

The Heart of Jesus

The Most Wonderful Invitation Ever Given, Part 2

Matthew 11:29 David Sunday May 14, 2017

If your neighbor asks you today, “What is Jesus like?” what would be the first words you would use to describe Him? What is Jesus like? Well, turn with me to Matthew 11:28-30, this is the second of three messages on this passage—the most wonderful invitation ever given. As we read these verses, listen to how Jesus describes what His heart is like:

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.

In the middle of that passage, verse 29 is unlike any other verse in the New Testament. Here’s why. Charles Spurgeon pointed this out. “This is the only time in the whole New Testament where Jesus tells us what His heart is like. We know a lot about His teachings. We know a lot about His miracles, His life, His death on the cross for our sins, His resurrection, His commandments. But only once does Jesus say, “This is what is in the deepest part of my heart.” Only once does Jesus let us peer into the very core of His being.” And what do we find there? What’s at the bedrock of His character? What does He tell us His heart is like? Look again at verse 29: *“I am gentle and lowly in heart.”*

“If there’s one thing I want you to know about My heart,” Jesus says, “This is it. I am gentle. I am lowly in heart.” Jesus is pulling out all the stops here. He’s pouring out His heart to a world that is rejecting Him. Matthew 11 is full of people rejecting Jesus, yet He’s pleading with weary and heavy-laden sinners to come to Him. It’s in this context that Jesus says, “Here’s what’s in My heart. This is how you need to understand Me. Down in the bedrock of My being, there is a heart full of meekness and gentleness; a heart that is lowly and kind.” Jesus is opening His tender heart to us in order to draw our trembling hearts to Him. We’re going to look at the heart of Jesus today. The heart of Jesus is gentle and lowly. Let’s probe those two adjectives.

First, the gentleness of Jesus. If you look in a lexicon of the New Testament, you’ll see that this word means considerate, unassuming, meek. It’s a word that speaks of great strength

under control in order to bring blessing, not harm, to those who experience that strength. It's the opposite of being pushy or demanding. If you look in a lexicon of classically Greek literature, this word is described as mild, tame, soft like a caress. That is what the heart of Jesus is like.

Jesus is not saying, "I am gentle of heart" so that we will think highly of Him. He never sought the praise of men. Jesus is telling us this so that we won't be afraid to come to Him, to get close to Him. He wants us to desire to be near Him. To all who are afraid that Jesus won't receive you, to all who think serving Him will be too hard or too harsh, hear His heartbeat. It's a heart beating with gentleness and meekness. It's the heart of great strength under control. It's a heart that's saying, "I will use all of My power to help you, not to hurt you." To all who feel unworthy—who fear that your sins will provoke Jesus to anger—listen to the gentle tone of His voice. Know that He wants you to get close to Him. He won't slam the door in your face if you try to come to Jesus. He's not like that.

He is rich in love and slow to anger. His name is great and His heart is kind. He is not easily provoked. Even when men were crucifying Him, He did not curse them or threaten them. Instead, He prayed for them, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they're doing" (Luke 23:32-37). If He did that to those who were crucifying Him, He will forgive you too. No matter how much you've insulted Him, scorned Him, ignored Him or injured Him, He's ready to pardon you. He's ready to pardon all your past offenses. He's born much from you in the past; He will bear still more from you in the future. You're never going to wear Him out. I love how Spurgeon put it when he wrote, "I am meek' means 'not only do I forget the past, but I am ready to bear with you still.' Though you should still offend Me, though you should still be ungrateful, though you should still treat me as I ought not to be treated and give unkindness for My love, I will endure it all because My heart is meek and gentle. Come to Me, although you cannot hope that your future character will be perfect, I will help you struggle into holiness. I will be patient with your failures. If you come to Me, I am prepared to forgive you 70 times seven. Yes, as often as you shall err, so often will I restore you, and as frequently as you shall grieve me, so frequently will I forgive you. I am ready to forgive the past and willing to bear with you in the present and in the future, because I am meek and gentle of heart."

Jesus wants you to know that. He wants you to receive that and believe that.

The second word is lowly. How would you define the lowliness of Jesus? Well, it means to be of low position. This is the same word that the virgin Mary used in the Magnificat when she said, "*He has put down the mighty from their thrones and exalted them of low degree*" (Luke 1:52, Amplified Version). It's a word that many would regard as an insult, as in low to the

ground, vile, contemptible in the eyes of the world. But Jesus wears that word with honor. “*I am lowly of heart*”—Jesus wants you to know that.

Jesus does not want you to hang around with the celebrities of this world. He’s not seeking to make a big fanfare and draw attention to Himself. He goes to where the poor are. He seeks out the lonely. No one is “low class” to Jesus. No one is beneath Him. He loves all sorts of people—the vilest of the vile, the lowest of the low. Jesus is not haughty. He doesn’t put people down. Children love to crawl up into His lap (Matthew 19:13-15). Women with sordid pasts find themselves opening the depths of their hearts to Him and they walk away from Him freed from their shame, freed from their guilt (John 4:1-45). The rejected find a friend in Jesus. Jesus is approachable—much more approachable than any of those who follow Him. He is more approachable than the disciples are. The disciples don’t have time for children. They don’t have any time for blind beggars crying on the side of the road (Mark 10:46-52). But Jesus loved to come to people like that.

He’s the lover of the lowly. He is affable. He is friendly. He is good-natured. Jesus is easy to talk to. He is easy to get close to. He is available to everyone who wants to get near Him. He’s never rushed. You never get the sense that you’re interrupting, bothering or distracting Jesus. And after you have a conversation with Jesus, you feel like, “No one ever understood my heart like He does, and no one ever cared for me like He does, and no one loves me like Jesus loves me—so purely, so completely, so warmly.” This, my friends, is the sacred heart of Jesus. He is meek and He is lowly of heart.

Yet He is high and lifted up. I think when we read those words, “I am gentle and lowly in heart,” we should think back to the Old Testament, where Moses asks, “What is Your name?” And God says, “I AM who I AM” (Exodus 3:13-14). When Jesus says, “I am,” He is reminding us He is God.” He describes how high and lifted up He is and how omnipotent He is, with all power and authority, when He says in verse 27, “*All things have been handed over to me by my Father.*” “I’ve got all authority in heaven and earth. I’m the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. I am so great that no one can add to My glory.”

So why does Jesus—the great I AM, the high and lofty One with all authority—why does He tell us, “I am gentle. I am lowly in heart”? He tells us that because He wants to encourage us to respond to Him. He wants to draw us close to Him, and specifically He wants to encourage us to respond to Him in three ways: He wants us to come to Him, He wants us to submit to Him, and He wants us to learn of Him. So let’s look at these three applications together.

1. Jesus wants us to come to Him.

This is what we were looking at in verse 28, but let's say it again: come to Jesus. Make no excuses. Whatever it is about you that makes you think you're disqualified, the heart of Jesus is bigger than that. He is more kind, more meek, more willing to bear offense, more eager to forgive than any sin or obstacle you can put in His way. Don't think the heart of Jesus is too narrow, too rigid or too constrained to receive you. Come to Jesus. He's got a big heart. You can trust Him. Unlike most of our politicians today, there's nothing in Jesus that you need to worry about. There's nothing you need to filter out. There's nothing you need to brace yourself for.

You don't have to wonder what He's really like. You don't need to think, "I wonder Who He is. I wonder how He will treat me." Jesus wants you to know, down to the very core of His being, that He is gentle and lowly. If you come to Him, you will not be cast away. You will not be rejected. You will not be disappointed. There is nothing in Jesus that should keep you at a distance from Him. He is calling one; He is calling all. Verse 28, "All who labor and are heavy laden, come to Me." The only question is: are you weary enough to come to Him? Are you worn out with the burden of sin? Are you exhausted with trying to look good in the eyes of others? Are you sick and tired of living a lie, pretending you can handle this on your own?

When Jesus says, "Come," it's like an exclamation point. It's like Jesus is saying, "Here I am. You're out there running around, striving, fretting, clawing your way through life, ignoring Me. But here I am. I'm right here for you. Come to Me! Do you realize your need for Me? If you do, I'm very close. I'm nearer to you than your body and your breath. I died for you. I live now with all authority in heaven and on earth to relieve your burden and give rest to your soul. The only question is: are you broken enough? Are you fed up enough with yourself? Are you weary enough to pay attention to Me for a change? Will you notice Me? I've been here all along. I've been available to you all this time?"

The problem is not that Jesus is not accessible. The problem is that we don't think we need Him. Jesus says, "Oh, if you could see My heart, you would come. Come to Me."

2. Jesus wants us to submit to Him.

Submit is not a popular word today, is it? We don't want to come under someone's authority or their yoke. We want to be free agents. We want to "do it my way." When Jesus says at the beginning of verse 29, "*Take my yoke upon you,*" everyone in His day would have pictured oxen. They would have seen that wooden brace a farmer put over the necks of two oxen—one older, the other younger—so the younger ox would be broken in and learn submission so that it would become responsive to the master's direction and command. The younger ox would have to

learn how to keep in step with the older ox. If it wasn't broken in, it would never be useful to the master.

Every mother of a toddler can tell you that every child has come into this world stubborn as an ox. Every child has to be broken, trained and brought into submission. God put a yoke over your neck on the day you were born and her name was Mother. God brought you under her authority and today you're thankful that she didn't always give you what you wanted. Thankful that she understood what you needed. Thankful that she loved you even when you resisted the yoke of her discipline in your life.

What happens when you leave children without training and without discipline? Well, later in life, when disappointments come they won't be able to cope with them. They won't be able to say no to themselves. Self-restraint will be like a foreign language to them. When you come to Jesus, you become God's child. And every child of God needs to be broken in. Our wills need to come under submission to His will. After we come to Him, Jesus is calling us to come under His yoke, to be trained by Him, to be broken in by Him, to learn how to keep in step with His Spirit. It's a lifelong process of handing your will over to Jesus, of listening to the voice of His Spirit as He speaks in His Word and saying to Him, "Lord, I am willing to follow You."

I love the prayer of Jerry Bridges: "Lord, I am willing to receive what You give, to lack what You withhold, to relinquish what You take, to suffer what You inflict, to be what You require." That's what it means to come under the yoke of Jesus and submit to Him. He is not only a Savior, He is also Master and Lord. You can't divide Him up into pieces. If you want Him to be your Savior, He must also be your Master. He must also be your Lord.

3. Jesus wants us to learn from Him.

If we really know the heart of Jesus—how gentle and lowly He is—we will learn from Him.

Back in elementary school, none of us got to choose our teachers. They were assigned to us. I remember waiting for that fourth-quarter report card, because down in the corner of the report card the teacher would write who the next year's teacher was going to be. Sometimes we would wait, thinking, "Oh, I hope I get Mrs. Acklen for second grade. I want her; not Mrs. Burquist." We'd be so excited if we got the teacher we wanted. But we didn't get to choose.

It wasn't until high school that we got to start choosing some of our classes and some of our teachers. And then college—wow! We could go to a class for a couple days, and if you didn't like the teacher, we could switch and go to another class, trying to find a teacher we liked. But there were teachers even in our childhood that we got to choose, like piano teachers.

So what do you look for when you hire a piano teacher? First, you look for competence. Does he or she know how to play the piano? That's a good start. Then do they know how to teach it? You look for availability: Will he or she be willing to take me on as a student? You look for demand: What will my teacher ask of me? You look for goals: What is my teacher aiming to lead me to experience or to achieve?

My first piano teacher was my best piano teacher. She was my mom—the best. Then my mom thought I needed a little more challenge, so she sent me to her piano teacher—Agnes Burg. I don't know what happened to Mrs. Burg, but at some point she wasn't able or willing to teach me any longer. Then there was the third piano teacher, whose name I will not mention for fear that she may stumble across this on a podcast. All I will say is that my experience with her was not that she was gentle and lowly of heart. I remember dreading the approach of piano lessons. I remember getting into the car one day and telling my mom, "I'm never going back there again. I quit piano. I can't stand the pressure of this teacher."

That's when my mom found Mr. Stewart. He was competent and I think at one point had over 80 students in his studio in Zion, Illinois. He had high expectations and ambitious goals. But because his heart was gentle, patient and longsuffering, he was able to prepare me to the point of playing a duet with him for my senior year recital—two pianos, four hands—Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue." That was so much fun. He was someone I wanted to learn from. Even when it got challenging and demanding, I didn't want to give up, because I didn't want to disappoint my teacher.

Friends, when Jesus calls you to come to Him as Savior, He simultaneously calls you to submit to Him as your Master. You cannot pick and choose here. He enrolls you in His school and serves as your Teacher. That's what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. You are a learner. Jesus is your Master Teacher. You're following everything He tells you. You're listening to His voice. You're looking at His example and you're walking in His steps. That's what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.

So first, you have to ask if this Teacher is competent. Does He know His subject? Is He able to teach it well? Yes! Infinitely so. Supremely so. Look at verse 27 again: "*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.*" Jesus is teaching you Who God Himself is. He is the ultimate and consummate Teacher of theology. The divine mysteries of the universe are the subject of His classroom and He boldly claims that no one can lead us to God the Father except Him. "I'm the only One qualified to bring you to the

Father,” Jesus says. “I’m the only One Who can reveal Who God is to you. If you want to know the Father, come to Me, because I can teach you.”

Friends, no one has ever improved on Jesus’ theology, and if anyone thinks they have, reject them instantly. They don’t know what they’re talking about. How arrogant, to claim to know more than Jesus. No one has ever plumbed the depths of His teaching. No one who is enrolled in His school has ever been left in the dark. The most simple minds—the most uneducated of men—who learn of Jesus become divine theologians. They get to know God in His glory, goodness and truth. Jesus is the kind of Teacher Who lives what He teaches. You can watch Jesus and when you see Him, you see God. You see a perfect example of the Man Who is Himself God. Is He competent? Oh, yes He is. No one can teach you like Jesus can teach you.

The second question is will I get accepted into His class? Just think of aspiring Olympic athletes. They want to hire the very best coach and they’re wondering, “Will he take me under his direction?” Or a cello player, hoping to study under Yo-Yo Ma. Or a resident in brain surgery applying to work under Dr. Ben Carson. There are only a limited number of spots. You have to be really good to earn a place under that person’s tutelage. But Jesus welcomes all. Not just the elite. Not just the omni-competent. In fact, there is one group Jesus refuses to teach. There’s one exclusion and it’s in verse 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.’”*

Jesus refuses to teach those who think they know better than He does, those who are wise in their own eyes, those who think they can figure it out without Him, those who are like adolescents, wanting to challenge His authority and reject His teaching. If you will not have a humble, childlike heart that recognizes your need, Jesus can’t teach you. He won’t teach you. But if you come to Him with humility to learn of Him, it doesn’t matter who you are, what your background is, where you come from, how much you know, what you scored on the Graduate Record Exam. Jesus says, “You can come into My school.”

The third question is this what will He demand of me? Well, this is tough. Jesus demands full submission, complete obedience, unswerving allegiance. Look back a couple chapters at Matthew 10. We need to read this, even on Mother’s Day. Maybe especially on Mother’s Day. Jesus tells us what He expects of those who come to Him to be His disciples, His learners. He tells us in Matthew 10:37, *“Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.”* On this Mother’s Day, we love our moms. I love my mom. I love my kids. But I hope I love Jesus more. I hope I am more loyal, more faithful, more willing to swear my allegiance to Him than I am even

to the dearest ones I have on earth. Jesus continues, *“Whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”*

So friends, the school of Christ is not for the faint of heart. It’s not a class you can audit. It’s something that will demand everything from you. Think of boot camp for the Navy SEALs. That’s what it’s like. Don’t shrink back from enrolling in this school because you’re afraid you might fail. Don’t think your Master Teacher will ever give up on you—because He won’t. Remember what His heart is like. He is meek. He is humble. He is gentle. He is lowly. Yo-Yo Ma probably does not teach many beginners. But Jesus, Who is able to instruct the highest archangel in heaven, isn’t afraid to work in the nursery. In fact, if Jesus were here in His bodily presence today, I’m not sure He’d be preaching from this pulpit. He might be back in a children’s classroom teaching John 3:16 to the little kids—because that’s what His heart is like. He welcomes the lowly.

No matter how much He demands from you, you’ll never look into Jesus’ eyes and see harshness or irritation or impatience or rejection. Every time you fail an exam, He’ll go over the questions with you. Again and again and again, He’ll show you where you went wrong, then He’ll let you take the exam again. And again. And again. And again. And some of you are on your hundredth time through that exam. Jesus says, “Okay. Next week we’ll go over it to you again,” because He’s a patient Teacher.

In this school of Christ, every student graduates eventually. No one gets a failing grade. It’s never about proving yourself. It’s never about qualifying yourself. No, Jesus has already qualified you. Jesus has already insured that you will graduate with highest honors—*summa cum laude*—because you will be clothed in His righteousness and credited with His perfect obedience. You will stand in the presence of the Father blameless, faultless and with great joy.

So this school of Jesus is not about proving what a good student you are—it’s about getting close to the heart of the Master. It’s about becoming like Him in this world. It’s about enjoying His nearness. It’s about getting so close to Him that you and Jesus are yoked together and you’re learning to keep in step with His Spirit. Here is a Teacher Whose heart is so gentle, so lowly, so kind. Whose goals for you are so noble, so good, so freeing, that no matter how much He asks from you, you will never feel like He took more than He gave—never.

“Come to Me. Take My yoke upon you. Learn of Me for I am meek and lowly of heart, and you shall find rests for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.” We’ll look at that next week. But today I want you to ask yourself, “Have I really accepted Jesus for all that He is?” You can’t divide Him up into bits and pieces. You have to take Him completely as He is

or you have not accepted Him at all. Have you received Jesus, not just as your Savior from sin, but also as your Lord and Master and Teacher? Can you say, “I am yoked to Him. I am under submission to Him. I am learning to obey all that He’s commanded”?

Are you getting nearer to His heart? Is He starting to rub off on you? The longer you follow Him, are the people around you at work, in your home and in your neighborhood starting to see that you, the follower of Jesus, are meek and lowly of heart, that you are gentle, that you are kind? For this is the heart of Jesus. When people meet us, they should be able to see and sense that we have been with Jesus, that His character is rubbing off on our lives.

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