

How would you react if you stepped out of church and saw me in the concourse telling you to “Come here”? You’d probably wonder what I wanted, what my intention was, etc. “Come here” is a command full of implications and one we must respond to thoughtfully. When my boys were younger and would yell “Dad!”, I knew it was an invitation to play, fun, and often wrestling. I could never resist. After a trying day, when Martha reaches out her arms and beckons me to herself to give me a loving and caring embrace, I go with haste. But when I messed up and my upset father said, “Get over here!”, I knew I was in trouble, and my response was usually slower and filled with dread. The invitation to go to someone is significant because it makes us vulnerable and is full of risk. What will happen if I go?

So then how do we respond when the Lord of the universe calls? In Matthew 11, Jesus says “Come to me.” And, like all instances, we likely ask what is the reason for and substance of Jesus’ invitation to us? What is his character and posture towards us? Do we really want to get closer to a holy and just and righteous God? How do we accept his invitation and what will happen when we do?

This morning we begin a new series called *Come to Me* to answer those questions. Through it we will spend three weeks looking at the invitation of Jesus, his heart towards us, and what happens if we accept it. This series is the beginning of a new ministry year focusing on abiding in Christ as the foundation of us living out our God given purpose. And we start here because, after Labor Day, we will look at the challenge of following Jesus and we’ll never understand the challenge if we first don’t understand his invitation. If we don’t believe we need to respond, don’t know the answer to those questions, or we believe to accept the invitation leads to pain, we won’t go. But if we believe there is goodness that follows, we will.

[Matthew 11:25-30] ²⁵ 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; ²⁶ yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. 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. ²⁸ Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ 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. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Jesus offers an invitation given to a specific group. If you are part of this group, the invitation is extended to you. He invites those who labor and are heavy laden. It is those who are carrying around a burden and are weary of doing so. That burden is sin and sin’s consequences. That burden is a recognition of our absolutely perfect, holy, righteous God and the question of how we can be right with him, what happens when we fall short, and how do we live in the midst of a world that has fallen short. Remember, Jesus is talking to Jews who are under the burden of the Law. Every day they wake up and have a list of things to do to appease God, and their leaders heap more and more on them. Ultimately, it’s up to them.

We’re no different. Some of us believe that at the end of our lives God is going to pull out a scale and on one side he’s going to put all the good things we’ve done and on the other he’s going to put all the bad things we’ve done. And if the good outweighs the bad, we’re good. But if the bad

outweighs the good, we're toast. Many of you have trusted in Christ for salvation but now think you have to bear down in your own power to beat sin or you get covered up in shame and move away from God when you fail in that. And, maybe all of us, when this broken world beats us down and we are experiencing pain, grief, anxiety, suffering, we own it and try to carry it ourselves. **How's that working out for you?**

I remember a moment in a parking lot where I saw a small elderly woman trying to lift something into her car. It was clear that she couldn't do it, so I ran over to save the day. And when I tried to lift it in her car, I couldn't believe how heavy it was. I looked at the lady like she was crazy. There was no way she could carry the load herself. So I did it and my back is finally starting to feel better!

All of us are that woman. **You cannot carry the weight of your sin and suffering on your own.** You cannot satisfy a holy God on your own. You cannot defeat sin on your own. You cannot endure suffering on your own. So where are you trying to do that? Are you here exploring Christianity but haven't yet believed in Jesus? Are you in a sin struggle you're trying to defeat with will power? Do you think you're a failure? Are you striving to make Jesus happy? Are you suffering, grief, anxiety, hurt on your own? Bad news: You can't. Good news: **You don't have to.** Jesus has an invitation for you.

Come, take, learn.

Jesus extends the invitation **come** to him in faith. It is a free, unconditional invitation that we can accept at any time. **That means you can approach him just as you are.** When you do, he gives you a different yoke and burden to **take** on yourself, one he calls easy and light. That word "easy" can also be translated as "kind" or "well-fitting". Why? Because he takes your burden and places it on himself and gives you his burden where he's doing the heavy lifting. He takes your burden of making yourself right before God and does it himself. He takes your burden of your battle with sin and fights it for you. He takes your burden of shame and guilt and says you are forgiven. He takes your burden of suffering and anxiety and say "I love you. Let me help."

It's not a yoke of leisure. Scripture tells us to work out our salvation with fear and trembling and to run the race. Being yoked to Jesus means being under his authority and care and being about what he is about. So the last part of his invitation is to **learn** from him. Learn is the same word as disciple. He shows us how to live that life, will walk with us as we do, and gives us his Spirit to empower us to do so. And while that yoke may feel a little odd at first, it is the yoke of joy and freedom.

When I was young, I walked on my toes and developed flat feet. That messed up my hips, back, and rear. So my mom took me to a doctor and he did two things. He gave me inserts to wear in my shoes because my arches weren't strong enough to bear my weight, and he taught me how to walk properly. At first the inserts were uncomfortable, and walking was awkward. But, after I continued to wear the inserts and follow his instruction, the pain went away, my stride normalized, and I became the world-class athlete you see standing in front of you today. That only happened, though, because I let the inserts bear the weight and followed my doctor's instructions.

Jesus is beckoning you to himself because he wants to bear the weight for you, show you his kindness, and walk with you in a life that fits perfectly in himself. You want to know how we accept that invitation? You confess “I can’t carry it anymore!” Your desperation is your acceptance. And when you do that, I promise you he’ll say, “I’m so glad you’ve come.”

So then why wouldn’t we do that? Why do we struggle to accept that invitation? See if any of these sound familiar.

I have no need. If you believe that you are likely not here. But some of you may and think you are good. Go back one section in this passage and see what Jesus says to those who reject him. “Woe!”

I can carry it on my own. I met with a woman who was dying, shared the gospel, and she replied “No one is paying for my sins. Only me.” So she decided to carry that burden into eternity and stood on her own righteousness before a holy God. And unless she changed her mind before she died, she is now eternally separated from him.

I am not worthy. We believe there is something in us that Jesus will reject. Yes, he calls everyone else, but he can’t possibly call me because I’m broken. Sure, maybe one day, but I’ll need to clean myself up a little bit first.

I did it again. We all have a sin or two we struggle with regularly. What is it for you? And as we commit that sin once more, we get sick of ourselves and we are pretty sure there’s a limit to what Jesus will forgive, restore, redeem. The first 50 times he’s all in, but now? How could we have failed again? And in our embarrassment, we stay away.

My pain is insignificant. Given all that’s going on in the world, Jesus doesn’t really care or need to worry about what’s going on in my life. He’s got bigger things to deal with.

I don’t trust the heart of Jesus. We’ll focus more on this one next week. You are suspicious God is not really good, not really loving, not really forgiving. You’re pretty sure he’s still at least a little mad at you, running out of patience, and one day he’s going to blow.

Two things are true. Jesus loves you and Jesus hates sin. And because that’s true **he will do everything in his power to separate you, the one he loves, from sin, the thing he hates.** That means he will take on flesh, he will tell you unless your sin is dealt with you can’t be with him, he will die on a cross and rise again, he will draw you to himself, he will send his Spirit into you, he will convict you of your sin, he will forgive you over and over and over again, he will counsel and comfort you, he will teach and discipline you, he will advocate and intercede for you, he will fight the devil who wants you stuck in sin for you, and he will help you escape from your temptations because everything you’ve experience and been tempted by he has too. But one thing he’ll never do? [SLIDE: John 6:37] ³⁷ **All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.**

You cannot out-sin, out-fail the love and grace of Christ. There is nothing you have done or will do that is greater than what Christ has done for you. Your worries, anxieties, pain, suffering are never so much that Jesus says he can't bear them. When you accept his invitation, he will say "I'm so glad you've come. Let me carry that for you." God loves you. God is for you. And God has done everything necessary to free you from the burden you carry.

Feel the weight. If you are here this morning and have not trusted in Christ for salvation, let me tell you that God's standard is perfection. So you either need to be perfect or you need to figure out a way to make up for your imperfection. That's the burden you carry every day. The problem is you can't bear either. But Jesus can and did. He lived the life you can't, he died the death you deserved to make up for your shortcomings, which we call sin, and he rose three days later in victory. You give him your unbearable burden and take on his easy yoke and light burden by placing your trust in him.

For those of you who have, we can still let that weight pile up. Pause. Ask God to show you what you are carrying? How are you living apart from him? What are you fighting on your own? Where are you striving? Where are you hurting? And when God shows you...

Act like a child. Here's something a three-year-old in great need has never said...I think I'll bear this burden alone. Sure, little ones can be stubborn. My youngest Joe would never let anyone help him with something. He'd look at you and say, "My do it." But I'm talking about a child in pain, hunger, crisis. They scream, cry, and run to their parents in desperate need because they know they can't handle it on their own. In this passage Jesus says the Father has revealed the Gospel to children, those humble enough to admit their need and go to the only one who can solve that need: Jesus.

You have been invited. You don't have to carry it alone. He's waiting with open arms, a loving and kind heart, and shoulders to carry the weight for you. Accept that invitation and be freed of your burden.

We are going to close this morning by commissioning two men who are taking on a new burden install the newest members of our elder board (elders and wives can come up). As most of you know by now, we believe the Holy Spirit has appointed Chris Widdell and Rob Langworthy as the next elders in our church.

[Acts 20:28] ²⁸ Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you (appointed you) overseers (elders), to care for (pastor) the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.

Over the couple months, we have given you all the opportunity to engage our leadership with any thoughts you have over Chris and Rob being in this role, and I can tell you that the feedback we have received has been overwhelmingly positive and affirming.

So today we have the privilege of doing something that does not happen often but is a vital practice of the church because, without leadership, there is no church. We are going to participate in the laying on of hands by our elders to affirm the choice of Chris and Rob to join the elder board and dedicate them to the work God has called him to.

Before we pray for them, though, I want to let you know Mike Webster has agreed to be our Elder Chair for another year and Joel Dow is stepping into the role of Vice Chair. I've asked Mike to pray for Chris/Jennie and Rob/Jamie.

Chris and Rob, as you stand before this congregation, let me remind you of the awesome responsibility you are taking on to lead, oversee, and shepherd God's people here at Fellowship Dallas. But let me also remind you that you have been given all you need to effectively fulfill the duties and responsibilities of this role. You have been appointed by his Spirit, who lives within you, and empowers you to faithfully lead in this church, and you have a Savior who will carry this burden for you. You are a beloved child of God who is pleasing to his Heavenly Father. And you have been called for such a time as this, to this good and important work of being an elder in this church and lead out in the mission God has given us.