

THE PATHWAY TO HUMAN FLOURISHING

(Sermon Summary)

Reading: Matthew 11:20-30

We often hear people talking today about 'human flourishing'. It would give the idea that there is a potential for development and growth in the human race, in general, and in individuals, in particular, which may or may not be realized. There is a lot of concern in the West about the amount of unhappiness felt, especially among the young, expressing itself as anxiety or depression. Some try mindfulness techniques to attempt to still the inner turmoil. People try to find peace of mind and an end to their inner turmoil by re-defining who they are and opting for a different gender. Yet any who go down this route report that they have not found the peace they hoped to find. They have not been able to flourish.

Christian writers also speak in these terms as well. Christians may or may not realise all that the Lord might intend for them to be and to do. Somewhere there is a roadblock to their flourishing as people of faith. So when the Lord promises to those who come to Him that they will find rest (Matthew 11:29), could what He promises connect with the valuable thought of human flourishing?

1. Promises that never come true.

Through the last decades, people were promised that the pathway to true freedom and flourishing was to be found in abandoning the Lord and the laws He had given humanity. Religion, including the Christian faith, was caricatured as a heavy burden that men had put on each other. It was said there was no rest for the soul in the Christian faith and so the 'death of God' and 'the death of the Bible' were pronounced as being good things.

But the promise never came true. It did not come true for Adam and Eve that they would be able to function better by being independent of God. Again and again, the promise is made to people and people believe the lie, only to find that it does not work. Instead, as Adam and Eve found, it leads to death, guilt, alienation from God and from each other. In other words, it produces the very opposite of what human flourishing might be imagined to be. So people end up labouring under man-made burdens, promises of freedom that turned out to be lies. They are depressed, fearful, ever searching for relief, but never finding it, hoping to find it, but it is always eluding their

grasp. More and different relationships are offered as a panacea. But they cause people to be harder, more violent, more cruel. There is no rest and no flourishing.

2. Hearing His voice.

The Lord Jesus makes Himself to be the focus of the promise of rest for the soul. His call to us to 'Come to Me' is timeless and arresting. Could the rest He promises be what is missing? Could this be where human flourishing is to be found? Has mankind, largely speaking, missed the way and ignored the very One who supplies the answers to be soul's deepest needs?

Our Lord speaks to the fundamental need of the human soul. Whether we care to admit it or not, we carry with us a wounded conscience, and we are morally defeated, having unmet spiritual hopes and dreams. Our Lord cuts through this sad state of our hearts to address us with tenderness and hope. He speaks with sincerity and kindness. Although He has been insulted and rejected by many of the local towns like Bethsaida and Capernaum, He still brings His appeal to our consciences again and again.

In fact, though we might have rebuffed Him many times, He still comes to us with His tender words and appeals. His address to us comes most clearly from the cross. That is His pulpit. He tells us to find rest from Him there where He is bearing the sin of His people. He tells us to come to Him, the One who lays down His life that we might be forgiven and have eternal life. This is the place where He is pacifying the wrath of God and making propitiation on our behalf. God's anger is a just anger directed against our transgressing His law, but the Lord is willing that this wrath should be diverted upon Himself. The punishment for sin is transferred in a very deliberate, specific and focused way upon Him instead of upon us, if we will believe in His promise and come to Him.

For God's forgiveness, offered to us and pronounced over us on the cross, is the pathway to human flourishing. Here the conscience can find rest from its torments and now look forward to a future walking with the Lord, with all His help and blessing. The lie is told to us that we will be able to flourish outside of God. The opposite is in fact true. Until we learn from the precious blood of Christ that is shed, that our sins are forgiven and that we can go in peace, we will never find true rest, never be able to come to terms with who we are and properly understand ourselves, and who we are meant to be. Until we discover our own personal emptiness and bankruptcy, we will never know how to repair the damage and to be filled with good things that will enable us to move on and flourish. Otherwise we will remain strangers to ourselves, a mass of unhappy contradictions, lives that do not add up to anything substantial, wrongly analyzing and diagnosing ourselves.

We should then stop fighting against Him and His appeal and promise to us. We must turn away from the route that leads to misery of all kinds. We should take up His yoke instead, part of which means that we have to suffer the indignity of having our dreams

of personal worth and value punctured, and to realize that we have no moral capacity to be pleasing to God as we are. We survey the way ahead that has ruin, personal poverty, not flourishing, attending its way, and take up the offer that He makes to us.

3. What a promise.

It is a great promise that He makes. We mistakenly think that the action is somewhere else, that we are missing out on something important and life-changing if we submit to His yoke and wear it. We come to our senses when we work out that, only by coming to Him and taking His yoke upon us, will we be able to flourish as people. He is the true Author of valid, and not false, self-discovery. He is not the enemy of us finding out what we need to know about ourselves in order to change and flourish, even be happy. Although He may have to bring to light hidden things in the soul and expose them to His fatherly rebuke, the result is rest in the innermost recesses of the heart. 'The real' you' becomes the person that Christ is making us into.

None of this implies that we will cease to be critical thinkers. The opposite is true, and we are able to think more robustly and rigorously when we know Him. We are not anxious that we 'are missing out' on something but are calmer and more at rest in our soul. This is a far better state to be in and a more promising place to be in order to flourish and find our way in life.

The Teacher who speaks to us is very compassionate, very wise, very kind. He is the source of all valuable learning and has not come to destroy us and extinguish our personality and any hopes we had of joy. We must forsake our sin for while hell is still our destination, there is no true flourishing now or in the future. That burden has to be lifted, and then we will find the rest for our soul, the pathway to true human flourishing.