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The Great Invitation

By Bryan Hodge

“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” (Matthew 11:28).

It consists of just fifty-two words in English. But, what a message!

1. Come to Me

The invitation suggests a distance between the Savior and those invited. Sin creates that distance (cf. Isaiah 59:1-2). “Can two walk together unless they are agreed?” (Amos 3:3).

The invitation suggests that He wants us to be saved. He “desires all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4). He is “not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (1 Peter 3:9).

The invitation suggests that the sinner has the ability to respond to the Savior’s invitation. When the people asked, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” They were given an answer (Acts 2:37-38). Peter exhorted, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation” {Acts 2:40 [J.W. McGarvey commented, "The original word is in the imperative mood... it requires the act of saving to be done by the person addressed" (New Commentary on Acts, p. 41). Wayne Jackson commented, "The fact that we are dependent upon God for our salvation does not, of course, negate man's responsibility in the divine scheme... Actually, the verb is passive ('be saved') but because it is in the imperative mood (a command) the ASV translators rendered it 'save yourselves'... God provides the plan; we must yield to it in obedience (Hebrews 5:9)" (Treasures From the Greek New Testament, pp. 23-24)]}

The invitation suggests that it is to Jesus, that man is to come. Peter said, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (John 6:68). Jesus declared, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). Peter proclaimed, “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved!” (Acts 4:12).

The invitation suggests that the choice belongs to man. Jesus said of Jerusalem, “How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wing, but you were not willing” (Matthew 23:37). He does not force us to respond. He says, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into him and dine with him, and he with Me” (Revelation 3:20).

2. All you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest

Sin is pictured as a great burden, a crushing weight. Isaiah uses the same language describing “A people laden with iniquity” (Isaiah 1:4). This weight of sin will keep us from the prize (1 Corinthians 9:24 cf. Hebrews 12:1).

Some are sick and tired of carrying around the guilt of sin. An invitation has been extended to all (cf. Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:47). There is a promise of rest for those who accept the invitation. Rest refers to the forgiveness of sins.

3. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me ... and you will find rest for your souls

This sets forth the condition for man to receive this rest. (a) “Take My yoke upon you.” That is, decide to serve Me. David Sain commented, “Taking upon us the yoke of Christ means submitting to him” (Spiritual Sword, Vol. 32, No. 4, p. 12). Roy Sharp wrote, “Christ’s yoke is also symbolic of a shared relationship of working together to do the Father’s will” (ibid, p. 5). (b) “Learn of Me.” That is, learn and follow my teachings. The great commission says, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations... teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20).

Rest is mentioned a second time. H. Leo Boles thought that the two might not be synonymous. He commented, “‘Rest’ in verse twenty-eight may be equal to forgiveness of sin, and ‘rest’ in verse twenty-nine may refer to the rest the faithful one’s have in heaven” (Commentary on Matthew, p. 254). There absolutely is a rest to come for the faithful (cf. Hebrews 4:9; 2 Thessalonians 1:7; Revelation 14:11, 13).

4. I am gentle and lowly in heart

The nature of the Savior ought to prompt us to respond. Albert Barns commented, “He is giving a reason why they should embrace his religion. That was, he was not harsh, overbearing, and oppressive like the Pharisees, but meek and mild and gentle in his government His laws were reasonable and tender” (The Gospels, p. 124).

5. My yoke is easy and My burden is light

This is especially true when one considers eternity. Romans 6:16, “Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slave whom you obey, whether sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?” Romans 6:23, “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Wendell Winkler penned these words, “The world longs for rest. The athlete longs for rest after grueling scrimmage. The laborer longs for rest after a toiling day. The traveler longs for rest after a weary journey. But, these, though legitimate, fade into oblivion when compared to the weary, sin-burdened soul” (Spiritual Sword, Vol. 32, No. 4, p. 7).

Won’t you accept the Savior’s invitation?