

Beloved congregation, during the course of our lifetime, we receive many invitations. Children, you could receive an invitation to go to a birthday party of a classmate of yours. We get invitations to attend weddings, and baby showers, and other social gatherings. And most of the time, we accept these invitations gladly. It's wonderful to celebrate important milestones in the lives of others.

But let's be honest that sometimes we don't always accept these invitations gladly. Sometimes we wish even we could get out from some of these invitations. We think to ourselves, not another wedding. Got to buy an outfit. Got to buy a gift. Is there some way that we can get out from underneath this invitation?

Well, our text this evening contains an invitation as well. But this invitation is so wonderful. It is so amazing. It is so gracious, so sincere that you simply cannot refuse it. And it is an invitation that doesn't come from a friend or a family member. or a fellow member of the congregation, it doesn't come from the Prime Minister, or even the King of England. This invitation comes from the Lord Jesus Christ himself. And it's not an invitation to come to a birthday party or an anniversary or a wedding or some other social event. It is an invitation to come to Him. And it reads as follows. If we had an invitation card, this is what the card would say.

Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden. and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me for I am meek and lowly in heart and ye shall find rest unto your souls for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

We want to look at this invitation of our Lord under the theme  
"Christ's invitation to the spiritually weary." Christ's invitation to the spiritually weary.

We'll consider, first of all, the persons addressed by this invitation. Secondly, the prescription contained in this invitation. And then thirdly, the promise attached to this invitation. The words of our text this evening congregation, are part of a larger discourse in Matthew's gospel, in Matthew chapter 11, that begins really in verse 20, and that's why we began our scripture reading at that verse.

Now, Matthew doesn't mention this in his gospel, but according to the parallel account in Luke's gospel, Jesus had just sent out the 70 disciples to proclaim his name and to perform miracles to verify that his claims were true, that he was, in fact, the promised Messiah.

And you remember how after they did this, they came back to the Lord Jesus with a very positive report, and they said Lord, even the demons are subject unto us in thy name.

And upon hearing this, Luke, in his account, writes this. In that hour, Jesus rejoiced in spirit and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and has revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight.

All things are delivered to me of my father, and no man knoweth who the son is but the father, and who the father is but the son, and he to whom the son will reveal him. Matthew records the same words in our text chapter verses 25 to 27. But then Matthew goes on to record words that Luke does not record. He goes on to record the words of our text and he quotes the Lord Jesus is saying this, come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.

Now you notice in the first place to whom this invitation is extended. It is extended to those who weary, and are heavy laden, who labor and are heavy laden. Who are these people? Well, there are various interpretations. Some say that Jesus here is referring to those who are laboring under conviction of sin.

And that's a very plausible interpretation. because sin is a burden. And when the Holy Spirit begins

to work in the hearts of sinners, they feel something of that burden, the burden of sin. Before the Holy Spirit is at work in us, we don't think anything about sin. We have no problem with sin. We love sin. But when the Spirit starts to work, all of a sudden we realize what sin is, that it is an affront to a holy and good doing and gracious and loving God. and it starts to convict us, and it becomes a burden for us.

And you know the story of Pilgrim's Progress, I'm sure, and how John Bunyan portrays Christian children. Remember that, how the Christian had this great big burden on his back? What was that burden? That burden represented his sin, and how he longed to be set free from that sin of his. And so it is for every person in whom the Spirit of God is at work, they feel something of the burden of sin and they long to be set free from that burden.

And so some say, well, when Jesus here is inviting those who are laboring and are heavy laden, he's referring to those who are deeply under conviction of sin. I say that's a legitimate interpretation. Others say Jesus could be thinking of those who are living in fear of judgment. Because remember the context in which he says these words of our text. In verses 20 to 24, he pronounces woes, judgments, on Chorazin and Bethsaida. And he does that because Jesus had done many mighty works there, and yet they had not repented of their sins and had come to him.

And this prompts Jesus to warn them. He says, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. And he said the same thing to the city of Capernaum. And thou, Capernaum, he said, which art exalted unto heaven, shall be brought down to hell. But I say unto you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for thee.

Oh, you can imagine some of the people listening to these words of the Lord Jesus, and they're quaking, they're shaking in their boots. And they're thinking to themselves, well, if that is what the end of these Jewish cities of Chorazin and Bethsaida and Capernaum, if that is their end, what's to become of us?

And so these are the people then who some say are the ones who Jesus has in mind. They're laboring, they're heavy laden about the prospect of future judgment. Congregation, it's most likely that when Jesus speaks the words of our text, when he refers to those who labor and are heavy laden, that what he's actually referring to are those who are laboring and are heavy laden under a heavy yoke of legalism that the scribes and the Pharisees, the religious teachers of that day placed upon them. And I say that because you'll notice in our text, after inviting these people to come to him, Jesus says, take my yoke upon you and learn from me. You can almost put the emphasis on the word my there.

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. Now children, you know what a yoke is.

A yoke is a piece of wood that's shaped to conform to the neck and the back of an animal, let's say an ox. And you could then put two oxen together and you could put the yoke between them so that they will both pull at the same time.

Now, the Lord Jesus uses the yoke as a metaphor for the obligations that one had to take upon himself in order to be a disciple of Christ. You see, when Jesus saves a sinner, he doesn't say to that sinner, okay, now you can live as you please, your sins are forgiven, you have the gift of eternal life, now just go ahead and you can live the way you want to live. No. He places a yoke upon his disciples. He says there are certain teachings you have to keep, a certain way you need to live. You need to live not for yourself, you need to live for me and for my glory.

That is the yoke of the Lord Jesus Christ. He gives his people a yoke and he expects them to bear it.

Now the scribes and Pharisees also had a yoke. And it consisted of a long list of do's and don'ts. A very long list. And they said that if you can keep this long list of do's and don'ts, you can earn part, if not all, of your salvation.

You can earn your own righteousness before God. And so that when you stand before God on the day of judgment, he will declare you not guilty and he will welcome you into his kingdom. But there were two problems with this. The first problem is there is no way that anyone can ever earn their own salvation before God.

Certainly not by the things that we do. You can't earn salvation by doing some things and not doing other things. That's impossible. You can try, and many people do try, and there are people who go to religious services and they perform some rituals and they try to be good neighbors, they try to be good to other people, and they think, well I'm not a bad person, I'm going to go to heaven when I die, that's works righteousness.

What they forget is that everything that we do, even if it's with the best intentions, everything that we do is tainted by sin and is therefore utterly unacceptable before a holy God. So there's no way that anyone can earn their own salvation by the things that they do.

Secondly, the yoke of the scribes and Pharisees was impossible to bear. Jesus said this, on another occasion in Luke chapter 11 verse 46. Jesus says there woe unto you also lawyers for you load men with burdens hard to bear and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers. You notice how the Lord Jesus here refers to the rules and the regulations of the scribes and the Pharisees. He calls them burdens. and they're burdens because they're heavy. They're impossible to bear. And they were impossible to bear. The scribes and the Pharisees regulated almost every aspect of your life.

You know, they said things like, oh, you can only take so many steps on the Sabbath day. You take one more step than the required number of steps and you've broken the fourth commandment. They criticized the disciples for walking through a grain field on the Sabbath day, and remember, children,

how they rubbed the wheat in their hands and they ate it because they were hungry? The scribes and the Pharisees they looked at that and said, oh, they broke the fourth commandment. They're not keeping the Sabbath day, prompting the Lord Jesus to remind them, that God created the Sabbath for man and not man for the Sabbath.

You see, it was this, terrible burden. All these rules and all these regulations regulating their lives to the smallest detail, and the consequences for failure were great. If you didn't keep all these rules, you'd go to hell. And yet the scribes and the Pharisees, they demanded that the people observe these rules and regulations and keep them and the people tried and the more that they tried the more they realized they couldn't do it, and so they were weary, they were burdened, they were laboring and they were heavy laden and you know there are still people like that in the church today, maybe you're one of them

People who think that they must establish, they must earn at least part of their own righteousness before God. It's a problem, it's part of our human nature. I have it too.

We think to ourselves, if only I did a bit more of this. If only I did a bit more of that. If only I could forsake this sin or that sin. If only I prayed more. If only my prayers were more sincere. If only my prayers were a little longer. If only I read the Bible more. If only I was more... gentle and godly and spiritual. If only I had more faith. If only I was a better father, a better husband, a better wife, and a better mother. If only I could gain mastery over this or that sin in my life. Then, maybe then, God would receive me. God would accept me.

Beloved, no matter how hard we try, We cannot, we cannot and will never be able to earn the favor of God. Because as I said already, everything that we do is tainted with sin. And whatever is tainted with sin is completely unacceptable. God demands and deserves absolute perfection. And anything less than absolute perfection totally unacceptable to him.

Now these are the people that Jesus is addressing. They have a problem. The problem is they're trying to earn their own righteousness. They're doing what the scribes and the Pharisees are telling them to do, and they're finding it impossible. So what does Jesus tell them to do? What's the prescription?

That's our second point. To these people who are laboring and are heavy laden, Jesus extends an invitation. The invitation is, come unto me. And you say, what does that mean? What does it mean to come to Jesus? We use that phrase a lot, don't we? We say, come to Christ, come to Christ. What does that mean exactly? To come to Christ. Well, first of all, we need to be clear what this does not mean. Jesus is not to be taken literally here, obviously.

If I say to you, come to Christ, where is Christ, children, where is Christ? He's in heaven, right? He's seated at the right hand of the Father. Now if I say to you, come to Christ or go to Christ, you can't go to heaven. Until you die and you're a believer, you'll never be able to come to Christ. There's no way we can come to him. And yet Jesus says, come to me. It's interesting he doesn't say, come to church. That's important. He doesn't say come to catechism class, that's important too. He doesn't say come to Bible study, all those things are important. But he says, no, come to me.

I am the solution to your problem. None of these other things can help you. They cannot solve your problem. Only I can solve your problem. And so I say, come unto me. So Jesus obviously here is speaking figuratively. When He says, come unto Me, what He means is believe on Me. Trust in Me. Embrace Me with a heart full of faith. Look to Me as the only hope and ground of your salvation. Not to yourselves. Not to your feeble attempts to try to earn the favor of God. Not to your legalistic practices, but come unto me, look to me. And we know that this is Jesus' meaning because, well, if you turn to your Bibles for a minute to John chapter six, John six is that famous account where Jesus identifies himself as the bread of life. He had just fed the 5,000.

And then you remember how the Jews came to him and they said, Lord, we want you to perform some miracle for us. You know, Moses gave us the man in the wilderness and they wanted the Lord Jesus to do something miraculous that would convince them once and for all that he was the promised Messiah. And so Jesus picks up on this idea. In verse 32 of John chapter six, he says to them, verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven, but my father giveth you the true bread from heaven, For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven and giveth life unto the world. And then in response, the Jews asked him to give them this bread and then Jesus replied, I am the bread of life.

He that cometh to me shall never hunger and he that believeth on me shall never thirst. Now you notice the parallelism there. He who comes to me is parallel to he who believes on me. So to come to Christ means to believe on Him. It means, as I said, to look to Him, to embrace Him as our Savior, to trust in Him as the only hope and ground of our salvation. And this is what Jesus is saying in our text. To those who labor and are heavy laden, He says, come to me. look to me, believe on me, and I will give you rest. Now, some people struggle with the simplicity of that. They say, well, surely being saved Surely attaining this rest that Jesus speaks of in our text, surely it must involve more than simply coming to Christ, doesn't it?

Surely I must do more than simply believe. Surely, you see, here comes the legalism again. Surely I

must I must be a better person. I must know my sins more. I must have a stronger faith. I must be more deeply taught and led by the Lord. I must be changed in some way. I must have a conversion experience like John Bunyan or some other great divine. I can't just come. Can I? Listen to the words of our text. Jesus says, come. That's all. Come unto Me. There's no conditions placed on that. Jesus doesn't say, well, come after you have done or experienced X, Y, and Z. Then you can come to Me. No, He says come. Come.

Now there are those who in an overreaction to easy-believe-ism disagree with that. And don't misunderstand me. Easy-believe-ism is a serious problem. It's rampant in the church today. But there are some people who are so concerned about easy-believe-ism that they have a hard time with what I just said.

They say that our Lord does indeed place a restriction on who may come. They say only those who labor and are heavy laden, they may come. And so until I labor and until I am heavy laden, I may not come. And if I do come, that I take something, I'm in danger of taking something that doesn't belong to me. I am in danger of stealing Christ.

But that cannot be. That cannot be what our Lord means. Why? Because, yes, it is true that the offer of grace is absolutely sovereign. No one will come unto me except the Father. Draw him. That is true. But the invitation is universal. It is sincere. And it is well-meant.

Listen to Proverbs 8, verses 3 and 4. Lady Wisdom, who personifies the Lord Jesus Christ. She cries at the gates, at the entry of the city, at the coming in of the doors. And she says, unto you, oh men, I call. And then. Without qualification. Without condition.

Unto you, O men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of man. In Romans 10, verses 12 and 13, the Apostle Paul, quoting Joel 2, verse 32, he says, For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek. For the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. Whosoever. And who could forget those last words? One of the last words of the Holy Scriptures in Revelation 22 verse 17 when Jesus says, Whosoever will. Whosoever will. Let him take of the water of life.

This point that I'm making here is expressed so well in our Canons of Dort's confessional. Our Canons of Dort, head three and four, article eight, says this, as many as are called by the gospel, and that includes every single one of you here this evening, because you're all under the call of the gospel. You hear it every Sunday. As many as are under the call of the gospel, our forefathers said, are unfeignedly called. Know what that means?

Sincerely, genuinely, the offer of God's grace is sincere and well-meant. for every sinner who comes under the preaching of the Word. For our forefathers go on to say, for God has most earnestly and truly declared in His Word what will be acceptable to Him, namely, that all who are called should comply with the invitation. That's profound. All who are called, if you are under the preaching of the Word of God and you hear with your own physical ears the invitation to come to Christ, to believe on Him, God sincerely means it.

He sincerely desires that you come to Him and receive from Him the gift of everlasting life. Our article goes on to say, He moreover seriously promises eternal life and rest That's the language of our text. And rest to as many as shall come to him and believe on him. You see what our forefathers are saying? You see what the scriptures are saying?

They're saying that the scriptures, that Christ the Lord Jesus invites all men to come to him and to come to him as they are. with much conviction of sin or little conviction of sin, with much faith or

little faith, it doesn't matter. There are no conditions for coming to Christ. He invites us all to come to Him, and He sincerely promises to save.

Now you say, if that is so, But why does Jesus seem to limit the invitation? Why does he seem to extend it only to those who labor and are heavy laden? That's not what he's doing. So I'm trying to argue this morning. Jesus here is not setting forth a condition that must be fulfilled. Because as I said, there are no conditions for coming to Christ. We come to Christ as we are. What's he doing then?

He's just describing the people of his day. He's saying the people of my day, because of the legalistic teaching of the scribes and the Pharisees, they're laboring and they're heavy laden. That's an apt description. That's an accurate description of the people of Jesus' day. And to all such, Jesus says, come to me.

Well, let me ask you this evening congregation, honestly, be honest before the Lord this morning. Are you one of these? Are you one of these people who are laboring and are heavy laden? Are you one of these people who's trying to make yourself more presentable to God? Maybe that's why you're here this evening.

Maybe that's why you got dressed in your suits, your dresses. Because you think that somehow that's going to make a difference. That God is going to be pleased with the fact that you're here. And of course God is pleased that you're here. God delights in the worship of his covenant people. But he wants more than that. He wants your heart. He wants you to live for him. And so Jesus says, this is the way to do that.

Come to me. That's the only solution to your problem. Come to me. I love what Bishop Ryle has to say on this word, come. Let me quote him. He says, come is a word of merciful invitation. It seems to say, I want you to escape the wrath to come. I am not willing that any should perish. I have no pleasure in your death. I would have all men to be saved, and to all men I offer the water of life freely, so come unto me.

Come, Ryle says as a word of gracious expectation. It seems to say, I'm here. I'm waiting for you. I sit in my mercy seat expecting you to come. I wait to be gracious. I wait for more sinners to come in before I shut the door. I want more names written down in the book of life before it is closed forever.

So come to me." And thirdly, Ryle says, come is a word of kind encouragement. It seems to say, I have got treasures to bestow if you will only receive them. I have that to give which makes it worthwhile to come, a free pardon, a robe of righteousness, a new heart, a star of peace, so come unto me." Jesus invites sinners, all sinners, to come unto Him, but that's not all He does. Not only must we come to him, but Jesus says we must also take his yoke upon us. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me.

I saw already that the scribes and the Pharisees, they have a yoke. Their yoke was impossible. Nobody could bear that yoke. Well, Jesus also has a yoke, but his yoke is not like their yoke. Their yoke was heavy. It was impossible. But Jesus says, my yoke is easy. And my yoke is light. What makes his yoke, what makes his burden easy and light? I'll tell you what it is.

What makes it easy, what makes it light is the fact that Jesus obeyed the law of God perfectly. for all who believe on his name. And in obeying the law of God perfectly, he earned for every single one of his people the righteousness that they need to stand before God and live so that they need not add anything. And they cannot add anything to what he himself has done. And that's not all.

Because He also promises to give His Holy Spirit to those who will come to Him and believe in Him. And the Holy Spirit will enable His people to delight in carrying that yoke. And we don't bear it ourselves, but the Lord Jesus, you know, the yoke children, remember the yoke attaches two animals to the same yokes that they pull together. Well, you think of the yoke of the Lord Jesus Christ, you think of how he expects us to live, how he wants us to live for him and to glorify him.

That's not easy, that's hard to do. It's a struggle because the old man is always battling against that every single day. And the Lord Jesus says, but listen, I'm on the other side of the yoke. You're over there, and I'm over here, and we'll pull together. We'll pull together.

The Lord Jesus is there to help and to assist us. And when we fall, and we feel like we can't go on anymore, and we stumble because of our sin, as we do all the time, the Lord Jesus, He doesn't condemn us. He doesn't say, get out of my sight. You're not worthy to be one of my disciples. No, he comes to us and he lifts us up. Because he is lowly. And gentle in heart, as he says here in our text. And he will gather the lambs in his arms and he will gently lead those who are with young. What a Savior.

Whatever we need, he is able and willing to supply.

And so Jesus commands those who labor and are heavy laden to come to him, take his yoke upon them. Will you do that this evening?

For the first time or again, if you will, listen, the Lord Jesus has a promise for you.

That's our third point, very briefly. After inviting these sinners to come to him, the Lord promises that to those who do, he will give a gift. What is the gift? It is rest. Come and I will give you rest. That's a promise that is made, first of all, in the Old Testament.

Jesus here is just echoing the Old Testament in Isaiah 11, verse 10. We read these words, and in that day, there shall be a root of Jesse, speaking about Christ, which shall stand for an ensign of the people. To it shall the Gentiles seek, and his rest shall be glorious. And in Jeremiah 6 verse 16, we read these words. Thus saith the Lord, stand ye in the ways and see and ask for the old paths.

Where is the good way and walk therein and he shall find rest. For your souls. What is this rest? It's not a rest of inactivity. The Christian is never inactive. The Christian is always busy. The Christian is always fighting. He's always doing battle against his own sinful nature, against the devil, and against the world. He's always active in promoting the cause of the kingdom of the Lord and sharing the gospel with others. He's fighting the good fight of faith.

So this rest is not inactivity. Rather, it is a rest that we experience when we come to trust in Christ. Knowing that whatever we need, He has done it all. There's a rest of knowing that we are free from the covenant of works which we have broken in Adam, but we still try to keep. Because he's done it all. There's nothing for us to do but to rest in him. And isn't that wonderful? Isn't that congregation, isn't that exactly what we need? Child of God this evening, isn't this exactly what you crave?

Is rest.

And nothing is more satisfying than, you know, working out in the yard on a hot summer's day or you're on the job and you've got an outside job and you're working away in the hot sun and you come home at the end of the day. Nothing is more satisfying than kicking off your work boots and falling into your lazy boy and just pulling the lever back and putting the footrest up and resting. Grabbing your newspaper in a long, big, tall, cold drink and resting. It's one of the wonderful things about the Sabbath day.

It's a day that we can set aside everything in order to rest, which ought to be a foreshadowing of the

greater rest, the greater Sabbath rest to come, which the Lord Jesus promises to give all those who trust in His name. Yes, we need physical rest, but oh, how we need spiritual rest as well. Rest from always trying to earn the favor of God by the things that we do. Oh, how we need rest from that. Nothing is more exhausting than always trying to be something and do something we cannot be and that we cannot do And Jesus knows that.

He says, if you come to me, I will give you rest from all of that. And that rest that he promises, what is that? It's a peace, isn't it? It's a peace with God. It is this settled conviction that no matter how often I may still sin against him, I know that my salvation is secure in him because he has done it all. I don't have to add one inch to my salvation.

And that rest that we experience here on this earth is a rest that will endure to an everlasting eternity, for heaven is a place of rest. Listen to what John says in Revelation 14. John hears a voice from heaven, and the voice said, Right, blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth. Yea, saith the Spirit that they may rest from their labors, and their works do follow them. Heaven. is a place of rest. Rest from sin. Rest from temptation. Rest from the relentless attacks of the evil one. And it will be a perfect rest. And it will never end. It will be a rest that will endure to an everlasting eternity.

Now I go back to how I started. We receive many invitations. in our lifetime. Many we reject. Others we wish we could get out of somehow. But congregation, I trust you will agree with me this evening that this is an invitation we cannot refuse. All that we need is right here. Hear the voice of the Lord Jesus.

Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest for your souls, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light. That's the invitation.

What will you do with that invitation?

Amen.