

## The Great Invitation

Matt. 11:25-30

**Intro.** What was the most wonderful and exciting invitation you ever received? Think about that for a moment. For some it may have been an invitation to attend the college at the top of your list. For others it may have been an invitation to play a role in a musical or some other production. For still others it may have been an invitation to join a team, a band, a fraternity or civic organization. Didn't it feel good to be included and accepted? Taking nothing away from the thrill of those invitations, there's one invitation that transcends every other. It's the invitation sent out to every human being by the Creator of the Universe...the Lord of heaven and earth. In terms so simple a child can understand, Jesus said, "**Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.**" - 11:28

The world's religions have muddied the waters but here in **Matt. 11:28-30** we find the clear essence of what it means to believe and be saved. The offer couldn't be less complicated! Jesus said, "**Come to Me...and I will give you rest.**" Following the invitation, **v.29** sets forth the essence of what it means to be a disciple or follower of Jesus. There Jesus said, **Take my yoke upon you and learn from me.** Our goal this AM is to consider the wonder of the gospel's life-changing simplicity. Before we get to those pivotal verses, we need to consider their context. The verses that precede **vs.28-30** set the stage for The Great Invitation. So let's be reminded of...

**1. The Grim Condemnation – vs. 20-24** - Then Jesus began to denounce the cities in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent. "Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you."

Jesus pronounced **woe** on the cities of Galilee that wouldn't repent despite the abundance of teachings they heard and miracles they witnessed. Let me explain what the word **woe** means. Imagine hearing the darkest, most terrible indictment God might pronounce. Nothing God said to you could be more ominous or terrifying. **Woe** is that word. **Woe** is the last word anyone should ever want to hear from God. **Woe** is a grim declaration of judgment and doom. When spoken by God, it's a word reserved for extreme peril and the ultimate horror of being condemned to eternal Hell.

As we found last time, the great sin of these Galilean cities wasn't idolatry, gross immorality or materialism...it was the sin of indifference. Given an abundance of light and exposure to the Messiah, most of the inhabitants responded with disinterest and unbelief. They refused to face their sin and need of a Savior. Because the testimony they were given was so compelling, Jesus said the punishment of **Korazin** and **Bethsaida** will be more severe than it was for **Tyre** and **Sidon**. The punishment of **Capernaum** will be more horrific than the destruction of **Sodom**. In **Lk.12:48** Jesus said, "**From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded...**" Based on this principle, God will someday judge the inhabitants of these cities and the world.

**Jn. 3:16, 17** is familiar to us all, but listen again - "**For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.**" Because Jesus came to save the world, not condemn it, this declaration seems out of character with His mission. But Jesus wasn't passing judgment on these cities, He was merely stating facts in a prophetic way. Twice Jesus used the phrase, **on the day of judgment.**

Since **the day of judgment** hadn't come yet, there was time for them to change course and respond to God's offer. But the ball was in their court as it is for every person who has heard the Gospel without responding in faith. Hell was more real to Jesus than to anyone who ever spoke on earth. Better than any man, Jesus knows the torment ahead for those who refuse Him. His heart breaks over the consequences of indifference. How could He claim to love these people and not warn them? So even in this sobering declaration, Jesus displayed the love of God.

Think of the Holy Spirit's ministry to the unsaved today. Jesus said in **Jn.16:8 - When He (the Spirit) comes, He will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment:** God's work of saving sinners begins with the alarming fact that we must give account to God someday. This isn't convenient, politically correct or taught anywhere but the Bible, but it's true! There are consequences for sin right now, but that's not the end of it...**Heb. 9:27 - ...man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment...** All too often Christianity is presented as a means to personal improvement or a happier, more fulfilling life. But the truth is this...the greatest need of every sinner is to be saved from God's judgment and the punishment of eternal Hell. But "*Pastor, doesn't God want people to come to Him because they love Him?*" Yes, God prefers that. But love for God develops as we grow in our understanding of who He is all He's done for us. Guilt and fear may not be the highest motivators...but if they lead us to Christ, God is pleased! He loves us and longs for us to come to Him by whatever motivation! So in unmistakable terms, Jesus told this Galilean crowd what to expect if they continued to reject God's messengers and their message.

**2. The Gospel Revelation – vs. 25-27 - At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure. "All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.**

Notice how this section begins with **praise**. Jesus praised His **Father**, who is **Lord of heaven and earth**. This section is rich in theology. 5x's Jesus addressed God as **Father**. The religious leaders were hard of hearing but this came through loud and clear. **Jn. 5:18** says, **For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.** Notice that Jesus praises His Father's wisdom...a wisdom that reveals salvation to little children. Do you know how and why God has hidden **these things** from the **wise and the learned**?...because the nature of **these things** is spiritual. They can't be discovered by human reason. The **mysteries of God** can't be examined in a laboratory or tested by scientific investigation. Yet these are the resources and tools of **the wise and the learned**. The wise and learned are very proud of their micrometers, microscopes, mental prowess, and methods of truth detection. But the infinite God exists outside the realm of human discovery. When it comes to God, we're like infants trying to understand the meaning of a ceiling fan. The short of it is this...there's no way finite man can comprehend an infinite God unless God chooses to reveal Himself. But that's why Jesus came. He came to reveal the Father. **Jn. 1:18 - No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.**

Later in **Matt. 18:3** Jesus said, "**I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.**" Do you know why young children are such good candidates to hear and believe the Gospel? It's because children are needy.

Children are simple / humble / and trusting. They need others to do for them. They're open, not closed. The **wise and the learned** are just the opposite. Truth for the **wise and learned** is complex. With their accumulated developments and degrees, they've out-grown childlike humility. They regard the needy as weak and unenlightened. They've ex-changed the virtues of childhood for pride and self-reliance. A lifetime of disappointments has taught them to be on guard and trust no one. So according to **His good pleasure**, God has devised and revealed a salvation that can only be received on the basis of childlike simplicity, humility and trust. But the **wise and learned**, resist the Gospel.

I was 6 years old when I prayed to ask Jesus to be my Savior. God's miracle of grace happened in the front room of my grandparent's home. My grandmother hosted a Good News Club every Thursday afternoon. She baked cookies / played the pump organ / led the singing / and taught the Bible lesson. She was the whole show...director / cast and / production crew. One afternoon she told an old CEF story about a boy who played with matches and burned down his family's chicken coop. Later that evening when the boy's father came home, the two of them walked through the ashes. In the ashes they saw the charred body of a hen. But to their amazement, beneath the hen were several chicks who survived the flames. They were sheltered and saved by their mother's body. I knew I was a sinner like that boy. I'd played with matches and done other things that weren't pleasing to God. My grandmother said God knew all about our sin. That's why He sent Jesus. Like that hen's body had been for her chicks, Jesus gave His life to shelter me from the punishment I deserved. God used this story to open my mind and heart to receive His salvation. I responded to His invitation. Looking back, I have no doubt that God saved me that day. And this wonderful grace of God is still reaching out to save whoever will come to Him by trusting His Son, the Lord Jesus. Though children are open to receive the Good News, it's more difficult for those who are wise, educated and self-satisfied.

But notice something more before we leave this section. In **v.27** Jesus said, **All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.** Do you remember when Jesus was transfigured in front of Peter, James and John? **Matt.17** says, **His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light.** The voice of the Father from heaven said, **"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to Him!"** Why must the world listen to Jesus Christ? Because the Lord of heaven and earth commands us to! The fact is...Jesus said, **"all things have been committed to me by my Father"**...**all things** includes all we need to know. God commands us to listen to His Son because He is the only one who knows God. This makes irrelevant any quest to know God through the teachings of Buddha, Confucius, Muhammed, or any other "Johnny come lately" prophet or philosopher! Only Jesus knows God!

**v.27** echoes **Jn. 14:6** where Jesus said, **"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."** It also echoes **Heb.1:1, 2** which says, **In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.** Jesus is the gate through which His sheep enter. He is the narrow door through which every human being must pass! He is the only one who qualifies to show us the Father and declare the Father's salvation because as He said in **Jn. 10:30** – **"I and the Father are one."** When the people of those Galilean cities ignored and rejected Jesus and His apostles, they rejected God. Dr. Alan Ross writes, *"This is a very 'exclusive' idea, but if we think about it for a while it can be no other way. If there is only one God, and that God has visited this world in the person of Jesus Christ, then how can people reject Jesus Christ and still claim to know the one true God?"*

By rejecting the light they were given, the indifferent consign themselves to darkness. So **vs. 25-27** is a theological interlude where Jesus addressed revelation or the process by which God makes known His truth. It's significant to the context because it underscores the tragic indifference of the Galileans. Jesus is God's appointed revelator, but they rejected Him. The only One who knows God was sent to them, but they refused Him. As **Jn. 1:11, 12** says - **He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God--** So this interlude looks back to explain the catastrophic indifference and grim condemnation declared in **vs. 21-24**.

But as a theological interlude, **vs. 25-27** also looks ahead to the great invitation of **vs. 28-30**. It prepares us to understand the legitimacy of the invitation, "**Come to me.**" Jesus didn't say, "*Come to God / seek out a priest / go to the Temple*" / "*join a church*" / or "*turn over a new leaf.*" He said, **Come to Me**. As you've heard in the series of messages Pastor Jerry has shared with us, 7 x's in John's Gospel Jesus emphasized His deity by use of the name "**I Am**". He said, **I am the bread of life / I am the light of the world / I am the gate / I am the good shepherd / I am the resurrection and the life / I am the way the truth and the life / and I am the vine**. If any missed it or if doubt remains, Jesus said in **Jn. 8:58** - "**I tell you the truth,**" ... "**before Abraham was born, I am!**" Every time Jesus applied "**I am**" to Himself, He used the name of God who revealed Himself to Moses saying, "**I AM WHO I AM.**" - **Ex. 3:11** So **vs. 25-27** prepare us to accept the legitimacy of this great invitation, **Come to Me**. No human being or angel could legitimately extend an invitation like this. Jesus Christ alone has the authority and legitimacy because He is God incarnate. He can provide what we need / lighten our way / grant us entrance / shepherd us / raise us from death to life / bring us to God / and make us fruitful...because He is the great **I Am**. So at last we come to the...

**3. The Great Invitation – vs. 28-30 - "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."**

**1. The call to salvation and rest – v. 28** - The invitation, **Come to Me**, represents the simplicity of the response God requires. Each person must respond and approach the Lord like a child in need...a child who trusts the generosity, goodness and adequacy of the one who has invited them to come. We come to Jesus through prayer. Believing God's Word is true, we confess we are sinners and that Jesus is the One who can save us. We ask Him to forgive us, cleanse us and receive us into God's kingdom and family. The wording of that prayer doesn't matter as much as the attitude of our hearts. God knows what's going on there. Then in simple faith, we thank the Lord for doing what He promised to do. We thank Him for saving us. The transaction is simple but dynamic. At that moment, the Spirit of God speaks new life into our souls and we are born again. The invitation is the call to faith...the invitation to believe. In reality, it's more a command than an invitation. The Lord of heaven and earth instructs us to come. Whoever understands and responds to these words has found the way to the heart of Christianity. What about you?

Notice that two groups are invited to come...the **weary** and the **burdened**. Since revelation is hidden from the wise and the learned, the invitation is offered to those humbled by life's circumstances. It goes out to those who know they have spiritual needs...not to the religious who were self-righteous and self-satisfied. The **weary** and the **burdened** represent both sides of human misery. The active sense of **weary** applies to those who have wearied themselves by bad choices or misplaced effort.

Life for the weary is hard and disappointing. Among them are the moral / the religious / and the rule-keepers. They've exhausted themselves trying to please God. Like a ferret running in a wheel, they wear themselves out in pursuit of self-salvation. They run endlessly yet never find the peace or rest their souls long for. Augustine confessed, *"Our souls are restless until they find their rest in thee."* So these are the weary...the religious...the performers...the doers...the workers... the tryers. To this group, Jesus says, **Come to Me...I will give you rest.**

The passive sense of **burdened**, refers to those on whom burdens have been imposed. Someone or something has loaded them down to the point of overload. They're maxed out. The primary burden referred to here is the demands of the legalism...and specifically, the standards imposed by the Scribes and Pharisees. In **Matt. 23:4** Jesus said, **"They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them."** It was hard enough to keep the Law; but the Pharisees had added hundreds of regulations which made compliance impossible. And listen...some churches are very effective when it comes to burdening their people. Fulfilling obligations and doing for God can be exhausting and burdensome!

Notice again what Jesus said to people in these two categories...**Come to Me...I will give you rest.** This sounds like a great deal...but rarely do offers deliver what they advertize. Aren't you alarmed by the side effects of some popular medications advertized on TV? So God we need to know more...we need to understand how this works. For that reason, He gave us the entire NT which explains how Jesus provides the rest our souls long for. On the cross, all that was so wearisome and burdensome was transferred to Jesus once for all. By faith in His blood shed for us, we're set free from the need to compensate for failures or perform in order to be good enough for God. By trusting His righteousness instead of our own, we're delivered from the heavy burden of a righteous law we were powerless to keep. God replaced all of our trying with the something even a child can do...trust Jesus. The fact is...He did all the work necessary for our forgiveness and salvation...all of it!

**Heb. 10:14** says...**because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.** The rest Jesus offers is the main subject of **Heb. 3, 4.** We'll discuss some of these verses in greater detail tonight at 6 PM, so if you're not involved in a Life Group or Arts Camp, I hope you'll return. (At MBC we believe in Christ's second coming and yours too!) But listen to just two verses found in **Heb. 4:9, 10 - There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his.** When Jesus and the writer of Hebrews speak of rest or ceasing from our own work, they refer to the end of striving or working to win God's approval and favor. This rest requires repudiation of every effort done in the hope of saving ourselves. Tell me...if we're saved by what we do, how much effort and what sort work does God require? How much is enough? Because these questions have no answer, we weary ourselves trying without ever finding rest.

Rest comes only as we trust Jesus who did the work necessary to our save us and make us right with God. When some people asked Jesus, **"What must we do to do the works God requires?"** **Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent." – Jn. 6:28, 29** In **Matt. 11:28**, to **Come to me** means the same as to **believe** in me...trust Me to save you. At this point we should pause to ask for a witness...can Jesus deliver what He promised? What say you church? Jesus is the Savior for those who have wearied themselves by failure or by a works salvation that can never save! He offers forgiveness and salvation that is both immediate and complete!

He alone can lift the wearisome burden of performing to please God. But there's more to His invitation. To those called to salvation Jesus extends...

**2. The call to discipleship and rest – vs. 29, 30 - 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."**

When Jesus asks us to take on His yoke, He isn't asking us to take on another burden...another assignment or obligation to weary us. Instead, He offers a relationship with Himself...a relationship where He is the teacher and we are His students...His learners. He invites us into the intimacy of the relationship He enjoys with His Father. And notice, His **yoke is easy and His burden is light**. He invites us to trade every failure and every self-imposed burden of worry and fear for the yoke we were always meant to carry: a close, intimate relationship of trust and love with Him.

In farming, a young ox was typically yoked or paired with one that was older and more experienced. (Like me and Robert.) Now take a guess...which ox took the lead and did the heavy lifting? So yoked to Jesus, our assignment is to learn from Him as He leads and provides the strength we need. And notice again, in this arrangement where we submit to Him and walk in step with Him by means of His Spirit, we find rest for our souls. We were made for this. When compared to the "yoke of the Law" (which the Jews new all too well) Jesus said, **my yoke is easy and my burden is light**.

One day after Jesus taught in the synagogue, the people questioned who He was and where His wisdom came from. They asked, **Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? - Mk. 6:3** Among other things, carpenters of that day made yokes. Each yoke was custom made and "form-fitted" for the ox that would wear it. An old legend claims that Jesus was known for making the finest yokes in Galilee. The sign above His carpenter shop may have read, "My yokes fit well" (though I'm not sure about that one) But legend aside...who knows you better than your Creator? His yoke is easy and His burden is light because He tailors a personal success plan just for you. He just asks you to keep in step with Him...to yield to Him by obeying His Word and to follow His lead day by day. That's discipleship.

But once again...notice His promise... **you will find rest for your souls**. You will! Say this with me, "If I follow Jesus, I *will* find rest for my soul!" If following Jesus seems wearisome and a burden, you're not doing it right! You're taking too much on yourself instead of trusting Him. The life of faith is contrary to every natural inclination and stimulus! It takes time plus teaching plus constant reinforcement to learn to rest in the sufficiency of our Savior. When we finally learn...we're only part way there!

So this AM we've heard the grim condemnation / the Gospel revelation / and the great invitation. This is a good pattern to follow in any presentation of the Gospel: all have sinned and will face judgment / God has sent His Son so that we might escape that judgment / but we each have to come to Christ and by faith follow Him. I came to Jesus when I was 6. I heard His invitation and responded. On that Thursday afternoon almost 60 years ago, Jesus forgave me / saved me / and made me His own. Through detours / distractions /and diversions, He has patiently been teaching me His selfless humility and gentleness. Though wearing His yoke and sometimes throwing it off, I have found rest for my soul. I recommend Jesus. If you haven't come to Him...why not trust Him today? His invitation is the most exciting and wonderful offer you will ever receive!