

Come Unto Me...

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[0 : 00] I'd like us to turn for a short time to the words that we read, Matthew's Gospel, chapter 11.

And we're looking at the words from verse 28 to the end. I would be very surprised if you had not read or heard these words read at some point.

Whether you're familiar with the Scriptures or whether you're somebody who regularly reads the Bible, I'm sure you've come across these words at some point.

Especially in the context of bereavement. Perhaps in our culture, in our local setting, we're used to attending services, whether it's wakes or funerals.

But it is a privilege, if it is the case, that we've come to experience something of what these words say to us.

[1 : 49] I think more and more, when it comes to funeral services, they take on a secular aspect.

Input into the services are very much more dependent on an input that has little base biblical input into them.

Many people want to seek to celebrate life.

Many people seek to focus upon celebration. which you can understand, I suppose.

People try and compensate for what is an inevitable consequence of death coming into our own experience.

[3 : 00] I'm not talking about the experience of families and loved ones who have to come face to face with grief.

And there's no escaping the reality of sorrow or grief. However much it's camouflaged, however much it's dealt with, I think it is a reality and people choose to deal with it in their own way.

And very many today do not look for comfort where comfort is to be found. Christ is the comforter that we can trust in.

Christ is the one who brings comfort to grieving hearts, to painful wounds, much more than any other can.

I firmly believe that. However much we try and reconcile the sadness that we inevitably experience and think that we've done our own endeavours to overcome it and think that we've done, we've secured that end, I can't believe that it's done to the same degree of success, if at all, as when Christ comes and ministers his comfort.

[4 : 37] He is the God of all comfort. He is the one who knows what grief really is. And these words that we have here, which, as I said, I'm sure you're familiar with, are precious words because of the meaningful way that they very often touched lives when they were suffering sadness and sorrow.

Bishop Ryle of old said that these words deserve to be written in gold, letters of gold, because of how much he sees the value of what they say to us.

It is a wonderful invitation extended to the universal predicament that so affects our society.

Universal, I mean by that, is everybody. Everybody is burdened. Everybody, in some way, shape or form, is crying out for comfort and for consolation.

Whatever it is that is behind it or whatever it is that stimulates the sorrows that come our way from time to time, there's nobody excluded.

[6 : 11] And I think that is what this verse or these verses remind us of. But we also need to put it into the setting in which these words are spoken.

And although we didn't read the whole chapter, it won't take a long to read it for yourselves. But we are told in this chapter that John the Baptist, who was prophesied as the forerunner of Christ Jesus, he was his cousin.

And the scripture told us that such a one was going to come and he was going to announce the arrival of the Messiah, the Christ of God.

And he duly did that. But we find at the point in this chapter that we come face to face with John the Baptist again, that he's in prison.

And there are many speculations about the nature of his questioning why he sends his own disciples to Christ.

[7 : 26] What is it that motivates this question that is his? He asks this question, which I suppose is a very pointed question.

Verse 3, Are you the one who is to come or shall we look for another? And that's a very clear question.

John wants an answer to it. But there's a lot of speculation about what was it that John wanted to know. Was he this great man that the scripture had declared would appear on the scene of time and who was going to be the ambassador or the one who would declare the arrival of Jesus on the scene of time?

Had he succumbed to unbelief? Was he doubting the passion of the Lord Jesus Christ? Was he questioning that he was who he knew him to be or thought him to be?

And there's various opinions as to what lay behind the question. And Jesus responds to the question and sends disciples back to John and he just tell John this.

[8 : 55] Tell him what you have heard and seen. The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear and the dead are raised up and the poor have good news preached to them and blessed is the one who is not offended by me.

So the answer to the question, well he is not saying yes I am he, he's just saying these are the evidences that you're being presented with that should prove that I am who you are looking for who you have been testifying to for the time that you were going about calling the nation to repentance. And then Jesus turns his attention to those who have been listening to John preaching. Those who have heard him preach rather than listen to him preach.

and he condemns them for their unbelief. And he brings their sin very much into the foreground.

And he tells them that if what they had heard and what they had seen done had been done in the days of Sodom and Gomorrah that they would have repented unlike them.

And he's very critical of that generation. Very critical of them because of their lack of faith or lack of belief. Very critical of their spiritual leaders in particular because they have not believed and they have not discerned the passion of Jesus as being the one who had come from God.

[10 : 52] So that is the setting for these words. the teachers and the scholars of the day are perhaps at the heart of the response of Jesus that we're seeing here.

Because in a sense some at least believe that his reply or his encouragement to those who are being spoken to necessarily brings them into the thinking that undergirds the invitation.

So there are three things that I want us to look at really and I don't suppose I'm telling you anything different but it's good to be reminded of them nevertheless.

I want us to consider the words come and take. Secondly who are invited to come and take and thirdly what are those who come and take promised.

So three simple thoughts and I suppose even as a further introduction I often get a row.

[12 : 21] I say this everywhere I go. I get a row for my long introductions. So if my introduction has been overly long forgive me that misdemeanor.

But I believe that there could be I know there are two bodies within this place. Two bodies of believers or unbelievers. Those who have believed the gospel and trusted the gospel and trusted the Christ of the gospel with their souls.

And there are those who have not. There are those who have not come. There are those who have not done what Jesus would have them do.

And that's the way it is. But there are also when I speak you would think looking at this verse it's probable that we would think this is a message for the believers for the unbelievers in particular an invitation to those who do not believe to come and put their trust in Christ.

That's the way you would probably want to emphasize it. but it is also a reminder to those of us who have faith and who have come to Christ and who do trust in Christ that we too have that message to share with others.

[13 : 51] and that we have the voice of experience to proclaim the same message to those who have not yet done so.

there is an encouragement to us or for us to tell others that there is a passion to whom we can come and that there is this passion who has not failed us when he has invited us and treated us even to come to him.

and we should try and remind ourselves of that that there is no possible better way of speaking to those that you know that have not put their trust in Christ than to tell them the reality of your experience having done so.

The reality of what it actually means to be a believer in a world that cries out for for the encouragement that Christ is giving to us here.

Now we can't doubt from the context the person who extends the invitation is. The immediate context tells us that this person is the Lord Jesus but there is a sense in which the Trinity is involved in this and the Trinity is behind this.

[15 : 38] The God of heaven and earth the Son of the Most High God the Spirit of the Most High God they're all actively involved in encouraging any and all to come to God to deal with or help them deal with the peculiar circumstances that are there in the here and now.

we know that Christ does send out people in his name. I'm here because I believe ministry where I would proclaim the gospel.

I believe your own minister is somebody who has experienced that call and there is this necessity to go and tell to share the good news with others but we remind ourselves that it is not me that's telling you to come I am telling you to come to the one who invites you to come for you to come to me would not really be of much use to you or to go to any other individual like me or even quite different to me would be to no!

avail! But you remind yourself of the person here who is speaking that it is the God of heaven and earth who is saying this if you go back just a few verses before the verses we're looking at there all things have been handed 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 and then the words come so Jesus is explaining the invitation almost or he is laying the foundation for the invitation by telling us that he is the one and God is the one and the Holy Spirit is the one through whom the words come are being presented to us the authority of the invitation or the authority undergirding the invitation is divine without a question the spirit's involvement you will remember that the activity of the spirit in the world is something that

Christ has established that he was going to leave the world that he was going back to his father but that he was endowing his church here on earth with an active ambassador the passion of the Holy Spirit and a shorter catechism tells us the activity of the spirit in the life of the believer is as follows effectual calling is the work of God spirit whereby convincing us of our sin and misery enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ and renewing our wills he does persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ freely offered to us in the gospel the gospel is preached and the Holy Spirit works in us the faith that is necessary in order for us to believe to believe and that is something that is almost unspoken here but it is necessarily something that we need to understand takes place and we dare not overlook the work of the

[19 : 32] Holy Spirit even here in this congregation or any other congregation we always look to the person of the Holy Spirit to take God's word and to apply it to the minds and to the hearts of those who are under God's word so that when you hear the words come from the mouth of the Lord Jesus himself the Holy Spirit is the one who applies that invitation meaningfully to our hearts in mysterious ways at times the story is told of famous minister George Whitefield or Whitefield however you want to pronounce it and he was once preaching somewhere down south I think in Devon or Cornwall somewhere down there anyway and it was in the days of open air preaching and he was praying and preaching on a round of services and people many people were coming to hear him preach and he was a notable preacher he was a well known preacher and many people did gather but one person came to hear

Whitefield preach not to hear him for the good of his soul but to do as much damage to him either to his reputation or physically to Whitefield himself so when he turned up at the service before he turned up he filled his pockets with stones at an appropriate point in the service he was going to throw stones at the minister I hope you haven't brought any tonight but he came prepared and he was waiting for his opportunity and he didn't do it at once and then after Whitefield had prayed and read the Bible he found that the stones he was going to throw fell from his hands and the spirit of God worked in him totally against his own intention and he went to speak to the minister after the

service and he told him that the stones that he intended to break his head with he had to discard because the

Holy Spirit had broken his heart or words to that effect he he touched him in a way that he knew I don't know if there are some people today don't know who the Holy Spirit is or what the Holy Spirit does which is probably right but in those days he probably had some understanding although limited but I suppose as we go on to remind ourselves is it not a mystery and it shouldn't surprise us but it does that the very people who have determined not to come the very people who have decided that they will not believe are sometimes the very people that are persuaded by God to do that very thing that they have so antagonistically prepared against

I can't explain that but that's the way it is at times but Jesus is saying here he is saying come and he is saying take my yoke to those who have no interest in doing that and perhaps who have an understanding in a limited way of what that might mean there are possibilities about the taking of the yoke when you read here come to me all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and lowly in heart I think the yoking that Jesus is speaking of here has a background in the agriculture people were used enough to see beasts of burden hawks oxen or horses perhaps yoked together with a wooden something that bound them together so that they walked in step in tandem and they usually it was for beasts of burden that pulled carts or perhaps some kind of heavy farm machinery and it needed them to walk a pace and it needed them to walk in step so a yoke served that function and

Jesus is saying here take my yoke upon you and he ties it into the burdens that he wants them to be relieved of now perhaps the teaching that is there some have suggested has to do with the yoke of the law and many commentators many teachers and preachers have gone down that way and I think if you look closely at these words when Jesus is saying to us come to me all who labor and are heavy laden I will give you rest take my yoke upon you and learn from me the spiritual leaders of the day whose role it was to teach others about the things of God they imposed the yoke of the law upon the people they took

[26 : 08] God's word and they applied it stringently on the lives of those that they were super intending and requiring them to go beyond even their own abilities to keep God's word and later on in this chapter in this book gospel chapter 23 and verse 23 we find there Jesus condemning the scribes and the Pharisees he says for you tithed and dill and common and have neglected the weightier matters of the law justice and measure and faithfulness these you ought to have done without neglecting the others you blind guides straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel woe to you scribes and Pharisees hypocrites for you clean the outside of the cup and the plate but inside they are full of greed and self indulgence you blind

Pharisee first clean the inside of the cup and the plate that the outside also may be clean and so on his criticism of these men who were exercising severe judgments against the people that they were meant to be caring for without themselves submitting to the same teaching that they were enforcing others to submit to so the Lord understands that and he understands the kind of of circumstances many of these people that he was speaking to had to go had to suffer as people who instead of being blessed with spiritual blessing with encouragement with teaching that would edify and teaching that would bring them on in the faith rather than doing that they were they were creating a heavy burden that they could not possibly hope to carry and

I suppose we have to guard against that in the way that we teach God's word Jesus is saying take my yoke my yoke is easy my burden is light these men that you have seen who refuse to believe the testimony of John these men who are amongst you these are they that are quite different to me so Jesus in that sense his invitation is an invitation with understanding an invitation that takes on board the kind of circumstances that he encounters in that generation not just generally speaking within society where all the ills of society are shared by one and all nobody is nobody escapes pain and suffering nobody escapes illness nobody escapes death nobody escapes poverty nobody escapes in one way shape or form but particularly there is a malaise there that he is challenging and he is the one who is the one to whom we go and it's not a select few that he is speaking to I think that's what we need to remind ourselves nobody is excluded this word is to everyone whatever it is that you are suffering from this evening you might have illness you might have problems in the workplace or in the home you might have emotional circumstances that create in you heavy hearts and so on you might have spiritual problems and Jesus is aware of these and he encourages all to go to him because he has that knowledge there are no limits to the sufferings that

we may encounter or have to go through within our society and nobody is excluded maybe it comes from time to time in waves maybe we escape at other times in a way that some people think that we're immune to all of these things but they're not those who know our circumstances but Jesus from this passage as whether you exclude yourself from this passage as being somebody who is not within the sphere of influence of this invitation you're getting managing quite well you've convinced yourself there there is nothing that Jesus has to say to you that you are not able to overcome without him there's no problem that you can't handle and I don't know who was talking about this recently and he was saying somebody said to him that you know that the gospel is for weak it's for people who are weak it's for people who can't handle this world and he says you're right I am weak but I have a God who is strong I have somebody who will help me in my weakness and who will support me when this world is greater than I am whatever whatever it may be [32 : 32] Jesus is saying come to me in order to learn from me what do you learn from Jesus well you learn from somebody who embraced poverty who took upon him the weakness of flesh without becoming embroiled in sin free from sin and yet he was not free from the after effects of sin or the impact of sin in the world that is there and he is telling us learn from me learn humility learn the spirit of submission learn what it is to be a servant and you're saying well I don't particularly fancy that I don't particularly want to serve others and that wouldn't surprise me because the world in which we live is so egocentric and so so much given over to doing my own thing and having my way whatever that costs but Jesus reminds us that it's not that it may be the spirit of the world but it is not the spirit that he encourages take yourself to the cross take yourself to when

Jesus encountered those who were most rampant enemies and Jesus was tried and Pilate found no ill with him and nothing wrong with him no sin that he could put against him and people said give us Barabbas give us Barabbas we will not have this man to reign over us and that was the point they did not want to submit to the Christ of God the anointed of God the king of kings submission to him was the last thing on their minds and that's the way the world works to this day but Jesus says come to me I will give you rest take my yoke upon you and learn from me the yoke of Christ may be something that many people don't want to embrace or to take on board but it is light in comparison to the yoke that this world places upon our backs light in comparison for one thing if that is what we choose we choose without

Christ and the cross of Christ is something that he carries and those who carry a cross never carry the cross by themselves he carries it with them finally there is this he promises! rest he promises relief I will give you rest he says and not just rest physical rest it's rest for their souls not repose not somebody reclining on a beach with sunglasses and a glass of something that's not the picture that we're meant to carry from this many people think that this world is for them to struggle through and to take their time away from these struggles and then they're rested and then they're at ease and then they return to the struggles once again but what we understand from this is that those who live their life like that are missing the mark and only by finding rest in the Lord Jesus Christ can a patient truly understand the significance of what he promises give you two quotations

I like my quotations I'll give you two one is a poem or a hymn by or a boar he says I heard the voice of Jesus say come unto me and rest lay down the weary one lay down thy head upon my breast I came to Jesus as I was weary and worn and sad I found in him a resting place and he has made me glad I found in him a resting place and that's what the Lord's people have discovered they take their rest in him his work is a finished work his dealings with sin are final and not one of them will cause the believer grief of the last it was Augustine who said that you have you have made us for yourself and not one of us can find rest words to that effect until we find a rest in thee and [37 : 54] I suppose there's a logic in that if the God who made us made us for himself there's a restlessness that will manifest itself in the lives of all who are in this world except they come to find their rest in the one who brings Christ likeness into their experience but God bless this word let us pray pray