

Rest for the Weary (Matthew 11:28-30)

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- [0 : 0 0] So let us now read the Word of God together. Matthew chapter 11 verses 25 to 30. I'm reading from the English Standard Version today.
- 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 had and 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 labour 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. And this is the Word of God. Thank you.
- [1 : 1 2] Well, hi again, everyone. It's a real privilege to be amongst you and opening the Scriptures with you. Can I start with a question?
- How are you doing? How are you doing? It's a serious question. How are you doing? Good, good. I'm pleased to see some nods. I ask you that because I came across a really interesting study a few weeks ago now by the New Zealand Mental Health Foundation, and they asked in the study a thousand Kiwis right across New Zealand the basic question, really, how are you doing?
- It was a little bit more complex than that. They were saying, like, how are you doing? How would you rate your well-being at the moment? And they were given a scale from one to five.
- If one is very poor, and two is poor, and three is okay, and four is, I'm doing all right, and then five is brilliant, how would you rate your emotional well-being at the moment?
- Do you know what people said? New Zealanders right across the country, over one in three said that they're doing really poor, or pretty poor at the moment.
- [2 : 3 1] One in three Kiwis are really struggling. And what was quite scary was that that was up from one in four just a year ago, and even then, when that result was captured, you know, that was a point of real concern.
- 36 percent, just over one in three of us at the moment, are saying that we're really, actually, if we're honest, we're not doing that great. And I guess it's no surprise, over the last two years, we've had what?
- Well, constant it seems, but you know, some pretty sustained lockdowns, with lots of social isolation. With that, we've had things like relational breakdowns, within families, where there's been disagreements, over some of the responses, to the public health crisis.
- We've got financial uncertainty, with all of that. And also just the, I guess the ongoing change, and some of the sense of loss, that we're experiencing at the moment.

It's no surprise, that many New Zealanders, are weary, and burdened, and anxious, and stressed. Do you realise, I don't know if you do, but the Royal College of GPs, in New Zealand, they've just told us, that 30 percent, of doctors visits, at the moment, 30 percent, relate to mental, or emotional health.

[3 : 52] We're not doing that great, at the moment. Now, with mental, and emotional health, as with physical health, it's often very important, to go to a doctor, right?

You know, we, medical professionals, have an important role, in our society. But if we were, to consult Jesus, this evening, the one, in whose name, we are gathered, at his invitation here, if we were, to talk to him, the greatest, physician, the world has ever seen.

If we were, to ask him, about our weariness, of soul, at the moment, what do you think, he would say to us? What would be, his prescription? Well, let's, let's listen again, to those words, that were read.

Let me, let me read them, to you once more, and they're up on the screen. At that time, Jesus said, I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven, and earth, because you have, hidden these things, from the wise, and the learned, and revealed them, to little children.

Yes, Father, for this, is what you were, pleased to do. And then Jesus, goes on to say, all things, have been committed, to me, by my Father.

[5 : 13] No one knows, the Son, except the Father. And no one knows, the Father, except the Son, and those, to whom the Son, chooses to reveal him.

And then Jesus, finishes with these words, come to me, all you, who are weary, and burdened, and I will give you rest.

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. So in these words, Jesus is giving us, I think, a prescription. This is his antidote, for weariness, for anxiety, for the stress, that many of us, are carrying in our hearts.

And so I think it's worth, at this kind of moment, sitting with these words, listening carefully, to these words, working slowly, through what, and carefully, through what Jesus, is saying here, line by line, word by word, that's what I'd like to do, in the time that we've got together.

[6 : 32] Is that okay? So let's do that. What is Jesus' prescription for us? Well, he starts off, with the word, come.

Come. I remember once, seeing a sign outside a church. A church was on the main road, and they thought, they'd make use of their, you know, their kind of their, roadside, marketing opportunities, and they put a sign, out the front, that said, God's favorite word, is come.

Yes, Jesus says, go, go and make disciples, of all nations. And yes, Jesus says, give, you know, give your life away, in service of me, in the gospel.

That's what it means, to be a disciple. And yes, Jesus says, love, and pray, and teach, and share, and forgive. But his favorite word, is come.

Come, Jesus says. Come, to me. Jesus, calls us to himself. Daryl Johnson, is a North American theologian, and I'm really indebted, to some of his work, on this particular text.

[7 : 48] He writes these words, about this. He says this, Christianity, when you think about it, Christianity began, on Palestinian soil, as a relationship, with a person.

But then, it moved on to Greek soil, and it became, a philosophy. Then it moved, onto Roman soil, and it became, an institution. It moved on to British soil, and it became, a culture.

It moved on to American soil, and it became, a business, business, and enterprise. And he says, now, when you think about it, Christianity is a philosophy.

It's the most coherent, and all-encompassing, of all philosophies. And yes, Christianity is, an institution, the most redemptive, and life-giving, of all institutions, or at least, it's supposed to be.

And Christianity, is a culture. It's the most, inclusive, and transformative, of all cultures. And Christianity, is an enterprise. It's the grandest, imaginable.

[8 : 56] The enterprise, of restoring, the whole universe. But Christianity, is essentially, a person. Come, to me.

Jesus says. Come, to me. And then what does he say? He says, all you, who are weary, and burdened. Or as some translations say, all you, who are weary, and overburdened.

Now, I'm not sure, if you're familiar with this, but in English, action words, like this, verbs, have two, well, basically, they come in two different voices.

There's the active voice, and the passive voice. Now, I know, at this point, I can see some of you, are starting to glaze over. You didn't come to church, for a grammar lesson, an English lesson. But, bear with me, because this is really important, to understanding, what Jesus is saying here.

So, in English, we have the active voice, and the passive voice. But in Greek, and these words, were originally written in Greek. In Greek, verbs have three voices, the active voice, the passive voice, and what's known as the middle voice.

[10 : 07] And this is important. Let me give you an example. So, active, I love. Passive, I am loved. Middle voice, I love myself.

These words, all you who are overburdened, they're in the middle voice. So, this is not the best translation. A better translation, technically, would be, all you who have overburdened yourselves.

Jesus says, come to me, all you, who have overburdened yourselves. Much of the time, excessive weariness, is our own doing.

That's the story of my life. I look to my own resources, my own abilities, or whatever it might be, to try and address the challenges that I'm facing.

And I wear myself out. I look to other people, other frail, finite, broken people, just like me. I look to them, for the affirmation, and the significance, that only God can give.

[11 : 31] And I wear myself out, trying to please them. I look to my own achievements, to try and feel secure, or significant, and they're never enough.

And I find myself worn out. You don't believe me, do you? None of you, you look as though you're, I mean, it's hard to see past your masks.

I'd love to see your whole faces, but it doesn't really look as though you get what I'm saying. Let me give you an example. Anyone here, heard of Madonna, the pop star, from the, you know, she was around in the 80s, in the 90s really, that was when she was at her peak, so it was a wee while ago now.

But she's still around, and she's still pretty, kind of, dominant force, when you get, when you hear her talk. Once she was interviewed, and she was talking about herself, and I, I remember reading this interview years ago, and I thought, wow, this captures something of, of our world, and the problems that we so often face.

It so struck me what she said, that I, I recorded it, I wrote it down. This is what she said. She said, I have an iron will, and all of my will has always been to conquer some horrible feeling of inadequacy.

[12 : 51] I push past one spell of it, and I discover, I prove myself to be a special human being, and then I get to another stage, and I think, I'm mediocre.

I'm uninteresting. Again and again, my drive in life, is from this horrible feeling, this horrible fear of being mediocre.

And that's always pushing me, pushing me, because even when I, I, I, I prove that I'm, I've become somebody, I still have to, again, prove that I'm somebody.

Again and again, my struggle has never ended. Did you hear that? My struggle has never ended, and it probably never will. Much of the time, excessive weariness is our own doing.

We're struggling to prove our own worth. We're struggling to prove that we're somebody. We're struggling to please or impress the audience. What's wearing you at the moment?

[13 : 59] If you were honest, what burden are you carrying? How have you overburdened yourself? Come to me, Jesus says, all you who are weary and have overburdened yourselves, and I will give you, what does he say?

I'll give you rest. What do you think of when you hear the word rest? What comes to mind? For me, it takes me right back in the biblical story to the very beginning.

We read about God creating the world in six days, and then it says, in Genesis 2, verse 3, God blessed the seventh day and made that holy because on it he rested from all his work.

Isn't that interesting? What does it mean to say that God rested? Did God kind of like just sort of slip into neutral? Did he just cease from all activity?

I mean, is he effectively saying he kind of shot off to Fiji for a holiday and just stopped doing anything? No. God rested, in these words, means that God entered into the reason he created the world in the first place.

[15 : 29] Let me explain. You know, in the song of creation that we read about in Genesis 1 and 2, time and time again, we hear this recurring refrain, it was evening and morning.

So it was evening and morning day one. It was evening and morning day two. It was evening and morning day three. Day four, day five, day six. But on day seven, there's no evening and morning because day seven has no end.

In this account of creation, day seven is the reason that God created the world in the first place. So God rested means that God entered into the reason that he created the world.

God entered into the wholeness that he intends for all creation. So think about it. This is really important. When Jesus says, come to me, all you who are weary and have overburdened yourselves and I will give you rest, he's saying, I will lead you into the wholeness for which you were created.

Come to me, he says, and I will lead you out of your old ways of being into a new way of being. That's an incredible invitation.

[16 : 48] That's what Jesus is offering us, a new way of being. So how do we accept that invitation? How do you receive it? How do you enter in? Have you ever thought that?

I mean, listen to what Jesus says. Let's read on. He goes on to say, so you want rest? Take my yoke upon you. So really?

Like taking a yoke will mean rest? That's a bizarre vaccine or antidote for weariness when you think about it. What's a yoke? A yoke is a harness, like a heavy, often heavy piece of wood that was placed on the neck of an ox to make it pull a really heavy plow or to make it pull a laden cart.

Do you know, in the ancient world, when Jesus was saying these words, yokes were placed on the shoulders of human beings, slaves and captives, prisoners of war.

And they actually were made to pull heavy, heavy, heavy loads themselves. That's how the pyramids got built and things like that. So for Jesus to say, you want rest? You want to know the rest that the world can't give you?

[18 : 03] Take my yoke upon you. So what's going on here? A yoke is a metaphor for oppression.

It's a symbol of heavy, hard work. And Jesus is saying, take my yoke. Well, maybe there's a clue in the text where Jesus says, take my yoke upon you.

He's suggesting here that the reason we are weary and burdened so much of the time is because we're wearing the wrong yoke. Every human being has to wear a yoke.

Like, sorry, but you don't get out of that. That's just the human condition. We all wear a yoke. The question is not, you know, when we wake up tomorrow morning, okay, so will I wear a yoke today? The question is, whose yoke will I wear?

And Jesus is saying here, wear my yoke. Or in other words, wear the yoke that you see me wearing. Which begs the question, so what is the yoke that Jesus wears?

[19 : 10] Any ideas? What's the yoke that Jesus wears? What's his yoke? Well, when Jesus was speaking these words, the Jewish rabbis of the day, they often used to talk about the yoke of the law, the yoke of Torah, the commandments of God that we had to carry or we had to live by.

And so, a number of commentators reading these words recorded in Matthew have assumed that what Jesus is talking about here is the yoke of his new law, the Sermon on the Mount and the teachings that he gave his people.

But is that really what Jesus is referring to here in this text? No. Not according to Matthew. Whenever we're reading the Bible, the context of what we're reading is so important.

Context affects the meaning of any piece of literature and not less the Bible. So let's think about the context here. In verse 25, Jesus says something.

He's talking here about his relationship with the one that he calls his father. Right? According to Matthew, Jesus' yoke, the yoke that he wears is the relationship that he enjoys with the one he calls father.

[20 : 36] I mean, look at this. Verse 25. At that time, Jesus said, I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned and revealed them to little children.

Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do. What's Jesus doing here? What's happening here? He's praying, right?

Have you ever noticed that? He's praying to his father. He's worshipping his father. He's expressing delight in his father, his father's sovereignty, his father's wisdom.

And then read on. Verse 27. He says this. So all things have been committed to me by my father. No one knows the son except the father.

And no one knows the father except the son and those to whom the son chooses to reveal him. So he moves from talking to his father to talking about his father.

[21 : 37] And he's describing this relationship with his father. And he describes it in very special terms as though there's something really intimate and exclusive and beautiful here that only he and his father share.

He's referring to the relationship that he as the son of God has shared with his father and the spirit from before the beginning of creation.

And from within that relationship, from within that beautiful conversation he turns out to the crowds, he turns out towards us and he says, so come.

Take my yoke. My yoke is my relationship with the father and I'm inviting you to share this relationship. Come in.

Enjoy the intimacy that I experience with my father. You guys look bored. Don't you think this is breathtaking?

[22 : 48] The eternal son of God has said to us that the relationship that he enjoys with the father is ours. So according to the famous, well he's not that famous, but a very well-known Scottish theologian, Thomas Torrance, he says, in these words, Jesus is offering us entry into the inner fellowship of God's life.

You know, or to put it another way, we've been given the most exclusive VIP pass in the history of the cosmos. Jesus says, come in, come right in and enjoy the relationship that I share with my father.

it's yours. It can be yours. So the question is, how do we receive that?

Well, what else does Jesus go on to say? He says, come in and learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart.

I am gentle and humble in heart. Some time ago I came across a study that was done. It was a really interesting study. it looked at the patience that people express or exercise when they are in car parks.

[24 : 12] Now, I don't know why people do studies like this. Like, you know, thousands of dollars, many, many hours of some team of researchers' time was spent at Stanford University or somewhere at some Ivy League university maybe in the United States looking at patience levels of human beings in car parks.

Do you know how long it takes the average person after you've done your shopping, might be at Mitre 10 or, you know, Bunnings, Pack and Save, wherever it is, do you know how long it takes the average person after they've done their shopping and they've got to their car to leave their car park?

You know, how long does it take to put your groceries or your shopping away, get in the front door, you know, shut the door, put your seatbelt on, start the car, start the engine, look in the rear view mirror and then get out of your car park.

How long does it take? On average, 32 seconds. But, the researchers discovered, guess how long it takes if there's someone waiting for your car park?

It doesn't take 32 seconds, it lifts to 39 seconds. We take just a little bit longer, you know, just adjust our seatbelt and make sure we've got everything.

[25 : 31] No, they can jolly well wait. And then, if the person in the car waiting for your spot gives you a little toot on their horn, then how long do you think it takes to exit your car park?

Not 32 seconds, not 39 seconds, 43 seconds. I think this is really interesting. I think, you know, these researchers with the study have captured something about the human spirit.

There is something fundamentally self-centered about us. Martin Luther, the Protestant reformer, said that humans, we are people curved in on ourselves.

There is something fundamentally self-centered about us. Our hearts, we exalt ourselves, we prioritize ourselves over others. now I know there are exceptions to that.

You know, I mean, parents care for their children beautifully, sacrificially. We love those who are dearest and nearest to us, but at heart, we are self-centered.

[26 : 40] But not Jesus. He says, I am gentle and humble in heart. He says, I won't berate you for over burdening yourself. I know why you get yourself into such a state.

I know why you chase after other gods, why you choose to wear other yokes. And I will not scorn you for that and keep you at a distance or make you wait.

No, I'm gentle and humble in heart. Come to me, you who have over burdened yourself. learn from me.

Let me lead you out of your old ways into my way, into a new way. And you'll find rest for your souls.

For, and the final line, for my yoke is easy, he says, and my burden is light. We know what his yoke is, so what's his burden? What is the burden that Jesus is inviting?

[27 : 47] us to carry here? Any ideas? Well, if his yoke is his relationship with the father, his burden is to please his father.

Again, you know, think about the scriptures and the gospels. We're reading Matthew's account of the life of Jesus here. But if you were to go to John's gospel, he talks there about Jesus saying to the crowds, I only do what I see my father doing.

I only say what I hear my father speaking. Or flick across to Luke's gospel and we read there that Jesus says to his own human family, didn't you know that I had to be about my father's business?

Reflecting on these words, Daryl Johnson, he says this, so Jesus lives his whole career, if we can use that word of Jesus, he lives his whole career for an audience of one.

He's driven, again if we can use a word like that for Jesus, he is driven to please the father. Nothing less, nothing more.

[29 : 05] Yes, the cries of the crowd, the needs of the crowd, they aroused his compassion, but they didn't set his agenda. He's not driven to please the crowds.

He's not trying to please the religious leaders. He's not, it doesn't have any sense of kind of a need to please Herod or Pharaoh or Pilate. No, Jesus' burden is to please his father.

He lives to please an audience of one. And Jesus says here that burden is light. It's light. And just before we finish, again, context is so important.

If you were to flick back earlier in this chapter to verse 20, you'd read there that the towns of Chorazin and Bethsaida and Capernaum, Jesus' hometowns almost, the towns that he grew up around, that he ministered amongst, those towns are rejecting his leadership, his teaching, his ministry.

They say, amongst other things, that he's got an evil spirit. That's how he's able to perform the miracles, they say. Or they say he's in cahoots with the devil, or he's lost his mind, he's bonkers.

[30 : 22] At one point, they pick up rocks to kill him. They've rejected him. It's like his ministry is a failure. It's like he's the coach of the All Blacks during their worst ever slump in form.

It's like he's coaching the All Blacks and they've lost five out of six games on the trot. The players are not sinking. The results are not coming.

The fans are not happy. The media have their knives out. The investors are about to walk. It's a disaster, it seems.

And Jesus, the coach, is doing what? He's not curled up in a fetal position wondering about his future. With poise and peace and joy in his heart, he's rejoicing, praising his father, delighting in his father.

Because his burden is to please his father, and that burden's light. So again, let me ask you, how are you doing?

[31 : 37] Honestly, don't want the Sunday church, I'm doing fine, praise Jesus. How are you doing? How are you doing? Are you weary?

Is your soul overburdened? How have you overburdened yourself, maybe? Henry Nowen was a Catholic theologian and scholar who once was carrying some heavy burdens, and he found himself in Rome where he had the opportunity to talk to Mother Teresa of Calcutta, the saintly, godly woman who cared for the sick and dying in the streets of Calcutta.

They were both in the city at the same time, and so Henry Nowen made an appointment, went to see her, and said, look, I need to tell you about some of the burdens that I'm carrying. He was struggling with some pretty serious issues, and as he shared some of his burdens with Mother Teresa, she said to him, and this was her prescription, she said, spend one hour a day adoring your Lord, and do nothing that you know to be wrong, and you'll be fine.

Spend one hour a day adoring your Lord, it's a one hour a day, adoring, focusing on your Lord, and do nothing that you know to be wrong, and you'll be fine.

besides gathering together like this, on Sunday, besides this practice, what practices, or maybe what single practice have you found most helpful for focusing on Jesus and adoring him?

- [33 : 43] Build your life around that practice, prioritize that practice, because yes, the truth is that medical professionals and clinical psychologists and counselors, they all have their place, they're important, but according to Jesus, the ultimate antidote for weariness of soul and stress and anxiety, the ultimate antidote is an invitation.

Come to me, he says, you who are weary from the harsh realities of life, you who have overburdened yourselves trying to please everyone or impress everyone, take my yoke, he says, on yourself, join me in the relationship that I enjoy with the Father, share that relationship, it's yours, it's yours, and then finally he says, and make it your goal, your primary goal, make it your burden to please the Father above all else, and you will live and play and work out of a soul at rest.

let's pray. Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we confess to you, we acknowledge that so often we do feel weary, we do overburden ourselves, and we're sorry for that.

We thank you, Lord, for this wonderful invitation that you extend to each one of us. thank you, Jesus.

You know our burdens, and with those burdens, we come to you now. We respond to your invitation. Come to me.

- [36 : 23] Would you give us your spirit now, strengthen us, give us the grace to enter in to the relationship that you offer us, your relationship with the Father.

And Lord, would you give us the grace to make it our goal, our burden, to please our Father in heaven above all else, that we might know the rest that you promise us.

And Lord, we think of those who aren't here, who we know, who we love, who we care about, and who are weary and burdened right now.

We pray for them. Give them the grace to hear your invitation and to respond. And Lord, we pray for those people, those communities, those parts of New Zealand and the world where there are heavy, heavy burdens, where there is a lack of peace, where there is much anxiety and stress.

Lord Jesus, would you make yourself known there, pour out your peace, and through your people, by your word, would you extend your invitation?

- [38 : 07] And would there be many, many people tonight around the world who hear your words and respond to your invitation?

Thank you.