

“Come To Me...”

Matthew 11:1-30

Key Verse: 11:28

“Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest.”

God came as a man and lived for a short time as a human being in this world he had created. He came with a mission and a message. His presence was announced by a proclamation: **“The kingdom of heaven has come near.”** John the Baptist, Jesus and the disciples he sent out on a fieldwork trip all proclaimed this message. (3:2; 4:17, 23; 10:7) This proclamation announced that for a brief period of time the promised Messiah - God himself, came down and lived on this earth. The kingdom of heaven was near because the King had come. Where the King is, there is the kingdom. The Messiah came as a servant king, to show God’s heart of love for suffering people. He climaxed his mission by his death and resurrection, the redemptive act which set mankind free from sin and death. It was good news that the King had come. All mankind and especially his people Israel, should repent and welcome him.

I. The Messiah has come

The kingdom was near because the King had come. His time on earth was short - just 33 years. He came to proclaim the kingdom of heaven during that time. He proclaimed the kingdom of heaven by his words and by his actions. He was the long awaited Messiah and he began his messianic work by calling the lost sheep of Israel to repent and believe the good news. He did not fit people’s ideas and hopes about the Messiah. He was not a conquering general. He did not drive out the Romans and establish the kingdom of Israel. He was a compassionate servant King. He saw that the people were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. He came to be their shepherd. He healed the sick and cast out demons and raised the dead. He forgave sins, for he had come with the authority of God. He showed the people that the kingdom of heaven was good news. It was news that God loves even sinful and rebellious people. He loves all people. God loves me and you. He showed them God’s love and power. This period of the kingdom of heaven on earth lasted only three years. It began with John the Baptist and ended with Jesus on the cross. Verse 12 says, **“From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has been subjected to violence and violent people have been raiding it.”** Both John and Jesus would suffer violent deaths. Satan sought to destroy the King and his kingdom before it could take root. He used doubt and fear and violence as his tools.

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First, “Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.” (1-6) John was in prison. He sent his disciples to ask Jesus, **“Are you the Messiah or shall we expect someone else?”** John had proclaimed the good news that the kingdom of heaven was near, but he was in jail and the world seemed to get worse. Jesus and his disciples continued to proclaim the kingdom of heaven and to show the compassionate love of God through their preaching and healing ministry. But the King, the Messiah, seemed to be ignoring John in prison. John had baptized Jesus. He had heard God’s voice, **“This is my Son whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”** He had introduced Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. John had challenged King Herod with a message of truth. He told him to repent of an adulterous relationship with his brother’s wife. For this, he was put in jail. And he would soon be killed. He wanted his disciples to meet Jesus and commit themselves to him. John’s mission was to make a way for people to come to Jesus. He sent his disciples to Jesus. Are you the long awaited Messiah or shall we wait longer? He wanted them to hear the answer from Jesus himself.

Jesus answered, (11:4-6) **“Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.”** Jesus described the work of the Messiah that Isaiah had prophesied. (Isa 35:5) He was saying, “Go and tell John what I’m doing.” By his actions he was saying, “I am God’s promised Messiah.” He was full of God’s power and compassion. John’s disciples should not stumble just because Jesus didn’t fit their idea of the Messiah. John knew that they needed to learn from Jesus. We should not stumble when God doesn’t seem to answer our prayers. God is Sovereign. God is good - all the time. We must go to Jesus and put our trust in him.

Second, Jesus spoke to the crowd about John. Read 11:7-10. **“As John’s disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: ‘What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings’ palaces.’”** When they came out to the wilderness to see John, what did they expect? John was not like a reed bent and swayed by the wind. He stood firmly on the side of truth and spoke with great courage. This is why he was arrested and killed. He was not dressed in fine clothes. He wore rough clothes - a garment of hair and a leather belt around his waist - just what Elijah the prophet had worn.(2 Ki 1:8; Mt 3:4) Jesus continued:

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“Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written: ‘I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.’” The prophets of the Old Testament prophesied about John and Jesus. Now, John came to fulfill those prophecies. He was more than a prophet. He was the forerunner of the Messiah. Isaiah had spoken about him. Malachi had also prophesied that one would come in the spirit of Elijah to introduce the Messiah (Mal 3:1; 4:5; Isa 40:3). Jesus identified John saying, (verse 13-15) **“For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John and if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come.”** Jesus affirmed John's greatness. **“Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”**

There was no one greater than John. He was great because he had a great mission, given to him by God. He was the forerunner of the Messiah. But one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. What did he mean? John was a kingdom worker. He proclaimed the kingdom of heaven and called people to repent. He had introduced Jesus. But John did not live long enough to know the gospel – Jesus’ death for our sins and his resurrection. He could not know the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost; or the transforming power of Spirit, the new birth. John’s disciples, the crowds who came to listen to him - and we - must accept John’s message and repent. But we cannot stop there. We must come to Jesus. We must come to Jesus for forgiveness and cleansing and for new birth. We must welcome Jesus into our hearts as King.

II. The unresponsive world (16-24)

First, childish indifference. If violent efforts to destroy the kingdom and it’s King fail, the devil resorts to indifference and ridicule. Look at verses 16-19. **“To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the market place playing games. They ridicule John's holy, ascetic life style and say, ‘He has a demon.’ They ridicule Jesus' humble, incarnational lifestyle, saying ‘he is a drunkard and a glutton and he hangs out with sinners.’”** These impossible-to-please people are like rebellious children who don’t dance when a joyful wedding tune is played and don’t mourn when a funeral dirge is sung. The way of wisdom they did not know. This kind of deliberate indifference comes from a deep spirit of rebellion. It is intentional indifference. They don’t respond because they don’t want to. Jesus saw this attitude on a larger scale. He saw this spirit in the towns he had visited during his Galilean ministry.

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Second, unrepentant towns. Jesus denounced Chorazin and Bethsaida and Capernaum, the towns he had served the most. He had healed the sick and cast out demons and proclaimed the kingdom of heaven in these towns. But the people ignored him. They did not repent. Jesus compared them unfavorably with Tyre and Sidon and even Sodom. These godless Gentile cities would have repented in sackcloth and ashes if they had heard the Messiah’s words and seen his gracious work. Once Jesus went to the region of Tyre and Sidon. He met a Canaanite woman. She begged him to heal her demon-possessed daughter. Jesus told her that he couldn’t help her because he couldn’t give the children’s bread to Gentile dogs. In great humility she asked for the crumbs that fall under the table. Jesus recognized her faith and healed her daughter. Then he left that region. It was not the time for a Gentile ministry. (Mt 15:21-28) But the day of final judgment is coming. Jesus words are a warning spoken in love and sorrow, not as an angry threat. **“Woe to you unrepentant towns!”** They and we must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. (2Cor 5:10) The King and his kingdom should not be ignored.

III. Praise the Father and give him thanks (25-30)

First, Jesus praised God. **“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, but this is what you were pleased to do.’”**

When Jesus looked at the hostile and unresponsive world he could have gotten angry or sad or tired. He could have thought, “It’s not worth it.” Or, “I need a break.” “I’m wasting my life.” “Nobody pays any attention.” He might have had a complaining conference with his disciples. He might have sent some despairing words to John. But what did he do? He went to his Father God with a heart full of thanksgiving. He accepted God’s sovereignty. God is the ruler of heaven and earth. He is the one who reveals Jesus. He thanked his Father, Lord of heaven and earth for revealing the secrets of the kingdom to his humble, childlike disciples rather than to the sophisticated intellectuals. Instead of focusing on the unbelief and violence and injustice in the world, he looked and saw what God was doing in the lives of a few people. He rejoiced with his Father God, **“Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do.”** And he was joyful in God. He was thankful and prayerful.

Second, he rejoiced in his personal love relationship with God his Father. Read verse 27. **“All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one**

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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.” Jesus had a deep love relationship with his Father. To know God and be known by him is a life-giving relationship. This is the real source of Jesus’ joy. It is this water of eternal life that he wants to share with his disciples. The Son chooses to reveal the Father to his disciples. It is because he loves them. This is the most important thing he can do for them, for to know God the Father and Jesus the Son is to have eternal life. Lord, you know me better than I know myself. I want to know you. (Jn 17:2-3, 6)

Third, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened...” Jesus is gentle and humble. Anyone can come to him and not feel despised or threatened. Gentle Jesus invites us, whoever we are to “Come to me.” We don’t have to clean up our lives before we come. He invites us to come just as we are. He doesn’t invite us because we are smart or pretty or talented or able. He invites us because he loves us. Who is qualified to come to him? No one. But he invites each one of us. Especially, he invites the weary and burdened to come to him. We are burdened by our sins. We are weary because we have no peace. He shed his blood on the cross so that I might be forgiven. He rose again on the third day and won the victory over sin and death. He invites me to come to him, lay down my burden of sin and accept his grace of forgiveness. He says, “I will give you rest.” Before the fall of man, humankind enjoyed God and his creation in his perfect, harmonious world. The Sovereign God ruled; spiritual order prevailed. This is the peace, the Shalom, of the garden and of the first Sabbath. It is the peace that was in the garden before sin came in. Humankind enjoyed harmony with God and with his creation. This peace was broken when human beings sinned. When our sins are forgiven by Jesus’ shed blood, broken relationships are healed. Peace and real rest is restored.

“I will give you rest.” He promises to give his rest, his peace to those who come. This is what every person seeks deep in his heart. The peace Jesus gives is different from the peace the world talks about. Jesus promised, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives." People have different ways of seeking peace. Some seek peace by staying busy; or surfing the net, or by going on exotic vacations; some by sleeping a lot; some through drugs or alcohol; some seek peace in a relationship. (the last time I spoke I told this story, but I can't resist telling it again.) Laura Hillenbrand wrote a New York Times best seller entitled Unbroken: A WWII story of survival, resilience and redemption. It was about Louis Zamperini, an Olympic runner. He joined the Air Force in WWII. His plane crashed. He survived. After 45 days on a rubber raft, fighting sharks, thirst and hunger he was blown by a typhoon onto an island in the Pacific. He became a prisoner of war. He stubbornly refused to be broken by a sadistic guard

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who beat him, tormented him, humiliated him and tried to dehumanize him. He survived and came home, but he was filled with hatred. He became an alcoholic. He couldn't hold a job. Because of terrible headaches and nightmares, one night he almost choked his wife, so she decided to divorce him. His tormentor visited him in his dreams every night. Finally, he determined to save his money and go back to Japan and find and kill the man who had ruined his life. Then, he thought he could find peace. At that time, a Billy Graham Crusade opened in his hometown of Torrance, California. His wife persuaded him to go. He heard Jesus' invitation, "Come to me." He tried to run away. Then, he remembered something he had forgotten. He was lying on the rubber raft. The sun was blazing hot. The ocean was calm. He feel his life ebbing of his body. He was dying of thirst. He prayed, "Save me God, and I'll serve you forever." Suddenly, gentle rain began to fall. On that clear night in California he could hear and feel the rain. That night in the Crusade tent he turned back and he came to Jesus. He went home and poured all his liquor down the drain. He dumped his stash of porno material in the garbage. God's peace came to his heart. Hatred left and he could forgive his tormentor. His nightmares stopped. He did go back to Japan. It was for the 1984 summer Olympics, to carry the Olympic torch and to face and forgive his tormentors. Louie had sought peace in alcohol, then in hatred and revenge. But he found that only the peace that Jesus gives is real peace. **“Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest.”**

Fourth, "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." A "yoke" has a bad connotation. Most of us don't like the idea of being yoked to anyone or anything. We want to be free. But as a matter of fact, we are yoked to the world, to our sins, to rules and habits of our own making. We are not free. This is why we are weary and burdened. A yoke is a piece of wood that fits over the necks of two oxen. It enables them to pull a load together. The younger, inexperienced ox learns from the older ox how to pull the load. Jesus invites us to take his yoke and find rest for our souls. When we are yoked to Jesus we can learn his mind and heart and grow in his likeness. Jesus' yoke is a yoke of grace. He sets us free from the yoke of the law. He tells us, **“Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls.”** He invites us to a life of discipleship. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a young pastor and student in Germany. He accepted the Bible as God's word. When he read the Sermon on the Mount, he realized that Jesus calls every believer to be a disciple of Jesus. A disciple is one believes and obeys Jesus. He is yoked to Jesus by grace. In the terrible times in which Dietrich Bonhoeffer lived, he learned to listen to Jesus and obey him. By God's grace he was set free from bondage to sin. God's grace is not cheap. He was

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set free from the yoke of law. He overcame fear. Since no one can live the Sermon on the Mount perfectly, he learned to come to Jesus with a humble heart, accept his grace and find rest for his soul. Jesus’ disciples are people who have taken his yoke and learn from him. Paul said, **“Have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus.”** When I come to him each day I can learn his gentle, humble heart and grow in his likeness.