the New Testament is, you see that Jesus himself faced agitated people living with this unrest, and Jesus himself was unable to reach them. As we've read the last 2 weeks, Jesus' ministry was in full swing: healing people, loving the outcasts, and feeding them. He had been teaching them the amazing things of God. And they didn't respond. (That gives me hope! ☺) Even the miracles were misconstrued by them! We pick up where Matthew says 11:25 *At that time Jesus said, "I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. 26 "Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight. He's saying "Thank you Father that you've concealed your ways from sophisticates and know-it-alls, but spelled it out for ordinary people...I'm ready to go over it line by line with anyone who will listen."* (The Message). And then Jesus speaks these words that changed my life...

28 *"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. 29 "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. 30 "For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."*

In the midst of chaos and unbelief and unrest is when speaks these words. Somehow I find that incredibly comforting. Let's look at them closely:

28 *"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.*

- Jesus says "Come..." Not "Do." Not "Learn." Not "Take my yoke." (That's later). It's come. It's you, and you have to go. It's present tense. He didn't say "Come tomorrow." It's now. It means you leave one place and go another. What is it about where you are now, that's preventing you from coming to Jesus?
- For some of us here, Jesus is saying "Don't be like those cities! Cross the line of faith. Leave *your* efforts to get it right and figure it out. Leave your self-reliance. Leave your sins, your presumptions, even your past. Leave everything else you've trusted in so far, and come to me."
- *Come to Me.* Look who's saying it: Come to Christ alone. Go past every other thing and every other person, every other cause, every other issue, and go to Jesus—the man, the God, the Mediator, the Redeemer, who gave all for you.

- Look at the next word: “*Come to me all...*” It’s for everyone.
- *Who are weary & heavy-laden...* If that doesn’t describe at least half of us in this room, I don’t know what does. Weary and heavy-laden from life, yes. But how much of our unrest is because of our *own* stuff we carry around? How much weariness are you carrying around from our *own* bad choices—mistakes in how we treat others around you? Yourself?
- *I will give you...* I will *give* you. It’s a gift. You can’t get it on your own. You don’t get it in “degrees.” It’s given all at once, when you allow Christ all the way in to your weariness. It’s a gift that’s perfect and complete. Salvation comes once and for all—and then you and I spend the rest of our lives living into it: learning to trust more and more of our lives to Christ.
- *Rest* will follow. (Aren’t you tired of carrying around all that other junk?) You don’t do anything else. It’s a one-way invitation. Without money, come. Without merit, come. Without preparation, come. It’s just come. Come now, come as you are, come with your burden, come with your yoke, and His promise will be fulfilled to you: “I will give you rest.”
- Your sin was not pardoned by a violation of God’s justice; justice was satisfied in Jesus. He gave you rest. Listen. If anyone here this morning has never felt that rest, come and have it. All you have to do is come, just as you are, and put your faith in Jesus and His rest. *Rest*—from your past sins, from all your efforts of striving to be good enough, rest from everybody else’s opinions of you, rest from yourself and your past and your unrealistic expectations. Imagine in the craziness of life, being able to *rest* like that.

Take My yoke upon you

- Okay. Here’s where it gets weird. We’re going from rest in Christ to taking on a yoke? Yes. (I know this is not a yoke, it’s an evener). THIS is a yoke. And it worked like THIS. After all, *your* yoke is a pain: all the things you have to do to make it. All the things you have to do to meet everyone’s expectations. All the things you have to be responsible for, to be good enough, to get far enough. Your yoke is hard. But Christ’s yoke is easy. Your burden is heavy; but Christ’s burden is light, when we walk in step with Him. When farmers got a new ox, they would yoke it to an experienced ox, so the young one could learn from the experienced animal, who would shoulder much of the burden in the beginning.
- So we come to him, and we must be willing to bear Christ’s burden. That is His cross, and every Christ-follower takes it.
- The Problem: **We think “rest” means doing nothing.** Why? Because we spend so much of our lives *not* resting, we can’t imagine what it would be like to live in His rest. But Christ’s yoke is anything but nothing! Christ’s yoke is learning from Him. It’s following His teaching. It’s walking side by side with him in our lives; not making up what we want to do for him, but finding Him, and keeping pace with Him.
- *Rest* for a Christ-follower who believes that God is living and active in the world today isn’t being a sluggard. It’s rest in the yoke. It’s Christ’s meaning and purpose being your meaning and purpose. It’s unforced rhythms of grace. There’s no *rest* in being wastefully idle. That’s just yet another form of escapism.

and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart,

- A word about these characteristics of Christ. We’re afraid of them. We think they’re weak. But being *Gentle*—is like being meek. But meekness comes from a root word meaning “bridled strength.” When a strong horse is bridled, it is considered meek. Its strength is focused, harnessed, and used for much good. Being gentle and meek is not weak. Like the guy at the gym who can handle heavy weights at the gym. The stronger you are, the more gentle you can be handling the heavy load. (About 2 months ago, I had to leave the gym THE GRUNTER)
- *Humble in heart*—Jesus our Lord was always of that lowly spirit. He did not strive. He didn’t make scenes. He didn’t scream his message. Upward mobility didn’t lure him. He didn’t care for fame. That was Satan’s problem: when Satan tempted Jesus it didn’t work because Jesus’ heart was not on himself. The closer you walk with His yoke, the easier it is to let go of your false expectations. You see true reality. You glory in Christ, and this rest—comes over you more and more.

and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS.

- After we “Come to Jesus,” we begin walking and working with Him, there’s this deeper rest. Do you see it? Jesus is opening us up to a depth of salvation and deeper rest that we have yet to reach.
- How good to rest in His sacrifice for your life. You don’t have to live in that unrest anymore! But even better, Jesus is saying: if you are in perfect step with him, you will begin to be transformed! Your life will be different. Not better than anyone else’s, but transformed – better than you once were, with new characteristics—Christ’s characteristics manifest in you. Results, or fruit the Bible calls them: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Preview of what you’ll read on Aug. 24th). You begin to rest in Christ’s character. You’ve been saved to live a better way. But there’s more. God rested the 7th day of Creation. Creativity is a part of this rest. We were created to declare and reflect God’s beauty and greatness. Some of us haven’t found rest because we haven’t claimed this aspect of Christ’s message. You can’t dream if you don’t rest.

What dreams has God placed in your heart, as you have rested in Him? As you learn this deeper rest, are you willing to let Him dream a new dream in & through you?

- Why can’t the (our) church become the place where the great artists of our time paint their first strokes and the great musicians sing their first notes?
- Why can’t the church become the environment where the great thinkers and the great scholars and the great writers of our time emerge?
- Why can’t our church become the community in which future poets and film directors, dancers and doctors and financiers grow up to discover that their talents are gifts from God?
- Why can’t the future leaders of this world come from the (this) church? [McManus, *An Unstoppable Force*]

By coming to Jesus alone, by resting in His salvation our hearts are joined to God’s. Our lives are transformed, and our imaginations can become the birthplace of the dreams of God for our lives, our church, our community, our world. Won’t you rest in Christ? Experience God’s conversion. Experience his character. And experience his creativity. And never, never forget Jesus reaching to you with these words:

28 "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. 29 "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. 30 "For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

Study Guide for Matthew 16 – 20

The Turning Point

Monday: Read Matthew 16. Pharisees & Sadducees (1-12). They were demanding a sign from Jesus. Jesus warn the disciples against false teachings. Are there dangerous approaches to religion today? Peter’s Confession (13-20). When and how did you recognize Jesus as your Messiah? Crucifixion Ahead (21-28). What does Jesus mean about saving and losing your life and forfeiting your soul?

Tuesday: Read Matthew 17. The Transfiguration (1-13). On the high mountain, the disciples get a glimpse of God’s glory and the greatness of Christ. Have you placed Jesus in the greatest sport in your life? How? A Healing & Taxes (14-27). Faith is the key to healing in these accounts. Pray for enough “light” to take the next step in your faith.

Wednesday: Read Matthew 18. Growing to Greatness (1-35). Do you like kids? What does being the “greatest in the Kingdom” mean for you? What is it about a child? (15-20) talks about when another Christian sins against you, how to handle it. Jesus also says “Where 2 or 3 come together in my name, there I am with them.” Who can you find meet with in Jesus’ name? The Parable of Forgiveness (21-35). What impact has forgiveness had in your life? Have you realized how often God has forgiven you?

Thursday: Read Matthew 19. Divorce (1-12). Pray for people’s marriages today: communication, forgiveness, Christ’s presence. Little Children (13-15). Rather than hinder kids, how can you help them to discover Christ at an early age? Rich, Young Man (16-30). Why is Jesus so hard on money? **Thursday Continued: Matthew 19.** Jesus hits him in his wallet. Where would he get you? Could you lay aside

everything to follow him?

Friday: Read Matthew 20. Workers & Wages in the Field (1-16). If you were first hired, how would you feel? On the opposite end, have you considered the plight of those who don't find their purpose "till the end of the day?" Jesus Goes to Jerusalem (17-19). What made Jesus go to the city, even though it would mean his doom? Greatness in God's Kingdom (20-28). Why is the world's view and the kingdom of God's view polar opposites? Two Blind Men Healed (29-34). In what ways are you "spiritually blind?" How is your sight better than 6 months ago?

Tips for Bible Study

1. *Don't look for hidden meanings.* God's Word is meant to unveil truth. Treat it as normal communication.
2. *Don't read verse by verse.* Read it in paragraphs. Most parts of the Bible are written in units of thought, not random verses. Go for the larger units to understand the bigger meaning.
3. *Don't jump to conclusions.* Read the Bible intelligently and think about what the passage is actually saying.
4. *Read God's Word expectantly,* not as a duty. God has given us the Bible, and God meets us in the pages. Expect God to touch your heart and mind.
5. *Find a way to respond.* React to what you've read. It's not simply philosophy. Christian faith is a lived out faith. Hear it and do it.

Remember the Qs of Discipleship: How's your life?
How's your walk with Christ? How's your ministry?