

10 THINGS **JESUS NEVER** SAID

and why you should
STOP believing them

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Contents

Acknowledgments 9

Introduction 11

Part 1: The Most Important Thing Jesus Ever Said

1 I Will Give You Rest 17

Part 2: Things Jesus Never Said

2 You're Too Far Gone to Be Saved 33

3 I'm So Disappointed in You 48

4 This Wouldn't Be Happening If You Were a Better
Christian 61

5 It's Okay Not to Love Certain People 76

6 Everyone Should Believe and Act like You Do 90

7 It's All Up to You 105

8 You Don't Have to Forgive Someone Who Really
Hurts You 120

Contents

- 9 You Missed My Will for Your Life 134
- 10 I've Given Up on You 148
- 11 This Is a Cross You Must Bear 166

Conclusion: Let's Trade 181

Appendix: You're Disqualified Because You're
Divorced 187

Notes 201

Introduction

What would happen if you were invited to a face-to-face meeting with Jesus? Suppose it was just you and Jesus for an hour, sitting directly across from each other, so close your knees were almost touching. What do you think he would say? Would you be uncomfortable? Would you look forward to that meeting? Would you eagerly jump at the chance to spend an hour with the incarnate God? Or would you dread it? What would you do if you were told to spend an hour alone with Jesus?

For many, spending any time alone with Jesus sounds absolutely wonderful. They know that someday they will be in his presence, and they eagerly look forward to their unbroken fellowship with him. But for many others, unfortunately, such an invitation doesn't sound too inviting. It's not that they don't love Jesus and long to finally and fully be in his presence; it's just that many of them—or I should say *us*—live with a tremendous sense of guilt in their respective Christian walks. They know they don't measure up to God's high and

holy standards. They believe they are constantly letting Jesus down, embarrassing him, and even causing him pain. If you felt like that about someone—a boss, a parent, a spouse, or a friend—would you look forward to spending time with him or her? Probably not.

So what do you think Jesus would say to you? How would the conversation start? I've asked that question to adults and teenagers all over the country. The answers are typically something like these:

I'm so disappointed in you.

What were you thinking?

You are a serious letdown.

You have no idea the damage you've done to my reputation.

If you were really a Christian, you wouldn't act like you do.

If you really loved me, you'd try harder.

We're done.

And one of my personal favorites: *I'm really getting tired of forgiving the same old sin.*

For a group of people supposedly saved by grace, loved unconditionally, and secure in our relationship with Christ, we certainly carry a lot of guilt and baggage in our relationship with God. Our hearts and minds are filled with tapes that play over and over, and the messages aren't very inspiring. *You don't measure up. You're not doing enough. I can't believe you call yourself a Christian.*

The problem is that many of the things we believe Jesus would say to us are actually things he never said and never would say. They're patently unbiblical and don't represent the heart of Christ. As Holy Spirit-sealed followers of Jesus, we must learn to push back against the mental messages that tell us how fed up with us God is. We must bring those rogue

thoughts under the authority of our loving Lord Jesus. We need to rethink our theology and let God's revealed truth direct our beliefs about him, not some fictitious statement that doesn't even come close to accurately representing how Jesus feels about us. In short, we need to reject the things Jesus didn't say and start believing the things he did.

In the chapters that follow, I will unmask several commonly believed myths about our relationship with God. I will expose many of the things that we think Jesus would say to us if he had the chance, and compare them to what he actually said. Then I want to replace the terrible failed theology of condemnation that so many of us have with the truth of how Jesus really feels about us. When you're done reading this book, I hope you will be much more confident, emboldened, and joyful in your relationship with God.

But before we look at what Jesus didn't say, we need to examine something he did say. In fact, I believe it may be the most important thing he ever said. By doing so, we'll not only gain great hope and assurance of how he feels about us, but we'll also lay the foundation for refuting the things he actually never said.

1

I Will Give You Rest

On July 4, 2010, I decided to celebrate our nation's birthday by doing a long and difficult solo mountain climb. I hiked to the summit of a mountain I've climbed many times before—Mt. Ypsilon. But this time, instead of taking the gentle western slopes to the thirteen-thousand-foot summit, I took a much more difficult route. It's called Donner Ridge. The final three miles of the push to the summit up Donner Ridge are considered Class 3. That means the route is extremely steep and requires much hand-to-foot scrambling. Class 3 climbs are just below technical. (Technical climbs are Class 4—they require ropes, helmets, carabiners, and harnesses. Class 3 climbs require you to be just a little crazy.) I found that Donner Ridge was every bit a Class 3 and then some.

It was, quite honestly, one of the most demanding physical things I've ever done. There was no trail and no way markers, and I didn't see another person the entire time I was on the ridge. Since I was hiking alone, I obviously had to be extra

Careful. If I were to step off into a deep hole, no one would ever know.

But I made it. After several hours of extremely strenuous climbing, I reached the summit of Mt. Ypsilon via Donner Ridge. My climb took so long that I spent literally only a few minutes on the top. Thunderstorms were brewing all around me, so I made a quick exit to the nearest tree line. (In the opposite direction, I might add, of the trailhead and my car!)

While on the ridge, I made a critical decision that I'm sure helped me not only survive the climb but also reach the summit. I decided to rest. On a long, hard climb, sometimes the most important time on the mountain is the time you spend not doing anything. Those brief minutes of rest give your body the necessary breathing time to catch up with your exertion level; they give you time to take in some much-needed food and water; and they allow you to enjoy the view, mark your progress, and remember why you started up the mountain in the first place.

Rest on a long, difficult journey is vital.

That's why I believe that one of the most important statements Jesus ever made was about rest. To a group of road-weary spiritual seekers, Jesus said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 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. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:28–30). Have you ever heard more beautiful or inviting words? Against the backdrop of a culture that stressed the importance of religious performance, Jesus invited hungry souls to rest. He basically said, "Hey, if you're worn out from trying to keep all

the rules and making sure that you're pleasing God enough, why don't you just come to me? I'll do the work for you."

Those words must have sounded really good to all the spiritual dropouts who had found the demands of keeping their cultural and religious laws to be too rigorous—or rather, impossible. Those words must have also reverberated through the religious establishment, whose members had cut their spiritual teeth believing that God indeed kept score and they didn't want to end up on the short side of his ledger. Many of the religious leaders of Jesus' day, however noble their intentions may have been, believed and taught that God was best appeased by painstaking adherence to hundreds and hundreds of rules and regulations. A few brave souls found comfort in believing they could manage or dictate their status before God by trying to keep the rules. Most just found exhaustion.

And then Jesus came along and offered rest. Specifically, he offered rest through a relationship with him. Let's consider what he said.

Jesus' Invitation: Come to Me

I've always found it curious that Jesus constantly invited people to himself. Today we invite people to church, a small group, a conference, or a special event. We invite them to read a book, watch a DVD, or listen to a message. But we always invite people who are hungry for spiritual truth to pursue or investigate something other than ourselves. We say, "This is what you need," or, "Truth can be found here." Imagine what kind of crazy looks you would get if you told your spiritually inquisitive friends that all they needed to do to discover truth

was to come and be with you, that you were somehow what they were looking for. Hopefully, you know better.

Not Jesus. He didn't hesitate to tell people that what their souls most desperately needed could be found solely in a relationship with him. He didn't point to a philosophy, a religion, or a place of worship. He tapped himself on his chest and said, "I am what you're looking for." To the seekers of purpose, meaning, and truth, Jesus said that he himself was the end of their search:

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18–19).

"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life" (John 5:24).

"I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty" (John 6:35).

"If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him" (John 7:37–38).

"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12).

"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die" (John 11:25–26).

“You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am” (John 13:13).

Do you see a theme developing here? Either Jesus was the most self-centered, self-deluded person in history, or he was indeed the answer to every human’s prayers and the fulfillment of every hungry soul’s dreams.

When you enter into a relationship with Jesus, you are not entering into a system that is maintained by your hard work, or one where you will be graded for your performance. You are not told to obey the rules, check off the boxes, or keep a running tally of your deeds. You’re simply invited to know him.

Jesus’ Guest List: All You Who Are Weary and Burdened

Jesus didn’t target the put-together, the well-polished, and the religious performers. Chances are they wouldn’t have seen their need for what he offered anyway. Rather, Jesus targeted the down-and-out, the spiritually bankrupt, and the religiously lost. All those who didn’t seem to make the cut or who couldn’t meet the impossibly high standards set by the religious elite were the very ones Jesus invited to come to him.

Notice how he described them—“weary and burdened.” Our initial reaction when hearing that is to think about physical exhaustion. I think of a traveler in Jesus’ day after a day of walking, or a merchant carrying a heavy load to market, or a farmer who has spent a day working in the heat of the sun—or me about two-thirds of the way up Donner Ridge. Any of those could well be described as weary and burdened. But Jesus obviously had more in mind than just physical exhaustion. He was speaking of spiritual exhaustion.

The weary and burdened Jesus referred to are those who realize the futility of their efforts to appease God. Consider Tracy. She is thirty-seven, never married, and struggles with chronic depression. Tracy had a difficult childhood with an overbearing father and an absent mother. She has attempted suicide twice and is on various medications for her mental and emotional struggles. Tracy is also a Christ-follower, but she never feels like she can please God. In her eyes, her life is a royal mess and she has very little to offer God. She feels like she is a constant letdown to him, and that no matter how hard she tries, no matter how much she prays or serves, her emotional struggles always trump her ability to please her heavenly Father.

It is to people like Tracy that Jesus offered this invitation. Not just those with obvious emotional or mental battles, but also those who feel completely frustrated in their efforts to make God happy. If you feel like you're always a day late and a dollar short in your relationship with God, or if you feel like you will never be able to do enough to get into his good graces, then Jesus was talking to you.

In his teaching in Matthew 11:28–30, Jesus used a familiar image from his day to help his audience understand what he was offering them: “Take my yoke upon you. . . . For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” Farmers knew all about yokes—those heavy wooden and leather harnesses that fit over the head and shoulders of oxen. They kept the oxen pulling together in the same direction.

No doubt many in Jesus' audience could identify with the heavy yoke of their cultural and religious legal code. The countless rules and regulations were impossible to keep up with, much less adhere to. So Jesus offered his yoke instead. He taught and modeled a faith system that was based on

grace, forgiveness, and healing. He said that if weary spiritual seekers would join themselves to him, they would actually find joy and abundant life in the process, not spiritual burnout.

For someone like Tracy, Jesus' words couldn't be any sweeter: "Connect yourself to me and let me do the work. I'll make you pure, I'll heal your wounds, and I'll make you right before God." If you have ever found yourself at the end of your proverbial rope, especially in your efforts to measure up before a holy God, then know that you are exactly the kind of person Jesus had in mind when he made this offer. You're on his guest list.

Jesus' Promise: I Will Give You Rest

In the months following the miraculous exodus of the Israelites from their captivity in Egypt, Moses found himself in an unlikely and unenviable position. As he led the people through the wilderness, they constantly moaned and complained about how bad things were for them. They had quickly forgotten how much they had suffered in Egypt and dared to gripe about their living conditions after God had led them out of slavery. On more than one occasion God offered or threatened to wipe out the entire ungrateful bunch and start over with Moses and a new nation. Moses often ended up pleading to God for mercy and patience with the rebellious and ungrateful Israelites.

In one poignant moment, Moses pleaded for God to protect the people and continue to guide them. He then prayed, "If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you. Remember that this nation is your people" (Exod. 33:13). That's quite a daring prayer. Moses boldly asked God not just to grant favor to his

rebellious people but also to grant it to him as their leader. He prayed that God might take him on as his very own student. I envy Moses' boldness before God and must confess that I have prayed this prayer for myself on many occasions.

God's response to Moses was far beyond anything Moses may have hoped for: "The LORD replied, 'My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest'" (Exod. 33:14). The promise of God's presence must have been music to the ears of Moses and his wandering people. God wasn't obligated to just hang out with them. If he chose to abandon them, they'd be sitting ducks for the marauding nations that inhabited the lands around them. The promise of God's presence brought with it the guarantee of his provision and protection for his people. Moses must have been humbled and thrilled.

But it's the second part of God's promise to Moses that really merits our interest here: "I will give you rest." This latter promise is the result of the former: "Because my presence will be with you, because you'll know my protection and provision, you'll have rest." There's a cause-and-effect relationship here: God's presence yields God's rest. The Hebrews knew that by *rest*, God meant not only the protection of their boundaries from invading hordes but also the emotional, mental, and spiritual confidence they would have knowing that God was irreversibly with them. *Rest* meant that they could stop worrying about what might happen tomorrow and what enemy might be waiting for them around the next corner. And don't overlook this point: *rest* was inseparable from God's presence. One always accompanies the other.

Now let's jump from Exodus to Matthew in the Bible, about 1,400 years later. Jesus stood before a group of weary spiritual seekers and invited them to enter into a relationship

with him. What did he promise? “I will give you rest.” That was no accidental statement by Jesus. Any good Hebrew knew what God had promised Moses and the Israelites back in Exodus. Those words were some of the sweetest ever spoken by God to a person or a people. So when Jesus said them, he fully understood the implications of what he was saying.

Imagine the murmur that must have moved through the crowd as listeners turned to each other and said, “Did he just say what I think he said?” No one, and I mean NO ONE, quoted God as an equal and lived to tell about it. When Jesus invoked the “I will give you rest” promise, he was saying that he had the same ability to bring peace, protection, and provision to people’s lives as did the God who’d spoken to Moses in Exodus. He was saying they were one and the same—that his presence was the same as God’s presence, and his rest the same as God’s rest.

Setting aside the obvious theological implications of Jesus’ statement for just a minute, let’s think about the implications for our lives and faith. In his invitation to road-weary spiritual seekers, Jesus offered to be to them what God was to the nation of Israel while they wandered in the desert. He promised to those who followed him that he would be their shelter, defender, leader, and provider. And with those things would come the mental, emotional, and spiritual rest that can occur only when a person knows with absolute certainty that God is his or her advocate, not an adversary.

What’s the Point?

What we do together right now is extremely important, so you might want to put the book down and stretch or grab a

cup of coffee before you finish this chapter. What we learn together right here and now will become the platform from which we refute the ten lies that so many of us believe about Jesus and how he feels about us.

Are you ready? Here we go.

We can draw at least two profound conclusions from Jesus' invitation in Matthew 11:28 that should forever mark how we view and understand our relationship with him.

Jesus Wants You

Make no mistake about it—Jesus extended his holy invitation for rest to *you*. You are not the grand exception in history that God cannot or will not love. You have not gone so far that he can't or won't forgive you. When Jesus spoke this invitation, he didn't aim it just at the really good people or the really pretty people or the really churchy people. He aimed it at the spiritually broken. If you find yourself nearing the end of your rope spiritually, if you find your stamina and desire to keep trying to earn God's favor rapidly waning, then you're exactly the kind of person Jesus was reaching out to. If you're not spiritually worn out or if you somehow think you have it all together, then you probably won't get anything out of reading this book. Just keep on going like you have been. Chances are, brokenness will find you. But if you feel desperate before God and yet hopeless without him, then you're exactly where God wants you.

Here's a little exercise. I want you to make Jesus' invitation personal. You know that he said, "Come to me, all you who are weary." The adjective *all* has a powerful meaning there, signifying that there are no limits about whom Jesus is

willing to receive. But the broadness of the comment can still leave some feeling left out or wondering if it really applies to them. So let's narrow it down. Here's the statement again, with a minor change: "Come to me, _____, and I will give you rest." I want you to write your name in that blank, and I want you to do it right now. Then read it out loud a few times. Let God's Spirit speak it to you.

Come to me, *Tony*. Come to me, *Sandy*. Come to me, *Amanda*. Come to me, *Carlos*. Come to me, *Benjamin*. Come to me, *Ajid*. Come to me, *Trevor*. Come to me, *Russ*. Come to me, *Mohammed*. Come to me, *Sylvia*. Come to me, *Will*.
Come to me, _____.

We could spend the rest of our lives filling in the blanks, because the beautiful and undeniable biblical reality is that the invitation is for every one of us. Including *you*.

Whatever the Size of Your Burden, Jesus Wants It

Jesus is in the business of burden lifting. Part of his mission is to remove the load from the shoulders of religious seekers and weary spiritual travelers. It doesn't matter what the load is, how long you've carried it, or how ugly it might be. If it's weighing you down and sapping your spiritual strength, Jesus wants it.

Let me be specific:

You were abused as a child. You have trouble trusting others and forgiving. *Jesus wants your burden.*

You recently had an affair and have terribly wounded the people you love most in the world. *Jesus wants your burden.*

You've had massive financial failures and had to file bankruptcy. *Jesus wants your burden.*

You struggle with contentment. *Jesus wants your burden.*

You often feel afraid. *Jesus wants your burden.*

You're a worrier. *Jesus wants your burden.*

You have always struggled with your weight. You don't feel attractive to others. *Jesus wants your burden.*

You feel consumed by guilt. *Jesus wants your burden.*

You hate your life and wish you could start over. *Jesus wants your burden.*

You battle depression. *Jesus wants your burden.*

You're a recovering drug addict or alcoholic. *Jesus wants your burden.*

You have a gambling addiction. *Jesus wants your burden.*

You secretly look at pornography. *Jesus wants your burden.*

You have never felt significant. You always feel like the world is passing you by. *Jesus wants your burden.*

You're lonely. *Jesus wants your burden.*

You feel like God is always angry with you. *Jesus wants your burden.*

You feel like you're always letting God down. *Jesus wants your burden.*

You don't think you can ever be good enough for God. *Jesus wants your burden.*

You _____
(write your burden in the blank). *Jesus wants your burden.*

There is no statute of limitations for the burdens that Jesus is willing to take. It doesn't matter how long-standing the

burden is, how weighty, how distasteful, or how intimidating. Whatever your burden is, he wants it.

Come to Me, All You Who Are Weary and Burdened

At the end of every chapter and at the end of the book, we'll come back to this invitation from Jesus. I want to keep it fresh for you. It represents the heart of what he has said to us. It's his red-letter teaching summed up in one beautiful sentence.

But first we have some work to do. Now that we know what Jesus has said and how he really feels about us, we are ready to take on the lies that so many of us believe about God and our relationship with him. We're ready to expose and refute the things Jesus *didn't* say. So let's get to it. There's great news ahead.