

Unmistakeably the goal of Matthew 11 is to recognise Jesus for who he is. See the question of John the Baptist in v 3:

Are you the one to come, or should we expect someone else?

The outcome Jesus seeks is at the end of the same chapter. V 29:

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

Many here and watching online have taken up this invitation and received its blessings.

The promise is simple. The more deeply you grasp your union with Christ. The yoke that joins us to him. The greater the easing of your burdens.

The promise is so appealing. The practice is more complex. We who have already been joined to Christ have a perpetual habit of rebuilding the burdens he is meant to have relieved us of.

Sin is always at the heart of them. Our rest returns to restlessness. Burdens that tear our hearts apart and usually then tear others apart.

Matthew 11 is a chapter about the refreshment and relief of the gospel that come to us when the Father comes to us. Through his Son. To deliver a lasting rest. Begun now. To be enjoyed and then fulfilled. At the Day of Christ's return.

The relief of the gospel comes in three sequential experiences in the chapter. 1) Recognition (vv 1-15). 2) Repentance (vv 16-24). 3) Revelation (vv 25-30).

This is what happens when a person comes to Christ. This is what happens as we continue in Christ. Recognition. Repentance. Revelation.

Recognition (vv 1-15)

An enquiry comes from John the Baptist. Jesus – v 1 - carrying out his ministry of teaching and preaching after preparing the disciples for their mission. The news of gospel enterprise makes its way to John, who has been imprisoned.

For John it was a question of recognition. We know him as the baptiser of Christ. Matthew 3. Where he first identified Jesus. As the one who should have been baptising him.

Prison had taken its toll. And raised doubts. A tension we all live with. Our circumstances make us uncertain about our beliefs.

Are you the one to come, or should we to expect someone else?

If there were a phrase not used enough in our sharing the gospel with others it's probably just two words. Stop looking. Maybe it should be 4 words: the search is over. Or 3: go no further.

Don't expect anyone else. Tell John the time has come. A new era has dawned. The Baptist's hopes have been met. His expectations exceeded. V 5:

The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.

When was the last time you felt the refreshment of Christ's presence? When you said to your soul 'Praise God this isn't all there is to life!'

Can you imagine John? In prison. We probably can't. But let's try and guess his circumstances. Every day looking like the last. The next day not promising anything more than the current. Except perhaps death. Which regrettably was the outcome.

Jesus reminds us never let your life be limited by the lines this world draws around you.

The age the prophet Isaiah spoke of has now arrived. Jesus' earthly ministry, and that of the 12, characterised by the miracles Isaiah prophesied would mark the coming of God's king.

Recognise we are under new Kingdom conditions. And in this age of renewal Jesus has a word for his followers, including John. V 6:

Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.

Are you in two minds about Jesus? Has your assurance been shaken?

Jesus is prepared to say that John was the greatest of all the prophets. The 'Elijah' that the prophet Malachi said pre-empted the coming of the Lord. John wasn't just the MC introducing the final act. He heralded the game-changing moment in Israel's history.

And yet he was only the messenger. Jesus puts his message in perspective. V 11:

Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he

It doesn't matter what you think of the Baptist if his message doesn't point you to Christ. To recognise the coming of the Messiah who promises eternal rest.

Available now. As Jesus says to John so he says to us: the search is over.

Repentance (vv 16-24)

Recognition. Followed by repentance. Turning away from yourself. Turning to Christ.

Only here's the kicker in the passage. Most don't.

When the good news of Jesus is preached, most don't buy it. Though they have stumbled upon the truth, they stumble because of it.

Even those you expect would grasp it, don't. Grown up with a religious pedigree. Under the scriptures. Well versed in church history.

Jesus launches into judgment upon the unrepentant people and towns of his own generation. V 17's parable:

"We played the pipe for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn."

The people of Jesus' day wanted to dance to their own tune. Like most of us.

John and Jesus' ministries are rejected. Yet Jesus declares in v 19 that those who look at his works and repent have received a wisdom from above. Christ himself.

In vv 20-24 the generation of v 16 is given geography. Bethsaida, Chorazin and Capernaum. Indicted for a resistance to the gospel works of Jesus that if seen by them would have made the Old Testament citizens of Tyre, Sidon and Sodom repent.

V 24. Beware the day of judgment. Christ will be present to either make the day incredible or unbearable. Eternal rest or eternal ruin. Comfort or condemnation.

Stop looking. Start turning. And look for the realigning that is the pattern for your life in Christ.

A heart constantly turning to Christ will never stop changing. It will be firm in trust but never hard in shape.

We talk about living with chips on our shoulders. Jesus wants to chip away at every part of us. And every time he does we have a fresh experience of his rest. His presence with us from this day until the last.

Invitation (vv 25-30)

The gospel shape of Matthew 11. Recognition. Repentance. And lastly, revelation.

We're used to the language of easing and tightening when it comes to Covid. What about the kingdom. Do you experience its easings?

I am not asking the question 'Is life easier?' Though that's very appealing. I am asking the question of kingdom relief.

The relief that comes from knowing you are a member of it. The relief that you don't have to live for others' approval. Because you have it from God.

Relief from popularity and power positioning. Relief from jealousy and envy of others. And their possessions.

Relief from justifying yourself by your own wealth and possessions. Relief from the accumulation syndrome. Success. Status. Superiority.

Relief from the burdens of religious practices and obligations. We'll hear about that next week in Matthew 12.

The relief that at some pre-determined point in your life. Not that you knew. The Father of heaven - v 27 – made himself known to you through his Son. And revealed to you the blessings of heaven. Union with Christ. Rest for your soul.

And in a remarkable expression of God's sovereignty and human responsibility in alignment, this revelation is an invitation.

Bible teacher Ray Galea once said that John 14:6 could have justifiably been shorter: "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father."

Because, v 25, he's hidden these things. These blessings of heaven.

And Jesus praises him for it. For concealing the gospel from those who believe it can be attained through human wisdom. Human insight. Human judgment. Human concoction.

And in case we think Jesus is condemning understanding and reason when it comes to the gospel that would be to misunderstand what has been concealed. And then revealed.

You cannot come to God on your terms. You can only come completely open to his. Like the child utterly dependent on their parent.

We've all been children. We've all been reliant on the principle of complete dependence on another for the most vulnerable of our years.

Then the human condition is to emerge into adulthood and assume self-sufficiency. Repeat this sometimes subtle sometimes obvious sin for the remainder of our lives.

The gospel of grace reaches into our lives to rescue us from ourselves. With the most powerful of all revelation. God reveals himself through the Lord Jesus Christ in the act of grace that is the invitation of v 28:

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ 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. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Are you experiencing the relief of the Christian life? The rest that comes from knowing your Father loves you as one of his children. Through his Son he is sharing with you the gifts of eternity. Which cannot be gained any other way than God revealing them to you.

Note what Jesus brings by his presence. Gentle and humble in heart. What should that do to our own hearts? Bring relief and rest.

The work of the cross ensures that what was once condemnation has turned to comfort. Jesus says, take my yoke upon you. Be joined with me and learn from me.

Whatever your circumstances. Whatever lines this world has drawn around you. Jesus promises his presence with you in the midst of them. Rest for your soul in a restless world.

Does yesterday look like today? Is tomorrow devoid of hope?

Has this rest from Christ? This reliance on Christ? Instead become a rut. A ritual? A rust? A decaying faith that has lost sight of the kingdom of heaven where the king resides.

Is yours a restless soul? Or a soul at rest?

Is Jesus the one you turn to? Or are you expecting someone else?