

Afternoon sermon, preached by MR H. DAWSON (Pastor, Union Chapel, Bethersden) at Providence Chapel, Cranbrook, on Sunday 20th February 1949

"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"—Matthew 11 : 28

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What a great mercy it will be if you and I are made by Divine teaching the character this word is addressed unto. To be one who is born again; one who is numbered with the living in Jerusalem. I wonder how many among us are concerned about an interest in eternal realities. The Word of God is very solemn about this all-important matter: "Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matthew 7 : 14). You and I are journeying through life to an eternal destiny, either to heaven or hell; it must be one of the two. Many, alas, do not see it to be a matter of such importance, and treat it lightly, or ignore it, but that does not alter the reality of it. You and I are dying people with never-dying souls. Where will you—where shall I spend eternity?

"As long as God shall God remain,
So long shall last hell's lingering pain;
So long the joys of heaven shall be—
O long delight! long misery!"

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I would like, as the Lord shall help me, to say a little more about the character this word is addressed unto. "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." I said this character is one made alive in things Divine. There is one special characteristic about this labour that I would mention. Looking upon it as indicating soul travail it is cheering to remember that travail (as every mother understands that word) is the only pain known on earth that issues in *life*, every other pain ultimately ends in death. The very intensity of the mother's pains are to issue in life, and not unto death. "The labour of the righteous tendeth unto life," says Solomon, or rather Solomon's God. If some poor sinners among you should be helped to think upon that simple statement it may help such to take courage and hope in God. Those spiritual pangs of mind, questionings, hopes and fears, "ifs", "buts", and "hows", that rend you, and cause you soul trouble at times are to issue, not in death—no!—but in life.

As I have said, it is a picture of a sinner burdened by sin. You may be sure if God has given you and me a religion that He is the Author of it will be a weighty matter indeed when exercised aright. Yes, you will be conscious of a burden concerning your soul and the salvation of it. Some of you this Sabbath afternoon *are* weighted, and the reason is the great question is not yet put out of question in your soul's experience. You hardly know what you are, or where you are, regarding your interest in the things of God, therefore you are labouring under many solemn apprehensions and uncertainties about your state before God. You do want something from God to assure you matters are right between Him and you. What is it you want. There is one word which sums the matter up. *Rest*. You want to rest in the Lord, and rejoice in His salvation.

"My heart is pained, nor can it be
At rest till I find rest in Thee."

This is labour such as our text refers to. "Come unto Me, all ye that labour". You look this way and that, and feel like the dove, who could find no rest for the sole of her foot outside Noah's Ark; and you are restless in your soul having no sure evidence as yet you do belong to the people of God. You can echo the hymn writer's words:

"In the Ark a weary dove,
Found a welcome resting-place;
Thus my spirit longs to prove
Rest in Christ—the Ark of grace."

This experience is to teach you a great and most necessary truth:

"None but Jesus
Can do helpless sinners good."

It is to such as you the Saviour speaks these gracious words: "Come unto Me, just as you are, all ye that labour and I will allay your fears, and confirm you with My Spirit's witness that you are born of God; I will give you rest." "I have it to give you, poor sinner, peace for your restless heart, relief for your troubled mind, ease for your guilty conscience—a wondrous calm beyond words to describe. I will *give* you rest."

Again, sometimes there is a labour concerning our profession of

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the Name of Jesus which many of us have made. It may be your name has been on the Church roll for a long time. You can recall the early dealings of God with you, when you were favoured to walk in the light of His Countenance, rejoicing in hope. Many in God's dear family can remember when they were so blest of Him, but now they are being reminded of such a word as this: "The days of darkness shall be many." Some of you may be saying even now: How glad I should be if I could only feel as I used to do years ago, when I felt liveliness in the ways of God. You look back to those days as good days, happy days, when you lived near to God, and you moved among His people feeling you belonged to them, and the future looked so promising. Many days have passed since then, and perhaps it may be said of you, and of me, as was said of the Church of Ephesus in the latter days of the Apostle John: "I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love" (Revelation 2). The things of God nowadays are not as they once were with us, and this brings about a labour. "O that I knew where I might find Him," said Job long ago; and you say so too. "As for my hope, who shall see it?" was another lament of Job's, and you can understand it also. Poor sinner, the Saviour says: "Come unto Me", and may you be helped to venture, as the dear woman in the Gospel, who said: "If I may but touch the hem of His garment, I shall be made whole." Is not that how you feel, you want your past experience renewed, and revived, and confirmed; you need another token for good, yea, you want the Lord Jesus to smile upon you. What does He say? "Come unto Me, all ye who have lost the joy of your past experience. I will restore to you the joy of your salvation." "And ye now therefore have sorrow, but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice" (John 16 : 22). "Come unto Me." There is a word in Joel's prophecy which Jesus makes good in a Gospel sense: "And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the canker-worm, and the caterpillar, and the palmer-worm, my great army which I sent among you" (Joel 2 : 25). Though, like Moses of old, you have dwelt long at the backside of the desert, the Lord will put His hand a second time to the work He has begun in you.

"All thy wastes I will repair—
Thou shalt be rebuilt anew;
And in thee it shall appear
What a God of love can do."

"Come unto Me, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Darkness of mind is a sad, a burdensome condition. Sometimes godly people have what physicians term a nervous breakdown, but physicians of earth are useless when it arises from soul trouble. It is then that Jesus is needed as Jehovah-Rophi—"The Lord that healeth thee." If a poor sinner breaks down in health through soul trouble the healing touch of the Good Physician is needed, and when it is known and felt, and the wondrous Balm of Gilead relieves the labouring soul, you will then be able to say: "I am quite well, thank you" when someone inquires: "How are you?"

This darkness of mind is referred to by Isaiah the prophet, and

shows that believers in those days had to labour in the same exercise of mind. "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of His servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? Let him trust in the Name of the Lord, and stay upon his God" (Isaiah 50 : 10). This sets forth one who has some religion that is of God and has a name enrolled in a Church book; he has obeyed the voice of God's servant, as proclaimed in the Gospel ("If ye love Me, keep My commandments"), yet he walks in darkness, and he has no light to see the dealings of God with him clearly. A painful path to tread, with no bright inshining, or shedding abroad of the love of God. Something like the hymn writer puts it:

"Some small glimmering light I have,
Yet too dark to see my way;
Jesus' Presence still I crave—
When, oh when will it be day?"

How the poor sinner labours to see light in God's light. Some of you know what such labour is. You read the Word of God; you look up your favourite chapters it may be; you look at this promise and that which have helped you in bygone experiences, but no light seems to shine upon the sacred pages. You try to pray, and have to say with Jeremiah: "Also when I cry and shout, he shutteth out my prayer" (Lam. of Jeremiah 3 : 8), thus you are much in the dark in drawing near to the Throne of grace. Sometimes you go aside and try to pray, and have to give up trying. I venture to say that when you did turn aside, feeling such a tumult within that you could not put your thoughts into words, there was more prayer going up before God than you realized. Blessed be God, He will not pass it by. "He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer" (Psalm 102 : 17). In this dark experience you may go to the house of prayer, week in, and week out, but you get nothing special—no light; you hear the Gospel with approval, but cannot say as Jeremiah did: "Thy words were found, and I did eat them, and Thy Word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart" (Jeremiah 15 : 16). When did you last get what you term "a good hearing"—something special? Some of you may say: "Alas, it seems such a long while since I had anything outstanding in the dealings of God with me." Yes, and you have to labour under the consciousness of it, and how kindly the Lord Jesus encourages you here. "Come unto Me, all ye that labour under a sense of darkness of mind, and have no light; all ye who desire to be right with God, and have many fears and faintings as to whether you are numbered with My dear people, or no. Come unto Me." Some of us who are getting older know that the grave is getting nearer, and we wonder if indeed all that is mortal of us will be laid therein in "sure and certain hope of a joyful resurrection". Is that *your* case? The Lord bless you wherever you may be. He says to you: "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

I first came into this pulpit many years ago, and I have been in it many times during my ministerial life, and, as I look around I have many solemn reflections. How many friendly faces of hearers I remember, who are now missing from the pews. A goodly number who

once were true worshippers in this house of prayer have gone the way of all the earth, and we would thank God that we believe their redeemed spirits are before His throne, rejoicing with joy unspeakable, and full of glory. Some of us older ones, as we lose our friends one by one, ponder in our hearts that we too in a little while shall be missing from the place that has known us so long. And the great thing is this: Do you and I possess a well-grounded hope that we are "Followers of them who through faith and patience have inherited the promises" ? (Hebrews 6 : 12). Are we heaven bound pilgrims ? Can we sing:

"We are travelling home to God,
In the way our fathers trod;
They are happy now, and we
Hope their happiness to see" ?

Do you remember how John Bunyan in his book *Pilgrim's Progress*, describes Christian and Hopeful entering the Celestial City ? Good John says that he watched their joyful ascent up to the city gates, and saw the wonderful welcome they received as the gates were opened to let them in; and while the gates were open, he goes on to say in his pithy way: "I looked in after them, and behold, the City shone like the sun"; and he beautifully describes the happiness of those who dwelt therein, and then aptly sums up his feelings: "which when I had seen, *I wished myself among them*". And so do some of you, and so do I; but you must remember such characters as are typified by Bunyan's pilgrims often labour long in life's journey against sins and doubts and fears ere they enter into the rest referred to in the text, which is an earnest of the rest awaiting the redeemed in glory. If you only get it in life's latest hours, poor sinner, it will be worth waiting for. "Blessed are all they that wait for Him" (Isaiah 30).

Many of the people of God labour well-nigh all their life time to possess sure, clear-cut evidence that they are indeed numbered with such a blessed people, because they dare not take it for granted. What they desire is this ? "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that *we* are the children of God" (Romans 8 : 16). I should not be surprised if some of you grey-headed friends are not yet as well-grounded as to your interest in the salvation of God as you would like to be. God grant you grace to be like the wise builder the Saviour spoke about, who digged deep, and built his house on a sure foundation. You will remember how it was tested. "And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock" (Matthew 7 : 25). Oh that Jesus would say to some of you, as He alone can say it: "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Much might be said about these characters and their burdened state, but I would like to say a little as to the words of our text being so applicable to our everyday life, and carrying our daily cross. If you are taught of God you will not find it easy to do as the Lord Jesus said: "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me" (Luke 9 : 23).

This means much more than being baptized, and making a profession of Jesus' Name. No, that is, as it were, but the opening of the door to walk out such a profession when it is made. If you and I are taught of God, we have our daily cross to take up and it will mean labour to take it up *willingly*, inasmuch as what one is by nature resents it. Every godly mother has her cross, every godly father too has his cross, often made heavy by the responsibilities of parenthood. Your cross may be in your business life, or in your family circle; whatever your cross is, it is chosen by Him who is infinite in wisdom, and you will need Divine aid, and labour to obtain it, to carry your cross willingly, and take it up voluntarily. "Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power" (Psalm 110 : 3). It is a sweet and blessed experience when we are enabled to take up our cross, and bear it willingly for Jesus' sake, as well as our own. I would like you to think about that aspect of truth. The Saviour says here: "Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls" (Matthew 11 : 29). To what purpose do you grumble about this or that in your everyday life which your flesh dislikes, your cross, and the nature of it. While you are in such a rebellious frame you will indeed be *restless*, miserable, cast down, and of the earth, earthy. Says Jesus: "Come unto Me, all ye that labour thus, and yet would be godly." How different one feels when grace is given to say something like our hymn writer does:

"Lord, I would indeed submit,
Gladly yield my all to Thee;
What Thy wisdom sees most fit,
Must be surely best for me."

You will then feel it to be an honour, a privilege, to be singled out to carry a cross that Jesus Christ has chosen for you, and which by His sanctifying grace is to be overruled for your eternal good.

"Shall Simon bear the cross alone,
And all the rest go free ?
There is a cross for all God's own—
There is a cross for thee."

Much might be said along such a line of thought.

Referring again to our text: "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." You will find it a labour indeed to *come* aright in your burdened state, and often you will not be able to put your feelings into words, and this will be a trial for you. "I would, but cannot pray," you will say, but you must not judge prayer to be always expressed in words. No !

"Prayer is the soul's sincere desire,
Uttered, or unexpressed;
The motion of a hidden fire
That trembles in the breast."

It is coming unto God with a sigh, a cry, a groan, a tear, a longing, a wish; but coming honestly to Him who is the Light of the world that matters may be made right between Him and you. "Come unto Me," says Jesus, "just as you are." Yes,

"Pray, if thou canst, or canst not speak,
But pray with faith in Jesus' Name."

What an invitation this is. "Come unto Me as the Sinner's Friend; I have spoken exceeding great and precious promises to encourage you; I have shed My precious blood to cleanse you; I have righteousness to clothe you; Come unto Me, I am able to save, I am Omnipotent, I am God Incarnate, a just God, and a Saviour too."

Come, poor sinners, and venture to Him, in the same way as Esther went in unto the Eastern king: "I will go in unto the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish." (Esther 4 : 16). This is good counsel, dear friends, especially if you remember that if you venture to go to Jesus, as He reigns on the throne of grace, it is *according to the Gospel that you should do so*. "Come unto Me." The Lord help us to heed such a kind word, and such help He is so ready to give. "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him" (Luke 11 : 13). He can give you grace according unto your need, even grace to feel your need of it. "Him that cometh unto Me, I will in nowise cast out" (John 6 : 37). Who can tell the encouragement there is in such a word to poor burdened sinners!

If you were asked to give your thoughts of the world at large nowadays, or, more especially, the people round about where you live, surely you would declare there is no word so applicable to mankind as the word *restless*. How evident it is "For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's" (Philippians 2 : 21); and how true "They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh" (Romans 8 : 5). On every side worldly folk are seen seeking their pleasures from some earthly source—the pictures, the theatre, the public house, the sporting field, the dance, the card pack, the novel, wireless and television, and many more so-called pleasures—hither and thither the worldling goes. Do they find contentment, peace, rest, happiness worth the name? No; no! Such as these are not to be found in any earthly source; these realities are they which a man cannot receive except it be given him from heaven (John 3 : 27). "Come unto Me," says Jesus; "I alone can give you rest." Poor sinner, it is to be found at Calvary's cross, and if you are brought there, and by living faith "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world" you will know such rest. You will rest in the Lord, and in what He has done for you, which it is impossible for you to do for yourself, and sweet your rest will be. You will say:

"How it *was* done we can't discuss,
But this we know, 'twas done for us."

It is a rest in the finished work of Jesus Christ; to rest in the life He lived for you, and find therein your righteousness wrought out to fit you for the skies; to rest in the death He died in your stead for you, and feel "Christ died for our sins"; to rest in what He is still doing for you as He appears in the Presence of God on behalf of poor sinners like you. It is a sweet feeling to realize at times: "For He shall stand at the right hand of the poor, to save him from those that would condemn his soul" (Psalm 109 : 31). Remember, poor sinner, He is able to save them that labour and are heavy laden to

the uttermost that come unto God by Him, for He ever liveth to make intercession for them. "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2 : 1).

Says Jesus: "I will give you rest". Wonderful promise, and known most of all in the forgiveness of sins—rest in one's conscience, feeling the peace of God therein. Listen to the blessed experience described by Jeremiah: "In those days, and in that time, saith the Lord, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, *and there shall be none*; and the sins of Judah, *and they shall not be found*: for I will pardon them whom I reserve" (Jeremiah 50 : 20). A wonderful time in a poor sinner's life which I hope some of you can look back upon; a time when you realized:

"Peace, perfect peace, in this dark world of sin;
The blood of Jesus whispers—peace within."

"When I see the blood, I will pass over you" (Exodus 12 : 13); thus is proved: "I will give you rest."

I would also mention that leading up to this rest there is a resting by faith in the promises of God—a hope which has been wrought in our souls by some word which has inspired us to believe the Lord will appear on our behalf. One hymn writer sums it up well:

"Rest in the promise God hath spoke,
In all things ordered well for thee;
His sacred word He'll ne'er revoke,
Nor alter His Divine decree."

It is establishing to one's soul to be helped to rest in the purposes of God concerning us. Nothing comes into your life, or mine, by chance. If you can by the grace of God believe that truth it will rest your restless mind. "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and he delighteth in his way" (Psalm 37 : 23); "The lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord" (Proverbs 16 : 33). Rest in the sweet assurance:

"All my times are in Thy hand—
All events at Thy command";

"Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him," and He will surely give you light upon your way.

A further opening up of this truth is to be helped to rest in the will of God for us, a needful everyday exercise of mind. I cannot say much about it, but I hope I do know a little of what such rest is. I have found it a hard lesson to learn, when I have been laid aside by affliction from time to time, that God is as much glorified when I do *not* preach, as when I try to do so. God does not *depend* on any servant of His, but He carries on His work irrespective of this worker or that. Every man sent to preach with Divine authority learns to say "Amen" to such a great truth, and can only do so as this blessed rest is imparted to him, then he can say: "The will of the Lord be done," whatever His will may be. I have often thought the words "God willing", printed on our announcement bills, ought to be in the largest letters thereon for only what God is willing should be done is worth doing, as this alone brings Him the glory that is His due. Out of such a sweet experience arises this conclusion: "It is the Lord, and let Him do what seemeth Him good"

(1 Samuel 3 : 18). Rest in the wisdom of His dealings with you, though they seem hard to be understood.

"Let but my fainting heart be blest
With Thy sweet Spirit for its Guest;
O God, to Thee I'd leave the rest—
Thy will be done."

I feel persuaded some of you heaven-bound pilgrims are not strangers to the rest our text refers to. Here a little, and there a little, you have realized it; and if you and I have ever known a little, it is, as it were, an earnest of the rest that will be known in an infinite fullness in the realms of bliss above. "There remaineth therefore a rest (a keeping of the Sabbath) for the people of God" (Hebrews 4 : 9). And if you and I are given an interest in this beautiful Gospel word: "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," then at the end of life's journey we shall hear another "Come". If it could be possible (and maybe it is) it will be even ten thousandfold more melodious in our ears than whatever you have rejoiced to hear that the Gospel proclaims. It is this: "Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25 : 34). Then it will be known, and not till then, what this word fully means: "I will give you rest."

"Sweet as home to pilgrims weary,
Light to newly-opened eyes;
Flowing springs in deserts dreary,
Is the rest the cross supplies;
All who taste it
Shall to rest immortal rise."

The Lord help you to think on these things. *Amen.*