

Reading: Matthew 11:20-30

Theme: Wonderful Invitations.

If you received an invitation to go to Buckingham Palace for a garden party or a presentation ceremony. You, like me, might check the date to make sure it wasn't April 1st! We might also check it was no windup! Yet what a shock if it was genuine! One of my teachers at school turned down 2 invitations to go to the Palace, accepting the 3rd because her father wanted her to go as her mother was ill! What an honour to be invited just once to the Palace!

At the end of the passage we read, there are glorious invitations made by Jesus in v28-30 and we will look at these invitations and see how they are truly made to and apply us. In doing so, we are not to forget the setting of these invitations. They are not there on their own, but follow on from what Jesus has said in v20-27 - where solemn warnings are given in v20-24 as Jesus warns of the more intolerable day of judgement for all who have had the honour and privilege of knowing of Him, hearing of Him and yet are unaffected by such. Then in v25-27 Jesus shows great rejoicing - the Father was in control, was sovereign even in the area of salvation and it wasn't left up to the will and whims of people. Jesus also rejoices that He is the means, the channel through whom people could know the Father. He is the anointed One, the God appointed glorious One and yet with divinely given authority and power freely and genuinely makes these invitations to us. Let's look at these verses using 4 headings to help us understand something of them:

1. The One Who Gives the Invitations.

I've already touched upon this in my introduction - we know from our reading it is Jesus who makes, gives these invitations. We need to pause and remember once again who He is. Yes, it is Jesus, but the verse immediately before it shows us something of Jesus' authority and position. He is not any old teacher or prophet or a good man, for v27 shows us He is unique - in His position, authority and

work. He is not as some worker in the Palace making out invitations to visit the Palace for friends or relatives. Jesus is not even as some personal secretary to the queen making the invitations either. He is the King Himself and He makes, gives these invitations personally.

Here we read of these amazing invitations from the King Himself, the One, the only One who can make known the Father and His way of salvation, along with that comes all the help, all the love, all the power of God. If this One does not make God known, then we are totally ignorant and in the dark.

So, King Jesus makes these invitations with a personal, powerful, exclusive authority. They are genuine invitations that cannot be overruled, they stand firm and are made to us all here this morning. Have we realised anything of the glory, the majesty, the unique position and absolute authority the Lord Jesus has? Does it seem incredible to you that such a One would make these invitations to people like us? Moving on we'll see more on this question:

2. The Ones Given the Invitations.

King Jesus makes these invitations with a royal authority, but it is quite startling and even shocking to see those to whom these invitations are sent. We would expect it would be made to good, moral, religious, successful or intellectual people, but these are not mentioned, nor are they excluded. Thankfully, it is an open invitation to all people no matter if they are rich or poor, educated or uneducated moral or immoral, religious or irreligious and it doesn't matter their background, what they've done or where they live.

King Jesus invites all those who are "*weary and burdened*"; "*labour and are heavy laden*". It doesn't matter what age, what background, what social standing, wealth, education, morals or church background people have, Jesus invites those who are weary and burdened. What does He mean by such terms? "***Weary or labour***"

(κοπιαω) means those who are weary or spent with labour, faint from weariness. We'd say "*shattered, done in*" and the like. The word "*burdened or heavy laden*" (φορτιζω) means to place a heavy burden on someone or something. Picture someone with a huge pile of bricks or whatever and they are moving slowly and struggling under the load. Here Jesus uses those 2 graphic pictures to show people who are weighed down, shattered, exhausted and yet trying to go on, to struggle on as best they can.

Jesus is not speaking exclusively about their physical state, but He is speaking in picture form here, picturing people who have great burdens, are weary and yet He can grant us strength and refreshing under the pressures and burdens that life puts upon us at times. Life can get too much for anyone of us through a great pressure or many pressures upon us - relationships are too much, worries about many things are too much; this, that or the other are too difficult, a great burden, such a heavy load and at times it seems we cannot go on any further or any longer. Yes, Jesus holds out hope to such ones. Yet, the primary emphasis of v28 is to those who want to find God, to know God and yet are weary and burdened by various things they do, have done or try to do. I'll concentrate on this, but the other things I've mentioned are included, so remember the emphasis in this passage, from the setting, is coming to know God - for when we know God, these other matters are put in their right place and we are able to have God's help and support in them.

As we understand our situation with God, as He begins to work in us, we can react by wanting to get right with God, by trying this, that and the other. As we try to do that, we find all we do just seems to make it harder and harder and we become exhausted, weary and despair more as we try to get right with God, to sort out things between us and Him. We may be like those who lived in Jesus' time - they were seeking God. They did so through the teaching of the Pharisees. The Pharisees took OT, robbed it of its force and truth and

put in its place a series of laws and regulations, dos and don'ts. In Jesus' time people were taught they had to do their best, do this and that, or not do such things! If they worked hard enough, long enough, then the scales would tip eventually their way and they would be ok with God. What a situation - always afraid, always in doubt, never having the joy of resting in a complete and finished work, always having to carry around the burden of doing or not doing. Those who had done wrong had to carry that around with them too - the guilt of failure, along with all the extra fear and doubts it would bring!

I wonder if anyone here feels like that? Yes, you want to be right with God, you certainly want a home in heaven, but you find it so hard to be good, religious, to do this, not to do wrong! You feel guilty for things you've done, said or should have done and said! If that describes you then listen – not just to me, but definitely listen to Jesus' invitations that are made to us all here. Maybe you feel too bad, feel just weighed down by an awareness of the wrong things you've done, thought, said and desired. Then listen very carefully, because this is good news for someone like us and all of us are to take heed and listen to the invitation Jesus makes to us personally.

I also need to say that if you feel you're ok, have no felt need to bother with Jesus' invitations here, then you could be like those cities of v20-24, you could be the self-contentedly wise and learned Jesus spoke of in v25 and your condition is far worse than those who realise they need, their weariness and burden. Moving on again we will see:

3. The Personal Invitations Made.

King Jesus personally invites us! Though the invitations are said to all, they are to be viewed as personally given from the Lord Jesus individually to each of us. Each and every one of us could put our own name in v28 and take the “all you” as meaning us alone. This verse includes us all without exception (*says John Calvin*) and none

of us should say that it could not possibly mean or include us. These invitations are to all, to whosoever will receive them.

King Jesus begins by inviting us “*Come to me*” - He invites us to go directly to Him, not go through some religious actions, or deeds of sorrow, by any church system, or through any religious man, woman or ritual. The King of heaven, personally invites us to go directly to Him. Going to Jesus means going to Him by faith - accepting who He is, what He taught, what He did and accomplished for us in His life, death, resurrection and ascension i.e. salvation. We are not to be relying one little bit on what we feel, try to do, but rely only upon Him - a hymn we sang says “*those who trust Him wholly, find Him wholly true.*” Why wouldn't we want to know the life, rest, peace and joy Jesus will give to us? If you want to know that rest, peace and joy, then go to the Lord Jesus in faith and trust Him as your Lord and Saviour.

It is incredible that King Jesus invites us to go to Him and we will receive rest. It will be rest not only from uncertainty, fear, anxiety, but especially rest from the fear of facing an angry God, hell and the despair that brings even now. This rest has above all a positive aspect - peace with God, the peace of God will rule your heart and mind, knowing the God in heaven loves you, cares for you, has reserved a place in heaven for you and He will welcome you there as His child. The rest and joy of knowing that all, every one of our sins, our offences against God are forgiven, that our guilt before God is removed and it will be our state and condition for ever. The rest that King Jesus gives us is glorious, amazing. We do not deserve it, cannot earn it, but if we feel our need of such then we can go to Him for He Himself invites us.

He also invites us to take His yoke upon us. A yoke? What is that? A yoke was that which was put on oxen or even people to spread the weight of a burden - it was used in work! Jesus calls us not only to

His rest, but also to His work for Him, to serve Him! Working in a field pulling a plough is hard, work, yet Jesus assures us that His yoke is easy and He is not going to abuse us in His service. His yoke is not a hard, harsh yoke, but easy. The Greek here means not only easy, but good, useful, profitable and agreeable, so it is comfortable and pleasant.

The Lord Jesus is no hard taskmaster or slave driver. He is gentle and kind. There is not a nicer, gentler, kinder master anywhere. The Bible says He knows us - all about us, our ups and downs; our good and bad times; our doubts and fears, our joys and tears. He not only knows, but He is touched by the feeling of our infirmities - He understands, sympathises perfectly with us and helps us when no one else can or does. Jesus is not high and cut off from us, but humble. Even though He is Lord of all, the anointed One of God, yet He comes to us, gets alongside us and shows us His love, care, concern and He helps us in our situations in life – taking the heavier part of the yoke!

Will we treat with disgust or ignore this further invitation to take His yoke upon us and serve Him when He promises to give us rest? He promises that if we accept such a yoke, we will find further rest for our souls.

What invitations and offers King Jesus gives to us. He gives us rest and we find rest even as we work for Him! This is a double blessing and encouragement. The One is a divine gift, personally given by God through Christ to us. The other is the rest of serving Him and is discovered by obedience, by learning of Jesus. As we do so, we begin to understand His care, promises, love, power and the life He wants us to live to please Him. We learn to cast our burdens on the Lord, realising that He cares for us and will sustain us. As we learn of Christ - He is both the teacher and the lesson - we learn to trust His leading, guiding, help and strength more and more and we find out

more and more there is rest for our worrying hearts, fears, for us and our family's well-being, our marriage, our job - in fact we realise He is in control and cares for every part of our lives – no part too big or too small.

The Lord Jesus is a marvellous Master and Teacher. He invites us to make Him ours by faith. We need rest for our souls. Augustine, an important man in the early church, said “*Lord, Thou madest us for Thyself, and we can find no rest till we find rest in Thee.*” Would we want to know rest for our lives and more importantly for our souls? Soul rest spreads through our lives and affects them also and fills every area of our lives with His rest as well (*story of miners' camp and new baby*). What wonderful invitations are given to such ones as us and from such a glorious one. My final point is a question:

4. What Will We Do with Such Invitations?

Things such as wedding invitations have RSVP on them and a reply date and address. If you do not reply or leave it too late you could well be excluded from the event. Thankfully these invitations from King Jesus have no date on them, but don't think they can be ignored or left until a more convenient time. We are to realise Jesus invites us all to His marvellous rest, to amazing things now. Surely, we would be wrong, even crazy to ignore them, neglect them and certainly to reject them! The Bible always urges us to consider gospel invitations and accept them now, today, soon. It never says “*Wait until...*” One time the preaching of Paul affected the Roman governor Felix and Felix was afraid, he had Paul leave him and said that when he found a convenient time, he would send for Paul again - but we never read that he was ever again afraid at the preaching of Paul, as if he was ignoring the invitations in the gospel to trust Jesus (Acts 24:25).

We are to realise that the time to accept these invitations from King Jesus are urgent. Jesus does not hint that we are to put off, delay

going to Him, for the Greek words should be translated as an imperative, a command from Jesus “*Come to me now!*” He wants us to realise the danger we are in, that we face judgement, yet we cannot come unless He draws us, but there He is, calling, commanding us and if we are aware of it, we are to come now without delay to Him.

RSVP? Will we come to King Jesus and have Him as our Saviour and know His rest? Or will we struggle on in our own limited abilities, our own limited and flawed goodness and face God and His judgement? The Saviour calls and commands us with authority to go to Him. I imagine all heaven holds its breath at your response at this time – what will it be? If we hear Him calling us, then let us go to Him with confidence and we will find out He will give us the rest and love we could never imagine at this time, coupled with a changed life and the joy of eternal life. What is your response?