

Sunday, December 1, 2024 am

## **The Invitation of Jesus**

### **Matthew 11:28-30**

Today, I want to examine a practical passage that we quote from time to time. It is the invitation of Jesus as recorded by Matthew. It comes after Matthew records some examples of rejection. John the Baptist is in prison and sends disciples to question Jesus (11:1-15), the rejection of Jesus by the religious leaders (11:16-19), and His rejection by the cities of Chorazin and Capernaum (11:20-24). Yet Jesus thanks the Father that He has made Himself available to all, including the marginalized. Certainly, Jesus was not the only one rejected by the corrupt leaders with power. Therefore, He offers an invitation with a promise that He would be with all who came to Him. It is this text we want to examine today. I want to notice some details associated with this invitation – either stated plainly in the text, or unquestionably implied. I will follow this up with a sermon this evening, in which we will ask, Why do some not accept His invitation?

#### **I. Our Savior who invites us**

- a. Clearly Jesus is speaking and inviting. Hebrews 1:1-2 – He is the one who speaks to us today through His word.
- b. He is the only one through whom we can have spiritual hope. John 14:6 – He is the way. Acts 4:12 – there is no other name, given among men by which we must be saved.
- c. This is an invitation from “the good Shepherd” – John 10:11, “the head of His body, the church” – Ephesians 1:22-23, the cornerstone of the building – Ephesians 2:20; our king – 1 Timothy 6:15 which notes He is “the blessed and only potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords...”.
- d. As such, He invites us to be part of His flock, added to His family (which is the church), a living stone in His spiritual building (1 Peter 2:4-5), and citizens under His benevolent rule.
- e. When it comes to invitations, there are none with greater impact in our lives.

#### **II. The invitation implies that man has been away from Him**

- a. When we sin we are separated from God – Isaiah 59:2 – our iniquities have separated us from Him. Ezekiel 18:4, “The soul who sins shall die.”
- b. In the New Testament, we are also reminded that we are sinners – Romans 3:23 tells us that “*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*” NOTE: It does not say we HAVE TO sin, but we have sinned. Ephesians 2:1-3 describes the former state of those who had not accepted the invitation. Eph. 2:4-10 describes what God has done about it – His grace has provided salvation. But notice Eph. 2:11-12, *Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands—that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.*
- c. NOTE: Let us understand that the reason we are separated from God is because of OUR sins. Contrary to the teaching of some, we are not born in sin. Ezekiel 18:20 is clear about that – repeating, “*the soul who sins, it shall die.*” The fact that Jesus calls for us to become as little children to enter the kingdom of heaven implies that little children are born innocent (Matthew 18:2-4). That is why scripture continually calls for us to repent – be WE are guilty. Nowhere does the New Testament state that we need to repent because of the sins of our parents.
- d. It is because of our sins, that Jesus (& God & the Holy Spirit) has invited us to come to Him.

#### **III. He wants us to come to Him**

- a. Jesus dealt with much rejection, even in the text surrounding the invitation. But what is clear is that He WANTED us to come to Him.
- b. John 7:37 Jesus said, *“If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink”*.
- c. John 12:46, *I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness.*
- d. John 3:16, Romans 5:8, etc. – these are texts that declare Jesus salvation is available to everyone.
- e. 1 Timothy 2:4 plainly declares that God wants all to be saved.
- f. But a point, we must remember is that while we wants us to be saved, He will NOT force anyone to obey Him. But there are consequences based on whatever decision we make.

**IV. All are invited**

- a. The invitation of Jesus was extended to everyone. While not stated in the text, I could see Jesus appealing to anyone who would listen and was interested. While many were not, some were. And to all who were interested, He was willing.
- b. Titus 2:11 – the grace of God has appeared to all men. 2 Peter 3:9 – He is not willing that any should perish.
- c. 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 tells us that He died for all.
- d. When Jesus extended the “great invitation” it was to “all the world” – Luke 24:46-47, Mark 16:15, Matthew 28:19-20.
- e. John 1:29, as John introduced Jesus, He said, *“Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.* John 6:33 – the bread of God... gives life to the world;
- f. Revelation 22:17 notes that whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.

**V. All CAN come to Him**

- a. The difference between this and the last point. God has NOT created a plan that cannot be followed.
- b. He has not teased man with something impossible (or nearly so) to obey. Consider a commercial for a high-end car, or expensive diamond or exotic vacation. They advertise it as if anyone can do it, but for most it is totally out of range, or it is obtained foolishly (e.g., debt). God’s gift is not like that.
- c. He has not demanded a million dollars or something like that. His steps to salvation can be done by anyone, anywhere.
- d. John 1:11-12 notes that Jesus came to His own but they rejected Him, *“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.”*
- e. In our text, Jesus said, *“My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”* While there are challenges to that, Jesus is saying, you CAN do this if you are willing.
- f. While His plan is not always easy, it can be obeyed. The actual plan is simple. Obey the gospel and be faithful to Him for life (cf. Matthew 28:19-20). And we have the promise of 1 John 1:7, 2:1-2. God’s willingness to forgive is not like what man does.
- g. Those who do not accept His invitation CHOOSE to do so. John 5:39-40, Cf. Matthew 17:37-38 – as Jesus wept over Jerusalem, He notes that their fate was their own choosing.

**VI. It is up to me to accept that invitation**

- a. The nature of the invitation – *“I’m inviting you, now come.”*
- b. God has done His part and made the invitation available. But He does not force anyone to obey Him. We were created with free-will, which is seen in many of the passages we have addressed.

- c. He knocks, but it is up to you to open – Revelation 3:20; He is the door to the sheepfold – John 10:9 – but it is up to us to hear His voice and join the flock; He is the way – but it is up to us to get on the path – John 14:6.
- d. John 6:66 – after some hard saying, “many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.” Thankfully, Peter and others stayed with Him – 6:67-69.
- e. Luke 15:11-32 – when the prodigal son demanded his inheritance, his father let him leave. He did not force him to stay but waited for him to return.
- f. Jesus did NOT force them to stay, ever!

**VII. What happens if I accept His invitation?**

- a. **Rest for your soul** – far too many today are living hopeless lives (Recall Ephesians 2:12 – they were without hope and without God in the world). They are miserable, bitter and hurting. They are guilty and they know it. That is why we see so many problems with drugs & alcohol, filled prisons, suicides and visits to psychologists, psychiatrists and counselors, etc. People are looking for answers.
  - i. When one obeys the gospel, if they understand what they are doing, there is a great sense of relief as they come out of that watery grave (Romans 6:3-4 – raised to walk in newness of life; 2 Corinthians 5:17 describes him as “a new creation”).
  - ii. When one has wandered away, and someone turns him back – when they genuinely repent (cf. 2 Corinthians 7:10-1), there is a tremendous burden lifted.
  - iii. The Bible gives us direction for dealing with life’s real struggles.
- b. **Eternal life** – the ultimate gift is a hope that extends beyond this life. Far too many live thinking that this life is all there is. No wonder they are miserable and hopeless. Here for a short while and then gone! But the Christian knows there is more to life than the “here and now”. We live anticipating our home in heaven – 2 Corinthians 5:1-5. Romans 2:7 speaks of eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor and immortality.
- c. **I am joined to Him** – Galatians 3:27. When all is as it ought to be, I become part of a spiritual family that will be there for me.
  - i. A family there for us in times of crisis - Galatians 6:2 – bear one another’s burdens; 1 Thessalonians 5:10– uphold the weak, comfort the fainthearted; Romans 12:10 – kindly affectionate to one another... rejoicing and weeping with one another (5:15). God, in His eternal wisdom designed it that way.
  - ii. A family we can TRUST, when the world lets us down. Christians are to live honorably with each other.

And thus, we can see the invitation of our Lord. It is simple, but when we study the text, it is filled with meaning and hope. As we have noted, it is available to all. What about you, have you accepted His invitation – both to becoming part of Him and living for Him? Think about it.

Sunday, December 1, 2024 pm

## **The Invitation of Jesus (2) Rejecting His Invitation?**

This morning, we examined the invitation of Jesus as recorded in Matthew 11:28-30. Basically, we broke it down to fully understand its components. 1) We talked about Jesus, the one inviting us; 2) Our need for this invitation – because we are sinners and separated from God; 3) God wants us to come to Him – descriptive of His grace; 4) It is universally available to all – God shows not partiality; 5) It is achievable - God did not give us an impossible plan (while not always easy, it is simple); 6) It is up to me to accept His invitation – God will force no one to obey Him, BUT there are consequences based upon the choice we make; 7) Finally, we addressed what accepting the invitation means – rest for your soul – a life with hope and meaning; an eternal reward in heaven, and relationship with Him and His followers.

With this as our backdrop, tonight, I want to address some reasons why some reject His invitation. You would think that knowing God and what is at stake, all – or at least the majority – would want to be part of this, but the sad reality is that faithful acceptance of His invitation has ALWAYS been in the minority. In Acts 2:41 we read that on the day of Pentecost, about 3000 obeyed the gospel. That sounds impressive, but when you understand that Pentecost was a major Jewish feast and a massive multitude would have been present, then number who obeyed the gospel on that day was likely a fraction of those present. Many had been with Jesus and seen His works and still rejected Him. In fact it was the rejection of the very powerful works He did that led to His crucifixion.

Today is no different, as anyone who has tried to share the good news with others knows that the majority will reject the invitation. Others, who might at first obey the gospel, but leave in short order afterward. So, let's talk about this rejection. Why does it occur and what will be the result?

### **I. Why some reject the gospel invitation, even today.**

#### **a. *An unwillingness to give up worldly pursuits.***

- i. 1 John 2:15-17 – issues a warning to not love the world or the things that in the world.
- ii. There are many who will not obey the gospel because it means they would have to give up a lifestyle that is meaningful to them.
- iii. Think of the rich, young ruler – Matthew 19:22-24 – he went away sorrowful.
- iv. Worldly pursuits come in many forms – money, relationships, activities, power, various lusts, entertainment, addictions, etc.
- v. Luke 9:57-62 records several excuses made before following Jesus.
- vi. Whatever stands in my way of putting God first - Gal. 2:20, etc.

#### **b. *An unwillingness to take up his cross –***

- i. Another reason many will not follow is because of what is expected of them. Being a disciple of Jesus comes with a cost.
- ii. Salvation is wonderful because it is freely offered – Romans 6:23, 3:23-24.
- iii. BUT, on the other hand it will cost you everything - Luke 9:23-26, 14:26ff. The life of a disciple of Jesus is about making Him lord over your life. Galatians 2:20, Romans 12:1-2, etc.
- iv. Many do understand what is expected and are unwilling to pay the price. John 6:66 records after some hard sayings of Jesus (and noting that the only reason some followed

Him was for the food – 6:26), many walked with Him no more. It was more than what they wanted.

- v. Or they put it off expecting to return later. Felix trembled – Acts 24:25 – Paul was reasoning with him about righteousness, self-control and judgment to come. Sadly there is no indicator he ever responded,

**c. *Because of what they see in professed Christians –***

- i. Sadly, many see hypocrisy, half-hearted worship, lack of compassion, division, false gospels, corrupt immoral behavior – especially leaders.
- ii. Politics – by its very demonstration divides (when we make the gospel political, we are alienating the other half, etc.) Biblically, the church is NOT a political organization. Jesus did not engage in political reform – e.g., Matthew 22:15-22 – render to Caesar. We need to let Christ be first and that needs to be reflected in our lives. We need to care about others.
- iii. I wonder how Jews were turned off by the hypocrisy of many of their leaders.
  - 1. Why did the message of Jesus appeal to the poor and needy? Mark 12:37 says, “... *And the common people heard Him gladly.*” This is after He deals with some of the political leader’s questions.
  - 2. Luke 15:1 says, “*Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him.*” This is followed by the accusation that Jesus received sinners which prompted the “lost” parables (sheep, coin & prodigal son).
  - 3. 1 Samuel 2:17 records the corrupt behavior of the sons of Samuel (priests) and how men abhorred the offering of the Lord.
- iv. This is why it is important that we be godly examples. People are watching us and we do not want to be the avoidable reason someone rejects the gospel – Matthew 5:16, cf. 1 Corinthians 9:22.

**d. *Because they do not know about Him***

- i. How can someone respond to the invitation if they do not know there is an invitation? Most know of the name of Jesus, but few more much more than that. Many have heard conflicting reports about Him, but few have investigated Him in the Bible. The Christian faith has been villainized on virtually every front and all many have heard is sound bites.
- ii. When must remind ourselves that God wants us to take the gospel to others – Mark 16:15, Matthew 28:19-20, 1 Peter 3:15, etc.
- iii. People need to see Christ living in us – Galatians 2:20.
- iv. IF we have opportunity, are we willing to share the gospel message with them? Or, lead them to someone who can help?
- v. Understand, that many will not accept the invitation no matter what you do. Jesus dealt with that in the Parable of the Sower – Luke 8:4-15. But we must keep trying and look for that ONE who is searching or can be influenced by us. They are out there!

**e. *A litany of excuses/reasons***

- i. Everyone is different. There are many who have heard the invitation but they tell themselves for one reason or another, they dismiss it. Some examples include:
  - 1. I am too sinful
  - 2. I am good enough and don’t need the gospel
  - 3. I cannot live the life expected of me
  - 4. I am too old/young

5. Family ties – I am satisfied with the religion of my parents, etc.
  6. I don't know enough
  7. Not right now
- ii. Each of these has an answer. But, they are excuses, and depending on the heart, when the answer is given, their true heart will be revealed. Romans 10:9-10 – it is with the heart that one believes unto righteousness and confesses the Lord.
  - iii. Luke 14:15-24, Jesus gave a parable about a man who gave a great supper and invited many. Some of those invited began making excuses and dismissed the invitation. As a result they were rejected and it was declared that they would not taste of His supper. Jesus was speaking about the kingdom.

**f. Some walk away later**

- i. There are some who will initially accept the invitation, but in time they reject it again. They fall away from the truth.
- ii. In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus described these as the rocky and thorny soils – Luke 8:6-7, 13-14. They hear and receive, but there is no depth or divided interests. When difficulties arise, they give up and quit – either totally OR faithfully (i.e., they continue with a superficial religion, but not a real commitment).
- iii. We have noted numerous warning that we CAN fall away – 2 Peter 2:20-22, Galatians 5:4, Hebrews 2:1-3, 4:11, 10:38, etc.

**II. WHEN the gospel invitation is rejected.**

**a. He forfeits the rest Jesus offered**

- i. Rest is (to me) one of the most appealing aspects of our eternal reward. Revelation 14:13, Hebrews 4:9-10.
- ii. But much of what Jesus offered also included rest from the burdens of sin, especially its guilt. Truly, God's grace is greater than our sins (Romans 5:20-21). And He will forgive ANY sin, if we will repent and turn to Him.
- iii. Philippians 4:6-7 – when we can put our trust in Him, we have a peace that passes understanding.
- iv. The godless do not have this peaceful rest. Their burdens have no real relief outside of this life. So often the Bible speaks of man's life without God in terms of a burden – Ephesians 2:12 speaks of "having no hope and being without God in the world", 4:17-18 speaks of those who without God are walking "*in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart;*"

**b. He forfeits eternal life**

- i. Romans 6:23 tells us that the wages of sin is death. The one who rejects the invitation has chosen eternal separation from God.
- ii. Again, Hebrews 4:9 – there remains a rest for the people of God. This is a reference to heaven. Eternal life is offered *to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality* – Romans 2:7.
- iii. Matthew 25:46 speaks of the ungodly going into everlasting destruction. 2 Thessalonians 1:9 speaks of this everlasting destruction being from the presence of the Lord.

**c. He may be walking away from a spiritual support system**

- i. Jesus said, "I will give you rest" – Jesus promises to be with us.

- ii. There are many blessings found in Christ Jesus – Ephesians 1:3ff.
- iii. The one who rejects Jesus as Lord does not have access to these.

**d. He alienates himself from God's people.**

- i. I believe this is a part of “the rest” Jesus is offering and how our burdens can be lightened and the yoke be made easier (compared to the yoke of sin in this world).
- ii. ONE of the great spiritual blessings IN THIS LIFE is the church. God designed the church as a people that can be with us and for us in our walk with Him. 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 describes us as a functioning body – the body of Christ. We are His support system on this earth. When functioning properly we will be growing (Ephesians 4:16), being there for each other (Romans 10:10-13), bearing one another's heavy loads (Galatians 6:2), and upholding each other (1 Thessalonians 5:14). Much more could be added to this list.
- iii. When one rejects the invitation, he does not have access to that spiritual family to support him.
- iv. When one walks away, he no longer has access to that spiritual family. In fact, we are called upon to sever ties with him so that he will repent and return. The purpose is to keep the body pure.

In considering reasons why one is unwilling to accept the invitation one source quoted Matthew 16:24, *Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.* It was observed that there are four primary reasons men reject the invitation: 1) There is no desire; 2) An unwillingness to sacrifice self; 3) An unwillingness to take up his cross – a willingness to suffer; and 4) An unwillingness to make Jesus Lord. We have addressed some of these in this lesson.