

A Heart that is Meek and Lowly

Glimpse Into The Heart of Jesus

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For our scripture reading this morning, we turn to Matthew 11. Matthew 11. We read verses 20 through 30 and our focus is going to be especially on verse 29. That's the text for the preaching this morning, Matthew 11:29, but we begin our reading at verse 20. This is speaking of Jesus.

20 Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not: 21 Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. 22 But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. 23 And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. 24 But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee. 25 At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. 26 Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight. 27 All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him. 28 Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

So far we read God's holy and infallible word.

The text is especially verse 29, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me," especially this, "for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls." Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, one of the questions that I have faced over the last few weeks is this: what kind of preaching is going to be good for this congregation, especially as we begin our relationship together as pastor and as congregation, what is

good for this congregation to hear from her new pastor? And what I keep coming back to is this: preach comfort. Preach comfort. Now, I can imagine that over the last year or so, this congregation has heard many comforting sermons. I think any visiting minister would understand that it's good for this congregation to hear that kind of word, but I think that now as well as you get acquainted with your new minister, this is what you need to hear from your minister too; as you get to know me and the voice of the under-shepherd we might say, and as I get to know you, this is what I need to be preaching right now: preach comfort.

And so this morning, as we begin together, going into God's word from Sunday to Sunday, this morning we begin a new series, and this new series is going to focus on the heart of Jesus. I don't know exactly how long this series will be, maybe somewhere around 10 sermons or so, but it's going to focus on passages that give us special glimpses into the heart of Jesus. Now I understand that all of scripture, in a sense, gives us glimpses into the heart of Jesus and into the heart of our God as the scripture reveals to us the good news and of God's mercy and compassion to his people, but in this series we're going to see that Jesus, we're going to focus especially on the heart of Jesus, and we're going to see that Jesus' heart is a heart of compassion and his heart is a heart of mercy and a heart of love. And in this series, we're going to see that Jesus understands us. Jesus can be touched. He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities. Jesus understands what it is to shed tears, and Jesus understands, too, what temptations are. He's got a human heart just like you and me. And as we go through this series, we're going to see just how great and glorious our Savior is and I'm confident that as we go through this study, taking glimpses into the heart of Jesus, we're going to come to a deeper knowledge of just how great and just how to see the depth and the length and the breadth and the height of the love of Jesus Christ. We're going to see that.

We begin our series this morning by looking at Matthew 11:29, and what is striking about this passage is that this is the only place in the New Testament where there is explicit reference made to the heart of Jesus. In the Old Testament there are a few passages in the Psalms where we read of the heart of the Messiah, Messianic Psalms that speak of "my heart," the heart of Jesus, but this is the only passage in the New Testament that speaks explicitly of the heart of Jesus. And what's special about this passage is that it's Jesus himself telling us about his heart, and it's striking in the one place where Jesus tells us about his own heart, what does Jesus tell us? Does he tell us that he is exalted and dignified in heart? Does he tell us that he is even joyful and generous in heart? No, but in the one place where he tells us about his heart, this is his choice of words, he says, "I am meek and lowly in heart," and that's especially what's going to shape our study of the heart of Jesus, Jesus' own description here in Matthew 11 that he is meek and lowly in heart.

So we're using this verse to kind of kick off this series, and we take as our theme this morning a heart that is meek and lowly, and we look at that theme under three points. First, we look at the meek and lowly heart; second, the beautiful calling; and third, the resulting rest. Matthew 11:29 Jesus says, "Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I

am meek and lowly in heart." What does that mean? That Jesus is meek and lowly in heart.

First of all, what is the heart? One thing that we need to understand right from the beginning is that in scripture, when the Bible speaks of the heart, it's not referring merely to someone's emotional life. Rather, what it is talking about is the very center of a person's being. The heart, according to scripture, is the center of our entire existence from a spiritual, ethical point of view. The heart is what sets the direction for all our thinking and all our willing, all our desires and aspirations, all our thoughts and inclinations. That's why in Proverbs 4:23 Solomon writes, "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." Out of it is the wellspring of how you live. In a sense, who you are in your heart really defines who you really are. Your heart is who you are, at the very center of your being. It's your heart that explains why you have the attitudes that you have, why you talk the way that you talk, and why you behave the way that you behave. It's because of what's in your heart and what makes this passage so striking is the fact that Jesus says at the very center of who he is, at the very core of Jesus' existence, this is what defines Jesus: he is meek and lowly in heart. That's the heart of Jesus.

So now what do these words mean, meek and lowly? Well, that word "meek" is a word that's only found three other times in the New Testament. It's found in Matthew 5:3 where you have that Beatitude, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." It's also the word used in Matthew 21:5 where you have Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey. It's the Sunday, Palm Sunday, the Sunday before his death on the cross. He's riding on the donkey and we read in Matthew 21:5, "All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass." And then third, that word "meek" is also found in 1 Peter 3:4 where Peter is giving encouragement to wives, he encourages them to cultivate a meek and quiet spirit which is in the sight of God of great price." And that same word in those instances, that same word that Peter uses to describe a godly wife and mother is the same word that Jesus uses to describe his own heart. Jesus is meek and so that word "meek" means gentle. It means humble. Not contentious. Not harsh. Not easily exasperated. Not reactionary but patient. Soft. Mild. Jesus is not one who is trigger happy. Jesus is not one who explodes in a fit of rage. The posture most natural to Jesus is not the posture of one with a pointing, condemning finger, but the one with an open embrace.

Jesus is the most understanding person in the universe. Still today at God's right hand in heavenly glory, Jesus is the most understanding person in the universe. Remember Moses, Moses who's described as the meekest man who ever lived, and Moses was gentle, he was patient, he was soft with the people. They were a rebellious and stiff-necked people yet day after day, year after year, for 40 years, Moses bore patiently with them. That's the word "meek."

Now what we need to understand is that in Jesus' day meekness was not a virtue. Among the Jews, and especially among the Pharisees, meekness was not a virtue. In fact, the opposite was the case. If you could be proud, if you could stick out your chest in

arrogance and strut yourself, then you had the respect of the people. If you were strong, if you were top dog, that's where you wanted to be. Just think of the Pharisees. Who were the Pharisees? Well, the Pharisees were those who were walking around boasting that they could keep the law of God. The Pharisees were saying, "Keep the law and you can be righteous in and of yourself just like we are." You see, the Pharisees, they were the ones who knew the laws, they were the ones who knew how to keep the law, they were self-sufficient, they were self-reliant, and they were self-righteous and everything that they needed they found in themselves. They were the strong. They were the wise. And they were also the angry ones. They were the ones who were criticizing, always condemning. And in a strange sense, the people in that day admired the Pharisees for it. They were the ones that the people looked up to. They were the ones that people could boast in. They were the ones to be imitated. And yet do you know what? At the same time spiritually it was like poison for their souls as they lived in that kind of culture. There was all this self-sufficiency, all this self-righteousness, and yet the reality was it was all a show. It was all hypocrisy. It was all of the flesh. It was all earthy, and the people were under a heavy yoke of legalism, the yoke of Phariseeism.

They knew they couldn't keep the law of God and yet the Pharisees were always there pointing a condemning finger at them, and yet the Pharisees themselves were the hypocrites. Jesus himself points that out. Luke 11:46, Jesus says, "Woe unto you also, ye lawyers! for ye lade men with burdens grievous to be borne, and ye yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers." Jesus says, "This whole culture is a culture of hypocrisy and dishonesty, a culture of outward show and it's burdensome, it's oppressive." And it's in that context that Jesus says these words, he says, "I am meek. I am gentle. I am understanding. I am patient. I'm not like the Pharisees."

That's the word "meek," then there's the word "lowly," and the word "lowly" means humble. In fact, in the King James it's translated, the same word is translated as humble in James 4:6. In James 4:6, we read, "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble," or we could say "giveth grace to the lowly." It's the same word. Jesus is meek and lowly. He is humble. But now we need to understand that that word "lowly," that word "humble," does not just describe one who has the virtue of humility, one who is characterized by humility as we normally think of it, but the word actually refers to the idea of being thrust downward by life's circumstances. You've gone through the wringer, you've gone through the hardships and you are brought low, that's what the idea means. You're brought to a humble estate. So not just everything is going well and you're humble but you're brought to a humble estate. Romans 12:16, Paul uses that word when he says "mind not high things but condescend to men of low estate." Literally, those who are poor and needy, men of low estate, those who are not self-sufficient but those who are socially insignificant in the eyes of men. And literally, that word "lowly" means low to the ground. Jesus says, "My heart is a heart that is low to the ground."

Again, what that means is that Jesus is not proud. Jesus is not haughty. Jesus is not ambitious. Rather, it's just the opposite. What does the Bible tell us about Jesus? Jesus is the one who made himself of no reputation. Jesus is the one who took upon himself the form of a servant. Jesus is the one who when he was reviled, when he was brought to the

cross, and when he was reviled, he did not revile again, but he took it. He did not strive, nor cry, nor cause his voice to be heard in the streets. And as other passages of scripture say, he doesn't break the bruised reed. He doesn't quench the smoking flax. Those who are down and their flame is almost out, Jesus doesn't quench them and crush them. He doesn't act with an air of arrogance or self-centeredness, but he's lowly. He's humble. He dwells with the humble and he's gentle. He is safe. He is safe. He's gracious. He is forgiving. Jesus doesn't domineer over his people. Jesus doesn't exercise lordship over his people like the princes of the Gentiles exercise lordship over those who are under them. But Jesus is affable, easy to be entreated, easy to be reached.

Jesus is meek and lowly in heart. In heart at the very center of Jesus' being, Jesus is meek and lowly. This is Jesus' genuine character. It's part of his very nature to not be proud. It's part of his very nature to be forgiving, to be merciful. Jesus doesn't force himself to be this way. He does not constrain himself to be like this. This is who he is. He's ready to forgive. He delights in showing mercy. He is compassionate. Jesus was not forced to take upon himself our flesh and blood. Jesus was not forced to come down from his exalted state in heavenly glory. He did it freely and he did it with joy because this is the heart of Jesus. We can say this is the heart of God revealing itself in his Son Jesus Christ. That doesn't mean Jesus winks at sin but it means that Jesus is of such a meek and lowly disposition that for all those who trust in him, rather than having them suffer the punishment for their sins, he takes those sins freely upon himself and he dies in their place. He does it willingly. He does it voluntarily. He does it from the heart.

He is meek and lowly in heart and what does this mean? I think the best way to put it is like this: it means Jesus is accessible. You don't need to make yourself perfect before you come to Jesus. That's the point. That's the point of self-examination too. You can't make yourself perfect. You are a sinner. Of yourself that's all that you are is a sinner, and to put this kind of a burden on you, to tell you that you first need to make your life spotless and sinless before coming to Jesus, that's a crushing yoke, that's no different than the yoke of the Pharisees. All your labor and all your toil after self-righteousness is vanity. You need a Savior and you know yourself you need a Savior and Jesus, who is the Savior, the only Savior, he is accessible.

Even think of the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper is for you who trust in the blood of Jesus, knowing full well how great of a sinner you are. And even today, as you struggle to walk that walk of holiness, Jesus says, "I will help you in your struggle. I will give you grace. Here are the means of grace. I will help you. It is all of me. I am your sufficiency. I will be patient with your failures. I understand. As often as you err, I will restore you. As often as you show yourself to be a slow learner, I will not forsake you. I don't choose the company of kings and princes. I don't choose the company of the wealthy and the witty. I dine with sinners. Yes, repentant sinners, in whom I have worked the grace of repentance, but I dine with sinners." All who come to Jesus, he will in no wise cast out, whether it be the blind man who says, "Jesus, thou son of David, be merciful to me." Whether it be the lame man who can't do anything living in poverty. Whether it be the man who's the father of the demoniac child, and he's at his wit's end and he comes to Jesus for help. Whether it be that woman with an issue of blood for 12 years. Whether it be the woman who was a

sinner and that's how everyone knew her, she's the woman who was a sinner. Or whether it be the man today who's struggling to submit to God's will. He wants to do God's will, but he feels this infirmity that still remains in him against his will and he's struggling and he's crying out for help. Whether it be the child who has all kinds of distressing questions. Jesus won't point the condemning finger at you. Jesus is meek and lowly in heart.

That's the heart of Jesus. That's beautiful, isn't it? Now for impenitent sinners who reject Jesus and refuse to come to Jesus, Jesus is not that way. You read that earlier in the passage, "He began to upbraid the cities. Woe unto you, Chorazin. Woe unto you, Bethsaida," but then he says, "Come unto me. I am meek and lowly in heart." That's the heart of Jesus and what's the beautiful calling? And the beautiful calling is threefold. Briefly, first come unto me, Jesus says, "Take my yoke upon you," Jesus says, and then he says, "Learn of me. Come unto me, you who labor and are heavy laden, you who toil and toil and you're trying to make your life perfect, but the more you toil, the more you see the futility of making your life perfect. You, you come to me. You who are groaning under the burden of guilt that is too heavy for human strength to bear, you who see your sin, the guilt of your sin, and the shame of your sin, and the power of sin, and the pollution of sin, all you who are oppressed under the burden of sin, you come unto me. You who have the heart's desire to get right with God and enjoy peace with God but know yourself to be a sinner, you come unto me." And I can add, "you who are weighed down by things that are outside of your control, you who have anxieties and worries and heartaches and trials, you come unto me."

And we need to understand that activity of coming to Jesus is the activity of faith. Jesus is saying, "Believe in me. Trust in me. Trust in my ability to wash you clean. Trust in my righteousness alone as the only basis for your peace with God. Trust that the sacrifice that I made on the cross has made the full satisfaction for all your sins." And Jesus says, "Trust that I am forgiving. Trust that I am merciful. Trust that I'm not like others. Trust that I am not just a mere man but that I am God." And this is how wonderful that God is, he's the God who delights in mercy, who doesn't deal with us as we deal with each other, but who deals with us graciously. Jesus says, "Trust that my heart is a heart of mercy and love and compassion. Trust my word to be a word of truth." And by God's irresistible grace, Jesus draws us to himself so that we do come to Jesus, we do trust in him, and we do believe in his finished labors.

And then Jesus says, second, "Take my yoke upon you," and that may sound a little strange to us, a little jarring because we know what a yoke is. A yoke is something that you put on over your shoulders so that you can carry a burden a little better. Maybe we think of a yoke as something that you might put on an ox or oxen so that they can plow the field better, but a yoke is also something a person could wear so that they could bear a burden better, maybe two big slabs of cheese on either side. That's what a yoke is, and this language sounds strange. It sounds as if Jesus wants to give us another burden to carry, but I think the better way to understand this language is to understand that it's ironic. Jesus is saying, "Cast off the yoke of the Pharisees and take my yoke upon you

because my yoke is easy," literally, "my yoke is kind." And the idea, then, is, "My yoke is really no yoke at all, and my burden is really no burden at all." That's what Jesus means.

Yes, as a disciple of Jesus Christ, you will have to carry your cross. You will have tribulations and sorrows. But a yoke in the sense of having a burden to carry in order to obtain salvation, no. Jesus has already carried that yoke. Jesus has already bore that burden. He carried that burden of all your sins and the obligation to keep God's law perfectly. He already carried it and the yoke that he now gives you is an easy yoke, a yoke that is kind. It's a good yoke, a yoke of joy, a yoke of thankfulness. We might say instead of a yoke that is a burden that bears us down, it's, in fact, a yoke that lifts us up. We might say it's a yoke that's filled with helium. It lifts us up as we carry our cross.

And then third, Jesus says, he says, "Come unto me, take my yoke upon you, and then learn of me," and what Jesus means there is this, "Learn of me, that I am meek and lowly in heart," because this is against our normal way of thinking. This is against how you're used to people dealing with you. "But I am meek and lowly in heart, learn that of me," Jesus says. "Learn how different I am from the Pharisees and from everyone else who's been in a position of authority over you. Learn how gracious I truly am." That's the idea, "Learn that I'm meek and lowly in heart."

And congregation, that's what our whole life is really about, isn't it? As we go through trials and sorrows in life, the point is that we might learn more and more just how gracious and good and wonderful our Jesus truly is. And there's always more to learn, always a new wave of learning when it comes to understanding how great, how good and how wise and how meek and lowly our Savior is. Through the difficulties of life he teaches us that, just how meek and gentle and soft and accessible he really is. That's the beautiful calling and then what's the result? "Come to Jesus, take my yoke upon you, learn of me," and then learning how meek and lowly he is, what is the result? The result is rest. The result is relief from the burden of sin. The result is relief from trying to carry out a task that we know is impossible to carry out. The result is peace of heart and mind. The result is that glorious feeling of entering into a task that's already been finished for you. Have you ever had that? You're ready to go to work and the work has already been done for you and there's just rest to enjoy. That's rest. There are no conditions to meet, no prerequisites. Jesus simply promises all who come to him as burdened sinners, that he will give them rest. Why is this the case? Because that's the heart of Jesus and we have to learn that. That's the heart of God himself as he reveals his own heart to us through his Son Jesus Christ.

That's the glory of God, beloved. That's the glory of your God and this rest is the rest that we enjoy at the Lord's Supper. Child of God, are you weary? Child of God, are you heavy laden? Child of God, do you know the guilt of your sins? Child of God, do you know the struggles of the Christian life? Come to Jesus. Come to Jesus every day. Come to Jesus. In the morning when the day dawns, come to Jesus. At night when it's time to go to bed, come to Jesus. And here this morning at the Lord's Supper, come to Jesus and remember again the finished, perfect labors of your Savior. Remember again the easy yoke and the light burden Jesus places on your shoulders. In Christ you are more than conquerors and

may not feel like it, but you are victorious. You have peace with God. And all things are for your sakes. Come to Jesus and learn and learn again and learn more fully how meek and how lowly your Redeemer is. May that be our experience this morning as we come once again to the Lord's Supper, and may we think how meek and lowly our Savior is because we see what he's done for us. Amen.