

December 27, 2020 by Steve Brandon



Gentle and Lowly

Matthew 11:28-30

1. His Earthly Ministry
2. His Heavenly Mercy

Two months ago, Ryan handed out to the elders a book by Dane Ortlund entitled, "Gentle and Lowly." He gave it to us as gifts. He said that the book has made an impact on his life. So, he encouraged us all to read it. And for the past two months, we have begun our elders' meetings with each of us sharing very briefly a quote of something from the book that we have found helpful to our souls.

Over these past two months, I have been slowly reading through this book. I just finished it this week. I have come to see why it impacted Ryan. I have never read a book quite like it. So, I would like to preach a sermon not quite like any sermon that I have preached before. I want to preach for you the message of this book. I will unashamedly borrow heavily from the book itself. At times, I will tell you that I am quoting from the book, and at other times, I'll just quote without you even realizing it. So, just assume this: everything that I say this morning is a direct quote from this book. [\[1\]](#)

Perhaps after my preaching, you will want to go out and purchase this book for yourself to read. Perhaps, more importantly, you will come to see why this book has made an impact upon me, and upon Ryan, and upon the others who have read it.

Now, what makes this book unique is that it's a book about who Jesus is. Not in the sense of him being God, the Son. Not in the sense of him being the second member of the Trinity. Not in the sense of him becoming human in the incarnation (which we just celebrated this Christmas season). Not even what he has done on the cross, dying for our sins, that we might be justified in God's sight.

This book isn't about those things, true as they are. I have read many books about those things, looking into the being of Jesus and into his sinless life upon the earth. I have read books looking into his death and all of its implications of the cross, and how it is that God can forgive us. Some books have provided deep dives into different theories of the atonement.

This book is about something else. It's about the heart of Jesus. This book describes the attitudes of Jesus and his mindset towards us. It's about what he feels about us, how he loves us, and how he deals with us in our sins.

The difference between these sorts of books can easily be described in terms of knowing a person. It's like knowing me. You may know me as a pastor. You might know me as a friend. My college friends might know me as a Physics major. Those who worked with me at the hospital before I was a pastor knew me as an I. T. professional. Some might know me as a basketball player (ha, ha). Others might know me as a Bears fan (socks). The people at Walmart know me as a customer. My pool buddies know me as a competitor. But these all describe me in terms of position or talents or interests.

None of these people know me as well as my wife does. She sees me at all my moments, from my weakest moments to my greatest moments. She knows my heart better than any. She knows what hurts me. She knows what encourages me. She knows how I really feel about other people. She hears my complaints and feels my pain. She shares my joys. She knows me. And that's what this book is about.

This book is about "the heart of Jesus." It opens us up to what really concerns him. It shows how he cares for his people, particularly for how he cares for the hurting and the helpless. The subtitle of this book is "The Heart of Christ for Sinners and Sufferers." Learning about the tender heart of Jesus towards us has been helpful for my soul. I hope that it is helpful for yours as well.

Let's begin where Dane Ortlund begins in chapter 1. He begins by sharing something that his father taught him. (His father is a retired pastor in Nashville, TN). His father told him that he read in Charles Spurgeon's writings, that "in the four Gospel accounts there's only one place where Jesus tells us about his own heart" (p. 17).

In the gospels, we learn much about his birth, his ministry, his teaching, his travels, even his prayer life. We read the sermons he preaches. We discover how he understood his life as a fulfillment of the Old Testament. We read much about his "unjust suffering and shameful death and astonishing resurrection" (p. 17). But in only one place "do we hear Jesus himself open up to us his very heart." It's found in Matthew, chapter 11. In verses 28-30, we get a glimpse into the heart of Jesus, who said, ...

Matthew 11:28-30

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 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. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Dane Ortlund writes, "In the one place in the Bible where the Son of God pulls back the veil and lets us peer way down into the core of who he is, we are not told that he is 'austere and demanding in heart.' We are not told that he is 'exalted and dignified in heart.' We are not even told that he is 'joyful and generous in heart.' Letting Jesus set the terms, his surprising claim is that he is "gentle and lowly in heart" (p. 18).

"Gentle" means that he is meek and humble (p. 19). He is not trigger-happy, nor harsh (p. 19). Rather, Jesus is "the most understanding

person in the universe" (p. 19). His most natural posture is "not a pointed finger but open arms" (p. 19).

"Lowly" means that Jesus is "accessible" (p. 20). Again, Ortlund points out how surprising this is. "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. No prerequisites. No hoops to jump through. ... The minimum bar to be enfolded into the embrace of Jesus is simply: open yourself up to him. It is all he needs" (p. 20).

We see this in the invitation in verse 28. Jesus says, "Come to me." If Jesus invites us to come to him, it means that we have access to him. If we simply turn from our ways, and turn to him for help, we will find him.

If you continue on in verse 28, you see who qualifies for coming to Jesus. "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden." The invitation is for those "who labor." It's for those who are "heavy laden." It's for those who feel their weakness and know that they need help. Like Christian in Pilgrim's Progress, who knew that he had a burden upon his back, a burden that he was unable to bear, so also does Jesus invite those who are burdened.

The promise comes at the end of verse 28, "I will give you rest." Jesus promises a satisfied state, like after the Christmas gifts are opened and after eating your large Christmas meal. You sit at your table with all your work done. You are satisfied of all that happened through the morning.

So, are you burdened this morning? Are you discouraged? Has sin got the best of you? Then come to Jesus. Find your rest in him. He is willing to take you in. We see this in ...

1. His Earthly Ministry

Just think about the life of Jesus upon the earth. When suffering people came to him, he gladly received them and willingly helped them.

Do you remember the leper? He came to Jesus with a terrible skin disease and asked Jesus to be cleaned. He told Jesus, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean" (Matthew 8:2). Jesus said, "I will; be clean" (Matt. 8:2). We often use this word, "will" to describe our deepest desires. Such is the case here. "And Jesus revealed his deepest desire by healing him" (p. 25).

Do you remember when the men brought their paralyzed friend to Jesus? There was no room in the home where Jesus was, so they cut a hole in the roof and let him down with ropes. Before they even said a word, Jesus saw their faith, and said to the paralytic, "Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven" (Matt. 9:2). It shows the eagerness of Jesus to heal. He was so eager to heal that he healed without anybody asking. It's almost as if "Jesus couldn't stop himself" from healing the paralytic (p. 26).

These are but a few demonstrations of the heart of Jesus. He is willing to help. He is longing to heal. We see this same heart often with the crowds that followed Jesus. He often felt compassion for them. "He had compassion on them and healed their sick" (Matthew 14:14). Jesus said, "I have compassion on the crowd," and fed the hungry (Matthew 15:32). "He had compassion on them ... and he began to teach them many things" (Mark 6:34).

All of these things stemmed from his compassion, literally, his bowels. "It's an ancient way of referring to what rises up from one's innermost core." When I think of this word, I think of my sister, Sonya. She has such compassion for people that she often hurts in her stomach if others are hurting. So also with Jesus. He is thoroughly compassionate "This compassion reflects the deepest heart of Christ" (p. 26). It's what moves him and drives him and compels him, his overwhelming compassion for sinners. It's his compassion that wipes the tears from the woman weeping at her feet because of her sin (Luke 7:13). It's his compassion that weeps for Jerusalem when they were hard toward the things of God. (Luke 19:41).

Jesus was drawn to the sinful and the hurting. "Time and again it is the morally disgusting, the socially reviled, the inexcusable and undeserving, who do not simply receive Christ's mercy but to whom Christ most naturally gravitates. He is, by his enemies' testimony, the 'friend of sinners'" (Luke 7:34).

Dane Ortlund says, "The dominant note left ringing in our ears after reading the Gospels, the most vivid and arresting element of the portrait, is the way the Holy Son of God moves toward, touches, heals, embraces, and forgives those who least deserve it yet truly desire it" (p. 27). This is the main thought that has struck me from this book: When Jesus sees weak and hurting people, he moves towards them, not away from them. When Jesus sees people that the world despises, he approaches them, and seeks them out. When Jesus sees people trapped in their sin, he pursues them, and offers them forgiveness.

When I think about my own actions, I think of how unlike Jesus I am. I don't naturally move towards hurting people. I don't naturally seek out the down-and-outers. I'm not naturally a "friend of sinners." But Jesus is like this, because, he is "Gentle and Lowly." Pursuing after the hurting is the joy of his heart.

Dane Ortlund shares the illustration of "a compassionate doctor [who] has traveled deep into the jungle to provide medical care to a primitive tribe afflicted with a contagious disease. He has had his medical equipment flown in. He has correctly diagnosed the problem, and the antibiotics are prepared and available. He is independently wealthy and has no need of any kind of financial compensation. But as he seeks to provide care, the afflicted refuse. They want to take care of themselves. They want to heal on their own terms. Finally, a few brave young men step forward to receive the care being freely provided. What does the doctor feel? Joy. His joy increases to the degree that the sick come to him for help and healing. It's the whole reason he came."

Remember what Jesus said when the Pharisees questioned the disciples of Jesus?

Matthew 9:11-13

"Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" But when Jesus heard it, he said, "Those who are well have

no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

The whole reason why Jesus came to earth was to share his medicine with those in the tribe who were suffering. And when sinners come to Jesus, it brings him great joy. Jesus said, "There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance" (Luke 15:7). That's why Jesus went to the cross to die for our sins. It was for his joy of seeing the sick and needy and sinful turn to him, giving him the joy of healing and forgiving them! "for the joy that was set before him, [Jesus] endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:3).

Jesus sits in heaven now, deriving joy in his heart when the sinning and suffering come to him. Right now, Jesus is in heaven, as our great high priest, praying for us.

We looked first at (1) His Earthly Ministry; how he drew near to the needy. He did this not out of any duty, but out of the essence of who he is, out of his heart. And now, we look at ...

2. His Heavenly Mercy

We read of his heavenly mercy in Hebrews, chapter 4:15-16.

Hebrews 4:15-16

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. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Because of his "earthly ministry," Jesus is able to extend his "heavenly mercy." This is one of the implications of Christmas. Jesus took on flesh, that he might know and understand and experience the weaknesses and the temptations that we all face. He knows what it's like to feel pain and sorrow. He knows what it's like to suffer. So, what we experience is not unique to us, Jesus in heaven, fully able to understand our weakness.

Verse 15 says that he is "able to sympathize with our weaknesses." This is because he experience humanity. "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" (p. 47). That's why he can deal gently with us, because, he has walked our road. Since his heart is to help us, "Jesus can no more bring himself to stiff-arm you than the loving father of a crying newborn can bring himself to stiff-arm his dear child" (p. 55). His heart longs to give us "mercy and grace to help in time of need."

So, church family, "Look to Christ. He deals gently with you. ... 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 [Jesus], 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" (p. 57) and mercy and grace.

When coming to Jesus, we can often think that Jesus grows weary in our coming to him. But he doesn't. Dane Ortlund writes, "[Jesus] does not get flustered and frustrated when we come to him for fresh forgiveness, for renewed pardon, with distress and need and emptiness. That's the whole point. It's what he came to heal. He went down into the horror of death and plunged out through the other side in order to provide a limitless supply of mercy and grace to his people" (pp. 36-37). Please notice why it is that Jesus doesn't grow weary. "Jesus doesn't want us to draw on his grace and mercy only because it vindicates his atoning word. He wants us to draw on his grace and mercy because it is who he is. He drew near to us in the incarnation [i.e. Christmas] so that his joy and ours could rise and fall together--his in giving mercy, ours in receiving it" (p. 37).

Jesus delights in extending mercy to us. He is like the parent who gives a Christmas present to his child. It is often debatable on who enjoys the experience more: the parent or the child. Certainly, a child loves his new toy, but the parent loves the delight it brings the child. This can easily be in the reverse as well. I had a great example of this very thing during Christmas. Our family was opening up our Christmas presents. My son had a gift to give to me. He said, "I'm so excited to give you this gift." He gave me a personalized mug that said, "World's Greatest video editor Dad." If you know me at all, you know how much I dabble in editing video. I do it, but I'm not nearly the level of my son, who is employed in doing so with a YouTube channel. Everyone in my family knows that. That's why it was significant that my mug mention my video editing skills, but crossed it out. But then, he tells me I'm the "World's Greatest Dad." His gift was very thoughtful. Now, I ask you, who had the greater joy? Me or my son? This is the same with Jesus granting mercy. We enjoy the relief of enjoying mercy. He enjoys the giving of it.

Now, some might say that we ought to be measured and careful in how much we come to Jesus. But Ortlund puts it in perspective, "Would a father with a suffocating child want his child to draw on the oxygen tank in a measures, reasonable way?" (p. 40). We are suffocating people. Jesus delights in giving us the oxygen to live, and he gives it to us in abundance.

Further, realize the work of Jesus. "Christ doesn't merely help us. He saves us" (p. 82). He "saves us" to the uttermost. Hebrews 7:25 says, "he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. Jesus can save us "to the uttermost." The idea of "uttermost" is the idea of fully and completely. You can picture a cup being filled all the way to the rim. You can picture a race that is run to the end. Jesus is able to to save us until the end, keeping us all the way through the finish line. And we need his help in this. "We who know our hearts understand. We are to-the-uttermost sinners. We need a to-the-uttermost Savior" (p. 82). This is Jesus. He saves us "until the end."

The confidence that we have is that we are secure in Jesus, if we but come to him. Listen to the promise of John 6:37, "All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out." This verse was one of John Bunyan's favorite verses. John Bunyan, the author of Pilgrim's Progress. John Bunyan wrote a whole book on this one verse. And Dane Ortlund quotes Bunyan elaborating

on the security that we have in Jesus. Bunyan writing in the 17th century, using the King James translation of John 6:37, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Bunyan writes, ...

"They that are coming to Jesus Christ, are often times heartily afraid that Jesus Christ will not receive them. This observation is implied in the text. I gather it from the largeness and openness of the promise: 'I will in no wise cast out.' For had there not been a proneness in us to 'fear casting you,' Christ needed not to have waylaid our fear, as he does by this great and strange expression, 'In no wise.' ... For this word, 'in no wise,' cuts the throat of all objections.

But I am a great sinner, say you.
'I will in no wise cast out,' says Christ.
But I am an old sinner, say you.
'I will in no wise cast out,' says Christ.
But I am a hard-hearted sinner, say you.
'I will in no wise cast out,' says Christ.
But I am a backsliding sinner, say you.
'I will in no wise cast out,' says Christ.
But I have served Satan all my days, say you.
'I will in no wise cast out,' says Christ.
But I have sinned against light, say you.
'I will in no wise cast out,' says Christ.
But I have sinned against mercy, say you.
'I will in no wise cast out,' says Christ.
But I have no good thing to bring with me, say you.
'I will in no wise cast out,' says Christ." (pp. 61-62).

Such is the security that we have in coming to Jesus, finding our rest in Christ.

Jesus is "Gentle and Lowly" and his heart is to receive sinners. He is our high priest, who will not cast us away. He is always praying for us. He intercedes for us before the Father. He does this "all the time." In other words, "Jesus is praying for you right now, even when we are negligent in our prayer life." And, as Dane Ortlund confesses, "Our prayer life stinks most of the time" (p. 84). The prayer life of Jesus never stops. But there are times when it steps up. This comes in the term, "Advocate," which John tells us in 1 John 2:1, "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." This term "advocate" draws us into the courtroom. It takes the posture of a lawyer, and argues our case before the Father.

When do you need a lawyer? When it gets really bad. When you have messed up really bad. You got drunk and drove and killed somebody. You need a lawyer. You need an advocate. You embezzled millions, and got caught. You need a lawyer. You need an advocate. You lost your temper and struck one of your children, breaking their arm and sending them to the hospital. Now, DCFS is involved and you may lose custody of your children. You need a lawyer. You need an advocate. Jesus is our advocate, when things are at their worst!

When things are at their worst, certainly, you need to "Remember your legal standing before God because of the work of Christ; But remember also your advocate before God because of the heart of Christ. He rises up and defends your cause, based on the merits of his own sufferings and death. Your salvation is not merely a matter of a saving formula, but of a saving person. When you sin, his strength of resolve rises all the higher. When his brothers and sisters fail and stumble, he advocates on their behalf because it is who he is. He cannot bear to leave us alone to fend for ourselves" (p. 91). So, when things are at their worst, and you have sinned in the greatest of ways, when sorrow over your sin is filling your heart, when you have lost all hope, go to Jesus. This is precisely when Jesus is ready and willing to stand in your defense.

Notice how our salvation is tied up with a person, not with some type of formula. We are saved by a person, not a prayer that we prayed that rests on a promise. No, it's a person who saves us. It is a person that we need to flee to. Remember again where we began:

Matthew 11:28-30

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 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. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

If you are heavy laden, go to Jesus. He will give you rest. Jesus is "gentle and lowly."

There is so much more that could be said about this book, as it directs us to the heart of Christ. All of my quotes have come from the first hundred pages of this two-hundred page book. There is much more to say. So, I want to finish with just one final quote of Dane Ortlund:

"So let the heart of Jesus be something that is not only gentle toward you but lovely to you. If I may put it this way: romance the heart of Jesus. All I mean is, ponder him through his heart. Allow yourself to be allured. Why not build in to your life unhurried quiet, where, among other disciplines, you consider the radiance of who he actually is, what animates him, what his deepest delight is? Why not give your soul room to be reenchanted with Christ time and again?

"When you look at the glorious older saints in your church, how do you think they got there? Sound doctrine, yes. Resolute obedience, without a doubt. Suffering without becoming cynical, for sure. But maybe another reason, maybe the deepest reason, is that they have, over time, been won over in their deepest affections to a gentle Savior. Perhaps they have simply tasted, over many years, the surprise of a Christ for whom their very sins draw him in rather than push him away. Maybe they have not only known that Jesus love them but felt it" (pp. 99-100).

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on December 27, 2020 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org.

[1] I will quote so often from the book that I will simply provide end note page numbers, rather than footnotes.