

JESUS INVITATION TO THE EXHAUSTED

Matthew 11:28-30

August 1930, 45-year old Joseph Crater waved good-bye to friends after dinner in a New York restaurant, hailed a taxi, and rode off. He was never seen or heard from again. Because Crater was a New York Supreme Court judge, many suspected murder, Mafia involvement, even suicide was considered. Yet the investigation produced many theories, no conclusions. A search of Crater's apartment produced an interesting clue. It was a note attached to a check left for his wife. The check was for a sizable amount and the note simply read, "I am very weary. Love, Joe." The note could have been nothing more than a passing thought at the end of a hard day. Or it could have been the epitaph of a despairing man.

Are you weary? I am not talking about physical weariness, mental fatigue, or emotional burnout. I am talking about a deeper, greater weariness. **AUGUSTINE** said it well: "Lord, Thou hast made us for thyself, and we can find no rest till we find rest in thee." There is a spiritual weariness in each of us that cannot be satisfied by anything or anyone but God. How can I find rest in God? There are two options. You can try to work your way to God. But this is not a real option. It only increases and intensifies our weariness. The only true option is to accept Jesus' invitation to the exhausted. **EUGENE PETERSON'S *The Message*** paraphrases it this way: "Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me – watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."

Matthew 11 marks a turning point in the ministry of Jesus. Israel's rejection of his messianic claims begins in earnest here, culminating with his death on the cross. Verse 25-26 records Jesus' official response: "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, yes, Father, for such was your gracious will." In the face of growing hostility, Jesus praised God for the mystery of salvation in which those you think would get it do not and the least likely to receive it do. In verse 27, Jesus declares, "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." This bold declaration of the sovereign grace of God in salvation is followed by an open invitation of Christ in **Matthew 11:28-30**. How can you experience the rest that Jesus alone provides for the weary?

I. ACCEPT THE INVITATION CHRIST EXTENDS.

Matthew 11:28 is one of the great declarations of Jesus, golden verses of the Bible, and best invitations ever given: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." This verse neatly divides into three clauses.

A. THE CALL

Verse 28 says, “Come to me.” In **Matthew 4:19**, Jesus called Peter and Andrew to be his disciples, saying, “**Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men**” In this invitation, Jesus does not say, “Follow me.” He says, “Come to me.” This is the first step of Christian discipleship. You cannot follow Jesus if you do not come to Jesus. This invitation is personal, exclusive and compelling. You cannot find rest in yourself, material possessions, or anything this world offers. Only Jesus offers rest for the weary. There is nothing grammatically emphatic about this call. But in light of the context, Jesus makes it clear that no creed, church, or clergyman can give you rest. Jesus is the only one who can provide rest for the weary. In *What Jesus Demands of the World*, **JOHN PIPER** writes: “Jesus did not come into the world mainly to bring a new religion or a new law. He came to offer himself for our eternal enjoyment and to do whatever he had to do – including death – to remove every obstacle to this everlasting joy in him.” True rest is only found in Jesus. In **John 14:6**, Jesus says, “**I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.**”

WITHOUT THE WAY, THERE IS NO GOING.

WITHOUT THE TRUTH, THERE IS NO KNOWING.

WITHOUT THE LIFE, THERE IS NO GROWING.

B. THE CONDITIONS

Jesus says, “**Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden.**” Labor means to become weary or tired as a result of hard work. It is to become weary through labor. Heavy laden translates a term that means to be overloaded or overburdened. It is the picture of a ship loaded with cargo for transport. But the ship is unable to set sail and reach its destination, because too much cargo has been stuffed into it. Jesus extends an invitation to all who labor and are heavy laden. But he does not address how the weary get that way. This invitation this is good for all who RSVP by faith in Christ.

In **Matthew 23:4**, Jesus rebukes the scribes and Pharisees, saying, “**They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger.**” People were crushed under the rules, rituals, and regulations placed on them. Jesus calls all who are tired of to-do list religion to come to him. Every unbearable load is either too heavy or has no handle to grip it. This is what happens when you try to establish or maintain a relationship with God from your end. It is like that arcade game where you have the little sledgehammer and hit the squirrels as they pop up. Every time you get one issue settled, sin pops up somewhere else. Only Jesus can give you rest from the burden and bondage of guilt. **Romans 6:23** says: “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

C. THE CONSEQUENCES

Verse 28 says, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Again, Jesus speaks in personal terms. First, he says, “Come to me.” Then he says, “I will give you rest.” The Greek is more emphatic. Literally, Jesus says, “I will rest you.” **Job 3:17** describes death: “There the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary are at rest.” But Jesus gives rest in life, not just in death. In classical Greek, the word “rest” was used of laying down an object, finishing a formal speech or legal argument, commanding soldiers to halt, or allowing a field to grow fallow. Think about it. You are carrying a heavy load up a hill. Every step reduces strength and renders the load more oppressive. You struggle on, using all your strength to reach the place where it must be laid down. At some point, you recognize you cannot make it up the hill with this heavy load. Then a strong man arrives and offers to walk with you and carry the load for you. This is the invitation Christ extends.

In *Believe and Belong*, BRUCE LARSON writes of counseling struggling people to faith in Christ. Occasionally, Larson would ask his counselee to walk with him from his office to the former RCA building on 5th Avenue in New York. In the entrance was a statue of Atlas, a beautifully proportioned man who strained to hold the world on his shoulders. “That’s one way to live,” Larson would say. On the other side of 5th Avenue is St. Patrick’s Cathedral. Behind the altar, there was a little shrine of the boy Jesus holding the world in one hand. “That’s the other way to live,” Larson would advise. Jesus invites you to stop carrying the world on your shoulders. Put your life in his hands.

II. SUBMIT TO THE DUTY CHRIST COMMANDS

In verse 28, Jesus offers rest through salvation in him. In verses 29-30, Jesus offers rest through submission to him. In verse 28, Jesus promises rest by taking the yoke from your shoulders and lifting the burden you carry. But verse 29 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.” What is the duty Jesus commands?

A. CHRIST COMMANDS YOU TO PUT ON HIS YOKE.

Verse 29 says: “Take my yoke upon you.” A “yoke” was a wooden frame fitted over the shoulders of animals to harness them to the plow and other beasts of burdens. Metaphorically, the term referred to bondage to any mandatory responsibility. It is subjection to another. This is how Jesus used the term here. In verse 28, Jesus offers rest to those who labor and are heavy laden. In verse 29, Jesus commands us to put on his yoke. This is no bait-and-switch scheme. It is a proper understanding of the nature of rest. True rest is not freedom from responsibility. Rest is to be bound to that duty for which you were created. Is a tree free when the wind uproots it from its base of nourishment in the soil? Is a fish free when the fishermen’s hook reels it out of the

confines of the water? Is a train free when it derails and to travels outside of the direction of the tracks? **AUGUSTINE** said, “If you take a bird’s wings away, you might seem to be taking weight off it, but the more weight you take off, the more you tie it down to earth. There it is on the ground, and you wanted to relieve it of a weight. Give it back the weight of its wings and you will see how it flies.”

B. CHRIST COMMANDS YOU TO LEARN FROM HIM.

Verse 20 says, “**Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me.**” What does it mean to put on the yoke of Jesus? It is to learn from him. The Christian disciple learns Jesus. **John 17:3** says: “**And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.**” To know Christ is eternal life. But the Christian disciple also learns from Jesus. He is not just the required curriculum. He is the resident scholar. Christianity is a school. Jesus is the subject matter and master teacher. **JAMES BOICE** wrote: “This is the school in which every true believer has matriculated and in which a lifelong course of study is prescribed.” A closed mind is the end of discipleship. We are to learn from him, with childlikeness, diligence, and submission. When you get on an elevator, you push a button and it does all the work. Too many of us want to be elevator Christians. But Christ calls us to take the stairs with him. Taking the stairs takes effort. Taking the stairs builds strength. Taking the stairs makes you appreciate where you came from when you arrive!

III. EMBRACE THE BENEFITS CHRIST OFFERS.

Jesus offers rest to those who trust him as Savior and Lord. But many try to receive Jesus as Savior, while rejecting the lordship of Christ. We view his yoke to be burdensome and miss the benefits Jesus offers those who trust him. In verses 29-30, Jesus gives three reasons why you should take on his yoke and carry his burden.

A. YOU CAN TRUST THE HEART OF CHRIST.

Verse 29 says: “**I am gentle and lowly in heart.**” This is the only passage were Jesus describes the character condition of his heart. What is the heart of Jesus like? It is good, pure, holy, just, and righteous. But Jesus did not mention any of those virtues. Jesus gives a twofold self-description of his heart: “**I am gentle and lowly in heart.**” “Gentle” is the same Greek word Jesus used in **Matthew 5:5**: “**Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.**” Meekness is not weakness. It is strength under control. This is Jesus. “Lowly” is synonymous with “gentle.” It means to humble yourself to a lowly state. This is Jesus. **Matthew 20:28** says, “**The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.**”

The fact that Jesus is gentle and lowly does not mean Jesus is not strong enough to lift your burdens or break the yoke that binds you. It means Christ cares about the yokes and burdens you carry. **Matthew 12:20** states Jesus is the fulfillment of the messianic prophecy recorded in **Isaiah 42:3**: “a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench.” A bruised reed cannot play music. You might as well break it. Jesus does not. A smoldering wick cannot give light. You might as well quench it. Jesus does not. Jesus is gentle and lowly in heart.

THERE’S NOT A FRIEND LIKE THE LOWLY JESUS – NO, NOT ONE! NO, NOT ONE!
NONE ELSE COULD HEAL ALL OUR SOUL’S DISEASES – NO, NOT ONE! NO, NOT ONE!

NO FRIEND LIKE HIM IS SO HIGH AND HOLY – NO, NOT ONE! NO, NOT ONE!
AND YET NO FRIEND IS SO MEEK AND LOWLY – NO, NOT ONE! NO, NOT ONE!

B. YOU CAN TRUST THE YOKE OF CHRIST

Verse 30 says, “**For my yoke is easy.**” This is the second reference to a “yoke” in this passage. In verse 29, Jesus commands, “**Take my yoke upon you.**” In verse 30, Jesus explains why you should take on his yoke: “**For my yoke is easy.**” “Easy” translates a Greek word that has a wide range of possible meanings. It can be rendered good, kind, easy, pleasant, loving, useful, or reputable. It seems to mean here “well-fitting.” Ox-yokes were made of wood. Before the yoke was made, the ox would be brought to the carpenter for measurements. The yoke was then roughed out. And the ox was brought back to try it on. It was then carefully adjusted so that it would fit well, not bruising or straining the neck of the beast. The yoke was tailor made to fit the ox. This is the assurance of Jesus to all who put on his yoke. There is a legend that Jesus made the best ox-yokes in Nazareth. His yokes fit well. It may be that Jesus took this calling card from Joseph’s carpenter shop to his Father’s kingdom business. Regardless, Jesus says to all who come to him, “**My yoke is easy.**” A Sunday School teacher asked what the yoke of Jesus is. A little boy answered, “It is when Jesus puts his arms around you to let you know that he loves you!”

C. TRUST THE BURDEN OF CHRIST.

Verse 30 says, “**For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.**” Coming to Jesus and following him is not a life without burdens. You will be subject to burdens everyone carries. Moreover, you will have to carry burdens that come directly from Christ. Jesus calls it “my burden.” The one who lifts the burden of sin replaces it with the burden of following him. Yet Jesus says, “**My burden is light.**” This is an oxymoron. A burden is by definition heavy. How can the burden of Jesus be light? My father said his father never put two strong or weak mules together. He would yoke a strong and weak mule together. The strength of one would compensate for the other. So it is with the burden

of Jesus. His burden is light, because he always carries the heavy part. If the burden of trusting and obeying Jesus seems too heavy, it is because you are trying to carry it on your own. But no burden is too heavy if you lean on Jesus.

You are driving up a steep hill. You notice in the distance before you a man carrying a heavy load. He keeps struggling and stumbling along the way. When you reach him, you pull over and invite him to get into the back of your truck. You drive him the rest of the way up the hill. He gratefully accepts. But as you're driving, you look in the rearview mirror and notice the man is sitting in the bed with the heavy load still on his shoulder. You pull over again. And you tell him, "Sit the load down. The truck that carries you can also carry the load!"

IF THE WORLD FROM YOU WITHHOLD OF ITS SILVER AND ITS GOLD
AND YOU HAVE TO GET ALONG WITH MEAGER FARE
JUST REMEMBER, IN HIS WORD, HOW HE FEEDS THE LITTLE BIRD
TAKE YOUR BURDEN TO THE LORD AND LEAVE IT THERE

IF YOUR BODY SUFFERS PAIN AND YOUR HEALTH YOU CAN'T REGAIN
AND YOUR SOUL IS ALMOST SINKING IN DESPAIR
JESUS KNOWS THE PAIN YOU FEEL, HE CAN SAVE AND HE CAN HEAL
TAKE YOUR BURDEN TO THE LORD AND LEAVE IT THERE

WHEN YOUR ENEMIES ASSAIL AND YOUR HEART BEGINS TO FAIL,
DON'T FORGET THAT GOD IN HEAVEN ANSWERS PRAYER
HE WILL MAKE A WAY FOR YOU AND WILL LEAD YOU SAFELY THROUGH
TAKE YOUR BURDEN TO THE LORD AND LEAVE IT THERE

WHEN YOUR YOUTHFUL DAYS ARE GONE AND OLD AGE IS STEALING ON
AND YOUR BODY BENDS BENEATH THE WEIGHT OF CARES
HE WILL NEVER LEAVE YOU THEN, HE'LL GO WITH YOU TO THE END
TAKE YOUR BURDEN TO THE LORD AND LEAVE IT THERE