

Sayings of Jesus 4 – Come unto Me

Reading: Matthew 11:28-30 “*Come unto Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*”¹

Introduction:

This lesson is a continuation of the series of lessons that are looking at various “sayings” of Jesus. The aim is to determine what they mean for us as Christians in practical terms. This week’s lesson comes from **Matthew 11:28-30**.

At the time that Jesus spoke these words, He and the Jews to whom He spoke were living under the Old Law – the Law of Moses (**Matthew 5:17-19**). This Law contained many different rules and regulations² beside the basic ones that are found in the ten commandments (**Exodus 20:1-17**). While the Law itself was holy (**Romans 7:12**), it ended up condemning people because of their weaknesses (**Romans 7:10**) - the people sinned (**Romans 3:23**), unable to keep the Law perfectly; unable to save themselves by their own works (**Galatians 3:10-12; James 2:10**). This left the penitent sinner with feelings of guilt and frustration at not being able to live up to the mark (**Romans 7:24**).

In addition to all that, there were many other laws that had been introduced by the religious leaders that placed heavy burdens on the people (**Matthew 15:9; 23:4a**). Yet these same religious leaders did very little to help the people to understand the ways of God (**Matthew 15:12-14; Luke 11:46**), or to help and encourage them to live righteously before God (**Matthew 23:4b, 13**). In fact, the leaders themselves were certainly not leading by example (**Matthew 23:3 f.f.**).

The result was that when Jesus came, those people who were trying to live righteously were struggling, mindful of their own sinfulness (e.g. **Luke 7:37-38; 18:13**), “.... *weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.*” (**Matthew 9:36**).

LESSON

1) Jesus extends an invitation

God has always been mindful of man (**Psalms 8:4-5**), and has always desired that all men turn from sin and come back to Him (**2 Peter 3:9**). This is because He loves us. His love is not a passive or inactive love. He is not sitting on the side-line and just watching us in our struggles. Rather, His love is active – He takes the initiative (**Romans 5:8**) and remains faithful (**2 Timothy 2:13**); He takes the first step in reaching out to the lost (**Luke 19:10**).

In **Matthew 11:28-30**, we see Jesus extending an invitation to all those who are “.... *poor in spirit ...*” (**Matthew 5:3**); to all those who “*labour and are heavy laden*”. There are specific calls in His invitation;

- “*come unto Me*”,
- “*take My yoke upon you*”, and,
- “*learn of Me*”.

We will look briefly at each of these in turn.

¹ All Biblical quotes are from the New King James Version Bible (NKJV).

² For example, see **Leviticus 1–7; 12–25; Numbers 18–19; 27–30; Deuteronomy 13–25**.

Sayings of Jesus 4 – Come unto Me

a) Come unto Me

The Pharisee's approach to people was, "*Do as I say!*", but Jesus approach is, "*Come unto Me ... and learn of Me.*" In saying "*Come*", Jesus invites the sinner to come to Him. He knows about the sinner's struggle with temptation, for He experienced temptation Himself (**Hebrews 4:15**). He knows about their sins (*e.g.* **Luke 7:47**), for nothing is hidden from His sight (**1 Corinthians 4:5**).

Not everyone will take up His call. Those who trust in themselves and exalt themselves, such as the cities mentioned just prior to our text in **Matthew 11:20-24**, do not come to Him. Most of those who consider themselves to be "wise" in this world foolishly reject Him (**Romans 1:22; 1 Corinthians 1:26**). They fail to see their need for the saviour, and consider the gospel to be foolishness (**1 Corinthians 1:23**).

But for those wanting to be right with God; those willing to learn and know the truth; those willing to surrender their self and put their trust in Him, they come, and He will not turn them away.

b) Take My yoke upon you

Jesus then said that they are to take up His yoke. In the area of agriculture and farming, a yoke is usually a large and often heavy piece of wood that is placed across the shoulders of two animals to couple them together, side by side. This is to ensure that they both walk and work together in unison, productively sharing a common load.

The yoke (or burden) of trying to be perfectly obedient to the Law, plus the additional load that the Pharisees had placed on the people, was heavy and hard to bear. It was a yoke that relied on the wearer's own ability to carry. And after loading people up, the Pharisees did nothing to help them carry the load (**Matthew 23:4**), in fact, they showed contempt towards those who did not live up to their standards (**Matthew 15:2; Luke 18:11-12**).

But Jesus makes a contrast between His yoke, and the yoke of the Law and of the Pharisees. His yoke is not heavy; the burden is light (**Matthew 11:30**). It is a yoke that is lined with love and compassion, for He is gentle and lowly in heart. The wearer will not be labouring and struggling in trying to keep up. They have the saviour to share the loads of this life. The sinner who stumbles will have an understanding companion with a hand that is always ready to lift them up again and encourage them.

But taking up the yoke of Jesus also places an obligation on the sinner. It requires them to submit to Him and to His authority, being subject to His teachings and commandments (**Luke 6:47-48; John 14:15**), and changing their lives to be like Him (*e.g.* **1 Peter 2:21**).

c) Learn of Me

One of the reasons for Jesus wanting sinners to come to Him and take up His yoke was so that they could learn from Him. In the verses just prior to the text for this lesson, Jesus presented His credentials. He said that all things had been delivered to Him from the Father (**Matthew 11:27a**). What He taught; what He commanded; the work that He did, He received from the

Sayings of Jesus 4 – Come unto Me

Father in heaven (**John 5:36; 12:49-50**). His teachings were not the teachings of men, but of God Himself. The disciple Peter recognised that the things that Jesus taught were indeed the words of life (**John 6:68**).

Christianity is not simply a life spent following a defined set of rules. Yes, there are commandments, and we need to obey them (**Matthew 28:20; Hebrews 5:9**). His commandments are holy and just, not burdensome, and can transform the life of sinners (**Romans 12:2; 1 John 5:3**).

Christianity is about converting people to Jesus, not simply to a “system”. It is more than just meeting together on Sundays. It is about converting people to a particular way of thinking; to a particular way of living. Learning from Jesus is not a “once off” thing - it is a continual, on-going process that involves both instruction, and experience through practice (**1 Corinthians 4:17; Ephesians 5:8-16; Hebrews 5:14; James 1:22**). It means to learn from His way of life; to learn about His attitudes (**Philippians 2:5**); to learn how He treated people and responded to them (*e.g.* **Luke 7:36-50**), and in particular, how He obeyed God and always did those things that pleased Him (**John 8:29**)³.

“Come take My yoke upon you and learn of Me”

2) He gives rest to souls

For those who come to Jesus and take up His yoke, He offers rest. This is not a physical rest where a person can now sit back and do no more work. In fact, those who come to Christ are required to work – sharing a yoke involves participating in work and sharing the workload. In **Ephesians 2:10** we read that those who have been saved have been “.... *created in Christ Jesus for good works*”; **Titus 2:14** says that they are “... *His own special people, zealous⁴ for good works ...*”⁵. Works are necessary, for it is by works that faith is perfected (**James 2:20-26**).

What Jesus was referring to when He said, “*I will give you rest*”, was rest for the soul. No longer does the person need to bear the burden and guilt of sin. No longer does the person need to feel frustrated every time they stumble. No longer does the person need to fear death and the judgement (**Hebrews 2:14-15; 9:27**). No longer does the person need to feel like giving up when they realise that they can’t make it on their own. Jesus has taken care of it. He died so that the sinner could have forgiveness (**Ephesians 1:7; Isaiah 53:5**) and be presented before the Father clean and holy and above reproach (**Colossians 1:21-22**).

This does not mean, then, that a carefree attitude or an indifferent approach to sin should prevail. Those who come to Him are to “... *abstain from every form of evil ...*” (**1 Thessalonians 5:22**). Satan is to be resisted (**James 4:7**). The old self with all its corruption and worldliness is to be put away (**Galatians 5:13; Ephesians 4:22; Colossians 3:5**) and the new man is to be put on, living a life

³ Converting people to Jesus also includes teaching them to be obedient to the Father and His word, because that is how Jesus was. Our obedience is a reflection of our love for God (**John 14:15; 1 John 5:2-3**).

⁴ *i.e.* keen, eager, willing, wanting to do good works.

⁵ Also **Titus 3:8** “... *be careful to maintain good works*”

Sayings of Jesus 4 – Come unto Me

that brings glory and honour to Him (**Matthew 5:16; Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:12-15**).

But when sin does occur, as it will (**1 John 1:8**), there is an advocate with the Father; there is one who will plead the sinner's case, and that "one" is Jesus (**1 John 2:1**). And His blood will continue to cleanse those who are walking with Him (**1 John 1:7**), taking up and bearing their share of the yoke.

Application:

Everybody sins (**Romans 3:23**), but not everybody cares. There are many in this world who do not believe in God (**Romans 1:20-22; Psalm 14:1a**). There are many who do not believe that one day they must stand before Him in judgement. There are many who believe that after death, there is either nothing, or that we are all going to heaven anyway, regardless as to how we have lived here on earth. Therefore, they see no need to come to Jesus, to take on His yoke, and to learn from Him.

But for those of us who believe in God and His word, we believe in the eternal nature of our soul (**2 Corinthians 4:16-18**); that we will have to stand before God one day and give an account of our lives (**2 Corinthians 5:10**); that He will render to us according to our deeds (**Romans 2:6-9**). Therefore, we desire to be right with God. We desire to live righteous lives, but acknowledge that we fall short so many times – that we cannot make it on our own, and that we need His help.

God has made it possible for us to be righteous, not based on our own efforts, but through His grace and mercy (**Ephesians 2:8-9**); through the sacrifice that Jesus made for us all (**Romans 5:6**). He now invites us to come to Him. There is no point turning to someone else. As we saw in the previous lesson in this series, Jesus said; *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."* (**John 14:6**), It is only through coming to Jesus that we can have salvation (**Acts 4:12**). It is only through Him that we have forgiveness of sins (**Colossians 1:14**). He is our High Priest, sitting at the Father's right hand (**Hebrews 8:1**), making intercession for us (**Hebrews 7:25**). He gives us hope (**1 Timothy 1:1**). He gives us strength when we are down (**Philippians 4:13; 2 Timothy 4:17a**). And He will never leave us nor forsake us (**Hebrews 13:5**).

But we have to do our part as well (**Philippians 4:12-16**). We are to take up His yoke and learn from Him. That means spending time with Him and His word. It means that we are to allow Him, through His word, to transform our lives (**Romans 12:2**). It means that we are to put aside our worldly ideas and passions, and become more and more like Him in the way we speak, the way we act, and the way we think (**1 Corinthians 11:1; Philippians 2:5**). And we are to follow His example of obedience to the Father (**Hebrews 5:8-9**).

The result is that we, too, will have rest for our souls. There will still be the issues of this life, problems to overcome, trials to bear (**1 Peter 1:6-7**). But He will always be there to share the load with us. However, and most importantly, the burden and guilt of sin will have been taken away, and we will have the joy of salvation (**1 Peter 1:8-9**). We will be in fellowship with the Father and His son, Jesus (**1 John 1:3**), looking forward to our eternal home (**1 Peter 1:4**).