

The Insult of Being a Disciple of Jesus

Thomas Robinson, *Following or Rejecting Jesus*, 3, October 6, 2013

Matthew 11:25-30 [Cf *Luke 10:21-22*]

²⁵ At that time Jesus responding declared,

“I thank (agree with) you, **Father**, Lord of heaven and earth,
that you have **hidden** these things from the **wise and understanding**
and **revealed** them to **little children**;

²⁶ yes, Father, for such was **your gracious will**.

²⁷ All things have been handed over to me by **my Father**,
and no one knows/recognizes the **Son** except the **Father**,
and no one knows/recognizes the **Father** except the **Son**
and **anyone** to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

²⁸ **Come to me**, all who labor hard and are burdened, and I will give you rest.

²⁹ Take **my yoke** upon you, and **learn from me**,
for I am **gentle and lowly** in heart,
and you will *‘find rest for your souls.’*

³⁰ For my **yoke is good**, and my **burden is light**.”

Matthew 11:2-3

² Now when John heard in prison about **the deeds of the Messiah**, he sent word by his disciples

³ and said to him, *“Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?”*

Matthew 9:35-36

³⁵ And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. ³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because **they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd**.

Isaiah 53:1-2

¹ Who has believed what he has heard from us? And **to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?** ² For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and **no beauty that we should desire him**.

Isaiah 57:15

¹⁵ For thus says the **One who is high and lifted up**, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: “I dwell in the high and holy place, and also **with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit**, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite.”

Jeremiah 6:16

¹⁶ Thus says the LORD: “Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the **ancient paths**, where the **good way** is; and **walk in it**, and **find rest for your souls**.”

But they said, “We will not walk in it.”

1 Corinthians 1:26-29

²⁶ For consider your calling, brothers: **not many of you were wise** according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. ²⁷ But **God chose what is foolish** in the world to shame the wise; **God chose what is weak** in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸ **God chose what is low** and despised in the world, even **things that are not**, to bring to nothing things that are, ²⁹ so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

Matthew 18:1-4

¹ At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” ² And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them ³ and said, “Truly, I say to you, unless you **turn and become like children**, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ Whoever humbles himself like this child is the **greatest in the kingdom of heaven**.”

God's Strange Way of Revelation

A remarkable and loved passage! Especially Jesus' invitation in vv 28-30. But also what Jesus says about his relationship to the Father encapsulates the intimacy expressed in 'Abba.' It begins with a prayer of affirmation to God for his ways of revealing himself (25-26). Then a declaration of Jesus' relation to God and that revelation (27). Finally the invitation for the burdened to take Jesus' yoke and find rest (28-30). But there is an edge to all of it.

Remember that the chap. begins with John's question about Jesus: "Are you the one to come?" Jesus warns against "being offended" by him. He talks about how most people saw John as a prophet, but too much: "He has a demon." They saw Jesus eating with tax-collectors and sinners and called him "a glutton and a drunkard." The cities of Galilee loved his healings and mighty works, but not enough to change their way of thinking. They were smart, no fools. Things had to be built on the solid rock of power: Rome & Herod or forces to overthrow them. Jesus' talk of loving enemies, rejecting anger, second mile, not judging – that was sand.

Jesus affirms this pattern in prayer. Each person is choosing to judge Jesus or follow him, but it's more. The way God shows himself in Jesus' ministry – God's inbreaking kingdom – seems strange, even laughable to anyone who knows how things really work. No real kingdom there! "The wise" – an honored term, trained in Torah and wisdom – don't see it. It's not as expected. Only little children see it! Jesus leaves us to ponder what that means. Not a term of praise for a savvy, self-determined adult. The stakes are high – myself. I judge Jesus. I reveal myself.

Seeing God as Jesus Sees

Jesus' declaration is challenging in context. John asked "Are you the one?" Jesus said, "Look, listen." Everything I'm doing – those 'deeds of the Messiah' – are what the Father has given me. Even John may not recognize me as Messiah, God's son, but God recognizes me. In Jesus' actions he was embodying God's purpose and will, giving definition to who God is.

It works the other way also. Jesus says, don't think you know God and evaluate me by that supposed knowledge. The Son/Messiah recognizes God's true reality by living, acting, teaching from that reality. Every competing understanding of God is evaluated by whether it fits with what Jesus said and did. Look at Jesus. You see yourself. You can see God.

It is easy to understand why many religious teachers as well as people whose lives and reality were defined by their power, class, profession, wealth, etc., found Jesus hard to deal with. Can I listen & watch and let Jesus redefine God and reality away from my old conceptions? Can I be a little child, wide-eyed, expectant, open to learn, ready for adventure, growing?

Invitation to an Unexpected Discipleship

Jesus invites! The invitation is for adults. Those laboring hard and burdened. Our first thought is of the poor, the struggling, the oppressed. Yes. Jesus invites all. But his language reaches deep into the burdens and yokes of all kinds of people, from the powerful to lowly. Ultimately human brokenness weighs down on all of us. We push for freedom from God, but find ourselves under loads of broken relationships, anger, alienation, hopelessness, anxiety, greed that can't be satisfied, violence, addiction, sexual brokenness, loneliness, etc.

Jesus says, "Take my yoke." Yes, it's a yoke. The life you are called to in the Sermon on the Mount. A life that always calls you beyond where you are to what God created you to be. But it's a yoke from me. Learning from me. I am gentle. I know your burdens. I am God's Grace. The yoke is Good! You will find both the goodness and the rest that God gives.