

True Rest

A sermon preached by Dr. John Clayton at Covenant Presbyterian Church of Fort Smith, Arkansas on March 10, 2019.

At that time Jesus declared, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from 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" (Matthew 11:25–30).

Hearing from prison of the widespread news of Jesus' ministry, John the Baptist sent a truth-seeking question to Him: "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" (Matt. 11:3). As a man whose entire existence was dedicated to preparing the way of the Jewish Messiah, the Christ, John had become disillusioned upon hearing the news of Jesus. John had preached of judgment to come upon Israel, while Jesus showered the people with mercy. John called the people to repentance of sin, while Jesus healed their diseases and forgave their sins. Jesus was not following the path that John thought he had prepared. But, in His grace and mercy, Jesus sent word to John, poetically capturing the essence of the prophecy: "the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me" (Matt. 11:5-6). Such a gracious, Scripture-saturated message let John know: He is the One; there is no other.

And, it is at this point in the Gospel of Matthew that we may begin to think that the evidence that Jesus is the Christ, the Savior of His people, is overwhelming. How could John doubt? How could anyone miss the fact that Jesus is indeed the Christ, the Son of God, our Savior. While the truth of Jesus may be evident to you and me, it is not to everyone, and it certainly wasn't to everyone in Israel. From the Fall to the final judgment, the Bible tells of those who are confronted with the truth of Jesus Christ and choose not to believe.

When confronted with the truth, the world will even contradict itself rather than believe. Jesus said, "It is like children sitting in the market-places and calling to their playmates, 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.' For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'" Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds" (Matt. 11:16-19). Because the world desires a god fashioned in its image, anything that does not conform to man or woman is disbelieved, even if it wreaks of foolishness. For such foolishness, the sin of unbelief will serve as the capstone of final judgment, but that is then, and this is now. What does the world believe prior to our Lord's imminent return and certain judgment? Considering the revelation of Jesus Christ and the truth revealed in

Him, we might assume that it is a matter of knowledge and wisdom. The testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ is evidence that demands a verdict, so to speak. If given enough information, coupled with a logical and compelling argument, the wise person will believe. Or, will he? We hear Jesus pray, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will." Yes, the truth of Jesus Christ is evident but hidden, hidden but also revealed, and all according to the gracious will of God the Father.

Hidden Truth

This is one of the great mysteries of the Christian life, isn't it? How could someone see Jesus, hear His preaching and teaching, observe His miracles, and still not believe? I am reminded of how the rich man in hell begged Abraham to send the poor man, Lazarus, back to earth to warn his brothers of the torment of hell. Abraham told him, "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them." But, the rich man pleaded, "No...if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent." To which Abraham answered, "If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead" (Luke 16:19-31). Indeed, the Son of God was crucified, died, and was buried and on the third day he rose again from the dead, and yet many did not believe in Him. Many do not believe the testimony of Him and in Him still today.

Why? Unless God reveals the hidden truth of Jesus Christ, no one will believe. It matters not your education or your IQ. It matters not your bank balance or net worth. It matters not your self-sacrifice or determination. It matters not your family heritage or DNA. How then are we saved from the condemnation of our sin and brought into a right relationship with a holy God? How can anyone be saved? "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works so that no one may boast" (Eph. 2:4-9). Hidden truth, according to the sovereign ordination of the Lord of heaven and earth, is truth revealed by His grace and for His glory.

Truth Revealed

If the saving truth of Jesus Christ is hidden by God and only revealed by His grace, to whom is this truth revealed? Jesus says that it is not the wise and understanding of this world but rather the "little children." A child is dependent upon his parents for everything in this world. As a child matures into adulthood, she will mature into independence. As adults, they are no longer to depend upon their parents but are to be self-supporting. This is right and good in the ways of this earthly kingdom, but it is not so in the heavenly kingdom.

Jesus scolded His disciples, “Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, *for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven*” (Matt. 19:14, emphasis added). Like dependent little children we are to come to Jesus, carrying or claiming nothing but God’s provision in Christ. Someone may ask: “Am I one of those children to whom God has revealed His truth? Am I one of the elect? But, that is the wrong question, delving into a matter that is not yours to search. The right question instead is: Have I heard the free offer of the gospel of Jesus Christ? Have I believed on the Lord Jesus Christ as my Savior? The answer is an eternal “yes” for the child of God! By God’s grace through faith, the child of God hears Jesus say, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 13:11), but this hidden truth has not been revealed to the world.

Someone may object arguing, “If saving truth is hidden and only revealed according to the gracious will of God, then there is no purpose in faith.” But, such an argument misses the point of God’s election and redemption. “Will what is molded say to its molder, ‘Why have you made me like this?’ Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use?” (Rom. 9:20-21). What God the Father has ordained, God the Son accomplishes, not for our glory but His. He who sovereignly purposed all things has chosen to redeem His elect through the means of a Redeemer, Christ Jesus the Lord. Therefore, Jesus could reveal, “All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”

The truth is there are not *many* paths to a relationship with the Lord of heaven and earth. Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). He is the One; there is no other. He is not a good teacher to be followed; He is the incarnate second Person of our Triune God. Jesus the man is a historical person, *and* He is the eternal God. As God, He chooses to reveal Himself according to His sovereign privilege and pleasure.

This is dreadfully bad news for the proud and arrogant, but it is a beautiful gospel for the children of God. That God the Father has predestined a people to be redeemed by God the Son and given eternal life through God the Holy Spirit is utter nonsense to the world. For, it is hidden truth. But to whom the truth has been revealed, to whom the gospel has been heard and believed, “to all who did receive [Christ], who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12). And, in this glorious truth the child of God finds rest.

Revealed Rest

Have you come to this point in your life, believing it was up to you to find God? Have you believed that it was up to you to be His child? Have you believed that the Christian life is about your flawless performance on God’s stage? Do you worry if you have sinned one sin too many to still be considered a child of God? Does your memory recall far more of your failures than Christ’s perfection? Jesus said, “Come to me, all who labor and are

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heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” The truth that while we cannot merit God’s holy favor but Christ has done it for us is a restful truth. Our hopeless to-do is perfectly done in Christ.

Jesus said, “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me.” The agrarian tool used to strap the working animal to plow, Jesus uses metaphorically to describe the rest we find in Him. The truth that “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20) is a restful truth. His yoke becomes our joyful rest. Jesus said, “I am gentle and lowly in heart,” and in Him we will find rest for our souls. The truth that we can never be snatched from the sovereign grip of our Savior, and “he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion” (Phil 1:6) is a restful truth. Our Savior’s work has given us eternal rest.

The world thinks of Christianity as a religion of works. Like a beast of burden we are yoked to the plow of do’s and don’ts. Because the truth is hidden from them, the world considers the commands of Christ to be a ten-point religious performance checklist. Worldly wisdom touts freedom from the shackles of Christianity, liberty from religious conformity. But to those children to whom the truth has been revealed, we know the yoke of Christ to be easy and His burden light.

We know that because we are saved not by worldly wisdom but according to the gracious will of God we are recipients of God’s favor for Christ’s sake. We know that “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21), and in his righteousness we enjoy a justifying, sanctifying, glorifying rest for today, tomorrow, and forever.

What God has hidden from the world
to children He reveals:
The gospel truth of Christ alone,
according to His will.

As wearied souls we come to Him,
a gentle, lowly heart,
and find the soulful rest we need,
for He has done our part.

No eye has seen nor ear has heard
nor human mind conceived,
the sovereign purpose of God’s love
in those who have believed.

So, joyfully we take His yoke
and rest on bended knee.
With yoke of ease and burden light,
true rest is found in Thee.