

*No One Like Jesus: Wisdom and Rest for the Children of God*

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*Psalm 116:1-7; Revelation 14:13; Matthew 11:25-30*

Friends, our final Scripture passage today is Matthew 11:25-30. May God add His blessing to the reading of His Holy Word. “At that time Jesus said, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure. All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.””

Education is foundational to the American system. We spend a huge part of our lives being educated, and we spend a ton of money on it. Gone are the days of expecting to find a job on the assembly line for 40 years right out of high school. We expect a lot out of our college degrees, enough to go into serious debt to get them.

But degrees don't equal intelligence. Some people work incredibly hard to get Cs, and other people barely study and still rack up As. A degree means you passed your classes, but it doesn't mean you're smart in real-world situations. I learned that with my pastor's degree. A lot of what I learned in seminary was great, but it didn't prepare me for leading a church. That took time and patience to learn, and I'm glad for those of you who helped train me.

We sometimes think the wise and learned have a leg up. That was especially true in the ancient Jewish world. The wise and learned had enough time and money to pursue an education when most people barely eked out an existence. The smart ones knew the Scriptures and seemed blessed by God to be able to study His Word. Those people became wise – at least in their own eyes and the eyes of their contemporaries.

But Jesus tells us something radically different about the Kingdom of God that sets conventional thinking on its ear. In today's passage, we learn that God shows Himself to whomever He desires, not just to a particular group of people. He also offers us a new way of life in Him if we are willing to come under His authority. Today's passage is full of hope for us, so let's dive in.

We've been discussing how John the Baptist sent his disciples to Jesus to find out if He was, in fact, the promised Messiah. Jesus sent them back with eyewitness testimony to His deeds and teachings. He defended John and told the crowd that John prepared the way for Him to come, as promised in prophecy. He follows that up by saying, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.”

This may be one of the most neglected and underappreciated verses in all of Scripture, one of the least celebrated things Jesus ever said. And it's so awesome! It's so exciting! Because it tells us this: *your earthly characteristics do not determine whether you're in or out of the Kingdom of God.*

When I was young, I heard the story of Solomon in church. When Solomon was still young, Solomon had a dream where God told him to ask for whatever he desired. Solomon asked for wisdom so he could rule well. God is so pleased that Solomon asked for wisdom rather than wealth or long life or military victory, God gives him the others as well.

I prayed Solomon's prayer that very morning, that I might have wisdom. I didn't see myself as a leader of God's people, but I knew that if God wanted Solomon to ask for wisdom over everything else, that was a good thing to ask for! For a long time, while I was a Christian, I thought wisdom could save me, that knowing the Bible well and knowing about God would make God pleased with me.

But that's not how it works. Studying the Bible is essential; learning about God is vital. But what's most important is knowing God and being known by Him. The Pharisees, the religious leaders of Jesus' day, thought they were right with God because they knew Scripture backwards and forwards. They *created* laws so they wouldn't break God's law – they thought, “If God set the boundary here and we move it even further, then God will *really* be pleased with us!” But their hearts were far from God, which *displeased* God. That's why they were so angry when John the Baptist and Jesus called them out for being two-faced. They thought they had it together by having so much wisdom, so much study, so many rules and regulations down pat.

But the people who really responded to Jesus were like children, spiritually. That doesn't mean immature. That means they accepted Jesus' message like a child might. Children believe their parents. They trust what we tell them because they have faith in us. All sorts of people listened to Jesus and had faith in Him...a few learned men, but also fishermen and farmers, housewives and soldiers, people with sterling reputations and people whose reputations were lower than the gutter. Their learning didn't determine if they trusted Jesus or not.

And that's true for us too. You can be smart and enter the Kingdom of God – but you don't have to be. You don't have to be wise or thoughtful or kind or helpful to enter the Kingdom of God. You don't have to be rich – Jesus warned that riches keep us from seeking out God's Kingdom, though rich people can be a part too. If you're tired, if you're broke, if you're poor, if you're addicted, if you have a home or don't, if you smoke or drink or curse, if you're attracted to the wrong people, if you're a criminal, or if you're none of these things, you are still eligible for the Kingdom of God. None of these things eliminates you from trusting in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord and receiving His salvation.

That's the heart of the good news – it's for all kinds of people. We have hope despite our circumstances, despite what we've done or what's been done to us. Despite our earthly weakness, we have strength in Jesus Christ. Despite our spiritual poverty, Jesus Christ makes us rich. Despite the decay in our bodies and souls that leads to physical and spiritual death, Jesus holds the key to new life, new health, and new hope.

God has revealed Jesus “to little children” by His good pleasure. Not only have both salvation and judgment been given to Jesus by the Father, but Jesus has the privilege of revealing the Father to us. Here’s the second concept for us today: *we are not saved because of our efforts, our worthiness, or our goodness, but because God chooses to reveal Himself to us in a way that causes us to trust Him in faith.* The Son chooses to reveal the Father to us.

God is pleased to bring our hearts and minds into the equation. We are engaged in the process of knowing God; we choose to turn away from sin, to follow God, and to become more like Him. But the root of it is not our choice, but God’s choice. God has chosen to reveal Himself to certain people in certain times and places.

Scripture is God’s Word, recording His revelation of Himself in history. It is a perfect record of that revelation. God uses the Bible, His living and active Word, to reveal Himself to many, many people. But God does not truly reveal Himself to everyone who reads His Word, just as not everyone who met Jesus saw or understood or accepted who He really is.

Think about it this way. You go to the movies and you see twenty minutes of trailers. The goal of a trailer is make you say, “I really want to see that movie!” They show things they think will interest us – explosions from an action movie, jokes for a comedy, a jump scare or two for a horror picture. They give you just enough to want to come back and see more.

Except that trailers don’t always bring people back to the theater. Sometimes they turn us off rather than get us excited about a movie. The trailers bores us or offends us or makes the film look awful. We may have different reactions to the same trailer. Some of you have never seen a *Star Wars* movie. The trailer for *Star Wars: Rogue One* makes me super excited to see it. But if you’ve never seen a *Star Wars* movie, that trailer may be one great big lump of, “Huh?”

The same thing is true about God’s revelation of Himself. One person will read a portion of the Bible, hear a sermon, be convicted, and say, “God is real and I want to be a part of what He’s doing.” Some people are offended by what they hear and they hate it – but they still keep coming! Something inexplicably draws them to God, to battle it out, to figure out who God is, and they wind up believing in Him. Others read those same passages, hear those same sermons, and are turned off. And sometimes, a person comes very interested and thinks it’s for them, but eventually their interest in God gives way to other things, other interests and pursuits.

Jesus tells us that God is at the heart of all of that. God reveals Himself to whom He chooses. The Father chose to reveal the truth of Jesus to the simple rather than the learned. God is behind who stays and who goes, who accepts and who rejects. That doesn’t discount human choice in the slightest, only that God is ultimately the King of the universe, and He chooses to reveal Himself where He desires to whom He desires.

If you don’t know a certain movie is coming out and you don’t go to the right movies or watch the right TV shows, you won’t see the trailer. The ad executives decide when and where and how to show it. We don’t earn the right to see it; it’s there for the seeing for those to whom it’s shown. God doesn’t have to reveal Himself to anyone, but He chooses to do so in His time and His way by His good pleasure. He doesn’t do it by merit, but by His choice.

And here's the big point for us: if you are here today hearing about God, then God has chosen in this place, in this way, to make Himself known to you in some small way. He is revealing His love, His mercy, His grace, and His offer of salvation to you. He's shown His love to you by giving Jesus to us as the perfect representative for humanity, who became a sacrifice for us so that we might become acceptable before God, who even now lives and speaks to the Father for us, on our behalf. He's shown you mercy and grace by offering new life to you...not because you deserve it, but because He chooses to do so.

Whether you've been a believer for decades or if today is the first day you've ever been in a church, God is giving you an opportunity to respond. Will you follow Him? Will you learn more? Will you trust Him? Will you respond to the light you've seen? If God is tugging at your heart and mind to come to Him, don't delay. And if you're a long-time believer, thank Him for revealing Himself to you, for drawing close to you, and determine to follow after Him.

And that's what the last portion of Jesus' statement today is about. He says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

We are surprised by this statement. It's difficult to follow Jesus, who said we had to die to ourselves to follow Him. Jesus and the disciples and millions of Jesus followers over the years were killed, brutalized, and oppressed. Jesus said that someone who loved father, mother, or family more than Him wasn't worthy of Him. So what gives? Following Jesus is a lifetime commitment of everything we have. Isn't that a huge yoke to carry?

From a worldly point of view, perhaps, but not from God's vantage point. And here's why: *the yoke of Jesus is always easier to carry than the yoke of sin we have on us otherwise.* Because of Adam and Eve's sin, we carry the burden of sin on us throughout our lives. We are stuck with it. It is more vicious, more soul-killing, and more brutal than most of us really realize.

Everyone has been talking about a gorilla this week. A diamondback was killed when a three-year-old hopped the fence at the Cincinnati Zoo this week when his mother wasn't watching. It's created a huge amount of controversy. Why didn't the mom stop the boy, why didn't the zoo tranquilize the gorilla, how did the kid have access? But the zoo ultimately did what it did because they knew the real threat it posed.

Sin is a 400-pound gorilla on our back, yoked to us. It appears docile, even friendly, and sometimes even helpful. Nobody goes against God's designs for us because it seems harmful. Sin looks to have our back. It offers us pleasure, which is often why we sin. But it also offers us an escape from difficult situations, a way to cope with our problems, a way to get things accomplished. When the boy first went into the gorilla's habitat, from the video, it looked like the diamondback was protecting him. The boy was right up next to him and the gorilla didn't do anything mean. It looked harmless, even safe, which is why many people were outraged. Sin looks innocent – or at very least, like a burden we can carry.

But sin is not innocent. Disobedience to God is deadly. If you are tethered to a 400-pound gorilla, it is going to drag you where you don't want to go. Sin makes us feel good for a bit, sometimes a really long time, but all the while it is a spiritual killer. When the gorilla got agitated, the boy was in trouble. It started dragging the boy around. That gorilla could crush a coconut with one hand. To those who knew, it was not a choice. There was one right decision.

In the same way, there is only one way to deal with the gorilla of sin. That's to kill it. If we don't, the burden will weigh down our souls, lead us away from God's presence, and destroy us. We think we're weight-lifters who can shoulder the burden; we think we can handle what others have failed. Or we think a simple sin like gossip or jealousy doesn't weigh that much. We deceive ourselves. Because sin doesn't have a weight limit, and we are all spiritual three-year-olds. No three-year-old can lift 400 pounds. No human can lift the weight of sin.

That's the beauty of Jesus' offer. He says, "Take my load instead. It's light." He offers to be our new Adam. The original Adam, when he sinned, put the yoke of sin on all of us. Anybody who is still counted as a part of Adam wears the yoke of sin. But if switch allegiance to Jesus and are counted by the Father under the headship of Jesus instead of Adam, we get a new and different yoke. Because Jesus was sinless, His yoke doesn't have the burden of sin.

To die to sin means to shrug off that yoke of sin every day to wear the mantle of Christ. To follow Christ is to switch sides, to desert the enemy camp, and to wear the uniform of Christ. And you know what? When you give your life over to Christ truly, when you come to know God and God knows you, that burden that looks so big from the outside becomes tiny.

Jesus says we've got to become righteous. That's impossible while we have the yoke of sin on us. When the gorilla is riding piggyback, no way it can happen. But when we follow Jesus, He does the transforming. He sends us the Holy Spirit who changes our nature. We begin to want to be righteous. It no longer seems like a burden. It becomes something you want to do.

It's like finding the perfect instrument to play or the sport you love. It's hard work, sure, but it's a joy. It takes 10,000 hours of practice to become truly proficient at an instrument. But most musicians wouldn't give it up for the world. The same is true when God reveals Himself to you and you become enamored with Him. Worshipping Him, spending time with Him, reading His Word, helping others as He commands, all take time and effort and sacrifice. But when you've traded yokes, the burden Jesus puts on us is a blessing because we start becoming the people God always intended us to be.

If you haven't already, will you switch yokes with Jesus today? If you haven't found the joy of living for Christ, maybe one shoulder's holding the weight of Christ but the other's stuck under the weight of sin. If that's the case, let go. The joys of sin are real for a moment but soul killing. The joys of Jesus can be painful, like getting callouses on your fingers learning the guitar or sore muscles from learning a sport. But the benefits are eternal. Switch yokes already! And if you have and you have that joy, go away today praising God that He has chosen to reveal Himself to you and brought you into His fold. You are His child forever! Thanks be for that wonderful gift...the gift He gives not to the deserving, but to those who will put their faith and trust in Jesus alone.