

Title: We Have an Invitation
Date: April 7, 2024
Subject: Jesus gives rest in all its facets.
Scripture: Matthew 11:20 - 30

We just had the spring election. People went to the polls to express their preference.

The reality is people vote every day. That's not meant as a joke...though ... some people say that's what happens in some places where they vote early and often. People vote with their lives - where they spend their money, how they use their time, where they're going to put their spiritual allegiance.

In our study of Christ's life, we've seen people vote for or against him. Some have tried to vote neutral, but that's not an option. There are no neutral parties when it comes to Jesus. People are either for or against.

Read Matthew 11:20-24

One of the challenges in studying the life of Christ is piecing together the four gospels in chronological order. It's often assumed each Gospel is written with that in mind. However, that's not the case. Some are more topical by nature and pull together incidents by theme.

There are helpful resources called harmonies. They're like a choir with sopranos, altos, tenors and basses where the goal is blending the four parts. Harmonies of the Gospels present passages from the four biblical books alongside each other so they're singing in the same place.

An important factor is determining the length of Jesus' ministry based upon the number of Passovers mentioned in the Gospels. Most Bible scholars feel it was 3 to 3 1/2 years. However, some have shortened his ministry to a year or a year and a half. Others think it was five years plus. We're using the most accepted one.

There are other Bible tools to aid to understanding God's Word. Some of you have Study Bibles. They're great because they have lots of tools. They don't have the depth and detail of full-size resources but they're certainly easier to carry around to church and Bible study than these – (hold up full size examples).

Study Bibles have cross references which show how one verse or word of a verse is connected to other places in Scripture. Dictionary to define words including those from the original languages. Encyclopedia to provide historical background to places and people. A commentary given through footnotes to explain what the passage means. These aren't divinely inspired but are helpful. A concordance lists where important words are used so we could do a topical study on a subject like prayer. They also have maps. The NIV study bible I use has chronologies of the Old Testament, New Testament, and Christ's life as well as an abbreviated harmony.

People who compose harmonies don't always harmonize with one another. We've come to one such place. One harmony inserts something at this point which others put later in Christ's life. We'll get to it then.

There's also the aspect of Jesus saying the same thing on different occasions. That happens today. The three cities and more from the passage are at a different time in Luke. The variations and differences shouldn't deter us from digging into God's word. Trying to put Christ life together is part of the fun of studying the Bible.

What Jesus says to the people who were familiar with him...wasn't quite so much fun.

1. Choosing against Jesus is the wrong way to vote. Vv. 20-24

Jesus was speaking to his adopted hometown crowd. He was raised in Nazareth and preached his introductory sermon there. Initially the people were amazed at his gracious words...but they soon tried to kill him which forced him to relocate to Capernaum for his base camp. It's where he selected many of his disciples. Korazin and Bethsaida were neighboring cities and also close to the north shore of the Sea of Galilee.

He would make occasional trips down to Judea but opposition there was mounting. Therefore, He spent most of his time in and around Capernaum. The inhabitants of the province of Galilee were the ones who had the greatest exposure to Jesus' teaching and miracles.

People seemed to respond but it was more of a token response. They liked the good things Jesus did. People had no problem joining the crowds and often nodded along with the words he was saying.

However, Jesus said to them, "Woe to you!" It seems like people just wanted a miracle worker, just wanted free food handouts. They didn't know the true nature of their condition. It's as if they were living in a fool's paradise. They were deluding themselves because they thought they were in a great place because Jesus was with them... but they hadn't personally placed their trust and confidence in him. They refused to allow what he had to say to change them at the core of their beings.

Jesus didn't mince words. He told them severe judgment will come upon people who had witnessed the tremendous miracles he performed among them and didn't turn from their sin and to him. He compared them to some infamous cities.

Tyre and Sidon, cities on the Mediterranean coast, belonged to the enemies of Israel. They were the poster children of wickedness, disobedience and pride. They had temples to false gods. The main thing to know is they were resistant to the Lord God Jehovah and his ambassadors.

Jesus previously had placed himself in hot water during his introductory message. He mentioned Sidon and the miracle that came through the prophet Elijah to help a widow during a famine (1 Kings 17). Jesus would later heal a Gentile woman's daughter in Sidon (Matthew 15:21-28), but that's a story for another time.

Portraying Tyre and Sidon in any kind of positive light would stir the hornets' nest. Let it be stirred! Jesus tells the crowd that if the miracles performed in Korazin and Bethsaida had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, if they would have had prolonged exposure to truth, they would've repented long ago. They would have had changed their minds and belief.

On the other hand, since the people of Korazin and Bethsaida had the incredible advantage of seeing Jesus perform miracles, they will be judged more severely than people who hadn't had the opportunity.

Next up... Jesus utters the name synonymous with the most depraved evil and wickedness. Sodom. People feel Sodom deserved what it got - fire and brimstone and burning sulfur raining from the sky which resulted in complete and utter destruction. They had rejected God's messenger, whether that was Lot who is

portrayed as a righteous man who was extremely upset by what was going on around him (2 Peter 2:6, 7) or it was the angels who came to check out things just prior to God destroying the city.

Jesus proclaims it will be more bearable for Sodom on judgment day than for those in Capernaum who had witnessed the miracles and didn't come to Jesus. Jesus isn't saying the people of Tyre, Sidon and Sodom would be excused. They'll still suffer punishment, but somehow there are degrees of eternal punishment.

There are people today who are aware of Jesus' teachings. They can quote specific verses and tell stories of what Jesus has done. They may be moved emotionally when they hear descriptions of Jesus' death on the cross or hear certain songs. But in the end... they want to be masters of themselves. They may even want to be close to Jesus, but not too close so he doesn't affect their lives and they need to change the way they live.

Unbelief leads to condemnation. Jesus turns over the coin. He begins by speaking about . . .

2. The Father and Son connection

Read Matthew 11:25-27

Jesus asserts his unique position and relationship in the mystery of God the Father and God the Son, and the incapability of the unaided human mind to comprehend. Only the Father has full and complete knowledge of the perfection of the character of the Son. Only the Father knows how the Son will carry out the entirety of the work and suffering that's been assigned to him.

Only the Son has full and complete knowledge of the perfection of the character and work of the Father, his essence, glory, mind, will, purposes, grace and love. However, there are those to whom the Son chooses to give a revelation of the Father which will be completed in the future. Jesus states at a later time that those who have seen him have seen the Father (John 14:9). To all other people, God is unknown.

Because of this unique relationship between God the Father and God the Son, the Father commits to the Son the supreme position of being over all things. Jesus is ruler over all truth, powers, kingdoms, thrones and authorities.

Paul prays in Ephesians 1:18-22 "that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church."

Flowing from Christ's description of his intimate relationship with his Father, he describes two kinds of people. The first is those from whom the things of God are hidden. Some people just aren't going to get it. Some people won't be able to grasp spiritual truth.

Many of the religious leaders of Christ's day were conceited because of their alleged connection to God. They were wise in their own eyes. We've seen how Jesus attacked their pride by asking them "Have you

never read Scripture that says..." (Matthew 12:3, 5; Mark 2:25; Luke 6:3). Their attitude prevented them from possessing insight and accepting Christ words as true.

The other group is described by Jesus as "little children." Jean and I are astounded by what our almost 2 year old granddaughter Josie comprehends. It's gotta be really confusing as her mom and dad are spending so much time away from her, hearing about a baby. She may be thinking this is the way it happens when a baby becomes part of a family. The mom and dad spend a lot of time away. It seems like she understands more. She points toward her mom's tummy and says, "Baby. Out." When showed a video of Elijah, Josie repeated words, "Baby. Out"...and started to cry. We think she understands that the baby should be at home with them.

Kiddos are open, accepting and simply believe. They don't try to make things complicated the way adults do. People who have a childlike faith don't try to over complicate things. They earnestly and simply place their trust in Jesus even as a child holds the parent's hand. They admit they're helpless and needy without Jesus. They're dependent upon God to reveal truth. They will be given spiritual understanding, insight into his teaching and work. Jesus will later say, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3).

This is a cause for rejoicing. As it says in 1 Corinthians 1:26-31 - "Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things - and the things that are not - to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God - that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.""

God the Father finds pleasure in what he does. "The phrase implies, not merely that it seemed good to God, but that, in a sense, it was his pleasure. For the workings out of the laws of truth must give pleasure to the God of truth" (Pulpit Commentary, Matthew 11:25).

Based upon Christ's work as the Son revealing the grace of the Father...

3. Jesus gives the invitation to come to him.

Read Matthew 11:28-30

Ellicott's Commentary: "As in the consciousness of this plenitude of power, the Son of Man turns with infinite compassion to those whose weakness and weariness He has shared, he offers them the rest which none other can give them."

Jesus speaks to the weary and are burdened. Weary from labor. Toiling along through the drudgery of life, maybe barely able to put one foot in front of another. Worn down by the grind and struggle of life. Burdened, heavy laden. A heavy weight upon their lives. It can be the circumstances of life; human made regulations about finding peace with God; the awareness of a person's sin, guilt, shame and failure; grief, sorrow. They feel oppressed, repressed, suppressed and depressed.

Jesus didn't specify the cause of being weary or burdened. He covers all possibilities. He says "Come, take my yoke." It's an invitation to take the first step and to continue to follow. Recognize own spiritual helplessness. Reorient spiritual life and direction.

People of Jesus' day used "yoke" to express the desire to come under the influence of a teacher. It involved turning from and severing the connection to whomever or whatever they had been yoked, submission to the new teacher's teaching and authority, adopting the teacher's way of life.

A person who takes Christ's yoke is declaring they're coming under his control, aligning themselves with him, submitting to his authority. They sign on to him being the teacher. Desire to live obedient lives.

Jesus informs us his yoke is easy which Allen Ross says means "good, comfortable or well-suited. Just as a yoke had to be tailor-made for oxen, the Lord's yoke fits well the needs and abilities His people" (bible.org/seriespage/16-offer-spiritual-rest-matthew-1120-30).

His burden is light. In taking up Christ's yoke, we lay down our burden.

Outcome. Rest. Two phases of rest. The first is rest for our souls. We are no longer at war with God. We have peace with him. Rest from the heavy burden of sin and it's punishment. Rest from trying to achieve salvation in our won power.

The second phase is the ongoing rest as we trust in Christ. Five year old Sarah was terrified by the dentist's drill. She jumped out of the chair and refused to get back in. The dentist told her father, "Daddy, get into the chair." He did, thinking he was to show his daughter how easy it was. But the dentist surprised him when he turned to the little girl and said, "Now, climb up and sit in daddy's lap." Sarah did and was at rest because she was sitting in her father's arms.

We find rest in the arms of Jesus. He is with us. We are with him.

The initial rest and the ongoing rest lead to the third aspect - eternal rest in the presence of God.

We looked at the center portion of this section of the life of Christ. Each of the episodes surrounding it, that we'll study in Sunday School, point to it or it points to them about how Jesus brings the solution.

The centurion whose servant was very sick. The widow whose son had died. John the Baptist whose mind was bothered with questions and doubt about Jesus. The sinful woman who anointed Jesus with her tears. The Pharisee who was judgmental. The 12 disciples and women who traveled with Jesus. The man who was demon possessed, blind and mute. Those who accused Jesus of being aligned with the devil. Those who wanted a miraculous sign. Jesus' mother and brothers who thought he was out of his mind.

Song Friend by Joel Vaughn: "Even when I'm walking through the valley of dark shadows. Even when I'm overwhelmed beneath the weight of sorrow. Even when I can't outrun my fears and every other hope has disappeared. I'm not alone, I'm not alone. I've still got Jesus, oh I've still got Jesus. Closer than a brother no matter where I am. When I need an ally in the fight and need to know somebody's on my side. He always steps in, I've always got a friend... Who's standing at the ready. When this life gets too heavy. He's there. He's there. He's there."