**Come to Jesus**

October 28, 2018

Matthew 11:1-30

Key Verse: 11:28 “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”

A New York Times best seller entitled Unbroken: A WWII story of survival, resilience and redemption, is a story 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 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. 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. Louis had sought peace in alcohol, then in hatred and revenge. But he found that only the peace that Jesus gives is real peace. Jesus invites us, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”

**First,** Jesus invites those who doubt. Jesus brought the kingdom of heaven on earth. Jesus the Messiah came as a servant king, to show God’s heart of love for suffering people. Jesus 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 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. But many people did not believe in Jesus. John the Baptist also began to doubt. Look at verse 2. “When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples to ask him, ‘Are you the one who is to come, or should 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 seemed to be ignoring John in prison. Probably John the Baptist himself was perplexed at what Jesus was doing. John clearly testified that Jesus is the Messiah promised to come. But to John, Jesus’ work was not what he expected. As we studied, John preached the message of repentance and judgment. So he thought that Jesus came to judge. But the distinctive characteristic of Jesus’ ministry was mercy and forgiveness. John was wondering, “Why hadn’t Jesus called down the wrath of God on sinners? Why hadn’t Jesus destroyed the hypocritical religious establishment? Why isn’t he quiet about Herod’s sin of divorcing his wife and his immoral life? Why didn’t he save me from the prison? Is anyone else coming to bring judgment later?” So he sent his disciples to Jesus to ask him, “Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?”

Jesus answered, (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 should not stumble just because Jesus didn’t fit his idea of the Messiah. We should not stumble when God doesn’t seem to answer our prayers. We should not stumble when God’s work doesn’t fit my idea. God is Sovereign. God is good - all the time. We must go to Jesus and put our trust in him.

Look at verses 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 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, (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 Jesus 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 did not know the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost; or the transforming power of Spirit, the new birth. As a citizen of the kingdom, we have a greater privilege than John the Baptist who did not have live long to enjoy the blessings of the kingdom. 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.

**Second**, Jesus invites those who are indifferent and proud. If violent efforts to destroy the kingdom and its 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, and he 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. Surely many other people of Tyre and Sidon would have repented at Jesus’ preaching like her. 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.

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. Look at verses 25. “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.’” 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.

**Third**, Jesus invites those who are weary and burdened. Look at verse 27.“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” 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 him.” 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.” Rest is to be free from whatever wearies or disturbs. Sometimes you will hear somebody say, “You kids don't give me any rest.” It is just relief from whatever wearies or constantly disturbs. In the spiritual sense, to have rest means to be at peace with God, not only that, to have the peace of God which passes all understanding, to have your heart totally calm in the midst of a storm, to have no more frustration and no more anxiety over life and destiny, no need to worry, sin is forgiven, no guilt is there. In fact, rest means salvation. Rest was also a Jewish term for the Kingdom. The Kingdom is called the time of rest, or the time of refreshing. Rest is also a term for heaven. So when Jesus says, “I will give you rest,” he is offering eternal salvation with its Kingdom relationship, and its heavenly relationship as well.

Look at verse 29. “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 is a piece of wood that fits over the necks of two oxen. Jesus probably made yokes as a boy in his carpenter’s shop in Nazareth. The oxen would come in and they would measure the oxen, they would carefully mark out the wood and they would carve it and then the ox would be brought back later for a final fitting because it was important that the yoke fit perfectly so that it didn’t irritate and harm the animal. It was the symbol of the submission of the animal to pull a load, to carry about a responsibility, to take orders, to be directed by someone, to plow a field, or to pull whatever they were to pull. The same thing was transferred over into the Jewish thinking so that a student who submitted himself to a teacher was said to take the yoke of the teacher. So the Jews used the phrase “the yoke” to refer to entering into submission to something. Peter used it in Acts 15 about the yoke that the Pharisees put on people that they can’t bear. The yoke symbolizes submission. Jesus is saying, “When you come to me, you must come with a submissive heart. You must come to take a yoke.” And then Jesus adds this phrase: “And learn from me.” It is a yoke of submission to his Lordship, to his teaching, to his instruction. It is a yoke that implies obedience. True salvation occurs when you in your desperation turn from sin to Christ with a willingness to have him take control of your life. If we do not take Jesus’ yoke, we are burdened by a yoke of ego, which is heavier than Jesus’ yoke. Our ego weighs us down with doubt, pride and self-centeredness. When we try to do everything by ourselves, it is a heavy yoke. St. Augustine described Jesus’ yoke as follows: “Any other burden oppresses and crushes you, but Christ’s yoke actually takes weight off you. Any other burden weighs you down, but Christ’s yoke gives you wings and lets you fly.”

At this time, Jesus is calling those who are weary and burdened. “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” May God help us to come to him each day, and learn his gentle, humble heart and grow in his likeness.