

Prayer

Heavenly Father and Lord of all,
you have made each one of us with love and care.
Release us from the ever present trap of selfishness
which prevents us from sharing ourselves with others;
May what we have, what we know and who we are
Be shared with those we meet, for the greater good of all
And for our own growth in the Kingdom of God. AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Internet Church

*There are many reasons why some people have difficulty in meeting regularly for worship.
Pray that the internet churches will provide a good service for those who need them.*

On-going prayers

- *Give thanks for small children and the joy they bring families*
- *Pray for important elections around the world, notably in the USA*
- *Pray about the growing divisions between countries in our world*

Meditation

Your work Lord God,

is to bring together what had been undone;
to mend lives that have been broken;
to restore order to what has been shattered;
to heal those who have been suffering;
to bring wholeness to what has been damaged;
to bind up whatever has been torn apart;
to release those who have been bound;
to restore what has been lost or mislaid;
and to complete what has been left undone.

You have been doing this since the beginning of time;
You will continue to do it until the world is completed,
And all things are re-created by You and in You. AMEN

Bible Study - Matthew 11:25-30

²⁵ *Jesus then continued, 'I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to children; ²⁶ Yes, Father, for this is how you have chosen it to be. ²⁷ All things have been handed over to me by my Father. 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.*

²⁸ *'Come to me, all you that are worn down by heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.'*

Review

With these words, Jesus completed what He had to say to the crowds at what proved to be the end of His ministry in the region of Galilee. He needed the disciples to trust Him and move beyond their 'comfort zones'; and by so doing learn much more about their Master and the call both He and they were following. Yesterday we read of Jesus' distress at the rejection He had received from the towns and cities of Galilee, but then He turned heavenwards and prayed. It is one of the few prayers from His own lips recorded for us.

Jesus firstly addressed His Father with thanks, using words from the Old Testament which speak of God's will to hide truth from the 'wise and understanding' and reveal it to 'children'. This reflects Psalm 8 which describes the powerful heavenly effect of the praises of little children; 'You have set Your glory above the heavens ... from the mouths of babes and infants you have founded a bulwark ...'. This is the first hint in Matthew's Gospel of Jesus' appreciation of children, something that appears later in His ministry when He says 'unless you become like little children, you shall not enter the Kingdom ...' (Matt. 18:3), and when He affirms the children who sing 'hosanna' as He enters Jerusalem (Matt. 21:15,16). Jesus perceived that children could sometimes appreciate the things of God far more than worldly adults. However, He was not berating mature wisdom and understanding, because He frequently used this Himself to defeat the Pharisees. Rather, He spoke against those who valued their own wisdom so highly that they were unwilling to consider even the simple and straightforward things of God!

After declaring this to be God's will, Jesus then spoke openly about His relationship with the Father for the first time; 'All things have been handed over to me by the Father. No one knows the Father except the Son ...' (11:27). This continues the earlier theme of the difference between what is hidden and what is revealed; and Jesus made it clear that His relationship with the Father was exclusive and private. However, He adds these essential words to qualify this privacy, saying that the Father may be made known to anyone 'to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him.' (11:27) This places Jesus at the heart of God's plan of salvation; He is the unique source of our knowledge of God!

The final words of this chapter are well known and powerful, and they have given comfort to millions and spoken to the hearts of Christians for centuries. Jesus spoke to invite people to come to Him with words of love and compassion 'Come to me ... take my yoke upon you, and learn from me ... and you will find rest for your souls'. By saying this, Jesus spoke completely openly to all people, issuing a universal call from the heart of God for people to recognise that in Jesus, God was offering the world blessing, salvation, healing and hope!

Around the first century AD, the works of a rabbi named Jesus Ben Sirach were well known and he had said 'come and ... take up wisdom's yoke, so that you may find rest' (Ecclesiasticus 51:23-27 and 6:24-31). But Jesus had just made it clear that God alone was the source of all hope, not wisdom or knowledge, so He changed this well known saying, with some help from Jeremiah 6:16; 'ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls'. Jesus used these famous sayings and added a personal twist to make the famous saying we now know so well; 'come to me ... and I will give you rest'. Note that Jesus does not promise to remove the burdens we bear completely, but to give us a yoke by which we bear our burdens with ease. In this way, we will find that what God requires of us will feel 'light' (11:30). Also, in verse 29, we are told to 'take' the yoke ourselves; Jesus offers His help, but we must want to receive this help, and have the faith to take it.

Two important things come from this saying. Firstly, it is to a 'meek' and 'lowly' Jesus (see the Beatitudes, 5:3-5) to whom we must come to receive the offer of a new and bearable yoke. Secondly, it is not God's intention that we are overburdened by His demands; rather,

that by trusting in Jesus and trusting in what He has to offer, we may find that our burden is made light.

Here is a hint of things to come. Whatever they thought of Jesus' teaching and however they measured up to it, those who followed Jesus had to keep their eyes on Him and follow Him closely if they were to cope with the demands of discipleship and find fulfilment and peace. There was much to come, but in this passage they were being offered a message of peace and hope for the future. It was an essential message for all who first heard Jesus and sought to follow Him. It is essential for us, as well.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. What place does wisdom and intelligence have in the things of faith?
2. Some people say that God may be found through other religions, and we may find the truths Jesus taught, elsewhere. Is possible or not possible, and why.
3. What is meant by the words 'yoke' and 'burden' here in this teaching of Jesus?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

I have always thought that God's 'yoke' was His discipline to which I must submit if I am to do His will. This, of course, is something which is difficult to quantify because it is different for different people; but there is no reason why we cannot recognise this 'yoke' at work in the lives of others, as they seek to do God's will. Indeed, it is important that we do this and so support one another in Christ.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Over a period of time, reflect on what Jesus means by saying 'all things have been handed over to me by the Father'. What does this mean, and what does it mean in terms of what you believe about God and Jesus.*
- *Seek out someone you know in church who is going through a particular burdensome time at the moment. Do everything you can to be of assistance to them, in the name of Christ.*

Final Prayer

We bless You, O Father, Lord of all. You know everything and can move and change the whole world according to Your will. We praise You for the wonderful promise we have of Your assistance and help in every area of our lives. May we always demonstrate our thanks through our faithful love in the service of Your Kingdom. AMEN