



# MATTHEW

## THE KINGDOM COME

Kingdom Rest  
Matthew 11:25-30

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### Introduction

Good morning, brothers and sisters.

I am glad to see you all here this morning, on this Daylight Savings Sunday—it is a good day to talk about rest.

You've just heard the text read from Matthew 11 this morning, it is a well-known quotation from Jesus, and the inspiration for a book we talked about last week—*Gentle and Lowly: The Heart of Christ for Sinners and Sufferers* by Dane Ortlund.

Now, some of you may be thinking: This book is not the Bible, why are we talking about it two weeks in a row? And that's a great question. The center of our worship services together is always the Word of God himself, God revealing himself to us through the Bible, so our goal is not to turn our eyes away from the Bible to this, other, book.

No, our reasons for highlighting this book are twofold.

1. **We just want to be honest.** A lot of our own understandings of the Bible passages that we've read over the last few weeks are rooted in this book. And so, we just want to be transparent about some of the things that have helped us, as pastors, in understanding and applying the text. It's good for you to know that pastors are not innovative—at least, they shouldn't be! So, one thing we're doing is just reminding you, we are helped and inspired by lots of different resources every time we enter into the task of preaching.
2. And the second reason is that when we do come across those resources that are particularly useful, whether it's some particularly helpful analogies or memorable sayings, or just someone who has been helpful for us in clarifying and piecing together the Bible for us, **we want to share them!** It's a particular passion of mine, to point people to some of the most helpful, tried and true resources that the Church has compiled in her 2000-year-old history. So, from time-to-time, we're going to recommend authors, artists, books, and other resources—not because these people or resources are perfect or should replace going directly to the source (the Bible), but because the Church is meant to be a help for us as we seek to know Christ

more. And this book is one of those kinds of resources that helps us see Christ clearly through the lens of Scripture and does so in some really striking and memorable ways.

But now, it's time for us to go back to the source material. But before we dig into these words of Jesus, would you pray with me?

## **Sermon Context**

Now, as we've been in the book of Matthew for the last few months, we've tried to do our best to give the context for every passage we look at. The vast majority of the Bible is not simply a collection of wise sayings or interesting stories, but a series of intentionally crafted narratives and letters and histories. So, rarely will we come to the Bible and treat a few sentences in isolation.

But, today, our passage is a smaller passage and sit and we'll have a chance to sit and dwell in it for a bit. But before we do that, I want to make sure we have just a little bit of the context in which these wonderful words of Jesus come.

So, to go back to last week, Pastor Ethan preached a wonderful message on Christ's heart for the lost. Matthew talks about how Jesus had compassion for the crowds that were harassed and helpless, and that his compassion drove him to send out his people on mission to reach them with the saving message of the gospel.

And then, throughout Chapter 10, Jesus gave his followers instructions and warnings about how to go out on mission. He spends a lot of time talking about the persecution that will come, encouraging them not to fear, but warning them of conflict on the horizon. Then, in Chapter 11, Jesus starts getting some response: some who weren't sure who he was and some who rejected him all together.

So, it's after this, when Jesus has sent his people out on mission, and has had a variety of responses to that mission, that he says these words. And so, it's important to see that because there are two different people who would hear these words of Jesus:

1. People who are meeting him for the first time, who have a decision to make on how to respond to him.
2. People who are on mission for him, who have followed him and now are in the thick of life as his followers and his missional agents in the world.

So, no matter who you are this morning, whether you count yourself as a follower of Christ or if you're trying to figure out: Who is Jesus? To each of you, Jesus says:

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

## Rest is Our Common Ache

Now, the first thing we need to really grasp the message of Jesus here is that all of us are in desperate need of rest. And, of all mornings, today is a morning that reminds us of our innate need for rest.

But this is fairly self-evident in our culture, how weary and heavy-laden we are. I have no research to back this up, but I'm certain the most common responses to the question: "How are you?" in our culture are: "I'm good", "Busy", and "Tired." Maybe that's just my household and my weakness showing, but that seems right to me! Sometimes we'll even combine all of those answers: "I'm good! Tired, but good! We're busy, but it's a good busy."

But, I really do think there's something there. There is something about us, as a country, as a culture, perhaps just as human beings, that produces a constant deficiency, which feels to many of us as if we are simply tired all the time. A culture of multitasking, a culture of metrics of likes and retweets casting a shadow over our every post, a culture in which we are defined by our jobs, a culture that has long boasted that it was the one the place where anybody could achieve anything if they just worked hard enough—is a culture of restlessness.

I could cite statistics of sleep deprivation or employee burnout, but instead, I'll just ask you to examine your own heart: Are you tired? Are you tired of feeling pressured to cultivate your home, your family, your very life in a way that lives up to the pictures you see on Instagram? Are you tired of the responsibility you have as a parent, consistently feeling uncertain and unworthy? Are you tired of having to put on a happy face as you come to church on a Sunday mornings, ensuring your friends and neighbors that you have it together?

Are you tired?

And friends, we have to be very clear here: the physical exhaustion that we feel is just a symptom. Physical exhaustion isn't actually the problem, it's the signpost. We strive, strive, strive, work, work, work, multi-task and push our physical bodies to the limits because our very souls are restless, itching with a sense of unworthiness, a sense of falling short, a sense that "I am not what I should be!"

And our only solution to that itch is to work, work, work to make a change. To be better. In ancient Israel, this looked like a meticulous, heavy burden of law-keeping imposed by the Pharisees—strive without ceasing to keep the list of rules day after day, week after week, and then perhaps your Heavenly Father will accept you. The Apostle Paul called this burden a "yoke of slavery" (Galatians 5:1).

In our culture today, that yoke of slavery looks a little different. Perhaps it's the temptation to build one's identity and sense of security on our job success. Perhaps it's a pressure to post the right things on social media, be them the right social justice initiatives, the right put-together pictures, or the right witty captions. Perhaps it is an incessant need to please the people around us, whether a spouse, a parent, or a mentor.

But in every person, in every culture, we are tempted to base our identity, our security, in the things that we do and achieve. And that is something in which we will never be able to rest.

This week, I was watching a new documentary that just came out about Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz—it really was a wonderful documentary about the stars of *I Love Lucy*. They have a fascinating story, a story that combines incredible beauty and deep sadness. The documentary tells the story of how a big part of the reason why they began *I Love Lucy* was because the two of them wanted to work together, to ensure that they would be able to be together and have family with some semblance of normalcy together after being on the road and being separated for almost the entire first decade of their marriage.

But the success of *I Love Lucy* led to more work and more work. They started their own production studio, taking on more and more. The show itself got bigger, their studio got bigger, buying out other production companies. At one point, you hear Desi saying in an interview: “I only had two choices. Either quit or get bigger. That is the way business is in the United States.”

Their personal responsibilities grew and grew, and in response to that, Desi sought out arenas of rest: golfing, gambling, boating. And eventually, this pattern of burnout and chasing rest in all the world drove the iconic couple to divorce.

It is ironic, that the one thing they began in order to be able to have rest, to have a family, is the thing that stole both their rest and their family from them.

The world does not hold the solutions for rest.

- Striving for success and achievement will not bring rest, because there will always be another level to reach, another imperfection to douse out.
- Periodic, temporary relaxation, vacation, and self-care may allow us to avoid complete burnout and collapse, but they will not fill the yearning desire to matter, to change.
- Constantly consuming—be it good food, entertainment, or current news or trends—will not provide rest, but actually create in us an ever-growing need to consume more.
- Certainly, giving into sin will not provide rest—oh what an insidious lie from the Devil that giving in to your lust, your anger, your jealousy will provide relief for your worn-out soul.

No, friends, real rest is not found in the world.

Rest is found in Jesus. “Come to me, and I will give you rest.”

### **The Rest of Christ is Knowing God**

The rest of Jesus, friends, is a real rest. Because it’s not a rest that is just a temporary cease from work, the rest that comes from Jesus is a full and lasting rest that sustains us even *in* our work.

The rest that is found in Jesus has so many layers. It's the rest of forgiven sins, as he took the punishment for you on the cross. It's the rest of a secure identity, as he invites you to be an adopted son or daughter of God. It's the rest of completed achievement, as his death and resurrection checked every box on your behalf! It's the rest of an unshakeable hope, as he prepares an eternally satisfying dwelling place for you.

But really, the ultimate reason that the rest Jesus offers is so fulfilling is because it is a rest derived from knowing God.

Go back to our verses for today and look at the context in which they come to us.

**<sup>25</sup> At that time Jesus declared, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; <sup>26</sup> yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. <sup>27</sup> All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.**

And it's only at this point, when Jesus switches gears, stops praying to the Father and starts speaking to you and I, saying: Come to me.

So, the Father, in his wisdom and care, has chosen to reveal himself—not to the wise and understanding and powerful of the world, but the weak little children. And the vessel through which he has chosen to reveal himself is his Son, Jesus Christ—the only window through which we get a glimpse of the Father.

And look what Jesus says: "I thank you, Father!" Jesus is grateful that God has chosen to reveal himself in this way, because Jesus \*loves\* his Father, and he loves his Father's people. He loves to bring them together. He loves the fact that his Father is gracious and has chosen to share his very life and presence with the smallest and weakest of humanity.

And so, Jesus says: Come, all you who are weak and weary, and I will show you the Father, and you will have rest.

And knowing the Father, friends, is what we were made for.

Augustine, a Christian bishop in northern Africa in the fourth and fifth century, famously said it best: "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you."

Brothers and sisters, you were made in the very image of God, and you were made to know him. You were made to walk with him in the cool of the garden as Adam and Eve did, to know him so intimately that you could hear him and instinctively obey him as Noah did, to gaze upon him and have the shining of his glory radiate from your face, like Moses did.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> It's fascinating that the two places where the fourth commandment is listed in the Old Testament (Exodus 5:8-11, Deut. 5:12-15) include the foundation of God's creative acts and his redemptive acts—the sabbath is given to remember, reflect, and rejoice in those realities. In other words, the command of Sabbath rest is given to help us to *know* God.

You were meant to know your maker, not simply knowing about God, but actually know him, relate with him. And the beautiful, restful thing about this kind of knowing God is not only that you know him, but that **he knows you**.

J.I. Packer, one of the most important evangelical theologians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, wrote an entire book about *Knowing God*—it's a wonderful book. But in that book, he makes a remarkable claim:

What matters supremely, therefore, is not... the fact that I know God, but the larger fact which underlies it—the fact that *he knows me*. I am graven on the palms of his hands. I am never out of his mind. All my knowledge of him depends on his sustained initiative in knowing me. I know him because he first knew me, and continues to know me. He knows me as a friend, one who loves me; and there is no moment when his eye is off me, or his attention distracted from me, and no moment, therefore, when his care falters.

Friends, in revealing himself to us, God does not merely offer information about himself to us, as if he's handing out baseball cards with a little biography on the back and all the stats about the things he's accomplished. No! He has offered his very self to us! It's as if the player himself has shown up in your living room, he knows your name, and he's brought a ball and glove to play catch.

When Jesus says: Come to me, and I will give you rest, he is offering the kind of rest that comes from knowing God and being completely and utterly known by him.

Oh, what freedom there is in being known, brothers and sisters.

If you not only know God, but are known by him, then no future discovery of past sins or future sins can hamper his love for you. He already knows it! You don't have to strive to maintain your reputation with someone who fully and utterly knows you, you don't have to pretend to have it all together. You don't have to compile accomplishments to earn any deeper love from someone who fully knows you. You don't have to wonder if what you did today was good enough. You don't have to agonize over whether you are pleasing someone or not. If they know every past, present, and future thing about you, and love you anyway... now that is rest.

### **Trusting in the Gentle and Lowly Heart**

This is what Jesus promises when he invites you, pleads with you, to come to him. A rest of knowing your maker and being fully known by him.

And Jesus offers this, friends, based on one thing: his heart.

You need to see this about Jesus. This is the only time the Bible talks about the heart of Jesus, and the heart is such an important Biblical image. Dane Ortlund, who wrote *Gentle and Lowly*, describes it like this:

“When the Bible speaks of the heart... it is not merely speaking of our emotional life, but the center of all we do. It is what gets us out of bed in the morning... our motivation headquarters. The heart, in biblical terms, is not part of who we are but the center of who we are. Our heart is what defines and directs us.”

So, Jesus here is giving us a glimpse into the core of who he is. And what do we find? What do we find at the heart of Christ?

“I am gentle and lowly.”

This is the foundation of our confidence in coming to him. That at the core of his being, Jesus is gentle and lowly.

He is gentle. That word is sometimes translated “meek”, and if you knew this verse in the King James, that’s likely how you would remember it. But I like “gentle” here because our conception of “meekness” is a little lopsided. This is not an absence of strength, but strength under control, like how the crushing strength of a mama alligator’s jaw can be used tenderly to carry her babies in her mouth.

This is the King of the Universe, whose strength can stop the mightiest storm or move the stoutest mountains. He is not absent strength! The same powerful hands that molded the heavens and earth gently embrace the weary and broken.

No matter how frail you may feel, how weak you may feel, when you come to Jesus, he does not deal with you in power and austerity. He looks upon you with compassion and tenderness.

This is the gentle heart of Jesus that caused the prophet Isaiah say: “A bruised reed he will not break.” It is so easy to break a reed! Did you ever play with cattails? I remember picking those as kids and being disappointed at how easily they would break. We’d wave them around like swords, but they would never last long, they’d break and just be limp. But so compassionate is Christ, so in control of his strength, that he picks up us bruised reeds without any danger of breaking them. The one who invites you to come to him knows exactly how to handle your particular bruising.

He is gentle. And he is lowly.

He is the infinite one, God of God, Light of Light, Creator of the Universe. Yet he humbled himself and took on the form of a servant. He has voluntarily put himself into a position of lowliness, and why? That he might be easier for us to come to him.

Because he is lowly, you will never be too low, too poor, too dumb, too wretched, too stained, too messy to come to him. All of your fears of rejection are swallowed up by those beautiful words: “I am gentle and lowly of heart.”

Jesus has stooped to the lowest of positions in order to bring you rest: He is willing to wash your feet, to bear your punishment and humiliation, to share in your sufferings. Your past sins, your present

imperfections, your future failure, none of it can dig a hole into which he is unwilling to climb. Oh, friends, will you come to him?

### **Practical Application: Come to Christ for Sabbath Rest**

Now, the final question for today, then, is how do we do this? How do we come to Christ?

Circling back to the very beginning of our time this morning, you'll remember that there are two audiences for Christ's words: the disciple and the non-believer.

#### **1. For the disciple, you can practically come to Christ and receive his rest by engaging in intentional Sabbath-keeping.**

Now, even just hearing the word Sabbath for you might bring up thoughts of legalism and uncertainty about how we are called to follow it. There is a long history of discussion and debate about whether we should consider Sundays a Sabbath or not, and what to do on them. I think there is a lot of fruit that can be had in that discussion, but that's not the point of this morning.

So, let me just say this.

It's not an accident that in the verses immediately following Jesus's invitation to come to him for rest, come two stories about Jesus and the Sabbath. And Jesus has to do some teaching and correcting in these stories, re-shaping how God's people were meant to think about the Sabbath, but he does not say: Forget about the Sabbath, it's no longer important. Instead, he highlights that the Sabbath is meant to point to the character of God himself, that Jesus himself is the Lord of the Sabbath, the central point of the Sabbath practice.

So, brothers and sisters, I am eager to embrace the Sabbath pattern: intentionally setting aside one day to practice the "coming to Jesus" for rest in a unique way. Let me just give you a couple key principles of Sabbath-keeping that may help you do this.

#### **1. *Counter-act your normal rhythms as a practice of dependence.***

The practice of keeping one day a week free from work is to remind ourselves that the world does not depend on us, but on God himself. One way to lean into this is to counter-act your normal rhythms for rest. If you normally spend all day sitting in front of a computer, go for a walk on Sunday afternoon. If you spend all day working construction during the week, enjoy a nap!

Don't give into the temptation to answer emails on Sunday, if you spend every day in your inbox. Try to avoid the household chores that pile up during the week. If you're on social media every day, maybe a weekly break would help you re-orient your mind on Jesus.

Now, to be clear, this kind of weekly rest and re-set take effort. It takes planning ahead. Just like the Israelites in the desert had to collect twice as much manna on the sixth day, you might have to do some extra work during the week to ensure you can take a full day off.

And the temptation will be to say: I just can't afford to miss that email, I can't afford to not do laundry on that day, you don't understand. But listen, one of the primary points of the Sabbath is to remember that you don't find ultimate rest in your ability to keep things altogether! You find rest in him! And taking a day to force ourselves to remember that is a way we practice with our bodies what we say we believe with our minds. It is an act of dependence and faith that is completely counter-cultural.

## *2. Prioritize knowing God in the person of Jesus.*

The Sabbath is not primarily about rest for your bodies. Rest for your bodies on the Sabbath is good, if it points you to the rest that is found in Jesus. The point of a Sabbath rhythm is to regularly re-orient our minds on the gospel and the true freedom that is found in knowing God.

So, however you choose to be intentional about resting on Sundays, do not stop with mere physical rest and counter-balances. Use the time you're not spending to draw nearer to the Lord. If you go for a walk, spend some of that time in prayer. If you take a nap, take five minutes before to read your Bible. If you spend time with some of your brothers and sisters in Christ, talk about what God's been doing in your life. We need to re-normalize talking about God in regular conversation.

## *3. Come to church.*

Look, if you need a place to start, start by redoubling your efforts to come to Church. The primary purpose of coming together as a people every week is to help each other rest in Christ. We try to show each other Christ by serving each other, by singing with each other, by taking communion together.

This hour and a half or two hours you spend here is ALL about seeing Jesus more clearly, that we might know God more intimately.

So start "coming to Jesus" for rest, start listening to his invitation by coming to his body every week. And while you're here, really participate in the corporate practice of looking to him for rest: Sing loudly, that your brother or sister around you will be encouraged. Listen to the words of scripture closely, that you'll know Jesus more accurately. Meditate on communion soberly, being fully reminded of Christ's deep love for you.

And if you're finding it hard to find real rest in being at church, don't give up on it. Find a brother or sister, or pastor, you trust and talk about it.

**2. For the seeking, you need to come to Jesus today. The rest that you seek cannot be found anywhere else. Come to him.**

Coming to Jesus looks like two things that are intertwined.

1. It means trusting him. Trusting that he is gentle and lowly. Trusting that when he came onto this earth and died, he did so in order to take the punishment for your sins. Trusting that he is the only way to true rest and salvation.

2. But it also means submitting to him as king. You cannot come to Jesus unless you first admit that you are weary and broken. You can only come to Jesus in humility and submission. To come to Jesus is to say: I surrender my constant need to control, I give it all to you, Jesus. And that, that is a scary thing. But he is gentle and lowly, friend. He will not leave or forsake you, he will not use your surrender as a chance to take advantage of you. He has your best interest at heart: to give you rest.

So come to him. Do not delay! Bring your burdens. The ones you are ashamed of, the ones that weigh the most. He is strong enough to carry them, yet gentle enough not to crush you in the process. Come to him, and he will give you rest.