

CYPRESS BIBLE CHURCH:

HOW TO RECEIVE RELIEF FROM WEARINESS: POPULAR PROMISE COMMONLY MISUNDERSTOOD” MATTHEW 11:28-30

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Scripture Reading: Psalm 42; Psalm 57; Matthew 23:1-12

I. INTRODUCTION:

One of the most amazing aspects about God sovereignty is that He engineers situations whereby we are called to step up to the plate to be used by Him in the most interesting ways. In some of the situations we are called to share the gospel, comfort a hurting stranger, and offer hope to a burdened soul. When those opportunities come about, planted right before you, you recognize that God just engineered a divine appointment... something that came about outside of your control. In those instances you can feel your pulse quicken, your mind start racing, and your affections stirred.

The latest opportunity presented to me was actually a long-standing answer to prayer and I praise God for allowing me the honor to participate in this event.

Here's what happened:

On our tour to Israel I assumed that my beautiful wife would be sitting next to me from Houston to London and from London to Tel Aviv. Last thing I need is my wife sitting next to a handsome Israeli soldier. While she sat next to me from Houston to London, I came to discover that she was not going to sit with me from London to Tel Aviv. Thankfully, she was assigned a seat next to one of my best friends from my college days at SFA. Instead of her, a very intelligent young man sat next to me. I instantly realized that this was a divine appointment. But I was not the only one. A dear couple from our church who sat directly behind me also recognized that this was a divine appointment. They began to pray.

This person who sat next to me on the plane was in his young twenties. He wore a black jacket, black pants, black shoes, and a white buttoned down shirt. He had dark piercing eyes, clear olive type skin, nicely square framed glasses, and a long ringlet of dark hair on each side of his face. On top of his head was a black yamaka. White strings with little knots draped down from his waist line. He was an orthodox Jew. Even though he was from Brooklyn, New York, his Jewish accent was very thick. Evidently, he spoke Yiddish more than English. Interestingly, he had huge biceps, twice if not three times as big as mine.

After introducing ourselves to each other and discussing why we are going to Israel, he turns to me and looks me directly in the eyes. With a gentle voice he inquisitively but plainly asks, “Who killed Jesus Christ?”

With a gulp in my throat, I thought to myself... “*Oh God, why do we have to start with this question!*” But I turned to the Hebrew Scriptures and showed him from Isaiah 53:4 that it was God the Father who ultimately killed Christ. But I also explained why. Jesus, who is the Son of God, became the sacrificial lamb, our substitute, in order that we might have eternal life.

For the entire flight from London to Tel Aviv the discussion continued, non-stop. The conversation ranged from defending the reliability of the New Testament Scriptures, the deity and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the fulfillment of the biblical covenants to issues regarding sexuality, the need for abstinence, and the nature of true pleasures (which point us to God) and false pleasures (which take us away from God). I presented the gospel to Him, read to him passages from the Old and New like Isaiah 52:13-53:12, Matthew 23, and 1 Corinthians 15. I discussed with him that when the Messiah comes back, Zephaniah (borrowing from Dr. Ron Allen) says that God will rejoice over you with His gladness, quiet you with His love, and exult over with loud singing. I said to him, do you realize that when the Messiah returns, God will sing in exultation over His people?

The conversation was fascinating. As we shared with each other, he began to open up to me about some heavy struggles he is experiencing as an orthodox Jew.

I believe what caused him to open up about some of his struggles to me, a Christian, was because, in part, I used dispensational theology, which I whole heartily embrace, as a tool of evangelism and a way of identification. He could not believe that I believed that God had a plan for Israel that was distinct from the church. He was amazed that I was pro-Jewish! In fact, after awhile he made the statement, *"I think you must be half-Jewish and half-Christian!"*

As he opened up to me, my heart just broke for him. Though the issues were multifaceted, one overriding theme stood out. In view of the community in which was raised and is identified, he is encumbered, that is, terribly weighed down by the following:

1. He is loaded with the responsibility to obey all 613 commandments of the Hebrew Scriptures.
2. He is obligated to dress distinctively-with eyes gawking at him wherever he goes in the U.S.
3. He is taxed by having to follow a strict kosher diet in a country like America where kosher food is not readily available. He is not able to eat things we take for granted.

If he fails to fulfill these obligations, then he will not only disappoint his family but perhaps be scorned by his community. Moreover, if he fails to follow these responsibilities, then he will inhibit certain possibilities: a good reputation, success, and an amazing woman for a wife. See, within his community, marriages are prearranged by a matchmaker. He cited *Fiddler on the Roof* as an example of the process of arranging marriages.

He admits that on one hand, he loves God. On the other hand, He does not like the fact that he is born into a community of faith that must be stand unique among others in this manner. See, he said to me that the weight of these obligations, the rules, and these precepts were pushing him toward atheism. His obligations were strangling him, overwhelming him, sucking his life away. Deliverance from these burdens were nowhere in sight. He was longing for relief from his burdens?

Are you?

Transition:

Are you drained? Encumbered? Are you loaded, weighted down? Are you longing for relief? You ask yourself whether your life will ever get better. You wonder if this is what life will look like till you die. You look at others and they seem to have it so easy. *"God, where is the relief?"*

For this dear young Jewish man, he moans under the weight of attempting to obey 613 Commandments in Hebrew Scriptures. The pressure by his family and community of faith is tough to carry.

Unfortunately, because he is forbidden to read the New Testament, he had never heard nor seen the following words from Jesus Christ:

Come to Me, all you who weary 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.¹

Does this promise from Matthew 11:28-30 resonate with you? The word **"weary"** refers to physical or mental exhaustion, excessive burdens, impatience, and even dissatisfaction. It can involve losing heart, namely, becoming discouraged. **"Heavy-laden"** or **"burdened"** means to "to place a burden upon; to load as when placing a load upon the back of an ox." **"Burdened"** is the generating source for *weariness*. In other words, "heavy-laden" is the cause whereas "weary" is the effect. But the **"rest"** that Jesus gives "relief, release, and satisfaction." It is a God-given relief that can refresh even the most burdened soul.²

I find this promise to be amazing! What hope to those of us who are weary! I'm confident that when Jesus said those words, hope must have been instantly generated among so many in his audience. Perhaps this promise resonates with some of you.

How can we receive relief from weariness? While this passage may appear at first to be warm and fuzzy, some of you might not like what this passage states after we unpack it. The reason is simple. Like the

¹The New King James Version. 1982 (Mt 11:28-30). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

²Swanson, J. (1997). *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)* (electronic ed.) (DBLG 398, #4). Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

priests of Baal who slashed themselves to try to get Baal to serve them on their terms, all too often we want God to relieve us but on our terms. We want God to bend His will and do what we want Him to do. But I hope you consider His invitation and the requirements for it, for if you will do what He says, know that His Word is clear: *experiencing His rest is within your grasp!* Let me put it this way, *He is offering His very best to you... will you not welcome His very best?!*

What is the context? This promise is found in a context of rejection, rebuke, and judgment. Three cities in Galilee, namely, Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, rejected the revelation God has given them about Jesus. In fact, they received more revelation than any other place. As a result of seeing Jesus and His miracles, these occupants of that generation will be held more accountable for their rejection of Him than people who lived in places like Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom. This is an interesting comparison because Tyre was known for oppressing God's people, Sidon was known for its paganism, & Sodom was known for its sexual immorality. But then again, a theme that finds expression in Scripture is that *judgment is proportional to revelation; the greater the revelation, the greater the responsibilities.* Had Jesus done the miracles that He did within the golden triangle of these three cities in Sidon, Tyre, and Sodom, repentance, mourning, and self-humiliation would have occurred-as described by Jesus' use of "*sackcloth and ashes.*" Thus, in contrast to the three cities that rejected Him, Jesus turns away from them and offers an invitation to anyone who is weary:

Come to Me, all you who weary 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.³

What we discover in this promise is that *Jesus, the Son of God, is willing to exchange your weariness for rest.* If relief and release from the "toil" and "burden" of weariness is something you are longing for, then consider this invitation from Jesus.

Let's make three observations about this particular promise from Jesus Christ. First, notice how tender and personal this invitation is:

³Ibid.

"Come to **Me**, all you are weary 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.

Jesus is not pointing to some formula, some ritual, or some form self-denial for rest. He is pointing to Himself as the source of relief: "Come to Me."

Because Jesus reveals the Father, Jesus draws a line between a way of life and religiosity, that is, programs that express themselves with endless rules, regulations, and rituals. See, it is not religion but Christ who is able to refresh and restore people. It is not in religion, programs, and systems that one finds relief. It is in Christ! How can God make such a claim that if the oppressed and weary will come to him, He will give them rest? He is God.

Second, notice the word, "**come.**" In the Greek it is an exhortation with the force of a command. I can picture Jesus standing near the Sea of Galilee and with an outstretched hand, with the authority of God He gently says, "**come.**"

And third, who is Christ exhorting to come to Him? It is an open invitation expressed in the word, "**all.**" "**Anyone**" who is weary and heavy-burdened can come to Him. Since Jesus is speaking to a mixed audience, weariness is experienced by both believers and non-believers alike. He is inviting anyone who is need of relief. Gender does not matter. Age does not matter. Religion does not matter. Background and status is irrelevant.

If you are a believer and are weary, know that this does not mean that you are not saved or somehow have short end of the stick. But do realize that this is all that the world can offer you! The world's representatives may promise you freedom, they may offer your fulfillment, but whatever they offer to you is short-lived, empty, devoid of the relief that only God can provide.

If you are loaded up with burdens, I suspect weariness has found in expression. You have become tired and worn out. Like Bilbo confessed to Gandalf in *Lord of the Rings*, "*I feel thin, sort of stretched, like butter, scraped over too much bread.*" Little did Bilbo know that his weariness and need for a long holiday was not because he was 111, but because

he was addicted to the presence of a magical ring that was filled with absolute evil. The ring of power was changing him and he didn't realize it. The world's affairs do the same to us.

Jesus is willing to exchange your weariness for His rest. Will you accept His invitation? In fact, he says, **“And I will give you rest.”**

Some Probing Questions: To have a full understanding the relief that Jesus is offering to you, we must first come to Him. “Rest” comes from Christ. The “rest” Jesus is offering is relief, release, and satisfaction to your soul.⁴ But if “rest” comes from Jesus and you are not experiencing it as a believer, then you must probe where you stand in your intimacy with God? When I say “intimacy” I mean an affectionate, close, and personal love-relationship with God. It is where God-giving longings find satisfaction, where our presence with Him becomes steadfast, and where joy, love, and, peace is dynamically shared and expressed.

If you are totally honest, is Jesus far removed from your daily life? Is He more like a long distant cousin you rarely see than one in which you schedule, make plans, and priorities around?

Has God become routine to you? You have come to the point in your relationship with Him that you serve Him out of orthodoxy, but not out of fervent love. Is your intimacy with God nothing more than you a long-distant memory?

Has Jesus become too familiar that you no longer pursue Him? The “new” has worn off and has become nothing more to you than security. Perhaps Christ is nothing more than a collection of abstract thoughts and evidences. The idea of “walking with and talking with” God is foreign to you.

When was the last time you delighted in Him through serious prayer, serious one-on-one study of His Word whereby your hands and eyes are focused on the Scripture directly? Have we become so calloused that God is worthy of only a glance into Scripture, a hearing about Him from another (no one-on-one study), and a quick, shallow, and routine prayer? I've discovered in my own life that when I'm not receiving His

⁴Wood, D. R. W., & Marshall, I. H. (1996). *New Bible dictionary* (3rd ed.) (1009). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

rest, I am weary for I'm operating on my own strength; I'm taking on my own problems rather than giving it to Him.

What are the basic symptoms of being distant from God? When one feels God is distant, the symptoms show up profoundly in two related ways. First, prayer life is negligent at best. Even if one regularly prays, one prays out of duty, not delight. The delight one might have once experienced has dissipated like a morning fog on a summer day. And second, one's study of God's Word is marginal at best. Even if one regularly studies God's Word, the study is routine and mechanical. You may be reading Scripture, but you are not engaged; there is no sense of relishing in His Word. His Word does not occupy your thoughts as you go about your day. What I have discovered in others and in myself is that God has never moved Himself away from me. Rather, each time I find myself distant with God it is because I have moved away from Him.

Why are you distant from God? We often move away from God because...

1. *We are head-strong.* We want our relationship with God to be controlled by us, not Him.
2. *We enjoy relish in doing things the way want to do things.* We might even like the attention we gain from others by doing activities our own way.
3. *We are too busy.* We are only able to give God our leftovers. Preoccupied with other responsibilities, we do not mean to make Him a lesser priority... it has just happened.
4. *We have lost our fear of God.* Somehow, we have forgotten that while God is always good, He is also dangerous.
5. *Worshipping God has digressed to a mechanical routine.* Like machinery on an assembly line, we do what we do because that is the way we do it.
6. *We fear God.* We are afraid that if we draw near to God, then He will demand something from us. We prefer a long-distant relationship; “do not call me, I will call you” sort of a relationship.

7. *God is irrelevant to the way we live.* For some, going to church is something one does merely out of obligation. Perhaps it due to your upbringing, a promise you made long ago to your Mom, Dad, or Grandma. But when it really comes down to it, God is irrelevant the other six days of the week.
8. *Sin.* We are afraid that if we draw near to God, then He will address us of a particular sin we have come to love. So, like a kid eating a cookie underneath the covers of his bed sheets away from the sight of his or her parents, we try to hide from God.
9. *God is equated with only information.* Knowing God has become reduced to knowledge of biblical, historical, and theological facts. God is merely treated as knowledge and not the Person that He is.
10. *An issue of ignorance.* We really do not know how to draw near to God.
11. *You are hurt.* Somehow we blame God for the pain, the hurt, and difficulties we are experiencing. So, we resent Him for it and in some way, we are taking it out on Him.
12. *You seek to punish yourself.* Perhaps we are trying to punish ourselves for acts of rebellion against God. Thus, we distance ourselves from God rather than turn to Him with confession and repentance (1 John 1:9). We think to ourselves that we are not worthy of intimacy, but only punishment. While we may be guilty of punishment, instead of allowing the God of the Bible to deal with us, we rather usurp His authority by choosing to punish ourselves. Now it could be that we attempt to usurp His authority because we are fearful what demands He will make us. I'm fearful, either way that we fail to understand the biblical doctrines of confession, repentance, grace, and sanctification.
13. *You just do not understand God.* As a result of our inability to understand God, we keep our struggles to ourselves thinking that we have a responsibility to bear your own burdens so as not to trouble Him anymore.

God is Gracious: Regardless what the reason is, God is gracious. In fact, unlike other masters, leaders, and bosses, Jesus describes Himself as one who is "gentle" and "humble." The "rest" He offers you is relief,

release, and satisfaction to your soul. Therefore, I encourage you to renew your walk with Him.⁵ When you are intimate with Jesus Christ, one of the benefits you will receive is rest. It is this type of God-given rest that a hymn writer can exclaim, "*It is well with my soul*" while traveling over the very place where he lost family members. It is a God-given *peace* that saturates your being in the midst of a raging storm. It is a God-given *comfort* that fills your soul-no matter how painful your situation becomes. It is a God-given satisfaction that only God can provide. It is a God-given release that says, "I forgive you!" "I love you!" If God can forgive you, then don't you think you need to forgive yourself?!" Since that is the case, then how can you pursue intimacy with Christ? First, "**Come to Me.**" Oswald Chambers puts it this way:

If I will simply come to Jesus, my real life will be brought into harmony with my real desires. ... Have you ever come to Jesus? Look at the stubbornness of your heart. You would rather do anything than this one simple childlike thing-'Come to Me.' ... Jesus makes Himself the test to determine your genuineness. Look how He used the word come. At the most unexpected moments in your life there is this whisper of the Lord-'Come to Me,' and you are immediately drawn to Him. Personal contact with Jesus changes everything. Be 'foolish enough to come and commit yourself to what He says. The attitude necessary for you to come to Him is one where your will has made the determination to let go of everything and deliberately commit it all to Him.⁶

"*and I will give you rest,*" Oswald Chambers interprets the passage this way:

'I will sustain you, causing you to stand firm.' He is not saying, 'I will put you to bed, hold your hand, and sing you to sleep.' But, in essence, He is saying, 'I will get you out of bed-out of your... exhaustion and out of your condition of being half dead while you are still alive. I will penetrate you with the spirit of life, and you will be sustained by the perfection of vital activity. Yet we become so weak and pitiful and talk about 'suffering' the will of

⁵Wood, D. R. W., & Marshall, I. H. (1996). *New Bible dictionary* (3rd ed.) (1009).

⁶ Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost For His Highest* (June 11).

the Lord. Where is the majestic vitality and the power of the Son of God in that?⁷

The Second Condition for “Rest”: Whereas the first condition for receiving rest is to “*Come to Me,*” the second condition for exchanging your excessive burdens is to commit yourself to becoming Jesus’ disciple. Consider verses 29-30:

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.”⁸

A Closer Look: The word, “*learn*” a form of the word “*disciple*” in the Greek. This word, “*learn*” means “*to learn, appropriate to oneself though instruction.*” Now the Lord is talking about something more than learning information. Jesus is talking about a transformed life through a personal, intimate relationship with Him. Because you are beholding Jesus, you are becoming like Him. The tense of this verb, “*learn*” is in present tense describing the process of discipleship as one of continuous change, development, and growth. Just like the yoke a farmer would put on his oxen, the yoke he demands from you is that you become His disciple.

How Do You Become a Disciple of Jesus? While Matthew 11:28-30 invites you to become a disciple and explains what will happen if you do, Mark 8:34 Jesus explains how to become a committed disciple:

34 “And He summoned the crowd with His disciples, and said to them, ‘If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me’”⁹

The first step to become a committed disciple is to **deny oneself**. This is a definite act that abandons, discards, and relinquishes claims of self no longer as the supreme object of regard. In fact the way it is stated in the Greek stipulates this act as an obligation or responsibility. In other words, a disciple must no longer make his own interests and desires

⁷ Ibid.

⁸The New King James Version. 1982 (Mt 11:29-30). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁹New American Standard Bible : 1995 update. 1995 (Mk 8:34). LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

the supreme concern of his life. He must “turn away” from the idolatry of self-centeredness.

The second step is to **take up your cross**. This step demands a willingness to suffer for Jesus even if it cost you everything. In other words, your allegiance to Christ will be unwavering-no matter how costly your circumstances become.

Finally, the third step is stated in three small words: “**And follow me.**” Look closely at this verb. The present tense denotes a continuing relationship that is expressed in persevering obedience to His leadership.

In Summary: If you desire the rest Jesus offers, you must (1) not only come to Him, but you must also (2) become His disciple. To become His disciple involves both a negative requirement and a positive requirement. The *negative requirement is self-denial*. You are exchanging your own plans, preferences, and priorities for God’s plans, preferences, and priorities. As we consistently harmonize our mind, heart, and will with God’s mind, heart, and will, we can honestly say are committed to Jesus and His way. The *positive requirement is faithfulness*. No matter the circumstance, no cost is too much to pay to reverently uphold His plans, preferences, priorities, and purposes of our Lord Jesus Christ. Learning from Jesus is assimilating, inculcating, and instilling His truth into our lives whereby it shapes our very lives. To the disciple, Jesus is not merely our example, our paradigm. No, He is our identity, our becoming, our being.

Serving God Exclusively on His Terms: While being a disciple of Jesus means serving Him on His terms and not our own, we have to bear in mind the following benefits: **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.”**¹⁰

First, unlike Israel’s religious leaders and their system of laws, Jesus’ is gentle, He is humble. Jesus is not a task master; He is infinitely good; He is good! I like how Hampton Keathley interprets this passage:

¹⁰The New King James Version. 1982 (Mt 11:29-30). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

“Do not fear my yoke for I am not like your previous masters. I am gentle and humble. You suffer now because your present masters, (the world system, Satan, and your own sinful nature) are haughty, proud, and dominating.”¹¹

And second, unlike these religious leaders and their system of laws, rest for your soul is actually obtainable in this life by becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ. His yoke is easy and his burden is light because Jesus is gentle and humble. It is basically pursuing Jesus on His terms, not our own.

Three Central Truths to Remember about this Promise: First, if you will come to Jesus He will give you rest (vs. 28). Second, you must follow Jesus in discipleship (vs. 29). And third, if you will accept his invitation, then you will discover that the yoke of discipleship is easy and his burden is light because Jesus is gentle and humble (vs. 30).

How Should We Then Live? If the load you are carrying is overwhelming, staggering, and suffocating, could it possibly be that you are serving another master, one that is haughty, proud, and dominating?

Perhaps that master is you? Some times we can be our own worst enemies. We put the world’s ways and activities upon our shoulders. *We choose* to live our lives the way the world tells us rather than following the ways of Christ. With what or whom is your identity? For some it is partying, for others, it is money.

Still, for others, it is beauty, power, or success. Because it is so easy for us to feed off the world as the world feeds on us, then many of us are identifying ourselves with material objects, hungering for the approval of this world. How long can we keep following the Jones’s? How long do we have to continue demanding to have what they have? Are we defining success according to the world’s standards? Is everything about us bent on being recognized by the people we admire and “celebrate.” If so, then the cost is gigantic. If you seeking the world’s approval, I suspect you are being sucked dry and only able to give God marginal consideration. But you keep saying, there’s got to be a way to do both! But is a duplicitous life worth living? Christ wants everything you are and have. But in return, He will not be like the world and spit

¹¹ www.netbible.org: Matthew 11:28-30.

you out when He is through extracting everything you are. He accepts you as you are! You do not need to constantly seek His approval. You already have it! In return, He offers you what the world cannot possibly give: Approval and satisfaction; A yoke worth carrying.

Are you embittered because of the tragedies of this world? You were raised in a dysfunctional home. You feel like you are a victim of unfortunate circumstances. Any dream you had has been squelched by problems, by the daily grind. What happiness you had a child has been replaced with tragedy and pain. Perhaps you have come to the place where you think, “The world owes me!” You find yourself going from one problem to another with no relief in sight. You just want to give up and sometimes you seriously wonder if life is worth living. Jesus is saying, “Come to Me.” Serve Me on My Terms. Not yours. You will experience My Peace.

Perhaps you are weighted down by sin. You’ve made some really bad choices and you are reaping the consequences. You’ve hurt someone and asking forgiveness from them seems so foreign. There is too much water beneath the bridge. You want to change, but you feel it is too late. It might be that you want to change but at the same time you want to punish yourself for all that you have done. So you wallow in your tragedies unwilling do what it takes to free yourself from the muck. Jesus is telling you... “Come to Me.” Serve Me on My Terms. Not Yours. You will experience My Release.

Conclusion: If any of these words speak to your situation, then know from the words of Jesus Christ that relief is possible. If you will become Christ’s disciple, then you will find that in your intimacy with Him, God will add to your life, not rob the best parts from you. If you will become Christ’s disciple, then your life will be well-lived, not poorly-lived. If you will become Christ’ disciple, then your life will be blessed, not broken. Why? Unlike the world and all of its heroes, Jesus, who is God, is gentle and humble.