

MESSAGE FROM THE MASTER

This is Pastor Wayne Mueller. The following is the Message from the Master sermon broadcast May 25, 2008. The sermon theme is "Cast Your Worry on Jesus" based on Matthew 11:28-30. Part of series: "Cast Your Cares on Jesus."

Remember in grade school art class when your teacher taught you the concept of perspective? She said that in a painting you represent depth and distance by making things different sizes. The farther something is in the distance, the smaller it should appear on your canvass. For instance, a mother who is chasing after her little son may actually appear smaller on a drawing than the six-year-old she is pursuing because she is so far behind him. In the same way large trees outside a window may appear smaller than a small bouquet of flowers on the table in front of the window.

Jesus Christ teaches us the concept of perspective in our spiritual life, that is, in our relationship with God. Things begin to seem unreal to us when they are out of proportion in our thinking and imagination. What should appear larger on our life screen, for instance, the report of our mutual fund balance or the time we give to Bible reading and prayer? What will be more important when this short life ends, the love and service we offered to our fellow believers and to the world, or the amount of things we piled up in our attic and garage? What should loom larger on our list of concerns, our relationship without relatives and neighbors, or our faith relationship with our Savior?

In one respect the world of Jesus' day was just like the world of today. People were overwhelmed with worry of every kind. When Jesus told the parable of the Sower and the Seed, he said that the cares of this life were like weeds which choked out the message of God's word in planted in their hearts. When the crowds came to hear him preach, Jesus commented that they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Today we would rank the Palestine of Jesus' time as a second or even third world country. They were occupied by a foreign power. They were taxed to death. The economy was poor. The church regularly received alms to help the poor. Women were without income and when their husbands died, religious leaders preyed on them by taking away their houses. The people struggled to live up to God's moral law, but their religious leaders sanctimoniously piled all kinds of man-made rules to burden their consciences even more. The average life span was only 42 years.

We live in different times but are burdened by no fewer cares. Did your kids get all their inoculations? What is happening to your daughter's marriage? Will Social Security be around when you need it or will your taxes rise to keep it going? How is the stock market decimating your retirement income? How are you going to be able to keep your

car running or your home heated with the rise in fuel prices? Will terrorism return to our shores? Will violent crime rates, abuse cases, campus shootings, the deterioration of our infrastructure, foreign trade competition, and corrupt politics continue to increase? Will you be thrown out into the street when you can no longer pay your property taxes? Will there be enough health care workers for all the boomers entering retirement? If there are, will be able to afford the health insurance to pay them?

05-26-08 Message for the Master, p2 W. Mueller

Of course, that does not begin to describe our internal spiritual concerns. There is that nagging conscience which never lets us rest. We know that there is a God. We know that he is perfect, holy, and just, and that he will demand an accounting of everything that is unholy and unjust. Our conscience tells us we are on the list to give an account, if not today, someday soon. We can divert ourselves from the cries of our conscience with sports, entertainment, arts and crafts, travel, work and just plain chasing around and buying more stuff. But none of our diversions brings comfort. Eventually, one way or another, God slows us down and we have to look at ourselves as we really are in the mirror of his law.

In polite company we can still smile and mumble that we are “just fine,” but something deep in our soul keeps us from inside happiness. We fear our secret sins will find a way out into the public eye. We see how our lifetime of bad habits takes its toll on both our body and soul. We begin to listen only casually when he sit in the house of God. We make excuses; we put up our defenses; we put off really dealing with what is really wrong with us.

With one of the most beautifully worded invitations in Scripture, Jesus entered the care and worry-filled lives of the people in Palestine. St. Matthew records it in Chapter 11: Jesus said, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 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. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (vv28-30).

With that same repeated invitation Jesus comes to you today. For anyone and everyone who is life-weary and burdened with conscience pangs, this is a beautiful invitation. America is a world leader in science, politics, psychology education, technology, economics, religious freedom and medicine. But none of those things—not one of them!—serves to fix what is really broken in the human psyche. Several years ago a nationwide survey was taken in the United States asking people to list their top five concerns. Over eighty percent of respondents replied that they were most worried about when and how they would die.

This is a remarkable statistic. People’s biggest fear is not gas prices, terrorism, the loss of health care or Social Security, or how their children are faring in adult life. Their

biggest fear was facing their own death. Obviously there is a big hole in our soul that our advanced society, including its generic religious preoccupation is not filling. When people in the great majority say they are afraid to die they mean they are not ready to meet God. They are not ready to give an accounting of their life. They are admitting that they have not yet received in this life what allows them to enter the next life without fear.

Jesus offers to all what most are not getting out of life. Jesus offers himself as the only real filler of the hole in our soul. Just before Jesus spoke his invitation, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened," he said, "No one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (v27). Jesus does not offer science, politics, social activism, health care or even generic religion to the world. Jesus offers himself as the only way to God.

05-26-08 Message for the Master, p3 W. Muel ler

Now I am fully aware that it is not politically, socially, or even religiously correct these days to suggest there is only one way to God. But Jesus said he was, and either it is true or you have to say Jesus Christ a liar. John wrote down Jesus' words to his disciples in the Upper Room just before he went to the cross. Again Jesus said the same thing: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

In spite of Jesus' claim to be the only way to the Father, it is not correct to characterize Christianity as an exclusive religion. The same Jesus made it equally clear that God loves the whole world, that he is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, that he died for all. God's desire to receive all, sinners and saints, without regard to age, color, race, sex or marital status is one of the most repeated teachings of Scripture. The Old Testament prophets said that God does not desire the death of the sinner. Saints Paul and Peter both write that God does not want anyone to be lost, but that all should come to repentance. Paul wrote that there is no difference between Jew and Greek, slave or free, male or female, for we are all the children of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

Jesus' invitation in Matthew is also all-inclusive. He extends his invitation to ALL who are weary and burdened. The perception that Christianity is exclusive cannot be laid at the doorstep of God who proclaims that he so loves the world. It cannot be charged to Jesus Christ who demonstrated God's love by dying for all. The only way in which exclusivity can be attached to Christianity is when people willingly and knowledgably exclude themselves from Christ. God excludes no one from his grace in Jesus Christ. But many exclude themselves, then blame God for being exclusive.

Why is Jesus the only way to God? Because nobody and nothing else works to win our way to God and heaven. People who try to earn their way to heaven only burden

themselves with more uncertainty and doubt about whether they have ever done enough. Jesus said, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and wither; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned" (John 15:5,6). Yes, God wants people to do good. But first he wants us in faith attached to Jesus and trust in him for salvation. If our good deeds are moved by the love of Jesus, they testify to our faith and please God. If we do our good deeds to try to please God by ourselves, we will end in ruin.

That's what Jesus means when he says, "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (v29). The burden we bear when we come to Jesus is the humility to admit we cannot come to God by our own efforts. The yoke we wear is our ongoing confession of our unworthiness to stand before God. The burden and yoke of Jesus is light because it is the yoke, if you can call it that, of faith. When the Holy Spirit leads us to humble confession of sins, he immediately lifts the real burden and yoke of life which is the guilt, the doubt, the punishment, and the anguish of conscience. The burden of humility and trust, if you can call it that, of coming to Jesus, is immediately lifted and replaced with the confidence that all our sins are forgiven, we are God's children, and we will go to heaven.

04-27-08, Message for the Master, p4 W. Mueller

Life already on this earth is different when all our cares are put on Jesus. Isaiah prophesied of the coming Jesus, "Surely he has borne our grief and carried our sorrows, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53). Sin, St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians is the sting of death. When our sins are placed on Jesus, the sting, the worry, the fear of death is gone.

This is Jesus' own invitation to see life from the perspective of the peace he brings. When he takes our sins away, he takes away our fear of death and dying. Heaven is a gift of God through his Son Jesus Christ. When heaven is certain through Jesus, the other cares and concerns in life are smaller: they fade into the background of our life's picture. In the portrait of the believer that God paints, Jesus is up in front of the painting, holding us by the hand and heart. Worries about money, in-laws, politics, health care, and everything else are much smaller, way in the background. Oh, yes, they are still there, but no longer to de crowd out the big picture: God loves us; Jesus died for our sins; we are going to heaven. Paul stated it very simply for the Roman Christians: If God is for us, who can be against us!

When our Lord Jesus visited the house of his dear friends, Mary and Martha, he found it necessary at one point to lovingly rebuke Martha for her busy-ness. Martha, Martha, he

said, you are busied and worried about many things. But one thing is needful. And Mary has chosen that better thing. Now that is the perspective Jesus invites you and me to see. May the Holy Spirit put Jesus and his invitation up from and large in our lives, and watch as our other cares fade into the background. Amen.

PRAYER

Thank you, Jesus, for your gracious invitation put to all our cares upon you. Your humility, your perfect life, and your innocent life brings us true and complete forgiveness and rest for our souls. Grant us your Holy Spirit to see you and your love as the only way to God. Fill our lives with thankful good works. Help us to love our neighbor as you have loved us. Keep us bold in the spirit of the victory of your resurrection. And hear us as we also pray in your name:

THE LORD'S PRAYER

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name, your kingdom come,
your will be done on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,
now and ever. Amen.**