

Mission Month - Invitation from God

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[0 : 0 0] Well, I want to start by thanking you for your welcome. When I opened the kitchen door,! Somebody recognized me. Nobody hugged me. When I came into the church, James came in, he shook my! I think the nearest I got a hug was from Ian who came towards me and put out his hand. I just want to compare that to Thursday morning when I was going in to preach. There was a line of girls throwing petals over me, and there was a sign welcoming me saying, Welcome, Honorable Guests, noticing there's nothing there to say I'm honorable. And then I was given a garland to wear, which I didn't wear while I spoke, but the welcome was slightly different. And I wonder when you think of your welcome from God, God. Is your welcome from God, your invitation from God, is it a reserved Scottish invitation?

Does He put out His hand and shake it firmly and warmly and tell you you're welcome, or does He do more than that? What I want us to think about this morning as you start on your mission Sunday, sharing a message that I'm pleased to be able to share in some ways in different places about how people are welcome to Jesus. I want you to know again that you're welcome to Jesus. And on the strength of your welcome to Jesus, I want you to know that you are welcome to invite others to Jesus. And that's what the mission of the church is, isn't it? To welcome, to invite people to Jesus. We sometimes think as we start that the God of the Old Testament, the God who gave us these laws that sometimes we struggle to obey, the God whose righteous acts of judgment sometimes send shivers down our spines when we read the Old Testament. We think that He is not as welcoming as the New Testament. So, what I want to do is just to let you know that you were invited to Jesus, you are invited to Jesus, you can invite to Jesus, and you will be invited to Jesus. So, we read first of all in the Old Testament in Isaiah chapter 55, and there we see that long before Jesus came to the earth, you were invited and we are invited to come and to put our trust in God. Come, all you who are thirsty. When I read a commentary on this years ago, it's never left my mind that this come, or if you remember the authorized version, it started, ho, everyone who thirsts, that this was given like a market trader. When I arrived in Glasgow as a student, one of the first things that surprised me was there would be people on the street and they would be shouting, I'll try and copy them, they go, hey, right times! What on earth is that all about?

In posh language, it's evening times. They were letting you know you could buy the evening times there. And if God is like a market trader, when I was in Pakistan this week, there's people going around in bicycles shouting that they've got vegetables to sell and they've got brushes to sell. Here we have God looking for your attention, shouting or saying loudly, come, come, come, all you who are thirsty.

[illegible]

with all of your sinfulness and everything that you've done wrong, you are welcome to come back. You're welcome to come to God. And what will you get when you come to God? You will find that if you turn to the Lord, He will have mercy on you. And if you come to God, He will freely pardon you from your sins. Everything is free. Everything is free. And people sometimes, and ourselves, we can see the church as this body that becomes a burden to us because, well, we have to go there every week, not that we don't want to go there. But we put wrong ideas in our head, is what I'm trying to say. And we forget that we are coming to God who wants to bless us and give us everything and enrich us and fulfill us. And always, always keep it in your minds. The best is always yet to come.

[5 : 44] Always. The glory days you think are behind you, no, they're not. They're ahead of you, and they always will be. So when people, and when you're tempted to think God has changed in Jesus Christ, no, God is the same. He freely welcomes you to Him. The book of Isaiah describes Him as a just, a fair God, and a Savior. That's who He is. He is not different. So we are welcome to come.

I came here today because James extended an invitation to me. I didn't have to send him a note and say, please, can I come to your church. He graciously extended the invitation. And it's always the same with the invitation from God. It's not that we were looking. It's not that we were searching.

It's not that we were looking for Him and nearly had everything we needed. It's that He, at His initiative, extends the invitation to us, and He lets us come. He lets us come to Him where we are, how we are.

We don't have to fix ourselves. We don't have to change our living situation. We don't have to get new jobs before we can come to Him. We can come to Him, and we'll find out later that things will change when we come to Him. But from where we are, however we are, we are welcome to come.

We're welcome to come, and every single one of us, all you who are thirsty, all you who are thirsty, everyone is welcome to come to Him. You think of weddings. In our culture, we had a girl in Dunfermline who gatecrashed even her cousin's wedding. She wasn't invited, but she went anyway. She was Northern Irish. I don't need to say more than that, do I? But we were thinking, that's a little bit rude of you.

[7 : 47] And you would think that's a little bit rude of somebody to do something like that. But there's nobody that isn't welcome to come to God. There's nobody in this room who is unwelcome if they would just come and show Him that they're thirsty. I have a friend who I hadn't seen for years, and I met him at a wedding, and he said, we're just five minutes off the A9. Call in if you're passing. We might not be in, but call anyway. How many times have I gone to visit him since he said that? None. Why? Because he couldn't assure me that he would be there to welcome me. You don't hear any qualification. Come. God will be in. I remember in Alt Bay, there was an elder who would always and often pray that the people who didn't realize, who hadn't trusted in Jesus would know that he is only a prayer away. It's a simple term, but how can you find Him? How can you access Him? You go to God in prayer, and when you come to God, you find that you are welcome to Him. Everything is given to you, the pardon you need, the wine, the milk, everything that you need. Maybe you need to hear this today, and I want you to hear it as if it's from an earnest God. He shouts to get your attention, and you're a wee bit tired of hearing it, but please give ear and come to me. Listen.

Remember an old preacher who every third or fourth word would be, listen. Are you listening? Are you listening? You're welcome to come to Jesus. Listen again. Give ear. Come. Listen. Why? Why might you listen? That you may live. What does God want to give you? He wants to give you life. Next, we see that you are invited to come to the Lord Jesus. We find that in the messages that we read in Matthew and in the Gospel of John. You're invited to come to Jesus. Jesus speaks to these people, and He tells them, come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Then we read in John's Gospel that whoever is thirsty, anyone who's thirsty may come, and when they come, streams of living water will flow from you. You'll be changed. What happens is that God gives you His Holy Spirit, and that is the thing that changes you the most. And then you get to the book of Revelation, just in case we're wondering.

It basically ends, or near the end, tells us that everyone who is thirsty can come. We are all welcome to come and have this thirst quenched. But first of all, look at this invitation from the Lord Jesus.

It's a free invitation. Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. I passed a police car at the side of the motorway in Pakistan this week, and I'm always looking out for the windows, and that's my problem in college as well, and things like that. But what surprised me was in front of the police car, there's a policeman lying down on his prayer mat, praying towards Allah he thinks. He's burdened. He can't get on and do his job without this ritual, it seems.

Jesus is speaking to people who were burdened by trying to please the Pharisees, trying to please God by pleasing their leaders rather than by going straight to God and finding their acceptance in Him and the forgiveness of sins that comes from Him. Perhaps that can be our problem too. We look at what other people think. These people who the burden on Him was breaking them, that they were struggling to live their lives freely, and they just couldn't ever, couldn't ever satisfy. I can never be good enough.

[12:13] Trying to get God's attention. When I've been phoning home, we've got foster children in the house, and one of the things that happens now when I phone home is I can hardly speak to my wife without these little faces appearing, and they're not always wanting my attention. They're just jealous that they're not getting the attention. They're competing. And we think it's like that with God. Does God listen to the young girl over here in the same way that she listens to the wise old man who's followed Him for a long time? Whose ear has God got? He's the God who, in Psalm 116, we have this picture of Him inclining, turning His ear towards us so that we might hear. And so we come. We come to God, and we come to God with this expectation that if we come weary and burdened, He'll give us rest. What does that mean? It means that we can trust Him to do what's necessary. I did one of the stupidest things I've ever done in my life yesterday.

I was in a machine about 500 tons high up in the sky, and I fell asleep. Is that a bit of a stupid thing to do? I was sitting beside the emergency exit as well. Why would I do that? Why could I do that?

Because I trust the pilot. I trust the pilot to get up in the air, to keep it in the air, and I trust the pilot to bring it safe to land. Come to Me, all you who are weary, and I will give you rest. You can trust the Savior. Trust the Savior to give you a new birth. You can trust the Savior not to lose any of those that the Father has given to Him. You can trust the Savior to be willing to come back and to take you to be with Him where He is. You can rest. You can rest in what Jesus has done.

And yes, yes, He says, take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you'll find rest for your souls. We can have our lives changed so that we might give our lives to serving Him, to living for Him, to having Him lead and guide us and take us into scary situations that we don't have the confidence to enter on our own but can go with Him. But He will give us the rest as He gives us this new burden and this possibility to go and to live for Him. He has done everything that we need as He gave Himself for us. Then we move forward into the Gospel of John, John 7 verse 37. And I want you to notice again just this idea that we should perhaps grasp. John 7 verse 37, on the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice,

Why did He say, let everyone who is thirsty come to Me and drink? Why does God make it so vocal?

[15 : 52] Because He wants everyone to hear. He wants everyone to hear that they are invited to come, and if they come to Him, they will get what they need. Let everyone who is thirsty come to Me and drink.

Whoever believes in Me, as Scripture said, rivers of living water will flow from within Him by this. We know what He meant. It tells us He meant the Spirit with those who believe in Him were later to receive.

that you will be changed as the Holy Spirit comes into you. Your life will be different, and you can come and get what you need. But you get it from Jesus. If I was able to show you the pictures earlier, I'd have taken you a walk through a slum in Navi Mumbai, a slum called Dagri Chol, a tin shack slum, and we see the rubbish, and we see the children half clothed, and we get to the well that they've dug out. And you wouldn't wash anything in that well. And if you drank from that well, you would be sick. Even they don't drink from it. It's not good yet. We want to fix it, but I can't invite you to come and drink that. Just this week, I had to be very careful what I drank, because if I drank the wrong thing, it would make me sick. Make sure the bottle is sealed and all of this sort of thing. Why? Because it's poisonous if I don't take the right stuff. Whoever believes in me will be changed. And you have to come and drink. You have to go to the one source. And I don't know who I'm speaking to. I guess I'm speaking to lots of Christians, and maybe one or two people who are unsure, and maybe somebody who's doubting completely. But if you come to the Lord Jesus, you're freely invited, and you can come, and you will safely be changed. You will take what He gives you, and it's good for you.

And it will not harm you or hurt you. It will not poison you. It will give you rivers of living water will start to come from you. What you actually take in becomes what comes out of you in a way.

Whoever is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. And if you drink what I give you, then streams of living water will flow from within them, flow from within them, which means come out. So, when God's people take the Lord Jesus, the Holy Spirit comes into our lives, and then we are changed. And the way that we live and act, it changes. So, we come, and we drink from this water, and we are satisfied with what He gives us. I will praise you, Lord. Although you were angry with me, your anger has turned away, and you've comforted me. Surely, God is my salvation. I will trust and not be afraid.

[19 : 03] The Lord, the Lord Himself, is my strength and my defense. He has become my salvation. With joy, you will draw water from the wells of salvation. You come to God, you receive what He gives you, and then it comes to you again, and you have all that you need. Well, who is this for? Let's just make sure we all understand. Who is this for? In Isaiah, we read, come some of you who are thirsty. No, come all of you who are thirsty. In John 7, we read, let anyone who is thirsty, in verse 38. In verse 38, we read, whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from them. Who can come? Whoever, anyone, all of you. Who can you extend an invitation to?

Just the ones that look socially acceptable? Or maybe just the ones that look poor enough to be desperate for something. Desperate for something. Who can come? Anyone can come. And how will they be able to come? You turn back a page in the Gospel of John, John 6, verse 37, all those the Father gives me will come to me. And whoever comes, I will never drive away. Whoever comes to Jesus, God will never drive away. And you might be unsure of how you can come, or all of these things. I have this lovely picture in my mind. I think it's a lovely picture. It's like, remember primary one. Some of you have put children into primary one or nursery. And they were nervous. And mummy held their hand. And then there was a teacher waiting to welcome them. And you got the child in, and you settled them. How are you going to come to God? Whoever the Father gives to me will come to me, and whoever comes, I'll never drive away.

Who's pushing you from behind? Well, is it the Father pushing you towards the Son, or is it the Son pushing you towards the Father? But you're caught in a sandwich, if you like, between God the Father and God the Son, and they're ready to embrace you, and to hold you, and to have you, and never to let you go. And you will surely come because you are being sent with that love towards God. So, you can come.

You can trust. You can have your sins pardoned. You can rest. Another thing that Christians need to hear is that you're still invited to come to the Lord Jesus. Even though you've been an idiot, even though you have sinned greatly, even though your sins are many and His mercy is more, and even though you have doubts, even though you have fears, you are welcome to come to the Lord Jesus. Don't know if you buy stuff online, but whenever you buy stuff online, you've got to be careful to click the button to make sure that you don't get an email every day to make sure that you buy another pair of shoes, or whatever it is. You think, I've got it already. And you might think, I've got it already.

I've come to Jesus, and I've got it already. Well, I wonder, I wonder, do you need to understand what you've got? I wonder, are you holding on to everything that He's given you? If you've grown cold, and you think, well, I'm useless for service. This is missions month, and if you knew my heart, if you knew my habits, you would think that God doesn't want anything from me.

[22 : 54] Well, maybe you need to fix some of your heart problems and your habits and stop doing things that are wrong. But how are you going to please God? How are you going to please God?

What's the work that God requires? The work that God requires is this, to believe in the one He has sent. So come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden. And what does it look like? I think the most beautiful picture of it is in the gospel, when Jesus tells the story of the son who went away, give me everything, Dad, before you go and let me go and live my life. And then He goes and He squanders it, and He realizes that His Father's servants have more. And so He wants to come back. I'll arise and go to my Father. And I think it's one of the sweetest pictures in the whole of Scripture. And when He was a long way off, His Father saw Him and was filled with compassion and came running to Him and threw His arms around Him and said, Son, do you need to come back? Do you need to come back? Do you think God's going to put you into solitary confinement before you come back? Do you think He's going to just put you through the mill and make sure that you've done your penance? No, He is a just God and the Savior, and He welcomes you to Him. So return, return to Me, and I will return to you, says the Old Testament.

Don't think that He is like that. I don't know if I'm just preaching to myself, because I think that I struggle to believe this. I do struggle to believe that God really, really loves me this much that when I say, Father, forgive me, that He freely does it. That He doesn't want to put me on sort of parole or something for a few months to check that I'm really sure that I'm sorry, that He's testing me or anything like that. I struggle to believe that He is as free and forgiving as He really is.

But He is. He is. He gives me what I don't deserve, His goodness and His grace and forgiveness. And so that motivates me, sometimes slower than it should, but streams of living water will flow from within me. She'll be able to say, I can't stop that. I can't help that, because when I came to Jesus and I drank, then He gave me everything I need. So I am changed, and it's Him that's changed me, and it's Him that's changed you. So what does that mean for us as Christians?

Well, sometimes we describe what we're doing as beggars inviting other beggars to receive the same piece of bread or to share what we've had. Well, yes, yes, maybe we are beggars. We're undeserving, but you are priests. You are royalty. You are heirs of a glorious inheritance. You're not just beggars.

[26 : 19] You are richer than anyone else. You have more than you need. Your cup overflows. God's goodness and mercy will be with you all the days of your life, and surely you will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. You have everything, everything. And so you are able to go and invite people.

That's what the Christian church is. It's this thing that's on the move, and we think of it as buildings, but it's a people on the move gathering more people at risk often to their own lives, and we pray for those. And sometimes in places like Scotland, going very, very slowly, but we are inviting others to Him. I'm in Edinburgh. I'm speaking to an Edinburgh congregation. I'll be surprised if there's not somebody in here with Costco membership. And if you've got Costco membership, one of the things that you'll have said is, you can come with me, and you can have access to cheap toilet roll too. And boy, is that worth having, you think. I mean, you've been like that.

Your friend is on the way to a lost eternity, on the way to hell. He has not heard the sweet invitation of the Lord Jesus. And you have. And so, you might be like the Apostle Paul who says to people, be reconciled to God. I implore you. I implore you. I try and persuade you. I try and winsomely attract you. I twist your arm if absolutely necessary. I implore you, be reconciled to God.

On Christ's behalf, it's not me that's given the invitation of just somebody that's received it. I'm the one who's giving the invitation on behalf of the one who gives it.

People have been in the free church here longer than I have, and you remember, they had this mission committee called the highways and byways, which sounds old-fashioned now, but what an excellent idea taken from the parable, go out into the highways and byways, or to the roads and to the pathways, and invite them to come in, compel them to come in. Why? Because the Father, the host, has this feast ready for this number of people. Invite them to come in.

[28 : 55] Invite them to come in. And be confident as you do it, as you go out and invite and you tell people, maybe you think you've got no authority, but can you just hear that the Lord Jesus did it in a loud voice? It's what He wanted people to hear. It's not a wee secret we're sharing here. It's the good news of Jesus Christ. Invite them to come in. And be confident yourself that you will be invited again to the Lord Jesus. There is a danger, we have to say. If you read the book of Hebrews, sometimes we shiver as we read this New Testament book that tells us if we keep on refusing, then ultimately we will be refused. And there's warnings about turning away. Don't do it. Don't be so flippant with the grace of God that you keep on turning it down, but keep on going to it as long as you know it's available. But as you come to Him, as you work for Him, you will be given rest.

Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, I'll give you rest. Now, for most of us, I think, well, all of us, if we look at death in a human way, the scariest days are ahead of us, aren't they? But still, in those days, we will have rest in the Lord Jesus Christ. We'll have a burden. We will have this water coming out of us, and we will keep going. And then the Lord Jesus will return, won't He? That's our hope. I can't get to heaven unless He comes for me. And when I get to heaven, or when He comes for me, this is what He's going to say, isn't it? He's going to say, come, you who are blessed by my Father. Take your inheritance. The kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. Come and get it. Come and get it. Well, how am I going to get it?

Well, as streams of living water have flowed from within me, as I've taken His yoke upon me, and His burden, which is light, it's meant that I've been able to be somebody who gave the hungry something to eat. I was able to invite the stranger in. I was able to clothe those who had no clothes. I was able to visit those who were ill and in prison. I was able to look after people.

Why do I want to do that? Well, to be honest, I don't really... I would prefer to be at home watching TV, maybe is what you want to say. But we're compelled to do something different.

Why? Because He has changed us and made us people that reach out and help others with their physical needs and with their eternal needs, sharing them, sharing with them the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ. Our faith is not dead faith, but our faith is faith that is alive, because faith without works is dead. And so, if we hear His invitation, we hear His invitation today to come to Him.

[32 : 15] If we hear His invitation to come back to Him, if we will hear His invitation to come to Him and receive this kingdom prepared for you from before the foundation of the world. We are always welcome.

Everybody can go out of here today knowing one thing. You're welcome, and you're welcome to come to Him. You were invited. You are invited. So, go out and invite, knowing that you will be invited to Him.

May God bless these thoughts to you.