



# AN OPEN INVITATION

Jesus invites anyone willing to follow Him to join His kingdom.

## MATTHEW 11:20-30

<sup>20</sup> Then He proceeded to denounce the towns where most of His miracles were done, because they did not repent: <sup>21</sup> “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented in sackcloth and ashes long ago! <sup>22</sup> But I tell you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. <sup>23</sup> And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will go down to Hades. For if the miracles that were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until today. <sup>24</sup> But I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom on the day



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of judgment than for you.”<sup>25</sup> 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 infants.

<sup>26</sup> Yes, Father, because this was Your good pleasure. <sup>27</sup> All things have been entrusted to Me by My Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son desires to reveal Him. <sup>28</sup> Come to Me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> All of you, take up My yoke and learn from Me, because I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for yourselves. <sup>30</sup> For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

*Record the stated reasons for Jesus' expectation that His hearers would accept His invitation, take His yoke, and learn from Him.*

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## FIRST THOUGHTS

Many of us regularly receive invitations to weddings, birthday parties, baby showers, anniversaries, graduations, and other social gatherings. If connected to the internet, we may get invitations to buy products, subscribe to publications, contribute to charities, visit vacation sites, and join travel groups. We get informal invitations to join friends for lunch or to meet them for coffee and conversation. The sheer volume of invitations dictates that we must be discerning and disciplined in choosing those we accept. Many invitations come with a sense of obligation attached to them due to ties of friendship or family loyalty. Others are more elective, giving us greater latitude to refuse them.

*List the different kinds of invitations you have received in the past month. How do you determine which to accept and which to decline?*

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Jesus offered His hearers a special invitation: come to Him and find rest from their weariness. This invitation included the opportunity to learn from Him and serve alongside Him. The issue was whether the people would accept or decline Jesus' invitation.

## UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

### **MATTHEW 11:1-30**

Matthew's pattern of alternating narrative passages with teaching sections continues in chapter 11. Following the discourse in chapter 10, chapter 11 opens with a brief summary of Jesus' ongoing public ministry (11:1). The summary leads in to the next narrative passage. While moving among towns in Galilee, Jesus used the occasion of a question sent to Him by John the Baptist to praise John's ministry. Being imprisoned, John asked for verification that Jesus was indeed the expected Messiah. Jesus pointed to miraculous deeds as His validating credentials (11:2-15).

In the course of preaching and teaching in various towns, Jesus denounced the lack of repentance by the majority of the people. By refusing to repent, the people put themselves in a more precarious position than would have been true of a place like Sodom, had its people been given the same opportunity afforded a place like Capernaum (11:16-24). During this period of His ministry, Jesus praised the Father for revealing truth to people of humble hearts, comparing such people to trusting infants as opposed to those who considered themselves to be wise and learned (11:25-27). At the end of the chapter Jesus invited weary and burdened people caught up in a religion of law-keeping to find rest in a personal relationship Him (11:28-30).

## EXPLORE THE TEXT

### **PROMISED JUDGMENT** (MATT. 11:20-24)

#### **VERSE 20**

**<sup>20</sup> Then He proceeded to denounce the towns where most of His miracles were done, because they did not repent:**



Jesus had just characterized His generation as an unresponsive one. In general, people had not heeded the preaching of John the Baptist, choosing instead to criticize his unorthodox and austere lifestyle. In the same way, those same people kept their distance from Jesus, choosing to criticize His interaction with sinners whom He came to save (11:18-19). In the face of such unresponsiveness to those sent by God, Jesus **proceeded to denounce** the places where He performed miracles because the people **did not repent**.

#### VERSES 21-22

**<sup>21</sup> “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented in sackcloth and ashes long ago! <sup>22</sup> But I tell you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you.**

Jesus began the denunciation of His unrepentant audiences with the declaration, **“Woe to you.”** *Woe* is a term that mingles a declaration of doom with a feeling of pity to issue a solemn warning. Jesus addressed His warning to **•Chorazin** and **•Bethsaida** (see p. 6), Galilean cities that had witnessed many of His miracles. He pointed out the advantage those cities had over the ancient Phoenician cities of **•Tyre and •Sidon** (see p. 6). Prophets frequently denounced the Phoenicians for the worship of the pagan god Baal coupled with inhuman cruelty toward others (see Isa. 23). Being Gentiles, the Phoenicians lacked knowledge of the promises given to Israel.

The Jewish population of Chorazin and Bethsaida not only had knowledge of the promises of God and the preaching of the Old Testament prophets, they also had the witness of Jesus’ miracles and preaching. In the face of greater opportunity, their refusal to repent carried greater accountability. Jesus’ declaration points out that divine punishment takes into account people’s degree of opportunity.

#### VERSES 23-24

**<sup>23</sup> And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will go down to Hades. For if the miracles that were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until today. <sup>24</sup> But I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom on the day of judgment than for you.”**

Continuing in the same vein, Jesus called **•Capernaum** (see p. 6) to task for its lack of responsiveness. Jesus made Capernaum the headquarters for a major portion of His public ministry, thus giving that city a greater exposure to His miracles and message. Jesus asserted that **the land of Sodom** would have responded differently if they had had the advantage the people of Capernaum had—the advantage of witnessing Jesus’ miracles and hearing His words. Once again, Jesus offered the principle that divine judgment takes into account people’s opportunity.

**List in order the five most grievous and destructive contemporary sins. Based on Jesus’ teaching here, where should rejection of Jesus rank on the list?**

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**BIBLE SKILL:** *Use multiple passages to understand a major doctrine.*

The most important theological question we should ask of any text is “What does this text teach about God, His character, and His ways?” Read Matthew 11:20-24. What does this text teach about God? Now read Matthew 11:28-30 and Jesus’ words of care and hope. What does this text teach about God? Allow both sections to inform your understanding of the nature of God. What is the determining factor in whether God brings retribution or rest? How might you respond the next time someone pits God’s love against His wrath?

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**PROMISED REVELATION** (MATT. 11:25-26)

**VERSE 25**

**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 infants.**



Jesus' attention turned from the unrepentant majority in Galilee to the humble, believing minority. He drew a marked contrast between those who rejected Him and those who were open to receive divine revelation. He praised God for the latter group, whom He referred to as **infants**. Those with simple, uncomplicated faith receive far greater reward than the prideful and self-sufficient **wise and learned**.

Addressing His **Father** as **Lord of heaven and earth**, Jesus praised Him for His grace and wisdom in revealing truth to those disposed to receive it. Supposed self-sufficiency is always the enemy of a simple faith that looks to the Lord expecting to receive truths from Him that the wise and learned have not imagined.

God retains His prerogative as God to either conceal or reveal His truth. When He chooses to conceal truth, it serves as a rebuke to arrogance and unbelief. When He chooses to reveal truth, it comes as a gracious gift to people of faith.

#### VERSE 26

<sup>26</sup> **Yes, Father, because this was Your good pleasure.**

Jesus emphasized the focus of His praise for people of sincere faith by restating the essence of His prayer: **Yes, Father, because this was Your good pleasure**. A heart open toward God and willing to take Him at His word brings Him pleasure. We can find no higher motive for our actions than that of seeking to bring God pleasure.

**Look up Matthew 7:6. How does Jesus' warning about casting pearls before pigs fit with Him thanking the Father for revealing the truth of the gospel to those who are willing to believe?**

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#### KEY DOCTRINE: *God's Purpose of Grace*

Election is the gracious purpose of God, according to which He regenerates, justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies sinners. It is consistent with the free agency of man, and comprehends all the means in connection with the end.

## PROMISED RELATIONSHIP (MATT. 11:27)

### VERSE 27

**<sup>27</sup> All things have been entrusted to Me by My Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son desires to reveal Him.**

The relationship between Christ and His Father has been uninterrupted from eternity past. That connection remained secure during Jesus' earthly sojourn. A key ingredient in the relationship was trust. Jesus declared, in fact, that ***all things*** had been ***entrusted*** to Him by His Father. Furthermore, the eternal relationship between Father and Son included full and intimate knowledge of one another. No one on earth has ever known the Father to the extent that the Son knew Him during the days of His flesh. Likewise, no one knows Christ with the fullness and intimacy that the Father knows Him.

Upon establishing the fact of their mutual knowledge, Jesus went further to declare that those who come to know Father do so because ***the Son desires to reveal*** the Father and is effective in doing so. We immediately hear in Jesus' claim the clear notes of divine sovereignty. The fact is that God is in charge and calls the plays, not us.

However, the Bible with equal clarity firmly establishes the fact of human free will and corresponding responsibility. In back-to-back sentences Jesus spoke with overtones of divine sovereignty and human free will. We hear sounds of sovereignty when He referred in this present verse to those *to whom the Son desires to reveal Him*. At the same time, we will see in the next verse that He invited all to come—an open invitation for everyone to respond (v. 28). Knowing God is both a choice we make and a choice He makes. Our logic is unable to match divine choosing and human freedom of choice, without exalting one over the other. So what logic cannot achieve, simple faith can accept while we await the day when the glass is no longer dark and we will know even as we are known. Our relationship with God through Christ is always based on faith and not on human reason.

The take-away truth in this verse is that Jesus' role in the Father's redemptive plan is the only way for humans to know the Father. No one knows the Father while bypassing personal faith in the Son.



***How do you respond when people label Christians as narrow and uncharitable for asserting that Jesus is the only way to the Father, with no other alternative?***

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## **PROMISED REST** (MATT. 11:28-30)

### **VERSE 28**

**<sup>28</sup> Come to Me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.**

Jesus revealed His compassionate heart toward all who are ***weary and burdened***. He expressed His compassion through an open invitation: ***Come to Me, all of you***. The implication that lies under the surface of the invitation is that all who are invited possess the freedom to choose to come. In addressing those invited as *weary and burdened*, Jesus made reference to religious weariness rather than the physical weariness such as follows a day of hard labor. They were burdened by the stringent and burdensome requirements that their Jewish leaders placed on them.

One example among many of such burdensome requirements was that of the meticulous prohibitions attached to Sabbath observance. Counting steps, or marking distance people could travel on the Sabbath, was one such burden that religious leaders attached to Sabbath observance. Jesus established Himself as Lord of the Sabbath and insisted that the Sabbath was made for man, rather than man being made so that the Sabbath could have its observers (Mark 2:27).

Jesus invites people to live in God's grace, as opposed to a legalistic approach of following a list of what must be done or avoided in order to be approved and accepted. God's acceptance is by grace through faith. Once accepted, service to God is done as a delight more than a duty. In the spiritual life, legalistic duty leads to spiritual exhaustion but delight generates joyous energy. Jesus called this outcome ***rest***. He did not thereby refer to lounging around in inactivity. Christian service done in His name to His glory by the power of His Spirit has its own kind of rest. We might think of it as the exhilaration of having done God's work in God's way.

## VERSE 29

**29 All of you, take up My yoke and learn from Me, because I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for yourselves.**

Jesus issued a second invitation to **all** people. This was an invitation to **take up** His **yoke**. In New Testament times everyone would have been familiar with seeing a yoke across the necks of a pair of oxen. The yoke connected them to one another. Taking up a yoke was a common image for choosing to be a disciple of another person. The basic idea is that of learning from a teacher. Thus, a summons to take up Jesus' yoke was an invitation to come to Him in order to, as He said, **learn from Me**.

One part of the motivation for accepting His invitation is the kind of person Jesus is. He is **gentle and humble in heart**. Unlike the religious leaders, Jesus was not harsh and legalistic. He possessed the capability of feeling what others felt. He related to common people with the common characteristic of genuine, inner humility. Jesus repeated His promise that His followers would find **rest**.

## VERSE 30

**30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”**

Another part of the motivation for accepting Jesus' invitation to come to Him is the nature of His **yoke**. His yoke is **easy** and His **burden is light**. Jesus' promise of rest resides in two assurances: first, that He Himself is gentle and humble; second, that His yoke is easy and His burden light.

Jesus' promise reminds us that to attempt serving Jesus in mere human energy is a burdensome path to trod. Such is a sure way to become weary in well-doing. Human qualities alone are not adequate to perform divine service. Such service requires divine power. Only divine service performed with divine power can be described as easy and light.

***Jesus promises that following Him is a life of rest, serving Him is an easy yoke, and bearing His burden is light. What factors make this true?***

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## IN MY CONTEXT

Every person will be held responsible if they choose to reject Christ. Jesus is the only way to the Father, with no other alternative. Jesus offers sure salvation to all who trust Him as Savior and Lord.

***Ponder the fact that every person is held responsible if they choose to reject Christ. What actions do you need to take in light of this reality?***

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***Review the content on the inside front cover about placing your faith in Christ. If you have made that decision, record how it has changed your life. If you have not made that decision, ask God to help you understand what you need to do.***

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***In light of the truth that Jesus offers salvation to all who trust Him as Savior and Lord, what might your Bible study group do that it is not now doing in efforts to bring others to a saving knowledge of Jesus?***

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## MEMORY VERSE

Come to Me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. —Matthew 11:28