

Come to Jesus: Matthew 11:28-30: Part I:
Meaning of Come and the Context of the Call

- v.28: *Come to me, all who weary and heavily burdened and I will give you rest;*
- v.29: *Take my yoke upon you and learn from Me; I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls.*
- v.30: *For my yoke is easy and my burden is light;*

How do Jesus' words strike you? Are they simply another invitation? What significance do they have for Jesus' audience, for you and for others? To answer these questions, we must have an idea of the meaning of the word *come*. Moreover, we must know who the Speaker and why He spoke; His audience; and His purpose for speaking.

The word (*deuro*) used here in Matthew 11 is also used by Jesus in Matthew 4:19 and 19:21 and by the master in Matthew 22:3-4. In Matthew 4:19 Jesus called to Peter and Andrew to come and they accepted it. In Matthew 19:21, Jesus made the same call to the rich young ruler who rejected it. Jesus' call is not simply a call to enter into the kingdom of God. It is also a call to enter into Jesus' school of discipleship. The call is to and for salvation and for growth as one saved. The term carries the idea of *here, hither to this place*. It is used only for a calling or an invitation and for encouragement to heed the call. Movement and a decision for that movement from one place or time are involved. In Matthew 11:28, Jesus is the Caller or Inviter. There was urgency, necessity, and compassion in Jesus' words. Jesus knew it was a matter of life and death, now and eternally.

The context of Matthew 11:28-30 help us answer the opening questions. Matthew 11:28-30 is preceded by two major sections with two basic concepts. The first is recorded in 11:20-24. Jesus denounced the unrepentant people in the cities of Korazim and Bethsaida, cities in Israel where most of His miracles had been performed. As a result the people had witnessed His power, authority, and loving concern but they rejected Him. He pronounced a woe on those cities. The people had seen with their physical eyes and heard with their physical ears but not heard spiritually - with their hearts. They understood only sensually. There was no saving faith. They did not believe. Jesus delivered a telling accusation: if He had demonstrated Himself to the Gentile cities of Tyre and Sidon as He had to Israel, those two cities would not have been destroyed. What a stinging rebuke to a self-righteous people! Jesus claimed that He saves Gentiles and their repentance is accepted by Him. The bulk of Israel thought that they did not need Christ, the Gentiles, and Christ's way – repentance. The call to repent was the way to come to Christ. Israel rejected the Way and the way (repentance) to the Way!

Jesus was speaking to the covenant community – Israel (Matthew 11:1). Both the lost and the remnant were present in the audience (see John 7:13; 9:22; 12:42; 19:36). Jesus knew Israel's history. There was a marked disconnect between what Jesus knew and what Israel professed (Acts 7:37ff, 44ff, 51-53). As a whole, the nation was a rebellious, idolatrous, prophet-killing people following in the footsteps of their forefathers. Yet through the ages Israel had denied this pattern. Israel had failed to repent despite the voices of the prophets throughout the ages; the ministry of John the Baptist, the penultimate prophet; and the presence of Jesus, the ultimate Prophet and the miracles He performed among them (Matthew 11:7-19, 20-24). The response to John and Jesus was

characteristic of Israel's patterned disdain for God's voice through the prophets. Jesus condemned Israel; Israel had not changed.

Jesus knew Israel's history – they were a rebellious, idolatrous people. As a nation they failed to repent (Matthew 11:20-24). Prophets were not their friends. They mistreated them and killed them. Spiritual leaders including the Pharisees were a prominent and powerful machine. They had established their own religion. They called it Judaism but it was not what God originally intended. Yes it was monotheistic. But from the outset, Yahweh expected, demanded, and deserved Israel's whole heart which was to be manifested by heart obedience. True Judaism was always an inside-out religion. Law-keeping was to be an expression of love for Yahweh (Matthew 22:37-40; Mark 12:29-34).

The spiritual leaders had rightly understood the horrors of the exile. But they denied the nation's history and role in bringing God's rightful judgment. They wanted God's blessing and did not want another exile. They knew that God demanded lawkeeping and assumed that lawbreaking - disobedience - led to the exile. In response, they devised their own game plan by becoming their own lawmaker, lawgiver, and lawkeeper. They added rules and regulations to the Law of Moses. Their laws and their interpretation took precedence over God's law.

They hoped to keep the law in order to avoid another exile. Their goal was to keep out of an exile. They were more interested in *no exile* than in pleasing God. But it was their law by their power and wisdom. In doing so, they functioned as the ones who "called the shots." They were competing with God. They established their laws as they fenced God's law. They functioned as if their laws were more important than God's and their efforts more important than Christ, the true Messiah. Personal lawkeeping designed by the spiritual leaders became the standard of the day. This was the system with its resultant mindset and lifestyle by which the spiritual leaders ruled the people. It appeals to proud people. Jesus drew the contrast between God's law and the traditions of men. He condemned the leaders for breaking God's law, the very law that they claimed they were keeping (Matthew 15; Mark 7). Their lawmaking and lawkeeping became the standard for the people. The people seemingly accepted this way of life.

Application:

1. What is the significance of Jesus' call?
2. What is the background of it?
3. What was Israel's history in regard to heeding the words of the prophets?

Come to Jesus: Matthew 11:28-30: Part II:
The Context of the Call

- v.28: *Come to me, all who weary and heavily burdened and I will give you rest;*
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To help understand the significance of Jesus' calling we must understand the context in which Jesus gave it. We know that Jesus is the Caller, Israel was the audience, and one of Jesus' purposes was to draw Israel's attention to their dire circumstances. By dire Jesus meant more than physical enslavement by the Romans. Two concepts preceded the record of the Jesus' invitation: the need for repentance which was covered in the first blog (Matthew 11:20-24).

The second concept is recorded in Matthew 11:25-27 which was a prayer-conversation between Jesus and the Father. These passages teach the necessity and authority of Scripture. Jesus taught that biblical truth is supernatural in its origin and in its application. God is the Revealer and His Son and Scripture are God's personal, powerful, and purposeful self-revelation (John 14:6; 17:17). Supernatural truth trumps manmade teaching regarding God, man, his problems and solutions, life on earth, and life after death. God, not the Pharisees, was the source of truth.

Jesus acknowledged that Israel's response was partially understandable. God had chosen to hide spiritual truth from some, if not most, of them (Matthew 13:13-15). Spiritual things are understood only through the Holy Spirit (John 3:3-8; 6:60-68; 1 Corinthians 2:10-16). The disciples and the people, both saved and unsaved, did not understand because they were ignorant. They did not have an understanding of salvation and life after salvation because they did not have a proper understanding of self and God. Therefore, they embraced the religion of the spiritual leaders. Or perhaps they were both ignorant and arrogant. Most had had no inside-out change of regeneration. Both groups of people viewed self and God only through the lens of the physical, material, natural, and temporal - sensually. They looked for a "physical fix" to a physical problem.

Several reasons can be given as to why the people did not come but they can be summarized as ignorance, arrogance, or both. The people spearheaded by the spiritual leaders of the day did not think they needed to come. Perhaps they did not know how to come. We should not limit the non-coming to the spiritual leaders. We do know that God had preserved His remnant and they did come. All the people heard the call *come to me* as given here and earlier as *repent and believe for the Kingdom of God is here* as initially proclaimed by John the Baptist and later Jesus (Mark 1:15; Matthew 3:2; 4:17)..

Scripture tells us that the majority of Israel did not heed Jesus' call because they did not believe they needed to come (Matthew 9:12-13; 12:7; Mark 2:17; Luke 5:31-32; 19:10). Seemingly they were comfortable and had their own rest. Most of Israel hadn't had a spiritual awakening. They were theologically dense. As a group and individually, they had physical eyes but they did not see and they had physical ears but did not hear. Their senses were trained for and by self-pleasing and self-worship. Jesus came to His own people but His own did not receive Him (John 1:5-9). For whatever the reasons, the people of Israel as a group were children of darkness. They accepted the teaching of their

spiritual leaders. Consequently, they were on the throne depending on their own lawmaking and lawkeeping. Jesus' first coming ushered in a more fully defined clash between two world systems and their opposing worldviews. The Israelites had zeal for themselves and their self-made truth but not for Christ. In fact, they had disdain for Him and desired to distance themselves from Him.

In spite of the people and from a desire to please the Father, Jesus offered Himself to His own. What would it take to motivate the Israelites to come to Him? The answer is rather simple. They must change their view of God and themselves. Jesus made clear that the teaching and example of the spiritual leaders was not God's way. God's way was through the Messiah - dependence on His covenantal law-making and law-keeping and His covenantal trustworthiness. The people were interested in relief and rest but not from themselves and their sin and sinfulness. Many wanted relief from the Romans. Rather, Jesus set forth Himself and His lawmaking and law-keeping in contrast to the spiritual leaders. What did they think? What would you think? They crucified the Messiah the only real hope and help!

Application:

1. How do you respond to the offer of a Person by a Person to come to Him?
2. Who was the offer to?
3. What was the context of the call to come?

Come to Jesus: Matthew 11:28-30: Part III
Jesus the Caller

- v.28: *Come to me, all who weary and heavily burdened and I will give you rest;*
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- v.30: *For my yoke is easy and my burden is light;*

The mantra *come to Jesus* is a common one especially in the evangelical world. However, the call of Christ to come to Him is more than a gospel call. It focuses not simply on salvation but life after salvation as well. The truth of the matter is no one can come to Jesus unless his heart has been supernaturally, miraculously, and radically changed (John 3:3-8; 6:35ff, 60-64). Coming to Jesus is a result and proof of this radical change that is done by the Holy Spirit within the person.

Jesus is the Caller. He called the people to come to Him. The response to the call necessitated movement by the people from one position to another. Coming to Jesus means moving from self, from Satan, and from sin. It means moving in faith and trust to Christ. In John 6:35, John recorded Jesus's words: *I am the bread of life*. Jesus offered Himself and He described Himself in terms of substance and sustenance. He is and He gives. Jesus promised that whoever comes to Him will never go hungry and whoever believes in Him will never be thirsty (6:35, 51-54). By the use of these metaphors Jesus explained that He is offering Himself which may have reminded the people of David's words in Psalm 34:8: *Taste and see that the Lord is good ...*. Jesus explained that the act of coming to Him means believing in and trusting in Him. Jesus knew that everyone is a truster – he trusts in something.

Man was designed by God as a faith-based being. God is the object of saving faith (Galatians 2:20). Jesus taught that believing and trusting Him and in Him meant that the person would no longer trust in self. Self-righteousness, self-dependency, self-sufficiency, and self-justification would be replaced by a God-wrought righteousness and a right standing before God based on Christ's lawkeeping in contrast to a man-generated standing before God on the basis of the keeping of a man-made law.

Throughout the gospels, the call and the invitation *come to Jesus* focused on saving faith and its use (faithfulness). Literally, saving faith means to *believe into*. It has several elements: acknowledgement of certain facts about self and God, acceptance of those facts, and resting upon what God in Christ by the Holy Spirit has done in and to the person. Resting means that biblical truth is relied upon as the guide and explanation for living as a God-pleaser. Further, resting means trusting God rather than self (Proverbs 3:5-8). Trusting is always linked to obedience. Jesus is not speaking only of salvation. His call is not simply evangelistic. He spoke to a mixed audience, saved and unsaved. Jesus focused on both salvation and life after salvation. The people were hurting but were ignorant and arrogant.

At Jesus' first coming He ushered in a new creation. A new world order and a new mode of existence were established at His first coming. Jesus was the beginning installment and fulfillment of that which was promised in the Old Testament (Isaiah 11; 35; 40; 41; 43; 49; Jer. 23; 30; 31; Micah 4; 5; 7; Matthew 22:1-14). More was to come!

In Matthew 11, Jesus spoke in relational terms and continues to this day. Jesus asks, and even commands, people to stop, look, and listen. Someone and something else is greater than they are. Jesus spoke about a supernatural awakening. Jesus came to His own but His own did not receive Him because they loved the darkness (John 1:3-5, 9-11; 3:17-21; 7:7). Jesus offered Himself and an insight into the “deeper” things of life. There is nothing deeper than the Triune God, Who He is and how He works.

Jesus knew that these people were heavy burdened. Jesus' call to come was urgent, merciful, and compassionate. He gave the ultimate contrast: Himself vs. the Pharisees. He contrasted Himself and His teaching with the spiritual leaders and their teaching as the one motivating factor in coming to Him. He was a teacher of God's truth, meek and humble; the spiritual leaders were teachers of man's “wisdom,” proud, arrogant, and fault finders. Recognition of this contrast and the futility of self-trust were to be major motivating factors for coming to Him. Sadly, many, if not most, did not get it. Such is true today.

What would it take to motivate the Israelites to come to Him? The answer is rather simple. They must change their view of God and themselves. They must change their view of Messiah. This required regeneration (John 3:3-8). Jesus made clear that the teaching and example of the spiritual leaders was not God's way. It burdened the people (Matthew 11.28-30). God's way was through the Messiah - dependence on His lawmaking and His lawkeeping. The people were interested in relief and rest but not from their self-orientation - their sin and sinfulness. They wanted relief from the Romans and a high standing before the world. Rather, Jesus set forth Himself and His lawmaking and lawkeeping in contrast to the spiritual leaders and their teaching. Sadly, as a nation, they persisted in their rebellion and they crucified the Messiah! (Acts 2: 23-24; 4:27). They traded a lawbreaker, Barabbas, for the Lawmaker and Lawkeeper. To their shame and misery, they attempted to keep self on the throne.

Application:

1. What is your view of the phrase *come to Me*?
2. How is it possible to come? See John 6:35-45.
3. Why would anyone not come to Jesus and why would someone come to Him?

Come to Jesus: Mathew 11:28-30: Part IV
The Audience and the Yoke

- v.28: *Come to me, all who weary and heavily burdened and I will give you rest;*
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- v.30: *For my yoke is easy and my burden is light;*

Throughout the gospels, Jesus preached and taught truth. In Matthew 11, Jesus emphasized a twofold truth: the people (and you and me) are heavy-burdened and God has answers. The burden of carrying one's sins, the guilt and the consequences of sin and sinning, weighs a person down. Man was never designed to be his own savior. At creation, God created Adam and Eve dependent beings with only one source of truth and strength – the Triune God. After sin, self took center stage and with it rebellion. As a consequence, personal lawkeeping and self-trust became a way of life. However the burden and cost of personal lawkeeping becomes very great. People try to rid themselves of the burden of self-righteousness and the resultant heavy burden of guilt that accompanies auto-soteriology (self salvation). They ignore their true condition and their impotence. They blame shift or assume a victim mentality. They may increase their works and or they may attempt to medicate it away. Or they change the rules and the laws as the Pharisees did. All of these activities only lead to further bondage which is usually denied.

In Israel, the people were in exile. The exile was twofold: physical and spiritual. Israel was under Roman domination, prisoners of Rome, and in bondage. Of major importance was their spiritual exile. They were not in the physical wilderness as were their forefathers, but their hearts, as were the hearts of their forefathers, were far away from God (Matthew 15:8-9; Mark 7:1-4; John 5-8; 1 Corinthians 10:1-14).

Jesus highlighted the fact of Israel's continued ignorance and arrogance in such passages as Matthew 9:12-13; 12:7; Mark 2:17; Luke 5:30-31; 10:10. Jesus did not come to the righteous and healthy but to sinners. Most of Israel did not think they were sinners and they denied that they were *sick spiritually*. They believed that they did not need a *doctor*, certainly not one who confronted them about their idolatrous self-pleasing which was manifested as self-trust, self-dependence, and self-sufficiency. Rather, a radical change was needed but as long as reliance on personal lawkeeping was taught and accepted, Jesus, and His lawkeeping, would not be accepted. Israel needed a true Messiah but Israel refused to believe that fact about them and thus they refused to hear the truth about Jesus and His mission.

The people were both myopic and blind. The activity of personal messiahship was and is fostered by sinful teaching so prevalent in Israel then and now throughout the land. The people listened to the spiritual leaders who apparently tickled their ears but laid heavy burdens on them (Matthew 23; John 9:22; 12:42-43). They prided themselves on self-effort and seeming self-gain. The leaders and the majority of the people believed that what they taught and were taught, and what they were doing was good and proper. The teaching – yoke and burden - of personal lawkeeping was done out of sense of pride and the false hope of refuge. It was fostered by sinful teaching about God and self and was alive and prevalent in Israel. The false teaching that man, in his own strength, can make

himself acceptable to God was a burden that the people were never intended to bear. Personal lawkeeping per say would not prevent another exile.

Paul, a Jew of Jews, taught that Israel had a real zeal for the law and personal lawkeeping (Romans 10:1-4). Paul had been under the same mindset (Philippians 3:3-6). But he learned, practiced, and taught God's answer. It was not self and personal lawkeeping that was the truth. Rather it is Christ by His lawkeeping alone through faith alone by grace alone through the Holy Spirit is truth. He was entrusted with a ministry of the Word (Romans 1:16-17).

Coming to Jesus requires a proper understanding of self and Jesus. Many people were coming to Jesus, but too often, it was simply to get (John 6:26). Yet, Jesus offered something that was in contrast to the spiritual leaders. He offered Himself. He was not a user of people. He gave a free offer of contentment and satisfaction that Matthew termed rest (11:28-30). A correct view of self forces one to look outside of self and one's own lawkeeping. However, simply looking outside of self may not supply the answer that gives you rest. Rather, Jesus gives the answer in John 8:31-32: truth sets you free and Jesus is truth (14:6).

The yoke and burden of the Pharisees meant *my lawkeeping is in my strength, by my standard, for my benefit, and for my glory*. They were own their lawmaker and lawkeeper. They did not need a savior – they had one – themselves. They wanted release from physical bondage and they wanted a God who would bless them. They entertained no personal or corporate spiritual bondage. There was no need for release from spiritual captivity. Luke 4:18-22 records Jesus' inaugural public sermon in the synagogue. In it, He included His mission. Israel rejected Jesus' claim to be the true *Bondage-Breaker*. Consequently the mantra from Israel was: we need our kind of messiah. He is one that will release us from physical domination. In the meantime, they functioned as religious people based on their understanding of truth. Such was the story of the rich young ruler. In contrast, coming to Jesus requires a proper view of God and self. Further, it requires a proper view of Christ and His lawkeeping. In the end, it is resting, trusting, and obeying God simply because God is God.

Application:

1. How about you: do you have an idea of what it means to come to Christ?
2. Here in Matt. 11:28-30 it means to reexamine your standard for thinking, desiring, and doing what you do and the means of trying to achieve it. Write out some of your checkpoints and your source of them.
3. Are you heavy burdened? How would you define those terms and what is Christ's answer? Compare your checkpoints with God's word and write out what you find.
4. Please read Ps. 34:8; Isaiah 55:1-3 and compare them with Jesus' invitation here. What do you learn about Jesus and yourself?

Come to Jesus: Matthew 11:28-30: Part V
The Yoke and the Yeast

- v.28: *Come to me, all who weary and heavily burdened and I will give you rest;*
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Matthew 11:28-30 contains both a warning as well as an invitation. *Come*, as previously discussed, is movement away from something to something. Jesus knew that the people had excuses/reasons for not coming. Therefore Jesus warned them about the yoke that they ignorantly and arrogantly were wearing or carrying. He invited the people to make an exchange – His yoke for the yoke of the spiritual leaders.

What is this yoke that Jesus spoke about? In the Jewish literature, yoke represented the sum-total of obligations which a person must take upon himself as a result of the teaching and traditions of the rabbis. Yoke, then, is the system of teaching by which a person is to abide by. Later in Matthew, Jesus termed the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees as yeast (16:6, 12).

Jesus was not through with His instructions. He warned the people to be on guard not only for the yoke and the yeast (teaching) of the Pharisees but their hypocrisy. In Luke 12:1-2, Jesus termed the yeast of the Pharisees hypocrisy. In Mark 8:15, Jesus warned the people regarding the yeast of the Pharisees and Herod. I suspect by yeast that Jesus indicated their hypocrisy.

In Luke 12:1-2, the phrase *be on guard* addressed proper thinking about God, self, and the spiritual leaders and their teaching. Hypocrisy is pretend. Hypocrisy is looking good on the outside but the inside is cold and hard (Matthew 23:13, 15, 16, 23, 25, 27, 29). It is play-acting such that the person is not the person he appears to be. Hypocrisy is deception and dishonesty. Ironically, the true hypocrites charged Jesus with deception which attested to their pride and deception (John 6:41, 52; 7:5, 12, 40-43, 47, 52; 8:48, 52-53, 57). The spiritual leaders and their followers were in serious trouble and denied that fact. Personal lawkeeping had worked just fine for them. They reasoned that they had no reason to depend on another's lawkeeping especially someone like Jesus. Jesus looked just like any other person, seemingly a typical Jew.

Jesus' answer to hypocrisy was Himself – the Truth – which John expressed as the truth will set you free (John 8:31-32). Personal lawkeeping when it is a way of life does not die quickly because it is habituated and patterned self-pleasing. It takes a supernatural act of God in the heart of a person to bring a change. John called this the new birth or more accurately the birth from above – by the Holy Spirit (regeneration: John 3:3-8).

Jesus summarized His meaning of teaching (yoke and yeast) and hypocrisy (yeast) in Matthew 5:17-20. Christ taught that unless a person's righteousness exceeds that of the Pharisees, he will not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Righteousness may refer to a right standing which is earned or that is inherent in the person. Or the term may refer to right living however defined. Jesus was teaching an important truth: entranced into the Kingdom was top priority. The Pharisees taught that their righteousness – right standing and right of entrance into God's favor - consisted of their personal lawmaking.

Their lawkeeping was the key. In their scheme, self-righteousness was measured by and gained through personal lawmaking and lawkeeping.

Some recent theologians have emphasized that this form of religiosity was not so much to earn a place in the kingdom but to maintain it. Personal lawkeeping was needed for membership in the covenant community to maintain a person's standing in it. In both schemes, the emphasis was on personal lawmaking and lawkeeping. In the religious system of Jesus' day, the person functioned as his own messiah. Jesus was not needed. In the system of Jesus' day and those who discuss the so-called New Perspective on Paul, self-righteousness trumped the righteousness of another person including Christ which was credited to another's account. Therefore Israel did not need a Savior, certainly not one like Christ. While some people may have appreciated the miracles, the general view of the day was to heck with Christ. They reasoned that they needed another type of messiah - one who would lead them out of physical bondage. They assumed their spiritual condition was healthy.

Application:

1. Define the yoke and yeast of Pharisees. Give the reasons it was/is so pernicious.
2. Give examples of self-righteousness (see Luke 18:9-14; The Rich Young Ruler; Phil. 3:3-6). Give reasons it is so God-dishonoring.
3. What was the hypocrisy of the spiritual leaders?

Come to Jesus: Matthew 11:28-30: Part VI
The Yoke and the Yeast

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Paul also took up the yoke of false teaching (see Romans and Galatians). Abraham had a similar adventure with lawkeeping. In Romans 4:1-3, Paul wrote that Abraham sought truth on the subject of lawkeeping and justification (right standing before God as Judge). Abraham learned that justification by works is unbiblical. It is no match for a saving faith-received justification through grace by faith alone following regeneration (Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5). In Romans 10:1-5, Paul addressed the subject from another angle. Paul gave a correct view of Israel. Israel had zeal for the law and lawkeeping but this was woefully inadequate and inappropriate. It was not simply a quantitative issue regarding the amount of lawkeeping. It was far more substantial. Jesus and Paul were touching the heart of the matter- the heart. Israel had such a high view of themselves as lawmakers and lawkeepers that they did not need anyone or anything else. In contrast, Jesus and Paul taught that there must be zeal for God's lawmaking and zeal for Christ's lawkeeping rather than for one's personal lawkeeping.

The call to *come to Jesus* was and is more than an invitation. It was an exhortation to a people in the throes of bondage. Scripture presents this bondage in a number of ways. In the case of Matthew 11:28-30, Jesus had drawn the contrast between Him and His teaching and that of the spiritual leaders of the day and their teaching. The contrast involved more than simple teaching and doctrine. Jesus contrasted Himself as a Person and Teacher with the spiritual leaders. The people bore a heavy, impossible load. But both the people and the spiritual leaders were blind and oblivious to their own hardness of heart. Peter draws a similar contrast in 1 Peter 5:1-4. He gives the proper manner for shepherds to shepherd God's flock.

Christianity is a works religion but the works are not personal lawkeeping as the source of salvation or sanctification. Rather, Christianity focuses on Christ's lawkeeping of God's laws and the person dependence on Him and His lawkeeping. Lawkeeping is an expression of one's salvation. Paul thanked God for His perfect, good law (Romans 7:12; 1 Tim. 1:8-11) AND for Christ's perfect obedience - His perfect lawkeeping (Romans 3:21-26; 8:1; 2 Corinthians 5:18-21). In the Pharisees' scheme, self-righteousness trumped Christ's righteousness. God was not needed to give the law and Christ was not needed to keep the law. They had Moses and what he gave and they had their man-made traditions.

Sometimes Christians fall into the same deceptive, God-dishonoring trap when they set up unbiblical checkpoints. One more good work and or one less bad work is

hoped to correct the balance-beam so that good outweighs the bad. The truth of the matter is that one sin – the one sin in Adam - so pushes the beam so far down that only divine intervention can change the scales. Therefore no one or desires to come to Jesus unless his heart has been supernaturally, miraculously, and radically changed (John 3:3-8; 6:35ff, 60-64). Coming to Jesus is a personal choice only as an expression of what God in Christ by the Holy Spirit has done in and for the person. Coming to Jesus is a result and proof of the radical change in a person's heart. In terms of life after salvation, coming to Jesus is an expression of growth in Christ which pleases the Triune God. Growth in personal holiness and Christlikeness is testimony to what one is in Christ – union with Christ wrought by the Holy Spirit. For the believer, personal lawkeeping is not a burden or even a demand, but a blessing and privilege. It is not to earn but to testify. It is done as a child of the King to God, for God, in Christ, and by the Holy Spirit.

Application:

1. What is your understanding of salvation and sanctification?
2. What is your understanding of the Law and lawkeeping?
3. Articulate the yoke and yeast of the spiritual leaders of Jesus' day.

Come to Jesus: Matthew 11:28-30: Part VII
Reasons for Not Coming and Not Resting

- v.28: *Come to me, all who weary and heavily burdened and I will give you rest;*
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- v.30: *For my yoke is easy and my burden is light;*

Come to Jesus can occur only if you have some but proper knowledge of who God is and of yourself. That knowledge is imparted by the Holy Spirit as a gift and blessing. *Come to Jesus* requires denying self. Deny self what? All people are to put off or replace self-dependence, self-sufficiency, self-righteousness, and self-exaltation. They are to put on God-pleasing God-dependence. In order for this to occur, people need an inside-out, supernatural and miraculous operation resulting in a new heart. Only the believer has the capacity to think, desire, and act as God-pleaser for His sake and His glory. Throughout His ministry, Jesus presented the *what* and the *how* of denying self. He taught and practiced self-denial. For Christ, denying self meant pleasing His Father I lieu of Himself. In his gospel, John reiterates the truth that Jesus came as the Father's Son disciplined by the Father with the goal of pleasing Him (John 4:31-34). That goal motivated Him to the cross and beyond.

A critical question that requires an answer is: why won't people come? The answer is a matter of life and death, salvation and condemnation. There was a marked disconnect between what Jesus knew and what Israel knew as a nation. It is critical to remember that Israel of Jesus' time was following the footsteps of the forefathers (see Acts 7:37ff, 44ff, 51-53). Several reasons can be given as to why the people did not come but they can be summarized as ignorance, arrogance, or both. The people spearheaded by the spiritual leaders and their religious machine, even juggernaut, did not think they needed to come. Perhaps they did not know how to come. The people had heard the call *come to me* as given here and earlier as *repent and believe for the Kingdom of God is here* as proclaimed by John the Baptist. We should not limit the non-coming to the spiritual leaders. In general, the nation as a whole was apostate. However, God's remnant was present in Israel and they did come.

Scripture tells us that Israel as a nation did not come because very few believed that they needed to come (Matt 9:12-13; 12:7; Mark 2:17; Luke 5:31-32; 19:10). Seemingly they were comfortable and they rested in self. Most of Israel had not experienced a spiritual awakening. They were children of darkness and theologically dense. They had physical eyes but did not see and physical ears but did not hear. Their senses were trained for self-pleasing and self-worship. Jesus had come to His own people, but they did not receive Him – they rejected Him (John 1:5-9).

Jesus described the people as weary and burdened. They were on the treadmill of human effort. They must churn out works and manipulate the rules or be buried in the realization that they can't measure up. In response to the exile and an earnest desire to avoid that experience, the spiritual leaders changed the standard by establishing their own – the traditions of men. The spiritual leaders had placed on themselves and the people a constant maze of legalistic contortions of keep and do (Matthew 23:4-7; Luke 11:46; 18:9-14). Rule and regulation-keeping functioned as acts of obedience but according to human tradition and human effort. These acts were to outweigh acts of disobedience. Paul followed this same philosophy until he was saved (Philippians 3:3-6).

The spiritual leaders and the people of Jesus' day were not different from people of today. So many people practice the balance-beam theory of acceptance before God in salvation and sanctification. The people depend on their own efforts, merits, and achievements to get ahead and to find acceptance. They never do and they never will. But those facts don't stop their efforts. Jesus knew that!

Jesus is the Knower. He knew the people and their anguish and misery. All believers should draw strength and hope from the fact that Jesus knows and has answers. He described the condition of those that He offered the call and invitation – they were weary and heavily burdened. What was happening to these people? Jesus was not referring to physical problems and physical labor. Jesus was describing a way of life that centered on self for self by self. That way of life was associated with the onerous burden and weight of personal lawkeeping and the constant drive to “measure up.” The people had bought into the false teaching of the Pharisees. Personal effort was mandatory and sufficient to gain and prove a special provision before God. Rather, the law of God was not the problem. The problem was fencing of God's law in an effort to keep the law for personal gain. The spiritual leaders established their laws in an attempt to keep God's law in their own strength. The fallacy of constant, perfect or semi-perfect lawkeeping remain today as a symbol of man's ignorance and arrogance.

Christ makes a promise – the gift of refreshment. Christ was addressing the sin of self-righteousness with its ignorance and arrogance. Jesus was giving the people a theological lesson. He was teaching them about Himself and themselves. Jesus was addressing an age-old problem: how do you get right with God? Some answer by saying they don't care – there is no God or they are not sure that there is one. So what is the big deal? Others view true religion as doing it yourself. This is a self-righteousness religiosity. This was introduced in the Garden at the fall. Many deny their inability choosing instead to believe in themselves. Being on the self-righteous merry-go-round keeps a person stuck on himself and away from God. A proud person steps onto and stays on the merry-go-round of earning *self-worth*. Pride and ignorance keeps him on it. Grace is God's gift and ticket off the merry-go-round. This applies for both salvation and sanctification - growth in Christ.

Application:

1. Where are you on works? Are they are blessing or a curse? See John 14:15, 21, 23 and 1 John 5:3 to help you answer.
2. Read Philippians 3:3-6, 7-11: describe how Paul answered the works question.
3. Read Philippians 2:12-13 and 2 Peter 1:5-10 and write out how they fit into Jesus' call? What changes do you need to make in your view of the law and law keeping?

Come to Jesus: Matthew 11:28-30: Part VIII

Come

- v.28: *Come to me, all who weary and heavily burdened and I will give you rest;*
- v.29: *Take my yoke upon you and learn from Me; I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls.*
- v.30: *For my yoke is easy and my burden is light*

As noted previously, the call to *come to Jesus* was more than an invitation. It was an exhortation to a people in the throes of bondage. It was a matter of life and death. Scripture presents this bondage in a number of ways. In the case of Matthew 11:28-30, Jesus had drawn the contrast between Him and His teaching and the spiritual leaders of the day and their teaching. The people were burdened but both the people and the spiritual leaders were blind and oblivious to their own hardness of heart.

As we have discussed Jesus had warned the people to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees. This leaven was their teaching: personal lawkeeping of their own law in their own strength for their own benefit. They were their lawmaker and law keeper. There was no spiritual need and consequently the mantra was: we need our kind of messiah. He is one that will release us from physical domination of Rome.

Simply, coming to Jesus means denying self. Deny self what? All people are to put off or replace self-dependence, self-sufficiency, self-righteousness, and self-exaltation. As I have written, in order for this to occur, people need an inside-out operation resulting in a new heart. The Bible speaks of this as regeneration (John 3:3-8). In Matthew 11, Jesus presented the essence of denying what He taught. Denying His teaching is denying Him. It seemed ludicrous and counterintuitive for people to embrace Jesus and His teaching. They only needed physical freedom and if Jesus could not obtain it for them, they would remain on the lookout for someone who would. In the meantime, they had themselves. For the people, physical problems and their solutions were keys. The physical trumped the spiritual. The people saw no connection with the physical and the spiritual.

Jesus warned the people to be on guard regarding another aspect of the Pharisees: their hypocrisy (Luke 12:1-2). The phrase *Be on guard* is addressed proper thinking - about self and the spiritual leaders as well as their teaching. Hypocrisy is pretend. It is play-acting such that the person is not the person he appears to be. Hypocrisy is deception and dishonesty. Ironically, the true hypocrites charged Jesus with deception which attested to their pride and deception (John 6:41, 52; 7:5, 12, 40-43, 47, 52; 8:48, 52-53, 57). The spiritual leaders and their followers were in serious trouble. They denied that fact. Personal lawkeeping had worked just fine for them so they reasoned that they did not need to depend on another's lawkeeping especially someone like Jesus. Jesus looked just like any other Jew. He had no personal pedigree and He was considered a loser.

Jesus warned against hypocrisy which is trying to look good on the outside but the inside is cold and hard (Matt. 23:13, 15, 16, 23, 25, 27, 29). Jesus' answer to hypocrisy is the same as that for false teaching: Himself. He is Truth. John expressed this in John 8:31-32: *the truth will set you free*. Jesus' statement indicates that every person outside for Christ is outside of the truth/Truth and is in bondage. Israel was following its history of bondage. Personal lawkeeping when it is a way of life does not die quickly. It requires a supernatural act of God in the heart - regeneration (John 3:3-8).

The gospels also warned the people to be aware of the yeast of Herod (Mark 8:15). What was his yeast? Herod Antipas was an evil, fearful person. He had beheaded John the Baptist simply to look good before his friends (Matt. 14:9-10; Mark 6:16). Herod hoped to see Jesus perform (Luke 23:8). He made a connection behind John the Baptist and Jesus but he desired to kill Jesus (Luke 9:7-9; 13:31; 23:8). Herod was guilty and on the run from God as taught in Proverbs. 28:1. Herod lived sensually: by a *now, material, earthly* philosophy – for me, by me, and to me. Herod's leaven was little different from that of the Pharisees. Self and hypocrisy took center stage

Come to Me should have been music in the ears (and hearts) of the people. Believing - saving faith - is a most wonderful thing. It is a gift. It ushers in a true conviction of self as a sinner, sin as rebellion against God, and the beauty and majesty of God in Christ via the Holy Spirit. The work of the Triune God ushers in salvation and continues the believer along the path of growth in Christ. Christ intended those truths to be a blessing then and now.

Application:

1. What is your leaven?
2. What is your response to it?
3. Compare 1 Peter 5:5-7 with Jesus' words in Matthew 11:28-30: what are the similarities?

Come to Jesus: Matthew 11:28-30: Part IX

Conclusion

- *v.28: Come to me, all who weary and heavily burdened and I will give you rest;*
- *v.29: Take my yoke upon you and learn from Me; I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls.*
- *v.30: For my yoke is easy and my burden is light*

Jesus issues an invitation. The invitation is for people to unite to Him. He offers Himself. He knew His people. By design, He was speaking primarily to Jews. He knew that they had been exposed to a false gospel. They were being taught that salvation and sanctification was for self-righteous people which were the proud, few, and hard-working people.

The spiritual leaders thought they knew the consequence of falling short of God's law – the exile. So in order to “improve” their chances of avoiding another exile, they introduced hedges or fences that assured themselves that they could keep the law. They were not concerned about God and His law but about self and their law. They exchanged the truth of God, His lawmaking and lawkeeping, for a lie – their lawmaking and lawkeeping (Romans 1:18-23). They hoped against hope to prevent the consequences of failing to keep the law. But the law was not God's law. They became a law unto themselves: they set the law, determined obedience or disobedience, and determined their reward. They lived based on externals. They did not need a spiritual savior or messiah. They had themselves. They only needed physical relief.

The Jews of Jesus day were following the footsteps of their forefathers. This external way of life is not new to the Jews/Pharisees. Israel had a long history of idolatrous activities and killing the prophets. The prophets had warned against religious externality (Isaiah 1:11-15; 44:3; Jeremiah 6:19-20; 7:20-23; Amos 5:21-24; Micah 6:7; Hosea 6:6; 1 Samuel 15:22-23; Psalm 50:6-14). Jesus, the ultimate Prophet, came to His own and offered a new way of life through Him. Jesus ushered in the new creation through a new exodus (2 Corinthians 5:17; Luke 9:31). Believers were to be new creatures with a new orientation and capacity (2 Corinthians 5:9, 17). The people refused to understand and acknowledge their true state and status. They were heavy burdened and had no rest. The daily grind of personal lawkeeping is like a boulder around one's neck. It takes an increasing amount of energy to keep going. There does not seem to be light at the end of the personal-lawkeeping tunnel.

Jesus speaks to the people as the beacon of hope, the living water, and the light of the world. He simply says come and offers contrast in Matthew 11:28-30 to help motivate the people to come and enjoy. Jesus was not simply offering the gospel. His call was a call for the people to change their whole approach to God and themselves. Getting saved and living as one saved were included in Jesus' call. Salvation and sanctification both involve a right view of lawmaking and lawkeeping.

Application:

1. Summarize your understanding of Jesus' message in terms of the problem and solution.
2. How have you functioned as your own lawmaker? What laws have you set up for yourself and others?
3. Reread Matthew 11:28-30 in its context, Romans 10:1-5, and Philippians 3:3-6, 7-11. What do you learn about God and you? Write out three applications and record the results of applying them.