

Matthew 11 • “I will give you rest”

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Matthew chapter 11 is where we are so open your Bible there. Matthew 11.
Let's begin with prayer.

Oh, Heavenly Father, we thank You that we can come into Your presence. We thank You God for Your Word. We thank You that we can worship You freely and Lord, we just pray that Your Holy Spirit would minister the Word to each heart.

Lord, we just want to be receivers today and so we ask You to help us. And we ask it in Jesus name, amen. Amen.

You'll remember you guys in the previous chapter, Matthew chapter 10, Jesus gave instructions to His closest followers before he sent them out to do ministry. I would call chapter 10, the mission discourse.

Now we move on to chapter 11. It begins by saying, *“When Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in their cities.”*

² *Now when John (and this is John the Baptist) heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples ³ and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?”” (ESV)*

I want you to pause there with me for just a moment so we can talk about this, because this question that John the Baptist posed through his followers to Jesus really troubles some people. And I think a lot of people have a hard time thinking, how in the world could this man John the Baptist, who received so much revelation from God, and had such faith, and baptized so many people, including Jesus, how could he possibly waver in his confidence related to the identity of the Messiah?

I mean, isn't this the same man who was given supernatural signs when it comes to identifying Jesus? Check this out on the screen from John chapter 1. It says,

John 1:32-34 (ESV)

And John bore witness: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."

And John bore witness: (he says) "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' (and look at this last line) And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."

Wow! That's pretty direct, pretty absolute. I mean, it sounds like this is a testimony that would come out of the mouth from someone who could never possibly be shaken.

But I want to remind you of 3 things, and I think there are fairly important things related to this question that John now asks Jesus. Are You the one? Are You the one? Or should we wait? Should we keep searching? Should we keep waiting? And so forth.

I want to remind you, first of all, that John was a man. He was a man with all of the same susceptibilities and vulnerabilities that you and I have. He was a fallible human being and that's just important to understand.

And you know what? Prison can have a pretty powerful impact on someone's outlook on life. Just set somebody in prison for a while and it can get pretty challenging. And that's really the second thing that I want to bring out.

You'll remember that King Herod had arrested John for publicly saying that his marriage was unbiblical and ungodly. And so he'd been arrested, thrown into prison where he by the way, will end his earthly life, and he probably knows that.

But the third thing I want you to be reminded of is that John was a Jew and as a Jew, John would have been raised with all of the typical expectations as it relates to the Messiah. And what they were taught that the Messiah would do when he arrived on the scene.

And I got to tell you something, Jesus didn't meet their expectations because they had a completely different set of expectations and you know why. We've

talked about this many times. Because the Jews tended to leapfrog over any passage about the Messiah that spoke of His suffering and they went right to the glory part, because that's the fun part. Everybody wants to hang out at the glory stage of things and that's what the Jews did.

And so Jesus didn't meet their expectations. And so John would have been raised with all of those same expectations related to the Messiah. They thought the Messiah would come, boom, He would just take care of Rome and He would establish the kingdom of Israel on the world stage as the dominant force of what God was doing.

And of course, that's all going to happen, but it hasn't happened yet. It's going to happen in the future, but they thought that was good. That was, to them, that was the first coming of Messiah. They didn't see His coming in two stages. We know it now as in two stages, but the Jews didn't know that.

And so John is now questioning whether this is the guy. Are you the guy, and I want you to pay close attention to what, how Jesus responds. And it's in verses 4 and 5 and 6 And this is very important.

He says, *“⁴ And Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John (look at this) what you hear and see:”* That's very important right there. And then he goes on to just elaborate.

He says, look guys, *“⁵ the blind receive their sight and 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. ⁶ And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.”*

Do you see what Jesus is doing here? Because this is really important. He's pointing John back to the Scriptures that John knows so well. And that's, I think that's really important. He's specifically pointing it back to the Scriptures that foretold what would happen when the Messiah came upon the scene, and He's specifically referring to select passages from the Book of Isaiah.

And the first passage that we're going to look at here, as I remind you of some of these Old Testament passages, is a passage that Jesus Himself read in the synagogue, and after reading it, said, In your hearing, this prophecy is fulfilled. (Luke 4:21) Here it is up on the screen, from Isaiah chapter 61.

Isaiah 61:1 (ESV)

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound...

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound...

And then there's passages like Isaiah 29. That says,

Isaiah 29:18 (ESV)

In that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see.

In that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see.

And then you've also got Isaiah chapter 35, 5 and 6.

Isaiah 35:5-6 (ESV)

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.

And guys, this is just a sampling from one book of the Bible. It talks about some of the things that would happen during the ministry of Messiah.

And so the answer to a shaken confidence is go back to the Word. Go back to the Word and revisit the promises of God. Do you know that's still the answer today, you guys, to a shaken confidence? Go back to the Word. Go back to the Word.

A number of years ago I had a gal in our fellowship got visited by some J-dubs, some Jehovah's Witnesses. And, she started a conversation with them about the deity of Christ and what ended up happening is they shook her confidence. Because, they're practiced in that area of denying the deity of Jesus Christ, and she was like, no. And she never really gave on to them that she was a little shaken, but she came to me and said, okay, now let's talk, sort of thing.

And you got to go back to the Word, just go back to the Scriptures, because it's clear. It's right there. And I like how this is just such a simple sort of a deal here, sort of an effort. Just go back to the Word.

Verse 7, look with me in your Bible. *“As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? (He asked) A reed shaken by the wind? ⁸ What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? (He says) Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. ⁹ What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰ This is he of whom it is written, (and here He's going to quote a passage in Malachi)*

*“Behold, I send my messenger before your face,
who will prepare your way before you.”*

And He says, *“¹¹ Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. ¹² From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. ¹³ For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, ¹⁴ and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. ¹⁵ He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”* Let's stop there for a moment, we have quite a bit to unpack from these verses.

Jesus, you'll notice begins by acknowledging and confirming that John was indeed a prophet. He says, who'd you go out to see, a prophet? Yep, you did. But not just a prophet, Jesus said, he's more than a prophet. And the reason He says that is because John had the unique privilege of being the forerunner of the Messiah.

He was the one who got to go right before Jesus and prepare the hearts of Israel to receive their King by baptizing them in water and getting them to confess their sins.

But verse 11 is an interesting one where Jesus says, *“Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist.”*

Okay, so he stands shoulder to shoulder with all the other Old Testament prophets. He says there's none greater and that includes Elijah, Elisha, and all the rest. He says none greater than John.

Yet He goes on to say that, *“the one who is least in the kingdom of”* God is greater than he, which would mean, would be greater than all of the Old Testament prophets. And this is a really interesting statement. It's what we call, a contrasting statement. And Jesus is contrasting, really, the benefits of the two covenants: the Old Covenant and the New Covenant.

Of course, the Old Covenant is the one which highlighted the law of Moses. The one that was given through Moses, but when we talk about the New Covenant, we're talking about the one inaugurated by Jesus Himself at the last supper, when He served up the bread and the wine. He said, this is the cup of the New Covenant and so forth from that point on.

And He's telling us about the superiority of the benefits of the New Covenant and sometimes we don't think of it that way. But guys, do you know how much better you have it than the people who are under the Old Covenant? Do you know how much better the covenant that you are under is than the one they were under?

Do you carry that on it in your heart day to day and do you think about it? Man, I'm so good. Sometimes I think people think, it'd be fun to live back in the Old Testament days. Oh goodness gracious. No, thank you. No, thank you. I love living under the New Covenant. And the superiority of the benefits of the covenant is something that the writer or the author of the Book of Hebrews really spends the entirety of his letter talking about. Let me show you one passage from Hebrews chapter 8 on the screen. He says,

Hebrews 8:6-7 (ESV)

...as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second.

...as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on (look at this, on) better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, (and if it was

everything we needed he says,) *there would have been no occasion to look for a second.* (one)

Right? But God promised a New Covenant, even back in the Old Testament, as we've talked about many times. And as great as John was, he lived under the Old Covenant, and his benefits were under the Old Covenant. And I want you to think about this. John was never born again in the way that you have been.

John never received the indwelling of the Holy Spirit the way you have. Because you see, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit never took place until after Jesus's death, burial, and resurrection. It was only after Jesus paid the price of our sin, and the vessel, if you will, was cleansed, that the Holy Spirit could now come and take up residence in a person.

But John died from the scene before the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. He was never born again the way you've been born again. And the benefits that you have are better than him. And that's why Jesus said, "*the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.*" It's a pretty amazing statement.

Now, verse 12, I got to tell you is a challenging statement. This is where Jesus says, *From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence*, (you'll notice the ESV says) *and* (it goes on to say) *the violent take it by force.*"

One of the challenges in interpreting this verse is that there's some fairly complex language that's being used here. And whereas the ESV says, "*the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence.*" The NIV renders this as, "*the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing*" or "*violently advancing.*" And frankly, both of those renderings are possible.

You read the scholars as they write on this particular verse, and they'll say, well, both of those could be. And Jesus says, "*the violent, take it by force.*" And I got to be honest with you, Bible scholars are divided on whether this violence is a good thing or a bad thing. Some of them say that it's a bad thing. Some of them say that it's a good thing. And you know what that tells you. It tells you, we really don't know because they're having a hard time agreeing on it. And because the tense of the Greek can go either way.

But Luke's recording of this very same statement seems to be in favor of the positive nuance. Let me show you this on the screen. Luke 16, he says, or he records Jesus as saying,

Luke 16:16 (ESV)

“The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone forces his way into it.”

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But again, even what Jesus meant as recorded by Luke, that “*everyone forces his way into it*” is unfortunately unknown. And so we deal with a verse here in the Bible that's very challenging.

I was talking with my son the other day, they popped over to the house and were chatting. And we were just talking about the Bible and how much we don't know about what the things that the Bible says. And I told him, what I learned even back in college, and that is the more you learn about the Bible, or the more you study the Bible, the more you realize what you don't know. In fact, I had a professor in college who looked at all of us wet behind the ear people and he said, I don't know more than all of you. Think about that for a second. Anyway, let's move on.

Then we come to this final statement about John in verse 13, where Jesus says “*For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, ...*” In other words, what Jesus is saying is, John marked the end of that prophetic voice that began throughout the course of the Old Testament. John is the end of that. Right. And that era of the Old Covenant prophecies.

And then He goes on to say, “¹⁴*and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah* (some Bible translate this as, *he is the Elijah*) *who is to come.* ¹⁵*He who has ears to hear, let him hear.*” And I'll tell you here in a minute why some people translate that as, “*he is the Elijah*” because Jesus is referring here when He says, “*he is Elijah.*” He's saying he's referring to a prophecy in Malachi chapter 4. Let me put it on the screen. Goes like this,

Malachi 4:5-6 (ESV)

“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.”

“Behold, (now, remember, this is the last book of the Old Testament, Behold) I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the

LORD comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.”

You read that in ESV and you think, well, it sounds like that could apply to John the Baptist. Well, here's the deal. You got to remember a little bit of your biblical history, and that is, first of all, Elijah was an Old Testament prophet who lived during the times of the kings of Israel. He was a man who was unique in the sense that he never experienced physical death. He was simply taken up to be with the Lord, without dying. Pretty crazy. One of about two people to which that happened.

And as we saw that Malachi prophesied in the verse we put up on the screen, is that he would do a work to return the hearts of the people back to the Lord. And Jesus again says that John here qualified as a fulfillment of that prophecy.

However we have reason to believe that John was not the final fulfillment of that prophecy. He is a fulfillment, but not the final. And I'll tell you why. And there's basically two reasons to believe that Elijah will still return at the second coming of Jesus.

And the first reason is because something that the angel said, you'll remember an angel appeared to John's father who was a priest and who was in the temple. And he was burning incense, as a priest, and an angel appeared to him, freaked him out and started speaking to him about the son that his wife was going to have. And of course, Zechariah was like, dude, my wife is way past Bible or rather baby bearing days, childbearing. My wife is way too old to have a baby.

And anyway, you guys probably know the basic story, but let me remind you on the screen of what the angel actually said. It's recorded in Luke chapter 1. It says,

Luke 1:16-17 (ESV)

“And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.”

“And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him (Messiah) in (look at this) the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, (you can see some of the same

language used in Malachi 4) *and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.*”

Did you notice that? He would go before the Messiah *“in the spirit and power of Elijah”* according to this angel that appeared to John's dad. All right. Very important that you see that. But I want you to notice it does not say he will be Elijah. *“...he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah.”* Here's the other issue that you have to deal with. John denied being Elijah. Again, up on the screen from John chapter 1.

John 1:19-21 (ESV)

...when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, “I am not the Christ.” And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.”

...when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, “I am not (the Messiah) the Christ.” And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” (and) He said, “I am not.”

Okay, the plot thickens. It's pretty interesting, isn't it? Well, finally, there's one last reason to believe that Elijah is yet to come. And that's found in that original passage that we looked at from Malachi. Let me do that up on the screen again. We already looked at this, but I want you to notice the language. It says,

Malachi 4:5-6 (ESV)

“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.”

“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.”

Now, you and I, we use the word awesome to mean really cool. That's awesome, man. But that's not the tense of this particular word in the original language. In fact, let me show you this first of all in the NIV. This is interesting.

Malachi 4:5 (NIV84)

“See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes.”

“See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes.”

That's what awesome means. It means dreadful. And then the New American Standard Bible (NASB) does the same thing.

Malachi 4:5 (NIV84)

“See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes.”

Malachi 4:5 (NASB 2020)

Behold, I'm going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD.”

Behold, I'm going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the (look at this) great and terrible day of the LORD.”

I got to tell you something. None of these descriptions fit the first coming of Jesus. It was not terrible or dreadful. In fact, we're about to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, which is the most wonderful thing that could have ever happened to us. We received the greatest gift that God could ever give. That wasn't terrible. That wasn't dreadful.

But can I just tell you, when Jesus comes the second time, it's going to be terrible, and it's going to be dreadful for many. And I also want to remind you that when Jesus quoted this verse earlier here in Matthew, He left off this part about the terrible day of the Lord.

And so I believe that what we're dealing with here is one more example of what we call, the law of double reference. And we've talked about this and we've run into it many times in the Old Testament. Let me put this description up on the screen for you to remind you that,

The Law of Double Reference is the tendency of biblical prophecy to refer to two events or people simultaneously — one relevant to the general time of the prophecy and the other relating to the distant future.

The Law of Double Reference is the tendency of biblical prophecy to refer to two events or people simultaneously — one relevant to the general time of the prophecy and the other relating to the distant future.

And there are several Old Testament passages that we have noted throughout the course of our study through the Old Testament that fit this whole idea of having a near and a far fulfillment. And I believe John was the more near partial fulfillment of the coming of Elijah, but Elijah himself will return in body before the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And it will actually be Elijah.

Notice that Jesus goes on in verse 16 to say, *“But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their playmates,*

¹⁷ “‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, (which is a funeral song) and you did not mourn.’

¹⁸ For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’

¹⁹ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ (and then He says this) Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds.”

And what Jesus is saying here is that this generation of people, it just couldn't be pleased. That just didn't matter. Didn't matter. John came along and he fasted most of the time and when he was eating, it was locusts and honey. And they thought, well, that's weird. The guy obviously has a demon.

And Jesus comes along eating and drinking and in doing so with notorious sinners. And they go, yeah, that guy's a glutton and a sinner. And He's basically telling them that they simply had a heart to criticize. I don't know if you can relate to that or not. Have you ever met somebody who just had a critical spirit? I mean, they just, that's all they can do is criticize.

They, the sky can't be blue enough. The sun can't shine bright enough for them. It's just, life is not good. And they criticize everything. And that's the heart of the people that Jesus characterized when He came. And yet, He said this at the end, *“Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds.”* And what that means is that real wisdom, regardless of how people may criticize it, it's going to ultimately be recognized by what it produces.

And so what that means is sometimes you won't know how good something was or how wise something was until much later on. You know what always amazes

me is the ratings that the news services come out and give to our sitting presidents. I've lived long enough now to see several presidents come into office. And I can tell you that I can look back now and I can remember when their ratings just tanked. And everybody was just like, what an idiot, get him out of the white house now, or we're all going to die. And that's the attitude, it's like the president's ratings were at an all-time low.

And then you give it about 25 years, 30 years, and we're like, we're hailing this guy as, practically like a savior of the people. We were thinking back on the things that he did during his presidency back in the 70s or the 80s or something like that, and people are just like, what a guy he was. It's like, well, if you'd have been around when he was in the white house, you wouldn't have always thought that. So sometimes you got to wait. Sometimes you got to wait to find out what somebody did if the benefits were real or genuine, you don't see things right away.

We give a president like 4 years, 8 tops to fulfill all of his promises. And then we give them these horrible ratings when they don't do them all or whatever. And it's just sometimes you got to give it time. All right.

Verse 20. Let's keep going. *“Then he began to denounce the cities where most of his mighty works had been done, because they did not repent.”*²¹ *“Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.”*

And I want to remind you that Tyre and Sidon were pagan cities. They were coastal cities of Phoenicia and wildly paganistic. In fact, Baal worship came out of the Phoenician cities of Tyre and Sidon, when Ahab married Jezebel. She was a Phoenician princess and she brought Baal worship into Israel.

But yet Jesus said, if the miracles that were done in these places here in Israel had been done in ancient Phoenicia, they would have repented. They would have gotten down on their face.

Verse 22, *“But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you.”*²³ *And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? (He says) You will be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.”* In other words, it never would have been destroyed.

“²⁴ But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you.” Jesus is, these are really strong statements here. Even bringing up Sodom, and Sodom has become synonymous with the most heinous, vile kinds of sin that you can imagine. And yet, He says they would have repented if they'd have seen the things that these other Jewish cities saw.

And so the bottom line here is there's a greater responsibility that goes along with seeing and hearing. You might want to think about that because of the fact that you're sitting in church right now. You're hearing things right from the Word of God and there's more responsibility that goes along when you hear, and when you know. And that means you can't stand before the Lord and say, I never heard that. That's a new one to me. He might just play back the tape for you.

Finally, verse 25. *“At that time Jesus declared, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding (other Bible translations say, the wise and learned) and revealed them to little children; ²⁶yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.”*

I want you to see here in these two verses that Jesus is revealing that the revelation of Jesus Himself comes to the humble heart that longs for truth. When He says that you've *“hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children;...”* He's not saying, that if you're 6 years old, you can get it. But if you're over, 10, you're probably going to struggle.

“Little ones” is a word that we've seen before in the Scripture that doesn't necessarily refer to little in stature. It's basically someone who is considered little in the eyes of the wise and learned. And He's saying essentially that, Lord, I just, I praise you that You have revealed Yourself to people who have a humble heart and have a desire to want to know the truth.

I believe within myself that anybody who wants to know the truth will receive the truth, will receive a revelation of the truth. Anybody. All you got to do is want to know. I really believe that with all my heart. And this is what Jesus is basically thanking the Father for doing; revealing these things to those whose hearts long to know.

And then He says in verse 27, *“All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one (look at this) knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”*

What we're learning now is that Jesus is the source of understanding. He's the way we get to know God. You want to know God? Go through Jesus. I mean, there's no big deal about that. That's exactly what, the writer of Hebrews starts off telling us and we've seen this other places in the Word of God.

But you might, you might come away from this and say, well, What if Jesus just simply decides one day He just doesn't want to reveal the Father to me? No. No. No. That's not how it works. There isn't just this random sort of a deal where He goes, okay, I'm going to reveal the Father to you, but not to you. And I don't like the way you comb your hair, and you dress weird, so you're out.

It's like I said, so who does Jesus reveal the Father to? The ones who desire to know the Father. You think He's going to turn away anybody who comes to Him in sincerity and wants to know God. He's not. Look what Jesus said is recorded in John chapter 6 up on the screen. He says,

John 6:37 (ESV)

"...whoever comes to me I will never cast out."

"...whoever comes to me I will never cast out."

You go to Jesus and you want to know, you want to know what God is like. You want to know that... He'll never cast you out. He'll never throw you away. He'll never say no. No. No. See, you weren't predestined. That's ridiculous. It's a ridiculous interpretation of the whole idea of predestination. It is not, you're not marked the lost and the saved. That's just simply not what the Bible says.

"...whoever comes to me (He says) I will never cast out." So you want to know about God? Come to Jesus. Just say, Jesus, teach me. Teach me all about the Father. I want to know about the Father. And as you think about that promise, *"...whoever comes to me I will never cast out,"* let's read these final verses.

This is verse 28. He says, *"Come to me, all 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."*

We've talked about these verses many times throughout the years, and they remain some of the most comforting verses in all of the Bible, where Jesus here talks about the illustration of a yoke. And I don't know, I'm sure most of you, know what a yoke is or what it, even what an ancient yoke looked like. I have a picture of what I'll put up on the screen.



And this was in the big loopy thing on the bottom there that went over the, that came up underneath the head of the animal. And the top of the yoke came across their shoulders, and you would hook your wagon, or plow or whatever. And there was a single yoke, like you see there. And then there were double yolks where you'd have two oxen who were pulling a plow, or a wagon, or something like that. Good grief. They'd be reusing yolks like that. Even as recent as when people came on the Oregon trail.

But here's the interesting part. I learned as I was studying this out that the Jews during Jesus's time would often use the idea of a yoke as a metaphor for a person's obligations to God. Isn't that interesting? Let me say that again. They used a yoke often as a metaphor to describe one's obligations to God.

So when you hear Jesus saying, "*Take my yoke upon you,*" you can think about it that way. He's differentiating between the calling, or the duty, or the task that comes from Him. And any other calling, duty, or task that we might put upon ourselves, or receive from other people, or receive from some religious system.

And I want you to notice what He says about His yoke. He says, it's easy. And He says the burden that comes from that yoke is light. Well, that is a fascinating statement, but there are several things I think to keep in mind about this statement.

And the first is, our Lord's description of an easy and light yoke should not be seen as a promise that life is going to always be easy because life is not easy. In fact, life is usually very hard, very difficult. And so you can't look at a promise like this and say, oh, well, Jesus promised me life is going to be a cakewalk. It's not what He said.

Secondly, I have come to believe that much of what Jesus was saying here when He spoke about His easy and light yoke was a response to the burdensome duties and tasks that were put upon the people by the Pharisees and the scribes. Because you'll remember, and Jesus talked about this, all of their man made rules and traditions that they heaped on the people, from God's Word it was a crushing burden upon the hearts of the people.

When we get to Matthew chapter 23, Jesus is going to talk about that. The way the leaders just heaped things on people that God never intended. Let me show you this on the screen from Matthew 23 verses 2 and 4. It says, this is Jesus speaking. He says,

Matthew 23:2, 4 (NIV84)

“The teachers of the law and the Pharisees... tie up heavy loads and put them on men’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.”

“The teachers of the law and the Pharisees... tie up heavy loads and put them on men’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.”

And, in other words, the religious system of the Jews got to the point where it was burdensome beyond the telling. It had a crushing weight to it, and Jesus comes along and He says, “Come to me.” “Come to me,” all of you who are weary and burdened. if religion, and by the way, religion is usually burdensome. I'll just tell you that.

And I've told you guys many times I suggest, my counsel is stay about as far away from religion as you can get. Draw near to Jesus, but pitch religion. Because most what comes under the category of religion is man-made like it was in Israel during the time of Jesus. And it has to do with traditions, and rules,

and things that we've come up in addition to the Word of God. But if you separate the man-made religion from the Gospel, which by the way, Gospel means good news.

You realize that what Jesus came to do for you and me, is easy and it's a light burden because He comes along and He says, listen, here's the deal. I'm going to do all the work. I'm going to die on the cross for your sins. And all you've got to do is put your faith and confidence in what I did on the cross followed by My resurrection, and you will be saved. And there's a lot of people who just can't deal with that. They're like, oh, that's too easy. There's got to be something else we got to do. There's got to be something.

And then Paul comes along and he says no, no, no, no. It's by grace through faith you've been saved. This not of yourselves. It's the gift of God. Lest anyone should boast, right? (Ephesians 2:8-9) Not by works. It's a gift. How many of you guys are going to be getting a gift here at Christmas? When's the last time you paid for a gift that you got? It would cease to be a gift at that point. A gift means, it's free, so salvation is free. My burden is easy and light, Jesus says.

But thirdly, I also believe that there is an expectation that whatever yoke might be given us by the Lord needs to be carried in the strength of the Lord. And that expectation is correct.

Do you guys remember what the apostle Paul... The apostle Paul worked hard and life was hard for the apostle Paul, really hard. I'm glad that I didn't get that ministry. I'll just be honest with you. Let me show you what Paul said, though, about the way he worked from Colossians chapter 1. He said,

Colossians 1:29 (ESV)

For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

You see when Jesus comes along and He says, take my yoke upon you, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light, there's an understanding here that we're going to operate in the power that He gives to deal with those very issues that we're called to deal with, right? Because I'm just here to tell you, and I've lived long enough, and I know you have too, most likely.

I've lived long enough to learn that when I try to serve the Lord or do the things the Lord tells me to do in the power of Paul, I fail every time. I don't have the goods. I just don't possess the goods to do it, to do what He's called me to do. I've been pastoring this church for over 34 years, and I can tell you right now, I never could have lasted this long. Sometimes I wonder if I can still last.

But I have to look back and just say, hey, it's the grace of God. It's the power. And we need to be able to say with Paul, for this I toil with all His strength, which works so powerfully in me. And that's why that yoke that He gives me is light, and that burden is easy. Because we do it in the power and the strength of the Lord. And how does that power of the Lord operate in our lives? Well, it says, God helps those who help themselves. It doesn't say that. It's not in the Bible.

You know how the power of God comes to Christians? Paul revealed it. 2 Corinthians 12:9, on the screen.

2 Corinthians 12:9 (ESV)

"...my power is made perfect in weakness."

"...my power (this is Jesus talking to Paul, my power) is made perfect in weakness."

You want the power of God? Get weak, stop trying to be the Christian hero and get weak and tell the Lord what He already knows. I can't do this, but You can through me, and I trust You. I trust that You'll do it through me.

I have watched over the years that promise played out so many times in my own life. Where I've had to get down on my knees and say, Lord, I can't do this. And the Lord always says the same thing. I know, I know you can't, and I've seen what you can do, but now I'm going to show you what I can do. And He strengthens me in ways that I could have never expected.

And why? Because He's faithful. He's faithful. And finally, Jesus wants us all to remember that weariness will come into our lives. From time to time, sometimes it's bone weariness. You ever been bone weary? That goes beyond just, I need to go to bed. Bone weariness is like, I think I'm going to die. Of course you don't, but we've all probably been there, and if you haven't, you will.

And He wants you to know that He knows that's going to happen. And when it does, all we need to do is remember His invitation. And that is, come to Me and I will give you rest, right? That's it. It's so simple, but so hard because we're so

thick headed. We think we got to do it ourselves. Grit our teeth be strong. Pull yourself up by your bootstraps all those other stupid things we say to people.

As a Christian, that's not the reality. The reality is that His power is made perfect in our weakness. In other words, it is perfected in our weakness. As I was looking through these last verses of Matthew chapter 11, I was just, there was so much more I could say, but I don't have time, obviously.

So I want to encourage you guys, even as you go into the Christmas celebration to just really meditate on these last few verses of chapter 11, where Jesus gives this beautiful invitation to come to Him. And just let the Holy Spirit speak further insights and stuff just from these verses to really encourage your heart and to get you to see the new year in a new way.

If this year has been hard, and I know for a lot of you, this year has been really hard, I want you to know that you can go into it, the next year with the promise that they who wait upon the Lord will renew their strength. They will mount up with wings as eagles. We all need that, amen? Ooh, that was weak. Yeah. Thank you.

Let's stand together. We'll close in prayer. If you need prayer for any reason, come on up front here. We'd be happy to pray for you. We'll have folks up here to pray.

So Father, Your Word is enlightening and so encouraging and so nourishing to our souls. We need it. We need to go back and look at the wonderful promises that You have declared in the Word.

And Lord, forgive us when we try to soldier on in our own strength instead of waiting on the Lord. Trusting in You and putting our hope in You and resting in You.

Lord, Your promise is that when we're weary, You will give us rest as we come to You. So Father, give us the courage to lay down our pride, our own personal strength, and whatever else that might hinder us, and just come to You. And to find strength in You for whatever task or burden or yoke we've been asked to bear.

We thank You. We praise You. We worship You. King of kings. Lord of lords, our soon coming Redeemer.

It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray, and all God's people said together,
amen.

Have a good rest of your day.