

THE OLD GOSPEL FOR THE NEW CENTURY

"Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Matthew 11:28

You have doubtless already heard several sermons from this text. I have discoursed upon it, I know not how many times—not so many times, however, as I intend yet to do if God shall spare my life! This verse is one of those great wells of salvation from which we may always be drawing, for we can never exhaust it. Our proverb says, "Drawn wells are the sweetest." And the more we draw from such a text as this, the sweeter and the fuller does its meaning appear to us.

I am going, on this occasion, to use this passage in a special way, so as to bring out just one single point of its teaching. I might speak, if I wished to do so, of the rest which Jesus Christ gives to the heart, the mind and the conscience of those who believe in Him. This is the rest, this is the refreshment which those who come unto Him find, for we might read it, "I will refresh you," and I should have a very sweet topic if I were to discourse upon the wonderful relief, the Divine refreshment, the blessed rest which comes to the heart through believing in Jesus Christ. May you all experience that blessing, dear Friends! May your rest, your peace, be very deep! May it not be a pretended restfulness, but a rest which will endure searching and testing! May your rest be a lasting one! May your peace be like a river that never ceases to flow! May your peace be always a safe one—not a false peace which will end in destruction—but a true, solid, justifiable peace which will endure throughout your whole lives and ultimately melt away into the rest of God at His right hand forever! Happy are the people who thus rest in Christ—may we be among that number—and if we are so, already, may we penetrate still more deeply into this glorious rest!

I might also speak, dear Friends, upon the various ways in which the Lord gives rest to Believers. And I might speak especially to some of you who are Believers, but who do not seem to enter into rest as you ought to do. There are some of us who get worried with the things of this world, or troubled by our own feelings. We are perplexed and tossed here and there by doubts and fears. We ought to be resting, for, "we who have believed do enter into rest." Rest is our rightful portion—"Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." But, somehow or other, some who are thus justified do not seem to realize this peace, or to enjoy this rest as they should and, perhaps, even while I am talking, they may discover the reason why they do not have all the rest and peace which they might have. Certainly, our Lord Jesus Christ did not speak only to one particular class when He uttered the words of our text. To all who labor and are heavy laden—whether they are advanced Christians, or unconverted people—He says, "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest." I shall indeed rejoice if, as the outcome of what I shall have to say, it shall happen that some who came in here distressed in spirit, and bowed down in heart—perhaps even fretful and complaining—shall come to Jesus Christ over again, drawing near to Him once more, and getting into touch with Him again, and so shall find rest unto their souls. It will then be doubly sweet to come and sit around the Communion Table, all the while resting—resting and feasting—not standing with loins girt and with staff in hand, as they did who partook of the Passover in Egypt—but resting, even as they did who gathered at the Last Supper when the Master reclined in the midst of His Apostles. So, spiritually, may your heads be resting on His breast and may your hearts find refuge in His wounds as you hear Him say to you again, "Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Yet it is not quite that Truth of God about which I am going to speak to you. I want to pick out just this one thought—the Glory of Christ, that it should be possible for Him to say, "Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." These words, from the mouth of any other man, would be ridiculous and even blasphemous. Take the greatest poet, the greatest

teacher of philosophy, or the greatest king and who is he, with most capacious soul, who would dare to say to all the laboring and heavy laden ones in the whole human race. "Come to me, and I will give you rest"? Where are there wings broad enough to brood over every sorrowing soul, except the wings of Christ? Where is there a harbor capacious enough to hold all the navies of the world, to give refuge to every tempest-tossed boat that ever crossed the sea? Where, but in the haven of the soul of Christ, in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead! And, therefore, in whom there is room enough and to spare for all the troubled children of men!

That, then, is to be the drift of my discourse. May the Spirit of God graciously help me in following it!

1. And, first, I call your attention to THE PERSONALITY OF THIS CALL. "Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

If you look at the text carefully, you will notice that there is a double personality in the call. It is, "Come you—come you—to Me, and I will give rest to you." It is two persons coming near to each other—the one bestowing and the other receiving rest. But it is not, in either case, a fiction, a figment, a phantom, a myth. It is you, you, YOU—YOU who really labor and are heavy laden and who, therefore, are real beings, painfully conscious of your existence—it is you who are to come to another Being who is as real as you are—One who is as truly a living Person as you are living persons. It is He who says to you, "Come you to Me, and I will give rest to you."

I want you, dear Friends, to have a very clear conviction of your own personality, for, sometimes, people appear to forget that they are individuals, distinct from everybody else. When there is a guinea to be given away and the jingle of it is heard in the distance, most men are conscious of their own personality—and each one looks out for himself and tries to secure the prize. But I find that, often, in the matter of eternal things, men seem to lose themselves in a crowd and they think of the blessings of Grace as a sort of general shower that may fall on the fields of all alike—they do not especially look for the rain upon their own plot, or wish to obtain a blessing for themselves. Now, then, you, you, YOU—you who are heavy laden, wake up! Where are you? The call of the text is not to your sister, mother, husband, brother, friend, but to you—"Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Well, now, you have shaken yourself up and you feel that you are a distinct personality from everybody else in the world. So next comes the most important thing of all, you are to come to another Personality, "says Christ, "and I will give you rest." Here I ask you to admire the wonderful Grace and mercy of this arrangement. According to Christ's words, you are to obtain rest of heart, not by coming to a ceremony, or to an ordinance, but to Christ, Himself! "Come unto Me." He does not even say, "Come to My teaching, to My example, to My Sacrifice," but, "Come unto Me." It is to a Person you are to come—to that very Person who, being God, and equal with the Father, laid aside His glories and took upon Himself our human flesh—

"First, in our mortal flesh, to serve.

Then, in that flesh, to die."

And you are to come to that Person. There is to be a certain action on your part, the movement of yourself to Him who says to you, "Come unto Me"—a movement away from every other confidence, to Him—a movement away from every other ground of reliance, or door of hope, to Him, as the Person whom God has appointed and anointed to be the one and only Savior, the great reservoir of everlasting Grace, in whom it has pleased the Father that all fullness should dwell! O glorious Man, O glorious God, who can thus speak with authority and say, "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest." I entreat you to lay aside all thought of anything except the Christ, living, dying, risen again and gone into Glory—for He points you, not to the House of Prayer, nor to the Throne of Grace, nor to the baptistery, nor to the Communion Table, nor even to the holiest and most sacred things which He has ordained for other purposes—not even to the Father, Himself, nor to the Holy Spirit—but He says, "Come unto Me." Here must your spiritual life begin—at His feet. And here must your spiritual life be perfected—in His bosom—for He is both the Author and the Finisher of

faith! Let us adore the Christ in whose mouth such words as these are fitting and full of meaning! He cannot be less than Divine who can thus speak to us, "Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

II. Now, secondly, I want you to notice THE LARGENESS OF CHRIST'S HEART, as illustrated by this text, "Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Notice, first, the largeness of His heart in singling out such needy ones to be the objects of His loving call. Did you ever notice the picture that our Lord has drawn in these words? "All you that labor." That is the picture of a beast that has the yoke upon its shoulder. Men think to find pleasure in the service of Satan and they permit him to lay his yoke upon their neck. Then they have to toil, and slave, and labor, and sweat in what they call pleasure—but they find no rest and no contentment in it! And the more they do in the service of Satan, the more they may do, for he uses the goad and the whip, and always urges them on to fresh exertions. Now Christ says to these people who are like beasts of burden, "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest."

But they are in a worse plight even than I have described, for they not only labor like the ox at the plow, but they are also heavily laden. Now, it seldom happens that men make a horse or an ox to be both a beast of draught and the carrier of a load at the same time, but that is how the devil treats the man who becomes his servant. He puts him in the shafts of his chariot and makes him drag it along, and then leaps upon his back and rides as a postillion. So the man labors and is heavy laden, for he has both to draw the vehicle and to carry the driver! Such a man labors after what he calls pleasure and, as he does so, sin leaps on his back, and then another sin follows, and yet another till sins upon sins crush him to the ground—and yet he has to be pulling and tugging with all his might at the same time! This double toil is enough to kill him. But Jesus looks in pity upon him—laboring under a sense of sin, and yet toiling to get pleasure in sin—and He says to him, "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest."

Does Christ want the devil's hacks, then, when they are used up in Satan's service? Does He want to persuade them to leave their old master and come to Him? What? These sinners that are only tired of sin because they cannot find strength enough to go on sinning—or who are getting uneasy because they do not enjoy the pleasure they once did in wickedness—does Christ call them to come to Him? Yes! And it shows the largeness of His heart that He should be willing to give rest to such laboring and heavily burdened ones.

But the largeness of His heart is seen in the fact that He bids all such sinners to come to Him—all such sinners, I repeat! What a great deal that little word, "all," includes! I believe that, generally, when a man uses big words, he says little things, and that, when he uses little words, he says great things. And, certainly, the smallest words in our language are usually those that mean the most. What does this little word, "all," mean? Or, rather, what does it not mean? And Jesus, without limiting its application, says, "Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden." Oh, the magnificence of the love and Grace of Christ, that He should have invited them all to come to Him! Yes, and He invites them all to come at once. "Come along with you," He says, "all you that labor and are heavy laden. Come in a crowd, come in great masses! Fly to me as a cloud and like doves to their windows." There are never too many coming to please Him. He seems to say, "The more, the merrier." Christ's heart will rejoice over all the multitudes that will come to Him, for He has made a great feast and He has bid many, and He still sends forth His servants to say, "Yet there is room. Therefore, come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden."

Remember, also, that Christ's

promise is personally addressed to every one of these sinners. If each one of them will

come unto Him, He will give rest to each one. To everyone that labors and is heavy laden, Jesus says, "If you will come unto Me, I—I Myself will give you rest—I will not hand you over even to the care of My servant, the minister, that he may look after you, but I will undertake the work Myself.

I will give you rest." Christ does not even say, "I will take you to My Word and there you shall find comfort for yourself." No. He says, "I, a person, by a distinct act of My own, if you will but come unto Me."

That personal dealing of Christ with individuals is indeed blessed. There is a poem of Tennyson's, which is, to my mind, the sweetest he has ever written. It is concerning a little child in a hospital who heard that she was about to undergo an operation, through which it was not likely that she would live. So she asked her young companion in the next bed what she had better do. She bade her tell Jesus all about it and ask Him to take care of her. And then the child enquired, "But how will Jesus know

me?" The little ones were rather puzzled because there were such long rows of beds in

the children's hospital and they thought that Jesus had so much to do, that perhaps He would not know which little girl it was that wanted Him to take such special care of her. So it was agreed that she should put her hands out of the bed, and when Jesus saw her hands, He would know that she was the little girl who needed Him. The scene, as the poet describes it, is most touching. I do but mar it in the telling, for, in the morning, when the doctors and nurses passed through the ward, they knew that Jesus had been there, and that the little one had gone to Him without any operation. He had taken care of her in the best possible way—and there lay the little hands out of the bed.

Well, now, we need not do even as much as that, for the Lord Jesus knows each one of us and He will come personally to each one of us and give us rest. Though it is quite true that He has a great deal to do, yet He can still say, "My Father works, and I work," for the whole universe is kept in working order by His almighty power and He will not forget anyone who comes to Him. Just as a person who knew that he had abundant provision, might say to a great crowd of hungry people, "Come along with you, and I will feed you all," so Christ knows within Himself that He has the power to give rest to every weary soul that comes to Him. He is quite certain of it, so He does not say, "Come to Me, and I will do the best I can with you." Or, "possibly, if I exert Myself, I may be able to give you rest." Oh, no! He says, "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest." It is quite a matter of course with Him, for, let me tell you that He has tried His hand upon millions and He has never failed once! So He speaks with an air of unwavering confidence. I am certain, as my Master was certain, that if there is any soul among you that will come to Him, He can and He will give rest unto that soul. He speaks with the consciousness of possessing all the power that is needed and with the absolute certainty that He can do the deed which is required.

For, mark you, Jesus gives this promise knowing all about the cases that He describes. He knows that men are laboring and that they are heavily laden. There is not a grief in the heart of anyone in this house which Jesus Christ does not know, for He knows all things. Your thoughts may be twisted in all manner of ways, and all your methods of judging may be like a labyrinth, a maze of which you think no one has the clue. You may be sitting here and saying to yourself, "Nobody understands me, and I do not even understand myself. I have become entangled in the meshes of sin and I cannot see any way of escape. I am perplexed beyond all possibility of deliverance." I tell you, Friend, that Christ does not speak without meaning when He says, "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest." He can trace the thread through the tangled skein and He can draw it out in one straight line! He can follow all the winding of the labyrinth till He reaches its very center! He can take away the cause of your trouble, though you, yourself, do not know what it is! And what to you is shrouded in mystery—an impalpable grief that you cannot get at or grapple with—my Lord and Master can chase right away! He speaks of what He knows He can do when He gives this promise, for His wisdom is such that He can perceive the needs of each individual soul, and His power is vast enough to meet all those needs! And so He says to every laboring and burdened spirit within this house, "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest."

Be it also remembered that when Christ gave this promise, He knew the number of those who were comprehended in that word, "all." Though, to us, that, "all," includes a multitude that no man

can number, yet “the Lord knows them that are His.” And when He said, “Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,” He did not speak without knowing that there are tens of thousands, and millions, and hundreds of millions that labor and are heavy laden—and He meant to speak to all that vast throng when He said, “Come unto Me, and I will give you rest.”

Am I making you think, dear Friends, of the vastness of my Master’s power and Grace? Am I causing you to adore Him? I hope I am. My own soul desires to lie prostrate at His feet, lost in a sweet sense of the greatness of that Grace which can speak thus, and yet which speaks not beyond the truth when it says to the whole race of ruined men, “Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will”—to an absolute certainty—“give you rest.” It must not be forgotten, also, that what Christ promised was intended for all time. Here is an individual speaking who was “despised and rejected of men.” Let Him stand out clearly before your eyes—the carpenter’s Son, the Son of Mary, “a Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief”—yet He said to those who gathered around Him, “Come unto Me, and I will give you rest.” But He looked right over the intervening centuries and He spoke to us who are assembled here, and then He looked on all the multitudes of this great city, and of this country, and of all the nations of the earth, and He said, “Come unto Me, and I will give you rest.” In effect, He said, “Till I shall come again to the earth, to sit upon the Throne of Judgment, I promise that every heavily laden soul that comes to Me shall find rest in Me.” The sorrows of men are as many as the stars of Heaven for multitude—and the men, themselves, are innumerable. Count, if you can, the drops of morning dew, or the grains of sand upon the seashore—and then hope to number the children of Adam from the beginning of time! Yet our Lord Jesus Christ, speaking to the vast mass of the laboring and heavy laden children of men, says to them, “Come unto Me; come unto Me; for he who comes to Me I will in no wise cast out. And whoever comes to Me shall find rest unto his soul.”

It shows, also, the vastness of Christ’s power and Grace when we remember the many to whom this promise has been proved to be true. You know that throughout all these ages up till now, not a single laboring and heavy laden soul has come to Christ in vain. Even in the utmost ends of the earth there has not been found a criminal so base, or a soul so closely shut up in the dungeon of old Giant Despair, but, on his coming to Christ, the promised rest has been bestowed upon him and, thereby, Christ has been magnified!

III. Now follow me while I dwell, for a few minutes, upon THE SIMPLICITY OF THIS GOSPEL.

Jesus Christ says to all who labor and are heavy laden, “Come unto Me, and I will give you rest.” This invitation implies a movement—a movement from something to something. You are bid to come away from whatever else you have been trusting in and to move towards Christ and trust to Him. And when you do so, He will give you rest. How different this simplicity is from all the complex systems that men set up! Why, according to some people’s teaching, in order to be a Christian—and to carry out all the regulations of public worship—you would need to have a little library to consult so as to know at what hour you ought to light your candles, and how to mix incense, and the proper way to put on your millinery, and in which direction you should turn when you say a certain prayer, and in what other direction you should turn when you say something else—and whether your intoning, or your chanting, or your mumbling will be most acceptable to God! Oh, dear, dear, dear! All this complex machinery of man’s inventing—the so-called “baptism” in your infancy—the confirmation in your youth—“taking the sacrament,” as many call it—all this is a wonderful hocuspocus, full of mystery, lies and delusion! But, according to Christ’s teaching, the way of salvation is just this, “Come unto Me, and I will give you rest.” And if you, dear Friend, have come to Christ, and trusted Him, you have received that rest and peace which He delights to give—you have found the kernel of the nut, you have reached the essence and the root of the whole matter! If your heart has abandoned all other confidences and is depending upon Jesus Christ, you have found eternal life! And that eternal life will never be taken away from you. Therefore, rejoice in it!

And, further, this invitation is in the present tense—“Do not wait till you get home, but let your soul move towards Christ now. You will never be in a better state for coming to Him than you are now. Nor will you be in a worse state for coming to Him, unless it is that by postponing your

coming, you will be more hardened and less inclined to come. You are now, at this moment, in need of Christ, so come to Him! You are hungry—surely that is the very best reason for eating! You are thirsty—that is the best reason for drinking! Or it may be that you are so sick that you do not hunger—then come to Christ and eat of the provisions of the Gospel till you get an appetite for them. I like, sometimes, when a sinner says to me, "I do not thirst for Christ," to say to him, "Then come and drink till you do thirst," for, just as it is with a pump that will not work, you must first pour water down it, so is it with some men. When they get some Truth of God into their souls—though it may seem, at first, to be but a very imperfect reception of the Gospel—it will help them, afterwards, to a deeper longing for Christ and a more intense enjoyment of the blessings of salvation.

At any rate, Christ says, "Come now," by which is implied that He means, "Come just as you are. Just as you are, come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. You labor, so, before you have washed those grimy hands of yours, come unto Me, and I will give you rest. You are faint, feeble and ready to die, but it needs no strength to come to Me! Faint into My arms. Die on My bosom, for so you have already come to Me." We do not come to Christ by the exertion of our own power to come, but by the cessation of the will to stay away! When your heart just yields itself up, drops everything that it is holding, and falls into the hands of Christ, it is then that the act of faith is performed and it is to that act that Christ invites you when He says, "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest."

"Well," says one, "I never did understand the Gospel. It has always puzzled and perplexed me." Well, then, I will try to set it before you very plainly. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, lived and died for sinners—and you are bid to come and trust Him. Rely upon Him! Depend upon Him! Hang your whole weight upon Him! Come unto Him and He will give you rest! Oh, that He may, of His infinite mercy, reveal this simple Truth of God to your heart and that you may be ready to accept it right now! I want to glorify my blessed Master who brought into the world such a simple plan of salvation as this. There are some men who seem to be Parson Puzzle-Texts, for they like to lose themselves amid difficulties and mysteries, and to display before their hearers the fruits of their great culture and their wonderful learning. If their Gospel is true, it is a message only to the elite and the many would have to go to Hell if they were the only preachers! But our Lord Jesus Christ gloried in preaching the Gospel to the poor—and it is to His honor it can be said that, even to this day, "Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called: but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, has God chosen, yes, and things which are not, to bring to nothing things that are: that no flesh should glory in His Presence."

It is so blessed to think that there is a Gospel that will suit the man who cannot read—and that will suit the man who cannot put two consecutive thoughts together—and that will suit the man whose brain has almost failed him in the hour of death—a Gospel that suited the thief dying upon the cross—a Gospel so simple that if there is but Grace to receive it, there needs no great mental power to understand it! Blessed be my Master for giving us a Gospel so simple and so plain as this!

IV. I want you to notice one more thing and then I will close my discourse. It is this—THE UNSELFISHNESS OF CHRIST'S AIM.

Come, you dear ones who love your Lord, listen while I repeat to you these sweet words of His, "Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "I will give you." He does not say, "Come to me, and bring me something," but, "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest." It is not, "Come and do something for Me," but, "I will do everything for you." This has, perhaps, been your trouble, dear Brothers and Sisters, that you wanted, today, to bring Christ an acceptable offering, and in the Sunday school, or in some other form of service, you have been trying to honor Him. I am glad of it and hope you will keep on trying to do so. But take care lest you fall into Martha's mistake and get "cumbered about much serving." For a while, forget the idea of coming to Christ to bring Him anything—and come now, you laboring and burdened one—and receive a blessing from Him, for He has said, "I will give you rest." Christ may be honored by what you give Him, but He must be honored by what He gives you! There cannot be a

question about the goodness of what you shall receive from Him if you come to Him, so, just now do not think about bringing anything to Him, but come to Him that you may receive from Him!

“I want to love Christ,” says one. Well, never mind about that just now—try to feel how much He loves you. “Oh, but I want to consecrate myself to Him!” Quite right, my dear Friend, but, just now, think of how He consecrated Himself for you! “Oh, but I desire never to sin any more!” Quite right, dear Friend, but, just now, think of how He bore your sins in His own body on the tree. “Oh,” says one, “I wish that I had an alabaster box of very precious ointment, that I might anoint His head or His feet, and that the whole house might be filled with the sweet perfume.” Yes, that is all very well, but listen. His name is as ointment poured forth—if you have not any ointment, He has! If you have none to bring to Him, there is plenty that He will give to you!

When my dear Master calls any to come to Him, it is not for His own gain that He bids them come. When He presses His favors upon them. When He comes with great promises of rest, it is not a bribe with which to buy their services. He is too rich to need the best and strongest among us! He only asks of us that, of our great charity, we will be kind enough to take everything from Him! This is the greatest thing we can do for God—to be emptied, so that His fullness may flow into us. That is what I want to do when I go down to the Communion Table—I want to just sit there and not try to think of anything that I can offer to my Master—but to open my soul and to take in all that He is willing to give me! There are times with you shopkeepers when you are dealing out your goods, but there must also be times for bringing in, you know. So, now, open the great warehouse door and let the goods come in wholesale! Let the whole Christ come into your soul.

“I do not feel,” says one, “as if I could enjoy my Lord’s Presence.” But why not? “Because I have been so hard at work for Him all day, and now I have so much care, and I am so heavy laden.” You are the very one whom He especially calls to come to Him! Do not try to do anything except just open your mouth wide, and He will fill it. Come now, and just receive from Him, and glorify Him by receiving! O sun, you give light, but not till God makes you shine! O moon, you are gladdening the evening, yet not with your own brilliance, but only with borrowed light! O fields, you yield your harvests, but the great Husbandman creates your grain! O earth, you are full, but only full of the goodness of the Lord! Everything receives from God and praises Him because it does receive. So let my weary heart lie still beneath the showers of love. Let my heavy laden soul rest in Christ and gladden Him by being glad in Him.

God bless you all, and may Christ be glorified in your salvation and your sanctification, for His dear name’s sake! Amen.