

The Main Thing

Matthew 11:25-30

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This passage is one of my favorites. It speaks very dearly about coming to the Lord's Table which we will do at the end of this study. Hear now God's Word. Matthew 11:25-30 says

[25] 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; [26] yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. [27] 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. [28] Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. [29] 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. [30] For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Here ends the reading of God's Word and may He continue to bless it in us as it is expounded for us in this study.

This is a remarkable text and in many ways it is perfect timing to be in this passage because it continues much of what Pastor Reeder has been doing the last few weeks. In Matthew 9 starting at verse 35 Pastor Reeder has been gleaning through some harvest principles and one might summarize them all this way in this one statement. The Gospel harvest is secured and assured by Jesus Christ. He calls us to pray for laborers as He provides those laborers through the harvest. Through my prayers God calls me and equips me for my role and responsibility in the harvest. Together we harvesters are marked by unity and diversity as we are sent out by Jesus two by two.

As I read through that one thing that stuck me was the fact that no one who names the name of Christ is exempted from taking a part in the Gospel harvesting process. You might say there are no four F cards issued. We have all been given gifts and circumstances that the Gospel can go out and it's God's intent not only that the Kingdom would be blessed but certainly that we would be blessed, by being a part of this Gospel harvesting process.

In the last study Pastor Reeder included three important takeaways which are one, the Gospel harvest goes global by starting local. In other words, it starts with us and it's not enough for a large church to get together a large budget and send it out to missionaries. That's wonderful and we do it but it starts with us; where we live, work, attend schools, among family and friends. It starts local and then goes global. Secondly, the harvest field is a battlefield. If you've not figured that out yet then you must be a brand new Christian because any where the harvest goes out we're going to encounter difficulty and struggle. That's what we'll kind of look at in this study. Thirdly, the Gospel harvest continues until the Lord of the harvest returns. He might even come back before I finish this study or in a thousand years. Whenever He comes back He has people He is preparing to bring to Himself and He gives us the privilege of being part of that process.

You will find that as you read in Matthew 10 and you're involved in Gospel harvest ministry we're not going to be the most popular people in the world. Jesus says in Matthew 10:16 says

[16] "Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves." Then Matthew 10:25b says [25b] If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul (Satan), how much more will they malign those of his household... which are you and me. Jesus says in Matthew 10:34, 36 [34] "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. [36] And a person's enemies will be those of his own household."

The Gospel harvesting process isn't going to make us the most popular people in the world.

In fact, it's a process that could be hard, difficult and perhaps even dangerous as early Christians have found out. As you read through to the end of Matthew 10 you see how the rewards are a wonderful blessing. We are the blessing as we share the Gospel to the world, although we may not be recognized as such. We are a great blessing to others and we are blessed as well but then Matthew under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in Matthew 11 turns to what I think are illustrations of the Gospel harvesting process.

It starts in Matthew 11:25, [25] *At that time Jesus declared...* What does 'at that time' mean? I think it points to at least three things. It points to Matthew 11:2 which are the struggles of John the Baptist. This was Jesus' cousin who had been His forerunner but John was in prison here because he was in conflict with the king and in prison he began to have some struggles and doubts. He began to wonder who Jesus really was and he sends his own disciples to Jesus. John's disciples ask Jesus on John's behalf in Matthew 11:3, "*Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?*" What's really cool is that Jesus doesn't say "Well yeah, dummy, are you not paying attention?" No, He very lovingly responds

by giving a description of Messianic ministry, the preaching ministry and healing ministry.

Matthew 11:4–5 says [4] *And Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: [5] 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.”* Jesus does what He does with all of us. Sometimes when we want to know specific answers we want to know why, wherefore and what He has in mind but He’ll often tell us enough to generate and cultivate our faith. He doesn’t tell John, point blank ‘yes’ for He has a much bigger agenda in mind. He wants to cultivate John’s faith so He gives them the evidences that absolutely point to Jesus being the Messiah. That is part of what the Gospel ministry produces. Sometimes there are even doubts among the followers.

Another thing very ominously is in Matthew 11:20. The Gospel harvest can bring judgment. Jesus turns His direction in perhaps a very dreadful way to give some woes to three cities who had refused to follow Him. Matthew 11:21 says [21] *“Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.”* Jesus had declared at this time that it was a struggle for John but it was after the unrepented cities are condemned. These cities had seen miracle after miracle after miracle. Capernaum was Jesus’ hometown and yet they had hardened themselves. So sometimes the Gospel harvest brings rejection and eventual judgment.

A third thing the Gospel harvest can bring is great joy. In Luke 10 we have Luke’s description of this occasion. In Luke 10:17 we find the story of the 72 returning. Jesus had taken 72 of His followers and sent them out preaching and performing miracles ahead of Him before He came. In sending them out they gathered one day and had a meeting where they all came back together and they were pumped, excited because the Gospel had gone out and it involved healing people and people coming to Christ. It was a thrilling time and with that Jesus warned them. In Luke 10:20 Jesus says [20] *“Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”* These passages illustrate to us that when the Gospel harvest goes out there will be great joy. There will be thrilling believers who come back with astounding stories and right now you can see them around the world of people coming to Christ. Sometimes there will be those who turn away and receive God’s judgment and then there will be those who just struggle at times because of adversity in our own lives.

Then Jesus brings them back to what He says to us. Regardless of our circumstances, whether they are circumstances of joy or circumstances of struggle with sin or physical ailments or challenges in your family situation, these words are wonderful. One commentator says that this is one of the most precious pieces of autobiographical information to be found in the synoptic Gospels as

Jesus shows Himself. In the midst of our lives it's as if Jesus puts His arm around us and says this, "You need to keep the main thing, the main thing." As you are involved in the Gospel harvest outreach you need to keep the main thing, the main thing.

With apologies to Steven Covey who said "The main thing is keeping the main thing, the main thing" in which I think he stole that from a German proverb, but I think it's a great lesson that Jesus would come on reflecting on the doubts, struggles, and judgment yet on the joy of the Gospel ministry to say in the end I thank You Father, Lord of heaven and earth that You have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and then says in Matthew 11:28, [28] *Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*

I think Jesus would say three things that are summarized in this passage. In the midst of the Gospel harvest He wants us to remember that God is Boss. God is the sovereign Ruler of the universe. Jesus speaks in a tone of absolute trust when He says these words and in fact they are reminiscent of what He'll say later outside the tomb of Lazarus – dead man He is about to raise from the dead. In John 11 He said "I thank You Father that You have heard Me." Here He says in Matthew 11:25 *"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."* Jesus comes in great appreciation.

What is the most effective way that we know that we are confident in the sovereignty of God that we appreciate God is sovereign and Boss in our lives? The best sign that we know and recognize that is Thanksgiving as we express our gratefulness. R.C. Sproul said "There is a certain sense in which God's sovereignty should influence our attitude toward prayer at least with respect to adoration. If anything our understanding of God's sovereignty should provoke us to an intense prayer life of thanksgiving. Because of such knowledge we should see that every benefit, every good and perfect gift is an expression of the abundance of His grace. The more we understand God's sovereignty the more our prayers are filled with thanksgiving." Jesus prays thanksgiving here, "Thank You Father, Lord of heaven and earth."

Some may be thinking "You mean preacher, He is thanking God for God hiding certain knowledge from some people and revealing it to others." Here of course is a great mystery because whenever I listen to the prayers of someone else there are always going to be things that I don't understand especially when we're eaves dropping on the prayer between Jesus and His heavenly Father. I promise you, there will always be mysterious things we won't entirely grasp and understand. In fact, that's true. Deuteronomy 29:29 is verse that we all need to memorize. It says [29] *"The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law."* That's a great thing to remember. God knows

everything and we don't. In affirming that, we affirm very thankfully that He does. We only partially understand.

What we understand very clearly here is that the blessings of salvation aren't a reward to those who are smart and wise in their own eyes. It is not there for those who are talented and skillful but they are given to those who are humble, children as He says. They are not given except by unmerited favor to those who come to Him as little children. Those who come to Him may be very smart and scholarly or simple and uneducated. That's not the point. The point is that they come to humble reliance to the Lord Jesus Christ and He by His grace and mercy pours out salvation into their lives. Jesus could sit back and only watch with awe the sovereign God of the universe who has no need for anyone else, willingly reveal the need for salvation to every rank and station in life and calls us to serve alongside of Him.

In Matthew 11:26 Jesus lingers for a minute and says [26] *yes, Father, for such was your gracious will...* and the footnote says 'for it pleased You well' which is reminiscent of a verse in the next chapter, Matthew 12:18a which says [18a] *"Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased."* We are spying here on the intimacy between Jesus the Son and God the Father. We see this marvelous connection. It's dazzling to us to see Jesus love His heavenly Father as much as He does knowing what lies ahead.

The point is that the sovereign Lord is delighted with the Son and is also delighted to reveal His Gospel to us and to use us for His Kingdom. He is delighted that you and I here to worship Him this morning. He is delighted that we step out for Him in the public place to defend the Gospel and share with others. God is Boss and that is one thing we can glean from Jesus' words. The second is that the Son is sufficient. In this type relationship in the Trinity that God saw that Jesus alone has what it takes and knows what it takes to save us. He alone through His sinless life, His atoning death and His bodily resurrection was sufficient to save us.

Jesus was sufficient and He had what it took. He had the proper equipment. When you go back through Matthew you see that Jesus has the authority over Satan, over demons, ailments, disabilities, wind, waves, body, soul, life, death, His own disciples and over all people. He is supremely able to do what God has sent Him to do. Jesus clarifies. The point is not what you know but who you know and that's the same with the Gospel. It's not true what you know. You might be able to recite the Gospel point by point with great eloquence but it's not being able to recite the Gospel or talk the talk but it's who you know in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus clarifies that in a reservoir so inexhaustible as God is where your weary soul can come for true replenishment. That's where you and I can truly find rest so therefore He gives us the invitation in Matthew 11:28 when it says [28] *Come*

to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Jesus is addressing those in His audience because those He is addressing are living under the tyranny of the Pharisees. In that day the religious leaders, like the Pharisees, had great volumes of rules and regulations which set the bar very high for pleasing God. That kind of rule and regulation had gone way beyond the law of Scripture and was very discouraging.

When we come to Jesus we don't come on the terms of those around us but on Jesus' terms. It's not after we decide to clean up our life or go to church or putting on the right clothes or paying lots of money. That's not it at all but we come to Christ Himself. You come to Me by faith, Jesus says, through prayer and when you do a couple of things will happen and He will ask this of us. He will ask us to give Him our burdens and let them go. When we come to Jesus we give Him those burdens we are carrying and let them go. That means in prayer, through His Word, and by the power of the Holy Spirit that we trust Jesus to change what we can't. We human beings would love to change history – hurts, damages, and hurts of the past – but we can't. So we entrust to Jesus what we can't change.

Secondly, we accept from Jesus the good and the bad as wisely given by a loving heavenly Father. He delights in us and we live in a fallen world. We need to accept from Jesus both the good things but also the tough things.

Thirdly, we give forgiveness to others because Jesus has forgiven us. I don't forgive others because they have earned forgiveness or because they're forgivable or because they're nice people. I forgive others only because Jesus forgave me. I fully intend of taking advantage of that forgiveness with Jesus in me. Jesus says you accept by forgiveness that you extend that forgiveness to others.

So we take His yoke upon us and learn from Him. That is another thing that is implied in this text. The yoke is not the oppressive obligations of other authorities or people around us. In Jesus' day they had the Pharisees telling them what to do but you have authorities in your life that would desperately want you to conform to their agenda in what you wear, where you go, what you say, how you spend your money and in your priorities in life. They may be your friends at school or a boss at work or a neighbor or a relative that want you to conform to what they think. You'll have those authorities and to that Jesus says 'Come unto Me and take My yoke upon you.' The yoke He is talking about are His teachings and obligations which come from One who loves us and has our best interest at heart and therefore the yoke He gives us becomes easy as it is distributed through our lives like a yoke as Jesus sees fit.

Jesus said "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me." Jesus also said what no other Pharisee could say in His name found in John 14:15 which says [15] *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments."* How do I know I love Jesus? John

14 clarifies that for us. If we find being obedient difficult which we will at times as Christians, and I'm especially speaking to those who have been a Christian for a long time, thirty plus years or more, who have walked faithfully yet in our times of dryness and difficulty we need to remember sometimes that we need to come to Jesus, not on the basis of His commands, but on the basis of what He has done. I find that the problem is that so often we forget Jesus but remember only the commands and that's when we need to stop and say "Lord, I need to come back to You" then those commands, those obligations won't be burdensome. We need to submit to Him and His Lordship and all those other things will take care of themselves.

In conclusion, why Jesus? Why does He place Himself as the One who we should come to in Matthew 11:28? There's a danger here if you isolate Matthew 11:28 from

Matthew 11:26 and 27, because many people love Jesus. Many have great respect for Jesus. He was obviously a person in history who was very commendable so the idea of coming to Jesus seems very appealing. So many will agree in some way that they need to come to Jesus but Jesus has given us Matthew 11:26, 27 to remind us not to miss the music or the Source of the power of this verse or to miss the point and engage in mere sentimentality – come to Jesus. Matthew 11:27 refers to the unique connection between Jesus, the Son and His heavenly Father. Jesus says only to those whom the Son is revealed responds with faith and obedience, can they come to the Father.

Jesus says in a sense 'come unto Me, I know the Father and I'll connect you with Him.' Who knows the Father? Jesus says Me. Who know Me more than anyone else than the heavenly Father? We come ultimately for rest to our heavenly Father but we come through Jesus. Come to Me. In fact, some would say that this is precisely Matthew's version of John 14:6. This is what Jesus said to Thomas and the disciples, [6] *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."* Yet in this passage Jesus is making very clear that we come to Him to get to the Father who knows Him who He knows.

Don't separate Matthew 11:27 from Matthew 11:28 because we find basically in one swoop that Jesus basically destroys all the ultimate speculations of theology that believe there are many ways to come to God or all the other religious viewpoints that say if you just follow this teacher or that teacher you can come to God or if you go to that performance or that location then you can come to God. Jesus sweeps that away and says "You come to Me and all who come to Me find their heavenly Father." Because of Jesus' connection with the Father He alone can provide our salvation, be our place of rest, carry our burdens and secure our eternal life.

In some ways we're very much like Ricky Hoyt. You may know the story from ESPN. Ricky Hoyt completed an Iron Man Triathlon. The problem was that Ricky Hoyt was completely disabled because of cerebral palsy. So how on earth did he finish an Iron Man Triathlon? He did it through the help of his father Jack (Dick). His father Jack swam two miles pulling a little boat with his disabled son behind him. After the two mile part of the race he carried him off the beach to his bicycle. He put him on his bicycle and rode a hundred miles of the race. Then he took his son off the bicycle and put him in a special cart and pushed that cart for twenty six miles to complete the triathlon. It was an astounding achievement and cited widely in sporting circles as almost a miracle.

When I think of Ricky I think of myself except that Ricky had more ability to run a triathlon than me dead in my trespasses and sins ever had an ability to find and come to my heavenly Father, but that was made possible because Jesus carried me. He lived that perfect life. He died that atoning death. He was resurrected powerfully and declared with power as it says in Romans 1:4, *[4] and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord...* and the only difference is I was less able to come to Christ than Ricky Hoyt ever was to run a triathlon.

A footnote to that story is that last year at 72 years of age, Jack Hoyt and his son Ricky, completed their 30th Boston Marathon together. Now their relationship will end but Jesus is going to carry me for all eternity and that's the blessings of His grace. No wonder they call this Supper a meal of thanksgiving. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, I thank You so much for what You have done for me in Christ, the incredible privilege we have of knowing You and walking with You. I just ask Lord, if there be anyone reading this who is struggling that they would come to Jesus or anyone that has felt the lash of judgment would come to Jesus. There are those here who are rejoicing that they would come to Jesus and continue to work in us. Now as we come to Your Table nourish us Lord Jesus for Your glory. We pray in Jesus' Name and for His sake, Amen.

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