

“THE GREATEST INVITATION”

(Matthew 11:28)

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Text:

“Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

Dear friends in Christ,

When we receive an invitation from family or friends to attend a significant birthday or anniversary celebration our hearts are filled with joy. Invitations like this only come from close friends who want to share their joy with you.

Now, I can't think of a more gracious invitation than the one we heard in today's Gospel. Jesus invites all to, *“Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”* (v28) Here, Jesus isn't talking about rest from hard physical labour, but the effort of carrying your sins. This is what St Paul refers to when he laments: *“I do not understand what I do; for what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate, I do. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. What I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing.”* (Rom. 7:15ff)

This is the default attitude of mankind: attempting to be good enough to earn God's favour. It's also a very hard life because false gods are neither forgiving nor merciful. Instead, they are hard task-masters who won't accept our excuses for failure.

We know that some ancient civilizations made human sacrifices or mutilated themselves to gain favour with their gods – like the Aztecs, for example. In the same way when the prophet Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal to a showdown (1 Kings. 18:28f) *they shrieked and howled and cut themselves to get the attention of the ‘god’ they worshipped.*

Now, physical or even human sacrifice isn't the only example of sacrifices made by religions. Some modern-day religions are secretive and won't allow their members to have fellowship with outsiders. Others, won't allow their followers to celebrate birthdays, or Christmas, or any other religious festive days.

So, what do all these religious sacrifices tell us about humankind? Well, firstly, it tells us that it's natural for us to believe there's something or someone out there bigger than we are. Plus, this entity isn't only powerful, but can also be very angry. Accordingly, we need to do something to satisfy this powerful entity so that he/she/it is appeased and on friendly terms with us.

This my friends, is the **hard labour** of all false religion. No matter how hard we work at appeasing this false god, things still go wrong and tragedies still happen. For instance crops fail, and earthquakes devastate nations. People get sick and injured, and they die. And when tragedy **does** strike, their followers just try harder to find favour with their god, or give up in despair. Indeed, our sacrifice is never enough for false gods.

However, my friends, God's Word gives us an entirely different worldview. The Bible tells us of the true God who created a world where work was a joy – it was rewarding and satisfying, never frustrating. But that changed when Adam and Eve sinned. From that day to this, work has become a burden and a source of frustration for most people. But, at the end of the day there's nothing that we can think, say, or do that can ever make us right with God.

But then along comes Jesus, the Son of God, with a new teaching. He says, "*Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*"

Now, this teaching is unlike any other religion in the world. Here, Christ tells us to lay down our burdens of failure, and rest. Jesus will replace our heavy yoke of sin with the light yoke of forgiveness. He will take our burden of sin and replaced it with the light burden of His own righteousness. Indeed, Jesus will replace the hard labour and burden of false belief with the holy rest of true faith.

Now, my friends, the reason our Lord can say this is because He is the Son of God who entered history to save us from our own sin. You see, by our own efforts we can do nothing to please God whereas Jesus can and did. Whilst we couldn't endure the punishment that would satisfy God's justice, Jesus' sacrifice on the cross did just that, once and for all time.

All this simply means that Jesus has done everything necessary to make us right with God. Thus, through the gift of faith and the blessings of forgiveness, life and salvation have become ours. Thereby we have the light burden of Jesus' righteousness.

However, the forces of evil hate Christ's easy yoke and His light burden. Our sinful nature always tries to lead us back to the broad road that leads to spiritual slavery and death. Indeed, our lives are spiritual battlefields where we're tempted to do the fighting.

Undaunted, however, Jesus continues to invite us to "*Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*" Through His holy life and innocent suffering and death on the cross, Jesus has earned your forgiveness – including the sins you committed after becoming a child of God by baptism. By faith in Christ, you also have the promise of eternal life.

The life of the Christian is a constant battle. Thus, it's also a life of continual repentance. But if Jesus Christ is our champion who has defeated sin, death, and the devil – and still intercedes for us at the Father's right hand – we are victors with our Lord. So in Paul's words, "*What, then, shall we say in response to all these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?*" (Rom. 8:31) Indeed, no-one. To God be the glory. **Amen.**

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Sermon by Pastor Ernie Kiss
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