

Christ the Only Rest for the Weary and Heavy-Laden

By George Whitefield

Sermon 21

Matthew 11:28 — “Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

Nothing is more generally known than our duties which belong to Christianity; and yet, how amazing is it, nothing is less practiced. There is much of it in name and show, but little of it in the heart and conversation; indeed, if going to church, and to the sacrament, or, if our being called after the name of Christ, and being baptized into that name; if that will make us Christians, I believe all of us would have a claim thereto: but if it consists in the heart, that there must be an inward principle wrought in us by faith; that there must be a change of the whole nature, a putting off the old man with his deeds, a turning from sin unto God, a cleaving only unto the Son of Righteousness; and that there must be a new birth, and we experience the pangs thereof; and that you must feel yourselves weary and heavy laden with your sins, before you will seek for deliverance from them; if this is to be the case, if there is so much in being children of God, alas! how many who please themselves with an outside show, a name to live whilst they are dead; and how few that have any share in this spiritual state, in this true and living name. How few are they who are weary and heavy laden with their sins, and seek to Christ for rest. They say, in a formal customary manner, we are sinners, and there is no health in us; but how few feel themselves sinners, and are so oppressed in their own spirits, that they have no quiet nor rest in them, because of the burden of their sins, and the weight that is fallen and lays on their minds.

Under these burdens, these heavy burdens, they are at a loss what to do whereby they may obtain rest; they fly to their works, they go to a minister, and he tells them to read, to pray, and meditate, and take the sacrament: thus they go away, and read, and pray, and meditate almost without ceasing, and never neglect the sacrament whenever there is an opportunity for the taking of it. Well, when the poor soul has done all this, it still finds no ease, there is yet no relief. Well, what must you do then? To lie still under the burden they cannot, and to get rid of it they cannot. O what must the burdened soul do? Why, goes to the clergyman again, and tells him the case, and what it has done, and that it is no better. Well, he asks, have you given alms to the poor? Why no. Then go and do that, and you will find rest. Thus the poor sinner is hurried from duty to duty, and still finds no rest: all things are uneasy and disquiet within, and there remains no rest in the soul. And if it was to go through all the duties of religion, and read over a thousand manuals of prayers, none would ever give the soul any rest; nothing will, until it goes to the Lord Jesus Christ, for there is the only true rest; that is the rest which abideth, and will continue for ever. It is not in your own works, nor in your endeavors: no; when Christ comes into your souls, he pardons you, without any respect to your works, either past, present, or to come.

From the words, my brethren, I have now read, I shall

I. Show you who are the weary and heavy laden.

II. Inquire what is meant by coming to Christ. And,

III. Conclude with exhorting you to accept the invitation which the Lord Jesus Christ gives unto you to come unto him, with the assurance of finding rest.

First, I am to show you, who are the weary and heavy-laden.

And here it will be necessary to consider who are not; and then, to consider who they are that are really so.

1. Those who think themselves good enough, and are pleased that they are not so bad as others, these are not weary or heavy laden.

No, these Pharisees are not thus troubled; they laugh and jest at those who talk of feeling their sins, and think there is no occasion to make so much ado about religion: it is to be righteous over-much, and the means to destroy yourselves. They think if they do but mean well, and say their prayers, as they call them, it is sufficient: though they may say a prayer, yea, thousands of prayers, and all the while be only offering up the sacrifice of fools. They may call God, Father, every day, when it is only mocking of God, and offering up false fire unto him; and it would be just for him to serve them, as he did Nadab and Abihu, destroy them, cut them off from the face of the earth: but he is waiting to be gracious, and willing to try a little longer, whether you will bring forth any thing more than the leaven of an outward profession, which is not all that the Lord requires; no, he wants the heart; and unless you honor him with that, he does not regard your mouths, when the other is far from him. You may say over your prayers all your lives, and yet you may never pray over one: therefore, while you flatter yourselves you are good enough, and that you are in a state of salvation, you are only deceiving you own souls, and hastening on your own destruction. Come unto him, not as being good enough, but as vile sinners, as poor, and blind, and naked, and miserable, and then Jesus will have compassion.

O ye Pharisees, what fruits do ye bring forth? Why, you are moral, polite creatures; you do your endeavors, you do what you can, and so Jesus

is to make up the rest. You esteem yourselves fine, rational, and polite beings, and think it is too unfashionable to pray; it is not polite enough: perhaps you have read some prayers, but knew not how to pray from your hearts; no, by no means: that was being righteous over-much indeed.

But when once you are sensible of your being lost, damned creatures, and see hell gaping ready to receive you: if God was but to cut the thread of life, O then, then you would cry earnestly unto the Lord to receive you, to open the door of mercy unto you; your bones would then be changed, you would no more flatter yourselves with your abilities and good wishes; no, you would see how unable you were, how incapable to save yourselves; that there is no fitness, no free will in you; no fitness, but for eternal damnation, no free will but that of doing evil; and that when you would do good, evil is present with you, and the thing that ye would not, that do ye. He knows the secret intent of every heart; and this is a pleasure to you, my dear brethren, who come on purpose to meet with him, though it be a field. And, however some may esteem me a mountebank, and an enthusiast, one that is only going to make you methodically mad; they may breathe out their invectives against me, yet Christ knows all; he takes notice of it, and I shall leave it to him to plead my cause, for he is a gracious Master: I have already found him so, and am sure he will continue so. Vengeance is his, and he will repay it. Let them revile me; let them cast me out of their synagogues, and have my name in reproach, I shall not answer them by reviling again, or in speaking evil against them: no, that is not the Spirit of Christ, but meekness, patience, long-suffering, kindness, &c. Ye Pharisees, who are going about to establish your own righteousness; you, who are too polite to follow the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and truth; you, who are all for a little show, a little outside work; who lead moral, civil, decent lives, Christ will not know you at the great day, but will

say unto you, O ye Pharisees, was there any place for me in your love? Alas! you are full of anger and malice, and self-will; yet you pretended to love and serve me, and to be my people: but, however, I despise you; I, who am God, and knoweth the secret of all hearts; I, who am truth itself, the faithful and true witness, say unto you, "Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity, into that place of torment, prepared for the devil and his angels." Good God! And must these discreet polite creatures, who never did any one harm, but led such civil, decent lives, must they suffer the vengeance of eternal fire? Cannot their righteous souls be saved? Where then must the sinner and the ungodly appear? Where wilt thou, O Sabbath- breaker, appear, thou, who canst take thy pleasure, thy recreation, on the Lord's-day, who refuseth to hear the word of God, who wilt not come to church to be instructed in the ways of the Lord? Where will you, O ye adulterers, fornicators, and such-like of this generation appear? Whoremongers and adulterers God will judge, and them he will condemn. Then you will not call these tricks of youth: no, but you will call on the rocks and the mountains to fall on you, to hide you from the fury and anger of the Lord. Where wilt thou, O man, appear, that takes pleasure in making a mock of sin, who despiseth all reproof, who throws about thy jests as a madman does fire, and asks whether thou art not in sport? Where wilt thou, O man, appear, that makes it thy business to preach against the children of the Most High; thou, who art inventing methods in order to stop the progress of the gospel, and using thy utmost power to quash [squash] the preaching thereof; who art raising of evil reports against the disciple of Christ, and esteemest them madmen, fools, schismatics, and a parcel of rabble? Thou, O man, with all thy letter-learning, wilt surely see the judgment seat of Christ, though, perhaps, sorely against your will; to be cast by him into eternal fire, a place prepared for the devil and his angels. There is a burning tophet kindled by the fury of an avenging God, which will never, never be

quenched. The devil longs to embrace you in his hellish arms, whenever the sentence is past, where you must for ever bear the weight of your sin: there is no redemption then; the day of grace is past; the door of hope is shut; mercy will be no more offered, but you must be shut out from God for ever. O who can dwell with everlasting burnings!

However you may think of hell, indeed it is not a painted fire; it is not an imagination to keep people in awe: then, then you will feel the power of the almighty arm. If you will not lay hold on his golden scepter, he will break you with his iron rod. O ye Pharisees, who are now so good, so much better than others, how will ye stand before Christ, when dressed in his glory as judge? You Arians, may now despise his divinity; then you shall have a proof of it; he will show, that he has all power, and that he was no subordinate God; he will show you that he has all power in heaven and earth; that he was King of kings, and Lord of lords; that he was the mighty God, the everlasting Father; and this power that he has, he will exercise in preserving you to no other end, but to punish you forever. Thus you, who please yourselves with being good enough now, who are not weary and heavy laden with a sense of your sins here, will be weary and heavy laden with a sense of your punishment hereafter.

2. Those, my brethren, are not weary and heavy laden with a sense of their sins, who can delight themselves in the polite entertainments of the age, and follow the sinful diversion of life.

Now they can go to balls and assemblies, play-houses and horse-racing; they have no thought of their sins; they know not what it is to weep for sin, or humble themselves under the mighty hand of God; they can laugh away their sorrows, and sing away their cares, and drive away these

melancholy thoughts: they are too polite to entertain any sad thoughts; the talk of death and judgment is irksome to them, because it damps their mirth; they could not endure to think of their sin and danger; they could not go to a play, and think of hell; they could not go quietly to a masquerade, and think of their danger; they could not go to a ball or an assembly in peace, if they thought of their sins.

And so it is proved, even to a demonstration, that these are not weary and heavy laden: for if they are not thoughtful about their sins, they will never be weary and heavy laden of them. But at the day of judgment all will be over; they shall lose all their carnal mirth, all their pleasure, all their delight will be gone forever.

They will say then of their laughter, it is mad; and of mirth, What dost thou? Their merry conceits, and witty jests against the poor despised people of God, are then over. Their mirth was but as the crackling of thorns under a pot; it made a great blaze and unseemly noise for a while, but it was presently gone, and will return no more.

They think now, that if they were to fast or to pray, and meditate and mourn, they should be righteous over-much, and destroy themselves; their lives would be a continual trouble, and it would make them run mad. Alas, my brethren, what misery must that life be, where there is no more pleasant days, no more balls or plays, no cards or dice, those wasters of precious time, no horse-racing and cock-fighting, from whence no good ever came, unless abusing God Almighty's creatures, and putting them to that use which he never designed them, can be called so. How miserable will your life be, when all your joys are over, when your pleasures are all past, and no more mirth or pastime? Do you think there is one merry heart in hell? One

pleasing countenance? Or jesting, scoffing, swearing tongue? A sermon now is irksome; the offer of salvation, by the blood of Jesus Christ, is now termed enthusiasm; but then you would give thousands of worlds, if in your power, for one tender of mercy, for one offer of grace, which now you so much despise.

Now, you are not weary of your diversions, nor are you heavy laden with the sins, with which they are accompanied; but then you will be weary of your punishment, and the aggravation which attends it. Your cards and dice, your hawks and hounds, and bowls, and your pleasant sports, will then be over. What mirth will you have in remembering your sports and diversions? I would not have you mistake me, and say, I am only preaching death and damnation to you; I am only showing you what will be the consequence of continuing in these sinful pleasures; and if the devil does not hurry you away with half a sermon, I shall show you how to avoid these dangers, which I now preach up as the effect of sin unrepented of. I mention this, lest you should be hurried away by the devil: but be not offended, if I point out unto you more of the terrors which will attend your following these polite and fashionable entertainments of the present age, and of not being weary and heavy laden with a sense of your sins.

They who delight in drinking wine to excess, and who are drunkards, what bitter draughts will they have instead of wine and ale? The heat of lust will be then also abated; they will no more sing the song of the drunkard; no more spend their time in courting their mistresses, in lascivious discourse, in amorous songs, in wanton dalliances, in brutish defilements: no, these are all over; and it will but prick each other to the heart to look one another in the face. Then they will wish, that instead of sinning together, they had prayed together; had frequented religious societies; had

stirred up each other to love and holiness, and endeavored to convince each other of the evil of sin, and how obnoxious they are to the wrath of God; and the necessity of being weary and heavy laden with a sense thereof; that they might have escaped the punishment which they suffer, by their following the sinful and polite diversions of the age they fell into. But as it was against God himself they had sinned, so no less than God will punish them for their offenses: he hath prepared those torments for his enemies; his continual anger will still be devouring of them; his breath of indignation will kindle the flame; his wrath will be a continual burden to their souls. Woe be to him who falls under the stroke of the Almighty!

Thus they are not weary and heavy laden with their sins, who can follow the polite and fashionable entertainments of the age. But,

Secondly, I am to show you what it is to be weary and heavy laden with sins. And

1. You may be said, my brethren, to be weary and heavy laden, when your sins are grievous unto you, and it is with grief and trouble you commit them.

You, who are awakened unto a sense of your sins, who see how hateful they are to God, and how they lay you open to his wrath and indignation, and would willingly avoid them; who hate yourselves for committing them; when you are thus convinced of sin, when you see the terrors of the law, and are afraid of his judgments; then you may be said to be weary of your sins. And O how terrible do they appear when you are first awakened to a sense of them; when you see nothing but the wrath of God ready to fall upon you, and you are afraid of his judgments! O how

heavy is your sin to you then! Then you feel the weight thereof, and that it is grievous to be born.

2. When you are obliged to cry out under the burden of your sins, and know not what to do for relief; when this is your case, you are weary of your sins. It does not consist in a weariness all of a sudden; no, it is the continual burden of your soul, it is your grief and concern that you cannot live without offending God, and sinning against him; and these sins are so many and so great, that you fear they will not be forgiven.

I come, *Secondly*, to show you what is meant by coming to Christ.

It is not, my brethren, coming with your own works: no, you must come in full dependence upon the Lord Jesus Christ, looking on him as the Lord who died to save sinners: Go to him, tell him you are lost, undone, miserable sinners, and that you deserve nothing but hell; and when you thus go to the Lord Jesus Christ out of yourself, in full dependence on the Lord Jesus Christ, you will find him an able and a willing savior; he is pleased to see sinners coming to him in a sense of their own unworthiness; and when their case seems to be most dangerous, most distressed, then the Lord in his mercy steps in and gives you his grace; he puts his Spirit within you, takes away your heart of stone, and gives you a heart of flesh. Stand not out then against this Lord, but go unto him, not in your own strength, but in the strength of Jesus Christ.

And this brings me, *Thirdly*, to consider the exhortation Christ gives unto all of you, high and low, rich and poor, one with another, to come unto him that you may have rest. And if Jesus Christ gives you rest, you may be sure it will be a rest indeed; it will be such a rest as your soul wants; it will be a rest which the world can neither give nor take away. O come all of ye

this night, and you shall find rest: Jesus Christ hath promised it. Here is a gracious invitation, and do not let a little rain hurry you away from the hearing of it; do but consider what the devil and damned spirits would give to have the offer of mercy, and to accept of Christ, that they may be delivered from the torments they labor under, and must do so forever; or, how pleasing would this rain be to them to cool their parched tongues; but they are denied both, while you have mercy offered to you; free and rich mercy to come to Christ; here is food for your souls, and the rain is to bring forth the fruits of the earth, as food for you bodies. Here is mercy upon mercy.

Let me beseech you to come unto Christ, and he will give you rest; you shall find rest unto your souls. O you, my weary, burdened brethren, do but go to Christ in this manner, and though you go to him weary, you shall find rest before you come from him: let not anything short of the Lord Jesus Christ be your rest; for wherever you seek you will be disappointed; but if you do but seek unto the Lord Jesus Christ, there you will find a fullness of every thing which your weary soul wants. Go to him this night; here is an invitation to all you who are weary souls. He does not call you, O Pharisees; not, it is only you weary sinners; and sure you will not stay from him, but accept of his invitation; do not delay; one moment may be dangerous: death may take you off suddenly. You know not but that a fit of the apoplexy may hurry you from time into eternity; therefore, be not for staying till you have something to bring; come in all your rags, in all your filthiness, in all your distresses, and you will soon find Jesus Christ ready to help, and to relieve you; he loves you as well in your rags, as in your best garments; he regards not your dress; no, do but come unto him, and you shall soon find rest for your souls.

What say you? Shall I tell my Master you will come unto him, and that you will accept him on his own terms. Let me, my brethren, beseech you to take Jesus without anything of your own righteousness: for if you expect to mix anything of yourself with Christ, you build upon a sandy foundation; but if you take Christ for your rest, he will be that unto you. Let me beseech you to build upon this rock of ages. O my brethren, think of the gracious invitation, "Come unto me," to Jesus Christ; it is he that calls you; And will you not go?

Come, come unto him. If your souls were not immortal, and you in danger of losing them, I would not thus speak unto you; but the love of your souls constrains me to speak: methinks this would constrain me to speak unto you forever. Come then by faith, and lay hold of the Lord Jesus; though he be in heaven, he now calleth thee. Come, all ye drunkards, swearers, Sabbath-breakers, adulterers, fornicators; come, all ye scoffers, harlots, thieves, and murderers, and Jesus Christ will save you; he will give you rest, if you are weary of your sins. O come lay hold upon him. Had I less love for your souls, I might speak less; but that love of God, which is shed abroad in my heart, will not permit me to leave you, till I see whether you will come to Christ or no. O for your life receive him, for fear he may never call you any more. Behold, the Bridegroom cometh; it may be this night the cry may be made. Now would you hear this, if you were sure to die before the morning light? God grant you may begin to live, that when the king of terrors shall come, you may have nothing to do but to commit your souls into the hands of a faithful Redeemer.

Now to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, be all honor, praises, dominion, and power, henceforth and for evermore.

Amen, Amen.