

A Gracious Invitation

Matthew 11:25-30

Last week we ended with the threat of judgment, a judgment so severe that it would be considered worse than the fate of the land of Sodom.

v.24 "...I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you."

But then what? What does Jesus say next? As you study the Bible, it is always helpful to look at the flow and progress that you observe, especially in the specific discourses of Jesus. Here, he rebukes his hearers, those whom he identifies simply as "this generation." He condemns those who rejected the message and ministry of John. He rebukes their hypocrisy in rejecting his own ministry as well. He especially denounced those cities where the majority of the miracles had been performed. The people simply did not believe! They would not believe. Thus, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the wicked cities of the Canaanites than it would be for them. That's Jesus' message. Judgment and destruction. Wrath and justice.

But then what? What comes after that? Why, the gospel, that's what. After the warning of judgment, nothing less than one of the most precious and sensitive invitations of the gospel in all of Scripture.

So the severe warning of judgment and the warmth of the gospel invitation are not contradictory. They aren't even in tension. There is no problem at all! Actually, the warning of the justice of God's wrath is the call to repentance, it is the call to turn from sin and to escape that judgment. And the warning of God's judgment is the context for Jesus to give this invitation, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Such...

I. A GRACIOUS INVITATION.

Jesus says "come." It is an invitation given often in Scripture!

John 7:37 "On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. 38 He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"

I want to show you that this invitation of the gospel is deeply rooted in Old Testament prophecy. Don't ever think that the God of the Old Testament was a God of wrath and the God of the New Testament is a God of mercy. God is the same, from the beginning. And he is both a God of wrath upon the wicked, and a God of mercy who gives this gracious invitation to come!

Is. 55:1 "Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; And you who have no money, Come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk Without money and without price. 2 Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And let your soul delight itself in abundance. 3 Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live; And I will make an everlasting covenant with you—The sure mercies of David."

Isaiah continues,

Is. 55:6 "Seek the LORD while He may be found, Call upon Him while He is near. 7 Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the LORD, And He will have mercy on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon...12 "For you shall go out with joy, And be led out with peace; The mountains and the hills Shall break forth into singing before you, And all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. 13 Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress tree, And instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree; And it shall be to the LORD for a name, For an everlasting sign that shall not

be cut off.”

Come, and drink of the water of life. Come eat the bread of life. Seek the Lord while he may be found. That’s the invitation of the gospel. That invitation is the very definition of graciousness. Return to the Lord, that he may have compassion and abundantly pardon. That is the invitation I declare and proclaim even this afternoon.

Notice how Jesus introduces this gracious invitation. He speaks of his sovereignty. We see in this text,

A. The graciousness of a sovereign God.

Somehow, some people think that God’s sovereignty eliminates any possibility of a free offer of the gospel. That idea goes by the name of hyper-Calvinism, and it suits neither the words and ministry of Calvin nor the Scripture. God is sovereign, in election, in predestination. And he is gracious. Look at, v.25-26

God is identified as “Lord of heaven and earth,” clear reference to his absolute authority and power over all of creation. The word “sovereign” means that there is no higher authority, no one to whom he is accountable. He does whatever he wills. Interesting that that gracious invitation of Isaiah 55 also includes this notion of sovereignty. Right in the middle of those words I read earlier, embedded in the very clear invitation of the gospel are these words,

Is. 55:8 “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,” says the LORD. 9 “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts. 10 “For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, And do not return there, But water the earth, And make it bring forth and bud, That it may give

seed to the sower And bread to the eater, 11 So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.”

The word of God will not return void. It will accomplish the purpose to which God assigned it. That’s sovereignty. And in that very same context, there is this most gracious of all invitations. “Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; And you who have no money, Come, buy and eat.”

In our text, verse 26, we read of what “seemed good in Your sight.” That word in Greek is nothing less than the word for God’s eternal decree, the good pleasure of his will; it is what Paul refers to in Ephesians 1, with reference to the predestination of God’s children to be adopted through faith in Jesus.

Eph. 1:7 “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace 8 which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, 9 having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself...”

“According to his good pleasure.” “According to the pleasure of his will, his good purpose! That which he decides. That which he determines, freely. As a matter of his his grace. That’s how God makes himself known, as he reveals himself to those whom he calls “little children.” The focus of this gracious will is upon God’s revelation, and who is able to hear and understand it, and who isn’t! So we see,

B. The graciousness of God’s revelation.

v.25

God chose to hide his word from the wise and understanding.

He chose to reveal himself to “little children,” to babes, to those who would receive the kingdom like little children, those who wouldn’t be stuck upon themselves or so pretentious as to doubt or question what they were told.

So God hid himself from those who were wise in their own eyes, from those who thought highly of themselves and of their own wisdom and intelligence. Paul expressed that same idea this way,

1 Cor. 2:6. “However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. 7 But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, 8 which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

Likewise,

1 Cor. 1:18 “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.” 20 Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?”

That’s his judgment. But with it, in his sovereignty, God makes himself known. He reveals himself according to his own gracious will and purpose.

1 Cor. 1:21 “For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. 22 For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; 23 but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, 24 but to those who are called, both

Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”

That self-revelation of God is an act of graciousness to those who would hear, for unless God had made himself known to us, we all would have perished in our sin. The question is not why he didn’t choose everyone to believe, but why he chose anyone at all! Such is his gracious will, the good pleasure of his will! So he reveals himself to those whom he identifies as little children.

Jesus goes one step even further, even deeper if you will. In verse 27, we see,

C. The graciousness of the Trinity.

Amazing, isn’t it, to walk into this discussion of the trinity, the interpersonal relationships between the members of the triune God. Here, two of them, the Father and the Son. And even this trinitarian definition is gracious, for the revelation of God is from God the Father to God the Son. The Father and Son experience and enjoy a relationship unlike any other, only the Father knows the Son. Fully, and perfectly. Only the Son knows the Father, fully and completely. None of us can enter into those inter-trinitarian relationships. After all, none of us are God.

But wait a minute. We can know the Father. If, by his gracious and sovereign purpose, the Son makes the Father known.

v.27

So God can be known. And God the Father will be known, not only by the Son but by “anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.” That’s grace, isn’t it? For why does the Son choose to reveal the Father to anyone? Why? Because we are so

good? The Son reveals the Father to those of us who are so good? Of course not. For there is no one good, no, not one.

Jesus, in the flesh, reveals to us the glory of his Father, as the greatest possible and imaginable act of his grace. He makes the Father known. And he invites you to believe. To believe him, to receive him. It is such,

II. A PERSONAL INVITATION.

Let me read it again, with all the personal appeal that these words carry from Jesus himself. Let me read that invitation again, and as you hear me read, listen to Jesus speaking, through his word, by his Holy Spirit at work in your own heart and mind.

v.28

I don't want to over-analyze these words, such that you miss their personal impact, but let me emphasize three things in the attempt to help you appreciate the invitation all the more. First, notice that,

A. The context of the invitation is the burden of our troublesome lives.

v.28

The invitation of the gospel is given to those who "labor and are heavy laden." The first word refers to your work, especially the difficulty and toil associated with that work. "Labor" is a very good English translation. It means that you are tired, exhausted by the efforts required. Heavy laden refers to the yoke or burden placed upon the back of a work animal. A burdensome weight whose load weighs very heavily upon the strength of the animal. The description is of one who is weighted down by the burdens of life.

Any of you know anything about that? Any of you ever had that experience? Do you understand the context of this invitation? I hope you do, because these words is the invitation of the gospel. "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." And remember Isaiah's words I read earlier, how those burdens of life are described, particularly with reference to the frequent sense of the hopelessness and emptiness of life, "Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy?"

That's the burden, isn't it? You are looking for meaning in life. You are looking for satisfaction. For happiness. For something of joy and peace, some measure of contentment or accomplishment. But there is none. Nothing satisfies. Nothing helps. Nothing matters. You spend your money for bread, and you are still hungry. You work hard and seem to have nothing to show for it! You're looking for something, but you just don't know what it is!

Or, you just can't escape the foreboding sense of danger and trouble. You just can't escape the crisis or the trials of life. Life is hard, difficult, painful, sorrowful, unfair. So all of you, who have felt even a portion of any of those things, listen to these words, listen to this invitation of Jesus, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden."

That's the context. In this world, you will have trouble. "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden." In this world, the pain of death still stings. "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden." In this world, there will be conflict. There will be disappointment. There will be sorrow. There will be grief. There will be tears. There will be disaster. "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden."

And what does Jesus promise? In a world of great burdens, in the midst of your troublesome lives, Jesus offers rest.

B. The objective of the invitation is the blessing of rest.

“I will give you rest.” An intermission. I will give you a break. A vacation. You can recover, you can take it easy. The emphasis is upon refreshment. “I will give you rest.”

The idea of this word “rest” is the opportunity to escape all the troubles of life. An opportunity to be refreshed by that freedom from the toils of life. It’s the best sense of what a vacation is all about.⁴

v.28 “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

That’s the invitation of the gospel. That is the invitation of Jesus to those who labor and are heavy laden. “I will give you rest.”

There is an Old Testament word for that same thing, and it is one of those many Hebrew words that you are actually familiar with. There is a particular Hebrew word for this sort of rest, the word sabbath. It is a word that also emphasizes the idea of refreshment. This rest, of course, is embedded in the law of God and the basis of the law is God’s own rest, God’s own sabbath refreshment. Never is that clearer than in,

Ex. 31:17 “[The sabbath] is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever; for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed.”

I love to think in that way of the sabbath, that God not only rested but was refreshed. He rested from his work of creation, and he delighted himself in that refreshment. Thus he calls us to

live the same way,

Ex. 23:12 “Six days you shall do your work, and on the seventh day you shall rest, that your ox and your donkey may rest, and the son of your female servant and the stranger may be refreshed.”

A day you don’t have to work! A day you can be free from the toils and struggles of this life. And yet, today, so many Christians called such the enjoyment of that blessing “legalism.” The freedom from the toil of labor is called harsh and legalistic. Yet God made us to enjoy a weekly sabbath, freedom from the labors of this life. God promises us an eternal sabbath. God promises us rest, and he blesses us one day each week with a day of rest.

In the broader sense of your whole life, that’s the objective of this gospel invitation. “You will find rest for your souls.” In Jesus. “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

Then, he defines his relationship to us with a reference to the yoke and burdens of life.

v.29

It is a yoke. It is a call to service, the calling of a bondservant, a slave. But,

C. The nature of the invitation is a call to delightful service.

“Learn from me,” Jesus says, “for I am gentle and lowly in heart.” There is no oppression. No burdensome duties. No harsh or bitter obligations. But slavery nonetheless, the delightful service of being disciples of Jesus.

And what is the nature of that promised rest?

Take off that heavy burden imposed by the world. Take off that heavy yoke of oppressive slavery which is required by the fallen world in which we all live. Take off that hard duty of enduring all the struggles and pains of this life.

And put on the yoke and burden to which Jesus calls you as his beloved children. Stop spending your money for that which is not bread, for things that don't satisfy. Stop working "for that which does not satisfy." Stop resisting the gracious call and invitation of the gospel. Instead, listen. Hear, and believe.

That invitation is equally valid and encouraging for all of you this afternoon, for it addresses every one of you exactly where you are now living. So listen to these words again, and hear them clearly, plainly. Receive them with much joy and thanksgiving, for they are words that Jesus speaks to you through this revelation of Scripture. Wherever you are today, whatever the circumstances of your life, whatever the particular examples of trouble might be within your own situation, listen, and hear Jesus speaking through his word.

v.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."