

# Meeting With Christ

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Practical and Exegetical Studies on the Words of Jesus Christ

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Based on sermons of Pasteur Eric Chang

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## I WILL GIVE YOU REST

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### Matthew 11:25-30

I would like to invite you to turn with me to the gospel of Matthew, chapter 11, v. 28. Matthew 11:28. Here, Jesus says this.

*Matthew 11:28. Come to Me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*

### Finding rest for our souls

This is a very well-known verse. It doesn't take too long in the life of a Christian to hear about Matthew 11:28. Preachers like to preach on this passage. Bible teachers like to quote this verse. And we like to hear it because it gives so much comfort to our souls as we live in a world that doesn't give us much rest. The emphasis of the lesson today will be on the question of how we come to that rest in the Lord Jesus. There is a wonderful promise here. But how exactly do you get it? This is what we want to examine.

Now, we have to put Matthew 11:28 in its proper context. We need to consider what comes before and what comes after this verse if we are to understand Jesus correctly. Let us begin with v. 25, Matthew 11:25-30. This is what we read.

*Matthew 11:25. At that time Jesus answered and said, "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes.*

*26 "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight.*

*27 "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 the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.*

*28 "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*

*29 "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.*

*30 "For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."*

### The glory of Christ

This passage begins with a wonderful revelation of the glory of Christ. Here the Lord Jesus says that everything has been handed over to Him by His Father. That is an incredible statement. All things, i.e. the whole universe, have been delivered to Jesus. Everything in this universe is under His authority. God has appointed Jesus, the Son, as King over the entire universe, everything and everyone who lives in it.

Now that, for a man, standing there, wearing the same shoes that we are wearing, combing His hair in the same way that we comb our hair, eating the same food that we eat, to make a statement like this is absolutely staggering. Don't you find?

And more than that, He only, Jesus, knows God. And only God knows Jesus. What Jesus is saying is that there is an equality between the Father and the Son, between God and Him. Only the Father knows the Son; and only the Son knows the Father. In this unique relationship, Jesus claims that He is absolutely equal with God, the Father.

## **Faith in Jesus**

Think about what Jesus is saying here. Jesus is equal to God and God had of His own choice and purpose given everything in the universe into Jesus' hands. Anyone who is reasonable must carefully weigh a statement like this. Either we are a bunch of fools to accept a statement like this or there must be some extremely good reasons why we believe it.

I wonder on what ground do Christians believe that Jesus is God who had come into the world. On what ground do you believe that Jesus is God manifest in the flesh? Not to deny a thing is not the same as believing. Some people say that they don't deny that there is a God. But that doesn't mean, from the Bible sense of believing, that you have faith in God. To believe in God because your parents happen to believe in God is not a ground for faith either. Faith is never second hand.

Let me put it plainly and bluntly. It is impossible for the natural man to believe Jesus' claim. How can anyone seriously believe that this man walking in Galilee, wearing ordinary cloth, speaking ordinary Hebrew or Aramaic, that this man is God walking into the world?!!

## **A divine revelation**

There is only one way this can become a burning reality in your heart: God revealed it to you. There is no other way. That is why in v. 25 it says, *I thank You, Father, ... because You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have **revealed** them to babes*. This means that the only way you can come to a true conviction of this is directly from God speaking to you. Logic and reasoning will not convince you of this because to every human statement, there is always an objection that can be raised. This doesn't mean that you cannot use reason. It simply means that reason alone is never enough. You will never come to a burning conviction of this reality nor will you ever be able to see this clearly until God reveals it to you.

The Lord Jesus insists on this point as He goes on in v. 27 and says, *no one knows the Son, except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father, except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to **reveal** Him*. The only way to know God is through revelation and that revelation is always direct faith. It never goes to somebody else. Becoming a Christian is a matter of having a direct relation to God, or to use a popular Evangelical expression, a personal relationship with God.

## **The context of the promise**

And then, having said that, Jesus makes this promise in v. 28. *Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*. So here is our verse. Before we try to understand its meaning, let me make this comment.

You won't fully understand this verse, v. 28, if you don't also take into consideration v. 29. The Lord Jesus doesn't just make a wonderful promise. He puts also an important demand or condition on that promise. You see, He says, *Come to Me, ... I will give you rest*. But He says a lot more than that. Look at v. 29. Verse 29 ends with the same words as v. 28, *You will find rest for your*

*souls*. So v. 29 is in fact explaining v. 28 and if you look at it carefully, you realize that it actually lays down a very important demand on the person who wants to enjoy the promise that Jesus speaks about.

When you study the Bible, make sure that you have all the facts together. We want to know the whole counsel of God. We want to know the whole truth, and not just part of the truth, even if this other part is to make us uncomfortable. Don't just pick the verses that you happen to like. And here I want to insist on the fact that no one can find rest in Christ for his soul if he doesn't meet the conditions that Jesus also speaks about.

So what are these conditions? This passage speaks of three conditions and they can be summarized in these three words: to come, to take, and to learn. Come to Me, take My yoke, and learn of Me. All these words lead to the person of Christ. If we want to find the rest unto our soul, if we want to find the sweetness of fellowship with God, that's what we have to do. To come, to take and to learn.

Now, when we look at these three words, we discover that each of these three words has to do with discipleship. It is to the true disciple of Christ to whom this promise is being made. Christian living is not just about attending church every Sunday or having your devotion every morning, or agreeing with the doctrines of your church. All this is certainly good, but it is much more than that. The Lord Jesus is concerned about you being His disciple, a disciple who practices His teaching. And He is saying that it is only when you truly become a disciple of Jesus that you will experience the fullness of that rest in Christ. To come, to take and to learn.

### **Are you burdened?**

So the first word is the word 'come', *come to Me*. This is Jesus' call to us. This is Jesus' call to mankind for its salvation. We have all been called and here we find that it is the call of Jesus to us to follow Him.

Notice the people whom the Lord Jesus is addressing Himself to. *Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden*. It is to those who are burdened, who labor under the burden of sin. We read about this burden, this toil, already in Genesis 3:17ff. There God said to Adam after his sin, *Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it ... In the sweat of your face, you shall eat bread*. God pronounces His judgment on Adam by saying that from now on, he will have to live by the sweat of his brow. This is how the Bible tells us that life for anyone is filled at some point with pain and sorrow because of sin.

But thanks be to God that in His grace, out of the seed of the woman, will be born a Savior who can give rest to a restless world. And today this promise of God, back in Genesis, has been fulfilled. Jesus is saying to those who are dissatisfied with life, who recognize their sins, who are seeking rest, *Come to Me ... and I will give you rest*. So this rest is not merely a psychological rest. It is a spiritual rest. It is a matter of salvation. It is Jesus calling mankind for its salvation.

Now, this word 'come' is often used in the context of discipleship. In Mark 1:17, Jesus says to two fishermen, Simon and his brother Andrew, *Come to Me, and I will make you become fishers of men*. In the same way, in Mark 10:21, Jesus invites another person to become His disciple. To this rich young ruler, He said, *Come, take up the cross, and follow Me*. And as you know, he didn't want to come to Jesus because he had great possessions.

### **The yoke of Jesus**

The second word, 'take', is again used of discipleship. For example in Luke 9:23, we have, *If anyone desire to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me*. If

anyone is to become Jesus' disciple, he will have to take up his cross daily. And to take up the cross is equivalent to taking Jesus' yoke as we read in Matthew 11:29 when He says, 'take My yoke upon you.' Let me explain why we can say that.

A yoke is an agricultural instrument used to plow a field. If you look at a yoke, you will notice that the yoke has the shape of a cross. It is made of two pieces of wood. One is across the shoulders of two animals. The other piece of wood goes trading down the ground. At the end of this second piece, there is a hook that falls into the ground. Do you get the picture? From this description of a yoke, we can see that to take up His yoke is in fact to take up His cross. It is exactly the same thing.

## **The yoke of sin**

The word 'yoke' is used some fifty times in the OT. What we observe when we read all these references one by one is that it is rarely used in its literal sense. Most of the time, the word 'yoke' is used in a figurative sense to picture the condition of someone who is under the authority of some person or some nation. To be under the yoke of a nation means that you are under the authority of that nation. The prophets of God warned Israel, time and again, that if they reject God's yoke, they are going to be under the yoke of an oppressing nation. And sadly enough, that's what happened to Israel because they would not listen to the prophets. They eventually came under the heavy and cruel yoke of the Babylonians and Assyrians.

But the word 'yoke' is also used in relation to sin. In the first chapter of Lamentations, the prophet Jeremiah was speaking on behalf of God about the destruction of Jerusalem. And in v. 14, we read this confession from the city of Jerusalem: *The yoke of my transgressions was bound; they were woven together by His hands (by God's hands), and thrust upon my neck.* Jerusalem was saying that her transgressions, her sins, were bound together by God into a yoke that was placed over her neck. So here, the yoke is the yoke of sin.

Now in life, there is no question of you not being under any kind of yoke. Don't think that this doesn't apply to you because you feel that you are the boss of your own life. The man who thinks that he lives under his own yoke is simply fooling himself. If you think that you can live in total independence, under no kind of yoke at all, you have not understood the situation. Because the reality is that you are either under God's yoke, or you are under the yoke of sin. In Romans 6, we read that you are either a slave of righteousness or a slave of sin; you are either under God's yoke or under the yoke of sin. There is no middle ground between the two. If you say that you live under your own yoke, it simply means, from God's perspective, that you are under the yoke of sin.

## **The Jewish understanding of a yoke**

For the Jews, to take on the yoke means three things. We see that from the OT. The first thing is that it owns the kingship of God in their lives. In Leviticus 26:13, we read, *I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that you should not be their slaves; I have broken the band of your yoke and make you walk upright.* The yoke was that the Israelites were the slaves of the Egyptians. And God says that He has broken the band of this yoke by bringing them out of the land of Egypt. But that's not all that He said. A few verses earlier, in Leviticus 25:55, we read this: *For the children of Israel are servants to Me; they are My servants whom I brought out of the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.* Before, they were slaves in Egypt and Pharaoh was the king. Now, they are still slaves, but a fundamental shift happened. They are now the servants of God and God is the king. For *I am the Lord your God*, for I am the King your God. And to reject God's yoke is to reject His kingship. It is to reject Him as King.

Secondly, a Jew took on the yoke of God, i.e. the kingship of God in His life, when he makes the declaration of what the Jews called the *Shema* in Deuteronomy 6:4-5 where we read, *Hear, O*

*Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might.* The Jews recited these words twice a day, in the morning and in the evening. And by this profession of faith, they committed themselves to live under God's yoke. They committed themselves to love God with all their heart, all their soul and all their might.

And thirdly, to take on the yoke of God is to serve God. Remember what happened when king Solomon died. It is Solomon's son, Rehoboam, who succeeded to the throne. And the people made to the new king this request in 1King 12:4: *Your father (Solomon) made our yoke hard; now therefore lighten the hard service of your father and his heavy yoke which he put on us, and we will serve you.* From this statement, we can see that the yoke is the service to the king. Your father made our yoke hard, and now we want you, Rehoboam, to lighten this hard service. So yoke = service. To take on the yoke of the king is to serve the king. So to take on the yoke of God is to serve God.

So for a Jew who listened to the words of Jesus, he understood these three things when Jesus says, *Take My yoke upon you.* First he understands that it means that Jesus becomes King in his life. Then secondly, he understands that Jesus has a total demand upon his life, that he will love Jesus with all his heart, all his soul and all his strength. And the third thing that he understands is that from now on, he lives for Jesus. As he takes on the yoke of Jesus, he serves Jesus. And this is also true for you and I when we take the yoke of Jesus.

## **Learning from Jesus**

So to come, to take and to learn, three conditions to experience the rest in Christ, each word being closely related to discipleship. 'If you are really My disciples,' Jesus says, 'you will come to Me, you will take My yoke, and you will learn of Me.' The third condition, then, is about learning from Jesus. The Greek word for 'disciple' is found right here, 'to learn'. A disciple is someone who learns from a master, namely Jesus for the Christian. The disciple's relation to Jesus is one of teacher and student. And what do we learn? *For I am meek and lowly of heart.* Realize that He is God, King of the universe, who humbled Himself to come down to this world, to die on the cross for us. Where can you find a better expression of meekness than that?

So then, *Come to Me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.* I hope that you now understand that it is a verse that has to do with salvation. It is Jesus calling mankind for its salvation. When Jesus says that He will reveal Himself to whom He wants to reveal Himself, it doesn't mean that He is going to do it at random like playing bingo. He will reveal Himself to the babes, as we read in v. 25, to the humble, to the poor in spirit, to those who recognize that their life is under the yoke of their own sins and that they need a Savior. And when you move towards Jesus under His conditions, as a disciple to his Master, to come, to take, and to learn, then you will find rest for your souls for all eternity.