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Matthew 11:28 - 11:30



Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

In Matthew 11:28-30, Jesus invites those who are weary and burdened to come to Him for rest. The speaker explains that no one fully understands the nature of God and man in Christ. However, seeking and growing in knowledge of Jesus, loving and following Him is what makes someone a true disciple. Though there are burdens involved in following Jesus, He promises an easy yoke and a light burden, as it is not through our own strength but through Him that we carry these burdens.

Transcript

In Matthew 11, verses 28 and 29, and also, I guess, 30, three verses, Jesus said, Come to me, all you 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. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Now this is a very well-known passage. It's often quoted in connection with evangelism, inviting people to come forward and accept Christ. Come unto me, He says.

And rightly so. I believe it is rightfully used in that way. I think it is an evangelistic invitation.

I do think, though, there are some elements of what Jesus said that are typically not clarified, or they are overlooked, when an invitation is given to come to Christ. I'd like to have a look at these verses, because they are the verses that we have come to in our study through Matthew. Jesus said, in the previous verse to this, in verse 27, He said, All things have been delivered to me by my Father.

And no one knows the Son, except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father, except the Son, and He to whom the Son will reveal Him. And then He makes this invitation, Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden.

There is a context for this, obviously. And this context is that everything has been delivered to Jesus by His Father. Now, what is this everything? What has been delivered to Jesus by the Father? Well, for one thing, over in John chapter 5, in verse 27, it says, All

judgment has been delivered into the hands of Jesus by the Father.

Because, apparently, on the day of judgment, rather than the Father Himself sitting in judgment, Jesus Himself will sit in judgment. Now, if that is true, of course, that means Jesus has supreme authority, and that all men are going to have to answer to Him on the day of judgment. Now, some people might say, Well, that's, I don't mind that.

Jesus is a nice guy, isn't He? Well, it depends on how you define nice. He certainly is a good shepherd. He certainly is a perfect Lord and Savior.

But that doesn't mean He's always nice. As a matter of fact, Jesus indicated that there will be wrath for many who have heard His words and have rejected them. Do you remember that Jesus said that many will say to Him on that day, Lord, Lord, we did, and then He lists several things that they did in His name.

And He'll say, I never knew you. Depart from me, you workers of iniquity. Now, that's the way some people are going to experience the judgment when Jesus is there.

This judgment has been delivered to Him. And it means that all authority is put into His hands. And authority means that He has the right to dictate and the right to rule.

And so those who reject the authority of Christ and reject what He has to say are going to be in trouble, according to what Jesus taught. Now, He said, No one knows the Son except the Father. Now, why did He say that? Certainly, the disciples felt they knew Him.

But I think that this statement, No one knows the Son except the Father, may be actually very helpful for us to realize. Because many of us feel that we know all there is to know about Jesus. We've got our theology straight.

We understand the Trinity, or we think we do. We've got a doctrine of the incarnation that satisfies all the scriptural text on it, as far as we're concerned. And we think we understand the essential nature of Christ as God and man.

And we have this doctrine. So we're so sure of ourselves, even, that we're willing to call anyone who doesn't hold our view a cultist. We're willing to call people heretics who don't see Christ exactly the way we do.

And believe me, I do believe there are some heretical notions of Christ that are so bad. They certainly do deserve to be called cultic. But what I'm saying is, we may flatter ourselves that we understand Jesus more than we really do.

There are some mysteries, remember, about Christ that are incontrovertible. Did not Paul say this in 1 Timothy chapter 3 and verse 15 or 16? He said, Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness. God was manifest in the flesh.

Now, the manifestation of God in the flesh was, of course, in the person of Christ. And

Paul said, Without controversy, that's a great mystery. I must confess to you, my listeners, that I don't understand that mystery as well as I would like to.

But it doesn't surprise me. There's nothing to compare it to. We people, when we're trying to explain some abstraction, always try to find some tangible thing to liken it to.

We see this happening when people try to explain the Trinity. And they say, Well, the Trinity, you know, that's sort of like a water. It can be in three forms at the same time, steam and liquid and solid ice, or other kinds of illustrations are sought in order to explain the abstraction of the Trinity.

Well, I'm not saying that it's entirely wrongheaded to do this. But we need to realize that for many spiritual things, there are no tangible counterparts. And any attempt to explain the spiritual, in some cases, by appeal to natural illustrations will fall short.

There is a great mystery about God being made manifest in the flesh. And that mystery means that we will not fully understand it simply by appealing to illustrations or just reading the text and analyzing the Greek. In fact, Jesus said, No one knows the Father, no one knows the Son, meaning Him, except the Father.

Now, I would say I know Jesus. And I'm sure many of our listeners out there would say they know Jesus. And I would say even at that time that Peter and James and John and those guys would say that they knew Jesus.

But Jesus said, No one knows the Son, except the Father. What does that mean? I believe it means that no one can really fully comprehend who Jesus is, except God himself. The mystery of the incarnation was so great, I believe, that only the Father really understands it.

I'm not sure even Jesus understood it. Remember when Jesus was on earth, he said there were things that the Father understood that he didn't. And Jesus said, You know, no one understands the Son, except the Father.

I don't know how much Jesus fully understood of the doctrine of the incarnation when he was here, but the Father did. And therefore, there's a great mystery about who Jesus is. And that should make us more humble about judging persons who have a different opinion on this or that aspect of the theology.

I'm not saying we should be infinitely flexible and that we should be open to every wild-eyed heretical notion that comes along. But I'm saying we shouldn't be so smug as to assume that we know more than we do. I suspect that no one fully understands the nature of what theologians would call the hypostatic union of the nature of God and the nature of man in Christ.

I mean, we can come up with theological terms for it. But do we really know it? I suspect

that we don't. And I suspect that we don't have to fully comprehend everything about him.

It's okay. People can be married to each other for years and still find each other mysterious in certain ways. And I think we need to humble ourselves and recognize that even if we know the Lord at some level, we don't know him fully.

There are mysteries about him that only his father understands. That perhaps makes it the more intriguing. But here his disciples were getting to know him, and he tells them, no one knows me except my father.

And I think that that illustrates that we can know Jesus without knowing everything about him and still be his disciples. His disciples at that particular time apparently didn't even understand that Jesus was God. The reason I say that is because when Jesus stilled the storm at sea, remember that time when he stood up and said, peace be still, and the waves stopped and so forth.

The disciples, when they saw this occur, they said, what kind of man is this that we're with? In other words, they realized there was something about Jesus they had not yet grasped when they saw him still the storm. Well, of course he was God, but they apparently hadn't grasped that until that moment. And maybe they didn't even then.

The mystery of who Jesus was dawned on them gradually. And yet that didn't prevent them from being true disciples. I suspect that there are people whose knowledge of Jesus is somewhat imperfect by maybe your standards or mine.

But who may be a true disciple as far as Jesus is concerned, because they are seeking and growing in their knowledge of him. And they love him and are following him. And we need to be cautious about nailing down firm perimeters of what we think a person can believe about Jesus and still be a Christian.

Because who knows the degree to which our own beliefs about Jesus may fall short of what God himself knows about him. We know what is revealed. But much of what is revealed is not clarified.

And we and that's why theologians get together and have big conferences over the throughout church history to try to explain these mysteries. Well, there may be some value in trying to explain the mysteries. But the problem is once we have explained them, we believe our explanations.

And sometimes our explanations might be simply the ingenuity of man trying to explain that which is inscrutable. And so Jesus himself is here saying that no one really knows him. And I would I would think he means completely and really understands who he is fully.

But his father. And he says, then, nor does anyone know the father except the son. So really, the son is not completely known by anyone except the father.

And the father is not completely known by anyone except the son. But then Jesus adds and to him to whom the son wills to reveal him. That means we can know the father if Jesus wills to reveal the father to us.

It's very clear that Jesus is the one left with the authority to do that or not. To reveal the father to somebody is the prerogative of Jesus. Nobody can know the father unless Jesus chooses to reveal the father to him.

Now, on what basis does does Jesus choose to reveal the father to people? Well, on the basis that they embrace his message and himself. If they come to him, as he next says, he says, come unto me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Now, what does he mean by those who labor and are heavy laden? Labor just means work.

Everybody works, don't they? Aren't we supposed to work? There's nothing wrong with working. But what does it mean to be heavy laden? What does he mean all you who labor and are heavy laden? I don't think Jesus is referring to people who are out, you know, in the farm, you know, sowing their seed and plowing their fields, working in that way. And are heavy burden, the word laden means burden, heavily burdened.

You know, a lot of work involves carrying burdens, lifting loads and carrying them from here to there and so forth. But that's not what Jesus was referring to, certainly. Jesus is talking about a spiritual burdenedness, and he is offering a spiritual rest.

He says, if you labor and are heavy laden, you come to me, I'll give you rest. He's not saying if you're a hard worker and you make your living by manual labor and by carrying weight and burdens, you come to me and I'll put you out of a job. I'll give you rest from that.

No, he's talking about something entirely different. This rest of which he speaks is not a rest from physical work. It is a rest, as he says in verse 29, to their souls.

He says, you will find rest to your souls. This is a spiritual condition of rest that he offers. And therefore, the labor and the heavily burdened state that he describes must be a spiritual state as well.

He's using a metaphor. People who work hard all day, who carry heavy burdens and their muscles are aching and they've used up their energy and they come in at the end of the working day and get to sit down and rest, that's a great refreshing because work is hard. Carrying burdens is difficult.

And you look forward to having a cessation of that labor and rest. The Jews had that kind

of a cessation once a week. On Saturday, they rested from their normal labors.

In fact, I would not be surprised if Jesus was here alluding to that very fact because rest from labor is what he's offering. Of course, we'll talk about what he meant by that in a moment. But he says, if you're laboring and you're heavily laden, come to me, I'll give you rest.

Well, to the Jewish mind, they could hardly avoid connecting that with the rest that God gives them on the Sabbath from their labors. Six days, you shall do your work and all your labor, God said. And on the seventh day, you shall rest from your labor.

So that Jesus is essentially offering a spiritual Sabbath. Those of you who are spiritually laboring, spiritually heavy laden, come to me and I'll give you a spiritual rest, a rest to your souls, a spiritual Sabbath. Now, this is going to be important when we get to the next part of Matthew, because in the next chapter, which follows immediately after this passage, in Matthew chapter 12, there are some controversies that arise about Jesus and the Sabbath day.

In fact, the next two stories in Matthew are about criticisms he received about his practices about the Sabbath. Well, as a fit introduction to those stories, Matthew records Jesus telling people that the Sabbath that he has to offer is a spiritual thing, a spiritual rest from spiritual labor. Now, what is this labor? Who are these people that Jesus is calling heavily laden? Now, if I were a regular gospel preacher, you know, the standard pastor type, as I used to be, I probably would say, well, the burden is the burden of sin, that every man who sins is really a slave of sin.

It's like he's dragging around a ball and chain. And this is a heavy burden. It's an unbearable burden.

It's like it's like the man in the story of Pilgrim's Progress. He's got this burden on his back. This is the burden of guilt and sin of his life.

And he has to bring it to the cross and be relieved of his burden. And that's what Jesus is talking about. That's what a good preacher would say.

But I must not be a good preacher because I don't think that that's what Jesus is saying. I don't think that in this particular place, when Jesus talks about being burdened, heavily laden and so forth, I don't think he's talking about the burden of sin. I believe he's talking about the burden of religion, as in particular, Jewish legalism religion.

And the reason I think so is because Jesus used the same term in another place significantly. Over in Matthew chapter 23 and verse 4, Jesus is talking about the scribes and the Pharisees, who were, of course, the religious instructors of Israel at that time. And therefore, their view of religion was that which prevailed among the populace who were under their instruction.

And of the scribes and the Pharisees, Jesus said this in Matthew 23, 4, he says, For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders. But they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. Then he goes on to say that they well, actually, what he said in the previous verse, he says, what they tell you to do, go ahead and do.

But do not do according to their works, for they say and they do not do. Now, that is to say, the Pharisees teach you what you ought to do. They give you religious instruction, but they don't keep that instruction themselves.

They don't obey it themselves. And he compares that to them putting heavy burdens on men's backs, but not experiencing or not being willing to carry those burdens themselves. What that means is the burden that is upon the backs of the average Jew was placed there by their religious instructors.

And it was a heavy burden. And most Jews were running around or walking around or trudging around with this great burden on their back, which is a burden of legalism. The legalism of the Pharisees was that people had to keep a terribly large number of laws, must have been extremely hard to remember them all, hundreds of them.

And they had to do them religiously. These were largely of a ceremonial sort. There were moral, of course, instructions, but they were mainly laws about ritual and ceremony, about remaining ritually clean and not getting defiled and making sure you observe the right day and do the right thing on the right day and so forth.

I mean, these are all rituals of Judaism. And this ritualism is a tremendous burden because basically there's an arbitrariness about it. There's not any real eternal good that is reflected in the avoidance of eating pork.

It is just a ritual. And yet to remember all these rituals is, for one thing, difficult. It's very disruptive to ordinary life.

And it was really a pain in the neck for a lot of people. Besides this, it burdened the conscience a great deal because most people could not keep all the rules that the legalists put upon them. And if you are taught that you are required to keep these rules and that if you fail to do so, God will be angry at you, and then, of course, you don't keep them because you can't, suddenly you're burdened with this condemnation.

This whole system of legalistic religion that the Pharisees taught was a great burden on the conscience and a great burden on the lifestyle. Now, I'm not going to say that there's no burden involved in following Jesus. Jesus did say elsewhere, take up your cross and follow me.

A cross is a burden of a sort, but Jesus actually says in this passage that if you come to him and you're heavily laden and burdened and you receive rest, you take his yoke upon

you and learn from him. He says, my yoke is easy and my burden is light. Actually, bearing the cross with Jesus is a much lighter burden than the burden of legalism.

And when Jesus addressed the Jewish people and said, come to me, all you who labor and are heavily laden, I'll give you rest. I believe what he's saying is you have been burdened by your religious teachers with a great deal of baggage, legalistic rules and regulations that really don't matter to God. These are the traditions of the rabbis and so forth.

And you have been burdened with a false notion of God that he cares about all of these little trifles. When in fact, the things God cares about are much, really much easier to live with than that. All you have to do, he says, come to me, I'll give you rest.

I'll relieve you. I will disabuse you of these notions of religion that the Pharisees have given you. I'll tell you what, take my yoke upon me and learn from me.

And he says, because I'm gentle and I'm lowly in heart. And in learning from me, you will find that you can become gentle and lowly in heart when you become humble and lowly and just walk a lowly life of obedience to God's standards and following Jesus. You'll find it's not all that hard.

My yoke is easy and my burden is light. And the reason it's not hard is because when you follow Jesus Christ, you don't do so on your own strength. Once you become a follower of Jesus Christ, you don't just become a follower of a teacher.

You become a participant in his life. His spirit is given to you by God. And when you receive Christ's spirit, you're capable of living like Christ.

And it's much easier than you would think. Now, I say easy. I'm not going to say there's no difficulty in the Christian life.

There's a great deal. You might even have to die. But even those great burdens and difficulties that come with the package are lighter to you because you have him to help you carry them.

And so, although he does, he didn't say, you know, come to me with your burden and I'll give you no burden. He says, take my yoke upon you. A yoke was a burden.

A yoke was a bar that goes across the neck of two working animals to pull a plow or a cart or something like that. And it meant that you come under my control. Two oxen that were under a yoke were under the control of the person whose yoke it was.

It was a steering device. And Jesus says, take my yoke upon you. Let me steer you.

Let me direct you. You know, get rid of these notions that the Pharisees have burdened

you with and let me direct your life and learn from me. And you will find rest to your souls.

Because my yoke is easy and my burden is light. Now, following Jesus, therefore, is actually much less stressful and much less a burden than being a legalistic religionist. Now, of course, Jesus, I think, was speaking, of course, in the context of Jewish legalism.

But there is the counterpart in the Christian church today. There is Christian legalism. There is, you know, there are burdens that some preachers put on people.

They say, you have to go to church every Sunday if you miss, you're in trouble. If you don't submit to your elders, God will be angry at you. You know, if you don't pay your tithes, you'll face financial disaster.

If you don't make positive confessions, you'll probably, your health will be destroyed. I mean, people put all kinds of rules and regulations on Christians that Jesus never did. And it burdens people.

No wonder it drives many people from the church. People have enough burdens in the world without getting more from the church. But following Jesus simply means that you love him, you obey him, you have his assistance day by day, you do what he wants you to do, and you'd be amazed at the assistance you receive from his spirit and how, indeed, following him is a light burden.

And it is an easy yoke, as he promised it would be. It certainly beats being religious. We'll see more on this next time.