



Week 1: The Heart of Christ

Based on “Gentle & Lowly” by Dane Ortlund
NCAC Adult Sunday School
January 16, 2022

“Christ’s own joy, comfort, happiness and glory are increased and enlarged by...”

What are some ways we might finish that statement?

“Jesus doesn’t want us to draw on his grace and mercy only because it vindicates his atoning work. He wants us to draw on his grace and mercy because it is who he is. He drew near to us in the incarnation so that his joy and ours could rise and fall together—his in giving mercy, ours in receiving it.” (Gentle and Lowly, p. 37)

Course Goal: To reflect on not just what Jesus has done or is doing, but on who he *is*—and to then find encouragement, strength and rest as we delight in the deepest affections of Christ for his people.

Want to Read Along? *Gentle and Lowly: The Heart of Christ for Sinners and Sufferers* by Dane Ortlund (Crossway, 2020)

- January 16: Chapters 1-5
- January 23: Chapters 6-9
- January 30: Chapters 10-14
- February 6: Chapters 15-18
- February 13: Chapters 19-23

“This is a book about the heart of Christ. Who is he? Who is he really? What is most natural to him? What ignites within him most immediately as he moves toward sinners and sufferers? What flows out most freely, most instinctively?...There will be a fairly natural progression through the book from chapter to chapter, though not so much as a logically building argument but rather looking at the single diamond of Christ’s heart from many different angles.” (G&L, pp. 13, 15)

From the one place in Scripture where Jesus opens up to us his very heart:

“²⁸ Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, 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 easy, and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30, ESV)

Who is Jesus calling out to in these verses? How well do you identify with this group?

What is Jesus calling us to do? What's another way of saying this? What does this require of us?

A yoke was used to link two oxen together so they could pull an object, often a plow. Jesus says, "My yoke is easy" (v. 30). The Greek word translated "easy" could be translated "kind" or "good." Given this, what does Jesus mean when he says, "My yoke is easy"? What does he not mean?

To those who come to Jesus, he promises "rest for your souls" (v. 29). What does this look like?

Jesus says, "I am gentle and lowly in heart" (v. 29). When the Bible speaks of the heart, it is speaking of the center of who we are. Our heart is what defines us, what directs us, and what drives us. When Jesus exposes his heart to us, what he tells us is that at his innermost being, he is "gentle and lowly."

***Gentle:** The Greek word translated "gentle" here occurs just three other times in the New Testament: in the first beatitude, that "the meek" will inherit the earth (Matt. 5:5); in the prophecy in Matthew 21:5 (quoting Zech. 9:9) that Jesus the king "is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey"; and in Peter's encouragement to wives to nurture more than anything else "the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit" (1 Pet. 3:4). Meek. Humble. Gentle. Jesus is not trigger-happy. Not harsh, reactionary, easily exasperated. He is the most understanding person in the universe. The posture most natural to him is not a pointed finger but open arms. (G&L, p. 19)*

***Lowly:** This specific word lowly is generally translated "humble" in the New Testament...In Mary's song while pregnant with Jesus, this word is used to speak of the way God exalts those who are "of humble estate" (Luke 1:52). Paul uses the word when he tells us to "not be haughty, but associate with the lowly" (Rom. 12:16), referring to the socially unimpressive, those who are not the life of the party but rather cause the host to cringe when they show up. The point in saying that Jesus is lowly is that he is accessible. For all his resplendent glory and dazzling holiness, his supreme uniqueness and otherness, no one in human history has ever been more approachable than Jesus Christ. (G&L, pp. 19-20)*

WATCH VIDEO: SESSION 1

In the video, Ortlund said some could accuse him of "cherry picking" a verse and inappropriately running too far with a single idea. What was his response to this? What's your response to this?

"The cumulative testimony of the four Gospels is that when Jesus Christ sees the fallenness of the world all about him, his deepest impulse, his most natural instinct, is to move toward that sin and suffering, not away from it." (G&L, p. 30)

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus' life prove he is "gentle and lowly in heart." For example:

- He offers forgiveness to the paralyzed man before the man even opens his mouth (Matt. 9:2).
- When he sees the crowds "harassed and helpless" he is drawn to heal them (Matt. 9:35-36).
- He is moved with compassion when he sees people in need (Matt. 14:14; 15:32; Mark 6:34).
- Twice we're told of Jesus weeping because of sorrow over another (Luke 19:41; John 11:35).

Does stressing the compassionate love of Christ underemphasize other elements of his character? Why or why not? Will *everyone* experience Jesus as "gentle and lowly"?

What misconception is Jesus correcting when he describes himself as "gentle and lowly"? How do you find yourself falling prey to that misconception in your own thinking?

"We project onto Jesus our skewed instincts about how the world works. Human nature dictates that the wealthier a person, the more they tend to look down on the poor. The more beautiful a person, the more they are put off by the ugly. And without realizing what we are doing, we quietly assume that one so high and exalted has corresponding difficulty drawing near to the despicable and unclean...[But,] this high and holy Christ does not cringe at reaching out and touching dirty sinners and numbed sufferers. Such embrace is precisely what he loves to do. He cannot bear to hold back." (G&L, pp. 23-24)

How do we today experience the same compassionate love Christ demonstrated while on earth?

"The New Testament teaches that we are united to Christ, a union so intimate that whatever our own body parts do, Christ's body can be said to do (1 Cor. 6:15-16). Jesus Christ is closer to you today than he was to the sinners and sufferers he spoke with and touched in his earthly ministry. Through his Spirit, Christ's own heart envelops his people with an embrace nearer and tighter than any physical embrace could ever achieve. His actions on earth in a body reflected his heart; the same heart now acts in the same ways toward us, for we are now his body." (G&L, p. 33)

If we are Christ's body, what must Christ feel when are suffering or experiencing disconnect with God because of our sin? What must he therefore feel when we go to him for healing or forgiveness?

Though now in heaven, Christ is as open and tender in his embrace of sinners as he was on earth: "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin." (Hebrews 4:15)

"The real scandal of Hebrews 4:15, though, is what we are told about why Jesus is so close and with his people in their pain. He has been 'tempted' (or 'tested,' as the word can also denote) 'as we are'—not only

that, but 'in every respect' as we are. The reason that Jesus is in such close solidarity with us is that the difficult path we are on is not unique to us. He has journeyed on it himself. It is not only that Jesus can relieve us from our troubles, like a doctor prescribing medicine; it is also that, before any relief comes, he is with us in our troubles, like a doctor who has endured the same disease." (G&L, p. 47)

What should this "solidarity" with Christ mean for our everyday life?

WATCH VIDEO: SESSION 2

If Hebrews 4:15 tells us *what* Christ is doing in his priestly role, Hebrews 5:2 tells us *how* Christ is fulfilling that role: "He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness." (Hebrews 5:2)

Though this verse is describing how a human high priest should deal with sinners, the writer goes on in Hebrews 5:5 to say Christ deals with us in the same way. In fact, Christ does this perfectly!

"[Christ can] no more cast off poor sinners for their ignorance and wanderings than a nursing [mother] should cast away a sucking child for its crying....Thus ought it to be with a high priest, and thus is it with Jesus Christ. He is able, with all meekness and gentleness, with patience and moderation, to bear with the infirmities, sins, and provocations of his people, even as a nurse or a nursing [mother] bears with the weakness...of a poor infant." (John Owen, Works)

What is Owen saying about the depth of feeling that Christ experiences toward his sinning people?

"When you come to Christ for mercy and love and help in your anguish and perplexity and sinfulness, you are going with the flow of his own deepest wishes, not against them...As truly God, Christ cannot become any more full; he shares in his Father's immortal, eternal, unchangeable fullness. Yet as truly man, Christ's heart is not drained by our coming to him; his heart is filled up all the more by our coming to him. To put it the other way around: when we hold back, lurking in the shadows, fearful and failing, we miss out not only on our own increased comfort but on Christ's increased comfort. He lives for this. This is what he loves to do. His joy and ours rise and fall together." (G&L, p. 38)

How does it affect you to know Christ delights to have you run to him for forgiveness and comfort?

"Look to Christ. He deals gently with you. It's the only way he knows how to be...As long as you fix your attention on your sin, you will fail to see how you can be safe. But as long as you look to this high priest, you will fail to see how you can be in danger. Looking inside ourselves, we can anticipate only harshness from heaven. Looking out to Christ, we can anticipate only gentleness." (G&L, p. 57)