

Jesus The Giver of Rest

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[0 : 00] We're going to turn then to the passage that we read there in Matthew's Gospel, chapter 11. And I invite you to have a Bible with you, a physical Bible or if it's on your phone, but a Bible that you can handle.

I know for myself, I've been, like the rest of you, participating in Zoom services for the last few months, and most of the time not taking the service. And I know how easy it is to maybe just turn on the laptop and maybe not with much in the way of preparation for participating.

I certainly speak for myself and even to the extent of not having a Bible to hand and just thinking, well, I'll just listen to what's said. And yet on this occasion, and indeed on any occasion, I think it's very helpful to have a Bible.

So, you know, I won't be able to see. So just slip away and find a Bible if you haven't got one so that you can follow more carefully the sermon as we consider this passage that we've read this evening, the one in Matthew.

Are you tired? Are you weary? Are you burdened? COVID-19 is exhausting. The pandemic is wearisome.

[1 : 17] Are you weary of death? On Friday, I received a WhatsApp message about a pastor in Coyique, where we are working in Lima.

This is a pastor that I've known for 30 years. I first met him when we first went to Mayabamba 30 years ago. And the WhatsApp message was from his son.

I didn't receive it directly from his son, but it was forwarded to me to inform that this pastor had been admitted to hospital with COVID-19.

And on that same day on the Friday afternoon, we made arrangements with folks in the office in Lima to make a small financial contribution to the family to help with some of the medical costs that we anticipated they would be having to confront.

Well, that was in the Friday afternoon. By the Friday evening, he was dead. He had passed away, another victim of COVID-19. And I'm sure you also, as I am, weary of death.

[2 : 25] Are you weary of suffering? By the grace of God, perhaps not your own suffering. Many of us have been spared suffering over this time, or certainly any measure of intense suffering.

But we know of others, perhaps somebody near and dear to us for whom that is not the case. And we are weary of suffering. And maybe, if we're honest, sometimes we have to say that we can be weary of being numb to suffering.

As we are surrounded by suffering, sometimes the impact of it, particularly when it is not our own, can be much less than perhaps it ought to be.

Are you weary of sin and the ravages of sin and the fall? Are you weary of a sense of powerlessness, of wanting to help and to hug and not being able to?

Are you weary of the many frustrations you or those you love face as a result of the pandemic and its effects? Maybe employment opportunities or opportunities to study that have been frustrated by all that we are living through.

[3 : 41] Are you weary of the uncertainty, of the unknown? Maybe you were excited, as I was, about gathering again for worship in the Bon Accord building.

And then in a moment, a spike in Aberdeen and that opportunity is taken from you. Perhaps in the grand scheme of things, that's not such a big deal. But day after day, the target seems to be moving.

Everything seems to be subject to change at very short notice. Are you weary of that? Jesus extends a beautiful and a tender invitation to the weary in the passage that we read.

The invitation is a very familiar one. And I'm sure you've heard the invitation. Indeed, no doubt heard many sermons on it. But let's just remind ourselves of the words of that invitation that we read just a moment ago.

Jesus invites us in this way. Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. As in the morning, our focus will not be so much on to whom the invitation is extended, but on the one who extends the invitation on Jesus, the giver of rest.

[5 : 00] Jesus, the giver of rest. It's a beautiful title and, more importantly, an accurate title of Jesus. Jesus, the giver of rest.

And as we draw out truths concerning Jesus, I'll try and illustrate some of what we discover with stories of the work we're involved with in Lima, with Operación San Andrés, or OSA, as we generally speak of it.

And especially in the area of emergency relief aid for those suffering the impact of COVID-19. Now, critical to our understanding, or certainly important to our understanding of the invitation, and what we can draw from the invitation concerning Jesus, who he is and what he is like, are the verses that lead into the invitation, that portray something of the relationship between God the Father and God the Son.

Between the one described by Jesus as the Lord of heaven and earth and Jesus. Something of this relationship is captured in Jesus' prayer to his Father, recorded there in verses 25 and 26.

And then in what follows in Jesus' declaration concerning the nature of their relationship there in verse 27. To be honest, my initial plan for this sermon was to look at this section in these three parts of it.

[6 : 22] The prayer of Jesus, the declaration of his relationship with his Father, and then the invitation that he extends. But in the end, I decided I would just focus on the third of those elements, that invitation.

But what comes before it is significant. And for that reason, I simply make reference to it without delving into it at any greater depth.

Well, but let me outline what we're going to develop or highlight concerning what we learn about Jesus. First of all, we're going to notice what we can discover concerning the identity of Jesus.

Just briefly, we'll notice a significant detail that gives us an insight into the identity of Jesus. But then secondly, we're going to consider the pretensions or the claims of Jesus that we discover in the invitation that he makes.

Then we're going to consider something about the character of Jesus, and particularly words that Jesus himself uses to describe his own character. And then finally, notice the purpose of Jesus.

[7 : 25] And in this regard, when we speak about the purpose of Jesus, it's the purpose of Jesus with regard to those he invites to come to him. So let's look at these three aspects, one by one.

First of all, the identity of Jesus. Who is Jesus? That is a big question. And we have an answer to it, certainly a partial, but a significant answer to it in the passage.

We read in Jeremiah chapter 6, the beginning of the service. And I want you to notice again what is said in verse 16 in particular.

So here, especially if you do have your Bible, it would be helpful for you to open it to that passage, Jeremiah chapter 6 and verse 16. And listen to what it says.

And as I read the verse, take note of who is speaking. So I'm going to read that one verse. Take note of who is speaking and take note of what he says.

[8 : 26] This is what the Lord says. This is what Yahweh 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. You will find rest for your souls. The Lord invites his people to find in him rest for their souls.

And here in the passage we've read in Matthew, Jesus extends the very same invitation. This very same invitation to find rest for our souls.

And in doing so, in extending that invitation in the very language that we find God employing there in the passage in Jeremiah, Jesus is consciously exercising this divine prerogative.

You see, only God can make such an invitation. No mere mortal can offer rest for a sinner's soul. This is something that only God can offer.

[9 : 39] And Jesus offers rest for our souls. And in doing so, Jesus identifies himself as God.

And he does so because he is God, the eternal son of God. So that's the first thing I wanted us to notice, that we can learn from the invitation, the identity of Jesus.

The second thing that I want us to think about are what I'm calling the pretensions or the claims of Jesus. When I was just writing out the sermon, I used this word pretensions.

And for a moment, I thought, well, is that do we do we actually use that word? And it suddenly dawned on me that I was kind of in Spanish mode because the word in Spanish is exactly the same, almost in its spelling, but it's much more commonly used.

And so it just dawned on me that that's why I had chosen that word. But I decided I would stick with it simply as a synonym for for claims. And as I was thinking about the word, what I wanted to declare or to state was that Jesus is astonishingly pretentious in the claims that he makes.

[10 : 51] And to be honest, the reason why I wanted to make a statement like that was that I thought really for effect that it could cause a reaction and maybe make you sit up and take notice. I don't know if it has done or not.

But I also kind of hoped that the word pretentious could be used in a neutral sense, simply one who makes big claims or pretensions.

Now, as it turns out, when I explored the matter a little, it would seem that the word pretentious can only be used in a negative sense. And so it certainly does not apply to Jesus.

That said, we can certainly speak of Jesus appearing to be astonishingly pretentious in the claims that he makes. Why so? Well, let's think about the invitation.

And let's think about the invitation in three ways or three claims that are made in the body of the invitation. First of all, in the nature of the invitation.

[11 : 49] Secondly, in the scope of the invitation. And thirdly, in the certainty of the invitation. At each of these levels, a huge claim is made by Jesus. First of all, the nature of the invitation.

Come to me. Particularly that very personal element. Come to me. What do we say to the weary and burdened who perhaps come to us for help of one kind or another?

I was thinking about the work that we're involved in there in Lima, in Operación San Andrés. And we often have all manner of weary and burdened souls asking for help and relief.

And this has been particularly so in these past few months. What do we say to those who ask for help? Well, I can tell you one thing for nothing. What we don't say is, come to me.

Come to me. A family member gets in touch and tells us that another member of the family has been diagnosed with COVID-19. Or perhaps another family. The issue is that the breadwinner has lost their job and they have no way of providing even for the most basic needs.

[12 : 59] What do we say to them when they come seeking help? Well, we might direct them to where they are able to get help. We might offer to provide some modest help in the form of a food parcel or monetary help to pay for a prescription to buy medicine.

What we don't say is, come to me. It would be folly for us. It would be folly for me. It would be folly for you to invite the weary and burdened in such a way.

And why would it be folly? Because we can't deliver. We can't deliver. And it would be a foolish thing to direct such an invitation to the weary and burdened.

Come to me. But Jesus can. Jesus can. Jesus can invite the weary and the burdened in this way. Come to me.

And he does. He addresses the weary in this intimate and personal way. Come to me. And of course, Jesus has previous in this regard.

[14 : 02] When Jesus began his public ministry, what was the invitation that he directed to his first disciples and indeed continues to direct to prospective disciples?

Come, follow me. Come, follow me. Come to me. This is the nature of the invitation. And it is an astonishing claim that Jesus is evidently of the opinion that he is able to respond to and to answer and to provide for the weary and the burdened.

So the nature of the invitation is in itself a significant, remarkable claim that Jesus is making. The second element of the invitation that speaks of it being a remarkable thing or a remarkable claim is the scope of the invitation.

Because what does Jesus go on to say? He says, come to me, all you who are weary and burdened. The focus there on the word all. All who are weary and burdened. No quotas.

No limits. No preconditions other than being weary and burdened. Again, as I think of the work that we've been involved in in the past few months in Lima, one of our main activities, it wasn't the case until the pandemic, but during this time, one of our main activities has been an emergency relief project that largely involves the distribution of food aid.

[15 : 31] It began with food parcels to families in great need in some of the communities within the larger community of Coyique. And laterally, the focus has been more on providing support to soup kitchens that have arisen in the course of the past few months because of the pandemic.

And at the last count, we've identified about 14 soup kitchens that we provide on a fortnightly basis. And some support for them so that they're able to provide at least one square meal a day for the most needy in their communities.

And I have one young man who is responsible for the logistics. His name is Noah or Noe. And the message that I constantly have to reinforce to him is we can't help everybody.

Noe has a big heart. I'm sure if you met him, you would be drawn to him. He has a very attractive personality, a real love for people.

And he has a big heart and he wants to help everybody. And so he's always in touch with me and say, Pastor David, can we not do this? And can we not help this people? And can we not do this? And I'm Mr. Bad Guy.

[16 : 46] I'm the one who has to say, no, we can't help everybody. And why? Well, because we can't. We can't offer relief to everybody. But Jesus can.

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened. Jesus extends his invitation to all, to all and sundry. And he can do so because his divine resources are limitless.

There will never come a time when somebody comes to Jesus and he tells them that the stores are dry. The resources have gone. There is no more rest to be provided.

Because his resources allow him to invite all and indeed to provide for all who come to him. So the nature of the invitation come to me, the scope of the invitation directed to all, but also the certainty of the invitation illustrates or demonstrates what a tremendous claim Jesus is making.

Because what does he go on to say? Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. And there the focus perhaps on that word will. I will give you rest.

[18 : 04] And again, just to illustrate this with something of the work that we're involved in in Koyike. I remember the first distribution of food parcels. I guess it must have been at least a couple of months ago.

And we had asked the local police to accompany us. You might think it's strange that we would have sought the help of the police. But distributing food in a pandemic, especially when it's in a public way, it can be a dangerous or certainly a risky endeavor.

I don't want to exaggerate the degree of danger. But it can be a difficult thing. And the problem that we encountered on this first occasion was that when people in the community saw, first of all, a truck making its way up the hills to where we were going to be distributing the food parcels, we'd already identified two small communities within the larger community who were going to receive these food parcels.

So we knew exactly where we were going and who we were going to provide them to and had made the coordination's necessity. But as we made our way and the truck made its way and it was followed by a police pickup.

And these were the police who were helping us. Now, people put two and two together. It wasn't that difficult to do. They saw, ah, truck, police, this is food aid. And so people kind of follow the vehicles, hoping that there might be something for them.

[19 : 30] Now, thankfully, with the help of our three armed police officers, we had no difficulties, no cue jumpers, no difficulties really of any kind.

But what did happen was that some mothers approached me. Now, these were mothers whose families were not being benefited by this distribution. And they approached me and they asked for help.

They said, what about our communities? What about our families? Can you provide help to us? Now, my response to them was, first of all, to say that if they could send me a letter where they indicate where they live, how many families there are for us to consider.

But the most important message, at least from my perspective, the most important thing I had to say to them was this. And it was just two words. And it was there were these two words. No promises. I said to them, I'm not making any promises.

I'm not offering you anything. You can ask. We'll think about it. We'll consider. We'll see if we're able to do something. But no promises. And, of course, I had to do that because I couldn't guarantee that I would be able to help them.

[20 : 42] I couldn't say to everybody who approached me, yes, we'll provide all the food and all the relief that you need. But Jesus can. Jesus says, come to me, all you who are of lead and burden, and I will give you rest.

Jesus doesn't say, come to me and I'll see what I can do. Come to me and we'll try and help you. Come to me and I'll point you in the right direction. No, he says, come to me and I will give you rest.

Now, that is an astonishing claim that he makes. The calm certainty with which he declares, I will give you rest. The pretensions or the claims of Jesus, of the eternal Son of God, of the one to whom all things have been committed by the Father.

To use the language that Jesus himself employs just in the previous verse. Jesus makes astonishing claims. But the most astonishing thing is that he makes claims that he delivers on.

So we thought a little bit about the identity of Jesus, how he uses language that is only appropriate for one who is divine. We thought of the astonishing claims of Jesus, claims that he is able to deliver on.

[21 : 59] But that's noticed also in the third place, on the character of Jesus. We're really just dipping into some of what we find in these verses. And at this point, we're dipping into Jesus' self-description.

When he speaks of himself in this way, in verse 29, he says, Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart. I am gentle and humble in heart.

It strikes me that there's a tension between the claims of Jesus that we've already noticed are astonishing claims and his self-description.

Here is one who makes the claim that he can provide rest to all who come to him. And yet, immediately following, he says, I am gentle and humble of heart. It almost seems as if the two things can't go together.

But let's just pause and consider the words that he uses, and especially the word that is translated humble in Jesus' self-description. For I am gentle and humble in heart.

[23 : 01] Those who know more about these things inform us that in common usage at the time that Jesus was ministering, and indeed in contemporary Greek literature of the first century, or at least roughly in that period, the word translated humble here is used invariably in a pejorative, in a negative sense.

Humility was not deemed to be a virtue. The word that is employed by Jesus carried the sense in the ears of his hearers of being servile, of being weak, of being powerless.

And yet Jesus says of himself, I am gentle and humble in heart. This has seen an astonishing thing for this rabbi to declare concerning himself.

Jesus exalts humility. That sentence in itself seems almost self-contradictory. And yet we can state this.

Jesus exalts humility. And notice also that Jesus speaks of being humble in heart. And while we perhaps need to be careful not to draw too much out of this, or certainly not draw more than is legitimate, I do think it's worth maybe pausing and just thinking a little bit about what the implications of this expression are.

[24 : 33] When Jesus describes himself as humble in heart. And I think we can conclude in this way. We can conclude that humility was not a character trait that Jesus adopted at the incarnation.

He is humble in heart. It belongs to his very nature as the eternal son of God. He is humble in heart. The incarnation is the demonstration of Jesus as the one who is humble in heart.

The word became flesh, but the word did not become humble. In becoming a man to save men and women.

Jesus is acting in character. He is gentle and humble in heart. And he demonstrates that most wonderfully and most eloquently in leaving heaven and coming into this world and becoming a man to live and to die in this sin sick world.

The character of Jesus, for I am gentle and humble in heart. And the final thing I want you to notice is what I've described as the purpose of Jesus.

[25 : 49] And what is Jesus' purpose in extending this invitation? Well, we read the invitation again. Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

But then he goes on. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me. And he continues. What is Jesus' purpose in extending the invitation? Well, I think his purpose in our lives can be summarized in the two words, rest and relationship.

His purpose is that we would enjoy rest. That the weary would enjoy rest. Rest for the weary. Rest for you. Rest for me.

Rest for the burden. That is his purpose. That we would enjoy rest. And not any kind of rest, but in the language that he himself employs.

Rest for your souls. Rest that is deep. Rest that is solid. Rest that is not dependent on outward circumstances.

[26 : 52] The outward circumstances that may be producing our weariness, be it a pandemic, be it our own circumstances.

Whatever it might be that is producing a weariness in our soul. Those circumstances may not change. God in his grace may change them.

But they may not change. But what Jesus offers is deeper than the circumstances that we may be experiencing. It is rest for our souls.

Rest for our souls that enables us to confront these circumstances. Difficult and weighty and painful though they may be. So Jesus' purpose is that we would enjoy rest.

But not just rest. Also relationship. The relationship of a disciple with his master. The language that Jesus uses of those who respond to his invitation.

[27 : 56] Learning from me. Is the language of discipleship. Is the language of a master inviting. Those who would respond to follow him.

And learn from him. The language of taking his yoke. The language of carrying his burden. Is also in that same theme. Of a disciple. Entering into a relationship with his master.

A relationship in which we learn from Jesus. And learn to become like Jesus. Gentle and humble in heart. Well this evening.

As we've made our way through. Fleeting. The verses that we have here. And particularly the invitation. That Jesus extends. We've met Jesus.

The eternal son of God. The one who makes extraordinary claims. The one who is gentle. And humble in heart. The one who calls us.

[28 : 57] To be his disciples. And how are we to respond? Just as in the morning. I said that the intention was that we would meet and respond. So the same intention this evening.

We've met Jesus. How do we respond to this Jesus who extends this invitation? Well first and foremost of course. We are to find and enjoy our rest in Jesus.

If you are weary. Then I would encourage you. To find and enjoy your rest in Jesus. Rest for your soul. Find and discover for yourself.

That Jesus delivers on the promise that he makes. On the invitation that he extends. Come to Jesus. Put your trust in him. Cast your burdens upon him.

And find rest for your soul. But again as in the morning. I think there's another responsibility. That goes along with finding our rest in Jesus.

[29 : 59] And that is that we are to share the invitation to find rest. With those who are weary and burdened. Now today or in these times.

And perhaps it's always been so. But certainly in the times that we are living. You don't need me to tell you. That we live in days when there are so many people.

Who are weary and burdened. We are surrounded by men and women who are weary and burdened. Perhaps in a way that they have not been in the past.

Perhaps recognizing for the first time. That weariness of soul. And as we are surrounded by such. We have a message of hope.

And refreshment for them. This is the message. The invitation. That all the weary and the burdened need to hear. And we have the privilege.

[30 : 58] And the duty. To extend that invitation. To those who God places in our paths. And may he help us. So to do.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father we do thank you for your word. We thank you for Jesus. We thank you for this wonderful invitation. That he extends to us. Come to me. All you who are weary and burdened.

And I will give you rest. Rest for your souls. Lord we do pray that you would help us. That by your spirit. You would help us to receive that rest.

To enjoy that rest. In the midst of times. When we are weary. When we are a burden. That we would know that rest. That can come only from you.

Heavenly Father we do pray. That you would also help us. To have a love for others. That would manifest itself. In inviting them also.

[32 : 00] To find rest for their souls. In Jesus. We pray that even in the course of this week. That has begun. We would seek out. And take the opportunity. To extend that invitation.

To others. And we pray these things. In Jesus name. Amen.