

Matthew 11:28–30 and John 6:37 'GENTLE AND LOWLY'

I've been reading this book, *Gentle and Lowly: God's heart for the sinner and sufferer*.

I'll be channelling it - which is okay, because it is just channelling British puritans from the 1600s.

I recommend reading it as a bit of a devotional. It has stacks of chapters that are just bite sized – can recommend!

Hook:

Complete this sentence: "Christ's own joy, comfort, happiness, and glory are increased and enlarged by..."

Why don't you talk at your table/in pairs

Get the feedback

Heaps of right answers there. I want to suggest one that maybe we don't often think about.

"Christ's own joy, comfort, happiness, and glory are increased and enlarged by showing grace and mercy, in pardoning, relieving, and comforting his members here on earth."

- Thomas Goodwin

Is it true that this is how God feels about us? Is it right to say this so strongly? Shouldn't it be tempered with his hatred of sin, and his desire for us to be transformed into the image of his son more and more?

Because of God's intolerance of sin

Is it possible that God's patience can wear thin with us?
Or that we can disappoint him, or let him down
That we've stuffed up yet again

This week I've felt some of these things.

I think of all my weaknesses and shortcomings in my parenting, as a husband, as a neighbour... my disobedience to God, even though I want to live my life for him.

And I've felt weary this week. Sick kids, constantly needing attention, weeks at a time with not much change day from day. Finding it hard to have time alone to read God's word, and when I do, not feeling very engaged, or stirred. Because I feel a bit numb inside.

Well if you've ever felt these things I'd like to push into 2 things this morning

1. What's God's heart toward the weary (stuck in the trenches of life)
2. What is God's heart toward the sinner (the sinner in God's family, but sinner none the less)

There's a question behind these questions: What is God like?

I think that's such an important question to answer in our preaching and hearing of God's word.

And especially as we draw closer to Christmas, where we remember that God became man, that God is with us, that he took on flesh – we can ask – who is it that stands amidst us? What is he like?

That's what I hope to answer this morning – let's pray.

First thing we're looking at: God's heart toward the weary

The first passage we're in is Matt 11, and we're just gonna step our way through it.

²⁸ "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened,

Weary – maybe from trying to crowbar your life into smoothness

Burdened – maybe from being weighed down by something outside of your control

Physical, emotional, spiritual, maybe all wrapped up into one, but come to Jesus and he says:

and I will give you rest.

Rest that's given to you. That you didn't earn, only because you came to Jesus.

²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart,

There's more to say about the yoke, but what a beautiful insight into the heart of Jesus.

The heart – not what we think of today - emotional, feelings, irrational, kinda that distinction between heart and head.

But 1st century heart – the core of someone. What they are primarily. The motivation headquarters. What makes them tick, what gets them out of bed in the morning. Their heart.

What we learn about Jesus' heart is that he is gentle, and humble.

Gentle = meek, humble. Not trigger happy, harsh, reactionary, exasperated.

Humble = on our level, he's accessible, because of his humility, and humanity, not high and haughty, distant and far off

Humble means that we, mere human creatures can know him.

What a surprise for the Lord of Heaven and Earth. The holy of holies. The righteous one. The King of Kings.

That he would be gentle, and humble in heart.

The context of Matthew 11 says he's not just gentle and humble, but he is to those who come to him,

And to those who do he says

and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Rest because of the Yoke Jesus gives. It's kinda a paradox. Because his yoke is really a non-yoke.

A yoke, normally the heavy wooden beam for driving oxen, for working them, but Jesus Yoke is easy and light. An image of his kindness.

Jesus' yoke is a lifejacket in a sea storm. It's our arrogance to think we can survive without it. But those who accept it will find rest, who could resist it! Jesus' yoke is good.

But notice it's not rest for bodies, it's rest for souls.

Even if we find ourselves physically worn down, exhausted or thin, like butter scraped over too much bread, as Bilbo would say, the rest Jesus offers is for your soul.

How is this encouraging for the weary, the burdened, the exhausted?

Your soul is the most significant part of your life.

When the things of greatest significance in your life are secured, they are an anchor point for the rest of your life.

A stupid example – but can you imagine being a planet that's not affected by gravitational pull? Your life would be a mess. You'd be burning up one minute, and freezing the next, colliding with other planets.

But if there's something you're in orbit around, there is security and safety in being locked in that pattern.

Or more personal -

Close to the centre of my life is my relationship with my wife.

When we are not smooth sailing in life, nothing is good. It doesn't matter how good the food is at the restaurant, if we're fighting, it tastes like bile.

When I know she's angry with me for something I've done, or more often forgotten to do, life is terrible. It doesn't matter how good the day is, it could be clear blue skies, but I feel miserable.

As soon as that conflict is resolved, it brings rest to all the other areas of life. Suddenly I can breath better, I can work better, I can relate to my kids better.

This is where the saying comes – happy wife, happy life.

When the centre piece of something is fixed it has a flow on effect for everything outside it.

Well the very core, the very centre piece, of most importance in our lives, is our relationship with the eternal God who created us.

When we come to Jesus he gives us rest for our souls. A rest that looks forward to an eternal rest. A rest that walks in peace with God.

When we already have the thing of greatest value, we don't have to pursue other things as though they will fill that hole.

When I think about a physical exhaustion, a life exhaustion, of someone stuck in a rut of life.

I think often the foundation of it is that their life is built on something that isn't God.

The high flyer, able to dine at Sydney's top restaurants

The journey up the corporate ladder

The pressure of high level sport.

These things aren't wrong. But we certainly don't need to pursue them as though everything is riding on them.

In Jesus our deepest need is fulfilled – peace with God.

...

If it's chronic fatigue you're living with, we live in a broken world, which our lives are affected by.

For you, the sweetness of physical rest and relief will be like none other in the new creation, you will be given a new body, and it will be physical. And it will be wonderful.

But it will still pale in comparison to the spiritual rest you already enjoy with the God who made you.

If it's just a physical exhaustion you're feeling, not talking about chronic fatigue, then it might be that you just need a nap. Take the annual leave that's been banking up! Set a discipline of rest! Make sure you're doing things in the week that are recreational – that break the cycle of work and sleep.

But if the exhaustion you're feeling is a bit more profound, there may be a few questions to ask...

Is God the centre piece of your life, but you're still finding yourself absolutely exhausted?

It might be because you're feeling the tension of being pulled in too many different directions.

Do you need to stop something? Do you need to give something up?

That's a really hard process to go through right?

Because it can seem like everything is important.

There's an illustration that can help. You've probably heard it before.

A consultant comes into a corporate business to do a presentation, and brings a jar, with rocks, gravel, sand and water.

He asks the business reps how to fit it all into the jar.

And they point out that you have to begin with the rocks, then the gravel, then the sand, then the water.

Which is right, and he fills up the jar so everything fits.

Then he asks what the moral of the story is, and one of them says that it means no matter how busy you are, you can always fit more in.

And he says no, it's that unless you get the rocks in first, you'll never get them in.

For the Christian, the rocks are the important things of life, the big things.

And when you're so exhausted and you can't function anymore, what I'm saying is that it might be time to empty your jar and start again.

What are the big things?? Are you able to name them, and put them back in the jar first. And after you've done that, figure out the things that don't fit.

Or it could be less dramatic – can you keep doing what you're doing, but remind yourself that if it falls through, whatever it is, the job, the team, the grades, the home,

that you already have the thing of greatest treasure, you don't have to go after this like a blood hound.

That's the pursuit of the world,
to find significance outside of God.

It leaves them haggard, dissatisfied, empty, weary, and burdened. It's tragic really.

But come to Jesus, and he will give rest for your soul,
because he's gentle and humble in heart to those who come to him.

What about the sinner who comes to Jesus, what about the repeat offender?

That's the next thing we'll look at: God's heart toward the sinner

John 6:37

This is Jesus talking about being the bread of life

And some have not believed in him, but then he says in verse 37:

"Most of [those the father gives will come to me](#)"

No,

[All those the Father gives will come to me.](#)

Jesus is not in an egg on spoon race, and we're the egg and he's trying to get us to God. And he's gotta be really careful and not rush, cause we could fall.

No. None of those whom God selects, whom he gives to the Son, will fall from his hand.

[All those the Father gives will come to me.](#)

And it's the Father who gives

Jesus isn't a third party that initiates salvation for people, because God wouldn't.

God the Father lovingly initiates salvation by sending the Son, and then gives those he calls to the Son.

AND, they will come to me.

God's call is irresistible.

Yet, read on, we're not robots - and whoever comes

God is obviously in control, but "we come" and we're not dragged into this against our will, kicking and screaming.

God's grace is so radical that it changes our very desires, that we see the beauty of Christ and are drawn to him.

And the amazing finish to the verse:

and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.

the literal Greek reads "the one coming to me I will not – *not*- cast out",

Nearly sounds like a double negative, but in the Greek it's emphatic.

It's like the negatives stack up on each other for more force.

Not not! Cast out, so our translation reads – never! Cast out.

A promise to cast out all fear of ever being turned away.

John Bunyan writes about this this verse, that it obliterates every objection of coming to Jesus.

The sinner might say
I'm a great sinner

But Jesus says
I will never drive you away

I'm an old sinner
I will never drive you away

I'm a hard hearted sinner
I will never drive you away

I'm a backsliding sinner
I will never drive you away

I have served Satan all my days
I will never drive you away

I have sinned against the light
I will never drive you away

I have sinned against mercy
I will never drive you away

I have no good thing to bring with me
I will never drive you away

...

In our fallen, anxious state, we can think the more ugliness in our life God discovers the more he won't like us.

But God knows it all, past present and future, and he will never cast us out.

Unlike us!

Every human relationship has a limit. There's only so much you can abuse someone before they've had enough.

But we can never give a final reason for Jesus to close himself off to his own sheep.

When I'm walking through the shops, Elka has really taken to swinging from my hand. I don't think I'm going to have an arm left by the time I'm 40. She grabs these two finders with both her hands, and as I take a step forward she uses the momentum to swing.

After a few goes, everything getting a bit slippery, from the yogurt land that's still all over her hands.

And there's just no way that she can hold on by herself. She's gripping me as tight as she can, but the thing that stops her flying across Ashfield Shopping centre and smacking into a shop window is my grip on her.

The same with Jesus.

We cling to him, but with the strength of a three year old, with sin as slippery as yogurt land,

but it's Jesus hold on our lives that means we will never be cast away from him.

Psalm 63:8 puts it this way, "my soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me".

We've wandered into the doctrine of assurance, "once saved, always saved". A beautiful true doctrine. A lot to say about it, and what it means to be saved in the first place.

But more deeply we are talking of God's love for his people. His delight in them.

...

We can know these things can't we,

Yet feel so rotten about the sin that's in our lives, and forget God's compassion and mercy towards his people.

C.S. Lewis talking about fallen, broken sinful humans writes,

"You are one of the poor whom He blessed. He knows what a wretched machine you are trying to drive (talkin' about our life). Keep on. Do what you can. One day God will fling that wretched machine on the scrap-heap and give you a new one.

...

God knows our infirmities, our addictions, our sinfulness, and he died for us while we were his straight out enemies,

he didn't drive us away when we came to him then, and he won't drive us away now.

...

Some of you might have raised your eyebrows about all this.

Is there a danger in talking about God's mercy and compassion of neglecting his wrath?

Shouldn't we make sure we keep a proportionate view of God?

3 things to say

1. Wrath and mercy are not on a see-saw.

The more one goes up the more the other goes down.

And I'm talking about our perception first.

As though, we perceive that God is wrathful, and think, he mustn't be very merciful.

Then we perceive God's mercy, and think he mustn't be very wrathful...

Actually, they rise and fall equally.

the more you understand the magnificence of God's mercy, the more the magnitude of wrath we're saved from.

The more you appreciate God's just wrath, the more you understand and appreciate his mercy.

And actually, apart from our perception, the very nature and character of God is that he doesn't change – it's not as though he's a petulant deity that is happy one moment, and then raging the next. In that little illustration there - the petulant God, happy one moment angry the next - is something that we call an attribute.

And in this particular scenario the attribute is petulance. Zeus is petulant, and from that attribute, he is either angry or happy.

YAWAH is not petulant.

YAHWH is love, just, holy, and his wrath is not who he is, only an outworking of who he is.

It's right to speak of God as love, and not as wrath. And these things are not in competition with each other. It's possible to speak of God's wrath at the same time as speaking about his love.

Is he angry with you? No, his anger against your sin is absorbed in Jesus death on the cross, so that Paul can say,

[Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus](#)

2. We're talking about the heart of God, who he is

In Isaiah 28:21 Wrath and judgement are talked about as God's alien work/strange activity.

Listen to it:

²¹The Lord will rise up as he did at Mount Perazim,
he will rouse himself as in the Valley of Gibeon—
to do his work, his strange work,
and perform his task, his alien task.

Judgement and wrath are strange and alien tasks to God.

Rather, when Moses asks to see the Glory of God he hears the voice, "[The Lord the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin](#)". Exodus 33.

The heart of God is Love and the thing he desires more than judgement and wrath is compassion, forgiveness.

3. We are just looking at the Bible

If the Bible shows a disproportion, we want to be accordingly disproportionate. We need to speak of God's amazing love and compassion, grace and faithfulness, mercy and forgiveness because the Bible makes much of these things.

...

God's heart toward the weary is gentle, and humble, come to him and he gives you rest. Rest for the deepest part of you.

God's heart toward the sinner is compassion and mercy. We have great assurance in God's love for us, and his grip on our lives that will never let us go.