

## Matthew 11:28-30 — The Heart of Christ: Gentle and Lowly

### Introduction

What motivates you to get out of bed in the morning? Work? Coffee? Friends or family? Perhaps you are decidedly *unmotivated* in this season. Discouraged, depressed, despondent. What might these motivations reveal about who we are, our most natural instincts and impulses, and our deepest desires?

The Bible places this central animating force squarely in our *heart*.

The heart, in biblical terms, is not part of who we are but the center of who we are. Our heart is what defines and directs us. That is why Solomon tells us to “keep [the] heart with all vigilance, for from it flows the springs of life” (Prov. 4:23). The heart is a matter of life. It is what makes us the human being each of us is. The heart drives all we do. It is who we are.

*Dane C. Ortlund. Gentle and Lowly*

When it comes to the Gospel accounts, there is only one place in all four gospels, eighty-nine chapters of text, where Jesus reveals his own heart to us. That is, Jesus opens up and reveals to us this animating center that motivates and drives him — what “gets him out of bed,” so to speak — and that will ultimately drive him to the cross.

Consider this for just a moment: we have special insight and knowledge into the heart of Christ, *in his own words*.

In the one place in the Bible where the Son of God pulls back the veil and lets us peer way down into the core of who he is, we are not told that he is “austere and demanding in heart.” We are not told that he is “exalted and dignified in heart.” We are not even told that he is “joyful and generous in heart.” Letting Jesus set the terms, his surprising claim is that he is “gentle and lowly in heart.”

*Dane C. Ortlund. Gentle and Lowly*

Why are we so graced and blessed as to know the Son of God so intimately? Because the heart of Christ is exactly what will draw us to him. His heart is exactly what weary, burdened, and heavy laden sufferers most desperately need. ***Though he is indeed many things, Jesus is, in his heart of hearts, what is most necessary for him to be if he is to be our rest — gentle and lowly.***

Think about it. You’re discouraged, anxious, and weary. You feel lost and unable to go any further under the burden you carry. You’re losing hope and not sure you’ll be able to hold it all together for much longer. You’re ashamed and guilty and afraid. Friend, your rest will not be found in an “austere and demanding heart,” nor in a “dignified and exalted” heart. Not even in a “joyful and generous” heart. ***Christ is so perfectly inclined to be your rest because his heart is gentle and lowly, the most comforting and restful disposition toward weary sufferers and sinners we could ever need.***

### Exposition

Let’s examine first these twin characteristics of Jesus’s heart, then zoom a little further out and see how they come together for our rest.

#### ***“I am gentle...”***

To help us get a clearer understanding of what Jesus means by gentle, consider the three other times this word was used in the New Testament:

- Matthew 5:5 — the “*meeek* will inherit the earth”

- Matthew 21:5 (quoting Zech. 9:9) — of Jesus the king “coming to you, *humble*, and mounted on a donkey...”
- 1 Peter 3:4 — Encouragement to wives to nourish more than anything else “the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a *gentle* and quiet spirit...”

If we take these together — meek, humble, gentle — we get that picture that Jesus is not harsh or reactionary, easily exasperated or trigger-happy. Rather, we see that he is understanding. “The posture most natural to him is not a pointed finger but open arms” (Ortlund).

### **“...and lowly”**

Typically, we think of humility in the virtuous sense, as in James 4:6 — “God opposed the proud but give grace to the humble.” But throughout the New Testament (and in the Greek versions of the Old Testament, especially in the Psalms), the word for humble refers not to humility as a virtue, but to humility in the sense of being thrust downward by life circumstances. For example, in Mary’s song, while pregnant with Jesus, she uses it to describe the way God exalts those who are “of *humble* estate” (Luke 1:52). In Romans 12:16, Paul tells us to “not be haughty, but associate with the *lowly*.” By this he means the socially unimpressive and the generally unwelcome.

The point in saying that Jesus is lowly is that he is *accessible*. For all his resplendent glory and dazzling holiness, his supreme uniqueness and otherness, no one in human history has ever been more approachable than Jesus Christ.

*Dane C. Ortlund. Gentle and Lowly*

### **“All who labor and are heavy laden”**

Who, then, qualifies for fellowship with Jesus? The answer is not just anybody, or everyone indiscriminately, but those who are burdened and exhausted by their labor. “The minimum bar to be enfolded into the embrace of Jesus is simply: open yourself up to him. It is all he needs. Indeed, it is the only thing he works with... You don’t need to unburden or collect yourself and then come to Jesus. Your very burden is what qualifies you to come... His rest is a *gift*, not a transaction” (Ortlund).

What does this invitation reveal of the heart Christ? ***It is that his desire that you find rest outstrips even your own.*** For the penitent, Jesus’s heart of gentle embrace is never outmatched by our sins, nor our insecurities, anxieties, and failures. That’s because gentleness and lowliness is not one way Jesus occasionally acts toward others. It is his heart. It is who he is.

This is why Jesus’s heart is exactly what you and I need as sinners and sufferers. Our toil and our labor — inescapable in the Christian life — flows from fellowship with a living Christ who is above all gentle and lowly.

Only as we walk ever deeper into this tender kindness can we live the Christian life as the New Testament calls us to. Only as we drink down the kindness of the heart of Christ will we leave in our wake, everywhere we go, the aroma of heaven, and die one day having startled the world with glimpses of a divine kindness too great to be boxed in by what we deserve.

*Dane C. Ortlund. Gentle and Lowly*

This reality of walking in fellowship with Christ is the *easy yoke* Jesus talks about here in our passage. By *easy*, Jesus doesn’t mean free of hardship or pain. Rather, it means *kind*, as in Ephesians 4:32: “Be *kind* to one another, tenderhearted.” Jesus yoke — the crossbar laid across oxen to force them to drag farming equipment — is a yoke of kindness. In other words, Jesus’ yoke is a *non-yoke*. It is never a burden. It is never

so heavy that it is uninviting. ***Putting on and coming under the yoke of Jesus is as much a burden to us as a putting on a life preserver is a burden to a drowning man.***

## **Application**

What are we to take away from Jesus' insight about his own heart? First, is to see how our own heart compares to his. Secondly, it's to accept the invitation he offers from his heart.

### ***Jesus' Heart and Ours***

The first thing we must recognize is that this is not our own disposition. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick..." (Jeremiah 17:9). One thing that will quickly become apparent as we work our way through this series on the heart of Christ, is that we are nothing like our savior. But that is a marvelous grace! ***And it is exactly this recognition that qualifies us to come.*** It our own hearts which weigh us down and burdens us. This burden uniquely qualifies us to be the recipients of Jesus very heart.

Secondly, know that Jesus' heart as gently and lowly is permanently so. That is, he doesn't change. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). Unlike our own heart, which is so fickle as to change with the weather, Jesus never ceases to be perfectly suited as our rest.

### ***"Come to me"***

We must shake off our false intuitions of who Christ is if we are to embrace his invitation to find rest in his heart. We project onto Jesus our skewed instincts about how the world works. Consider this insight from Thomas Goodwin, the old English Puritan and pastor: *We are apt to think that he, being so holy, is therefore of a severe and sour disposition against sinners, and not able to bear them.* "No," says he; *"I am meek; gentleness is my nature and temper."*

Jesus' gentle and lowly heart means that, even as he bids us to come, *he comes to us*. But it's not enough that he simply draw near, but he does so out of his deep desire and longing to be for us who he is in his heart. He does not hold his nose as he comes, but embraces us in his arms, unhesitatingly, welcoming, gently.

Friend, accept his invitation today!

Christian, our savior's invitations stands as open to you today as it did the day you first heard it. Walk in it.