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The Greatest Invitation Ever Made - Part 2

October 17, 2021



The Bible for Today with John Stott - Premier

John Stott outlines from whom the invitation is sent; to whom it is addressed; what Jesus offers and what He asks from us.

Transcript

I don't know about you, but I marvel at the balance of the teaching of Jesus. Because He offers not only to lift our burden, but to place His yoke upon us in its place. And there are too many people who want the rest.

They are Jesus' office, but not the yoke. They want to lose their burden, but they don't want to gain his. Welcome to the Bible for today with John Stott.

During his lifetime he impacted the evangelical church on every continent and was author of the landmark Lausanne Covenant on Evangelism. But for all his global influence, he had an unassuming demeanor preferring to be known as Uncle John and living in a small apartment above a gallerage of a rectory in London. Indeed, the rectory of all souls rang in place, which was his home church for almost 60 years.

We are privileged to be marking John Stott's centenary by bringing you just some of his timeless teaching. Last week John Stott spoke on the greatest invitation ever made. He showed us firstly who the invitation is from and secondly to whom the invitation is made.

You'll find it helpful to have your Bible open to Matthew chapter 11 verse 28. Which brings me to the third question, what does Jesus offer us? Will he offer us to ease our misfit yoke? He offers to lift our burden to give us rest and to set us free. Indeed, we want to add nobody but he can do it because he is portrayed in the New Testament as the world supreme burden bearer because he bore our burden when he died on the cross.

Listen, if you will again to these words of the Bible, many of which I think whatever your background may be, you will know. From Isaiah, the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of our soul. There is the burden of our sin transferred to Jesus Christ.

Or again, John the Baptist, behold the Lamb of God who lifts up and carries away the Son of the world. Or again in the letter to the Hebrews, he was once offered to bear the sins of many. Or again, the letter to Peter, he bore our sins in his own body on the tree.

Why, my friends, this is the very essence of the Christian good news that God came after us himself in the person of Jesus Christ. He took our nature upon him and became a human being like us. He then lived a perfect life of love and humility and unselfishness.

His life unstained by any sin or selfishness. Then on the cross, as he died for us, he identified himself deliberately with our sin and guilt. In the startling language of the apostle Paul, he was actually made sin for us, made sin with our sins so close with the identification.

And then in words, even more shocking, he was made a curse for us. He bore in his own innocent person the judgment that our sins deserved. He became our substitute.

He plunged into the God-forsaken darkness that is hell in order that we might be spared and forgiven. And now on the ground of his burden bearing on the cross, on the ground that is of his sin-bearing death, he offers us a full and a free forgiveness. Our burden can be lifted because he bore it when he died.

Do you know these eloquent words in Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, which is all about a man bearing a burden, a man called Christian, he is like this, up this way then the burdened Christian run. But not without great difficulty because of the load on his back. He ran thus until he came to a place somewhat ascending and upon that place stood a cross and a little below in the bottom a supple-cup.

"So I saw in my dream," says Bunyan, "the justice Christian came up with the cross, his burden loosed from off his shoulders and fell from off his back and began to tumble and so continued to do till he came to the mouth of the supple-cup where it fell in and I saw it no more. Then was Christian glad and lights him and said with a merry heart he has given me rest by his sorrow and life by his death. Then he stood still a while to look and wonder, but it was very surprising to him that the sight of the cross should thus ease him of his burden.

He looked therefore and looked again even until the springs that were in his head sent the waters down his cheeks. So from whom does the invitation come from Jesus of Nazareth who claimed to be the Son of God made flesh? To whom it is addressed, is it addressed to us if we acknowledge that we are weary and heavily burdened? What is he offered to ease the burden, to lift it, to remove it because he died for us?" Which brings me to my fourth and last question, what does he ask from us? And the first answer of course is nothing. We can contribute nothing to our own forgiveness.

That's why we need to be forgiven. We cannot earn our own forgiveness by anything that

we do. All we have to do is to come to him.

Salvation or forgiveness or a new life is a gift absolutely free and utterly undeserved. But there is no substitute you know for this personal coming to Jesus. And I venture to ask whether you've ever done it.

Have you come to Christ in order to receive his free gift? He says, "Come unto me if you're laboring and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." But he gives rest to those who come to him, acknowledge their need of him and receive from him this gift. Now there are some of us, maybe some here tonight, who are preoccupied with the externals of religion. I was myself for a number of years, so I think I know what I'm talking about.

These people come to church. They come maybe to Holy Communion, or they come to a clergyman in order to seek his advice, or they may come to the Bible, or they may come to a religious meeting. They come here and come there and come to the other place, and they've never come to Jesus Christ.

It's perfectly possible to come to church and never have come to Jesus Christ. But his invitation is that we come to him and don't stumble over the simplicity of this invitation. There is one more thing, however, as we're thinking about the invitation, and that is this, that as Jesus invites us to come to him for rest, because he bore our burden on the cross, he then bids us take his yoke upon us in order to learn from him.

Now we all know what a yoke is, although we may not have seen one in this country, but in developing countries, oxen are still yoked to the plow, the yoke is of course a horizontal wooden bar that is laid upon the necks of oxen, and throughout the Bible the yoke is a symbol of submission to some kind of authority. The Jews will have known at once what Jesus meant when he said, "Take my yoke upon you," because the Jews always refer to the law as the yoke of Torah, the yoke whose authority, the authority of the law, to which they were required to submit. Now Jesus says, "Take my yoke upon you, submit to my authority, and learn from me, let me be your teacher, as well as your burden bearer, submit to my teaching authority, and become my disciple." Well, I don't know about you, but I marvel at the balance of the teaching of Jesus, because he offers not only to lift our burden but to place his yoke upon us in its place.

And there are too many people who want the rest, they are Jesus' offers, but not the yoke. They want to lose their burden, but they don't want to gain his. But you see, you can't pick and choose.

I'm talking about the greatest invitation ever made, but in a sense it is a double invitation, first to come to him to receive the gift of life, and then to take his yoke upon us and become his disciple and follow him and obey him, which is such a joy. So you know, when you come to Jesus, a rather wonderful exchange takes place. He eases our misfit yoke under which we're laboring, and puts upon us his yoke that he says, "My

yoke is easy.

It fits." He lifts from us our burden, and he calls it a heavy one. Come to me, if you're heavy laden, but as my burden is light. So that is the exchange.

We lose the heavy burden of our sin and guilt, and take upon us instead the light burden of a daily discipleship in which we find human fulfillment and joy and peace and rest. So we have nothing but ever to fear, not only is his yoke easy and his burden light, but he himself is gentle and humble in heart, and we have nothing whatever to fear from him. Oh, I hope there isn't somebody here tonight who thinks of Jesus as some kind of harsh ogre who as soon as you're enjoying yourself tells you to stop it, some kind of celestial cop.

Jesus is lowly and gentle in heart. He died for you. He rose again.

He is alive. He invites you to come to him. He loves you.

He longs for you to enter into fulfillment as a human being. You know the name, don't you, Dietrich Bonherfer. He was Lutheran pastor during the war.

He was executed in the Flossenburg concentration camp in April 1945. A few days before the allies liberated it, and in his famous book, *The Cost of Discipleship*, he writes this about these verses, "Only the person who follows the command of Jesus without reserve and submits unresistingly to his yoke finds his burden easy. The command of Jesus is hard for those who try to resist it, but for those who will submit to his yoke it is easy and his burden is light." So what must you do if you want to come to Christ? Let me spend my final few moments answering that question.

I would like to give you a very simple A, B, C, D, if I may in order to help you to remember these things. There are four steps we have to take, one after the other. They're very simple to understand, but the first I think is the hardest to take.

A stands for something to admit. The very first step we have to take is to admit that we are in the language of Jesus, laboring and a heavy laden. There is the burden of our sin and guilt, and God's just judgment upon our sin and guilt, and our rebellion against him.

We've tried to lead our own life. We strut around the world as if we own it. We think we're independent.

There is only one independent being who lives, and that is God himself. He depends on himself for his being. And everybody else depends upon him, whether they acknowledge it or not.

He is their creator and their sustainer and their life to him. If he takes away their breath, they die and turn again to the dust. But we don't want to admit our dependence on him.

We want to go our own way and do our own thing and be our own master. And that is the essence of what the Bible means by sin. Sin is the independent spirit, the proud arrogant spirit that says I can get on all right without him.

I'm my own master. We have to repent of that. We have to admit that that is sin, it's rebellion against God.

And it's the hardest step to take because it strikes at the very root of our self-esteem and of our pride. Is there a friend here who will humble themselves tonight and admit it's true? You've been resisting it all these years, but it's true you need Christ. You're laboring, you're heavy laden with sin and guilt, you need Christ.

That's a "be" something to believe. That is the Jesus is able to lift the burden you've admitted you have because he bore it when he died on the cross. He is the son of God, mad flesh.

He is the one and only God man, perfect God, perfect human at the same time. And on the cross he bore our sin and guilt and identified himself with them in his own innocence. What a wonderful thing that is.

Now you can't go any further till you can believe that. Maybe you don't yet believe it. But that's the second step.

First admit that you need Christ, you're a sinner, you need a Savior. Be, believe that Jesus is the Savior you need because of who he is and because of what he did when he died and rose again. See something to consider.

That is if you come to him not only will he lift your burden but he will place upon you in its place his yoke of a daily discipleship. He wants to be your Savior but you have to have him as your Lord and teacher as well and submit to his authority and begin to follow him in the way. That's something to consider.

You can't come to Jesus Christ on your own terms. You have to come on his terms. That means losing your burden, gaining his yoke.

Something to consider. D. Something to do. Come to him.

He stands before us tonight, unseen but really present. Arms out, stretched to invite and to welcome us. Come to me.

He says, just as you are, come to me and I will give you rest. I wonder if you are able to take those four steps. Shall I go through them again and then we will pray together? A. Something to admit.

You have gone your own way. You brought yourself under the displeasure of God. You need his forgiveness.

Something to admit. B. Something to believe. Jesus Christ can meet your needs.

He died for your sins. He can forgive them. He can give you a new life.

You can start all over again. See something to consider. He wants to be your Lord as well as your Savior to give you his yoke as well as to take your burden.

And then, D. Something to do. Come to him. Great simplicity like a little child that come with the full consent of your mind and heart and will and commit yourself to Christ and receive his free forgiveness and the beginning of a new life.

I do know what I am talking about. I took these steps myself. Well, it is over fifty years ago now.

So, I have had plenty of opportunity to prove the reality of what I am talking about. This is true. This is good news.

It is not pretense. It is not make-believe. It is not a fairy-tale.

It is true. And if you come to Christ, you can prove it yourself. So, let's pray together as we remain seated or if you prefer to kneel.

Thinking in our imagination that Jesus Christ stands before us without stretched arms inviting us to come to him. We have to decide if we are ready to come. If you are not ready to come, don't come.

But if you are ready, don't put it off. You are the only person who knows whether you are ready or not. Now, I am going to say a prayer in the first person singular, such as I myself prayed fifty and more years ago.

And if you are ready to come to Christ, you could echo it in your heart sentence by sentence after me. Again, let me say, if you are not ready, please don't do it. Don't take a step.

You are not ready to take. But again, I beg you if you are ready. And you know that tonight is the night on which you ought to come to him, then come.

Your Jesus Christ, I humbly admit my need of you. I have gone my own way and sought to be my own master. I'm sorry for my independent spirit.

I thank you for dying for me, for bearing my sin in your own innocent person and taking the penalty I deserved. Now I come to you, just as I am, in answer to your invitation, in order to receive your forgiveness and a new life. And I want to take upon me your yoke and follow you as my teacher and lord all my life.

Lord, we pray for any who tremblingly but sincerely have echoed that prayer. Give them

the courage to follow you, not to be ashamed as your followers. And for others who are not yet ready, we ask you to pursue them with your patient, magnetism of love.

You've been listening to The Conclusion of a Message by John Stott on the greatest invitation ever made. If you would like further help on this matter, then head to our website. Scroll down to the bottom of the homepage and follow the link entitled "What is Christianity?" What we've just heard is really good news.

It's the gospel. It's the very heart of evangelical truth. And that's also the title of our book recommendation for this week, evangelical truth.

You'll find details on the homepage of our website, premierchristianradio.com/ John Stott. The legacy of John Stott lives on and is growing, touching every level of society across the world. Today, Christian leaders throughout the majority world are being equipped to provide pastor training and resources in their own countries thanks to the vision of John Stott, who donated all his book royalties to support this ministry through Langham Partnership.

To find out about this and other ministries, John Stott founded, go to premier.org.uk/JohnStott. Join us at the same time next week for more from The Bible for Today with John Stott.

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(buzzing)