

Come Unto Me

Jesus' Invitation to All Men

On beautiful summer Sundays—when the sun is shining and the clouds are so perfect that they might as well have been painted in the sky, we feel such calm... such peace. Time and worries almost seem suspended in mid-air. Oh, what we wouldn't trade to get back to these precious moments in a few months when the weather turns in a cold snap, and the gray sets in, and the rhythm of life feels like every day is just one Monday morning after another. What a stark contrast! It's hard to imagine how *we* could ever let life get so hectic, so bogged down by obligations and lifeless routines.

“But,” we will be reminded, if you don't pick up those extra hours at work how will you send the kids to camp next summer? If you don't keep your house looking like a magazine, how will others know that you really care? If you don't get all As, then how will you get into school [A], to get job [B], to afford a house with [x number] of bedrooms and bathrooms?

It's so easy to lose perspective of the things that truly matter, isn't it? And to feel powerless when life already seems to be filled up with the “urgent things” and there's no room left for the “important” things.

A wise man, whom the kids learned about this week during VBS, experienced these same frustrating patterns over a hundred generations ago before ours. And King Solomon asked the question,

“What do people gain from all their labors at which they toil under the sun? Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever. The sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises. The wind blows to the south and turns to the north; round and round it goes...” (Ecc. 1:9).

Solomon gloomily concedes, “there is nothing new under the sun.”

The God-Shaped Hole: A Heavenward Yearning

But you know, King Solomon eventually *does* conclude that life is *not* meaningless. That purpose and promise *do exist* and *can* be found! And this hope is corroborated in every human heart.

Deep down *many* of us experience the feeling that our life—even though it often eludes us—has been earmarked for a true purpose; formatted and calibrated for true meaning and significance. Do you know what I'm taking about? And the longing that we each feel to satisfy that desire for fullness, for completeness, it's one of the reasons we know God exists. I love how one writer puts it:

'Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists.

A baby feels hunger: well, there *is* such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: well, there *is* such a thing as water. Men feel sexual desire: well, there is such a thing as sex.

If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. If none of my earthly pleasures satisfy it, that does not prove that the *universe* is a fraud. Probably earthly pleasures were never *meant* to satisfy it, but only to arouse it, to suggest the real thing.

If that is so, I must take care, on the one hand, never to despise, or to be unthankful for, these earthly blessings, and on the other, never to mistake them for the “*something else*” of which they are only a kind of copy, or echo, or mirage. I must keep alive in myself the desire for my true country, which I shall not find till after death; I must never let it get snowed under or turned aside; I must make it the main object of life to press on to that country and to help others to do the same.”

C.S. Lewis. *Mere Christianity*.

So if we experience this deep-seated desire for completeness, for purpose, then just as every other desire is made to be satisfied, so too is this desire made to be satisfied. The problem *is* that our lives are like a busy Tanzanian marketplace. Let me tell you what that’s like: You walk in and find yourself surrounded by vendors on all sides, each one beckoning you in to his or her booth where you are *sure* to find that special treasure you’ve been searching for. You move from booth to booth to booth, but it’s useless. Unless you know what you’re looking for, where it is located, and how to get there—you might as well just call it a day.

Ever since Adam and Eve were first led astray by the voice of a serpent in the garden, we, too, have fallen prey to these snake-oil salesmen—all of them trying to convince, to persuade us to buy into their solution, their line. Money, sex, food, success, things, people... each one eventually falls short of the mark, leaving us emptier and more desperate than before. And sometimes when they’ve really tired us out and our guard is down, the voices get darker: alcohol, drugs, angry words, weapons...

These voices are all the same—if we let them, they will make themselves our idols— leading us astray. Like taking a poorly-marked “detour” off the highway in the middle of the night, we may never find our way back again. These voices all belong to the same mouth: the Devil—the Bible calls him the Father of lies (John 8:44). And no matter the lying idol he gets us to take ahold of or the route he gets us to drive, the final destination never changes: death and destruction.

Discerning the Sound of Another Voice

But there is another voice calling out. Can you hear it? If your life is as loud as mine was and so often tends to be, you’ll need to make and keep silence—and that can be hard. Underneath the howling of the winds, the tumult of the earthquakes, and the roar of the fires (all of which command

our attention, urgently) you can hear the still small voice of God, who has been calling us back home—each and every one of us—from the moment we stepped foot outside of that garden.

But how can you know? How can you discern this voice from all the others?

The writer of Hebrews says that, “In the past, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe.”

God’s “Word became flesh”, the Gospel of John tells us, “and dwelt among us.” “Full of Grace *and* Truth.” “In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.”

And this Son, Hebrews tells us, “is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being.” A trustworthy and true voice.

While the enemy’s voice brings death, the voice of Jesus brings life—abundant and overflowing. Jesus says that as a *Shepherd’s* voice is known and loved by his sheep, so also is His voice recognized and revered by his disciples.

And this is the invitation that I am sharing with you this morning—the one addressed to every single person on earth, by the voice of the Good Shepherd.

In Matthew 11 Jesus returns to the region of Galilee to teach and preach in the surrounding towns. (We read that in verse 1). We learn that John the Baptist has some doubts about whether Jesus truly is the promised Messiah—he asks in verse 3, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?” Jesus responds indirectly, by reminding John that He is indeed fulfilling messianic prophecy, “the blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed...” Jesus even publicly affirms the prophetic ministry of John, too in verse 10—not only is Jesus the Messiah, but John’s faithful ministry testifies to that fact. “Wisdom” He says, “is proved right by her actions” (verse 19).

The Condemned (Matthew 11:20-24)

Starting in verse 20, Jesus then goes on to compare two groups—this is the part just before today’s scripture reading.

The first group had seen both the miracles of Jesus as well as the good works or “actions” of John’s ministry *and yet* they respond to neither. Theirs was a generation which should have repented—they saw with their own eyes the Son of God!

In the time of Jeremiah the prophet, God called out to another hard-hearted generation. After telling Jeremiah to go to a Potter's house, God said,

“Can I not do with you, Israel, as this potter does?”... “Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, Israel.” “So turn from your evil ways, each one of you, and reform your ways and your actions.”

“But they will reply,” [and this is how the unrepentant generations in Korazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum replied] ‘It’s no use. We will continue with our own plans; we will all follow the stubbornness of our evil hearts.’”

Their response is woeful to Jesus. That is to say: sad, heartbreaking, agony.

“From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.” That’s what Jesus says in the parable of the Faithful and Unfaithful Servants in Luke 12.

"Woe," He says, to *that* generation, who would be held to account to God for *all* that they took for granted.

Then in prayer, Jesus turns His attention to a second group.

The Saved (Matthew 11:25-27)

²⁵ At that time Jesus said, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. ²⁶ Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do.

In verse 25, He praises God the Father for revealing the Kingdom of Heaven to the unexpected—those who appeared to the world like children. In writing to the Corinthians, Paul explains how this choice works to both exalt and humble:

“God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, [Why?] so that no one may boast before him.”

The name of the Lord is exalted—His worthiness, *His* Sovereignty, *His* Generosity—and those who took pride in their *own* strength, righteousness, pedigree, or position—*they* are humbled.

And in verse 27 we see the divine synergy of the Father and the Son.

²⁷ “All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

God has placed *all* things under the care and the control of Jesus—the only whole, unbroken relationship between God and mankind is found in the relationship between God the Father and Jesus, the son of both God and Man.

The Great Invitation (Matthew 11:28-30)

And so with all heavenly power and authority in His hands, what does He do next? How does *Jesus* wield his power? Does He immediately exact judgement? Does He pursue the political or military agenda of a Supreme Jewish State or Empire? Does He crush his critics and opponents?

No, not at all.

With all authority, He calls out, with love infused by urgency: “Come to me!” Like a parent whose toddler blissfully plays on the tracks while the train approaches, “Come to me!”

An Invitation to Rest (or Surrender)

²⁸ “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

First is the invitation to rest. Who is invited? All you who are weary and burdened. All who have been exhausted by the searching, by the striving. Notice, only those who are *burdened* are invited to come to Him and receive rest—the self-sufficient and self-righteous have no need. The “healthy” do not need a doctor. ([Luke 5:31-32](#)).

In the Gospel of John, Jesus addresses a like invitation to “all those who thirst.”

Here in Matthew, the one who is worn out and tired will be invited to come to Christ and **receive rest**. In John, the one who is parched is invited to come to Christ with the promise, not only that **his thirst shall be quenched**, but also that he himself will become a spring of spiritual refreshment—a **vehicle of the Spirit of God!**

Jesus says, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened...” the ESV says “you who labor and are heavy-laden.” “and I will give you rest.” This implies that we must leave behind the source of our toiling, of our laboring, and whatever has been laid upon us by others in order to accept the gift of rest that He offers us. We relinquish these burdens, surrendering them to Christ in exchange for true peace, true respite.

The Invitation to Learn (or Discipleship)

Then, in verse 29 the next stage of the invitation to “come to Jesus” unfolds.

²⁹Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

If we should desire for our hungry, hollow souls to be satisfied, we must humble ourselves and become disciples of Christ. Accepting to be lowly, as He—our friend, brother, teacher, and master—is lowly. In faith-filled-obedience taking His yoke upon us. Bonding ourselves to Him in a teacher-student relationship, re-learning to walk—how, where, and when *He* walks. Studying how His very being shifts to support added loads and then emulating Him.

Some might prefer to remain on the sidelines and just wait to see what this yoke is all about—hedging their bets and reducing their risk, but this is not an option, nor is it even possible. Jesus makes the invitation personally—and everyone called must decide for her and himself to come and see.

Hard work, right? His call is *not* an invitation to laziness or inactivity, but to a new and better apprenticeship, one organized and ordained by the hand of the Creator to sanctify us.

But as you come to Him, surrendering your burdens and turning away from those things which occupied your hands and captivated your hearts, you learn to know His voice—you study it in all its range, its rich timbers, declensions, and forms. You become as the sheep to the shepherd, part of His fold.

Invitation to Live (or Citizenship)

As we “learn from Him” we are forever changed and transformed. This is an invitation to a new life in the Kingdom of Christ.

The book of Colossians (and this is where I’ll close), says that when we come to Christ we take off the old self—and the old ways we used to live—and chapter 3, verse 10, we “put on the *new* self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.”

Paul goes on to say that the distinctions that used to define and divide us disappear,

“Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.”

As Christ becomes more to us than those things, we find a new source of belonging and identity: Members of God's own family, brothers and sisters, linked together in a new blood relationship—the blood of Jesus. A *pilgrim* people, pressing on heavenward toward the promised land. A *chosen* People, set apart and dearly loved. Compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience are our new clothes. Forgiveness and longsuffering become our new instincts, and above everything else, love is over us like a covering—binding us together in perfect unity.

An Invitation to Reflect and Respond

If the life that I just described sounds too good to be true, all I can do is testify to my own experience—it *is true*, and it *is too good* to pass up. Come and see for yourself!

If the yoke that you are under is *not* easy and the burden on your back is *not* light, then please understand that you are *not* under the yoke and burden of Christ. If this is your situation, then there is no better invitation than the one Jesus Himself already gives you.

If you hear His voice today, calling you, do not delay. Come unto Him.