

## Come to Me!<sup>1</sup>

Christians in all ages have puzzled over why some people are willing to drop everything in their lives in order passionately to take up with Jesus, while others appear indifferent to faith. That very puzzlement is a theme of Matthews' eleventh and twelfth chapters. The eleventh chapter begins with John the Baptist expressing doubts about Jesus asking, "Are you the one?" Jesus talks about people who reject both John and Jesus. He moves on to name cities where Jesus had visited and even performed miracles. Yet nevertheless these places had bland reactions to Jesus.

Following our lesson we see stark differences in peoples' reaction to Jesus. Sick and demon-possessed people come to Jesus desperate for his touch. And the religion leaders reveal that they can hardly tolerate Jesus.

Maybe you've wrestled with the mystery of differing responses to Jesus. The significance of Jesus Christ simply grabs some people and changes their lives. Others are indifferent. They may be in a strong church-going family and community. They get dragged to church. But nothing is happening. They're always looking for the exit. When mom and dad's social pressure eases, they're gone. Another might be

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<sup>1</sup>Douglas DeCelle preached this sermon on July 6, 2008 at the First Presbyterian Church of LaGrange, Georgia.

brought up in a thoroughly non-Christian environment and still manages to get in contact with Christians, faith, and the church.

Jesus' remarks in our lesson shed profound light on this mystery.

Jesus begins by saying that a certain attitude will forever block one from receiving the riches of a relationship with him and the life he gives. The attitude is the one where some say deep in his heart, "I've got this figured out." Life may be a mystery to weak people—but not me. I knew that I want thank you. I'm certainly smart enough to manage my own being, navigate by my own compass, take my licks, and stand tall.

Paul Anka's song, "My Way" sung by Frank Sinatra is a winsome anthem to the attitude Jesus is talking about. Listen to the last verse:

For what is a man, what has he got?  
If not himself, then he has naught  
To say the things he truly feels and  
Not the words of one who kneels  
The record shows I took the blows  
And did it my way

You may be thinking what I sometimes think, "Hey, I really like the "my way" credo." And that gives us a sense of the attractiveness of doing life "my way," and the depth of Jesus' challenge. People who've got it all worked out don't get what Jesus came to give.

Who does? Beginners. Babes in our translation. *Napioi* is the Greek word which means learners. There's a wonderful wisdom about not being so sophisticated and self-sufficient. Because God has hidden his treasure from the wise and understanding and given it to *napioi*—the clueless. Kids of all ages.

Why are the wise and understanding penalized spiritually? That leads to a second principle in operation in this text. Why do the unwise and unsophisticated get the treasure? Because full life is God's gift not our achievement.

I knew a man who actually was a natural musician. He could, as they say, play anything. Played by ear. Every song was played at a C+ level. Every song sounded like every other song. The melody was there. Harmony was a cliché. Obviously, the missing element was instruction—guidance and benefit from the musical discoveries of generations of musicians.

Transfer this to life. Some people have natural ability in life. We're smart, good-looking, have charm, and the advantages of wealth and living in an advanced culture. But in comparison to the depth and quality of what God intends life to be for us, the self-made person is going to live at the level of spiritual mediocrity. C+. We need instruction and companionship from outside in order to realize what we're created to be.

Listen again to our text: "All things have been delivered to me by my Father, and 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.

Think of an old-fashioned glass oil lamp. The lamp is quite attractive in its own right—even if it is never lit. But an oil lamp is intended to be filled with fuel and lit and able to illuminate a whole room.

You and I are like that. Our essential purpose and beauty is to be filled with God's presence and beauty which causes our being to illuminate the whole house. On our own there is an essential attractiveness and beauty, even genius. But that's not the point. The point is that we receive and radiate what only God gives us.

So, how do we not miss the principle of partnering with God, receiving from him, and living as he intended. By coming to Jesus. "Come to me, you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest."

A powerful depiction of this verse is the story of the Dollmaker by Appalachian novelist, Harriett Arnow. The novel traces the migration of a backwoods family to Detroit and jobs in the auto factories. In the grim city, life is drained of its soul and dignity. The culminating loss is when one of the children is killed by a train. Now Gertie, the mother, is a skilled wood carver and her most prized possession is a huge block of cherry which she intends to be a bust of Jesus. She

makes a bold decision. She has a cabinet maker saw up the marvelous head of Christ into little blocks from which Gertie carves toys and what-nots. With the money she earns, she buys back their truck, and they return to Kentucky.

I'm guessing that when our lives are a mess and we realize that all of our wisdom and phony understanding is digging us deeper and deeper in struggle and bondage, this is precisely the time when we see in Jesus a fresh start.

Have you ever been in that place? Things may seem fine on the exterior of your life. But in a deep place you know that being your own god, doing it your way, has been a fundamental mistake.

When someone visits me and we talk about how life is going for that person, it almost never fails that Jesus' Spirit and the wisdom of his teachings looms up. You know when your marriage or your working life comes undone; or when you keep making the same stupid mistake and repeatedly destroy relationships, or when life is utter chaos or you suddenly don't care about anything, these words make deep sense.

Imagine this, the one who has been given all the riches of life from the Father invites you over to his life to share them with you! Isn't it something that when you least deserve God's treasure, that is when you must be able to receive it. Come, Jesus invites us, to me."

I believe that each of us will have confronted God's word for us when we see each of the elements in this lesson as applying directly to our lives. You and I will never inherit the treasure of abundant life as long as we're so self-assured in life to think we've got life figured out. Our lives were never intended to be lived apart from a partnership with the one who made us. And it is Jesus who grants all that the Father has to give. Life is a gift, living richly and above mediocrity is even more a gift.

Finally, and thankfully, the invitation to receive stands. Come to me. It's not a philosophy or a puzzle. It's not something that the rich and clever grab because they're rich and clever. It's a relationship with Jesus Christ. Come to me.