

One of the movies that really fascinated me was “The Matrix”. The movie is set in a world in the future dominated by computers, the hero is Keanu Reeves who is described as ‘The One’ – he was the one who was foretold and had special powers. In the movie everything is slowed down so he can dodge bullets and even stop bullets. He becomes someone who is indestructible. Well Keanu Reeves is just a make-believe character. Today we learn about the person who was truly ‘the one’. One way in which Keanu Reeves is definitely not like Jesus is that Jesus knew that he was the one. Today in our reading it’s as if Jesus is being revealed more and more to us – until in the end Jesus is saying, “Only I truly know God; come to me and I will show you God.”

So, let’s get into it. In verses 2-6 we have a section about the doubts of John the Baptist. ‘Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?’ In a sense, John’s question is the question everyone around Galilee is asking. Who is this Jesus? And this is probably the key theme in this chapter today. Jesus is making bolder and bolder claims about himself. And the opposition is growing, especially from the people who are the Jewish religious leaders

John has been put in prison by Herod. John’s hearing stories that Jesus is mixing with tax-collectors and prostitutes. That’s ok but he doesn’t seem to be judging the people. Do you remember back in chapter 3:12 when Jesus was about to be baptised by John, John had prophesied that the coming one, the Messiah, would sweep away the old order and its corruption: ‘His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing-floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.’ This was a very heavy message of judgement. But where is the fire? Where is the judgment? Why isn’t Jesus doing this? So John sends his messengers to enquire about this.

In his answer to John, in v.5,6 Jesus quotes from the OT, Isaiah 35 & 61, to sum up his ministry to this point. The miracles prove that he is the expected one, and he is bringing in a new order. But significantly, what Jesus does not quote here are the lines from Isaiah about the day of God’s

vengeance and the day of judgment. What he says to John is that the miracles are demonstrating his identity, and the good news is being preached to the poor. The vengeance and judgment that are there in those Isaiah texts are not yet being worked out, because at this point the kingdom is here in blessing, not judgment. That will come, as we'll see later on. But at this point, it is a day of open doors and great opportunity.

In verses 16-24 Jesus condemns those who have seen what he's done and have ignored Jesus and refused to acknowledge that he's the ruler, the boss. Those who are proud and feel they don't need God.

And then in the last six verses which I am focusing on, Jesus reveals more about the heart of God and it ties in so much with what we've been learning about the Trinity. Now Jesus turns to those who do get it, who do understand his message: he calls them 'little children' (v.25) The terrible irony is that the 'wise and learned' often miss the point, while those who know they have a lot to learn grasp the truth. They are not blocked by their own pride, and they are not bound up by false ideas. God not only comes in unexpected ways, but he involves the people we least expect! And we come to a mind-blowing statement by Jesus in v.27 – ²⁷ *“All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.*

At the heart of what God is revealing to those who are open to it is the oneness of Father and Son: the Father reveals who Jesus is, and Jesus reveals the Father (v.25,27). There is a unique intimacy and trust between Father and Son, yet, incredibly, through Jesus we are invited into this trusting and open relationship (v.27), just like we learnt with the Passage from John 17 last week.

So let's look carefully at Jesus' claim? (11:25-30)

Jesus is saying I am the fulfillment of all the hopes of the OT, I am the heart of God's revelation. In a dark world where we sometimes get flickering candlelight and a lamp Jesus is like a searchlight. Jesus is the huge revelation of God.

There are 5 distinct elements in his claim and these are incredibly significant:

1. JC maintains that God the Father hides and reveals according to his will. People cannot grasp a true understanding of God and true relationship with God by their own efforts. We cannot figure out who Jesus is, what the Kingdom is, unless God shows us. God conceals or hides these things from those who are wise in their own pride, those who think they know everything, God reveals these things to those who come with childlike trust and are teachable. Whenever anyone comes to faith in Jesus its God who has made this person know.

2. Jesus claims to have the full power and authority of God the Father. He comes from the Father's side; he fully represents God, he fully shows God's love and fully shows God's power; and he comes with God's own claim on people's hearts.

3. Only God the Father fully understands Jesus. Not John, not the disciples, not the wise, not the little children. Jesus remains a mysterious person, even though we have tried to understand for the past two thousand years. Theologians have tried to work out how can Jesus be both fully God and fully man. We can't understand him. Only God knows Jesus fully – our human hearts are limited

4. Only Jesus fully understands the Father. Great people have discovered and taught many true and noble things about God. But none of them have known God with the intimacy that Jesus has when he says Dear Daddy. Jesus says, "No one knows the Father except the Son" NO ONE!! He doesn't just know something about God. He does not even know everything *about* God. He knows God absolutely.

5. Jesus shares the Father's nature as well as ours. He alone can reveal the Father. He can show us, because he knows. He can introduce us because he belongs; he IS the Son. Now this is pretty heavy stuff. Normally in our society if someone goes around saying these things they get locked up in the psychiatric asylum. But when you look at how Jesus acts and speaks, you know he's not a lunatic and he's not a fraud. You're left with only one conclusion. He is the One, the One sent from God.

In John's gospel, John records Jesus saying, "I am the way , the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father but through me" "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father". Just like Matthew, John is saying in his gospel, "If you want to know what God is like look at Jesus. If you want to get through to God, come to Jesus. It's only in Jesus. There is no other way. So we come to the last part of Jesus' words. **Read v.28-30** *Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.* ²⁹ *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.* ³⁰ *For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*" And these again, for the average Jew listening to Jesus are quite amazing. Jesus' hearers were familiar with the offer of finding 'rest for your souls'

Have a look at Jeremiah 6:16 – "This is what the Lord says: 'Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find **rest for your souls.**'"

This was not the opportunity to put your feet up and do nothing: it had to do with following God and choosing God's path – 'the good way' – and walking in it. Now this offer comes directly from Jesus. You can see why 'Come to me' rather than 'Go to God' was a mind-blowing concept! Jesus says "Come to me" Notice Jesus doesn't say. "Go to God" which is what any good prophet would say – no, he says 'Come to me'".

I'm still grappling with what it means to rest. We notice right back at the beginning of the Bible God created the world and then he rested on the 7th day. Now I don't think that meant that he just stopped doing everything. If he did, the world would have stopped functioning – no, God did something different to the other days where his focus had been on working and creating the world. Rest is a stopping from the busyness of life and taking time to recharge the batteries, but above all, it's taking time to be with God, to be on his path, and its unburdening ourselves to God, consciously dumping on God and saying, "I don't have all that it takes, I'm trusting you Lord." Something that will re-centre my soul, my relationship with God; that will remind me again that I am in God's family, that I am "in Christ".

Rest, this is something that I am not good at. Just stopping and being with God. If we don't intentionally stop and do this, the danger for us is that we will continue to rely on our own strength; we will think that our success depends on our own efforts. We just keep going and going. Rest is not an optional extra; I easily say, "I'll do it if I have time". That's me. No, it's an absolute necessity. And you know we can be busy in lots of different ways – there are the normal ways of being busy, in a job working long hours; studying for hours to do well at our studies; and being busy is not wrong but if it gets in the way of our relating to and trusting God, then we need rest. So how else does this busyness play itself out.

There can be the busyness of looking after other people; busyness of partying; busyness of playing games on the computer; busyness of being on Facebook or some other social media; busyness of work; busyness of taking our children to all their sporting programmes; the busyness of visiting lots of people or even preparing sermons. We need to stop and rest – put aside the normal routines. Rest is linked in to trusting God. It doesn't mean just lying beside the swimming pool and being served food and drink by the waiter. No, I think rest is primarily to do with unburdening ourselves on to Jesus. How can I enjoy Jesus?

Ok, v.29. After calling us to come to him Jesus calls us to take his yoke on us. The yoke – it was the wooden collar that ran across the shoulders of a pair of oxen and enables them jointly to pull enormous weights. The Jews have this ceremony called the bar mitzvah, where a youth would become an adult. In the ceremony the yoke was used to describe the law which the Jewish youth undertook to bind to himself. It was like committing themselves to the law. Here is Jesus, the carpenter, who probably made many yokes. And he says, ‘Come to me, My yokes fit well. They don’t rub your necks and shoulders. Come to me. Get yoked up to me. Make an act of loyal obedience, like a bar mitzvah, to me. And you will find a deep peace and satisfaction that you could never find elsewhere. I have come for you. Come to me.’”

One big difference - the yoke in Judaism applies to the law. But Jesus says something different. He invites them not to go to the law but to come to him. All their lives they’ve been told that the law is everything, obey the law, wear it on your forehead (mention the phylactery) – Jesus says I am better than the law – my yoke is the yoke of love not duty. It’s a different yoke. It is liberating but in a sense it is also more demanding. We take the yoke of Jesus, responding as liberated people, not out of duty or obligation. Everyday, I need to take up Jesus’ yoke, because his yoke is gentle and liberating, it frees me but it also binds me in all I do to him. In Pakistan we used to often see oxen ploughing the fields. The yoke would bind the oxen together as they worked in the field. A young inexperienced ox would be put with an experienced, stronger one. So the young ox was a bit like an apprentice. It didn’t really do very much but learn from the older ox. Jesus says, “let me be yoked to you, become my apprentice, learn from me and you will discover life like you have never had before”. We need to rest by trusting Jesus with our burdens. If you stay awake at night worrying about your job, how you’re going to pay off the house, about the children, about our health – that is a burden that is too much to bear; We need to learn to unburden our worries by coming to Jesus and saying, “Give me rest.” Jesus invites us to come.

Taking his yoke will bind us to him, but will also free us. He carries our burden; yet we intentionally bind ourselves to him. What will it mean for you today to bind yourself to Jesus? To yoke yourself to Jesus? It goes against our independent proud nature doesn't it – but who is this Jesus – he heals the sick, the blind, he raises people from death. This all powerful one the one who knows God says 'Come to me". Bring your burdens to me and when you do that's what rest will be. Will you let him?

How does this work out in our lives? I've learnt a lot from my wife, George, just watching how she responds to God. She wants to be available for God to use her in people's lives. Instead of feeling guilty about not doing enough she prays for different people; different situations – as she prays she is aware of God showing her the ones who she is to speak to or God brings her across the people she's been praying about; she can't fix everyone's problems and she wouldn't want to; but God knows the things he has for her to do – she can REST in God, she can bring it to God; he will sustain her.

As we finish I want to read these last three verses again but this time from The Message:

28-30"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."

Let's pray