

Matthew 11:20-30

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[0:00] Please take your copy of God's Word and turn to Matthew chapter 11. This morning we're taking a scheduled break from our study of the book of James.

As I'd like to share with you the meditation of my heart over the past couple of months. Our text for today will be Matthew chapter 11 verses 20 through 30.

And while you get yourself to this place in your Bible, I'll ask you a couple of questions and make a couple of opening remarks. Do you find yourself tired this morning?

I mean, deep down in your core, are you just absolutely exhausted? I think the general answer to that question would be yes.

Most of us have way too much to do. We have too many things on our plate. It seems impossible to accomplish the things before us. We are frenetic, trying to pack in all the tasks of any given day or week.

[1:16] There are jobs to be worked, meetings to be scheduled and had, projects to complete, children to be schooled, clothes to wash, grass to cut, cars to maintain, relationships to be built and restored, people to check in on, things to be learned, emails to write, classes to attend, classes to be taught, events to plan.

And the list goes on and on. Those are the things that popped into my mind as fast as I could type them when I wrote this introduction.

So many things to do. In addition to all of the matters given to a regular person in a regular life, we've been navigating a time of civil and medical and political and ideological unrest.

I think our foundations just feel so shaky right now. And so I think we have reasons to just feel worn out.

Most of you know that a number of weeks ago I took a one month sabbatical. And this is a normal part of my rhythms as a pastor. We have elders who love me and care for my soul and have said, you will do this every year.

[2:38] So it's normative. It's on the schedule each year. And I told you before I took this break that it wasn't because of anything wrong with me. I wanted to assure you that I wasn't walking through any sort of crisis of faith or otherwise.

And this was an honest assessment of my state at the time. But I really wasn't aware of just how very tired I had become.

In my last week before I was officially off, the final days of prepping, scrambling to make sure everything would be covered in my absence, a frightening phrase popped into my mind.

And I don't want to do this anymore. And I've been a pastor here for 12 years. I've never had that thought. There have been challenging seasons, times that I go, oh, how am I going to get through it?

Oh, it'll be by grace. There's been moments that I've taken sabbaticals where I just felt like I was falling across a finish line to get to that point. But I've never thought, I just don't want to do it anymore.

[3:40] I felt ready to go on that sabbatical and to never come back. I began to entertain how I would transition out of my role. I'm a planner. You all know who would step into it, what I would do next.

And it just kept rolling over this phrase in my mind. I don't want to do this anymore. I spent about a week in this state. And then God, because he loves me and is merciful toward me, reminded me of

something our Lord Jesus Christ said.

It's found in verse 28 of Matthew chapter 11. He said, come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

A bit at a time, the phrase, I don't want to do this anymore, became replaced with Matthew 11, 28. This was the phrase running through my mind.

Come to me, all who are labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. And I meditated on this. What does it mean to come to Jesus for rest?

[4:45] And it was very good for my soul. So I just imagine, as I've been feeling tired, that I'm not alone in this. And so I want to invite you this morning to just stop for a bit.

I think for many of us, being at church on a Sunday morning is another task. It's another thing we know we're supposed to do. We've been told that it's a good thing to do. We've experienced it as a good thing to do.

There's a struggle within us when we wake up in the morning. There are some Sundays I am thankful that God gave me responsibilities so that I would keep moving and show up and be here with you all.

When we come to church, often we get another set of things we know we're supposed to be doing, right? More tasks to add on top. And those things are good things and should be considered and done.

But this morning, I just want you to stop for a bit. Come and hear the call of Jesus for us to rest in him. I want to show you today and remind myself afresh that we can rest from our work.

[5:57] And that when we do work, we can work from a place of rest. In order to grasp the meaning of chapter 11 and verse 28, we need some context.

So we're going to back up to verse 20 and read down through verse 30. With all that I've said in mind, let me remind you, beloved, that this is God's word to us.

It was written for his glory and our good. So we would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and obey its commands.

Matthew 11, beginning in verse 20. Then Jesus began to denounce the cities where most of his mighty works have been done because they did not repent.

Woe to you, Chorazin, woe to you, Bethsaida. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

[6:57] But I tell you, it would be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades.

For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you.

At that time, Jesus declared, I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children.

Yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

[8:02] For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. Now, we won't unpack the entirety of all these verses this morning, but I want to draw your attention particularly to verse 28.

In it we find a great invitation. Come to me, all who are lady and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

This is such a great invitation for at least two reasons. Number one, Jesus' invitation is a great invitation because he offers us rest from our greatest problem.

Jesus speaks such comforting words in the conclusion of our text, but not all of his words are comforting. We must back up to verse 20 and read from there.

What has he been talking about? He's been denouncing these woes is what we find. Woe to you, Chorazin and Bethsaida and Capernaum.

[9:09] You have been wicked and you have been unrepentant. These are all Jewish cities in which, as Matthew here records for us in verse 20, most of Jesus' miracles have been performed.

Jesus juxtaposes their unbelief against how the Gentile cities of Tyre and Sidon and the ancient city of Sodom would have responded had such miracles been performed among them.

So the text starts with judgment. Now, so that we don't lose sight of the most important thing here, we don't want to get caught up in the miracle performing.

The point that Jesus is making is that he came with power and he preached a message. A message that these denounced cities did not respond to.

Many in our day are seeking new signs, wanting some taste of the metaphysical in order to believe. But God has given us his son, the Lord Jesus Christ, the very one speaking these words in Matthew 11.

[10:18] We have the incarnation and we have the resurrection. Do we need more miracles than these to believe in Christ? It suggests to you that we need nothing further.

Look at what Jesus says just a chapter later in Matthew's gospel. This is Matthew chapter 12, beginning in verse 38 and following. Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him saying, Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you.

But he answered them, An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.

For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah.

And behold, something greater than Jonah is here. So they're seeking for a sign. And he says the sign you'll have is the sign of Jonah.

[11:30] And how is it that this is significant? It's because Jonah points them to Christ. He's using the scripture to say you need the Christ.

And of course, we know that this Christ is Jesus. Something greater than Jonah, the fulfillment of the type that Jonah was.

He is God with us, his incarnation. And the sign of Jonah that he was three days in the belly of the great fish.

So will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. We have the sign, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And he came and he preached a message. Matthew records in chapter 4 and verse 17. From that time, Jesus began to preach, saying, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

[12:32] What is repentance? It's a word used often amongst Christians and in church gatherings. Repentance is recognizing one's offense against a most holy God, feeling remorse for the offense, and seeking to satisfy the consequence of the offense.

Repentance is recognizing your sinfulness and turning away from it. But if we are to satisfy the consequence of the offense, if we are to seek that out, we will find ourselves woefully lacking. We will never be able to do enough good to outweigh the bad that we have done. Apart from Christ, I am not okay, and you are not okay.

We cannot place our lives on a scale and be found with anything good of ourselves. Paul writes in Romans chapter 3, verse 10 and following, None is righteous, no, not one.

No one understands, no one seeks for God. All have turned aside, together they have become worthless. No one does good, not even one.

[13:56] And just in case you find some creative way to wiggle through that and to feel righteous at the end of it, he adds in verse 23, All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Apart from Christ, we are hopelessly lost. So we must repent. The kingdom of God is at hand.

We cannot work ourselves into God's favor. And this repentance that we must have, it begins with humility.

It begins with recognizing this reality. We can't do it. It's impossible. We cannot. Every religion in the world teaches you some method by which you can climb up to the top of the mountain to meet with

God.

And Christianity says nothing of the sort. Christianity says you cannot climb, but God came down the mountain to meet with you. Jesus tells a parable in Luke chapter 18, verse 9 and following.

[15:05] Jesus also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and treated others with contempt. Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

The Pharisee standing by himself prayed thus, God, I thank you that I'm not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.

I fast twice a week. I give tithes of all that I get. But the tax collector standing far off will not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast saying, God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.

We need Christ. Isaac Watts was a late 17th, early 18th century. Hymn wrote the following of this parable, Jesus tells in Luke chapter 18.

[16:12] Saints, at your heavenly Father's word, give up your comforts to the Lord. Behold how sinners disagree, the publican and Pharisee.

One doeth his righteousness proclaim, the other owns his guilt and shame. This man at humble distance stands and cries for grace with lifted hands that boldly rises near the throne and talks of duties he has done.

The Lord their different language knows and different answers he bestows. The humble soul with grace he crowns whilst on the proud his anger frowns.

Dear Father, let me never be joined with the boasting Pharisee. I have no merits of my own, but plead the sufferings of thy son.

We have sinned against an infinite God whose holiness is infinite, and therefore our offense against him is infinite, which is why we need the infinite sacrifice of Jesus Christ to satisfy the consequence of the offense.

[17:27] You see, friends, God expects perfection from us, but he extends to us that perfection in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Upon humble admission of our offense against God and placing our faith in the saving work of Jesus Christ, God not only forgives us our sins, but also gives us the righteousness of Jesus.

The doctrinal term for this is double imputation. Christ takes our punishment. He gives to us his righteousness.

So Jesus extends to us a great invitation because he offers us rest from our greatest problem. And because we can rest eternally, you're asking, you started this by asking if we were tired, and I'm not hearing anything about that yet.

Because we can rest eternally, we can rest temporally. We can rest in the here and now because our greatest problem has been fixed if we are in Christ.

[18:39] You and I do not have to labor to find ourselves approved before God. Our consciences can be without guilt. We can quiet our souls because we're accepted by God in Christ.

If you have placed saving faith in Jesus Christ, you are approved, and now any work that you do comes as a grateful outflow of what he has done for us.

We can rest from our work. And when we work, we can work from rest. Those who are not in Christ cannot rest.

They have no true rest for their souls. Isaiah chapter 57 and verse 20 says, but the wicked are like the tossing sea for it cannot be quiet and its waters toss up mire and dirt.

If God is pleased with you, you can and you should rest in the temporal, right? Psalm 127 and verse 2 says, it is vain, it is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil.

[20:02] For he gives to his beloved sleep. He gives to his beloved sleep. We are finite.

We are not infinite. We need to spend approximately a third of our lives sleeping. What a reminder that we are not God.

But I will tell you that I far too often act as if I am. Act like I'm not going to run out of energy. Act as if my humanity has been set aside when it has not.

I am an embodied soul. And my body is failing, right? Bit by bit by bit. God is not unaware of your human frailty and he intends rest for you.

We need regular rhythms of physical rest. God himself, who needs no rest, modeled this for us.

That there would be a day, one in seven, that we would intentionally set aside for rest.

[21:17] We're certainly instructed by Psalm 127 that we should lay down and sleep at night. Beloved, I'll tell you that these times can be worshipful as we lay down control and anxiety for the future and entrust ourselves to our God and his good promises.

It's an act of faith to go to sleep. It's an act of faith to take a day off in seven to say, you know what? The things that I feel like can't wait, can wait.

God is pleased with me. I don't have to run around seeking his pleasure. I certainly don't need the pleasure of people if God is for me.

Our physical rest here declares that we are at rest spiritually and one day be forever at rest. So I want to challenge you when you lay down in the evening.

That's one of the sweetest moments of my day, that first moment when you lay down. And before it gets painful to be laying down, older people know what I'm talking about. Before you start tossing and turning, that initial moment and you kind of like sink in to the bed and your muscles just relax for a moment, think about the forever rest that will be ours.

[22:35] And trust yourself to God in that moment. Lord, this was a day. Were you pleased with me today? Did I do all that I could in thankful response to what you've done for me today and then go to sleep?

Wake up and start anew. George Whitefield, great evangelist, once said, how sweet is rest after fatigue.

How sweet will heaven be when our toilsome journey is ended. And then Spurgeon once said, rest time is not waste time.

It is economy to gather fresh strength. It is wisdom to take occasional furlough. In the long run, we shall do more by sometimes doing less.

We are finite, but our God reigns. And if we are in him, we have nothing to fear, nothing to be concerned about. We are his and he is ours and therefore we can rest.

[23:44] So Jesus' invitation is a great invitation, right? Because it's a solution to our greatest problem. Secondly, Jesus' invitation is a great invitation because he offers us rest in the greatest person.

Jesus invites us to come to him, all who labor and are heavy laden, and he will give to you rest.

Jesus makes some astounding claims about himself in this text.

We can't unpack in their entirety, but I just want to point them out to you quickly, perhaps for some further study. First, he says that he is the son of God, right? Not a new claim in Matthew's gospel, but it's an astounding one all the same.

And he says it again here, first part of verse 27, all things have been hammered over to me by my father and no one knows the son except the father and no one knows the father except the son and anyone to whom the son chooses to reveal him, right?

Jesus is the son of God, right? And he either is the son of God or he's a lunatic. They're really the options that are before us.

[24:51] One of the two. He's the son of God. Number two, he states that he possesses all authority. Still there in verse 27. All things have been handed over to me.

We are so tempted to think that that excludes something in our lives. Not a single thing isn't under Jesus's authority.

He says in Matthew 28, verse 18, all authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. This includes everything. I tend to have a kind of boss mentality about God.

Like I got this one. I know how he would want me to act in this case. I tend to run out self-sufficiently so often. And I need to be brought back.

And I need to be reminded that I am finite, that he is infinite, that he can handle all things. He's the only one with the power to handle all things. All things have been handed over to Jesus by his father.

[25:53] And all authority on heaven and on earth has been given to him. Third, he has the power to save.

Now for me particularly as a pastor, the work that I do is to teach God's word for the sake of seeing people's souls change, right?

I want to see people converted, death to life, enemies to friends. I want to see people grow up in Christ. But I don't have the power to make that happen.

And I'm glad for that when I'm at my best. I struggle with that when I'm not. I met with a pastor friend not too long ago.

And I've got a piece of property we've been doing some work on. And I've been cutting down trees. And I was talking about cutting down trees. And he said, I can tell you're really enjoying doing that. And I said just off the cuff, I said, you know what I think I enjoy about it most?

[26:50] That when I cut the tree down, no one can come and pick the tree back up and put it back on the stump. It is done. It is an un... You cannot reverse the work that has been accomplished.

And he said, this was his response. He goes, pastoring can be hard, can't it? I'm like, man, you read right through the metaphor. Yeah. Yeah, it can be. But when I recognize that I don't have control, if I end there, that's dismal.

But if I recognize that there is one who has control and he's much more qualified for the task, then that's a wonderful thing. Jesus has the power to save.

Last part of verse 27. No one knows the father except the son and anyone to whom the son chooses to reveal him. My work as a pastor is to be faithful to what God has called me to do.

And he works, right? Just like Paul said, he planted a potless water. God brought the growth. Fourth thing, Jesus says that he is gentle and lowly.

[28:00] Verse 29 says, take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

I'm going to commend to you a book that some of you may already be familiar with. It's a book primarily on this passage, chapter 11 and verse 29, and it's called Gentle and Lowly.

It's by a man named Dane Ortlund. I've got a copy of it here. I'm just going to show you what the cover of it looks like. There are approximately 50 of these sitting out in the hallway right now. So if you would like to take this book home, I'd encourage you to take it, give it a read.

I think you'll find yourself encouraged by it. Dane Ortlund in this book heavily cites a Puritan work entitled The Heart of Christ by Thomas Goodwin. And they both labor to help their readers see that this is the only place that Jesus tells us who he is at his very core, gentle and lowly in heart.

Jesus is gentle. This Greek word is translated as meek in Matthew 5, 5. So power restrained, and it is humble.

[29:21] Zechariah 9, 9 is the place that this is translated. Jesus possesses all authority and all power. Undoubtedly, we've made that point already.

Jesus could smite you in your sin, right? And he would be just for doing so. But he says that his heart is gentle toward you and he invites you to come.

That's astounding. That is incredible, right? The one who will come, he'll return, and he'll judge the earth, right? Calls to you who are tired, who are worn out, who are sick of laboring to be found acceptable by God.

He says to you, come, I am gentle and lowly in heart. Learn from me. Him being lowly.

The point of this Greek word is to communicate that Jesus is accessible. He's saying that he's not in such a high status that you can't come to him.

[30:24] He is the king of the universe, right? He sits at the place of honor next to the right hand of the Father, and he rules over all things. But the repentant can approach him and in him we will find rest for our souls.

Jesus is not unable to sympathize with us in our weakness. Having become fully man, he experienced your pain and your exhaustion, right?

He has at his heart a care and a concern for you. Jesus grew tired, John 4, 6.

He got thirsty, John 19, 28. And hungry, Matthew 4, 2. He became physically weak. He also needed rest, Matthew 4, 11.

Luke 23 and verse 26. This, beloved, is our Savior. I too often wrongly think of him as my boss, right?

[31:28] Give me a list of commands. Now go and go and go and go and go and go and go. And he is more aware of how weak I am than I am aware. He says rather to me, I have a light burden for you, right?

Come to me. You'll find rest for your soul. Thomas Goodwin, being cited by Dane Ortlund, wrote, men are apt to have contrary conceits of Christ, but he tells them his disposition there by preventing such hard thoughts of him to allure them unto him the more.

We are apt to think that he, being so holy, is therefore of severe and sour disposition against sinners and not able to bear them.

No, says he, I am meek. Gentleness is my nature and temper. The author of Hebrews wrote in Hebrews 4 and verse 15, for we don't have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

So, beloved, you can go to Jesus with all of your hurts and all of your struggles. Even as we work to see the kingdom of God fully realized, and Christians ought to be the busiest people on the planet because we have normal life stuff to do and kingdom of God stuff to do.

[32:57] There's a lot of people chilling this morning. But Jesus promises us, and this is such a good meditation for me, Luke 12 and 32, fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

If we would just be faithful and do the things that he's asked us to do, it is going to come to pass. So Jesus' invitation is a great invitation because he offers us rest in himself.

The Bible also uses the metaphor of thirst to express our need of rest in God. And this in closing, Jeremiah chapter 2, beginning in verse 12, Be appalled, O heavens, at this.

Be shocked. Be utterly desolate, declares the Lord. For my people have committed two evils. They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.

Hear the words of Jesus in John chapter 7, beginning in verse 37. On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.

[34:16] Whoever believes in me, as the scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. We can find rest in Christ.

Francis Bevan, 19th century hymnist, wrote a song called, O Christ, Christ in thee, my soul hath found. It's four verses and a refrain.

I want to read it for you and then I'll close with some prayer. O Christ in thee, my soul hath found, and found in thee alone. The peace, the joy, I sought so long, the bliss, till now unknown.

I sighed for rest and happiness. I yearned for them, not thee. But while I passed my Savior by, his love laid hold on me.

I tried the broken cisterns, ah, but how the waters failed. Even as I stooped to drink, they fled and mocked me as I wailed. The pleasures lost, I sadly mourned, but never wept for thee.

[35:25] Till grace, the sightless eyes received thy loveliness to see. And this is the refrain. Now none but Christ can satisfy.

None other name for me. There's love and life and lasting joy. Christ Jesus found in thee. Let's pray together.