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Matthew 11:28-30 “The Great Invitation to Rest in Jesus”

Intro. In vv. 20-27 Jesus gave a strong word of warning to the cities of Galilee that refused to heed His call for repentance. This was in spite of the fact that Jesus performed many miracles before their eyes. He must have shocked them when He said that they would receive greater judgment than wicked cities like Tyre, Sidon, and even Sodom.

But the language of my text today is in contrast to what has preceded it. It is like coming out of a blizzard into the warmth of a sunny, spring day; like passing from a storm into a calm; like going from darkness into light. Today’s message is not full of condemnation. Instead, Christ gives His compassionate, loving appeal to all who are weary and burdened in life.

Is there anyone here today who is weary of your search for happiness? Is there anyone here today who is burdened by the guilt of sin? Is there anyone here today who views religion as a burden, rather than a blessing? Is there anyone here today who is burdened with the heavy load from life’s trials? Is anyone wore out by the threat of the corona virus and the measures to prevent it? Well Jesus says, “Come to Me.” Christ not only has the solution; He *is* the solution. So as the solution to your every need and problem, let’s turn our attention to Christ, as He invites us to come to Him. This is one of the great invitations of the Bible, and this particular invitation is only found in the gospel of Matthew.

Now I want us to think first of all about:

I. THE RECIPIENTS OF THE GREAT INVITATION

To whom is this invitation given? Whenever you have a birthday party, you invite certain people to attend. But this invitation of Jesus is extended to *all* who realize their need. He said in v.28, “Come to Me, *all* you who labor and are heavy laden....” This is expressed in other invitations of the Bible. For example, Rev. 22:17 is the last invitation of the Bible. It says, “And the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.” Isa. 55:1 says, “Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; and you who have no money, Come, buy and eat....” Both of these invitations refer to those who thirst. In other words, the first requirement to receiving something from God is to recognize your need.

Now this particular invitation here in Matthew is addressed to “all you who labor and are heavy laden.” Consider the twofold designation of the persons addressed. The one word (*kopiao*) refers to one who labors to the point of exhaustion. The present tense of the verb denotes one labors continually. The other word (*phortizo*) refers to one who carries a burden for a long time. This verb is in the perfect tense, which refers to a burden placed upon them in the past, and the burden continues into the present.

I want to apply this text the way Jesus meant it. It refers not so much to those who are physically tired and exhausted. I’m sure some in my audience are physically tired on a regular basis. But that is not what Christ primarily has in mind. He is talking about those who are *spiritually* exhausted. I say that because He said in v.29, “and you will find rest for your souls.”

Now I believe there is primarily a:

A. Jewish Application - The Jews labored hard in their religion and were oppressed by the heavy load of rules and regulations placed upon their shoulders by the scribes and Pharisees. Back in 9:36 we read that Jesus had compassion on the multitudes “because they were weary and worn out” (HCSB). In reference to the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus said in Mt. 23:4, “They bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men’s shoulders.” The Jews groaned under the heavy weight of their ceremonies, laws, Rabbinical regulations, traditions, and holy days. Peter referred to the Law as a yoke that “neither our Fathers nor we were able to bear” (Acts 15:10).¹ “Heavy laden” does not refer primarily to the load of sin, but to the burdens which Pharisaic interpretations of the Law imposed. They misinterpreted God’s laws and added many other legalistic requirements. From the time you woke up until you went to bed at night, there were hundreds of rules and regulations governing your life. They even had a rule against a woman looking in a mirror on the Sabbath day. The reason for that rule is that if she did that, and if she saw a grey hair, she would be tempted to work on the Sabbath by plucking the grey hair! If I plucked my grey hair, I wouldn’t have any hair left!

Yet we must also see in our text a:

B. Gentile Application – This invitation applies to religious people all over the world. It applies to anyone who tries wholly or partly to achieve salvation by means of his own exertion. Some go to great pain and agony to “get to” God. They think that if they work hard enough, and do all the rituals well enough, they will atone for their sin, and receive heaven as a reward for their efforts. You can find examples of this in Catholicism, Mormonism, Islam, and other religions. I’ve seen adherents to Islam beating their backs with chains in such rituals. Even in Baptists churches, you can find such religion. Many Baptist grudgingly get up, come to church, and go through the religious exercises they are taught to go through. They do so, not in gratitude for salvation but to earn salvation.

There is also the burden of sin. Isaiah 1:4 says, “Alas, sinful nation, A people laden with iniquity...” My friend, sin is too heavy for you to carry. You can’t overcome sin and live by the commandments of God perfectly. You can’t do enough to atone for your guilt. The only place in the world to put that burden is at the cross of Christ. He bore it for you, and He invites you to come and bring your burden of sin to Him. He can forgive you, because on the cross He bore the burden of your sin.

Do you realize your need today? Are you weary and tired from carrying a burden, whether it’s the burden of sin, or the burden of a legalistic religion, or the burden of a heavy trial? Well, I have good news. We also see in our text:

II. THE REST CHRIST OFFERS

Jesus promises in vv. 28-29 that if you come to Him, and meet the conditions, you can find rest for your souls. Now I want you to understand:

A. The Kinds of Rest He Offers - There are two kinds of spiritual rest that Christ offers. First, there is:

1. The Rest of Salvation from Sin - Christ frees us from a self-serving, meritorious, performance-based religion. The Bible says that salvation and eternal life are received by grace

¹ In fact, the yoke was a common metaphor in Judaism for the law.

through faith, and not of works (Eph. 2:8-9). Romans 6:23 says that the “gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Christ offers rest from all your human efforts to climb the ladder of salvation, hoping to be good enough to be accepted by God. One result is peace with God as stated in Romans 5:1. Another result is the rest of the assurance of salvation. Those who work for their salvation never reach the point where they enjoy the security of knowing for sure that they have done enough to be saved. If you ask them if they are going to heaven, all they can say is, “I hope so.” Secondly, there is:

2. Rest in Daily Living - Rest includes the absence of fear and worry; it is peace of mind and heart. This is “the peace of God” that passes understanding (Phil. 4:6-8). There is peace and rest in faith. Look how that little child goes to sleep in its mother’s lap, secure from harm because it trusts. Fear and faith are often contrasted. The rest which Jesus here provides is the very opposite of the aggravated mental stress that sends so many people to doctors, hospitals, and even to the grave. Psalm 127:2 says, “It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows; for so He gives His beloved sleep.”

Another aspect of this rest that Christ gives for daily living is the rest of refreshment, and the renewal of strength. This same word is translated “refreshed” in 1 Cor. 16:18²; 2 Cor. 7:13; & Philemon 1:7 (NKJV). It is the refreshment and renewal that makes service and obedience to Christ much easier. Even the Old Testament prophesied of this renewal of strength. Isa. 40:31 says, “But those who wait on the LORD Shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint.”

Let me illustrate it this way. Suppose a young apprentice goes to work for a master craftsman. He watches him do the work, and the master performs beautifully, and it seems so easy. But when the apprentice tries to do the same thing, it seems so hard and difficult. However, after he spends a few years learning from the master, the day will come when he, too, will work with the same ease as his master. Even so, if you learn from Christ, you will find that living the Christian life is not a burden, but a blessing. It’s not so hard as you mature in your faith and appropriate the strength that Christ provides.

I want to testify to you from personal experience that Jesus indeed gives rest. I’ve learned to trust the Lord and not worry. I focus on pleasing Christ and not exhaust myself trying to please everyone. I’ve found that His strength makes the task of living for Jesus easier.

Have you found this kind of rest in Jesus?

B. The Final Place of Rest He Offers - Revelation 14:13 says, “...Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on... that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them.” Heaven will be a place of never-ending rest in the sense that we will never get tired, we will never again worry, or be afraid. We will be eternally secure. It will not be long before you and I will be where Jesus is; wherefore, till then, let us patiently bear all that He lays upon us.

Those of you who have loved ones in heaven, rejoice on their behalf that they are enjoying heavenly rest, free from the burdens and troubles of this life.

Wouldn’t you like to have your burden lifted? Wouldn’t you like to find such rest for your soul? Well Jesus Christ wants to tell you how you can have the burden lifted, and find rest for your soul. But this is conditional. You will not have this rest if you do not meet the conditions, so listen carefully. You need to understand last of all:

² “For they refreshed my spirit and yours....”

III. THE REQUIREMENTS CHRIST GIVES

Often an invitation is accompanied by some requirements. Many invitations are RSVP, for example. Sometimes you're invited, but you have to bring something. Even so, if you are going to be blessed with the rest that Jesus promises in vv. 28-30, you must meet the three requirements that Christ gives here. First of all:

A. Come to Christ – In v.28 Jesus said, “Come to Me.” That is the starting place. Now before you will come to Christ for rest:

1. Recognize that He Is the Solution – If you are sick, what should you do? You should first recognize that you have a problem, and then you need a capable doctor (or nurse practitioner) that you trust can help you. The same is true spiritually. You must first recognize that you have sinned and you are not right with God. Then, you need to seek the right solution. The answer is not a religion of rules and rituals. The Answer is a relationship to God through Christ. In v.27 Jesus gives an indication as to why you must come to Him. He says, “All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.” All things have been given to Him: the right to forgive sins; the right to grant eternal life; the right to give the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, He alone knows the Father. And the only way you can know God is for Christ to reveal Him to you. It is Jesus' claim that the weary search for God ends in Himself. Who among all the characters that have stepped upon the stage of human history could venture to say for a single moment what Jesus here says? On the lips of any other speaker would it not sound hollow, futile, and absurd? He who spoke these words must have been the Son of God. And Jesus Christ, in this merciful invitation of His, speaks to all the men that have tried, and tried in vain, to satisfy their consciences and to obey the law of God, and says to them, “Cease your efforts, and no longer carry that burden of failure and of sin upon your shoulders. Come to Me. I can help you.”

Yet too many seek rest or comfort in someone or something besides Jesus, whether its entertainment, alcohol, pornography or a myriad of are the other things that dulls the pain of life. Yet such things offer only temporary escape and typically just make things worse. Instead, come to Jesus!

2. You Must Trust in Him - Again, once you go to the doctor, and after he or she has diagnosed your problem, you must trust him enough to take his or her medical advice. Then, and only then, can you get well. Even so, you must trust Jesus when He says His death on the cross paid for your sins. You must trust Jesus to keep the promises He makes here in this text. It is clear from this passage and from Jn. 6:35 that “coming” to Jesus means “believing” in Him. To “come to Him” implies, distinctly, that He, and no mere theological dogma, however precious and clear, is the object on which faith rests.

Have you truly come to Christ? Have you put your faith in Him? Have you found the rest He offers? Many claim to have come to Christ, but the real test is found in the other two requirements:

B. Take His Yoke – In v.29 Jesus said, “Take My yoke upon you....” Now for the benefit of city folk, please understand that Jesus is not talking about an egg yoke! He refers to a yoke that keeps two animals working together, such as oxen, donkeys, or horses. It is almost strange that Jesus promises rest, but immediately speaks of His followers taking a yoke, which was used in work! It sounds like an oxymoron! But the rest He promises is a release from the drudgery of sin

and man-made religious rules, not from the service of God or obedience to God.

So what is the meaning of this yoke that Jesus requires us to take?

1. The Meaning - "The yoke" was a common Jewish metaphor for discipline or obligation. In Jewish literature, a "yoke" represents the sum-total of obligations that, according to the teaching of the rabbis, a person must take upon himself (cf. Acts 15:10). The yoke of Christ is not Jewish Law but God's will. The Christian is not lawless. The yoke of Christ is His word, His precepts, His commands, the greatest of which is the command to love. To "take His yoke" is to submit our wills to His authority and Lordship. Jesus said, "My food is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to accomplish His work." The same should be true of us. Many are willing to listen when He says, "Come to Me that you may be pardoned," but they are not so willing to listen to what He says afterwards, when He calls upon us to take His yoke upon us, to obey Him, to serve Him, and above all to imitate Him.

2. The Motivation – So there is indeed a yoke and a burden for the followers of Christ. But, lest those words "yoke" and "burden" should sound too harshly to our ears, the Lord very graciously and sweetly says in v.30, "For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." The word translated "easy" (*crestos*) means not harsh or hard, but pleasant and kind (cf. meaning in Luke 6:35; Eph 4:32). According to Barclay it means here "well-fitting." In Palestine, ox-yokes were made of wood. The yoke was tailor-made to fit the ox. Now there is a legend that the carpenter Jesus made the best ox-yokes in all of Galilee. It has been suggested that the sign above the door of the carpenter's shop in Nazareth may well have been, "My yokes fit well." God has a task for every one of us, which is made to measure for us.

But you say, "God's will is hard." It may *seem* that way. However, God has given us much to make the burden manageable and the yoke light.³ There are several reasons why this is so: a) Because of our new nature. 2 Cor. 5:17 says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." When God gives you a new heart, and writes His law on your heart, living for God is truly easier. On the other hand, serving Christ *is* hard if you have never been saved. An unconverted man would be as happy in church serving God as I would be in the middle of a mosh pit at a heavy metal rock concert! Come to Christ; be born again, and you will *enjoy* worshipping God, hearing His Word and serving Him. It will no longer be a burden, but a delight. The Psalmist said, "Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good" (34:8). You will not realize how good and gracious the Lord is until you commit your life to Him, and experience Him for yourself. b) The power of the Holy Spirit is available to Christians to help us serve God without it being such a burden. When He comes to us as Comforter, Guide, Strengtheners, and Friend, then the yoke is easy, and the burden is light.⁴ A yoke is used to tie two together to share the work load. So Christ, by means of the Holy Spirit, will share the load and make the burden lighter! Because of this, Paul could write, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Php. 4:13). If you trust Him, Christ will give you the strength to live right, though you've failed in the past when you tried to do it in your own strength. I have found this to be so true. Whereas going to church used to be something that I didn't look forward to, it became a joy after I dedicated by life to Christ. c) He has given us the motivation we need. Our love and

³ It should never be forgotten that a yoke, literally a wooden frame, was placed upon a person's shoulders in order to make a load or burden easier to carry, by distributing its weight in equal proportions to opposite sides of the body. For example, if you had 50 lbs of apples in a large bucket, and you needed to carry that 2 miles, you would do well get a yoke with 2 buckets.

⁴ This same concept is used of marriage in Mark 10:9, "Therefore what God has joined together (*suzeugnumi*), let not man separate." Believers become the Bride of Christ. Since we are yoked together, we are not pulling the load alone!

gratitude to God will make it easy. Hard work or obedience is not bad if it is enjoyed and done willingly, not grudgingly. And love and gratitude for the forgiveness of sin makes us more than willing.

There is a very old familiar story that tells how a man came upon a little boy carrying a still smaller boy, who was lame, upon his back. "That's a heavy burden for you to carry," said the man. "That's not a burden," came the answer. "That's my wee brother." The burden which is received in love and carried in love is always light.

There is one more requirement for finding rest for your souls:

C. Learn from Christ - Up to this time, the Jewish people were expected to learn from the Rabbis. But they were the ones who were adding burdens to the people. So Christ says "Learn from Me." Here, Jesus places His own teaching over against that to which the people had become accustomed. So they had to reject the old teachings, and learn new teachings. The first two commands represent a crisis as we come and yield to Christ; but this step is a process. As we learn more about Him, we find a deeper peace, because we trust Him more. The only way to experience the peace of God, and rest for your souls, is to become a committed disciple of Jesus Christ.

So what does Christ mean when He says, "Learn from Me." "Learn" is from the verb form (*manthano*) of the word translated "disciple." It is to actively engage in being a disciple of Jesus by learning from His teachings and from His example. It also refers to a change of mind and attitude. If Christianity is not going to be a burden, you must learn new truths from Christ. He is saying, "Accept my teaching, namely, that a person is saved by means of simple trust in me." You also need to learn from Christ regarding how to live each day, and how to respond to the trials of life. You need to read your Bible and grow in your understanding of the Christian life. Recent (2017) Barna Research shows that only 17% of Christians who consider their faith important and attend church regularly actually have a biblical worldview. Unbiblical tenets of secularism, postmodernism, Marxism and New Spirituality have infiltrated the thinking of a vast majority serious Christians, especially younger Christians!⁵ They are learning from the world more than learning from Christ.

I started learning from Christ beginning when I was about 16. When I started reading the Bible and learning the teachings of Christ, my perspective of serving and obeying God changed completely. I found that as I learned from Christ, the yoke was easy and the burden was light. My parents no longer had to make me go to church; I *wanted* to go to church. In fact, my parents were Sunday morning Christians, and I started going to church on Sunday night and Wednesday night. I wanted to, and it was not a burden to do so.

Now He gives one reason why we can feel comfortable learning from Christ: He is meek (*praus*) and lowly (*tapeinos*) in heart. Many teachers are arrogant. The Bible says, "Knowledge puffs us" (1 Cor. 8:1). College professors can be an arrogant, proud group. Such teachers are often impatient and hard toward those who are slow of understanding. But Christ is mild and gentle. He is humble and lowly.⁶ He condescends to teach poor students, and to teach novices. He is the kind of teacher you should learn from. Furthermore, Christ will give you the Holy Spirit, who will be your teacher if you trust Him (Luke 12:12; John 14:26; 1 Cor. 2:13; 1 John 2:27).

Conclusion: Some of you have heavy burdens to carry, but you have nobody to help you. You do

⁵ www.barna.com/research/competing-worldviews-influence-todays-christians/.

⁶ By the way, did anybody ever before say, "I am humble" without provoking the comment, "He that says he is humble proves that he is not?" But Jesus Christ said it, and the world has allowed the claim to stand.

not have Christ and the Holy Spirit in your heart. You are trying to do the best you can with the burdens you have. You may try to cast off the burdens by turning to drugs and alcohol. But there is a better way! Come to Christ, and He will give you rest. He can take away the burdens of sin, worry, and the expectations of others, and give you a lighter burden, along with new strength to carry that burden all the way to heaven! Don't bear that burden alone.

Sources: William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible Series: Matthew* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975?); Charles R. Erdman, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Westminster, 1966); Oliver B. Greene, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, Vol. 2, (Greenville, SC: The Gospel Hour, Inc., 1971); William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973); Matthew Henry (on *Online Bible* [CD-ROM]); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture, Vol 6* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975 reprint); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 4 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); G. Campbell Morgan; Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:30] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2017); Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew*, reprint, Christian Publishing Co.; Charles H. Spurgeon, *Spurgeon's Expository Encyclopedia*, Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House), 293-302; Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Loyal: Matthew* (Wheaton: Victor Books/SP Publications, Inc., 1980); Michael J. Wilkins, *The NIV Application Commentary: Matthew* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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