

Our oldest daughter got married this past September and it was the best! (It helped that we really like the guy!) But, as you can imagine, weddings don't just happen. There's so much to consider as you go about planning for this big event:

- the date
- the pastor
- "the dress" for the bride (& mother of the bride)
- venue
- time of day
- food/beverages
- cake or, in our case, donuts
- lastly, that tiny little issue of... the cost of it all!

I've only planned one wedding in my life and that was mine—with my mom and dad (and Ron!) making sure we stayed within the budget. Because we got married later than many of our friends—30's—we decided to go all out and pretty much invite almost everyone we knew. We had 400+ guests! And, in a lot of ways, that made it easy. But, with our daughter's wedding, she and her fiancé wanted something smaller, more intimate. I was not prepared for how hard that would be for me. We had to come up with a list of slightly less than 100 people. We/I wanted about 200. We wrote down names of family, our closest friends, people who we knew really well...and there were too many.

The toughest part for me was whittling down that list. Asking questions like, "How likely is it that "so and so" will come, especially from such a distance? Will we hurt people's feelings?." I especially lost sleep over that one. The list of people we ended up inviting were people we really wanted to be there.

Truth be told, during our daughter's wedding planning, nothing was more frustrating than:

- When we invited someone and they didn't respond at all and we ended up having to call them to see if they were coming or not
- When we invited someone, they RSVP'd "Yes" they would come and then, they ended up being a no show!

Today, we're going to look at a passage of scripture that includes some very important invitations from Jesus. Jesus spent his energy and efforts for people who he invited to be part of the new thing God was doing in the world. What we'll see today is they made a choice to respond to Jesus. What was available then is

also available to us; we have a choice to respond to the invitation of Jesus.

But first, let me remind you where we've been in our series in the Gospel of Matthew. Last week we saw Jesus pointing to his actions—what he had done—to answer John the Baptist's expectations. We saw Jesus connecting his ministry to the ministry of John, answering the culture's expectation of John. And we saw Jesus pointing to his actions to answer the culture's expectations of God. Today we continue in Matthew 11:20–24.

Then Jesus began to denounce the towns in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent. "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. But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. 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. But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you." (Matthew 11:20–24)

Wow...Jesus harshly criticizes the cities where most of his miracles were done. In the cities mentioned here, the people didn't even take any direct action against him. They simply **ignored** him. Jesus preached, taught and performed amazing miracles in their midst, yet they carried on business and their lives as usual—seemingly unaffected. And Jesus definitely notices.

What's so bad about their indifference? Well, it completely disregards God. He's not even taken seriously enough to criticize. The people in these cities witnessed the awesome evidence of his divine power and goodness yet did not repent, didn't change. So he says, "Woe to you!" Sounds strong, right? Kinda "judgey."

It is, but it's not a grim call for vengeance. It's an expression of regret. It combines warning and compassion. Jesus is sad about the fate the city has brought down upon itself.

Let's look at these cities and who lived in them.

Chorazin was a small village about two miles away from Capernaum. It was known as a town of some importance. Most of His mighty works were done here.

Bethsaida was the hometown/village of Philip, Andrew and Peter. Jesus gave sight to the blind man there. Mark 8:22–26, Luke 9:10–17 tells us this was the location of the feeding of the 5,000 and probably much more. Both these cities were close to Capernaum where Jesus visited often and ministered. They were like his headquarters.

According to Jesus, the greater the privilege, the greater the responsibility. The greater the light, the greater the consequences for not receiving it. These cities had all the privilege and all the light they could have possibly needed to know the truth about who Jesus was.

Jesus brings out the enormity of the sin of the people of these cities by calling to mind Tyre and Sidon, which were ancient pagan towns known for Gentile corruption, immorality, and godlessness. They were known for their pride, injustice, and greed and were vigorously denounced by the prophets. Jesus says to them: “Yet those two wicked cities would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes,” if they had the privileges of Chorazin and Bethsaida. They ignored God when he appeared to them, while totally irreligious towns who didn’t know God eagerly received Him.

Capernaum exceeded Chorazin and Bethsaida in privilege. The ancient city of Sodom exceeded Tyre and Sidon in wickedness.

Jesus makes crystal clear people who are the most blessed by God will ultimately receive the harshest judgment if they reject Him and remain indifferent.

The people of Capernaum never persecuted Jesus and few of them criticized him. They never mocked him or ridiculed him. They never ran him out of town or threatened his life

Yet, to Jesus, their sin was the worst of all. Worse than if they had done all of those things. Their sin wasn’t violence or immorality but **indifference**.

Jesus’ teaching maybe interested them. His miracles entertained them. But he wasn’t looking for their amazement or admiration or to increase “likes” on his “Facebook Fan Page.” He was looking for a response of repentance and change but they never allowed his pure grace to enter their hearts. Never allowed his truth to change their minds. His invitations never induced faith in them. It’s as if they said, “Nah, no thanks, I’m good.”

I can easily think, “How could they possibly do this? If I’d seen Jesus do these miracles, I would never act like them! I’d never be indifferent” But, really?

Let’s consider what might it look like for us to respond with indifference to Jesus?

Could indifference possibly look like:

- Thinking we don’t have time to spend 20 minutes reading your bible, but we somehow have time to watch hours of Netflix every week?

- Working so much that we do little to grow our relationships with other believers? We just don’t need them to get ahead, right?
- When we think our kids’ success at school, sports or their careers are more important than their growing relationship with Christ?

I don’t think we realize sometimes that deciding not to do something out of indifference is every bit as much a choice as outright sin...at least to Jesus it is.

Now, if you’re like me, you’ve probably been through seasons in your faith where you have been an indifferent follower of Christ. The question remains, why do we become indifferent?

It can be so subtle but I think we cultivate indifference when we don’t pay attention to:

- How busy we become, how full our schedule gets, running from appointment to appointment
- How much tv/phone/screen time we’re glued to
- The radio always on in our car—why do we need that? It dulls us, numbs us.
- All the noise and clutter we allow in our life without taking time, even 5 min, (building in time to be still) to be quiet and to listen to Jesus.

My former church’s pastor, John Ortberg once told our staff, he had been talking to his mentor, Dallas Willard. He was downloading all his frustrations, and expressing how overwhelmed he was with all the demands on him. He went on and on and then said desperately, “I just don’t know what to do, please tell me, what can I do to make this better or different? I can’t go on living this way.” And his wise mentor replied, “John, you must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life.” John replied, “Oh, that’s good, thanks.” He wrote that suggestion down. And then said, “What else?” Dallas Willard said, “There’s nothing else that would help, just do that.” To which John replied, “Oh...I think I get it.”

Following and not following Jesus is always a choice—be careful—don’t take that lightly!

The significance of the invitation to follow Jesus is seen in what he says next:

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. Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do.

“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.

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 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. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” (verse 25–30)

Jesus praises his Father because he hides “these things” from the wise and intelligent and instead reveals them to little children. What’s hidden from them? The truth of who he really is.

The first step to Jesus’ invitation of salvation is humility. What does that look like? It looks like coming to God with nothing—just our need for him.

To reveal means to uncover, to make known. Anyone watch “Fixer Upper?” It’s a show on HGTV where Chip and Joanna Gaines help families buy houses really cheap (in Waco, TX) and then fix them up so they’re completely transformed. They do something at the end of the show called the Big Reveal. They ask the couple waiting to see their new house, “Are you ready to see your Fixer Upper?” Chip and Jo pull back a gigantic picture of what the house looked like before and then shows them what it has become. It’s quite a transformation!

Jesus reveals who he is to little children, not the wise and intelligent. What does that mean? It’s a contrast—not between the knowledgeable and the ignorant, the educated and the uneducated, the brilliant and the simple-minded. It is a contrast between those who think they can save themselves by their own human wisdom, resources and achievement and those who know they can’t. It’s a comparison between those who rely on themselves and those who rely on God.

People who think they have it all together could miss the invitation from Jesus to the thing they most long for—life with God.

And finally, we come to the most incredible part, **“Come to me ALL who are weary and burdened and I’ll give you rest.”** Who hasn’t found comfort in these verses in your walk with Jesus? I sure have. But I want you to know this verse is only good because of what preceded it. Now wait a second—If I were Jesus, at this point, with all these people who are ignoring him, I would have long run out of invitations (they definitely would not have made my wedding list!) I mean, why keep inviting people who are indifferent? Let’s be honest here, not one of us would do what he did. We have a limit of how much we’ll reach out to someone who ignores us, right? A limit to how much we’ll give to someone who isn’t appreciative. Jesus does something that people just don’t normally do. He continues to invite. What a powerful example of grace. His invitation is still being offered. He wants them to come.

Those whom Jesus invites to himself are all those who already are weary and heavy laden. From what? “Religion”, all their efforts of “self-sufficiency” and their working/striving to the point of exhaustion, who are carrying a burden too heavy for them, the stuff that keeps them up at night.

Jesus calls to himself everyone who is exhausted from trying to find and please God with their own resources. He invites them to repent and make a 180 degree turn from the burden of the old life to the restfulness of the new.

Give rest—means to refresh or revive, as from labor or a long journey. Jesus promises spiritual rest to everyone who comes to him in repentance and humble faith. The spiritual rest God offers is cessation from action, motion, labor, or exertion. To enter God’s rest is to cease from all efforts at self-help in trying to earn salvation. Second, rest is described as **freedom from that which wearies or disturbs**. He invites everyone to freedom from the cares and burdens that rob them of peace and joy—rest for their souls/psyche.

Then, salvation involves submission, because it is impossible for Christ to exercise lordship over those who could care less about obeying him. His invitation includes the call to submission, symbolized by a yoke.

You might already know that a yoke is a great big, long, wooden beam. At each end, there are two big, metal rings. You would put an animal (oxen) underneath it. A yoke was part of a harness used to pull a cart, plow or mill beam and was the means by which an animal’s master kept it under control and guided it in useful work.

I love Bryan Lorrits explanation of...*For my yoke is easy*. “This Greek word for easy is very picturesque. It’s a word that means, “custom built.” It means tailor made. Needless to say, you need to understand the culture a bit. Whenever they would yoke two animals together they would never just take a one-size fits all yoke, but instead the carpenter would go to the animal and would measure the animal’s neck and would custom make a yoke, because he wanted to make sure that that yoke wouldn’t be too heavy, that it wouldn’t be too loose, that it wouldn’t chafe the neck. He tailor-made and custom fit a yoke for the animal to make sure that that yoke would be easy, that he could bear the burden. Jesus is a carpenter, and carpenter Jesus says I have looked at each of your lives. I have made you intricately, I know you intimately. Trust Me. Everybody’s yoked to something. If you’re yoked to Jesus, whatever it is that you’re going through, it won’t kill you. By the way, if you’re not, it might. Jesus’ yoke is custom made for you.”

And learn from me; this isn’t a learning that happens by listening to lectures or to a sermon on Sunday. It carries the idea of a disciple learning from a Rabbi, following them around everywhere, asking questions, why/how? It reinforces the truth that Christ’s disciples are His submissive learners. A yoke symbolizes obedience but, submission to Jesus brings the greatest liberation we can experience. Actually it is the only true liberation we can experience, because only through Christ are we freed to become what God created us to be.

Why does this matter? Because we're all yoked to something. We're all trying to figure out how to navigate this upside down world of ours and make sense of it.

There can be some things we're yoked to that take us away from who we're meant to be.

My struggle is often with the approval of others. I want you to like me, respect me, tell me I'm doing okay. Comparison goes hand in hand with that for me. Comparing myself to this mom, this speaker—if only I could be like them. When I do that I'm not seeing and being content with how God's made me and what I have to offer. Not especially proud of that, but that's what I allow myself to be yoked to sometimes. It helps me to ask myself, "Whose voice am I listening to?"

What is it for you? What are you yoked to that is taking you away from who you're meant to be? Maybe that's what you need to some time thinking about this week?

Conclusion

My hope for you today is that you would make a choice to follow Jesus. To do that, maybe you need to take some "internal inventory" about what you're yoked to besides Jesus. What choices are you making that are taking you away from Jesus? Buy a journal and write to help you. What has helped me so much, during times like this, is to be vulnerable with someone I trust, who knows me. Maybe you need to take a friend like that to

coffee this week to process with and talk to about your choices and struggles. Ask for their help, prayers, and accountability.

Maybe you already see and know what you're yoked to besides Jesus and you just need to make a conscious decision to go a different way.

Recently, I had a conversation with someone close to me along these lines, who was frustrated, defeated, exhausted and I asked (gently), Who did they think they were ordering their life around? They responded, "I know...I know. I really do want it to be Jesus...in everything. I want to go about my life and career with Jesus at the center—I really do. Would you help me and pray for me?"

Maybe you know and you need to make a confession to the Lord and tell Him that you want Him to be the most important to you. Only you can make that choice and tell him you can't do it by yourself anymore. By the way, you really can't do it by yourself. Whatever it is that you need to do today, I want you to know that Jesus is:

FOR YOU

HE SEES YOU

HE KNOWS YOU and

HE INVITES YOU to come to Him - (after all, He invited people who completely ignored Him) He's not giving up.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC South. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.