

An Open Invitation  
February 14, 2016  
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Matthew 11:20-30

Opening discussion: Let's learn a little about this group and vacation.  
**If had time off to rest, relax, and recharge where would you go...  
what would you do?**

In this text Jesus offered people a special invitation to come to Him and find rest from their weariness; to learn from Him; and to serve alongside Him. Today Jesus is still extending this special invitation to be a part of His Kingdom. How we "RSVP" will impact the rest of our life on earth; and our eternal destiny beyond.<sup>1</sup>

- Last week in Matthew chapter ten, Jesus had paused his miraculous works to call the twelve disciples and teach them so they could go out to bring in the "harvest" of souls. Now, verse one of Matthew eleven tells us:
- Matthew 11:1 (ESV) *"When Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in their cities."*
- No sooner had Jesus set out, than messengers came from John the Baptist, who was in prison. Even John the Baptist had some doubts and needed confirmation that Jesus was the promised Messiah.
- Jesus gave the best confirmation of all: the evidence...in 11:5 (ESV), *"the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them."*
- Then in verse six Jesus said something interesting: "And blessed is the one who is not offended by me."
- Though Jesus had displayed miraculous signs and wonders; though He had preached a radical message of love; the establishment was offended.
- The cities where He had done the most good were filled with those who were "wise in their own eyes" (Is. 5:21) who despised and rejected Him.

- Jesus said they accused Him of being “*a glutton and a drunkard, and a friend of tax collectors and other sinners!*” (Mt. 11:19)
- Now Jesus addresses these unbelieving cities and judges their rejection:

Matthew 11:20–30 (ESV)

<sup>20</sup> Then he began to denounce the cities where most of his mighty works had been done, because they did not repent. <sup>21</sup> “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. <sup>22</sup> But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. <sup>23</sup> And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. <sup>24</sup> But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you.”

- Jesus pronounces “woes” on the cities where He had done the most work and received the least belief.
- The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines woes as disaster, calamity, cataclysm, catastrophe, tragedy<sup>2</sup> The Greek word: an expression of grief or denunciation<sup>3</sup>
- Old Testament prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah used to pronounce “woes” on those who rejected God. Isaiah said woe twelve times to others and once to himself. Jeremiah tossed out a dozen woes to others and himself. Woe simply means: “This place is doomed!” How doomed?
- Jesus: “*Ever hear of Tyre and Sidon? You’re worse than those cities!*”
- Tyre and Sidon were Phoenician cities that wanted nothing to do with God.
- For example, God told Ezekiel: “*set your face toward Sidon, and prophesy against her* <sup>22</sup> *and say, Thus says the Lord God: “Behold, I am against you, O Sidon, and I will manifest my glory in your midst. And they shall know that I am the Lord when I execute judgments in her and manifest my holiness in her; <sup>23</sup> for I will send pestilence into her, and blood into her streets; and the slain shall fall in her midst, by the sword that is against her*

- on every side. Then they will know that I am the Lord.” That’s an ungodly city! - Ezekiel 28:21–23 (ESV)*
- Jesus said, *“If I had done in Tyre and Sidon what I did in your cities they would have been on their knees begging for forgiveness of their sin!”*
  - Then Jesus turns to Capernaum (his base of operations) and takes it up a notch. **What did He mean when He said: “...it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you?”**
  - Capernaum had rejected Him so completely as a city, He said: *“You’re worse than Sodom!”* **How bad was Sodom? Why is it infamous?**
  - **Was Jesus denouncing every individual person in Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum?**
  - These cities had the most exposure to Jesus but didn’t believe, so they would suffer greater punishment. What’s the lesson for our world? Nations and cities with churches on every corner and Bibles in every home will have no excuse on judgment day if they do not repent and believe.<sup>4</sup>
  - Though Jesus called these cities to account for their unbelief, He was not surprised by it. Note how He prayed in verses twenty-five and twenty-six:

<sup>25</sup> At that time Jesus declared, “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; <sup>26</sup> yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.

- **Who were the “wise?” What is ironic about calling them that?**
- **Who are the “little children” Jesus references?**
- **What do you think Jesus meant that God had hidden certain things from the wise and revealed them to children? Why would He do that?**
- The Apostle Paul wrote about this in his first letter to the church at Corinth:

1 Corinthians 1:19–21 (NLT)

<sup>19</sup> As the Scriptures say, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and discard the intelligence of the intelligent.” <sup>20</sup> So where does this leave

the philosophers, the scholars, and the world's brilliant debaters? God has made the wisdom of this world look foolish. <sup>21</sup> Since God in his wisdom saw to it that the world would never know him through human wisdom, he has used our foolish preaching to save those who believe.

- Then in verses 26 & 27:

<sup>26</sup> Remember, dear brothers and sisters, that few of you were wise in the world's eyes or powerful or wealthy\* when God called you.

<sup>27</sup> Instead, God chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful.

- Those are “wise in their own eyes” think they have no need for God. God only reveals Himself to those who come in child-like dependence.

Later in Matthew (18:3–4 (NLT)) Jesus said:

<sup>3</sup> ...unless you turn from your sins and become like little children, you will never get into the Kingdom of Heaven. <sup>4</sup> So anyone who becomes as humble as this little child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.

- Back to Matthew 11:27, Jesus turns to those before Him and states:

27 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.

- No one can know God unless they know His Son. And God the Father gave Jesus authority to “choose” to whom that knowledge will be revealed.
- No one can come to Christ unless God opens their spiritual eyes to their sinful condition. This is the mystery of election and predestination.

John MacArthur writes:

Sinful, rebellious humanity are so stubborn that without a sovereignly-bestowed spiritual awakening, none will acknowledge the depth of their spiritual poverty. That is why, as Jesus says in

verse 27, salvation is the sovereign work of God. This truth of divine election in verse 27 coheres [is logically consistent] with the free offer to all in verses 28–30. <sup>5</sup>

- God in His sovereignty (through Christ) decides to whom He will reveal Himself. However, there is a dynamic tension between God's sovereignty and man's free will. Jesus gives an invitation that demands a choice:

<sup>28</sup> Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> 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. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

- One commentator writes: “The language of these verses (“hidden,” “revealed,” “your good pleasure”) is incontrovertibly predestinarian in nature, but the language of free will appears equally clearly in vv. 20-24, in which people are judged for their rejection of Jesus, and in vv. 28-30, in which Jesus offers salvation to those who will respond more positively.”<sup>6</sup>
- So, which is it? Strictly God’s sovereignty or does man have a choice?

A seminary professor once said: *“Try to explain election and you may lose your mind. But try to explain it away and you may lose your soul!”*<sup>7</sup>

- Smarter people than us have debated this for years. My opinion: it’s a mysterious combination of both and one day God will explain it.

When Charles Spurgeon was asked to reconcile God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility he said, *“I never try to reconcile friends—they are both in the Bible.”*<sup>8</sup>

- Here’s are two links to learn more about election and predestination: <http://www.sbclife.net/articles/2006/04/sla7>  
<http://blog.greglaurie.com/?p=10152>

- Regardless of your stance on God's sovereignty vs man's responsibility, one thing is plain: Jesus invites people to "come" to Him. Let's talk about that for a moment.
- In verse twenty-eight Jesus invited those who "labor and are heavy laden" to come to Him for rest. The picture here is one of trying to do a big job in your own strength while you have a heavy burden on your back.
- Picture this: Imagine you are working in your yard in the heat of August wearing a full football uniform, pads and all plus a thirty pound backpack.
- *"Hey why are you working in the sun in that uniform and helmet?" "You never know, something bad might happen to I have to protect myself!"*
- *"What about the backpack?" "Well, that's where I keep my emergency supplies – no one else is gonna provide for me if I don't!"* Hmmm.
- *"What about the other stuff in that pack?" "Oh, that's just my 'baggage' from the bad things that have happened to me. I carry it with me everywhere I go."* Hmmm.
- *"Ever think about losing all that heavy stuff?" "Of course not! Who's gonna protect me; provide for me; carry all my baggage if I don't?"* Hmmm.
- When Jesus came to earth the Jewish people were trying to honor God by keeping the law in their own strength but they couldn't do it.
- Jesus criticized the Jewish religious leaders in Matthew 23 (NLT):  
<sup>2</sup> *"The teachers of religious law and the Pharisees are the official interpreters of the law of Moses.\* <sup>3</sup> So practice and obey whatever they tell you, but don't follow their example. For they don't practice what they teach. <sup>4</sup> They crush people with unbearable religious demands and never lift a finger to ease the burden.*
- Trying to be "good enough" to keep the law had become a burden. Jesus came with a better idea. *"Take my yoke upon you."* "Wait, you're going to take us out of one yoke and lock us into another?"
- Jesus said, *"I have a different kind of yoke. Mine is 'easy and light.' This yoke is custom fit just for you as an individual. It will*

*keep you going straight but it won't wear you out. That's because instead of you trying to carry the load of living right, I'm going to carry the other side of this yoke."*

- **How does Jesus lighten our load when we trust Him?**
- Wiersbe says: "Note the double use of the word "rest" (NKJV). "I will give you rest"—this is the peace with God that comes with salvation. "You will find rest"—this is the peace of God that comes with surrender (see Phil. 4:6–9). To be yoked to Christ is the greatest blessing possible."<sup>9</sup>

So, What's the Takeaway?

- The Life Application Study Bible tells us:  
*"A relationship with God changes meaningless, wearisome toil into spiritual productivity and purpose. Jesus doesn't offer a life of luxurious ease—the yoke is still an oxen's tool for working hard. But it's a shared yoke, with weight falling on bigger shoulders than yours. Someone with more pulling power is up front helping. Suddenly you are participating in life's responsibilities with a great Partner—and now that frown can turn into a smile, and that gripe into a song."<sup>10</sup>*
- What about you? Have you accepted Jesus' invitation and His easier yoke? If you've trusted Him as Savior and Lord, you have. If not, why not today?
- If you are a follower of Christ, are you still straining to labor with a heavy load instead of letting Jesus give you the rest that comes with trusting Him to carry the weight?
- Jesus offers rest for your soul. His yoke is easy, and His burden is light. So, why are you going through life carrying around that heavy load?

<sup>1</sup> Lifeway. (n.d.). *Explore the Bible Adult Leader Commentary Session 13 Explore the Bible Adult Leader Commentary Session 13 Explore the Bible Commentary*.

<sup>2</sup> Merriam-Webster, I. (1996). *Merriam-Webster's collegiate thesaurus*. Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas, R. L. (1998). *New American Standard Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek dictionaries : updated edition*. Anaheim: Foundation Publications, Inc.

<sup>4</sup> Life Application Study Bible NKJV by Tyndale

<sup>5</sup> THE MACARTHUR BIBLE COMMENTARY Copyright © 2005 by John MacArthur

<sup>6</sup> The New American Commentary Volume 22 - Matthew by Craig L. Blomberg - B&H Publishing 1992

<sup>7</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 2, p. 11). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>8</sup> <http://blog.greglaurie.com/?p=10152>

<sup>9</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1992). *Wiersbe's expository outlines on the New Testament* (p. 47). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>10</sup> Life Application Study Bible NKJV by Tyndale