

Preacher: Reuben Capill

Date: 07/11/2021

Reading: Matthew 11:28-30

Title: Gentle and Lowly: The Heart of Jesus

Introduction

As we move into Advent, as we prepare for Christmas, we celebrate Immanuel: God with us, Christ come down to us. But this year, as we lead into Christmas, we want to prepare a little differently from other times. Over the next couple of months, we want to focus our eyes on Christ and his heart toward us. We want to ask the question, *who is he?* This God-man, Jesus, who came to be with us, who came to rescue us – who is he? What's he like? Perhaps you know what Jesus has done for you – you understand important doctrines like the incarnation and atonement – but do you also live with a deep awareness of his innermost heart for you, every day amidst your sinfulness?

I wonder if you've ever tried to tell someone about your husband or wife, or about your siblings or your parents or your kids or your best friend. I wonder if you've ever tried to put into words what that relationship is like. What do you say? I mean, I could tell you that my wife Sjaan has blonde hair and blue eyes. I could tell you what she does, that she's a mother and a jeweller. I could tell you about her hobbies and interests, her love of music and art and making things. I could tell you the movies she does and doesn't like. I could tell you about her family, her parents and her brothers. I could tell you that we've been married for 8 years and that we've developed a wonderful deep friendship over those years.

But to be honest, none of that information really feels like enough. It doesn't really sum up who Sjaan is. It doesn't capture the relationship I have with her. There's something deeper than all of this which is hard to put my finger on. The thousands of moments we've shared together over the past decade, every conversation and argument and experience that has been binding us together in a relationship that I really can't describe with words... and yet I can see and feel it in the way she looks at me and trusts me and cares for me.

Sometimes as Christians, as people who come to church often, we can find ourselves speaking about Jesus in some sort of factual, theoretical way, where we often focus on what he has done for us (which is really important)... and yet we can forget in some deeper sense that *he's a real person, with a real heart, who we're in real relationship with every day, through all the real life issues of sin and struggle*. And when this happens, whether we put this barrier up intentionally or without even realizing it, our Christian faith tends to become stunted and shallow and dry. We can be like a husband who books a table for two at the restaurant for Friday evening, puts on a nice suit, buys a red rose... but then instead of inviting his wife along, he sits there alone with a piece of paper, covered in facts and information about his wife. And then we wonder why our faith feels dry, irrelevant, lacking in joy. We wonder why those other 'more mature' Christians seem so excited about this Jesus-guy. We wonder how Paul can get so excited in Philippians 3 about 'the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.'

So that's really our goal in this sermon series: *to dive deeper into who Jesus is, in the deepest core of his being*. We're going to go on a treasure hunt over the next 8 weeks, digging through various passages in the Bible as we try to appreciate and reflect on and grow in our love for who Christ is. And as we do this, we're going to be drawing inspiration from a great little book called *Gentle and Lowly*, written by Dane Ortlund. If you haven't seen this book before, I highly recommend it. It's full of nice short chapters, quite devotional, not too hard to read, and full of beautiful truths. You can

get it from Koorong or Reformers bookshops for about \$22, or the eBook for \$15. In this sermon series, Jack, Jed and I are looking forward to unpacking some of the ideas in this book with you.

Let me give you a taster, just to whet your appetite. Here's how it begins.

'This book is written for the discouraged, the frustrated, the weary, the disenchanted, cynical, the empty. Those running on fumes. Those whose Christian lives feel like constantly running up a descending escalator. Those of us who find ourselves thinking: "How could I mess up that bad—again?" It is for that increasing suspicion that God's patience with us is wearing thin. For those of us who know God loves us but suspect we have deeply disappointed him. Who have told others of the love of Christ yet wonder if—as for us—he harbors mild resentment. Who wonder if we have shipwrecked our lives beyond what can be repaired. Who are convinced we've permanently diminished our usefulness to the Lord. Who have been swept off our feet by perplexing pain and are wondering how we can keep living under such numbing darkness... It is written, in other words, for normal Christians. In short, it is for sinners and sufferers. How does Jesus feel about them?'

Well, what better place to begin our treasure hunt than in one of the most famous and beautiful passages in the whole Bible? In all the four gospels, full of hundreds of stories and teachings about Jesus, there's only one place where Jesus tells us about his very *heart*. There's only one place where Jesus says, let me describe my very heart to you. It's here in Matthew 11:28-30. Jesus says, 'Come to me, all you who are weary 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.'

We're going to look at these verses together in three parts. All three parts are right there in verse 28. First: come to me. That's the *invitation*. Second: all you who are weary and burdened. That's the *condition*. And third, I will give you rest. That's the *promise*. An invitation, a condition, and a promise.

Let's begin with the invitation.

The Invitation

Jesus says, Come to me. *Come - to me*.

Come. What welcoming words! What a warm invitation! Doesn't it make you think of arms wide open, of a face wrinkled up with a smile, a tone of voice that's soft and wise and gentle? This isn't the angry parent who calls, 'Reuben Samuel Capill, come here.' This is the wooing call of a lover.

Come – to *me*. Isn't that striking? To *me*. To a person. Not, come to a set of rules and laws. Not, come to church. Come to *me*. That's what makes Christianity so different to any other religion: come to *me*. Come to a relationship with a real person.

But who is he? Well, let's look at the verse before, v27. '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.' Who is he? He's the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, the one who knows the Father! Knows him because he's one with him! Jesus is the God of all glory, utterly holy and set apart and unique from anything else in all creation. And he says, 'All things have been committed to me by my Father.' So he's the one with all authority and all power! You could search the history books, you could scan the red carpets, but you'll never find someone more exalted, more dignified, more worthy of honour... than this man.

And yet, in the very next breath, he says these staggering words: 'Come to me... for I am gentle and humble in heart.' Honestly, who of us saw that coming? Not, I am holy and powerful. Not, I am wise and worthy of your worship. He could have said that... but he doesn't. He says, I am gentle and lowly in heart.

It's important for us to remember that in the Bible, your heart isn't just your emotions. It's the centre of who you are, it's the core of your being, it drives everything you do. And here in this verse, Jesus unzips his flesh and lets us peer inside. What is his heart? What is he at his core? 'I am gentle and lowly in heart.'

Gentle. It means to be tender. Understanding. Humble. Jesus isn't a harsh task master with a whip. He hasn't come looking for slave labour. No, he's come to be the servant. He's come with tenderness to help. And Jesus says, I'm *humble*. Or perhaps better, I'm lowly. It's the idea of having a lowly status, of taking a low position. In other words, Jesus is saying, I'm approachable. I'm accessible. You can come to me because I'm lowly.

Is that how you think of Jesus? Gentle, tender, lowly, approachable? Perhaps you say, 'Well yeah, I guess so. I mean, I know he was willing to hang out with sinners. I know he made himself low, even to the point that he died for me.' And that's absolutely true! But Jesus is saying more than that. I don't want us to miss this. Jesus says, 'I am gentle and lowly *in heart*.' At his core, in his heart of hearts, in the deepest part of who he is... that's the part of him that longs for you to come near.

Think about it. What is Jesus' attitude to us in our sin? What emotions does he feel when he sees you going yet another day without really praying to him or relying on his Word? What does he long to do when he sees me drowning in my sin, screwing up yet again? Sure, we know that he wades in to rescue us... but *what's his heart, what's his attitude, as he does this?* Does he wade in reluctantly? Does he reach out tentatively, cringingly, begrudgingly – like you might do when dealing with your child's nasty nappy?

Jesus says, in my very heart, I am gentle and lowly. Rescuing sinners and strugglers is what I *delight* to do!

When children are adopted into a new family, it can take them years to learn that their new parents really do love them and really can be trusted. After years of hurt and mistreatment and being let down, these children have sometimes been hard-wired to expect betrayal, disappointment, and rejection. Or perhaps to expect help, but only out of some sort of condescending pity. Not out of a lowly heart that bursts with genuine tenderness and love.

One of our goals in this sermon series is to challenge how we think about Christ, and about the Father who has adopted us into his family. We want to examine the subconscious thoughts we have about Jesus, and to ask whether they're accurate. Whether our view of Jesus is shaped by Scripture, by who he says he is, or whether it's shaped by our own broken experiences of how the world works... shaped by decades of living in a world where powerful people abuse the poor, where forgiveness is always something we're reluctant to offer, where charity is always infused with selfish motives.

Jesus invites us this morning to take him at his word. I am gentle and lowly in heart. And so he invites us to come to him.

But now, who's invited? What are the conditions that need to be met in order to come to Jesus? That brings us to our second point.

The Condition

Jesus says, Come to me, *all you who are weary and burdened*.

As you hear this sermon, perhaps there's a niggling question in your mind: what about Jesus' anger and judgement? Perhaps you're unconvinced by all this talk of Jesus' tenderness and approachability. Is this a wonky, wimpy, one-sided view of Jesus? It's a good question. That's why we need to think about these words: come to me, *all you who are weary and burdened*. There's a condition here. Who does Jesus invite to come? Who is he gentle towards?

Jump back a couple of verses to v25. Jesus is praying, and he says, '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*.' Do you see the contrast? Group 1, the wise and learned: they don't see Jesus or the kingdom he is bringing. God hides himself from them! They're the evil, unrepentant, stubborn cities that Jesus talks about in verses 20-24... and Jesus says, Woe to you, because a terrible judgement is coming. So whatever we make of this gentle and lowly King, we can't say he's a spineless pushover, can we?

But then there's group 2. Jesus calls them, 'little children.' I happen to have a little child, and I can tell you, they're very precious, but boy are they helpless! Their lives are a mess! They're constantly on the brink of tears and tantrums, after even the smallest setback. They're endlessly in need of help, to give them food and drink, to put their shoes on, to tidy up their messes, to clean their bodies, to tell them when to sleep, what to touch, where to go. And Jesus says, they're the ones I've come for. I haven't come for the wise and learned, the self-sufficient, the proud, the religious know-it-all. I've come for the people who are like little children. The messy, the helpless. The weary. The burdened.

The word for weary is an active word. It's the person who is exhausted from always working, hustling, trying, smoothing, striving. Trying to hold it together, trying to be good enough, trying to be someone, trying not to be a failure, as a mother, at school with your friends, in your career, in your family... trying to find truth, trying to relieve a troubled conscience, trying to break free. Can you relate?

The word 'burdened' is more passive. It's the person who's weighed down by things outside of their control. Hurting, broken, helpless. Damaged by sin. Worn down by suffering. Scarred by life. In Matthew 23:4, Jesus scolds the religious leaders who 'tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people's shoulders.' Perhaps the burden you're carrying is a religious burden, an unshakable feeling that God is constantly disappointed with you, that you're failing as a Christian because you're not meeting his required level of obedience.

What does Jesus say? With open arms and a heart of love, he says, *Come*. Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened. *All*. Every single situation. Every person. Every burden. What's the condition for coming to Jesus? Just one: *you've come to the end of yourself*. You've come to the end of yourself. You're ready to say, O Lord, I'm not wise and learned. I don't have it all together. I'm weary! I feel like a failure. I've been trying to be good enough for you, but I just can't. I've been hustling out in the world, trying to create a life where I'm happy and successful, and it's not working. Have you come to the end of yourself?

If you have, then you need to know that Jesus is with us in this room this morning, through his Holy Spirit. And he isn't annoyed with you, disappointed with you, tired of you. It's actually quite the opposite. His heart goes out to you. He is gentle and approachable and delighted that at last, like a little children, you've come to him for help.

There's nothing you need to do before you come. You don't need to make any payment. He's already done that on the cross when he bore all of God's wrath, all of our guilt, all the consequences of our sin. You don't need to clean yourself up before you come. As Dane Ortland says, 'Your very burden is what qualifies you to come!' This is what makes Christianity so utterly unique and wonderful! The gentle and lowly Saviour has already taken the initiative and come to us, he has removed every barrier... and now he is crying out to the world, to Launceston, to you and me this morning: *come home. Just come.*

That brings us to our third and final point. We'll finish here: what happens when we come? What does Jesus promise?

The Promise

Jesus says, 'Come to me, all you who are weary 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.'

How does that work? Rest sounds nice, definitely. But what does he mean, take my yoke upon you and learn from me? A yoke was a heavy crossbar that was strapped onto the shoulders of an oxen so it could drag farming equipment through the field. It hardly sounds restful, does it? Jesus doesn't say, take my seat. Or take my mattress. He isn't calling us to a lazy life of lying around. The Christian life isn't free from pain and hardship. In another place, Jesus even calls us to take up our cross and be willing to suffer for him.

So how can Jesus say, I'll give you rest? Well, have a look at v30: 'My yoke is easy and my burden is light.' This life of being yoked to Jesus, of learning from Jesus, of being his disciple, his follower... Jesus says, it's easy. It's light. Coming to him, following him, serving him... it won't burden you! It won't make you weary! That's an intriguing thing to say. How's that possible?

Because the rest Jesus gives us is *soul-rest*. 'You will find rest for *your souls*,' he says. That's what's missing when we try to do life on our own, isn't it? Deep inside, at the centre of our beings, we don't have rest. We don't have peace or security. We're working from a place of needing to prove ourselves, needing to persuade God to love us. Needing to protect our families and finances from whatever the future might bring – because otherwise, who knows? Needing to work harder and do better because otherwise, God forbid, we might look back on our lives with regrets, we might turn 40 or 50 or 60 and feel like we've failed.

Do you see how incredible it would be to know that the God of the universe, the creator and adjudicator and assessor of your life, isn't frowning on you or frustrated with you? That he isn't breathing down your neck with his tape measure out, always measuring how high you can jump? That instead, he has come alongside you with a heart full of love and gentleness, he has accepted you, and instead of saying, 'jump higher,' he picks you up in his arms and lifts you over the bar?

I want to finish with an illustration that isn't my own, I stole it from one of my favourite preachers, Adam Ramsey. Some of you will remember that classic old film, Chariots of Fire. It tells the story of two runners who are preparing for the Olympics in Paris, especially the 100 meters. One guy is called Harold Abrahams, and the other guy is a devout Christian called Eric Liddell. And at one point in the movie, Harold Abrahams say this about why he runs. He says, 'I will raise my eyes and look down that corridor; 4 feet wide, with 10 lonely seconds to justify my whole existence.' 10 seconds to justify my whole existence. And then later in the movie, Eric Liddell says this: 'I believe

God has made me for a purpose, but he also made me fast. And when I run, I feel his pleasure.' When I run, I feel his pleasure.

Do you see the difference? Harold is running to prove himself, he's running to be someone, to justify his whole existence. If only I can get my life together and achieve this, then I'll find rest and peace. But Eric is different. He's still running! But he's running from a place of acceptance, from a place of rest. He's already made it, he's already accepted by God. So he isn't running to prove himself. He's running because he wants to glorify the awesome God who loves him... the God who made him fast.

That's what Jesus is promising us in this passage. Come to him, cast all your burdens on him, and then every day, learn from him, more and more, what it means to experience God's endless love as you live for him. That's soul-rest.

I don't know what it is this morning that might be stopping you from coming to Jesus and rest in him. Maybe you don't think you're good enough. Maybe you don't think he really wants you. Maybe you're not willing to give up your dignity and your hard work. Maybe you're in denial that you really are weary and burdened. Whatever it is, whether you're not yet a Christian or you've been a Christian for a long time, I urge you: *come to Jesus!* He's gentle and lowly, and he delights to give rest to burdened sinners like you and me.