

Rest for the Weary

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[0 : 0 0] Congratulations. You are the millionth visitor to this site and you're guaranteed a cash prize. Or you're one click away from a free iPod Touch. You can earn 80 pounds an hour from the comfort of your own home. Now some of you are sneering at such a small amount. But these are the kind of things we are informed of. Is it too good to be true? Well, in a word, yes, these offers are indeed too good to be true. We wisely treat free offers with a healthy dose of skepticism, holding to the maxim that there is no such thing as a free lunch. Some of you are familiar with Christianity Explored and the video presentations that make up that course. And in one of the lessons, and those of you who are familiar with it will bear with me because I'm relying on my memory and may have some of the details wrong. But in one of the lessons, the story is told of a guy who stood on a corner of Piccadilly Circus handing out bits of paper which read, hand this back to the person who gave it to you and get five pounds. Or words to that effect. Well, the guy handed out hundreds of these little bits of paper. Now I wonder how many of the people who received that bit of paper turned around in their tracks, handed it back, and got their five pounds.

One person. All the rest carried their way. Well, why was that? It was so easy. You know, they got the bit of paper. It would have taken them a second or two to read the bit of paper.

They needed to simply turn around and get their five pounds. Well, why didn't they do so? Well, because it was too good to be true. They thought there must be a catch. And so they didn't respond to the offer that was made to them. This morning I want us to consider an invitation that Jesus makes that some might consider as too good to be true. We've read the passage and we focus our attention on verse 28 of Matthew 11. Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

Rest for your souls. Jesus offers you this gift, this free gift of rest, of relief from your burdens, of refreshment for your parched and tired soul. Is this too good to be true? Let's think a little about this invitation. First of all, let's ask the question and consider for a moment who it is that extends the invitation. Now, that's a very easy question to answer. We've read the passage. It's very clear who it is that extends the invitation. It's Jesus. Jesus is speaking, and He addresses these words to His disciples, certainly, and perhaps others who were present. But who is this Jesus who makes this very bold offer, who is able to guarantee this rest and refreshment to all who would come to Him?

Who is this Jesus? Now, it's important for us to be clear on who it is that is making the offer, because our likely response to any invitation or offer will be a function of the credibility and the capacity of the one inviting or offering. It's a bit like the guy in the corner at Piccadilly Circus.

[4 : 19] People didn't respond to the offer because they considered that it wasn't credible, that He wouldn't be able to respond to what He claimed He was able to do. Maybe if I could illustrate it in a way that I imagine that many of you will be familiar with. If I were to go home after the service and check my email and find that I've got an email from Sister Goodwill Happiness from Burkina Faso, and she's offering me 12 million pounds for Christian ministry. What will I do? Will I get very excited and get in touch with Sister Goodwill and get the money and spend it in all kinds of wonderful ways? Well, no, what I'll do is I'll press the delete button as quickly as I possibly can. Now, why is that? Why do I reject so cavalierly such a generous offer? Well, I do so because the offer has zero credibility, and the one who offers has zero capacity to fulfill with the offer that is made. So, it's very important for us to establish who is it that is making an offer so that we can sensibly determine how we are going to respond.

Well, what about Jesus? What about His credibility? What about His capacity to deliver on what He offers? What He offers is clear. I will give you rest. You will find rest for your souls if you come to Me.

The offer is clear. But what about His credibility? What about His capacity to deliver? Now, we have to limit ourselves this morning to what we can learn about Jesus in this passage.

If we're going to consider the credibility of Jesus in an exhaustive way, of course, we would need to consider all the material that we have that speaks of Him, but that's beyond our remit.

This morning, we limit ourselves to this passage. And in this passage, there are certainly two things that are said about Jesus, or really that Jesus says about Himself that would be relevant to our consideration of His credibility and of His capacity to respond to those who would come to Him in the way that He claims that He can do. The first thing that I would want you to notice is that Jesus claims for Himself a unique relationship with God the Father. Notice the language that He uses there in verse 25.

[7 : 08] At that time, Jesus said, I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because You have hidden these things from the wise and learned and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was Your good pleasure.

And then He goes on to say, 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.

He speaks of God as My Father, and He describes Himself as the Son. Now, we know that the Bible uses the language of Father and Sons in a more general way. Indeed, there are occasions in which all men and women are described as sons and daughters or the offspring of God by creation. We know also that as Christians, there is that sense in which we are privileged to become sons of God, sons and daughters of God. And yet here, Jesus speaks of His relationship with the Father in a much more particular way. He describes Himself as the Son in a unique way, and there certainly is a pointing towards, at the very least, of this eternal sonship as the One who has ever been the Son of the Father, shading the nature of the Father. Jesus is the One who enjoys this unique relationship with God the Father. He is the One who makes this offer, who makes this invitation, who extends this invitation, even this morning, to you. Come to Me, all you who are weedy and burdened, and I will give you rest.

Jesus also claims to share with God the Father the power to dispose of all things. Notice that in verse 27, all things have been committed to Me by My Father. Now, in the context of what He goes on to say about a knowledge of God that is possible only through the Son, there is a possibility that this reference to all things particularly refers to all knowledge. But it's also legitimate to take it more broadly, at face value, all things, all things have been committed to be to Me by My Father.

Father. He shares this authority and this power to dispose of all things. And so, coming to the point at issue, if He offers rest for your soul, then He can deliver rest for your soul. For to Him have been committed all things. Now, some might respond, and it's a reasonable response. Well, you're basing His credibility and His capacity on what He says about Himself. But what if it's not true what He says about Himself? Well, I would respond in a couple of ways. First of all, I would make the point, which I think is a reasonable one. It maybe doesn't secure the argument, but a reasonable point that there are many reliable witnesses who would testify to His credibility and capacity to deliver, very particularly in this matter of rest for your soul. But the second thing I would say, in any case, if you're still not persuaded,

[10 : 45] I would say this, that the proof of the pudding is in the eating. If you're uncertain as to whether Jesus can deliver rest for your soul, then taste and see. Taste and see that God is good. Come to Jesus and discover that He can indeed deliver on this promise that He makes. Jesus then is the one who extends the invitation. But another matter that we can consider or question that we can pose and attempt to answer is, to whom is the invitation directed? Well, we have it there in verse 28. Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened. All who are weary and burdened. If you are tired, you are invited. If you are wearied with life, you are invited. If life has become a tiresome drudgery, you are invited. If you feel you just can't cope with all the stuff that life throws at you, you are invited. It is very important to notice and to stress that Jesus adds no qualification to indicate the nature of the burden. Anyone who is wearied with any of life's multiple burdens is invited. I think there is that very broad appeal, if you wish. Jesus very broadly casts the net and says, whatever your burden, whatever it is that wearies you, then you are invited.

Having said that, and in no way backtracking from making the point that this is a very broad invitation, it is true that the nature of the rest offered does point in a particular direction in regards to the nature of the burden to be relieved. And I refer particularly to the way Jesus grants greater insight into the nature of the rest when He goes on to speak of rest for your souls. See, in the original invitation, He speaks of giving rest. But then He goes on, just a moment later, to speak of rest for our souls. And that language does point in a particular direction also as regards the burdens that would require such rest or such relief.

So is the invitation, having suggested that it very particularly is directed to those whose souls are hungry and thirsty and tired and weary and burdened. Are we to conclude?

Are we to conclude? As a gathering this morning, largely of Christian people, are we to conclude that the invitation is exclusively for those who have never discovered in Jesus rest for their soul?

You may imagine that to be the case, but I don't think we have any reason to come to such a conclusion. The language and the invitation and the passage is often used very much in terms of an evangelistic invitation, where we would invite those who as yet have not put their trust in Jesus, who are not yet resting in Jesus for their salvation, come to Jesus. And of course that's entirely right and proper, that we should encourage such to come to Jesus.

[14 : 45] But the invitation here surely is also directed to Christians, the likes of you and me, who know what it is to be tired and to be weary and to be burdened, to have tired and weary souls. We often stand in need of rest and refreshment for our souls.

We need that God-given, spiritual R&R; , rest and refreshment for our souls. And so I say to you this morning, you're a Christian, but are you wearisome? Are you tired? Are you burdened?

Well, the invitation is for you. Jesus says to you this morning, come to me, all you who are wearied and burdened, and I will give you rest. Another question that we need to consider is this. What is it that you need to do?

We know who it is who invites us in such a manner. We know what it is that he offers to us. We know that the invitation is directed to all, all who can at any rate in honesty identify themselves as wearied and burdened. But what do you need to do?

How are you to respond to the invitation that is made to you? Is the rest offered just one click away? Is there a number you can phone to claim your soul rest? Well, Jesus here in this passage identifies three related, connected actions required on your part, where the first of these three is foundational and opens the way for the subsequent two. Well, let's think of the three in turn, and hopefully that will become apparent.

[16 : 48] The first thing that we're told that we need to do, I very much include myself and so speak of what we need to do. It's what you need to do. It's what I need to do. It's what we need to do. What's the first thing?

Well, it's there before us very clearly in verse 28. Come to me. Come to me. Now, there may be those who would like to skip this part. Yes, I'm tired. Yes, I'm wearied. Yes, I'm burdened. And how I would like rest and refreshment.

But just give me the rest without that coming to Jesus' part. But there can be no rest apart from Jesus. Jesus does speak here of giving rest, and yet in a very real sense, He is our rest. Rest isn't simply some commodity that He dispenses. He Himself is our rest.

We find our rest in Him. And so, we must come to Jesus and enter into or deepen or cultivate that personal relationship with the risen Jesus as we would put our trust in Him as our Lord and as our Savior. As Christians, we need to continue to come to Him as we would daily seek His help and His forgiveness, His grace and His strength. What is required is a personal encounter and a continuing personal relationship? You can't do this online in some faceless transaction. Come to me. That is what we must do as we respond to the invitation if we are to enjoy the rest and the refreshment offered and promised. Come to me.

Now, maybe you're unsure. You say, well, what does that involve? You know, where is this Jesus that I would go to Him? Well, if you are unsure, what I would encourage you to do is to speak to Him. Speak to Him.

[19 : 11] There where you are. Lord, I'm not really very sure what this coming to you involves. I don't even know and I'm not altogether sure if you're listening to me at all, but here I am. I come to you. I want this rest. I need this refreshment for my soul. I am burdened. I am weary. Give me what you offer. What have you to lose in coming to Him in this way? That's the first thing. And it is, as I said, foundational, but Jesus goes on to identify two other actions that we must perform. The second one is that we must take His yoke.

Again, notice the passage before us. Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Take my yoke upon you.

Now, we've been speaking about offers that are too good to be true, and, you know, in some of these offers that are too good to be true, we discover that that is the case when we read the small print.

And all the things that go along with this headline offer, and you always wonder whether he or Jesus also is coming on to the small print.

He offers rest for our souls, and then He says, ah, yes, but by the way, you have to take my yoke upon you. So, with one hand He offers rest, and with the other He burdens us with a yoke. Now, this picture of a yoke would have had, for those who first heard Jesus speaking of it, a variety of connotations, some negative, some perhaps neutral, and some actually positive.

[20 : 57] The idea or the picture of a yoke could be and could carry very negative and oppressive connotations. Those who were listening to Him, the Jews especially, might have thought of the yoke of Roman oppression.

And so, the picture of a yoke would have been a very negative one. There's also the idea of yoke as speaking of servitude, of being the servant of a master. Now, that could be a negative picture, or it could be a neutral one, depending on the nature of the master. The idea also of a yoke would have carried for some of us hearers, maybe many of them, a religious connotation where the idea of the law was a yoke that was placed upon men and women. Now, some of them would have seen that as a positive thing, as a yoke that grants direction in your life. And so, the yoke and the one who is responsible for guiding those who are under the yoke would direct us in the way that we should go. But of course, also, for many, the picture was a very oppressive one, especially in the context of the Pharisees and the multiplicities of laws that they were imposing on people, that if you're going to be right with God, you have to do this and that and the next thing. And so, this idea of a yoke would have been for many a very oppressive picture. But what about the yoke that Jesus invites us to take? And it is an invitation. He's not going to oblige us. He's not going to force this yoke upon us. No, He says, take my yoke upon you. It's up to you. If you choose to take my yoke, then you take my yoke. If you choose not to take my yoke, well, that's your decision. So, there's no sense of obligation here. But what about this yoke? Well, certainly, it is not an oppressive yoke. It is a symbol of our servant status and of His masterly direction in our lives. We can maybe think of the yoke in this way, as the means of establishing a solid and permanent relationship. You see, once the yoke of Jesus is taken upon us, we're connected with Jesus. It's not just a one-off encounter that is very pleasant and exciting, and then we all or each go our separate ways. No, as the yoke is placed on us, as we willingly take it upon ourselves, there's a connection established, and it becomes a permanent connection. If you wish, a working relationship. Again, thinking of the picture of a yoke and the farmer and the oxen that the yoke is placed upon. The yoke connects us personally to Jesus, who will accompany us and direct us in the way that we are to go. And this idea of taking upon a yoke, and as we do so, enjoying the blessing and the privilege of being directed by our new master, ties in, perhaps in an intriguing way, with the one other occasion in the Bible where this precise language of rest for your souls is found. Now, the concept or the reality of rest for our souls is a recurring theme throughout the Scriptures. But in Jeremiah chapter 6, we find that precise phrase used by the prophet, well, by God Himself through the prophet. In Jeremiah chapter 6 and verse 16, listen to what is said, this is what the Lord says, stand at the crossroads and look, ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls.

God there speaks of rest for our souls being, if you wish, the product of good decision-making, God there speaks of God. And the yoke that Jesus speaks of is a means where we can be sure of making the right decisions and going in the right direction, because there will be one behind us and over us, directing us by means of the yoke in the way that we should go. And so, we will enjoy, as God promised through the prophet of old, rest for our souls.

We don't need to overly speculate on the nature of this yoke that we are to take upon ourselves, because Jesus Himself describes the yoke we are to take in this very passage. There He speaks of it in verse 30, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light. Well, this is what He claims. But is that true?

Does Jesus not, on other occasions, describe the Christian walk in extremely demanding terms? Is there not some contradiction here? We could do the exercise, we won't this morning, but we could do the exercise of identifying a number of occasions where the language Jesus uses is extremely demanding of Christian discipleship, of taking up our cross daily and following Him. And we could multiply the examples. And yet, here He speaks of a yoke that is easy and a burden that is light. How do we reconcile these things? Well, I think the point at issue is not the volume of work to be carried out.

[26 : 57] As Christians, we are indeed called to very hard work, but rather the identity of the one for whom we work and the manner in which we are to engage in the work. First of all, the identity of the one for whom we work.

Who is our master, our taskmaster? Well, He is the one who here describes Himself as gentle and lowly in heart.

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart. The one who treats his own with patience and tenderness. The one who will never ask you to plough a furrow you are incapable of ploughing.

And so the work is hard, and though the demands are great, yet it can also be said that the yoke is easy and the burden is light because of the identity of the one we serve, the one who helps us and accompanies us in the doing of the work. We can also think of the manner in which we work. You see, as we work for such a master, as we work for Jesus, the one who is gentle and humble in heart, yet able to say with the psalmist, to do your will, I take delight. To do your work, I take delight. The work Jesus gives, demanding, though it may well be, and indeed is, the work Jesus gives is to be delightful, fulfilling, energizing, satisfying, tiring, indeed exhausting, indeed exhausting, perhaps, yes, but also invigorating. Now, is that true for you?

And I address this question very particularly to Christians. Is your work for the Lord delightful, fulfilling, energizing, satisfying? But is it the case, if you're honest with yourself, as you must be, or it's very wise to be, would you respond, well, actually it's become just a bit tiring.

[29 : 18] It's become wearisome. I'm still doing it. I'm still performing the tasks that I believe I've been called to perform. I'm still involved in some aspect, maybe of church life, that I feel gifted for and called to, but really it's become a bit of a drag. It's tiring. It's wearisome. I take very little delight in what I do. What must you do? Well, what you have to do is listen to Jesus. Come to me.

Come to me. If you're burdened, if you're weary, if your labor for me has lost that enthusiasm and sparkle and buzz, come to me, come to me. And I will give you rest. I will give you refreshment. I will help you to recover that which you recognize that you have lost along the way for maybe a variety of reasons.

We have to come. We have to take. We have to take our yoke or His yoke upon us. And then there's a final thing that Jesus says that we must do in response to the invitation. We are to learn. We are to learn.

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me. Now, the yoke clearly in the picture that has been painted is a precondition for learning. And what that reveals to us is that for the Christian, learning from Jesus is always on the job. The model is not of the academy, but of the apprenticeship.

If we think of the oxen, how do the oxen learn to plow? Do the oxen take an HNC in plowing techniques and having passed the exam, they're ready to go into the field to plow? Well, no, it's a ridiculous picture that's being painted. No. What do they do? Well, the yoke is placed on them and they start plowing. And I imagine the first time, they don't do it very well. They maybe go off in all kinds of directions. But they learn along the way, on the job. They learn how to do what they're required to do in the manner that it needs to be done. And so, we as believers, as Christians, as we would learn from Jesus, we learn on the job, as we take the yoke upon us, and as we do what He would ask us and command us to do, in the doing, we learn what is involved in serving Him, in being a disciple of Jesus, in being useful in His service. And so, in the light of those thoughts, I ask you the question, where will you learn from Jesus? In your mind is your conception that you learn from Jesus, or you learn about Jesus, or you learn what it is to be a Christian in here. That's what you come to church for. That's what the minister's there for. He's there to teach you what it is to be a Christian. Or do you learn from Jesus out there as you serve Him, as you take His yoke upon you, and as you go your way doing what He would have you do? Where will you learn from Jesus? There's a final question that I want us to briefly notice and comment on, and that is, what is it that you will receive? Brings us back, really, to the beginning when we spoke of this great offer that seems so good to be true, rest for your souls. And just think for a moment of what is offered, and what it is that we receive as we respond in the manner described, coming to Jesus and taking the yoke upon us and learning from Him. What will we receive?

[33 : 15] Well, if you do come, and if you do take His yoke, and if you would learn from Him, you will receive rest and refreshment, rest and refreshment for your soul. Only Jesus can bring refreshment to your weary soul, for it is in Him alone that the weary soul can find rest, rest that is deep, that is genuine, and that is permanent. And might it be that your appetite for rest and refreshment has been stimulated as you've considered for a moment this invitation that Jesus extends, as you've pondered for a moment where you are in your life. And if you are tired and weary and burdened, then I can do no better than to say to you, listen to Jesus. Come to me, all you who are wearied 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. Let us pray.