

Be Still

REST FOR YOUR SOUL



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Mark 4:39

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INTRODUCTION

We've spent some time of late learning about God and meeting with Him in the secret place¹. We found that the Lord Himself never neglected this special time to be with His Father in Heaven. As a result, peace filled His life as He looked to the future. For this reason, Jesus could say in Matthew 6:34,

So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

That kind of wisdom only comes from the Father. Jesus also said in John 5:19,

... the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner.

So there is real power and understanding that comes through spending time in that secret place with our Lord. But now, let's look again at the subject of having *anxious* thoughts. We haven't yet arrived at the fullness of God's purpose for us. It is true that we are hidden in Christ in God and we have many kingdom promises found in Scripture as our inheritance. We have the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God. We also have available to us spiritual weaponry, both offensive and defensive along with God's wisdom at our disposal. Yet, we still need to *purpose in our hearts to press* into the inheritance that our Lord has for us. Our tendency is to put off coming before Him in a secret place and then slowly slide back into the worldly mindset of being "anxious for tomorrow." Once we stop coming before Him, gathering His wisdom, His mind perspective, etc., our anxiety becomes a clue and a cue for us – a clue that something is wrong and a cue to rise up and seek His face. Just so, if you notice anxiety when a brother or sister is sharing their heart, find out how much time they are spending with Him.

HIS YOKE

Let's look at Matthew 11:25-27. This isn't necessarily an easy passage of scripture to understand, yet I believe that God designed it that way on purpose. Jesus oftentimes would speak in such a way so that we would have to seek harder for the meaning. Pressing in produces the character of the Lord.

At that time Jesus said, "I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight. All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.

There is a lot of doctrine in these few verses. However, one interesting fact that immediately grips us is that God has *hidden* many things from the wise and the intelligent. Whenever I see the Lord speaking with a certain amount of obscurity in scripture, I ask, "What is He talking about? What is the context in which He spoke? What is His purpose in saying this?" In this case, it's even more puzzling to notice that Jesus immediately went into a *seemingly out-of-context* declaration in verses 28-30,

Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. 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. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.

This passage seems to have nothing to do with what was said before or after it. There seems to be no correlation; Christ's words are just suddenly there! Yet His words jump right out at us. If you are like me, every time something like this happens, I have to stop and pay special attention to discern what was in His heart. What was He thinking? For example, while we often hear reference to Jesus' words, "Take My yoke upon you for My yoke is easy and My burden is light," we often fail to notice the *reason* to do so, that the Lord is *gentle and humble of heart*.

This morning we sang all kinds of songs, about God's glory, His majesty, a powerful Captain of a powerful army, His strategy in leading us into warfare, etc. But here He says the real reason He can minister to us and give rest to our souls in all that we go through, the real reason we can refuse to be anxious, is because He is gentle and humble. These two characteris-

tics of Christ are not the usual attributes of false and foreign gods. Counterfeit deities often emphasize their *great power* instead. And of course, only the *true* God is all powerful, all knowing, and to be feared. But we see here that there is a humble gentleness about the Lord that we need to grasp.

How does the Lord express this gentleness when He comes to us in these quiet resting places? Let's discuss for a moment what He is delivering us from the anxiety, the consternation, the turmoil, and those fears that surface in us when He is taking us through the spiritual maturation processes of life. Unchecked, our reactions can cause us to behave unintelligently, contrary to the Spirit, even to the degree of acting like an animal, blindly, almost to our own destruction. However, if we come to see the Spirit of the Lord in the things we're going through, then it becomes a whole different scenario. James 1:2-3 instructs us to,

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.

I don't know if the English word endurance is quite accurate enough to explain the original Greek word because He goes on to explain in verse 4,

*And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in **nothing**.*

The word God uses to define the fruit produced in us through His testing of our faith means a *completeness*. It is almost like there is no word in our dictionary that can truly explain what is being produced so, in effect, it's as though He was saying, "After you are done, you are going to be full! You are going to come, abundantly, into all God has planned for your life." Verse 5,

But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

So as we go through the trials, the circumstances of our daily Christian walk, God's intent is not that we become frustrated, or angry, or fearful. Rather, His goal is that through this divinely designed process His character might be formed in our lives. While we all love the gifts of the Spirit, they are primarily a means to an end, to produce the fruit. The holy character of God formed in us *is* that end.

GENTLE AND HUMBLE

I believe God uses the fashioning process to bring about a different temperament in us. Consider the first part of Matthew 11:28, “*Learn of Me because I am gentle and humble . . .*” When I am going through trying circumstance, these are probably not the words I would choose to describe my feelings. “Ah yes, here in the midst of trouble, I feel so gentle at the moment, so humble.” But, on the other hand, when God has worked a measure of His character into us, we try and express His temperament instead. When Jesus was going through the worst of His experiences on earth, He said nothing; He made no defense. He was completely humble and gentle. He could have struck out with all the power of heaven to crush His oppressors, but He did not. Today His instructions are timeless, “Learn of Me for I am gentle and humble of Spirit.”

Boy, have we got a ways to go if we want to consistently experience Christ’s rest in our circumstances, to be perfect and complete, like James says we should. The question is whether we are *willing* to become gentle and humble just as the Lord is. He knew how to be humble; it was the essence of His character. I often like to envision the Lord riding among the nations on a white horse with a drawn sword! But Christ’s humility is an aspect of the Lord which I’ve tended to put aside on a shelf. I’ve thought, “That’s a side of You I don’t really want to focus on.” In Isaiah 53:3, the prophet describes Christ as,

. . . a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;

I don’t like thinking of Jesus like this. Calvary is such a picture of weakness. But we must speak about the cross. We even expressed our gratitude in a song this morning, “Thank You for Your nail-pierced hands!”

He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

Clearly He was acquainted with grief. But how did He experience it? The *physical* punishment of the crucifixion was only one part of the rejection that men expressed towards Him. Calvary was the ultimate expression of man’s rebellion. In effect, mankind said, “We reject You. Here’s a nail pounded right into Your hand.” Again, He was clearly acquainted with grief. But it wasn’t just physical grief; He experienced *mental* anguish also. He knew the heart of men. He knew how they could become sons of God if they would only humble themselves. What a terrible waste. He had created

the very ones who were crucifying Him; what sorrow! More so, long before the cross, Christ knew rejection. He had experienced grief when a third of the angels followed Satan in his rebellion against God's rule in heaven. (Personally I believe that when the Father created man from the dust, He turned to Satan and taunted him, "From the *dust*, I can make one greater than you!")

But from that humble place, from where His gentleness overcame horrific violence, He is raising up an army of redeemed men and women, well equipped, empowered by the Holy Spirit, to do battle in the darkest places.

Then to further encourage us, Isaiah prophesied in verse 11 of chapter 53,

As a result of the anguish of His soul, He (the Messiah) will see it and be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities.

It is an awesome privilege to learn of the Lord. When He embraces us in our circumstances, He does so with perfect knowledge of what we are going through. There is not one part of the process He is unacquainted with. He understands our grief and our suffering. Apart from His omniscience, He also understands our pain from the yoke He Himself had to bear. And, because He is one with the Father, He can give *us the same power* He had when He was going to the cross. This is our inheritance that we can learn of Him and that we too can go to the cross with the joy set before us. We simply cannot succeed *unless we recognize and submit to what we see the Father doing*. When we recognize the Father's hand in a "cross-situation," it then becomes easy.

Jesus knew trouble; don't think for a moment He didn't. He also knew disappointment. He knew what it was to be rejected. From personal experience I can assure you, people don't like rejection. We all want to be accepted. I want to be accepted. However, I know that there is really only One who can accept me totally and completely with all of my faults, and that is the Lord Himself. When He embraces me it is a full embrace; He doesn't hold me off a little. It's a full, long, complete embrace, because He knows what we are going through, what we've been through, and what He has yet in store for us. He is committed to us through it all and the end result of this process is going to be awesome.

THREE PHASES OF OUR FAITH

D.L. Moody described the Christian's faith in three ways, three phases of maturity. One is a *struggling* faith; the second is a *clinging* faith; and the third is a *resting* posture of faith, pictured as one sleeping in a boat on a stormy sea.

At the beginning of our walk, we are just out there swimming in the deep water, floundering and looking for anything that can help. If all we see is just a splinter of a raft we'll grab hold of it. We are a little like that when we first come to the Lord. We are going through the circumstances of life and we see something floating by and say, "That's it!" We grab ahold of it. It might be a new teaching, a new method, a new leader, etc. But there we are, treading water, struggling and wailing, "I need this." It's a desperate call for help borne out of a struggling faith. But then suppose, as a struggling swimmer, we notice a boat! We find the edge of the boat, grab hold of the gunwale and say, "I'm not letting go." This is the *clinging* faith. At this point, I'm beginning to understand something, "God gave me this word, this prophecy, this promise and I'm not letting go." Finally though, as we mature, we realise that it is God who has taken hold of us and *He's* not letting go. In fact there's a place inside of this boat where we are able to go to sleep as Jesus did. In Him we find the resting posture of knowing that the full provision of God is our portion even in the midst of the storm.

Daniel chapter 3 tells the story of when Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego were thrown into a furnace. There seemed no way out alive. But it didn't matter to them whether God rescued them or not. They simply weren't ever going to worship a human king, because God was their true King. Since they wouldn't bend the knee, they were thrown into the fiery furnace. But when the Chaldean king looked closely he saw not three people but four! And the fourth was like the Son of God! Clearly Daniel's three friends had been through trials before. They had already experienced both the struggling and the clinging kinds of faith, but they had grown spiritually and had come to know the resting posture in the Lord. For it says in verse 27,

... nor had the smell of fire even come upon them.

They didn't smell like smoke! Can you imagine? When I come out of a trial my clothes are singed and smoke is still coming off of them. People say, "What happened to you?" I answer, "You wouldn't believe what I've been through." I'm smoking all over the place. However, as we ma-

ture, we begin to exclaim instead what James has instructed in his first chapter — we count it all joy. In fact we begin to understand God’s rest and the yoke of the Lord upon us. *His* burden is indeed easy. It becomes a whole different story. We go into a trial, come out at the end of the day, and guess what? Even our wife cannot tell!

There was a time for many years when I worked for a man who was just an awful employer. I don’t know how I did it. I would be on my way home and would put on the mindset of a father because I had three children at home and I knew that my wife had already had a hard enough day. There were days when she called and informed me that I would have to talk to Andrew, or Jessica, or Hilary when I got home. One or more of them was in trouble. But rather than react, all I said was, “Okay.” I had to put aside all the problems that I had just left at work (It didn’t matter if they seemed to rank higher. It just didn’t matter.) since I knew what the Lord wanted me to do. He wanted me to be a father to my children, and a *loving* husband to my wife.

This particular trial was very difficult for the first years of my marriage. It began as a *struggle* and then it became a time of *clinging*, “Oh please, Lord, give me the strength.” But then He brought me to a place of a *rest*. Hopefully the process of finding this rest will be the story of all our lives as we mature in the Lord. We have to realize He is Lord over all our circumstances. He’s in charge of our physical lives, our health, our emotions, and our spiritual life. He’s the manager of it all; we are not. He is. He is also the Lord of the political system, everything we face personally, and even the whole world.

He is raising up His church to speak a clearer word to the nations and to bring His presence in an ever greater way to a dying world. More importantly to me, as an elder, He is in charge of this church. He’s the manager, the Lord and the Head. Not me. That’s why we can all really lean and rely upon Him.

I’m going to tell you another story. When I think about traveling (I do a fair amount of that), I remember being a student in my late teens going down to visit my mom in Florida. In those days the cheapest way to travel was not by bus but by plane on “student standby” status. So I would take the bus down to NYC and somehow get to JFK airport and then wait for a direct flight, “student standby” to Orlando. I can remember the agony and anxiety of waiting and not knowing whether or not I was going to be on the next plane. I would keep going up to the desk, “Are there seats available

yet? Are there seats available yet?” The guy would look at me with compassion, knowing my problem and say, “Don’t worry, son, we’ll get you on.” But no amount of consolation at that point would truly calm my nerves. I was floundering, struggling for something to hold on to.

Then I remember traveling in later years with my young children to San Francisco. In some ways I think of that trip as a taste of the “great tribulation.” Why did we have to have a play pen with us? I still have no idea. I said, “Can’t we *rent* one of these things?!” Here I had the luggage and a huge play pen to get from point A to point B, across the airport, over across the street and into a rental car. There simply was no room for this thing no matter what, especially with the strollers and everything else. *Aaaaaah!* At this point I was hanging onto the rail, “I’m not letting go. Lord, you’ve got to help me here.”

Then again, I remember a more recent trip to Europe a few years back, where we tried to find a particular cathedral in Strasbourg. We thought we would just drive up to it and park the car. As it turned out no cars were allowed to enter the center of Strasbourg; it is surrounded by a little moat so that one has to *walk* to the cathedral. Of course we didn’t know that ahead of time! We drove around and around and around; there were no directions or signs. But this time was different. I thought, “No big deal, it’s either God’s will to see this cathedral or it’s not. There are certainly many more of them in Europe.” The truth is, I was finally *resting* in God and it was great.

Then there was one time in Belgium when we were going through their little, cobblestone streets. I pulled into one of them and suddenly noticed a horse coming right at me! I was shocked; this would never happen in Poughkeepsie. Or again, we were traveling one day on the Autobahn and suddenly the road stopped. Literally. It ended; there was no more road. That would never happen in the USA. *Yet I had peace.* You see, it’s a process.

CONCLUSION

Have you ever noticed the God-given switch in your mind? You’re struggling, clinging to anything you can get ahold of, when suddenly you realize the trial is too great and you know you cannot handle it. So you throw the “switch.” The switch says, “This problem is God’s; I give up. Lord, what would you like me to do?” Well we could have thrown that switch all along, at the very beginning.

We need to know the power of Christ in our lives, for His yoke is easy and His burden is light. “Come all who travail and are heavy laden and I will give you *rest*. Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me for I am gentle and humble of heart. You shall find *rest* for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” Amen

Father, we thank You for this message. We know the cost You paid on the cross of humiliation. And we know how gentle You can be even in the times that are exceedingly rough. In the trials of life we face, we can confess to You we really don't know how to proceed. But we know You have already paved the way, for You have promised You would be a lamp to our feet and a light to our pathway. You are with us, O God, and this is Your life, this is Your church, this is Your world. We proclaim it to be so! We refuse to take upon us the yoke of the enemy saying that if we don't get it done it won't get done. Rather we take upon us Your yoke and we know we can rest in knowing that Your will and Your purposes will be accomplished upon the earth. We indeed rest in knowing this truth in our personal lives, in our home group, in this world, this church, in any process. We pray for Your revelation in Jesus' name. Amen.

God be with you and let His yoke, that teaches us how to be one with Him, be upon you.

REFERENCE

1. Peter Scott, CAMP DAVID, THE SECRET PLACE, Fountain of Life Tract.

All scriptures from the New American Standard Bible unless otherwise stated.

