

“Rest for Your Soul” Matthew 11:25-30

When an author writes a novel, he or she has the right and the freedom to choose every single detail in that story. The author alone determines the *plot* of the story, the *themes*, the *flow*, the *twists and turns*, the *characters*, the *fate* of the characters, the *ending*, and the *meaning* of the story. In this sense, the author is *sovereign*. She is not obligated to consult with her readership to determine how the plot should unfold or how the story will end. He doesn't consult with the characters in the story to see how they would like to be portrayed, or what their fate will be. The characters are products of his imagination, and their fate is entirely based on his sovereign will.

I think you know where I am going. The infinite, self-existent God of the universe is the Author of a grand, eternal story that is incomprehensible in its magnitude and detail and complexities. It's a story in which you and I and every other created being in the universe are characters, each of which has been given a role (however small it might be) that contributes to the overall plot. It is a plot that He has pre-determined and that He has purposed will come to pass according to His will, in His time. It is a plot that is essentially about God glorifying His dearly beloved Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Son glorifying His Father.

And since the story originates from the Author's imagination, He is sovereign. He alone gets to determine how every detail in the story serves His purposes. And that includes all the characters in the story, like you and me that He has created out of His own imagination. He gets to determine how every living being participates in His plot.

That is His prerogative as the Author. It's His story, and it unfolds according to His sovereign will. No one can say to Him, "Wait, I don't like the direction this story is going." Or, "I don't like the way you've portrayed me, or the role you've given me, or the destiny you've assigned me. I'd like you to rewrite the story to put me in a more favorable light or let me have a more desirable ending." No, it's not up to us, because the story isn't about us. It's about Him and His Son; and how the story goes is determined according to His sovereign will.

In the section of Matthew's Gospel that we have been studying recently, chapter 11, Jesus has been talking about God's grand, eternal story, and He is addressing the confusion and the bewilderment of many in His day because of the way this story was unfolding (or, more precisely, the way it wasn't unfolding). They had been told by John the Baptist that the kingdom of heaven was near. They had been told by John the Baptist that Jesus of Nazareth was the long-anticipated Messiah who would inaugurate the kingdom and rule over that kingdom. But the kingdom didn't look like they thought the kingdom would look, and Jesus wasn't doing what they thought Messiah would do, and many of them, including John the Baptist himself, were disappointed.

So, Jesus addresses their discomfort by reminding them whose story this is. It's the story of an infinite, eternal, sovereign God! Of course it's going to be different than what any human being thinks or expects! Since it is *God's* story there are transcendent, mysterious aspects about it. There is an element of incomprehensibility to it. In fact, it is such a magnificent story that we cannot even understand it without divine assistance. Consider what Jesus says in **verses 25-26**. ***25 At that time Jesus declared, "I thank 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.***

Jesus is talking to His Father, who is none other than the *Lord of heaven and earth*. That expression, "Lord of heaven and earth" is a title frequently used in Jewish literature to

refer to God's sovereignty. But since Jesus knows His Father intimately, His Father's sovereignty is not an abstract theological concept; it is an endearing quality, simply because He knows how wise and loving and kind He is. So this is a statement of praise as Jesus reflects upon how His Father's sovereignty is exercised in and through the characters of His salvation story.

The Father has hidden "these things" from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children. What things? Throughout Matthew 11 Jesus has been talking about how God's story is unfolding. Particularly how the kingdom is now present in the ministry of Jesus, even though it was unrecognizable by many, not even by John the Baptist. And Jesus praises His Father because it *was* unrecognizable. It was *hidden* from the wise and understanding.

Why is that praiseworthy? Because when it comes to understanding deep spiritual truths, we would naturally expect that those with the most theological education would have the most comprehension. We would naturally think that those who went to Bible institutes and seminaries, those who were mentored by the esteemed rabbis, those who had the most exposure to Scripture would have the greatest advantage.

But Jesus says no. That is not necessarily true. Theological knowledge does not necessarily lead to kingdom comprehension. In fact, it may be a deterrent to comprehension. Because there can be a tendency for theological knowledge to breed pride and presumption—the attitude of thinking that one has it all figured out.

That was certainly the case with the Pharisees and scribes in Jesus' day. They were self-appointed experts of the Scriptures who meticulously studied the minute details and nuances of the law. But in so doing, some of their interpretations of what God was like and what God was going to do and how His kingdom would be established were skewed. And those skewed interpretations were serious enough that they prevented them from believing the truth when He finally showed up, because Jesus didn't fit into their theological boxes or their pre-conceived notions.

That's what Jesus meant when He said that his Father had "hidden" these things from the wise and understanding. God has determined that prideful, pretentious, presumptuous attitudes prohibit the comprehension of spiritual things, and, therefore, prevents those with such attitudes from entering the kingdom. So contrary to the prevailing opinion in Jesus' day, Bible scholars and academic specialists do not have an advantage when it comes to entering and participating in the kingdom.

On the other hand, Jesus goes on to praise His Father for revealing the mysteries of the kingdom to "little children" or "babies," the demographic we would least expect to understand deep spiritual truths. Of course, Jesus is using this term in a metaphorical sense. In contrast to the pride and presumption of the intelligentsia, Jesus is beckoning His audience to consider characteristics of little children that would make them receptive to the Father's revelation.

My granddaughter, Charlie, is twenty months old, the quintessential age of discovery. Everything is interesting to her, everything is an adventure for her, and she is willing to do pretty much anything we invite her to do (except eat her vegetables), because she loves us and knows us well enough to trust us. Whenever she comes to our home she goes straight to the refrigerator and peels the magnetic pictures off, then brings them to me so we can look at them together. Then she goes to a particular drawer in the kitchen, a drawer dedicated exclusively to Charlie's knickknacks, and pulls out her Turkish cup and saucer, her notepad and pen, her flip phone, and then brings them to me so we can sip coffee together and talk on the phone. Then she goes and gets a dog biscuit to give to our dog, then she pets the

kitties, then she goes downstairs to see WhoWho and GG (my mom and dad).

And that's only the beginning. All day long there is one activity and one adventure after another, and as long as Mindy or I are giving her our attention, she is just as content as can be.

So, what are the childlike characteristics to which Jesus is referring in verse 25? I would suggest to you that they are innocent, humble curiosity and simple trust. Jesus is saying that God reveals the kingdom to those who have a childlike curiosity and faith. That's what He did for the woman at the well. That's what He did for Mary Magdalene, and Zacchaeus, and Saul of Tarsus. Yes, Saul, who was Himself a Pharisee with a brilliant mind and a first-class education. But when He was confronted with Jesus none of that mattered. He believed the voice that He heard coming from heaven and put all His trust in Him.

Which leads me to say that Jesus is not condemning Bible knowledge or theological education, just as He is not condoning ignorance or naivety, which are also childlike characteristics. He's advocating a childlike faith. The childlike attitude that says, "I believe you, I trust you, I love you."

And that childlike curiosity and trust compel Jesus to praise His Father. **Verse 27,** ***26 Yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.***

Talk about counter-cultural! Talk about an upside-down kingdom! In Judaism, the more elaborate and complex your theology and the more strenuous and difficult your moral code the more pleasing you were to God, they thought. Not so, says Jesus. The way to have God's favor is to come as a child, which levels the playing field. You don't have to be educated, or religious, or even good to come to Him. Anyone who comes to Him with humble eyes of faith can know His story and participate in His kingdom.

But look at what else Jesus says about knowing God and His plans and purposes. **Verse 27,** ***27 All things have been handed over 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.***

Wow! That is quite a statement! That is a statement packed with profound theological truth. In fact, theologians have referred to this verse as *the* most important Christological passage in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke). That's because Jesus describes his unique relationship with the Father. First, He refers to Him as "my" Father, which is not how any Jew had ever referenced God, nor would they even consider doing so. When Jesus said, "my Father," and then proceeded to describe some of the aspects of their relationship, He is asserting that this is more than just a relationship between a created being and His Creator. There is an implied history between the Father and the Son that goes way back, before Jesus came to earth. This intimate knowledge of His Father wasn't merely obtained by Jesus in His thirty-something years on this earth. There is an implied *divine* self-consciousness in Jesus' statement.

Of course, we know Jesus was validated as the Son by His Father at His baptism, then again at His Transfiguration, when a voice came from heaven saying, "This is my beloved Son." And there are several other references in the Gospels, including Peter's confession in Matthew 16, that reinforce His divine Sonship.

But the point Jesus is making in verse 27 is that in both His incarnate and eternal state as the Son, Jesus and the Father know each other in an exclusive way. ***"No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son."*** As one New Testament scholar put it, "They enjoy a direct, intuitive, and immediate knowledge that is grounded in their divine relationship as Father and Son. As such, what the Father and Son share stands apart from all human relationships and all human knowledge" (Wilkins,

Matthew: NIV App. Com.).

Let's look more closely at what Jesus says. *All things have been handed over to me by my Father.* The verb *handed over* was often used in Jesus' day to refer to passing down instruction or tradition from teacher to student or from one generation to the next.

Jesus has been explaining why His audience did not understand the kingdom, and why they were not able to acknowledge the presence of the kingdom in His ministry. It was because the prevailing theological opinions of the day were based on the traditions and instructions that had been passed down from rabbis in several successive generations. But those opinions were inaccurate and distorted and were actually preventing people from understanding the truth.

Jesus, on the other hand, received His knowledge not from the rabbis or tradition, but straight from the Source—His Father. That knowledge is meant is indicated also by the fact that Jesus immediately goes on to address the knowledge He has of the Father. Jesus is claiming to have *real* knowledge of God.

There were many in the first century who held that the essential being of God cannot be known by human beings, because He dwells in unapproachable mystery. They were right. But Jesus tells us that because He is the Son of God, He knows God's essential being because God is His Father.

But there is more. Not only is it impossible for human beings to know God as He really is, it is impossible for human beings to know Him, the Son. They cannot know Jesus' essential nature either, because He also is divine, and therefore incomprehensible. Only His Father knows Him, because only God can really know God.

The Jewish leaders had consistently rejected Jesus, so it was plain enough that they did not know *the Son*. But it is also the case that John the Baptist and the disciples did not yet have an adequate understanding of Him either. At this point in His ministry it was only the Father who had real knowledge of Him. It is interesting and significant that later, in Matthew 16, when Peter came to know Jesus as He really is, the Christ, the Son of the living God, Jesus said that this was not revealed to Him by man, but by His Father in heaven (Matt. 16:17).

This is not to say that prior to this Peter did not have *some* knowledge of Christ, or that John the Baptist did not have *some* knowledge of Christ, or that even the Pharisees did not have *some* knowledge of God. But their knowledge was incomplete and imperfect, because it was tainted with bias and assumption and human reasoning and tradition and a heart that is inherently deceitful. And all these things lead to skewed perceptions and understanding, especially about a transcendent God.

And so Jesus says that our only hope of knowing God is Him. Look what He says at the end of **verse 27**, *"No one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."*

Do you realize what this means? Apart from Jesus we cannot truly know God, much less His story and His kingdom. Jesus has been given exclusive authority to reveal the Father. So not only, as Jesus declared in John's Gospel, can no one *come* to the Father except through Him (14:6), no one can *know* the Father except through Him. He alone can reveal the Father, so if we are going to know God, which is the most important, consequential knowledge there is, we must get that knowledge from Jesus.

But there is something else in this statement that is crucial. No one can know the Father unless Jesus *chooses* to reveal the Father to him or her. Not only is Jesus the only One who *can* give someone the true knowledge of God, He *decides* to whom He is going to give that knowledge. In other words, Jesus, just like His Father, is sovereign. He decides,

He determines who gets to have this profound knowledge of God that opens the door to eternal life. For He said in John's Gospel, *"Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent"* (John 17:3).

God is the sovereign author of His grand, eternal story. The Father and the Son are both sovereign because they are both God, and that makes them co-Authors of this grand, eternal story. Which means they not only *know*, they have *determined* what part each character in their story is going to have. Remember it is a story that is ultimately about the Father glorifying His Son, and the Son glorifying His Father. But every living being that they have created is in the story, including you and me, and our part in the story, our fate in the story, our contribution to the Father's and Son's glory in the story, is up to them.

Characters in the story don't have the right to say, "Wait, I want to decide my part in the story." Or, "I don't like the way the story is going for me, or the role I've been given, or the destiny I've been assigned." No, it's not up to us, because the story isn't about us. It's about the Father and the Son; and how the story goes is determined according to their sovereign will.

Now, because our minds are finite and limited, we cannot read a statement like, *"no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him,"* without concluding that we must not have any choice in the matter. We must not have a free will. Our knowledge of God and our salvation and our eternal life are predetermined, and we cannot do anything about it. It would seem so...if you stopped at verse 27. But even though we're not going to study this until next week I want to read **verse 28**. *"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."*

Jesus extends an invitation to come to Him, and that is evidence that we have a *will* that can choose to come to Him or not. We'll talk more about that marvelous invitation next week.

But let me close with a couple of implications about Jesus' sovereignty that I believe can be helpful for us. First, the reason God created mankind in the first place, the reason God gave us His Word, the reason Jesus came to this earth is so that we *could* know Him. He's not trying to conceal Himself; He *wants* to reveal Himself. When Jesus said in verse 26 that it was His will that He would reveal profound spiritual truth to children, He didn't say it was His sovereign will. He said it was His *gracious* will. It is gracious because anyone, including children, including the mentally disabled, can come to Him with humble curiosity and simple faith and know Him. In other words, He didn't make it hard to know Him. He made it easy, because He is gracious.

Second, if in fact Jesus is sovereign in that He only reveals the Father to those He chooses to reveal Him to, then that gives us a very specific and effective way to pray for our loved ones who don't know the Father and don't know Jesus yet. We simply ask Jesus to reveal Himself and His Father to them. Ask Him every day. Ask Him twenty times a day. Plead with Him. Beg Him.

You might be thinking, "But you said that because He's the Author He's already predetermined the characters and their fate in His story." Yes, I did. But I didn't say I know *who* or *how* He predetermines them. His story is incomprehensible. How do I know that He hasn't ordained that my loved ones come to know Him through my earnest prayers for their salvation? It's a mystery that none of us can comprehend.

But we can know that he wants to be known. Paul said to the Athenian philosophers, *²⁶From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. ²⁷God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is*

not far from each one of us” (Acts 17:26-27).

Do you see God’s sovereignty in this passage? It’s there in verse 26. Do you see man’s free will in this passage? It’s there in verse 27.

Paul went on to tell the Athenians about Jesus, because he knew that it was only through Jesus that they could truly know God. And some of them believed, and some of them did not.

I close with this question: Do *you* truly know God? I’m not asking if you go to church faithfully or read the Bible regularly. The Pharisees did all those things better than any of us, and they completely missed Him. The way to know God is go through Jesus. He said, I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. And then he added, *“If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well”* (John 14:6-7).

Come to Jesus, and you will find rest for your soul!

“Who Knows?”
Matthew 11:25-27

Main Idea: No one can know God or Jesus without their enablement

Jesus Praises His Father for His Sovereign Revelation (25-26)

Father hides the truth from those whom we would expect to know it
The meaning of “the wise and understanding”

Attitudes that prevent true understanding

Father reveals the truth to those whom we would expect *not* to know it
Metaphor of “little children”

Attitudes that enable true understanding

The Father Delegates his Sovereignty to His Son (27)

The exclusive relationship between Father and Son

The exclusive knowledge shared by Father and Son
Only the Father knows the Son

Only the Son knows the Father

Only the Son can reveal the Father

Implications of Jesus’ Sovereignty