

Bigger On The Inside: Matthew 11:25-30

December 28, 2014

Good morning, everyone. I want to invite you to open up your Bibles and turn to Matthew 11. That's the main text we're going to be exploring today.

If you don't have a Bible and you want one, raise your hand and one of the ushers will get you one. Otherwise, we'll have the text up on the screen for you to follow along.

Like Pastor Bryan said, my name is Chris Cummings. I'm on the leadership team here at Transformation Road, overseeing our children's ministry and our website.

A little bit about me: I have three sons whom I love very much: Joseph, David, and Luke. And up until a couple years ago, I suffered from really bad panic attacks. I don't want to connect those two things -- fatherhood and panic attacks -- all I'm saying is, I know something about stress, and we'll get back to that in a minute.

I'm humbled, I'm excited, and thankful for the opportunity to share God's word this morning. And my prayer is that my words and my heart would be acceptable to you, Lord, and that what we talk about for the next half hour would be glorifying to you and useful to the people you've gathered here today.

Please stand while we read God's word. Actually, please stand and let's **read it out loud** together...

25 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; 26 yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. 27 **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.** 28 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." - Matthew 11:25-30

You can be seated.

Jesus, the Son of God, is saying a lot in those verses.

I'd like to look at just three things today:

1. What does Jesus promise about rest?
2. How does Jesus deliver rest?
3. How do we respond to Jesus' invitation to rest?

First, what does Jesus promise about rest?

Let's look at verse 28 again:

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

There are two words that jump out to me in that. First, the word "all"...

"Come to me **all** who labor and are heavy laden," Jesus says. That word "all" -- it's an open invitation. To whom? To everyone. Because everyone is laboring in some way to show someone something. To justify their existence, or to prove their worth, or to prove that they're worthy of love.

And it's exhausting. You want to talk about work? THAT'S work.

And even if you don't think about your life in those terms -- think of it this way:

Do you know what it's like to feel overwhelmed or worn out or depressed because of whatever's happening in your life -- or not happening in your life?

Do you exhaust yourself by taking on too many tasks or responsibilities?

Do people exhaust you sometimes?

Yeah. And what happens when you're feeling like that?

For some of us, when we're feeling like that, we take it out on other people.

For some of us, it's avoidance: Our natural inclination can be to push away feelings we don't like, and avoid the depressing people or the irritating people until they've got their acts together.

Thankfully that's not how Jesus operates.

Instead of picking a fight or shutting off the lights and closing the blinds on us, he says, "Are you a basket case right now? Are you thoughtless? Are you a complainer? Do you hurt people with your words? Do you hurt people with your actions? Are you haunted by your past? Troubled by the present? Afraid of the future? Are you exhausted from pretending to be a better person than you know you really are? Then come to me," Jesus says. "Right now."

That other word that stands out? “**Give.**”

This rest, this relief from everything that weighs us down -- it's a gift. An act of mercy. This promised rest is not something you earn. It's not a reward for good deeds. It's a gift from God.

Sinclair Ferguson is a Scottish theologian and a professor at Redeemer Seminary in Dallas -- and he points out that Matthew tells us about Jesus healing the man with the withered hand, and healing the man who's demon-possessed, and healing the man who's blind and mute -- why? -- it's as if to **prove to us** that **if** Jesus can give rest, and peace, and hope to people with problems like THOSE -- people who are stressed out more than we can even begin to guess -- then he can definitely **keep his promise** to give deep, meaningful rest to everyone who comes to him.

Which leads us to point number two:

How does Jesus deliver rest?

Let's look at verse 29:

Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart,
and you will find rest for your souls.

In 1871, Charles Spurgeon preached a sermon on this section of Matthew and he pointed out the order in which Jesus describes this exchange. It's not, “First take my yoke and **then** I'll give you rest”. It's, “Come to me so I can **give** you rest, and then take my yoke”.

A yoke connects two animals together so they can do their work more effectively. So what is Jesus saying here?

I believe he's saying, we're all tied to something. We all believe **something**.

Whether we're Christians or Muslims or Buddhists or atheists, or we call ourselves “spiritual but not religious” -- we all believe something. And that belief defines everything: What we do, what we say, how we live, what we spend our money on, who we think we are.

The Bible tells us who we are:

We're created by God, in his image and likeness, but instead of loving and serving and obeying our maker, we all rebel. We'd all rather live life **our** way and do what we think is right. But rather than abandon us or destroy us, God executes the greatest rescue plan in the history of the universe!

God steps into human history and becomes the God-man Jesus, who lives the perfect life we did not, willingly takes the just punishment we deserve for our disobedience, suffers and dies on a Roman cross, is buried, and is brought back to life, defeating Satan, sin, and death, so that any of us rebels who believes in Jesus and repents of our sins can be saved from God's just and holy wrath.

Jesus takes our yoke of self-justification and **selfishness** and self-righteousness and sin, and gives us rest from THAT. Then he gives us his yoke, and his yoke is "easy, and [his] burden is light."

That's how Jesus delivers rest. On the cross. Dying in our place. Taking the punishment that we deserve. Rising from death, because death could not hold our sinless savior. So that we can find new life, eternal life, in him.

Which brings us to the third point: How do **we** respond to Jesus' invitation to rest?

I spend a lot of time in the car. And a good chunk of that time has been redeemed by listening to sermons. Earlier this year, Judah Smith of City Church in Washington preached a series about our souls and, at one point, he described Jesus as being "big on the inside".

I'm sure he didn't mean it this way, but that particular phrase resonated with me as a fan of *Doctor Who*.

If you watched PBS in the eighties or early nineties, or watch BBC America today, you've probably seen the British TV show *Doctor Who*.

For those who don't know it, basically Doctor Who is a science fiction program about this man who travels through time and space in this amazing vehicle.

This vehicle -- the TARDIS -- is enormous -- on the inside -- with multiple levels and different rooms. But on the outside, it's small. It looks like a blue telephone booth. And a long-running joke on the show involves people entering the TARDIS and being astonished because "it's bigger on the inside."

As I studied this section of Matthew, I came to see that our souls can be like that, too: We can be bigger on the inside. Or we can be smaller.

I mentioned earlier that I used to suffer from recurring panic attacks.

If you've never had a panic attack before, thank God. Seriously! But to try and explain it to you:

It starts with your heart racing for no reason. Then your stomach starts to twist itself in knots as wave after wave of fear cuts through you. You're sweating. You feel so scared that can't catch

your breath, and you have no idea why this is happening or how to make it stop and you're thinking, maybe it won't ever stop, and maybe you're dying, which of course just makes you panic even more.

A panic attack can be a one-time thing -- a few minutes and it's over -- but for some people they can be recurring, triggered by something specific. Mine hinged on traveling. Which was a huge problem for me because I travel a lot.

For the last 15 years I've either worked in Boston or Waltham. Which means every day, Monday through Friday, traveling in rush hour traffic on 93 or 128 or the T in the emotional state I just described. Hours, every day, in that state. And then, on top of that, I was trying to hide what I was feeling from friends and family because it was so embarrassing and crazy...

All of that was so emotionally exhausting that when the weekend would roll around, I didn't want to leave the house.

Any time we'd go out, I would be anticipating that moment, that awful moment, when the panic would hit. And as I'm dreading that moment, imagining that moment, I'm getting more and more restless and angry that we're not home yet.

Life went on like that for me, for about 20 years. Sometimes better, sometimes worse. But my insides were always twisted up in that anxiety.

I tried to soothe myself by being really good at my work and getting raises and promotions. Getting that approval helped. But a big thing for me -- the main way I self-medicated -- was by buying lots of things that I didn't need but, I told myself, if I had them, I'd be happy.

One of my biggest "triumphs" -- and I'm using that word ironically, for sure -- was rebuilding my Transformers collection from when I was a kid.

So much time and thought and money went into hunting down and collecting these toys until I had so many of them that I had to buy not just one, but two glass cases to display them. It was after I bought that second glass case that I started to think, "Maybe this is not the answer."

Now, I still love Transformers, but I look back on that time and it's horrifying what I was doing with my money, and the lessons I was teaching my kids about what we do with money.

And I could ask myself, "What was I thinking?"

But I know exactly what I was thinking: "Maybe this will take my mind off how upset I am all the time."

And if we dug deeper, it'd be: "Maybe this will give me some purpose."

And it would. For a while. But it would never last. There are only so many toy robots you can buy before you realize even Optimus Prime can't win this fight.

At pretty much my lowest point, about five years ago, that's when I saw Jesus reaching out to me. Through the friendship of some of the men I met here -- especially Alex, Kyle, Norm, and Ben -- it was through that friendship and those conversations and going through the joys and pains of life together with them that I experienced Jesus.

And when we read Tim Keller's book, King's Cross, together, I came to understand in a deeper way what Jesus had done on my behalf, on the cross.

I started to understand what true love, sacrificial love, really is -- and that changed my life forever. That inner life, that soul of mine, which had shriveled up so much, suddenly stopped shrinking, and started to heal, and grow.

Jesus' life, death, and resurrection promises Christians something that no other religion or philosophy does: True hope. It's not just consolation for all the things we suffer today or have suffered or will suffer. It's a **promise** that all those sad things are going to be undone.

When Jesus returns, we get new bodies that never age, never get sick, never wear out. There will be no more broken relationships. No more suffering. No more tears. And death itself will die.

So, how do we **respond** today to Jesus' invitation to rest in him?

If you're not a Christian, and you're suffering or facing some kind of hardship, I want you to know there's just one difference between you and the person next to you who believes in and follows Jesus: The believer knows that God promises to be with us during the hardest times and also promises a future that will make today's sorrows seem light and momentary.

If you're not a believer, you don't have those promises. But the invitation is there. It's waiting for you to respond. If you have questions about that, about what it means to be a follower of Jesus, please come see me or Pastor Bryan or any of the leadership team after the service.

For those who are believers in Jesus, but are still feeling this restless in their souls, what do we do?

Let's look at the beginning of today's scripture:

At that time Jesus declared, "**I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth...**"

What's the "time" Matthew is talking about?

If we rewind to Matthew 11:20–24, we'd see that Jesus is talking to the people of cities where he performed most of his miracles. Those people rejected him, and accused him of being a drunkard and a glutton, and all kinds of bad things.

To put it mildly, Jesus was disrespected by a bunch of jerks -- and his response is not exactly what you or I might do: He doesn't give them the finger. He doesn't gossip about them. He doesn't self-medicate. Or yell at his dog, or binge watch on Netflix, or turn up the music really loud to blot out his thoughts.

He prays. A prayer of thanksgiving, to God the Father: **"I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth..."**

In all of time and space, you are not going to find anyone who is bigger on the inside than Jesus. And I think he's showing us that one of the keys to true, deep rest is being thankful.

Not thankful that bad things happen to us -- but thankful we have a God who helps, heals, and comforts us in bad times. Thankful for a God who is always good.

I feel like we should be real about this, though: Being thankful does not mean our current circumstances are going to change.

Jesus himself knows that praying and being thankful does not always take away the troubles we face and it does not mean we won't ever be sad or hurt.

Look at Matthew 26:36-38:

36 Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here, while I go over there and pray." 37 And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. 38 Then he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me."

Jesus knows what it's like to be [overwhelmed by sorrow](#). And to me, that passage is really comforting. It says to me, when we're feeling sad and broken, we can be thankful that we can admit it -- just like Jesus did -- and [be thankful](#) because we know we're loved.

We can live how the apostle Paul puts it in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18:

16 Rejoice always, 17 pray without ceasing, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Let's pray.

Father God, if we did absolutely everything we possibly could, we would still fall short of justifying ourselves and proving ourselves worthy of knowing you or being loved by you. Thank you so much for the salvation we have in Jesus. We pray, Lord, that you would bring about real transformation in our lives and give us the rest our souls so desperately need -- for your glory, our joy, and the good of people who don't know you yet. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

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