

LESSON SIX

HEAVEN'S GREAT  
INVITATION

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

MATTHEW 11:28



## REFLECTION

Invitations to join this club or that . . . requests for our presence at a party this weekend or a wedding next month . . . proposals for a deal here or a partnership there . . . life is filled with offers. What are some of the best invitations you've ever received? What have been the worst?

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## SITUATION

Since the time of Moses, Israel had been in possession of God's law, including the Lord's clear-cut commands and provisions for the Sabbath, the weekly day of rest and reflection. But over the centuries, the Jewish leaders had turned it all into a confusing and soul-destroying system. Then Jesus entered the scene and made a startling invitation.

## OBSERVATION

*Read Matthew 11:16–30 from the New International Version or the New King James Version.*

## NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION

<sup>16</sup> “To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others:

<sup>17</sup> “We played the pipe for you,  
and you did not dance;  
we sang a dirge,  
and you did not mourn.’

<sup>18</sup> For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’ <sup>19</sup> The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.’ But wisdom is proved right by her deeds.”

<sup>20</sup> Then Jesus began to denounce the towns in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent. <sup>21</sup> “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed 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 for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. <sup>23</sup> And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted to the heavens? No, you will go down to Hades. For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. <sup>24</sup> But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day 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 little children. <sup>26</sup> Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do.

<sup>27</sup> “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.

<sup>28</sup> “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

## NEW KING JAMES VERSION

<sup>16</sup> “But to what shall I liken this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their companions, <sup>17</sup> and saying:

‘We played the flute for you,  
And you did not dance;  
We mourned to you,  
And you did not lament.’

<sup>18</sup> For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' <sup>19</sup> The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' But wisdom is justified by her children."

<sup>20</sup> Then He began to rebuke the cities in which 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 which were 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 say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. <sup>23</sup> And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades; for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. <sup>24</sup> But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you."

<sup>25</sup> At that time Jesus answered and said, "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes. <sup>26</sup> Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight. <sup>27</sup> All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him. <sup>28</sup> Come to Me, all you 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."

## EXPLORATION

**1.** What does Jesus reveal about human nature in verses 16–17?

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**2.** How did Jesus say the people had responded to John the Baptist? How did he say the people had responded to his ministry?

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**3.** Why did Jesus denounce so many of the cities in which he had ministered?

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**4.** What do you make of Jesus' prayer in verses 25–26? What is he really saying in these verses?

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**5.** To whom does Christ extend his gracious invitation?

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**6.** What does this invitation tell you about the heart of God?

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## INSPIRATION

Invitations. Words embossed on a letter: "You are invited to a gala celebrating the grand opening of . . ." Requests received in the mail: "Mr. and Mrs. John Smith request your presence at the wedding of their daughter . . ." Surprises over the phone: "Hey, Joe. I've got an extra ticket to the game. Interested?"

To receive an invitation is to be honored—to be held in high esteem. For that reason all invitations deserve a kind and thoughtful response.

But the most incredible invitations are not found in envelopes or fortune cookies, they are found in the Bible. You can't read about God without finding him issuing invitations. He invited Eve to marry Adam, the animals to enter the ark, David to be king, Israel to leave bondage, Nehemiah to rebuild Jerusalem. God is an inviting God. He invited Mary to birth his son, the disciples to fish for men, the adulterous woman to start over, and Thomas to touch his wounds. God is the King who prepares the palace, sets the table, and invites his subjects to come in.

In fact, it seems his favorite word is *come*.

"*Come* now, let us settle the matter. . . . Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow" (Isaiah 1:18).

"*Come*, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters" (Isaiah 55:1).

"*Come* to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

"*Come* to the wedding banquet" (Matthew 22:4).

"*Come*, follow me . . . and I will send you out to fish for people" (Mark 1:17).

"Let anyone who is thirsty *come* to me and drink" (John 7:37).

God is a God who invites. God is a God who calls. God is a God who opens the door and waves his hand, pointing pilgrims to a full table.

His invitation is not just for a meal, however, it is for life. An invitation to come into his kingdom and take up residence in a tearless, graveless, painless world.

Who can come? Whoever wishes. The invitation is at once universal and personal. (From *And the Angels Were Silent* by Max Lucado.)

## REACTION

7. What do you remember about the first time you ever comprehended and responded to Christ's invitation to come to him?

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8. What is Jesus' "yoke"? What does he mean when he says it is "easy"? Easy compared to what?

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9. In what ways do modern Christians (and churches) repeat the errors of the Pharisees and create a religious system that wears people out?

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10. What sorts of daily burdens bring the most weariness to your soul?

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**11.** When have you experienced genuine soul rest to the deepest degree? To what do you attribute this?

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**12.** What counsel would you give to someone who said, "I'm at the end of my rope. I'm burned out. Please, help me. Tell me what to do"?

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## LIFE LESSONS

Christ looked into the leathery faces of farmers and weary faces of housewives and offered rest. The crowds came. They poured out of the cul-de-sacs and office complexes of their day. They brought him the burdens of their existence, and he gave them not religion, not doctrine, not systems, but rest. Today, Christ continues to look into the disillusioned eyes of the churchgoer, the cynical stare of a banker, and the hungry eyes of a bartender. And his paradoxical invitation still stands: "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:29).

## DEVOTION

*Father, I want to trade my burdens—all my man-made rules and self-imposed religious obligations—for the true rest that you promised. Thank you for the constant invitation to come to you. Grant me the wisdom and courage to live as you intended so that I might attract others to you and not repel them.*

## JOURNALING

First Peter 5:7 states, "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you." How can you give all your worries to God? If you did this, how much more "restful"—how much less anxious—would your soul be?

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## FOR FURTHER READING

To complete the book of Matthew during this twelve-part study, read Matthew 11:1-12:50. For more Bible passages on rest, read Exodus 23:12; Psalm 62; Isaiah 30:15; and Hebrews 4.