

What Did Jesus Say?

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”

Perfection. Perfection is something I've striven for my whole life. For most of my life before college it took on many forms. Be it perfection in a sport, academically, or even being a perfect child. There were many times when I didn't even know what exactly the perfection looked like, but was naively still striving towards this idea because I felt that if I achieved it, all my problems would go away. This never came true. Though in the eyes of many I seemed to have everything together, all people ever really saw was the façade that I had come all too good at putting on. Because I never seemed to achieve or even fit in to this earthly construction of perfection, I began to lose my passion and drive for life. I wondered what I was actually doing all of this hard work for and what was it all really for? It was at this low point in high school that I came to realize something that had been sitting right in front of me this whole time.

I grew up in a Christian household, and because of this, I felt as if I didn't really have to actively pursue God myself since my parents had such strong faith. I never really prayed, read my bible, or even paid attention in Church because my parents did enough of that for honestly the whole country. The summer before my senior year in high school I finally began to realize what all the fuss was about. At a point in my life when my pursuit of perfection had beaten me down pretty badly, I finally opened my eyes, ears and heart to the subtle call that has followed me all my life but I had never taken notice of in my pursuit of perfection. "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" Matthew 11:28. This simple yet powerful call changed my life. I spent that summer grappling with this concept and this religion that should have been so familiar to me, yet seemed almost brand new. In Mark 2:17, Jesus says "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." That whole summer as I refocused my life and began to do away with some of my detrimental habits and views, I began to wrestle with this idea that there was a God who wanted the "sinners". In a world in which perfection is the guiding principle, to tell someone that life really isn't about this pursuit of perfection is kind of...nutty. Because if life isn't about this pursuit, then what is the purpose of it? It is this search for understanding and meaning in my life that began to strengthen my faith and has brought me here today. My faith in God may have started at a low point in my life, but in no way shape or form does that make it a faith just for the weak or desperate. Many people don't think they need religion or better yet God now because everything is going pretty well in their lives and I understand that mindset. Though most of my life was spent striving towards an ideal I would never achieve, I did still achieve many goals I had made. So why follow or believe in God if we don't have 99 problems? My answer to that would be that we don't have to wait, like I did, for life to bring us to our knees before we acknowledge what is right in front of us calling us towards a life that has purpose, a life where despite our baggage there is a God who will always love us if we just acknowledge who He is. Now I'm a second generation bargain shopper, so I know a good deal when I see it, and in my opinion this was and is it.

Once I realized that Christianity could give me the peace I had been yearning for in life I realized something else that had been holding me back all these years. Isn't being a Christian hard? I'd be lying if I said it was a walk in the park. But despite some of the uphill battles there is always someone there holding your hand or sometimes even carrying you through it all. Yes, it is not easy to rid ourselves of certain principles which have bound us for years or even all our lives, but Matthew 26:19 reassures us by reminding us that "With God all things are possible." Hebrews 13:5 continues this reassurance by telling us that God loves you so much that "[He] will never leave you nor forsake you." This promise is one that I know to be 100% true and is one that I would lay my life down for. Radical? Absolutely not. Once you have lived this truth and know that when you are on your death bed in the middle of nowhere in Ghana surrounded by no one you know or love, as I was this past summer, having and feeling the assurance that there is someone watching over you through it all is the most powerful promise you will ever know.

The last view of Christianity that I've encountered and struggled with is one that paints it as a religion devoid of happiness or fun. But for those who know me, those two words would probably be the last two characteristics you would say I was devoid of. I find pure joy in the simple things in life again and don't even know how to properly frown. Now not everyone will encounter faith in God the same way I did, but that's okay because there is no perfect way to encounter or follow God. Trusting God may not be the easiest thing I've ever done, but it was definitely the most rewarding. So since the benefits outweigh the costs in every way, I took Blaise Pascal's wager and decided to gamble that there is much to be gained from wagering that God exists and little to be gained from wagering that God doesn't exist. No regrets, now and forever.

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