



NEW HOPE

SMALL GROUPS

Connect - Engage - Serve

When God..., Part 1 “When God is Inattentive” Week of November 11th, 2018

Connecting -with your group

As we come to a break in small groups for the holiday season, take some time as a group to talk about something you have learned, appreciated or a person in the group who made an impact in your life. What did you enjoy about your group? What would you like to see change as we enter next year?

Leaders, Pastor Russ and I would love to hear responses from your group. Group leaders, please empower your group members to begin inviting new people to your group! Reaching others and connecting them with the body of Christ is apart of our mission as believers in Christ. Please make sure you are inviting new people and those who have fallen away from meeting to your first small group meeting the week of Jan. 6th!!!

Engaging- with the Word of God and others

1. What impacted you from the message? Did you have any questions about the message?

Read Matthew Chapter 11 as a group and answer the following questions.

2. Talk as a group about John the Baptist, what do we know about him? What was difficult about the role he was given?
3. Have you ever experienced hearing from God but having to be patient on the “when”, share with the group. What about a time when you felt you gave everything but did not receive recognition or a reward?
4. What do you believe helped John the Baptist to finish the task he was given, even though he was persecuted and only was with Jesus when he Baptized him?
5. What does Jesus say about John? Focusing on verse 11, who did Jesus say is greater than John the Baptist? What differences do you see Jesus making on how things are viewed on earth versus how they are viewed in heaven?
6. After studying Chapter 11 and hearing the message, what would your response be to the following question; Why are there times when God seems to be inattentive? What advice would you give them to get through that time?

Serving- your group through prayer and care

As we prepare to break, make a plan to stay dedicated, supportive and encouraging to one another. How will your group stay connected, continue fellowship and prayer? Make a plan and a promise to stick to the plan. Pray as a group for God to keep each of you, pray that he would continue to grow His kingdom and your group not only in depth but in width. We want more people in groups but we also want to grow deeper in a relationship with each other.

THE SIX ACCENTS IN THE VOICE OF JESUS ([Matthew 11:1-30](#))

[Matthew 11:1-30](#) is a chapter in which Jesus is speaking all the time; and, as he speaks to different people and about different things, we hear the accent of his voice vary and change. It will be of the greatest interest to look one by one at the six accents in the voice of Jesus.

The Accent Of Confidence ([Matthew 11:1-6](#))

11:1-6 And when Jesus had completed his instructions to the twelve disciples, he left there to go on teaching and to go on making his proclamation in their towns.

When John had heard in prison about the things that the Anointed One of God was doing, he sent to him and asked him through his disciples: "Are you the One who is to come, or, must we go on expecting another?" "Go back," said Jesus, "and give John the report of what you are hearing and seeing. The blind are having their sight restored, and the lame are walking; the lepers are being cleansed, and the deaf is hearing; the dead are being raised up, and the poor are receiving the good news. And blessed is the man who does not take offense at me."

The career of John had ended in disaster. It was not John's habit to soften the truth for any man, and he was incapable of seeing evil without rebuking it. He had spoken too fearlessly and too definitely for his own safety.

Herod Antipas of Galilee had paid a visit to his brother in Rome. During that visit, he seduced his brother's wife. He came home again, dismissed his own wife, and married the sister-in-law whom he had lured away from her husband. Publicly and sternly John rebuked Herod. It was never safe to rebuke an eastern despot and Herod took his revenge; John was thrown into the dungeons of the fortress of Machaerus in the mountains near the Dead Sea.

For any man that would have been a terrible fate, but for John the Baptist it was worse than for most. He was a child of the desert; all his life he had lived in the wide open spaces, with the clean wind on his face and the spacious vault of the sky for his roof. And now he was confined within the four narrow walls of an underground dungeon. For a man like John, who had perhaps never lived in a house, this must have been agony.

In Carlisle Castle, there is a little cell. Once long ago they put a border chieftain in that cell and left him for years. In that cell, there is one little window, which is placed too high for a man to look out of when he is standing on the floor. On the ledge of the window, there are two depressions worn away in the stone. They are the marks of the hands of that border chieftain, the places where, day after day, he lifted himself up by his hands to look out on the green dales across which he would never ride again.

John must have been like that, and there is nothing to wonder at, and still less to criticize, in the fact that questions began to form themselves in John's mind. He had been so sure that Jesus was the One who was to come. That was one of the commonest titles of the Messiah for whom the Jews waited with such eager expectation ([Mark 11:9](#); [Luke 13:35](#); [Luke 19:38](#); [Hebrews 10:37](#); [Psalms 118:26](#)). A dying man cannot afford to have doubts; he must be sure; and so John sent his disciples to Jesus with the question: "Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?" There are many possible things behind that question.

(i) Some people think that the question was asked, not for John's sake at all, but for the sake of his disciples. It may be that when John and his disciples talked in prison, the disciples questioned whether Jesus was really he who was to come, and John's answer was: "If you have any doubts, go and see what Jesus is doing and your doubts will be at an end." If that is the case, it was a good answer. If anyone begins to argue with us about Jesus, and to question his supremacy, the best of all answers is not to counter argument with an argument but to say, "Give your life to him; and see what he can do with it." The supreme argument for Christ is not an intellectual debate, but the experience of his changing power.

(ii) It may be that John's question was the question of impatience. His message had been a message of doom ([Matthew 3:7-12](#)). The ax was at the root of the tree; the winnowing process had begun; the divine fire of cleansing judgment had begun to burn. It may be that John was thinking: "When is Jesus going to start on an action? When is he going to blast his enemies? When is the day of God's holy destruction to begin?" It may well be that John was impatient with Jesus because he was not what he expected him to be. The man who waits for savage wrath will always be disappointed in Jesus, but the man who looks for love will never find his hopes defeated.

(iii) Some few have thought that this question was nothing less than the question of dawning faith and hope. He had seen Jesus at the Baptism; in prison, he had thought more and more about him, and the more he thought the more certain he was that Jesus was he who was to come, and now he put all his hopes to the test in this one question. It may be that this is not the question of a despairing and an impatient man, but the question of one in whose eyes the light of hope shone, and who asked for nothing but confirmation of that hope.

Then came Jesus' answer, and in his answer, we hear the accent of confidence. Jesus' answer to John's disciples was: "Go back, and don't tell John what I am saying; tell him what I am doing. Don't tell John what I am claiming; tell him what

is happening." Jesus demanded that there should be applied to him the most acid of tests, that of deeds. Jesus was the only person who could ever demand without qualification to be judged, not by what he said, but by what he did. The challenge of Jesus is still the same. He does not so much say, "Listen to what I have to tell you," as, "Look what I can do for you; see what I have done for others."

The things that Jesus did in Galilee he still does. In him those who were blind to the truth about themselves, about their fellow-men and about God, have their eyes opened; in him those whose feet were never strong enough to remain in the right way are strengthened; in him those who were tainted with the disease of sin are cleansed; in him those who were deaf to the voice of conscience and of God begin to listen; in him those who were dead and powerless in sin are raised to newness and loveliness of life; in him the poorest man inherits the riches of the love of God.

Finally comes the warning, "Blessed is he who takes no offense at me." This was spoken to John, and it was spoken because John had only grasped half the truth. John preached the gospel of divine holiness with divine destruction; Jesus preached the gospel of divine holiness with divine love. So Jesus says to John, "Maybe I am not doing the things you expected me to do. But the powers of evil are being defeated not by irresistible power, but by unanswerable love." Sometimes a man can be offended at Jesus because Jesus cuts across his ideas of what religion should be.

The Accent Of Admiration ([Matthew 11:7-11](#))

11:7-11 When they were going away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John. "What did you go out to the desert to see?" he said. "Was it a reed shaken by the wind? If it was not that, what did you go out to see? Was it to see a man clothed in luxurious clothes? Look at you, the people who wear luxurious clothes are in kings' houses. If it was not that, what did you go out to see? Was it to see a prophet? Indeed it was, I tell you, and something beyond a prophet. This is he of whom it stands written: 'Look you, I am sending before you my messenger, who will prepare your way before you.' This is the truth I tell you--amongst those born of women no greater figure than John the Baptizer has ever emerged in history. But the least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he is."

There are few men to whom Jesus paid so tremendous a tribute as he did to John the Baptizer. He begins by asking the people what they went into the desert to see when they streamed out to John.

(i) Did they go out to see a reed shaken by the wind? That can mean one of two things: (a) Down by the banks of the Jordan the long cane grass grew; and the phrase a shaken reed was a kind of proverb for the commonest of sights. When the people flocked to see John, were they going out to see something as ordinary as the reeds swaying in the wind on Jordan's banks? (b) A shaken reed can mean a weak vacillator, one who could no more stand foursquare to the winds of danger than a reed by the river's bank could stand straight when the wind blew.

Whatever else the people flocked out to the desert to see, they certainly did not go to see an ordinary person. The very fact that they did go out in their crowds showed how extraordinary John was, for no one would cross the street, let alone tramp into the desert, to see a commonplace kind of person. Whatever else they went out to see, they did not go to see a weak vacillator. Mr. Pliables do not end in prison as martyrs for the truth. John was neither as ordinary as a shaken reed, nor as spineless as the reed which sways with every breeze.

(ii) Did they go out to see a man clothed in soft and luxurious garments? Such a man would be a courtier; and, whatever else John was, he was not a courtier. He knew nothing of the courtier's art of the flattery of kings; he followed the dangerous occupation of telling the truth to kings. John was the ambassador of God, not the courtier of Herod.

(iii) Did they go out to see a prophet? The prophet is the forthteller of the truth of God. The prophet is the man in the confidence of God. "Surely the Lord God does nothing, without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets" ([Amos 3:7](#)). The prophet is two things--he is the man with a message from God, and he is the man with the courage to deliver that message. The prophet is the man with God's wisdom in his mind, God's truth on his lips, and God's courage in his heart. That most certainly John was.

(iv) But John was something more than a prophet. The Jews had, and still have, one settled belief. They believed that before the Messiah came, Elijah would return to herald his coming. To this day, when the Jews celebrate the Passover Feast, a vacant chair is left for Elijah. "Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet, before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes" ([Malachi 4:5](#)). Jesus declared that John was nothing less than the divine herald whose duty and privilege it was to announce the coming of the Messiah. John was nothing less than the herald of God, and no man could have a greater task than that.

(v) Such was the tremendous tribute of Jesus to John, spoken with the accent of admiration. There had never been a greater figure in all history; and then comes the startling sentence: "But he who is least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he."

Here there is one quite general truth. With Jesus there came into the world something absolutely new. The prophets were great; their message was precious; but with Jesus there emerged something still greater, and a message still more wonderful. C. G. Montefiore, himself a Jew and not a Christian, writes: "Christianity does mark a new era in religious history and in human civilization. What the world owes to Jesus and to Paul is immense; things can never be, and men can never think, the same as things were, and as men thought, before these two great men lived." Even a non-Christian freely admits that things could never be the same now that Jesus had come.

But what was it that John lacked? What is it that the Christian has that John could never have? The answer is simple and fundamental. John had never seen the Cross. Therefore one thing John could never know--the full revelation of the love of God. The holiness of God he might know; the justice of God he might declare; but the love of God in all its fulness he could never know. We have only to listen to the message of John and the message of Jesus. No one could call John's message a gospel, good news; it was basically a threat of destruction. It took Jesus and his Cross to show to men the length, breadth, depth and height of the love of God. It is a most amazing thing that it is possible for the humblest Christian to know more about God than the greatest of the Old Testament prophets. The man who has seen the Cross has seen the heart of God in a way that no man who lived before the Cross could ever see it. Indeed the least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than any man who went before.

So John had the destiny which sometimes falls to men; he had the task of pointing men to a greatness into which he himself did not enter. It is given to some men to be the signposts of God. They point to a new ideal and a new greatness which others will enter into, but into which they will not come. It is very seldom that any great reformer is the first man to toil for the reform with which his name is connected. Many who went before him glimpsed the glory, often laboured for it, and sometimes died for it.

Someone tells how from the windows of his house every evening he used to watch the lamp-lighter go along the streets lighting the lamps--and the lamp-lighter was himself a blind man. He was bringing to others the light which he himself would never see. Let a man never be discouraged in the Church or in any other walk of life, if the dream he has dreamed and for which he has toiled is never worked out before the end of the day. God needed John; God needs his signposts who can point men on the way, although they themselves cannot ever reach the goal.

Violence And The Kingdom ([Matthew 11:12-15](#))

11:12-15 "From the days of John the Baptist until now, the Kingdom of Heaven is taken by storm, and the violent take it by force. For up to John all the prophets and the Law spoke with the voice of prophecy; and, if you are wiping to accept the fact, this is Elijah who was destined to come. He who has ears to hear let him hear."

In [Matthew 11:12](#) there is a very difficult saying, "The kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and men of violence take it by force." Luke has this saying in another form ([Luke 16:16](#)): "Since then the good news of the Kingdom of God is preached, and every one enters it violently." It is clear that at some time Jesus said something in which violence and the kingdom were connected, something which was a dark and a difficult saying, which no one at the time fully understood. Certainly Luke and Matthew understood it in different ways.

Luke says that every man storms his way into the Kingdom; he means, as Denney said, that the "Kingdom of heaven is not for the well-meaning but for the desperate," that no one drifts into the Kingdom, that the Kingdom only opens its doors to those who are prepared to make as great an effort to get into it as men do when they storm a city.

Matthew says that from the time of John until now the Kingdom of heaven suffers violence and the violent take it by force. The very form of that expression seems to look back over a considerable time. It indeed sounds much more like a comment of Matthew than a saying of Jesus. It sounds as if Matthew was saying: "From the days of John, who was thrown into prison, right down to our own times the Kingdom of heaven has suffered violence and persecution at the hands of violent men."

It is likely that we will get the full meaning of this difficult saying by putting together the recollection of Luke and Matthew. What Jesus may well have said is: "Always my Kingdom will suffer violence; always savage men will try to break it up, and snatch it away and destroy it; and therefore only the man who is desperately in earnest, only the man in whom the violence of devotion matches and defeats the violence of persecution will in the end enter into it." It may well be that this saying of Jesus was originally at one and the same time a warning of violence to come and a challenge to produce a devotion which would be even stronger than the violence.

It seems strange to find in [Matthew 11:13](#) that the Law is said to speak with the voice of prophecy; but it was the Law itself which confidently declared that the voice of prophecy would not die. "The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from among you, from your brethren." "I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brethren; and I will put my words in his mouth" ([Deuteronomy 18:15](#); [Deuteronomy 18:18](#)). It was because he broke the Law, as they saw

it, that the orthodox Jews hated Jesus; but, if they had only had eyes to see it, both the Law and the prophets pointed to him.

Once again Jesus tells the people that John is the herald and the forerunner whom they have awaited so long--if they are willing to accept the fact. There is all the tragedy of the human situation in that last phrase. The old proverb has it that you can take a horse to the water, but you cannot make him drink. God can send his messenger but men can refuse to recognize him, and God can send his truth but men can refuse to see it. God's revelation is powerless without man's response. That is why Jesus ends with the appeal that he who has ears should use them to hear.

The Accent Of Sorrowful Rebuke ([Matthew 11:16-19](#))

11:16-19 "To what will I compare this generation? It is like children in the market-place, calling to their companions, and saying, 'We piped to you and you did not dance; we wailed and you did not mourn.' For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'The man is mad.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look you, a gluttonous man and a wine-drinker, the friend of tax-collectors and sinners.' But wisdom is shown to be right by her deeds."

Jesus was saddened by the sheer perversity of human nature. To him men seemed to be like children playing in the village square. One group said to the other: "Come on and let's play at weddings," and the others said, "We don't feel like being happy today." Then the first group said, "All right; come on and let's play at funerals," and the others said, "We don't feel like being sad today." They were what the Scots call contrary. No matter what was offered, they found a fault in it. John came, living in the desert, fasting and despising food, isolated from the society of men; and they said of him, "The man is mad to cut himself off from human society and human pleasures like that." Jesus came, mixing with all kinds of people, sharing in their sorrows and their joys, accompanying with them in their times of joy; and they said of him, "He is a socialite; he is a party-goer; he is the friend of outsiders with whom no decent person would have anything to do." They called John's asceticism madness; and they called Jesus' sociability laxness of morals. They could find a ground of criticism either way.

The plain fact is that when people do not want to listen to the truth, they will easily enough find an excuse for not listening to it. They do not even try to be consistent in their criticisms; they will criticize the same person, and the same institution, from quite opposite grounds. If people are determined to make no response they will remain stubbornly unresponsive no matter what invitation is made to them. Grown men and women can be very like spoiled children who refuse to play no matter what the game is.

Then comes Jesus' final sentence in this section: "Wisdom is shown to be right by her deeds." The ultimate verdict lies not with the cantankerous and perverse critics but with events. The Jews might criticize John for his lonely isolation, but John had moved men's hearts to God as they had not been moved for centuries; the Jews might criticize Jesus for mixing too much in ordinary life and with ordinary people, but in him people were finding a new life and a new goodness and a new power to live as they ought and a new access to God.

It would be well if we were to stop judging people and churches by our own prejudices and perversities; and if we were to begin to give thanks for any person and any church who can bring people nearer to God, even if their methods are not the methods which suit us.

He Accent Of Heartbroken Condemnation ([Matthew 11:20-24](#))

11:20-24 Then he began to reproach the cities in which the most numerous of his deeds of power had been done, because they did not repent. "Alas for you Chorazin! Alas for you Bethsaida! For, if the deeds of power which happened in you had happened in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented in sackcloth and ashes long ago. But I tell you, it will be easier for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you! And you Capernaum, is it not true that you have been lifted up to heaven? You will go down to Hell, for, if the deeds of power which happened in you had happened amongst the men of Sodom, they would have survived to this day. But I tell you--it will be easier for the land of the men of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you."

When John came to the end of his gospel, he wrote a sentence in which he indicated how impossible it was ever to write a complete account of the life of Jesus: "But there are also many other things which Jesus did; were every one of them to

be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written." ([John 21:25](#)). This passage of Matthew is one of the proofs of that saying.

Chorazin was probably a town an hour's journey north of Capernaum; Bethsaida was a fishing village on the west bank of Jordan, just as the river entered the northern end of the lake. Clearly the most tremendous things happened in these towns, and yet we have no account of them whatever. There is no record in the gospels of the work that Jesus did, and of

the wonders, he performed in these places, and yet they must have been amongst his greatest. A passage like this shows us how little we know of Jesus; it shows us--and we must always remember it--that in the gospels we have only the barest selection of Jesus' works. The things we do not know about Jesus far outnumber the things we do know.

We must be careful to catch the accent in Jesus' voice as he said this. The Revised Standard Version has it: "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida!" The Greek word for woe which we have translated "alas" is *ouai* ([Greek #3759](#)); and *ouai* expresses sorrowful pity at least as much as it does anger. This is not the accent of one who is in a temper because his self-esteem has been touched; it is not the accent of one who is blazingly angry because he has been insulted. It is the accent of sorrow, the accent of one who offered men the most precious thing in the world and saw it disregarded.

Jesus' condemnation of sin is holy anger, but the anger comes, not from outraged pride, but from a broken heart.

What then was the sin of Chorazin, of Bethsaida, of Capernaum, the sin which was worse than the sin of Tyre and Sidon, and of Sodom and Gomorrah? It must have been very serious for again and again Tyre and Sidon are denounced for their wickedness ([Isaiah 23:1-18](#) ; [Jeremiah 25:22](#); [Jeremiah 47:4](#); [Ezekiel 26:3-7](#); [Ezekiel 28:12-22](#)), and Sodom and Gomorrah were and are a byword for iniquity.

(i) It was the sin of the people who forgot the responsibilities of privilege. To the cities of Galilee had been given a privilege which had never come to Tyre and Sidon, or to Sodom and Gomorrah, for the cities of Galilee had actually seen and heard Jesus. We cannot condemn a man who never had the chance to know any better; but if a man who has had every chance to know the right does the wrong, then he does stand condemned. We do not condemn a child for that for which we would condemn an adult; we would not condemn a savage for conduct which we would condemn in a civilized man; we do not expect the person brought up in the handicaps of a city slum to live the life of a person brought up in a good and comfortable home. The greater our privileges have been, the greater is our condemnation if we fail to shoulder the responsibilities and accept the obligations which these privileges bring with them.

(ii) It was the sin of indifference. These cities did not attack Jesus Christ; they did not drive him from their gates; they did not seek to crucify him; they simply disregarded him. Neglect can kill as much as persecution can. An author writes a book; it is sent out for review; some reviewers may praise it, others may damn it; it does not matter so long as it is noticed; the one thing which will kill a book stone dead is if it is never noticed at all for either praise or blame.

An artist drew a picture of Christ standing on one of London's famous bridges. He is holding out his hands in appeal to the crowds, and they are drifting past without a second look; only one girl, a nurse, gives him any response. Here we have the modern situation in so many countries today. There is no hostility to Christianity; there is no desire to destroy it; there is blank indifference. Christ is relegated to the ranks of those who do not matter. Indifference, too, is a sin, and the worst of all, for indifference kills.

It does not burn a religion to death; it freezes it to death. It does not behead it; it slowly suffocates the life out of it.

(iii) And so we are face to face with one great threatening truth--it is also a sin to do nothing. There are sins of action, sins of deed; but there is also a sin of inaction, and of absence of deeds. The sin of Chorazin, of Bethsaida, and of Capernaum was the sin of doing nothing. Many a man's defence is: "But I never did anything." That defence may be in fact his condemnation.

The Accent Of Authority ([Matthew 11:25-27](#))

11:25-27 At that time Jesus said: "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and the clever, and have revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for thus it was your will in your sight. All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one really knows the Son except the Father, and no one really knows the Father except the Son, and he to whom the Son wishes to reveal his knowledge."

Here Jesus is speaking out of experience, the experience that the Rabbis and the wise men rejected him, and the simple people accepted him. The intellectuals had no use for him; but the humble welcomed him. We must be careful to see clearly what Jesus meant here. He is very far from condemning intellectual power; what he is condemning is intellectual pride. As Plummer has it, "The heart, not the head, is the home of the gospel." It is not cleverness which shuts out; it is pride. It is not stupidity which admits; it is humility. A man may be as wise as Solomon, but if he has not the simplicity, the trust, the innocence of the childlike heart, he shuts himself out.

The Rabbis themselves saw the danger of this intellectual pride; they recognized that often simple people were nearer God than the wisest Rabbi. They had a parable like this. Once Rabbi Berokah of Chuza was in the market of Lapet, and Elijah appeared to him. The Rabbi asked, "Is there among the people in this market-place anyone who is destined to share in the life of the world to come?" At first Elijah said there was none. Then he pointed at one man, and said that that man would share in the life of the world to come. Rabbi Berokah went to the man and asked him what he did. "I am a jailer," said the man, "and I keep men and women separate. At night I place my bed between the men and the women so

that no wrong will be committed." Elijah pointed at two other men, and said that they too would share in the life to come. Rabbi Berokah asked them what they did. "We are merry-makers," they said. "When we see a man who is downcast, we cheer him up. Also when we see two people quarrelling with one another, we try to make peace between them." The men who did the simple things, the jailer who kept his charges in the right way, the men who brought a smile and peace, were in the kingdom.

Again, the Rabbis had a story like this: "An epidemic once broke out in Sura, but in the neighbourhood of Rab's residence (a famous Rabbi) it did not appear. The people thought that this was due to Rab's merits, but in a dream they were told ... that it happened because of the merits of a man who willingly lent hoe and shovel to someone who wished to dig a grave. A fire once broke out in Drokeret, but the neighbourhood of Rabbi Huna was spared. The people thought it was due to the merits of Rabbi Huna,...but they were told in a dream that it was due to the merits of a certain woman, who used to heat her oven and place it at the disposal of her neighbours." The man who lent his tools to someone in need, the woman who helped her neighbours as she could had no intellectual standing, but their simple deeds of human love had won them the approval of God. Academic distinctions are not necessarily distinctions in the sight of God.

"Still to the lowly soul
He doth himself impart,
And for his dwelling and his throne
Chooseth the pure in heart."

This passage closes with the greatest claim that Jesus ever made, the claim which is the centre of the Christian faith, that he alone can reveal God to men. Other men may be sons of God; he is The Son. John put this in a different way, when he tells us that Jesus said, "He who has seen me has seen the Father" ([John 14:9](#)). What Jesus says is this: "If you want to see what God is like, if you want to see the mind of God, the heart of God, the nature of God, if you want to see God's whole attitude to men--look at me!" It is the Christian conviction that in Jesus Christ alone we see what God is like; and it is also the Christian conviction that Jesus can give that knowledge to anyone who is humble enough and trustful enough to receive it.

The Accent Of Compassion ([Matthew 11:28-30](#))

11:28-30 "Come to me, all you who are exhausted and weighted down beneath your burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of 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."

Jesus spoke to men desperately trying to find God and desperately trying to be good, who were finding the tasks impossible and who were driven to weariness and to despair.

He says, "Come unto me all you who are exhausted." His invitation is to those who are exhausted with the search for the truth. The Greeks had said, "It is very difficult to find God, and, when you have found him, it is impossible to tell anyone else about him." Zophar demanded of Job: "Can you find out the deep things of God?" ([Job 11:7](#)). It is Jesus' claim that the weary search for God ends in himself. W. B. Yeats, the great Irish poet and mystic, wrote: "Can one reach God by toil? He gives himself to the pure in heart. He asks nothing but our attention." The way to know God is not by mental search, but by giving attention to Jesus Christ, for in him we see what God is like.

He says, "Come unto me all you who are weighted down beneath your burdens." For the orthodox Jew religion was a thing of burdens. Jesus said of the Scribes and Pharisees: "They bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders" ([Matthew 23:4](#)). To the Jew religion was a thing of endless rules. A man lived his life in a forest of regulations which dictated every action of his life. He must listen for ever to a voice which said, "Thou shalt not." Even the Rabbis saw this. There is a kind of rueful parable put into the mouth of Korah, which shows just how binding and constricting and burdensome and impossible the demands of the Law could be. "There was a poor widow in my neighbourhood who had two daughters and a field. When she began to plough, Moses (i.e. the Law of Moses) said, 'You must not plough with an ox and an ass together.' When she began to sow, he said, 'You must not sow your field with mingled seed.' When she began to reap and to make stacks of corn, he said, 'When you reap your harvest in your field, and have forgotten a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it' ([Deuteronomy 24:19](#)), and 'you shall not reap your field to its very border' ([Leviticus 19:9](#)). She began to thresh, and he said, 'Give me the heave-offering, and the first and

second tithe.' She accepted the ordinance and gave them all to him. What did the poor woman then do? She sold her field, and bought two sheep, to clothe herself from their fleece, and to have profited from their young. When they bore their young, Aaron (i.e. the demands of the priesthood) came and said, 'Give me the first-born.' So she accepted the decision and gave them to him. When the shearing time came, and she shared them, Aaron came and said, 'Give me the first of the fleece of the sheep' ([Deuteronomy 18:4](#)). Then she thought: 'I cannot stand up against this man. I will slaughter the sheep and eat them.' Then Aaron came and said, 'Give me the shoulder and the two cheeks and the stomach'

(Deuteronomy 18:3). Then she said, 'Even when I have killed them I am not safe from you. Behold they shall be devoted.' Then Aaron said, 'In that case, they belong entirely to me' (Numbers 18:14). He took them and went away and left her

weeping with her two daughters." The story is a parable of the continuous demands that the Law made upon men in every action and activity of life. These demands were indeed a burden.

Jesus invites us to take his yoke upon our shoulders. The Jews used the phrase the yoke for entering into submission too. They spoke of the yoke of the Law, the yoke of the commandments, the yoke of the Kingdom, the yoke of God. But it may well be that Jesus took the words of his invitation from something much nearer home than that.

He says, "My yoke is easy." The word "easy" is in Greek *chrestos* (**Greek #5543**), which can mean well-fitting. In Palestine ox-yokes were made of wood; the ox was brought, and the measurements were taken. The yoke was then roughed out, and the ox wigs brought back to have the yoke tried on. The yoke was carefully adjusted so that it would fit well, and not gall the neck of the patient beast. The yoke was tailor-made to fit the ox.

There is a legend that Jesus made the best ox-yokes in all Galilee, and that from all over the countrymen came to him to buy the best yokes that skill could make. In those days, as now, shops had their signs above the door; and it has been suggested that the sign above the door of the carpenter's shop in Nazareth may well have been: "My yokes fit well." It may well be that Jesus is here using a picture from the carpenter's shop in Nazareth where he had worked throughout the silent years.

Jesus says, "My yoke fits well." What he means is: "The life I give you is not a burden to gall you; your task is made to measure to fit you." Whatever God sends us is made to fit our needs and our abilities exactly.

Jesus says, "My burden is light." As a Rabbi had it: "My burden has become my song." It is not that the burden is easy to carry but it is laid on us in love; it is meant to be carried in love, and love makes even the heaviest burden light. When we remember the love of God, when we know that our burden is to love God and to love men, then the burden becomes a song. There is an old story which tells how a man came upon a little boy carrying a still smaller boy, who was lame, upon his back. "That's a heavy burden for you to carry," said the man. "That's no' a burden," came the answer. "That's my wee brother." The burden which is given in love and carried in love is always light.

-Barclay's Daily Study Bible (NT)