

It was the summer of '97. Seven people had been in a minivan for 10 hours. My dad, my mom, the four girls, and my cousin, Dottie. We were headed to Disney World, but the sun was going down, and we'd had enough of being in the car.

Suddenly, a toll booth appeared out of nowhere! This was the days of cash only. So, my mom passes up a gallon sized Ziploc bag of loose change she's been keeping for this very moment. My dad says to me, "I need \$1.25 exactly."

I'm in the passenger's seat, because I'm the oldest girl. I reach in and grab a handful of change, but the sun is going down fast, and I realize I've grabbed mostly pennies.

"Hurry!" my dad says.

"Five, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen," I reply.

"Forget the pennies!" he shouts!

From the back of the minivan, my mom offers to help, but my hand is in the bag again, hoping for bigger coins.

"Emily! Help your sister!"

"Gin, give me the bag!"

"Twenty-four, twenty-nine. Oh! A quarter! Um . . . fifty-four!"

"Come on! We're almost to the booth!"

"Mom, why'd you put so many pennies in here?"

"Give me the bag!"

"I've got seventy-two!"

"I swear I will turn this car around, and we'll just go home if I don't have \$1.25 in my hand in ten seconds!"

“Just give him five quarters!”

“I can’t see anything in the dark!”

And then my little sister says from the back row, “I’ve gotta go potty. Now.”

Have you ever been in a situation in which everyone was frustrated? Well, good! This story from Matthew 11 will be relatable then.

One of the things I love about preaching is that I get to reveal how scripture, that is thousands of years old, written by mostly men in foreign countries and foreign languages, is extraordinarily relevant.

Here’s what’s happening. We’re about halfway through Matthew’s gospel. And like lots of other journeys in life, there’s excitement and patience and grace at the beginning and action and energy at the end. But in the middle, there’s the slog of endurance and impatience and hunger and personalities clashing – bumps in the road. There’s been some bad weather and long nights and hunger. People, even Biblical people, can get on each other’s nerves or disappoint one another. And then there are the expectations. Those darn expectations that get shattered and make us mad.

In the beginning of Matthew chapter 11, John the Baptizer, cousin of Jesus, fiery prophet who is calling the nation of Israel to repent because the Messiah is here, is in prison.

First century prison. No running water. No electricity. No hygiene. Prison. And he’s frustrated, understandably. So, he sends his disciples to Jesus and asks, “Are you the One we’ve been expecting, or are we still waiting?”

It’s a brutal question. He’s been Jesus’ hype-man for a year or two already. But his expectations of Jesus are not lining up with his current reality. He’s been prophesying about a Messiah who will come with power and vengeance and justice and make things right. But Jesus is not *that* guy, and John is suffering.

Jesus tells John's disciples to return to John with a message about what Jesus *is* doing – namely healing and helping the most vulnerable. And then those disciples leave. It doesn't say so, but they're probably frustrated, too. They probably hoped that Jesus would return with them and rescue John.

But then Jesus speaks to the crowd and praises John in really generous ways. He says there's never been a prophet like him. The best in history. The greatest ever.

But then Jesus says these words starting in verse sixteen, ¹⁶“But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another, ¹⁷‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.’

¹⁸“For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon’; ¹⁹the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.”

Jesus is expressing his frustration here. He is saying to the people, “You are so incredibly stubborn! There's been no other generation of Israelites as stubborn as you! God has been trying to get through to you in different ways, and yet you refuse to listen!

John was sent in the traditional line of prophets. He came loud and animated and dressed outlandishly and he fasted and warned you like the prophets of old to straighten up, but you called him crazy and now he's in prison. Then, I came more quietly and friendly. I helped the poor and ate with the outcasts, and you call me a drunk and a friend of sinners.”

This language Jesus is using is really similar to the language Jeremiah used in his prophesy. In chapter six of Jeremiah, he warns the people, “You are at a crossroads. If you choose the right path, and walk in it, you will find rest for your souls. If not, you'll suffer.

And then God says through Jeremiah, I've told you which path to travel down, but you've rejected my advice. I've sounded trumpets to warn you of danger, but you've said,

“We will not heed your warnings!” It’s a frustrating moment for God and God’s prophet, and I think Jesus remembers this as he is looking out at the people.

He says, “we’ve tried getting through to you in multiple ways.” He says, “I’ve done miracles right before your eyes and yet you still don’t believe.” He’s healed the deaf and the blind. He’s calmed a storm. He’s healed leprosy and paralysis and fevers. He’s healed people with severe mental illness who were thought to be demon possessed. And he raised a little girl from death to life. He’s proven his power, and yet people are still questioning. And he’s frustrated. Understandably.

And the people he’s venting to are frustrated. They have been under Roman occupation for about seventy years at this point in history. Taxes were heavy. Military presence was intimidating. They were an oppressed people struggling to maintain their identity and theologically wrestling with their status on earth and their unique covenant with their God. They want someone to deliver them from the oppression they bear. They want to work and worship without the shadowy threat of the Roman Empire hovering over them. They’re frustrated. It’s understandable.

So, Jesus does the smartest thing he could possibly do when he’s frustrated. He prays. In verses twenty-five through thirty, it says, ²⁵At that time Jesus said, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; ²⁶yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. ²⁷All 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.

²⁸“Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

I like the way Eugene Peterson translates this in the Message version. It speaks to the frustration we’re all feeling here. Jesus offers us this exit from the rut we’re in and says, “Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—

watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."

Jesus understands that everyone, himself included, is frustrated at this point. So, he prays. And his prayer is for child-like faith, opened eyes, and partnership in the struggle. The yoke he refers to is the equipment placed upon a pair of oxen. Jesus is offering to walk right beside us and share our struggles. That's how we break the cycle of frustration. Let Jesus walk right beside us, through everything.

Friends, life is hard. Relationships, even loving ones, are frustrating from time to time. Faith in one another can even ebb and flow, but the scripture normalizes frustration, and Jesus offers us his presence.

Now, that doesn't mean that we won't have our moments in life of unmet expectations or will never again struggle to be patient with one another after a ten-hour car ride, but what it does mean is that we can relate to the word of the Lord and remember that the ache of unmet expectations can frustrate even the very best of us. Prayer helps. Letting Jesus walk with us helps. Being honest about our frustration helps. And organizing your loose change helps, too. Amen.