**GRACE: BY INVITATION ONLY**

**(Matthew 11:25-30)**

 Two years ago, this month, Ruth Ann and I boarded a plane at Will Rogers in OKC and flew to Houston. In Houston, we boarded a much bigger plane, crossed the Atlantic Ocean, and landed in Germany. Then, we got on a similar plane and flew to Israel. Those last two planes were the biggest airplanes I have ever been on. They had a second story. We were on the lower deck

 During the middle of the night, Ruth Ann and I wondered what it was like on the upper deck, where the rich people were. We decided to investigate. Toward the back of the plane, there was a spiral staircase leading to the second floor. When we got the top of the stairs, we saw a stewardess. I figured she was there standing guard. We ignored her and acted like we belonged there. There were two aisles, just like we had below, but these seats weren’t like ours. These seats could lay out flat, so the occupant could stretch out, which is exactly what everyone up there was doing in the semi-darkness.

 We decided to return to our more, humble surroundings. We crossed over to the other aisle to head back. It was about that time that I discovered the stewardess was in hot pursuit. She caught up to us about the time we reached the stairs. In a thick German accent, she informed us that we were somewhere that we didn’t belong. “You cannot be here. You must go down.” We didn’t have a ticket for that upper deck, and no one had invited us.

 There have been times, however, when I have gotten to see how the other side lives without feeling like or being an intruder. On a couple of occasions, I was given tickets to the club level at Boone Pickens Stadium in Stillwater. Watching an OSU football game from the club level is a whole different experience. When you are in the cheap seats (which aren’t really cheap) and you want to get something to eat, you have to go find a concession booth, stand in line, and you will wind up with something like tortilla chips drowned in liquid cheese, and you have to pay for it.

 On club level, however, you can enjoy a full, catered meal. You can go back through the line and get as much as you want and as often as you want. If all you want is a snack to satisfy your sweet tooth, they have candy bars that you can grab. It is all free for the taking. It is all included in the price of your club level ticket. I had the ticket, but I never paid for the ticket. I was there at the invitation of someone else who bore that cost on my behalf.

 I’ve never watched a football game from the suite level which is a step above the club level, but I did watch an OSU basketball game once from the Sutton family suite. Eddie Sutton (the legendary, retired coach of the Cowboys) was there, his wife Patsy, their daughter-in-law Trena, while their son Sean was on the floor coaching the team having succeeded his father as the coach of the OSU Cowboys. I was enjoying their suite and eating the catered meal only because I was invited.

 There are some blessings and privileges in life that are by invitation only. While 60,000 fans may watch an OSU game from the stadium, only a small percentage will do so from the club or suite level. Not just anybody can enter those areas. You have to have a ticket or a badge, and someone is placed at the door to check your credentials. If you don’t have what is needed, you will not be allowed entrance.

 No one is barred from buying a ticket. Anyone can receive a ticket if it is offered to him or her, but to get into the stadium or to any particular place in the stadium where you want to go, you have to have a ticket or a badge that authorizes you to be there.

 When it comes to spiritual blessings such as entrance into God’s family or admittance through heaven’s gates, you can’t buy a ticket. None are for sale. You have to be invited, and having heard the invitation, you must accept the invitation, and once you have accepted the invitation, your name will be written down, and that reservation will be kept awaiting your arrival.

 In today’s text we are going to observe several spiritual blessings that can be ours, but they are had by invitation only. Each of them becomes ours by grace.

 We are going to examine the last six verses of Matthew 11. In this passage Jesus utters a prayer to God in the hearing of the many who were before Him, and then He issues an open invitation. Let’s look at Matthew 11:25-30.

1. **BY THE FATHER’S GRACIOUS WILL, WE CAN GRASP DEEP TRUTH.**

 In the middle of v. 25, Jesus uses an extremely vague phrase. He says, “these things,” but He doesn’t identify what He means by *these things.* Whatever those things are, they are hidden from the worldly wise, and they are revealed to those who are little children by comparison.

 In his thorough commentary on Matthew, R.T. France argues that *these things* refer to “the truths [Jesus] has taught and the truth about who He Himself is.”

 Grasping the deep truth of Scripture is not a function of raw brain power. There are many intellectual heavy weights who make a mess of the Scripture because the truth of God’s word has been hidden from them.

 Instead, God has chosen to reveal spiritual truth to those who cannot decorate the walls of their office with framed degrees from institutions of higher learning.

 In 1 Corinthians 1:21 Paul wrote, “In the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom.” In Romans 1:22 Paul speaks of those who “Claiming to be wise, they became fools.”

 Our colleges and universities are filled with educated fools. I say that based on Psalm 14:1 in which David maintained, “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’” According to the word of God, if you deny the existence of God, you are a fool. Atheism is educated foolishness.

 That reminds me of the story the late Adrian Rogers told. Someone was complaining that Christians have Christmas, and Thanksgiving, and Easter. He argued that atheists should have a national holiday. Adrian observed, “They do. It’s called April Fool’s Day.”

 Academic research shows that children are more perceptive than adults in regard to believing in God. Researchers from both Yale and Oxford concur that children have an inborn belief in a higher power who they believe has created the world.

 Based on his research, Psychologist Justin Barrett at Oxford University concluded, “It appears that we have to be educated out of the knowledge of God by secular schools and media.”

 Sofia Cavaletti, another researcher who has studied spirituality in young children, reports that children often have an amazing perception that far surpasses what they’ve already been taught. For instance, one three-year-old girl, raised in an atheistic family with no church contact at all, no Bible in the home, asked her father, “Where did the world come from?” He answered her in strictly naturalistic, scientific terms. Then he added, “There are some people who say that all this comes from a very powerful being, and they call him God.”

 Suddenly, the little girl started dancing around the room with joy as she said, “I knew what you told me wasn’t true—it’s Him, it’s Him!”

 Why does God choose to hide the knowledge of Himself and His word from the learned of this world and reveal this truth to those this world views as foolish? We are given the answer in v. 26.

 Whatever knowledge you have of God and His word you possess by virtue of His gracious will.

 Let me ask you a question: Do you like to be around people who constantly boast, who are always telling you how great they are, how wonderful and accomplished they are? No, you don’t, and I don’t either.

 As it turns out, the Lord is also not particularly fond of boasters unless they fit the condition found in 1 Corinthians 1:31 which says, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

 When we realize that every good thing we have is ours by grace, we understand that we have no grounds to boast about ourselves. We read in Ephesians 2:8-9, “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

 What is true of our salvation is also true of our knowledge of deep truth. It comes to us by grace. We have what we have by the Father’s gracious will.

1. **BY THE SON’S GRACIOUS CHOICE, WE CAN KNOW THE FATHER.**

 Knowing the Fatherentails more than being aware of His existence. Look again at Matthew 11:27. In Scripture, the word *know* is often used to convey the idea of knowing experientially, to have a relationship with someone. To know God is to have a relationship with Him. In v. 27, Jesus added a prefix to the usual word *know,* and that prefix changes the meaning of the word. It doesn’t just mean *know;* it means *know fully.*

 Let’s re-read that verse using the words *fully know* . . . The Father fully knows Jesus and Jesus fully knows the Father because they are in relationship with one another. The glorious truth of this verse is that we fully know the Father because Jesus chooses to brings us into a relationship with His Father.

 Notice how Jesus addressed God in v. 25. The Jews of the OT referred to God as being the Father of the Jewish people. The OT Scriptures taught that truth, but they never addressed God as *Father.* Jesus, however, routinely addressed God as Father, and He taught us to do so as well. In the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus taught us to pray, “Our *Father* who art in heaven . . .” As Christians, we can address God as *Father* because we have been brought into relationship with Him.

 For us, God is not a concept, not a spiritual notion, not a theological supposition. God is our Father. Paul wrote in Galatians 4:6, “And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba, Father!’” *Abba* is the Aramaic word for Father. Aramaic rather than Hebrew was the language the Jews in Jesus’ day routinely used. It is quite likely that as Jesus was growing up, He addressed Joseph as *Abba.*

 Look at the last phrase of v. 27—“to reveal Him.” By His grace, Jesus has chosen to reveal His Father to us. I don’t often used Greek words when I am preaching, but I am going to do so here because it is a word that has come over into English. The Greek word for reveal is the word *apokalupsai.* We get the word *apocalypse* from that word. It happens to be the first word in the last book of the Bible.

 The Book of Revelation gets its name from the first word John used in that letter. When we hear the word apocalypse, we think it refers to some cataclysmic event that brings about the end of the world. The word simply means *revealing.*

 Jesus reveals to John what is going to happen and what it means. Jesus is going to reveal Himself to the world. Every eye will see Him, and every tongue will confess that Jesus is the Christ.

 In today’s text, we learn that the only way we can know God and have a relationship with Him is for Jesus to choose graciously to reveal His Father to us. Jesus said similar things elsewhere. He told the disciples, “You didn’t choose Me; I chose you.”

 On the night Jesus observed the last Supper with His disciples, He said to them: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” then in the very next verse He says, “If you have known Me, you will know My Father also. From now on you do know Him and have seen Him” (John 14:6-7).

 In the following story, Lee Eclov, a pastor in Illinois illustrates what Jesus did for us:

 A year or two ago my friend Linda’s cat escaped. It was cold and rainy, and that cat would not come home. Not for three days! The cat wasn’t exactly lost; Linda knew where it was—a good 20 feet up a tree right outside the back of the house. But that little critter would not come down. So, another friend named Jim took a long extension ladder over to help, and he called me for my unique expertise—ladder-holding in the rain. That cat probably hadn’t eaten in three days. It was cold and scared, but when Jim finally got up there, that cat was not glad to see him. It was downright hostile. In fact, the only way Jim got the cat down was to put a towel over its head and pry its claws out of the tree. Jim did all the rescuing. All the cat did was finally let go of the tree.

 Salvation is often a lot like that—it is when we finally let go. None of us can look to Jesus, remembering our rescue, and say, “We made a good team, didn’t we!”

 Let me ask you, what are you holding onto that you need to let go of? In addition to your sin, you may need to let go of pride. How about hurt? Some people hold on to the wrong that has been one to them like a security blanket. They use that past hurt as the excuse for why they can’t go to church or get close to Christians. Jesus understands what it is like to be hurt by religious people. It was the religious people of His day who orchestrated His arrest, put Him on trial, found Him guilty, and petitioned the Roman Governor to order His crucifixion. Yet when He was being crucified, Jesus prayed, “Father, forgive them. They have no clue what they are doing?”

 Jesus stands ready to rescue you. Your only responsibility is to let go. He will do everything else.

1. **BY THE SON’S GRACIOUS GIFT, WE CAN FIND**

 **TRUE REST.**

Let’s read again the wonderful invitation Jesus extends in vv. 28-30. Jesus offers one thing. He promises rest. What kind of rest? He specifies what kind of rest in the latter part of v. 29—rest for our souls.

 If you want physical rest, you can probably get that with a Sealy Posturepedic and a Tylenol PM. If you, however your soul harried and hurried, if it is wearied and worried, and you want rest for your soul that is something different than a tired body. It just so happens that Jesus specializes in giving rest to human souls.

 What is the soul? Your soul is that inner part of you that makes you, you. We often try to hide our real selves. We are afraid that if people see who we really are, they will reject us, they will judge us. So, we put on masks; we hide behind roles. All this play-acting and hiding is hard work. Jesus promises real rest for your real self.

 While you can’t add anything to the God’s work of salvation except letting go, there are some things that Jesus requires of you in order for you to enter into the rest He offers. In fact, there are three specific things Jesus mentions.

 **First, Jesus says: Come to Me.** This is a personal invitation. Jesus doesn’t say:

* Go to Church. He says, Come to Me.
* Go do religious deeds. He says, Come to Me.
* Go perform good deeds. He says, Come to Me.
* Go find a skilled counselor. He says, Come to Me.

 On the first page of his religious biography, Augustine, the great fourth-century, Christian leader, wrote: “You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they can find peace in You.”

 **Second, Jesus says: Take from Me.** We are to take His yoke. He is not talking about the inside of an egg. That yolk is spelled differently. Since I’m pretty sure that no one here happens to own a team of oxen, you may be unfamiliar with a yoke. It is a harness that is placed over an animal so that his great strength can be captured to perform work for his master.

* A team of horses are yoked to pull a wagon.
* Santa’s reindeer are yoke to pull his sleigh.
* Oxen are yoked to pull a plow.

 It doesn’t seem to make sense that we are going to find rest for our souls by allowing Jesus to put on us something He can use to get us to do work.

 What you and I need to keep in mind is that we are going to serve somebody. It might be the devil. It might be somebody else. If you say proudly, I’m going to be my own master, you will find that you have become a slave to your passions.

 The lightest, easiest yoke we can take on is the one Jesus offers. But keep in mind, Jesus offers a yoke, not a pillow or a feather bed. Jesus is not calling us to a life of ease. He is calling us to a life of meaning and purpose. We find rest for our souls when we are doing what we were made to do and when we are becoming who we were made to be.

 **Third, Jesus says: Learn of Me.** Life becomes wearisome when we are learning lessons from the wrong teachers. The world says life is all about acquiring possessions, attaining position, and exercising power.

 Jesus modeled different set of values. Let Him be your teacher. Study His life as it is recorded for us in the gospels. Learn what He emphasized, what He considered important.

 This past week I preached a funeral. I closed the message with a story told by Anne Graham Lotz, the daughter of Billy Graham. She has written many books. One of those is entitled, *Heaven: My Father’s House.* Of course, it was written long before his death just last year. In that book she tells about people who want to visit her father’s home in the mountains of North Carolina. They drive up the long drive and come to the gate. They knock on the gate and say: “Billy Graham, let us in. We’ve read your books; we’ve watched you on TV; we’ve written to you; and we want to come to your house.” But my father doesn’t let them in because they are not members of his family, and they didn’t make any arrangements to come.

 She wrote:

 But when I drive up that same driveway and knock on the gate, I say, “Daddy, this is Anne, and I’ve come home.” The gate is thrown right open, and I go inside, because I’m the father’s child.

 Jesus said that heaven is His Father’s house . . . Because heaven is God’s house, He has the right to decide who comes in and who stays out. He says He will welcome anyone inside His home, anyone can come, but they have to be born again into His family through faith in Jesus Christ.

 That gives us a wonderful hope, that when the time comes . . . we can be assured that at the end of the journey, we’ll step right into our Father’s arms. We’ll be welcomed there, because we are our Father’s child.

 Jesus is inviting you to become part of the family. If you will receive Him as your Savior and Lord, He will give you’re the grace to grasp His truth, the grace to know His Father, and the grace to find His rest. Will you accept His invitation?