

THE CROWNING CALL

"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Matthew 11:28-30.

Our Lord had been speaking of the unwillingness of people to accept the gospel message. After saying, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear," He spoke of two classes to whom the gospel tidings came without blessing. The first class was composed of the critical and faultfinding. They found fault with John the Baptist because he was an ascetic; then, they found fault with the Lord Jesus because He was not an ascetic. They criticized John the Baptist because he would neither eat nor drink as others did; then, they criticized the Lord Jesus because He did eat and drink as others did. They are an illustration of the fact that you can never satisfy those who will not be satisfied. The second class was composed of the wilfully rebellious. Christ spoke of those in Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum, where His wonderful words had been spoken and His mighty works had been done, but they were rebellious and antagonistic toward God and refused to repent.

About six months before His crucifixion the Lord Jesus picked out a company of seventy men, and sent them out into all the villages where He planned to go Himself. By and by, those men came back with shining faces, joyous hearts and ringing voices. They reported how things had gone with them, out among the crowds of the countryside. Upon hearing their reports, Christ looked up and said, "I thank Thee, O Father." Then, as if He were looking at those crowds to whom the disciples had been ministering, He spoke the familiar words of our text. Nobody except Christ could have uttered such sweet, tender, precious, profound and wonderful words. The same words upon the lips of any mortal would have been ineffective. Only Christ has the power to give rest. Others may tell you about rest and how to obtain it, but they cannot give it.

This inexhaustible text has not lost its applicability to present-day human conditions. It contains an invitation which requires our immediate and complete attention. It is one which vitally concerns us at this very moment. Oh, the tenderness and the majesty of these wonderful words! "Come unto me." "Come"—that involves and requires action. "Unto me"—that suggests the direction of coming and the proper attitude. Come because of your sense of need. Come because of the promise accompanying this invitation, which assures you that your need will be met in the giving of rest.

"Come" gives us a simple and interesting invitation, easily understood and easily obeyed. However, it necessitates decision and action. Keenly sensitive to the hard lot of those who were far away from God, the Saviour extended this cordial invitation to them to come to Him. Instead of offering them a philosophy or a code of rules, He invited them to come to Him.

In His great tenderness and condescension the Saviour still sees the need of sinners and invites them to come unto Him. After inviting them to do so, He promises them that, when and because they do come, they will receive rest as a gift from Him. In this respect our Lord is different from all other teachers of religion throughout the ages. Whereas, other teachers tell you to go there or to do that, Christ says, "Come unto me...and I will give you rest." To all who are seeking rest elsewhere, Christ says, "I am the only source of rest."

To those who have not come unto Christ, trusted Him as their Saviour, and received rest from Him there is a real message in the gracious words of this text. It declares to you that there is not any rest for you anywhere else. Rest in the midst of the world's restlessness is what Christ promises to those who will come to Him, confess Him as God and trust Him as Saviour.

I. To The Rest Of Salvation.

Christ said, "Come unto me." The heart may say, "Why should I?" "Ye labour" is one reason why you should. "Ye are heavy laden" is another reason why you should. The labor problem is not something of modern origin. It goes back to the Garden of Eden. There was work before the fall of man, but there was not any labour or toil. Labour or toil was the result of sin. Knowing men as no one else ever did, Christ said, in substance, "You labour. You are laden. There are burdens put upon you. You are staggering along life's highway beneath many a load." What a picture of humanity out of Christ, labouring and laden! What hope is there for such? Is there any help? In substance the Lord Jesus said, "Come to Me and I will give you what you do not merit. I will give you what you cannot purchase. I will give you what you cannot earn. I will give you what cannot be obtained in any other way--rest from an accusing conscience, rest from the fear of coming judgment, rest from the guilt of sin, rest from the defilement of sin, rest from carping care and weary disappointment, and rest from your hearts, your minds and your spirits."

Christ's invitation to come unto Him is winsome in speech and gracious in theme. It carries the charm of the impartial. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden." That appeal is to all, without distinctions and without exclusions. The pauper with his empty purse and the prince with his empty heart are alike included. This invitation also carries the charm of the essential. What Christ offers--this rest amid restlessness--is no frilly luxury, but it is an utter necessity. Christ calls all of us to experience the priceless rest that comes to those who are in harmony with God. What He offers is not some frothy meringue at life's table, but it is the very bread of God without which men shall starve.

For more than nineteen centuries Christ has been pleading with men to come unto Him. This gracious invitation from the Saviour should arouse hope of receiving some needed blessing. "I will give you rest." What a promise! Only an omniscient and omnipotent God of love could speak such words, for only such an One could know the longing, the aching and the restlessness of the hearts of people. "Rest"--that for which the people had been striving in their ignorance and blindness, and were unable to obtain at any price--was offered freely to them. Christ assured them that it was theirs for the taking.

What is the burden under which the unsaved are labouring and are heavy laden? It is threefold--the burden of conscious guilt; the burden of impending judgment; and the burden of bondage to the power of sin. He will remove every one of those burdens if you will come unto Him. How does He remove the burden of guilt? He bore your sins in His own body on the tree. How does He take away the burden of judgment? He went through judgment for you, and satisfied the demands of the broken law of God; and, if you believe in Him, you shall never come into judgment, for God will never exact two judgments for the same offense. How does He deliver you from the bondage of sin? He imparts to you the Holy Spirit, Who breaks your fetters, and introduces you into the liberty of a child of God. If you are burdened with your guilt, look to Him Who took your guilt upon Himself. If you are burdened with impending judgment, look to Him Who bore judgment for your sake, and Who abolished it for every believer. If you are burdened with the bondage of sin, look to Him Who says, "I will give you rest." There is a sermon in every word of that sentence, "I will give you rest." "I,"--the fulness of blessing is treasured up in Christ. "I will," indicates the certainty of it. "I will give," signifies the freeness of it. "I will give you," states the directness of it. "I will give you rest," proves the thoroughness of it. In the Greek it is "I will rest you." How? Why, if there is the burden of guilt, it is removed by the sacrifice of His precious blood. "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."

The rest that Christ gives to those who put their trust in Him is perfect. It includes rest of mind, of conscience, of spirit and of heart. It is possible for those of you who have not accepted this rest to have an experience now which you have never had before, and to enjoy the rest which Christ gives. Calvary's cross is a blood-written invitation from God to all the generations of men to step out of their poverty into God's riches, to step out of their sins into God's salvation, to step out of their slavery into God's freedom, to step out of their fear into God's favor, to step out of their death into God's life, and to step out of their darkness into God's light.

II. To The Rest Of Sanctification.

What causes the restlessness of the children of God? It is due to something wrong within them. Unholy dispositions cause restlessness. You cannot be restful while you are jealous of what men may become, or envious of what they are already. All restless dispositions are born of pride or of self-will.

To those who have received and experienced the rest of salvation our Lord extends the invitation to come and sit at His feet, hear Him talk, watch His conduct, and sit at His feet, hear Him talk, watch His conduct, and see the absolute absence of all self-advancement, self-seeking, self-pleasing, self-will, self-glory, self-defense and self-trust. There is absolutely no peace or rest in a life that is lived for self.

Just as verse twenty-eight deals with sin, so verse twenty-nine deals with self. Christ wants all who receive from Him the rest of salvation to learn not to be selfish and not to be proud. As people cannot receive the gift of salvation except by coming to Christ, neither can they enter into the blessing of sanctification except by sitting at His feet and learning not to be selfish and not to be proud. Selfishness is a hydra-headed monster. When it comes to pride, what do we have of which to be proud anyway? Who has any right to be proud? Some are proud of their good looks. Well, they did not give themselves those good looks, and too soon they will lose them. There are singers who are proud of their voices. Well, they did not make them or buy them, but they were given to them by the Lord to be dedicated to Him for use in His service. We do not possess anything worth having that we have not received. We are not proprietors of anything we have, but stewards. For our stewardship we shall be held accountable to God.

Because pride is a vulgarity, Christ said, "Learn not to be proud." There are people who call themselves Christians who act as though the like of them had never been seen before in the world, and never would be again. That is insufferable. Remembering the meekness and lowliness of our Saviour, it is obvious that it is sinful for us to be proud of place, proud of race, proud of means, proud of gifts or proud of success. Our blessed Lord took a towel and girded Himself and washed the feet of His disciples. It is no wonder, then, that He calls upon those who have received the gift of salvation from Him to learn not to be selfish, and learn not to be proud. While these lessons may be difficult for us to learn, we must learn them if we are to be like Him.

III. To The Rest Of Service.

In calling for a dedicated life Christ said, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me." Originally, a yoke was something for a beast of burden. It was intended for work. A yoke harnessed the strength of the oxen to the job to be done, in order to get it accomplished more easily and more efficiently. There was no point or occasion in the oxen wearing a yoke except while working.

In this crowning call of our Lord, He challenges us to yield to His sovereignty, to submit to His authority, and to study to learn His will and to do it. To those who have come to Him for salvation, but as yet have not taken the yoke of His service upon them, He says, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me."

In this matter of Christian living the choice is not between Christ's yoke and no yoke at all. If you and I will not have Christ's yoke—that is, if we will not commit ourselves to His Lordship and to the service of His kingdom—then we must continue to be bound by the yoke of our self-centeredness, the yoke of our fears, the yoke of our frustrations, and "what have you" that binds and fetters our lives. We are going to serve somebody or something. We can serve Christ, if we will. It is optional whether we bear the yoke of Christ or not. But, if we refuse to bear His yoke, the bearing of another is not optional. Every man must bear some kind of yoke. Even though Christ wants us to take His yoke upon us, He will not force us to do so. Whether we accept His yoke or not is purely optional. He will never compel anybody to come to Him, or force him to bear His yoke. He invites and persuades, but He never coerces.

"Take my yoke upon you." Why should you do so? It is easy. That is one reason. It is light. That is another reason. Taking it, what then? "In it you will be at rest." When the Master made this remarkable statement, implying that you will find His yoke easy when you get into it, He was assuming that we would understand that He was the One Who would determine the direction and set the pace. If there are two oxen in a yoke, and one wants to go in one direction and the other wants to go in the very opposite way, then the yoke would not be easy. If one wants to go very slowly and the other prefers to go faster, the yoke could not be easy. How grateful we should be that Christ, whose yoke is easy, helps to bear our burdens and to lighten our loads!

There are two kinds of rest—given and found. The given rest cannot be found, and the found rest cannot be given. Given rest always comes from Christ. Why not live the richest fullest, happiest and largest life that God makes possible for us? Why go limping along the way when we might run swiftly, or even mount as on eagles' wings?

The blood-stained hands of Christ are extended toward you, entreating you to tear loose from self, from sin and from Satan, and accept the Lord Jesus as your personal Saviour, if you are not already a Christian. His invitation to you is very personal, and you will either accept it or reject it. The very approachable Christ has never refused or failed to save any who have ever accepted His invitation to come unto Him. There has never been a burden that He was not able to take away, or any trouble that was so great but what He could relieve it. He is our sufficiency in every state and at every stage.

In the words of the noble hymn of Horatius Bonar we have a great testimony. He said,

"I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"Come unto Me and rest;
Lay down, thou weary one, lay down
Thy head upon My breast."
I came to Jesus as I was,
Weary and worn and sad,
I found in Him a resting-place,
And He has made me glad.

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"Behold, I freely give
The living water; thirsty one,
Stoop down and drink, and live."
I came to Jesus and I drank
Of that life-giving stream;
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived,
And now I live in Him.

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"I am this dark world's Light;
Look unto Me, thy morn shall rise,
And all thy day be bright."
I looked to Jesus and I found
In Him my Star, my Sun;

And in that light of life I'll walk
Till traveling days are done."