

## **AN URGENT INVITATION FROM THE HEART OF JESUS: Come As You Are...Leave With His Rest**

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We are going to jump right in this morning. Matthew chapter 11 and we're going to read from verse 25 to verse 30, the end of the chapter. Matthew 11 verse 25:

**“At that time Jesus declared, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; (26) yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. (27) All 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 who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. (29) Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. (30) For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:25 - 30)**

About 11 times in the gospels of Matthew and John, we read that Jesus made statements containing the word, “I will.” He said, “I will.” “I will do this. I will do that.” I'll give you a few examples. He said, “I will make you fishers of men.” He said, “I will build my church.” He said, “I will rise again.” And then, thank God, he said, “I will come again.” So there's lots of these.

As I mentioned, there's about 11 of them in total that Jesus said. And there's one of these “I will” statements right here in the passage that we just read together. Look again at verse 28. **“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28)** “I will give you rest.”

Isn't it beautiful? What a wonderful statement by Jesus. Maybe some of the most precious words Jesus ever spoke. “I will give you rest.” Because, I meet so many weary people these days. So many people who are burned out by life and they are burdened down with anxieties. You know, we have a national and international mental health crisis. And just because of the pressures of this generation, there are so many people with anxiety.

Just living life itself is wearying, isn't it? I want you to think about this, this morning. If you are average weight and height, here is what you will go through in an average 24-hour period. Your heart will beat 103,689 times in 24 hours. Your blood will travel 168 million miles as your heart pumps approximately four ounces per beat. You will breathe 23,040 times, inhaling 438 cubic feet of air. Your stomach will take in three and a half pounds of food and 2.9 quarts of liquid.

You will lose seven-eighths of a pound of waste. If you are a man, you will speak 4,800 words. And if you're a woman, you will speak close to 7,000 words. You will move 750 muscles and you will exercise seven million brain cells.

No wonder we're exhausted! We're doing all that just to survive, just to stay ambulatory. We're going through all of these processes. On top of that, there are so many burdens and difficulties that life throws on you. Whether you're rich or you're poor, it doesn't matter. Life gets hard. But then on top of that, there are so many burdens and difficulties that come to us because we are people of faith, because we're Christians. And that would be many people in this room.

And you know, we're swimming against the stream. So when you swim against the current, you're using additional muscle, spiritual and emotional and psychological muscle. So there's a lot of burdens in our lives. Thank God for these words of Jesus. "Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Now, the background to this passage, if you take the time to read through the whole of Matthew chapter 11, is that Jesus had completed a phase of training with his disciples. And he sent them out. This was his practice. He would do some training and then he would send the disciples out to do what they had learned. And they went out to towns and villages all around the north of Israel. They went out in pairs and they taught what Jesus had told them. And they preached and they laid their hands on the sick and sick people got well. An amazing, amazing thing.

What Jesus was doing, as well as their training, was he sent them out as advanced people. Because then what Jesus did was he went and he ministered in those same towns where the disciples had already gone.

And so people were hearing Jesus' life changing teaching and they were seeing him and his disciples back it up with amazing healings and signs and wonders. And huge crowds began to follow Jesus all over. But at the same time, there were also a lot of people who didn't respond to Jesus at all.

Jesus has always done this all the way down through history. He has been a dividing line between people. You know Jesus said that? He said, don't think that I came to bring peace. I came to bring a sword. To divide. And he has always divided people.

The ones who will hear his call and the ones who turn their backs and ignore or reject him. He doesn't divide on racial lines or status lines or gender lines or anything like that. He divides on this one question, what you will do with him.

And people came to him and people turned away from him. So Jesus began to preach in some of these towns like Chorazin and Bethsaida and even in his own home base town of Capernaum. And he said to them these words.

He said, "If Tyre and Sidon had been privileged to hear the teaching that I'm giving you now and to see the wonderful works that I'm doing among you, those hardened wicked cities would have repented. You have this amazing opportunity but you are turning your backs, you're sticking your fingers in your ears and you're covering your eyes. How hard must your hearts be?"

That's a really challenging message for Canadians today. Because we have been so blessed by the Christian message, by the Christian gospel, right from the very founding of this nation. And I want to tell you that is a big responsibility.

We need to hear Jesus' words here. **"But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you." (Matthew 11:22).** Our nation has turned our backs on the light that we have been given. We as individuals cannot do the same.

Well, Jesus started to meet up with the disciples again. They came back from their preaching tours, back to where Jesus was. And they were so excited about what had been happening while they were preaching.

Jesus had given them that authority to heal. And they said to him, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name.” The disciples were praying for demonized people and they were being delivered. And they were so excited about everything that God was enabling them to do.

So, understand there's this big division between people. On the one hand, the disciples and the crowds who were following Jesus. And on the other hand, whole towns that just shut him out and refused to listen. And that is where we come to our reading. Where Jesus makes an amazing invitation to everyone. Those who are already coming and those who are rejecting. He makes this invitation in verses 28 to verse 30. And this invitation of Jesus still rings out to every one of us today.

Listen, this is the invitation of the ages. You'll never get a better invitation than this. It's an invitation to you. And I want to show you that it's an invitation that actually has four parts to it. So, we're going to break it down and have a look at it really quick. I'm not going to be a long time.

## 1) **AN INVITATION TO COME (v. 28)**

First of all, it's an invitation to come.

Verse 28, **“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28)**

Think about that. “Come.” After the way back to God has been closed to us for so long. Human beings have been cut off from God. You know, when Adam and Eve fell from grace in the Garden of Eden right at the beginning, when they sinned, it says that God put a flaming sword at the gates of Eden so they couldn't come back in. He shut them out into a wasteland because sin always separates us from God.

So, we were cut off from that moment. You know, when Moses was around and he led the people of Israel out of Egypt and out of their slavery, they came to this place called Mount Sinai where God gave to Moses the Ten Commandments.

But only Moses was able to go up into the mountain and no one else really wanted to go up there because there's lightning and fire and thunder and everything. No one else went up there except Moses. The Bible says there was a perimeter around the mountain and he said, “Don't cross that line.”

Why? Because sinful man is always cut off from God. Always cut out. And God was, even at that moment, bringing a nation to himself so they could come back to him. But until that covenant was in place, there had to be a perimeter. You stayed back from God's presence.

In the temple, God's house, the priests and the people who prepared themselves could come in so far. But there's this final room called the Holy of Holies right at the end, where the presence of God was said to reside. The Ark of the Covenant was there. There's this massive, thick curtain blocking the way. No one's allowed. We have been cut off from God since Adam and Eve.

So, King David, the beautiful writer of all those psalms in the Bible, King David, he said this. **“Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully.” (Psalm 24:3 - 4)**

Now that's a problem because that doesn't describe anybody in this room. We've all sinned. Our hands are already filthied by sin. We've already tainted our hearts. We can't come to God. We're cut off. We always have been. It's how we were born. So we are disqualified. And yet, here is Jesus standing up, lifting his voice, talking to everyone who can hear him. It's written down in the Bible for you and me this morning. Jesus says loudly and freely, "come!" "Come!" Religion says, "Do!" But Jesus says, "come!"

In the days that Jesus said these words, religious leaders were telling people that they had to do more, do more, do more, so that God might accept them. Before they could come to God, they would have to measure up. And Jesus just pushes all of that aside, and he says, "Come as you are, and I will give you rest." See that? I will give it to you. It's not something you can earn. It's a gift. Jesus says, I will give you rest.

The Christian life is not me trying to live like Jesus. It is Jesus living his life in me, and that's a completely different thing. When he comes into our lives and changes them. Who does he invite? Well, it's very interesting who he invites. I've said it's everybody, and that's true. Listen to who it actually says he invited. It says, all who labour and are heavy-laden. That's who the invitation's to.

All who labour and are heavy-laden. Notice there, labour is something that is active. It's something you're doing, doing, doing, doing. And boy, we live in the GTA area. We are always doing, doing, doing, doing. He says, it's labour. It's exhausting.

He says, all of you who are doing, all those who labour, and then those who are heavy-laden. Even when we're not doing, stuff is being put on us. This is passive. But we are burdened by all that we're doing, and even just the stuff being put on us. And this invitation comes, if that's you, this invitation is yours.

And the invitation is regardless of status or capacity. Look at what Jesus just prayed out loud a couple of verses before, verses 25 and 26. **"At that time Jesus declared, 'I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; (26) yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.' (Matthew 11:25 - 26)**

God delights to open up all of his infinite riches and wisdom and goodness and blessing to children or babes. What's he talking about? What is a babe? Well, you could say it's someone under a certain age, but that's not what he means. He means it's people who are weak and totally dependent. Think of a baby. You have to do everything for him.

And it's the person who recognizes that they have that kind of need, that dependency, that's who the invitation is to. So what could stop you from receiving the invitation from Jesus this morning? Only one thing could stop you. That is if you don't sense or admit your need. If you say, I don't labour, I'm not heavy laden, I have no need of God's help with my burden. Well, the invitation's not addressed to you, is it? But for the rest of us, thank God it's for us.

All who are burdened and heavy laden. Some people are too wise, too clever, so self-sufficient, it's just they never hear the invitation. They're not listening. Jesus says to all who will hear, come. And listen, He does not say, come to church. If you find a good church, it's a really helpful thing. I think most people would say, this is great, we have a church family and it's so helpful to us, that's great. But the church can't give you rest for your soul.

He doesn't say, "Come to the sermon, come to the preachers, come to the pastors." He doesn't say that. Jesus says, "Come to me and I will give you rest." When He says, I, if you were to read that in the original Greek language, it is an emphatic I, it says, literally it means, I, myself, I and no other, I will give you rest.

We come to Jesus in answer to His invitation and He gives us rest for our souls. So it's an invitation to come.

## 2) IT'S AN INVITATION TO TAKE (v. 29a)

Verse 29, He says, **"Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."** (Matthew 11:29) Take, take what? Take a yoke, take my yoke. All right, we need to understand what He's talking about here.

This is a yoke (INSERT YOKE PICTURE) and you know what a yoke is? It's got two kind of pieces to it so you can put the heads of two animals in there. This is a yoke and I'll show you what it looks like with two animals inside. (INSERT YOKE WITH OXEN PICTURE) There you go, there are two oxen who have yokes around their necks and they are pulling the cart and it's the yoke that keeps them together, keeps them in harmony and they pull whatever it is that is their load behind them, a yoke of oxen.

Now the word yoke always, always means two. If a single animal is linked to a load, is pulling a cart or something like that, it's not a yoke, it's a harness, okay? The word yoke has the idea of coupling two animals together. Now there's an interesting thing in those ancient times and even in some parts of the world today you can go and you can see this phenomenon that farmers will actually yoke a donkey next to an ox, not two ox.

Why would he do that? That seems like a mismatch but they actually do it. They put a donkey next to an ox. You know why? Because the ox is strong but the donkey is smart. They can be stubborn but they're smart. So they put strength and smarts together and that way you can have both the strength to pull the load but also good direction.

In this picture that Jesus gives us when he says, take my yoke on you, he's calling us to be linked up with him. Our heads are in one loop, his is in the other. To be linked up with him, to be side by side with him, to be joined to him and when we do that, then in our partnership with Jesus, we have both the wisdom and the power that we need. We have both the direction for our lives and the strength for our lives that we need.

That's what it means when Jesus says, take my yoke on you. Now you might say to me, a yoke? Isn't that just another burden? Didn't he say he came to give us rest from our burdens but now we're getting this big yoke on us. Is that what Jesus offers us? Swap one kind of misery for another kind of misery? The world's misery for the misery of religion?

Now you don't have to raise your hand right now because I know it doesn't feel very spiritual to answer this question. How many of you have found religion is miserable? Just bat your eyelids at me. Look at you. Religion is miserable. Is that what Jesus is saying? I'll lift the burden of the world but I'll give you the burden, I'll give you the misery of religion.

The Jewish people who heard Jesus say this knew all about heavy yokes. They had on them at this time the yoke of Rome, the oppressive Roman Empire. That made their lives miserable. It was

taxation, it was hard work, there were people being crucified. Not just Jesus, I mean hundreds and thousands of people being crucified. Anyone who was an enemy of Rome, people being thrown in prison, people being beaten. It was terrible oppression. The yoke of Rome.

They had the yoke of sin like all of us have. So these Jewish people knew what it was to want to live one way but always let everybody and let themselves down by sinning. And then they had already a yoke of religion, the yoke of the law that was pressing them down. They have 613 laws or commandments that they are obligated to follow. 613!

They were living under this burden, this bondage. And you can imagine them hearing Jesus say this about take my yoke upon you. And they're thinking what do you have for us, Jesus? Just another burden to carry? A lot of people think that of Christianity. It's just a list of do's and don'ts. Just a burden on the backs of the poor naive people who've been taken in.

But listen to me, Christianity is not a program or a performance. Christianity is a person. It's him, it's Jesus. Jesus didn't say come to religion. No, he said come to me. Come to me. What do you have for us Jesus? Another burden to carry? No, this is a very different kind of yoke. Because you're going to get linked up with Jesus and listen what he says in verse 30. **“For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:30)**

Now don't misunderstand the word easy. It doesn't mean everything's going to be rosy in the Christian life. There's a weight to this yoke. There's a responsibility you have to pick up. But in another sense, this yoke makes life bearable. You are going to have burdens no matter what, but to have someone carrying the load with you. You might even say that there are times in your life when this is a yoke that carries you.

It's an invitation to come. “Come to me all you who are burdened and weary and heavy laden and I'll give you rest.” It's an invitation to take. Take my yoke on you. Get in partnership with me. I will help you.

### **3) IT'S AN INVITATION TO LEARN (v. 29b)**

Thirdly, it's an invitation to learn. An invitation to learn.

Again, verse 29. **“Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me...” (Matthew 11:29).** That word learn that Jesus spoke is the Greek word “mathetes” which means disciple.

Come unto me you who are weary and heavy laden. Take my yoke upon you and be disciplined by me. It's a call to be his followers. To be a student and a follower of Jesus is a process. He says, learn from me. Learn what? We've all learned a lot of things in our lives.

What can Jesus teach us? What is it? Is it more earthly knowledge? More mathematics? More physics? What is it? More philosophy? No. Jesus is talking about learning things that really matter. Learning to know God. Learning to know the eternal stuff of God. He says, that you can only learn from me. You can go to college for other things. Come to me and learn what is really important.

Jesus had already said this in verse 27. He said, **“All 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.” (Matthew 11:27).**

That's what he wants to teach you. To know God. To walk with him. That's something that is going to last not just for our lifetime, but forever. Knowing God. "Learn from me. Be my disciple."

Here's the wonderful thing. That first inner circle of 12 disciples learned Jesus' life and they loved him until their dying day. Because to know God is the most wonderful, the most blessed privilege in all the world. They loved Jesus for it. His yoke was their joy and they lived for him.

Look what Jesus says. He says, **"...learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart..." (Matthew 11:29).**

He's gentle to receive and he's humble. He's humble. The king of the universe. The one who gave us all breath and spoke the world into existence. He's humble. Listen to what is said about him in Philippians chapter 2. The apostle Paul says, **"Let this mind which was also in Christ Jesus, [6] who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God" (Philippians 2:5-6, NKJV).**

In other words, he didn't have to grasp up to try and be God. He was God. Jesus always was God before he came into the world, but he made himself of no reputation. Taking the form of a bond servant and coming in the likeness of men and being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even his death on the cross.

See, here's the problem. We have this sin barrier that separates us from God. Jesus has come, but unless a way is made, we can't come. Jesus could only call out, "Come," because he put his own life down and died on the cross so that our sins could be forgiven and we could be reconciled to God. Jesus did that for us, but imagine that, the King of glory, I mean, for eternity past, everything belonged to Jesus. From the creation of the world, if he would just speak a word, angels would run to do his bidding.

Planets would form at his name, and yet a bunch of Roman soldiers were able to take him and drag him down the street and put him on a cross and pound nails into his hands and kill him. How on earth? Only because he's the most humble, gentle man who ever lived. Thank God he rose again from the dead, and he still says, "Come."

So, here we are, the one who washed the disciples' feet, Jesus, is saying, "Come." It's an invitation to come, to take, to learn, and finally, an invitation to find.

#### **4) AN INVITATION TO FIND (VS. 29C)**

**"Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." (Matthew 11:29)**

There's a popular saying that goes something like this, "the journey is more important than the destination." How many of you have heard that said before? People say that, it's a nice little platitude. The journey is more important than the destination. Now, listen, we understand there's a kind of truth in that, but the problem is, there's so many people have these journeys that might be very interesting and very complex and what have you, but they never arrive at any destination.

But Jesus says, there is a destination to find. It's not just the journey, the journey is important, but there is a destination to arrive at. You know, the Bible talks about people who are always learning, but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth. 2 Timothy 3 verse 7, people **"Always learning, but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth." (2 Timothy 3:7)**

They never arrive. That's why you can walk into Chapters and you go into the self-help section and they always have new titles, and there's thousands of them. Why? Because no one's come up with the answer yet. No one's got to the destination. They just pour out all this stuff and they say, the journey is more important, but there's nothing at the end.

Jesus says, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest... Learn from me... you will find rest for your souls." There's a destination, what you're really looking for. Rest at last for the weary.

St. Augustine famously prayed these words. He said, *"You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."* And he's right. I've met people from all over the world and I can tell you this, we never stop our searching for rest until we find God, and then we find rest. There's a God-shaped vacuum inside of you, only he can fill. You need him above everything else, and Jesus says you can have him. It's an invitation to come, to take, to learn, and to find.

God offers you this invitation today. Now listen, it's not just this one paragraph in the Bible. This invitation is actually all over the Bible. It's everywhere. In Isaiah 55, way back 600 years before Jesus was born, the prophet Isaiah was already announcing God's plan to send Jesus, and he said this. He said,

**"Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." (Isaiah 55:1)**

He says the things you're really searching for, God's going to give them to you in his son Jesus. In Revelation 22, so Isaiah is before Jesus came, but now you get right to the end of the story. The last book of the Bible, and this is a sound that's echoing today and off into the future where it says, **"The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.' And let the one who hears say, 'Come.' And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.(Revelation 22:17)**

God offers you all that he has if you'll come to him through Jesus. "Oh, but pastor, are you sure that the invitation is for me? I mean, you don't know me. You don't know what I've done." I've got a pretty good idea. I've got a pretty good idea all that you've done.

You know why? Because we all start at the same place, cut off from God by our sin, running from him as hard as we can, making a mess of our lives. That was me, and guess what? It still tends to be me making a mess of things, but thank God now I'm yoked to Jesus, and he's leading me, and he's helping me.

No matter who you are or what you've done this morning, the promise is exactly the same for every one of us. Listen to how Jesus said it in John 6, verse 37. Look at these words, **"All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out." (John 6:37)**

I did a whole word study in Greek on that word all, and do you know what it means? It means all. All that the Father gives me will come to me, and the one who comes to me I will by no means cast out. How do I know this morning that the invitation is for you? When you come to him, when you RSVP, that's the proof.

He said they will come to me, because I call them so wonderfully, because God's promise is that he will never turn anyone away, and he never has, and so I know it's for you.