

“Come to Jesus”

Recently, we have been having a fascinating conversation among the clergy leadership. I believe that it is a conversation that every church and every church leader should have from time to time. The conversation centers around the purpose of the church. What is the “big why” behind the church? Is the church more than a social organization? Is the church more than a group that goes out to serve? Is the church more than a place where all of those who agree with each other are welcome and those who don’t aren’t? What is the purpose of the church?

“Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Matthew 28:19-20

According to Jesus’ commission of His followers, here is what we should be about as the church. First, we should be going to make disciples of all nations, which means we are to be telling others about Jesus and inviting them to believe in Him for life. Second, we are to be baptizing, which is a step of discipleship. One of the things that the church can and must do is inspire people to take their next step, and baptism is one of those. Third, the church should be about teaching what Jesus taught. It can’t be clearer. We must be teaching all that Jesus commanded. Think about it: if the church doesn’t teach the Word of God, who will? Lastly, the church is to trust Jesus together. He promises here that He is with us always so we can worship Him and trust Him always.

So, as a believer in Christ, what is your role in the church? There are many answers to this complex question, but the way that we are answering it today is this. We are building relationships that build disciples. We are building relationships that help us:

- Invite others to believe in Jesus through our actions and words.
- Grow spiritually by loving God and loving people.
- Serve others by sharing the love and message of Jesus.
- Worship Jesus through faithful living.

It is every believer’s responsibility to go and make disciples. It is expected that all Christians grow and mature in their faith so that it is seen in their relationships. It is required that we make a difference in the world through serving others and sharing the grace of God with them. It is essential that we worship Jesus together and trust Him as we work to live faithfully to His plan and His commands.

We’re going to be in Matthew 11:28-30, and we going to look at this amazing passage of scripture that tells us who Jesus is for us. It’s such an important thing to see because we carry around so many wrong or incomplete thoughts of who Jesus is, about how he thinks about us, interacts with us, treats us, and so forth.

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. This is God’s word.

- To all who are weary and need rest.
- To all who mourn and long for comfort.
- To all who feel worthless and wonder if God even cares.
- To all who fail and desire strength.
- To all who sin and need a Savior.
- This church opens wide her doors with a welcome from Jesus.

Before we do anything else together, we want to bring our deepest needs to Jesus, and sometimes we just need someone else to call out those needs for us. We can think of these words as our confession that we are always needy for grace and mercy. No matter what it looks like on the outside, we come weary and heavy laden just by living in this broken world. We come in need of a rest we cannot give ourselves, longing for gentleness in a yoke only found in Jesus, an easy one where the burden is light, and the rest is eternal.

Jesus offers himself to the real us, not some future version of ourselves, not some cleaned-up image of ourselves, but just plain old us. Weary. Mournful. Depressed. Anxious. Failing. Sinful. We come to Jesus just as we are, without any pretense, without anything in our hands to offer but need, asking Him to convert our longing into reality, transform sorrow into joy, remove the guilt of sin by His blood, and give new life to those barely hanging on.

These three verses we're looking at today are perfect for people like us because they show us the kind of heart Jesus has for us. Charles Spurgeon once pointed out that in all the gospels, this is the only place that Jesus himself speaks of what his own heart is like. Gentle and lowly. Not harsh and reactionary. Not easily put out and frustrated. Not ready to strike you down. He is the most understanding person in the world. As author Dane Ortlund says, "The posture most natural to him is not a pointed finger but open arms." Gentle and lowly. Gentle enough for the worst of us and lowly enough for the humblest of us. We can't be too needy for Jesus. He's not put off by our neediness. I mean, we can think ourselves too good for Jesus, but we can never be too bad for him.

Listen to who Jesus is—what his heart is for us. As we listen, we hear three things:

- The invitation to Jesus (v. 28)
- The promise from Jesus (vv. 29b-30)
- The pathway of Jesus (v. 29a)
- The Invitation to Jesus (v. 28)

"Come to me..." Jesus doesn't say "work toward me." He doesn't say, "earn me." He doesn't say, "deserve me." He says, "come to me." What does it mean to come to Jesus? In this verse, the word come isn't only a command; it's also an exclamation. Jesus is saying something like, "Hey guys, I'm over here!" We're running around everywhere, going from one place to another, trying to make our life work, and we're just not noticing the gentle and lowly Savior sitting right before our eyes offering everything we're longing for. The truth is, Jesus isn't hard to find. He's made himself available. And he wants to get our attention because who he is the one thing, we most need.

"Come" is a present tense command here. Jesus isn't asking us to come tomorrow or the next day or someday out in the future, but today. Come today. Leave your self-reliant efforts today. Leave your sins today. Leave your burdens today and come. Rest is here right now for you. Just come. In a world that demands our learning, our doing, our working before anything else, Jesus asks only first for our coming. Our new life begins right there—just by coming to him.

Here are the only qualifications: "All who labor and are heavy laden..." Other translations read "All who are weary and heavy laden." That's a good translation too. If you're working yourself to death trying to fix your life (labor) or if your life is weighed down by something outside your control (heavy laden), Jesus calls you to himself. Isn't that amazing? The worn out and pressed down, the weary and burdened. The needy. I mean, he could go anywhere. He could go to the powerful, the impressive, the might. But where does he go? To the needy. To the lowly. To the people who can't figure life out and don't know what else to do or where else to go. To the very people he must call to attention because they can't seem to slow down enough to look his way. You and me. Us.

Here's one amazing truth about the gospel that runs counter to every other religion: the needier you are, the more perfect you are for Jesus. There are no self-made Christians. There are only needy people who collapse at the feet of Jesus and let him lift them up.

So, you can come to Jesus. And when you come to Jesus and entrust yourself into his care, he gives you something no one else can. Look again at verse 28. "Come to me...and I will give you rest." So, when your life falls apart, this is a verse you can come to. When you can't find rest anywhere else, here is Jesus your savior saying, "Come to me." When all else fails, he never will. It's an offer we can't refuse. We'd be crazy to refuse it. And as we come, Jesus never leaves us in the same place he found us. He always takes us on a journey with him, which is our second point.

Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart...Now, given what we just saw, this verse is a bit surprising, isn't it? Jesus offers rest and then immediately says, "Take my yoke upon you." He didn't say "Take my seat" or "Take my bed" or "Take my vacation." He said, "Take my yoke." What's a yoke? A yoke is an agricultural term. Farmers place a yoke on animals to use their strength to plow fields. So, wait a minute. How does this make sense? How is a yoke the natural outflow of the rest that Jesus gives? Well, notice how he calls it His yoke. Not a yoke. His yoke. "Take

my yoke upon you.” The yoke of Jesus is vastly different from every other yoke. In verse 30 we see his yoke is easy. It’s not heavy. It’s light.

First, his yoke comes along with his teaching. “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me.” To have his yoke means you will be working, and that’s a good thing, despite how it may sound at first. Work is not a result of the Fall. God gave Adam work before he sinned. It is part of who we are. We’re designed this way. Jesus offers rest not by inviting us to do nothing, but by leading us to the right activities.” As we move forward as a church together Jesus will call us to work. He’ll call us to do hard things for him, even suffer for him. But isn’t working with Christ even in suffering better by far than living without him?

Second, his yoke isn’t heavy because of who he is. “For I am gentle and lowly in heart.” Here is what separates Jesus from everyone else. He is gentle and lowly. The word gentle means pleasant, mild, soothing, friendly. It’s the opposite of rough, hard, and violent. Jesus is not out to get you. His most foundational disposition is not to destroy you, but you save you; not to strike you but to comfort you; not to do violence, but to be gentle. When we go the wrong way, he gently redirects. He doesn’t shame us. He doesn’t embarrass us. He gently leads us back to himself, back to the right path, to learn afresh from him, to see him again for who he is, and to fall in love with him all over again through how he loves us.

He’s also lowly. The word lowly means weak, insignificant, servile. This was not a virtue even in Jesus’s day. It was looked down upon. Who in their right mind would be this way? Well, Jesus would. At his deepest core, Jesus is a servant. He came to serve and not to be served because that’s who he is at heart. He doesn’t mind stooping down to our level, getting inside our messes, dying for our sins. His heart is not limited to what we deserve; it rejoices to serve the unworthy, the guilty, the sinful, the wayward, his children.

We were made to be with God. So, when we come to Jesus and take his yoke upon us, what we find is the kind of life we long to live, and we find it together. He becomes not just my savior or your savior but our savior. He joins us together and he begins to use us for his glory. We start getting involved in things we never could have imagined before for his sake. He shows us how to live for Him. He carries the load, but He deploys us in mission. He sends out into his fields ripe for harvest to do his work in the world. He’s patient. He’s tender. He’s open. He’s accommodating. He’s understanding. When we stumble, he picks us up. When we can’t go on, he carries us. When we doubt him, he proves himself. When we fail, we get his success. When we sin, he’s already paid the penalty.

Here’s the amazing thing: Jesus is willing to be yoked to us, and we aren’t holding him back. Even more, he’s happy to be so. He longs to be so. Nothing in him shies away from us. No sin is too great. No weakness too much. No failure too excessive. He comes down to our low place and takes us to his high place. And he doesn’t mangle us on the way. He’s gentle. He knows our frame. He knows because he’s been in the weakness of flesh. But he never sinned, so his strength is far greater than ours. He knows the path, and he will teach us.

Jesus isn’t just talking the talk. He walked the walk. He entered in. He came. Would we imagine God would get down in the field with us and pull the plow? Would we imagine Jesus would make himself nothing to bring us to the Father? Would we imagine the gentleness and lowliness of God would be enough to save us from the strength and stronghold of sin? But so, it is. The gentle and lowly Jesus is our Savior. He’s offering his yoke to teach us his ways, and he’s making a promise, which is our third point.

Jesus mentions rest for a second time. The first rest was an immediate rest from coming to him. This rest is the rest after the rest. The first rest is given, the second discovered. Yes, given also, but discovered along the way. The first is instant relief. The second is a lifelong journey. It’s the rest of a learner. The rest of the one who after receiving now serves alongside his master. It’s not a physical rest. After all, there is a yoke involved. There is learning involved. Neither is easy. It demands something of us. Jesus doesn’t offer rest for our bodies. What he offers is rest for our souls. My soul needed rest. Yours does too.

What does Jesus have for us during that? Rest—at the deepest possible level, at the soul level. Maybe we can’t live with ourselves after what we’ve done, but Jesus paid the penalty for us on the cross, and he’s not holding our sins over our

heads. Maybe we can't forget the pain of the past, but Jesus says that doesn't have to be our future. He is preparing a place for us in our Father's house. Maybe we can't turn off the anxiety of another uncertain day, but Jesus says, "I'm already out there ahead of you. I know how this will end, and no matter what comes, no one can snatch you from my hands."

We need a rest that stretches further than today. We need eternal rest. We need to know that we can't ruin this some time out in the future. We need peace of heart—peace with God that lasts. We need a clear conscience. We need the removal of guilt. We need shame to disappear. And Jesus, through his life, death, and resurrection, offers it all. His salvation is total and complete, right now, for us!

Looking forward to Christ's cross, in Jeremiah 31:34, God tells us what he thinks about his people because of Christ's atonement. "I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." God is not holding our sins over our heads. Jesus's yoke is easy. Do you see the kindness in this? In fact, the word easy means kind. Jesus is kind to us. His yoke is therefore a kind of non-yoke. It's not burdensome. It's easy, kind. It's the kind of thing that we just long to do—to come under him, to be shepherded by him, to follow him.

Who doesn't need kindness? How kind Jesus our savior is! His kindness is seen most clearly in the cross. We were weighed down by the burden of sin. We could never obey God perfectly. In fact, we ruined our shot at perfection before we even had the capacity to understand what we did.

So, what then is our hope? It's Jesus! He came to be our substitute. When Jesus lived on earth, he obeyed God perfectly. He was the one single person in all history to earn God's blessing by his obedience. And what did he do with it? He went to the cross to take God's curse for sin. He did that for you. If Christ's cross wasn't at the center of history, there could be no offer of rest. Jesus offers rest then and he can offer rest now because the wrath of God we're owed for our sin has been fully satisfied in Christ on the cross. He has paid it all. And by coming to him, by accepting Jesus, you are free from the penalty for your sin. All that you deserve was given to Jesus on the cross, so all that Jesus deserves is given to you. Jesus earned eternal rest, and he graciously gives it to you and me just by coming to him.

You can have peace with God! Even if all the world stands against you, you can lay down at night and sleep well because God is for you. He takes great delight in you. He will quiet you with his love. He will rejoice over you with singing. (Zephaniah 3:17) Once Jesus has become your Lord and Savior when those terrible memories pop up again, you can boldly apply the gospel to them. You don't have to think about them anymore. You don't have to keep beating yourself up. Maybe you need to apologize to someone, but because of Christ's cross, you are at peace with God the moment you repent and come to Jesus by faith. You're free from the past. You're free in the present. You will be free in the future. You have rest for your soul.

That's why Jesus says his yoke is easy and his burden is light. He's not saying life won't be hard. There is still a cross to be carried. There will be trials. Jesus promised us that. We have battles to fight and hardships to bear and sufferings to endure. Jesus is not discounting that. What he is saying is that the comforts of the gospel outweigh them all.

Jesus offers rest we never thought possible. When we come to him, we come to the answer of our life's pursuit. It's him. The most loving, accessible, approachable, kind, gentle, and lowly person in the universe. He's, our Savior. He's, our Lord. He's, our rest.

Why am I talking about this in this season that we're in as a church? Simply this: coming to Jesus moment by moment is the only future we have together. How could it be otherwise? He's, our leader. He's, our Savior. He's, our Lord. He's, our master. He's the one we follow. We go wherever the Lamb leads. If we don't receive the real Jesus in his own words, we will be harsh, unkind, and restrictive. It's just who we naturally are. Thankfully, we are not that way here at Refuge, but let's not think we couldn't be.

If we continue to receive the real Jesus in his own words and keep receiving him moment by moment together, there is no end to the joy and love and peace and harmony and risk-taking and cross bearing that we can experience together with him.

All Jesus is asking is for us to come. Just stop running everywhere else and come to him. Let's take His yoke upon us, for Jesus is gentle and lowly at heart. The rest we never thought possible is ours in Christ our Savior. Amen.