

Come, all who are Weary - Matthew 11:25-30 -

10 July 11 Ranui Baptist - Sebastian Murrihy

In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, William Wilberforce worked tirelessly to overcome the slave trading business in England. He was convinced that God regarded all human beings—regardless of gender or ethnicity—as equals. Wilberforce was a brilliant politician, constantly wowing parliament with his oral skill and quick wit. He was intelligent, bold and strong. Yet, when he saw the slave trade, when he looked upon a slave, his heart was broken. He was convinced that God was calling him to use his parliamentary ability to overcome the slave trade, to put an end to the horrific trade that was rife through the glorious British Empire.

So Wilberforce set to work debating furiously in the chambers of government. He exposed the awful conditions of the slave trade. He worked hard, never ceasing, never giving up despite the mounting opposition. It cost Wilberforce his health, his family and his friends. A number of times, the burden that was laid upon him was so great, his health so fragile, he nearly died. Yet, he couldn't quit. This burden he carried was the burden of the gospel.

Likewise, many, many people in our Christian heritage have died for the sake of the gospel. Missionaries have been killed all around the world. In the first few centuries after Jesus lived, the Christians would give to the poor, feed the hungry, look after the sick, and for it, they were persecuted and killed.

Also today, we have our own burdens. We suffer with death, injustice, depression, loneliness and a whole host of other things. It can be big life changing things, or it can be little things that get us down. For example, we are currently in the middle of winter. Now, I don't really like winter. It's cold, it's wet and it's always a depressing grey outside. I always dream of the summer months with blue sky and long, sunny days.

But all that to say: life isn't always easy. The Christian life isn't always rosy flowers and giant smiles. And sometimes it feels like we just want to lie down and breathe a deep sigh and have all our burdens and troubles disappear into the nether world, and find rest.

And it is in this moment that we hear a strange, soft word. **'Come.'**

'Come to me.'

Who said that?

Who is this call for?

'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened.'

The wearied and the burdened?

'Come to me, and I will give you rest.'

Rest? Did it say rest? What if I'm a solo parent who has a couple of kids? Does that include me?

What if I have never been to church my whole life? Can that call be to me? What if I've been attempting to run? Can I finally stop running and find the peace I've been seeking?

'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.'

What words of comfort! What words of hope!

But, are they genuine words? Who is this person calling me?

Read Matthew 11:25-30

This person who is calling is Jesus.

But are his words trustworthy? Can we believe that in Jesus we have rest? And what about this thing he says at the end of the passage, 'Oh well you see guys, the key to having a peaceful and restful life is for me to put another burden on you!'

Who is this God?

He is the God that won't stop pursuing you. He is the God that won't give up on you, that will chase you down till you give in to his gracious love. He is the God that has revealed himself to you.

Jesus demonstrates this wonderfully with three parables in Luke 15. First, he says that God is like a shepherd who loses one of his sheep and runs off into the wilderness to find this lost sheep.

Secondly, Jesus says that God is like a woman who lost one of her prized coins. She sweeps the house, looks under all the furniture and turns the whole house upside down in pursuit of this one coin.

Finally, Jesus says that God is like a father whose son says in effect to him, 'Drop down dead, dad. I don't want to be around you anymore. Give me my inheritance so that I can be rid of you!' Yet instead of sending the son to his room or grounding him for the rest of the year for being a right little twat, the father sadly gives his son what he asks for. This dad doesn't celebrate that his horrible son is now gone. Instead, he looks down the road and waits and waits and waits for his son to come back. And finally, after a long time waiting, this dad sees his son at a distance down the road. The father sprints as fast as he can toward this son arms held out wide and he receives and embraces his son. For his son was lost, but now he is found.

In his pursuit God put on the flesh of human beings, he spent time with the broken-hearted, the sick and the poor. This God, Jesus, the one who calls us, took those who are on the fringes and on the outside and he made them the centre. This Jesus died and rose again to reconcile us back to him.

And so it is this Jesus that calls, **'Come.'**

You don't have to be the best, the most influential, the best looking or the richest to hear this call. God doesn't call you based on that stuff, he just calls you. That's it. Just you as you are.

I've heard some people say that 'Living a successful Christian life is about what you put into it.' For example, to have the best experience in worship, the more you put into it, the harder you strive to bring God praise, the better your worship experience will be. But I wonder if that is really the truth? Maybe Christianity is less about what we put into it, and more about what God puts into it.

Growing up, I tried and tired and tried to be the best Christian I could possibly be. I would read my Bible, I would pray a lot. I threw myself into every opportunity that presented itself to serve. I tried my best to always do the right thing. I wanted to be a good disciple of Jesus. But what I forgot was this subtle, little call, **'Come.'**

'Come to me all who are weary and heavy burdened, for I shall give you rest.'

I had no need to impress God! I had no need to strive to reach God! God was there the whole time reaching down to me. In fact, he was the one chasing me down!

There is another thing I have heard, and maybe you have heard it too. People sometimes say 'when you come to church, leave your problems at the door. If you have had a bad week don't bring it in here, leave it behind, throw it off and worship God!' But, I don't think God wants you to hide part of you away. I don't think God wants you to come only if you are faultless and problemless. I don't think God wants you to hide all that stuff away from him. Maybe, God in his unfathomable grace, simply just wants you to come, as you are. To worship him, to love him even with the distress, the weariness or the fear that you have and to bring it to him.

I don't think Christians are supposed to be on Cloud 9 all the time, laughing all the time, constantly with a big smile on their faces. I think back to William Wilberforce, or our brave brothers and sisters' who have died for the cause of the gospel. The fact is life sucks sometimes. It can be tough and wearisome and exhausting.

Yet, we are not helpless. Instead, there is still this gentle call, **'Come'**.

But God! I've done something terrible!

'Come.'

But God I'm so frustrated and scared.

'Come.'

But God I'm so underserving.

'Come.'

But God...

'Just come.'

And then Jesus says something strange. Something unusual. Something absurd.

'I will give you rest. But to do so, I will put my burden onto you.'

Umm, but Jesus, I know that you are all-powerful and all-knowing and all that stuff. But uhh, if you remember I was coming to you to get rid of my burden. Remember how I was saying that I was tired and exhausted and stuff? Well, I wasn't really joking.

So what is this new burden?

Well, maybe Jesus' burden is a new perspective? Like a new way of looking at things.

Like, for example, there was this church and they were away on their annual church camp. And a number of the members were sitting around a bonfire, swapping stories and sharing jokes with each other. Laughter filled the night air as they enjoyed talking and being in each other's company. After a while the pastor of the church asked a question. He said, 'So if you don't mind sharing with me, what is it that you like about our church?' Some said, 'Well I love the people there. They are so warm and kind.' Others commented on the great sermons they heard every week. Still others spoke highly of all the wonderful programs and the 'things that were happening' at the church. And then it came to a woman who was quite new to the church to share. And the pastor asked her, 'So what do you like about our church?'

The woman looked at the pastor and replied, 'Well, what makes you think I like this church?'

Somewhat taken aback the pastor managed to regain his composure and asked, 'Well uhh, what do you mean by that? Can you take me into that a little more?'

And she replied, 'I'm sure what all these lovely folk have said are true. But you know what? I had a happy life. I lived in a comfortable house with enough food in the pantry and enough money in the bank account. I was enjoying life until somebody just had to bring me to this church! It was at this church that I met Jesus! And once I met Jesus, my whole world turned upside down. No longer could I live in my comfortable house with all the food in my pantry while there are starving kids in Africa! Since I met Jesus, I've adopted three African children and they live in my house with me.'

Now that's a good thing! Indeed meeting with Jesus does give us new perspective. It certainly shakes the way we think about others and our world. I'm pretty sure this is all part of it, but as we saw with William Wilberforce even doing good things for Jesus can make us weary and tired.

What if this yoke—or burden—that Jesus places on us is something that gives us joy, that lifts us up, that makes us feel alive again? What if this burden that Jesus gives us doesn't weary us, but energizes us? What if...what is this burden?

If you cast your mind back to verses 25-27, what does it say? It's Jesus praying a little prayer of thankfulness to the Father about their relationship. It is then from this prayer about a deep, dynamic, loving, intimate relationship that we hear this call, **'Come.'**

Surely not? Surely it can't be that simple! Surely there is more to this story! Can it, can it really be true? The yoke of Jesus is not a heavy burden at all. It's a call. A call to relationship! It is a call to join Jesus and the Father in a deep, intimate relationship. Where the Father knows you and you know the Father. It is a flowing dynamic relationship with this God who has chased you down. Who has hounded you. Who has relentlessly bugged you. This God who has chosen to pursue, and never give up on you. He bids you 'Come' and join this deep, life giving, free-flowing relationship. What greater hope? What greater love? What greater grace and forgiveness?

The yoke is a relationship with Jesus. The burden is to please God by joining him—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—in their deep, everlasting relationship.

And this is God's greatest call to discipleship. Love and relationship with our Creator.

'Come, all who are weary.'

Footprints by Mary Stevenson

One night I dreamed I was walking along the beach with the Lord.
Many scenes from my life flashed across the sky.
In each scene I noticed footprints in the sand.
Sometimes there were two sets of footprints,
other times there were one set of footprints.

This bothered me because I noticed
that during the low periods of my life,
when I was suffering from
anguish, sorrow or defeat,
I could see only one set of footprints.

So I said to the Lord,
"You promised me Lord,
that if I followed you,
you would walk with me always.
But I have noticed that during
the most trying periods of my life
there have only been one
set of footprints in the sand.
Why, when I needed you most,
you have not been there for me?"

The Lord replied,
"The times when you have
seen only one set of footprints,
is when I carried you."

