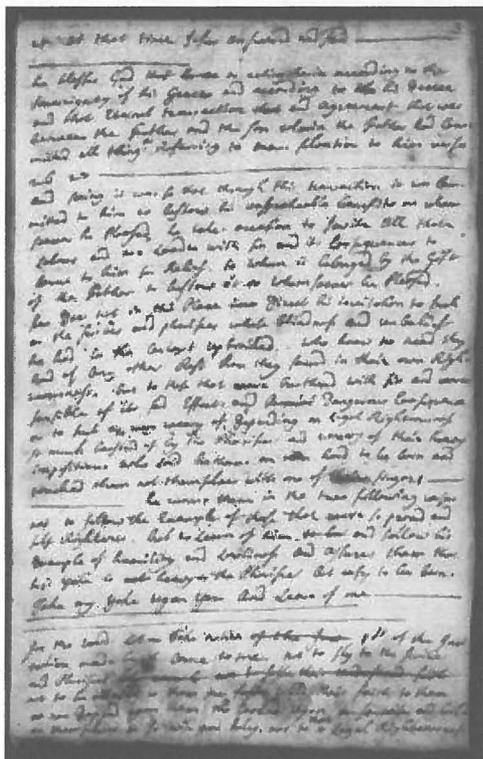


THEME CLASSIC: Jonathan Edwards on “What it is to Come to Christ” (Matt 11:28) (A Previously Unpublished Sermon)



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Editor's Introduction: In the summer of 1726, Jonathan Edwards started to compose a sermon on Romans 12:1, but for whatever reason, he only wrote the first page. More than a quarter of a century

passed, before he used that same sermon notebook in which to write the present sermon on Matthew 11:28. What is transcribed here, appearing in print for the very first time, is a relatively short (for Edwards) sermon, though one that has an unusually short (again for him) Application. This previously unpublished sermon has been transcribed by the present writer, direct from the MSS held at the Beinecke Rare Book and MS Library at Yale University. Edwards had no systematic use of punctuation and so most has been added, otherwise no editorial changes have been made to the sermon, except for the insertion of a small number of missing words for the sense of the text, as indicated by the use of square brackets. I have also given the full form of some abbreviated words. As indicated in Edwards' own notes, this was a

sermon he preached at the Stockbridge Mission after his dismissal from the Church in Northampton.

What It Is To Come To Christ

Stockbridge Indians, August 1752

Matthew 11:28, 'Come unto me all ye that labour'.

The internal motive to Christ's coming into the world, and those labors and sorrows, the equal of which never heard upon earth before, was his pity and compassion. He saw us in great misery, and it moved the eternal Son of God to pity. Amongst all the creatures which God has made, Christ had a peculiar favour and benevolence towards mankind. He especially rejoiced in the habitable parts of this earth and his delight was with the sons of men, Proverbs 8:31. When he saw us therefore brought exceeding low it moved his pity and his bowels yearned towards us.

He came therefore, that he might deliver us and he earnestly calls after us and tells us that there is a deliverance for us, proclaims the good news, and urges us by all means to accept of it and to come to him, and he will save us, offering us of his ability and readiness to do it. Such proclamations we frequently have from Christ Jesus. And one of the most pathetic and moving examples we have in our text, which words seem to be thus occasioned. Christ as we have account in the context [had] been upbraiding those parts of the land wherein he had been principally conversant, and had been blessed with the greatest advantages for saving knowledge, that they still were ignorant through their willful and obstinate rejecting the clear light offered them. Not that those things were hidden from all, but from the Scribes and Pharisees and those that were in greatest esteem for wisdom and strictness of life amongst the Jews. Which Christ makes an occasion of thanksgiving, as being agreeable to his designs of grace and mercy, that the wisdom of the wise should be turned into foolishness, and that those that were wise in their own eyes and self-sufficient, should be left in darkness and that they should be revealed to the humble, lowly, and poor in spirit, as v.25, At that time Jesus answered and said, 'Come unto me all ye that labor'.

He blesses God, as acting herein according to the sovereignty of his grace and according to his decrees and that eternal transaction and agreement that was between the Father and Son, wherein the Father had committed all things as referring to man's salvation to him, verses 26 and 27. And seeing it was so, that through this transaction it was committed to him to bestow his unspeakable benefits on whomsoever he pleased, he takes occasion to invite all that labour and are laden with sin and its consequences, to come to him for relief, to whom it belonged by the gift of the Father, to bestow it on whomsoever he pleased. He does not in this

place direct his invitation to such as the Scribes and Pharisees, whose blindness and unbelief he had in the context upbraided, who knew no need they had of any other rest than they found in their own righteousness, but to those that were burthened with sin, and were sensible of its sad effects and dangerous consequences, or to such as were weary of depending on legal righteousness, so much boasted of by the Pharisees, and weary of their heavy impositions, who laid burthens on men hard to be borne, and touched them not themselves with one of their fingers.

He warns them in the two following verses, not to follow the example of those that were so proud and self-righteous, but to learn of him and follow his example of humility and lowliness, and assures them that his yoke is not heavy as the Pharisees', but easy to be borne, Take my yoke upon you and learn of Me.

In the words let us take notice, first, of the invitation made by Christ, Come to Me. Not to fly to the Scribes and Pharisees, not to be attracted to them nor yield their faith to them, nor depend upon them, though looked upon by themselves as so wise and holy, nor to that legal righteousness, so much extolled and gloried in by them, But believe in me, trust in me and obey me and take my yoke upon you.

2. The persons invited, All the weary and heavy laden, the miserable, for Christ came to save from misery, and those that are sensible of their sin and misery, for such only accept of his salvation, those that are weary of their bondage to sin, being heavy-laden with an uneasy conscience, awakened by the law and burthened with the yoke of Jewish ceremonies, which they nor their fathers, were able to bear, to take Christ's easy yoke upon them instead of it. But the invitation is universal, ALL ye weary and heavy-laden with sin or its effects of every sort and degree, for the Gospel of God is not confined in its offers, or the Gospel Kingdom to the Jews, or any other nation or set of men whatsoever.

3. The argument used and motive presented, And I will give you rest. You are weary and burthened, 'tis relief and rest you want, come to Me and I will give it you.

Doctrine. That Christ gives rest to all such as are spiritually weary and burthened, that come to him for it.

I use the same expression as in the text, of coming to Christ, as being very expressive of that act of the soul, or of the man, intended by it, which we shall endeavor to explain in the explication of the doctrine, wherein we shall:

- I. Show who are intended by the spiritually weary and burthened.**
- II. Show what is meant by coming to his rest, and**
- III. That Christ will give rest unto such.**

I. Who are intended by the spiritually weary and burthened

First. Those that are burdened with a sense of guilt and fear of wrath. 'Tis a dreadful condition that those are in, that are held under the guilt of sin, that lie under an obligation to suffer the punishment of all the sin that ever they have been guilty of. A man had better have a viper cleaving to his heart, than have the guilt of sin lying upon his soul. While a man lives under the guilt of sin, he hangs over the pit of hell. He is as it were bound by a chain that Satan has hold of at one end. He has the thunder of God's wrath impending over him, and heaven's cannon are leveled against him.

But yet there are many that are in such a condition that are not sensible of their misery. They are in such a dead sleep, that they are resting quiet and secure in it. 'Tis not very burdensome to them to be thus.

But there are others that God is pleased in some measure to be waking out of their sleep, and to be making sensible what a condition they are in, and upon these their guilt lies as a heavy load, day and night. 'Tis a burden that they can't get rid of. They can't lay it aside to rest. It continually oppresses them. They go about from day to day in pain. It is a continual labour of heart to support itself under this burden.

The awakened sinner has a terrifying sense of God's wrath upon his heart. He sees the storm that threatens him, and he hears the rumbling of the thunder that is ready to break upon his head, and it is a dreadful sound in his ears. He has it impressed upon his mind, that the great God is angry with him and is his enemy, that his wrath burns against him, and that God has made ready his arrow upon the string against him. And it abides upon him lying down and rising up. He goes about with a sense of God's anger from day to day. He is afraid of meeting with wrath wherever he goes. He has no peace in his mind, his mind is tossed to and fro, as a vessel in a storm. He goes as a man that travels, having a scorching heat perpetually beating upon his head, and he can find no shade to rest himself.

He is ready to cry out, How shall I dwell with consuming fire? How shall I dwell with everlasting burnings? What shall I do to bear the anger of Almighty God to all eternity? He is in a distressed condition. Terrors take hold upon him. He is a poor, frightened, trembling, helpless creature. He knows not which way to turn, nor what to do to escape eternal damnation.

He remembers such and such sins he has been guilty of, and the reflection upon them terrifies and affrights him. He has a sense of God's anger against him for it. Those sins lie as a heavy and intolerable weight upon his mind.

2. Those that are weary with fruitless endeavors to find rest in other things. While the soul is thus burdened with a sense of guilt and a fear of wrath, it is restless and uneasy and is seeking rest. It wanders about from mountain to hill, sometimes hopes to find rest in this thing, sometimes in that. They are striving to lay some tie upon God. They can't bear to see themselves to be the objects of wrath, and have it remain wholly as uncertainty whether ever they shall escape. Therefore they are endeavoring to bring God under some obligation to show them mercy, and they take refuge in what they have done. They think how much better they have been than many others that God has shown mercy to. They think how much pains they have taken for it, and are ready sometimes to say, Surely God will have some respect to the pains I have taken. They think how many prayers they have made, how many tears they have shed, and they hope that God will have some respect to that and not cast them off, notwithstanding all. They think how careful they have been to avoid all ways of sin, and how strict in duty, and they think God would deal hardly by them, to have no regard to it. And they are sometimes striving to make their hearts better, that they be the better fitted to come to Christ and that God may be the more ready to have pity upon them. And they are sometimes striving to work up their hearts into a believing frame. They are sometimes ready to trust in ministers and in the prayers of good people for them. Thus they weary themselves. They wander about, sometimes taking rest in one thing and sometimes in another, still striving to get something to depend upon for escaping of eternal damnation, which they are so terribly afraid [of], but they find all to be fruitless and vain, and they are in as much danger and distress as ever they were, the dreadful sound still follows them. None of their refuges prove sufficient to give rest to their souls. Thus they are weary with wandering to and fro, and they are weary with striving to procure rest for themselves.

II. Inquire. What it is to come to Christ for rest. Here are these three things:

First. The soul is made sensible that there is rest to be had in Christ. The soul thus burdened and weary, is very sensible of its need of rest, and it has been seeking of rest in other things, and thought to have found rest in them. He hoped to find rest sometimes in this thing, and sometimes in that, but at last he is very sensible that no rest is to be found in them. But

he now sees where rest is to be had. He is convinced that he may have rest in Christ.

He was burdened with a sense of his guilt. He sees that in Christ he shall be free from guilt, that if he be in him, he shall be delivered from that burden. He was burdened with fear of wrath, but he sees that in Christ he shall be safe from that wrath. Christ has made satisfaction to offended justice, and his satisfaction is sufficient. He sees a way how the wrong done to God's majesty may be made up, so that he may be saved, and that he not be injured, and sees in Christ enough to satisfy the cravings, and to supply the needs of his soul.

Second. He chooses and desires rest in Christ. He chooses Christ's rest, that rest that Christ purchased for him and that he offers to him, which is a holy and heavenly rest, a bearing Christ's yoke and doing his work. He chooses rest in Christ's way above all other ways that he can think of. He chooses then safety and rest in Christ's righteousness, and in the grace of God in him, rather than in his own righteousness. He delights in that way that gives so much glory to free grace. He chooses his rest should be attributed to Christ, that all the glory of it should be given to him.

Third. The soul applies to Christ for rest. It seeks it of him. His application is to him and his expectation from him. He commits himself to Christ, that he may save him and give him peace. He looks to him as they that looked to the brazen serpent in the wilderness, and were healed.

III. Christ will surely give rest to all weary and burdened souls that thus come to him.

First. If they come to him, he'll take away that which was the foundation of their weariness, and will secure them from it. He undertakes to take the guilt of such upon himself that he will be responsible for them, that their debt shall be put to his account and that he will secure them from the wrath which they fear. This is the work and business which he has undertaken. He engaged to do it before the foundation of the world. Even from all eternity he has undertaken to be the Refuge and Savior of those that are afraid of God's wrath and come to him. And Christ has faithfully promised it to men, he has plighted his faith for their security if they put their trust in him. He hath thus done by his own free and voluntary act.

If sinners come to Christ they have done that whereby they have exposed themselves to God's wrath and to the stroke of justice. It is not their concern how they shall satisfy or how they will answer for what they have done, Christ looks upon it as his concern, he'll look to that. Let there be never so much wrath deserved, if they are in Christ they are as

safe as if they never had deserved any, because Christ has undertaken to stand in their stead, let there be more or less.

There need be no fear whether his suretyship will be accepted of the Father upon their account for he is chosen and appointed of the Father to this very work, 'tis the Father that sent him into the world, Christ died and suffered wrath in obedience to the Father. And there need be no doubt of the sufficiency of what Christ has done, for he has fulfilled the law. The law is as much fulfilled as if they themselves had personally obeyed, or had personally suffered the curse of the law. And then God's honor won't suffer at all by their escaping punishment and being made happy. For what Christ has suffered has repaired God's honor, and what he has done has done much more honor to God, than ever our sins dishonored him.

They need not doubt of finding acceptance with the Father through the Son, seeing that Christ is so dear to God, a Person that is intimately near to him, and in whom he is infinitely delighted.

2. Christ will give sensible peace and rest to their minds in a sense of the removal of their guilt and their safety from punishment. There shall be more or less of a sense of this here in this world. Christ gives peace of conscience to believers, though it may be much interrupted in this present state, as faith itself is. But where there are exercises of faith there will be more or less of this peace. And generally Christ gives to believers manifestations of pardon and justification that are exceeding refreshing, and very much quiet and compose the mind in a sweet rest and calm. This is that peace that Christ gives, John 14:27, Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you, not as the world giveth give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled neither let it be afraid. This is the peace of God that passeth all understanding, Philippians 4:7. And if their peace be much interrupted in this world, 'tis ever more through want of faith, 'tis because their faith is weak and interrupted, 'tis because they don't come to Christ so often and trust in him so fully and so constantly as they ought to do. And however this peace may be disturbed with doubts and fears in this world, yet hereafter it will be perfect and undisturbed forever. This everlasting rest will Jesus, the true Joshua, give to all those that come to him for rest, Hebrews 4:8,9.

Application.

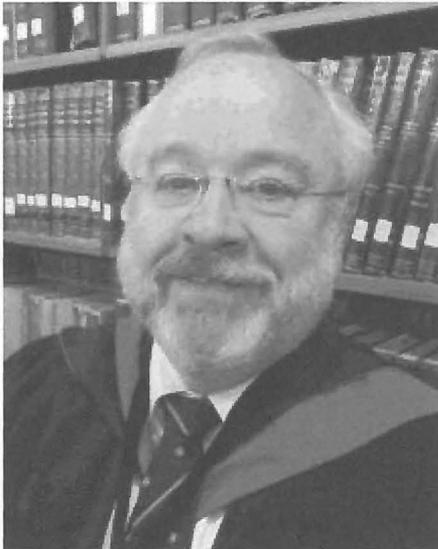
The Improvement I shall make of this, is to invite those that are weary and burdened to come to Christ. You are sensible that you are in a doleful condition, that it is dismal to go about having God's wrath impending over your head not knowing how soon it will fall upon you, hanging over

the pit by a slender thread not knowing every moment but that you may drop in.

It is doleful, if we consider the turmoil and uneasiness that such a condition is attended [with] or may justly be attended with [in] this life, and you have some experience of it. You find nothing but wearisome days and wearisome nights. Your heart is filled with fears and you have little or no comfort in the world. Your burden is so great that you are ready to cry out under it. And how needless it is, that you should continue in such a condition, when Christ offers you his peace and rest freely.

How happy would your condition be to what it now is, if your heart were but persuaded to close with Jesus Christ. Then you would be free from guilt and out of all danger. Whatever storms were without, you might hear the rush of the rushing of the wind, and the roaring of the thunder, while you are quiet and unmolested in a safe shelter.

O! be persuaded therefore to come to Christ, that sufficient, that blessed and excellent Savior that labored and was heavy-laden for our sakes under the heavy wrath of God, so that we who had committed the sin might have safety, ease and rest forever.



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