The Greatest Invitation Ever Given

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[0:00] We'll keep going. Verse 28, where Jesus says, Come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 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, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Last year I received a very special invitation. That invitation was to attend the National Prayer Breakfast at Westminster Hall in the Houses of Parliament. Clergy from many different denominations were there, and we mingled with, I suppose you could say, the great and good of British politics, business, industry.
The Speaker of the Commons welcomed us with his inimitable order. Former Prime Minister Theresa May was just a few metres beside me.
New York-based Tim Keller, the minister, he gave the keynote address. It was very much a highlight for the many, and there are a good number of Christian MPs in Parliament.
We joined in prayer with fellow believers. A few free church colleagues, ministers, were there as well. We really shared in the privilege of receiving that invitation and being in that great hall on an occasion.
[1:27] Such will certainly live in my own memory for many, many years. Of course, we've all received special invitations. We have particular events. Maybe it's a wedding.

Maybe it's a particular anniversary. Maybe it's a birthday party. Maybe it's a garden party at Holyrood. Maybe it's a birthday party at Holyrood. Maybe it's a birthday party at Holyrood.
And yes, these invitations are special in themselves. But the greatest invitation, well, that hasn't come from a government or a bride-to-be or a birthday boy or girl.
It's come from the Lord of Lords. It's come from the King of Kings. It's that invitation has come from the Lord Jesus. It's that invitation that we read there in that passage.
And that invitation that was given then and is given now. It's as live today as it was when Jesus uttered these words 2,000 years ago. These words come to me, says Jesus.
[2:27] All who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. And each one of us is here this morning to hear the Lord Jesus speak to us.

If you're a Christian, you're to hear these words. If you're not a Christian, listen to these words of Jesus. Because these words that Jesus gives apply to each one of us. And we're going to look at three aspects to this invitation that Jesus gives.
As you see in the notes, the giver of the invitation, the receivers of the invitation, and the result of the invitation. But before we look at these main points, of course, we need to get the setting.
Why does Jesus utter these words where he does? Well, we read in verse 16. In fact, we could have read earlier, I suppose. But when we particularly read, I've read from verse 20.
What do we see there? We see actually condemning words. Uncomfortable words that Jesus gives. Uncomfortable words about judgment. These words of Jesus that are words of condemnation against those cities where, yes, Jesus had performed mighty works in.
[3:41] And yet in these same cities, he was rejected. And Jesus is telling his disciples of these particular cities, that the people in these cities who hadn't repented of their sins, who hadn't turned to the Lord Jesus for salvation, these cities that claimed some kind of moral and spiritual superiority over places such as the non-Jewish Tyre and Sidon, or the infamous Sodom and Gomorrah.

And yet it was the self-righteous places that Jesus condemned. And it wasn't the other cities that Jesus was focusing his utter condemnation on.
And it's in the wake of that announcement of judgment, of that, if you like, uncomfortable judgment, that Jesus comes before his Father in prayer.

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And notice, he's joyful. He's joyful in prayer. Because notice the words he's thanking his Father for that revealing of salvation, that's found, of course, only in him, only in Jesus.
And that salvation that's been kept from the self-righteous, from the, as Jesus says, the wise and understanding. In other words, you know, those who claim to know salvation by their own wisdom and intellect.
[4:58] Jesus thanks his Father. It's not to those whom salvation is known. No. It's that salvation has been revealed to little children.

In other words, the humble. The humble in heart who received the Lord Jesus, not in any kind of self-pride, but in complete dependence on Jesus. And, you know, we find Jesus in prayer to his Father.
We've been allowed into that secret place, if you like, of Jesus' prayer. We've been permitted to hear these words. This is the Son of God.
Communion. Communion. With God the Father. What do we hear Jesus say in that prayer? We hear Jesus tell of his authority. That authority, that power that was granted to Jesus by God the Father.
That power to reveal God to those whom he reveals, whom he chooses. And with that truth revealed, then Jesus issues this invitation.
[6:04] This invitation that focuses on Jesus. Here's a gift being mentioned. The gift of salvation. The free offer of salvation. Salvation. Salvation.

Offered. In grace. To the needy. To you. To me. These are comforting words. As opposed to the uncomfortable words that Jesus has just mentioned.
Now we've got comfortable words of Jesus. Comforting words. And because they're comforting words, listen to them. Open your ears. To hear Jesus speak. Well, we've mentioned Jesus.
He is. First point. The giver of the invitation. I mean, if it was anyone else. Anyone else who gave an invitation to know salvation. To know freedom from the burdens.
As we'll see in a moment. The burdens of sin. The burdens of life. The burden of self-righteousness. The burden of false religion. If it was any other person who claimed to be the promised Messiah.
[7:03] The promised Savior. Well, that person would just be considered a self-deluded, arrogant fraud. But Jesus is no self-deluded, arrogant fraud.

He is the Savior. He is the only Savior of the world. Remember what Simon Peter said on another occasion. Remember when many people were actually deserting Jesus.
And Jesus asked his disciples if they wanted to leave him too. What did Simon Peter say? He said this. To whom shall we go? To whom else shall we go?
There's no other person to whom we can go. No other person to whom we can come to. No other Savior. There's no one else. No other person whose promises are sure and true.
Who gives the promise of salvation that no false religion, no false Savior can offer and promise and give. And you know, as I know, we live in a world of many false saviors.
[8:09] The false saviors of other religions who claim the way of salvation through good works. Through some kind of self-sacrifice. Through following another Savior who's no Savior.

Or we live in an atmosphere of political saviors who claim that their policies are going to bring true happiness. True freedom. True fulfillment.
When of course no political solution can truly and fully give what mankind truly needs. Or we hear secular saviors.
They promise a new world of freedom. Freedom from restrictions. Freedom from the perceived oppression of the Christian faith. But these secular saviors actually only increase human misery. Because it's a false gospel. A gospel of godless liberty. When in fact there's no liberty at all. But there is a savior who does meet all your needs.
[9:11] Who does address you at the point of your need. And of course as that need is, as Jesus tells us here, that need is. It speaks of burdens. And so there's special invitation given to all who labor and are heavy laden.

And the promise that Jesus, He will give you rest. And then, you know, when we think of the credentials of Jesus. When we know that He is the only saviour.
He's the one who's given this invitation to come to Him. And we know there's no other. Well, He is the only one. Because He promises and has promise.

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As we find in the Old Testament. The bruised reed. He will not break. I mean, He's come. As Jesus announced, He's come as the good shepherd. And even thinking of these words, the good shepherd.
Tells you of His loving care for His flock. And also when we think of Jesus, the Lamb of God. He gave Himself for you in sacrifice.
[10:11] He doesn't give a false promise, a false assurance. He doesn't disappoint. Jesus' call to come to Him is sincere.

It's genuine. It's for your eternal good. And it's for His great glory. Come. To whom? Come. To Jesus. But who? Who's been invited?
Who are the receivers of this invitation? Well, we're told, as Jesus tells us here, all who labour and are heavy laden. Here's a message. Here's the message of the invitation.
It's one of great hope. Hope over despair. Here's Jesus uttering these words full of joy. Because He knows of the sure hope that all who have burdens and...
Well, you know, I know we can't get rid of these burdens ourselves. But Jesus can. And Jesus does. Jesus is about to declare both His burden bearing, and if you like, burden relieving.
[11:16] Think of the parable that Jesus gave of the lost sheep. You find in Luke chapter 14. The one sheep that is strayed from the fold. And the shepherd found the lost sheep.

What did he do? He carries that sheep in his shoulders. And the comment made, the comment that the shepherd gave to his neighbours, rejoice with me because the sheep that was lost is now found. And the rejoicing of the sheep that was once lost and now found. That solitary sheep carried on the shoulders of the shepherd. Yes, we might see a burden.
But actually no burden at all because of the joy of the recovery of the lost. And that's the spirit of rejoicing that Jesus has when He gives this invitation.
Because He knows that He can deliver on His Word. Come to me, all you who labour, and I'll give you rest. He knows that that can and will give you rest. And we'll think of what He means by rest later on in our thoughts.
[12:13] But Jesus knows that you can't bear the heavy burdens you have. But Jesus can and Jesus does. And does so in grace and in love.

But then you might be asking, well, what are these burdens? All you who labour and are heavy laden. Let me give two. And then later we'll speak on a third one. But let's give two initially.
And surely the first is the burden of sin. I mean, sin is a crushing burden. The heaviness of sin that weighs in your mind, that weighs in your heart, that weighs in yourself.
Now, you have given your life to the Lord Jesus. You know of sins forgiven. You know you have that constant warfare in your heart. You are engaged in that spiritual warfare.
You are engaged in that eternal fight until you enter glory. And you know, as I know, these times when sin has been allowed to enter your heart.
[13:15] The secret sins. The sins that no one else knows about. The sins that no one else sees. The sins that may give you some sort of short-term pleasure. But you know.

You know the guilt. You know the shame. You know that you've sinned against heaven and against earth. And these sins that have become idols. Idols in your heart that have weighed you down. You've never even confessed these sins. Maybe you've never even cried to the Savior, Lord, have mercy upon me, a sinner. And mention these particular sins before our God and Savior.
Sins that cling to you. You know in your own power you can't loose them off yourself. Have you come up with these unforgiving sins? I mean, do you cherish them too much?
But you know this, as I know it, the more you harbor sin, the more that you continue in particular sin, the more your conscience is going to be burdened by the guilt of your sin. And the more that happens, the more you'll lack that peace of heart.
[14:22] But take heart. Jesus is calling you. Come to me. Come to me, yes, with the burden of your sins. Come to me, says Jesus, with the sins you've been struggling with.

Come to me with these sins that have been so deep-rooted in your heart. Come to me with these sins that you know are your lusts and the idols and the lies and the neglect of communion with God or the sins that are an offense before a holy God.
Jesus says, come to me. Come with them. Name them before them. And yes, in your naming and your confessing and your repentance, yes, they'll be revealed as ugly and horrible and you'll know you've not measured up to what God's required of you.

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And in your brokenness, you will cry out, Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner. And yes, you'll come as that bruised greed we were mentioning earlier. But you're not going to be turned away.
Jesus is calling you. Come to me. And therefore, it's an urgent invitation. Don't delay in that coming. Come to him now.
[15:31] Yes, even in the quiet of your heart. Yes, with that inner voice within. Cry out. Plead. Plead. Plead with him to take that sin away to forgive you your sins.

But then you might be thinking, well, Jesus can't be interested in me. Can he be interested in me? But no. Look at what Jesus says. Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden.
Here's this invitation given, yes, to you so that no one needs to think that they're excluded. You need help.
Come to Jesus. Come to him for his grace and salvation. Yes, your sins are many. My sins are many. Our sins are many. People don't exclude you from the gracious call of Jesus to bring them to him.
You know you can't help yourself in the removing of that burden of your sin. But you know that Jesus can. And Jesus does. He has that power to relieve you of that burden.
[16:33] He knows the burden of your sin. And he'll relieve you of that burden. In his grace, come to him. Then we have to say, surely secondly, that there's the burden of life's struggles.

One of Job's comforters, who said actually something that was correct. He said, man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upwards. Well, we know these troubles.
The troubles of loneliness. The burden of rejection. Troubles even within families. The burden of unrealized expectation. The burden of bereavement.
The burden even of differences between and divisions between Christians. And even, ultimately, the burden of the gnawing fear of death.
We read in Proverbs 18, a crushed spirit. Who can bear? I mean, Jesus knows these things. Jesus says, come to me and I'll give you rest. Jesus knew burdens.
[17:37] Isaiah prophesied of these burdens in Isaiah chapter 53. When Isaiah prophesied of the Lord to come, of Jesus to come, He, Jesus, was despised and rejected by men.

Jesus was a man of sorrows. Jesus was acquainted with grief. Jesus was one from whom men hid their faces. Jesus was despised. And as Isaiah says, we esteem them not.
I mean, Jesus bore these burdens, these troubles in His humanity. And He suffered. He suffered for your sake. He knows, Jesus knows what it's like to be lonely.
He knows what it's like to be bereft of human company. Remember when He was arrested there in Gethsemane, what happened? His disciples fled from Him. Even in the cross itself, Jesus crying out in that moment of dereliction, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
But remember, Jesus in heaven, Jesus is our great high priest. Jesus is interceding for you. Jesus does sympathize with you.
[18:40] He sympathizes with your troubles. The writer to the Hebrew tells us that. Hebrews 4, 15 to 16, For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin.

So have that confidence before you, confidence in the Savior who knows your needs. And as the writer to the Hebrews then commends all who are troubled, commends with these words, Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that you may receive mercy and find grace to help you in your time of need.
That's what the hymn writer wrote. Are we weak and heavy laden, cumbered with a load of care? Precious Savior, still our refuge, take it to the Lord in prayer. Do thy friends despise forsake thee? Take it to the Lord in prayer. In his arms he'll take and shield thee. They'll find a solace there, the receivers of the invitation. But then, finally, the result of the invitation.
Come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden. I will give you rest. And then as Jesus continues, Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart.
[20:01] And you'll find again the word rest for your souls, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light. You know, I often think that rest is one of these great words of comfort, certainly that we find in Scripture.

You know, that rest that speaks of the state, the quality of peace with God, your peace with God, that peace that comes from a right relationship with God.

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That peace that tells you that you have that sure and eternal security in the Lord Jesus Christ, as you rest in Him. It's that blessing of rest that you know now, and the blessing that you're promised in all eternity.
And that eternal rest for every believer. When you reach glory and you know of that heavenly rest, and will know of that heavenly rest.
Now, we have that present reality. Now, of course, the peace that God promises His people, that peace to know that when you come before Him with sins, that you're repenting of, you know that peace that you have in the forgiveness of your sins.
[21:13] And yes, the burdens that you are enduring, the troubles that, well, you know, that Jesus knows. He's not going to permit you to endure more than you can bear.

And yes, you have that assurance that, yes, when you do fall, when you do crumble under the burden of your sin, or life difficulties might just seem too much.
Yes, yes, when you do yield to these temptations, that, yes, it so easily beset you. You have that assurance and comfort to know that God's grace is sufficient for you.
That you're not going to fall utterly. That His grace does restore a broken heart. I can testify to that many times. That your guilt is relieved.
That your burden is lifted. So you have that blessing of resting in that knowledge that your sins, yes, have been paid for wear on the cross. It may well be that your life's troubles are not an end.
[22:15] And that they're not an end in themselves. But yes, God has given you particular, yes, sufferings to endure in His providence for a purpose.

Paul spoke of that in Romans 5, 3 to 5. Suffering produces endurance. Endurance produces character. Character produces hope. And hope doesn't put us to shame because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who's been given to us.
Yes, we can rejoice even in suffering. And that rejoicing in itself, it surely is that peace that Jesus gives you. That He gives you by His grace.
Yes, peace even in the midst of suffering. But what of the further words that Jesus said? Jesus doesn't stop, as it were, at verse 28.
He says, take my yoke upon you. Learn from me. I'm gentle and lowly in heart. You'll find rest for your souls, for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. I mean, this promise of rest, well, there you see it in this closing part of this invitation to all who are weary and heavy laden.
[23:29] And that promise, promise involves, yes, the one who's burdened to take something from Jesus.

What is it? What are we told? Take my yoke. Okay, we live in a post-agricultural society. We don't generally use the word yoke. It's certainly not in the original setting, the original meaning.
That yoke that was the wooden frame that joined oxen together as they were ploughing the field. Lord. And at this time, the yoke was a sort of a metaphor for, certainly in Jewish thought, for the law.
And you know, of course, that the Pharisees put all these added extras onto the law, these extras that just burden the people with, all these little things, these minutia, the legalism that demanded the minutest of detail to fulfill the commandments.
I mean, these were impossible demands, yet they were demands that the people were expected to fulfill if they were to be considered right with God. In other words, it was a graceless religion, the burden of a graceless religion.
[24:39] That mindset of the Pharisees that, you know, the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector, that Pharisee who was so self-righteous in reciting how good he was, how righteous he was in all his works, and he considered that these works, good works, justified him before God.

And we hear there in that parable, the foolishness of that legalistic mindset that denies the grace of God and salvation.
And when you have that kind of thinking, that legalistic thinking, actually it crushes you. Because it crushes the self-righteous person who claims he can earn his way to salvation, when in fact his works are actually futile and ultimately destructive.
But the yoke that Jesus promises, if you like, the burden that he asks you to carry, it doesn't bring the demands of a works righteousness.
You know, as if you've got to earn your way to God, as if you can cast off your burdens by your own efforts, not at all. As Jesus says, my yoke is easy, my burden is likewise, he says, because I'm

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gentle, because he wants your greatest good.
[25:57] He wants you to rest in him. He wants you to cast your burden on the Lord, because he cares for you. Now yes, Jesus tells us, and you know in your life, there are crosses to bear in the life of the believer.

And if you follow the Lord Jesus, you're going to follow him in that narrow road. And in that narrow road, yes, there are trials to endure. There are battles to be fought. There are frowning providences to experience.
But as someone has said, the comforts of the gospel far outweigh the crosses that you're going to bear. Because you know, you know, you know the Lord Jesus, you know that he cares for you. You know that he comforts you in all your afflictions. And he comforts you with that knowledge, that sure knowledge that he's with you always, even to the end of the age.
And he has counted every tear that you have shed in your burdens. And he promises that he'll wipe away every tear in that eternal rest that he's promised you.
[27:03] So Jesus has given you a great invitation to come to him. So what are we waiting for?

Yes, you've sins to be forgiven. Come to him now for that forgiveness. Come to him now for that cleansing. You've griefs that you've borne with a heavy heart. Come to him now for that peace to come upon you.
If you've got a wound of conscience to be healed, come to him now and he'll give you that rest. And yes, you'll know that true satisfaction found in Jesus alone. And come every day.
Come to him every day. For every day that God grants you breath, come to him and find rest. I may have mentioned this story before, but it certainly speaks to me and spoken to me for a long time, I suppose.
Some of you remember, as I do, the late Professor Collins. And his autobiography, he writes of an elderly gentleman in Uig and Sky, who reminded Professor Collins of a sermon that Collins had preached many, many years before.
[28:09] It was actually a sermon on what we've mentioned, the Pharisee and the tax collector. And, you know, the tax collector prays, Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner.

And that old man from Sky, he was actually gravely ill. And he told Professor Collins that the words of the tax collector, Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner. He said, these words are my prayer every day.
And he said these words, many times I've used them, many times I've used them since. I'm now in my deathbed and they suit me still. Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner. And so, yes, we do come and must come to Jesus every, every day.
Yes, with a petition for mercy. With that trust, when we call to him for mercy, that he'll give you that rest that you crave.
But what if you've never come to Jesus with your burdens? Now is the opportunity. Now is that acceptable time? Come to him now. You're actually not in this building.
[29:13] I'm not in this place of worship by accident. Not here by some kind of, you know, coincidence. We've heard the word of Jesus. Well, act upon that word.

Come to him, Jesus. Come to me, Jesus says. Who knows if you'll ever have another opportunity to come to the Saviour and know that joy, the joy of his touch in your life.
And yes, when you know the joy of that touch in your life, you will go in your way rejoicing. When you've taken Jesus at his word, and when you know that peace that passes understanding.
And I pray then that we will all have come to the Saviour. And that you all will have found that rest in him now and eternally.
Amen. Let us pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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