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A Gracious Invitation

Morning sermon preached by MR H. DAWSON (Pastor, Union Chapel, Bethersden) at Providence Chapel, Cranbrook, on Sunday 20th February 1949

"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"—(Matthew II : 28)

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I earnestly hope the God of all grace will enable me to say something which may be helpful, and do poor sinners good. I would like to feel some of you are gathered here in the hope of getting some help under the Gospel, and that you have been sowing in tears in the expectation of reaping in joy what will be for your soul's profit and peace. The text is familiar to you, and it may be you have heard a number of sermons preached from it. Possibly the text is so familiar to you that you do not realize and appreciate the fullness of the Gospel set forth therein. Remember, Jesus Christ, verily God, verily Man, is the glorious Speaker in the text.

Says Jesus: "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden." I shall be glad if two aspects of this blessed invitation are well understood and impressed upon our minds.

(1) I would ask you to consider *the majesty* of the Inviter, for He is the God of all grace, who is, of a truth, the Sinners' Friend and able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think" in making His friendship known. I sometimes think His Name as the Sinner's Friend is the Name which most encourages poor sinners as they seek Him concerning the salvation of their souls. When you think of God, as some of you do, and the question arises: Can such a holy God have anything whatever to do with you—a sinner so unholy and undone, think also on what our hymn-writer says:

"Whom though we cannot comprehend,
Knowing Thou art the Sinner's Friend—
We love Thee, and adore."

Think upon the majesty of the Inviter—the Lord Jesus Christ. The hosts of heaven adore Him in endless praises, setting forth His grandeur and His grace, yet in our text He speaks so kindly to poor sinners such as you and I: "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." It is the word of Him who is the Eternal Son of God in His Divine Nature. Do you believe this? Millions of poor sinners have proved this word to be what it is—the Word of God, and their redeemed spirits are now around His throne in glory singing His eternal praises. And still this word can be proved. "Who can tell but what God may be gracious unto you?" "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden." Mark the wording. Underline the little word "all" in your minds for it is big with encouragement. Young or old, it matters not in this respect—"All ye that labour and are heavy laden."

(2) I would not only set before you the majesty of the Inviter, but I ask you to think upon *the mercy of the Invitation*. Do not look at our text cursorily, as the mere looking at black and white letterpress will not help you, but think upon what had to be done ere Jesus Christ could proclaim such a word as this: "Come unto Me." Such an invitation makes the Gospel to be good tidings of great joy to poor sinners who have ears to hear it.

Go back in your minds to Eden's Garden. There you will see how God, in His infinite wisdom as the Creator, made Adam and Eve, and placed them therein, giving them a capacity as His creatures to enjoy all possible earthly happiness, with which the Garden was filled. He gave them as they were made in His image a *free will*, and they were the only two people who ever possessed it. God placed them under a Law, and so long as they obeyed it, they could dwell in Eden's Garden, and enjoy the creature happiness it afforded. It is evident from the Word of God that God made Himself known to Adam as his Creator, and spoke to him as to how he was to order his life in Eden's Garden, although we can only refer to this with trembling, and not say more than the Word of God declares. Alas, how soon was the fair picture in Eden's Garden marred. The Word of God tells us: "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Romans 5 : 12). Sin and Satan wrought sad havoc, and what is termed the "Adam Fall" took place, and Adam and Eve had to turn their backs upon that fullness of earthly happiness. They went out into a world now blighted by a solemn curse, and who can tell how miserable they must have been as they began to reap the dire consequences of their wrong doing. Solemn is the reading in the Word of God: "So He drove out the man: and He placed at the east of the Garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life" (Genesis 3 : 24). Oh think, dear friends: "So He drove out the man"; not as you read in our text: "Come unto Me". No, ere that beautiful word "Come" can be spoken in the Gospel proclamation, provision has to be made for the fiery sword guarding the way to the tree of life to be sheathed. Blessed be God this was done by the Speaker in our text when He died in the stead of poor sinners on Calvary's cross—then the sword of Divine Justice was sheathed, and the way made sure for poor sinners to enter in through the gates into the City of God, and have right to the tree of life. Meanwhile the word in Eden's Garden was (as it were): "Go", "Depart"; not "Come unto Me." I have told you these things very simply to bring out what had to be done ere the beautiful words: "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden" could be known in the Gospel as the sweetest music that a sinner's ears could listen to.

Again, under the Law in Old Testament times such a word was not heard. Find, if you can, such a word as "Come unto Me" under the Law. No; such a word is unknown under the Law. All the Law can say is "Do this", or "Do that"; or else, "Do *not* do this, or that." And if it is not attended to as God desires it to be done, then the

sinner must sweat it out in eternal misery.

"Righteousness to full perfection
Must be brought; lacking naught—
Fearless of rejection."

The Law is based on "Do this, and live"; but the Gospel is founded on this foundation truth: "Come unto *Me*." And ere the Gospel could be guaranteed in its proclamation that it might be put to the test, and proved by millions of poor sinners, something had to be done, and no man, or angel, could do it. God in His infinite wisdom devised the way whereby it could be done. The explanation is exceedingly simple and sublime: "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3 : 16). And of that dear Son of God, His Own Word declares: "Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of Me, I delight to do Thy will, O my God" (Psalm 40 : 7, 8). Yes, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Timothy 1 : 15). Is not it indeed "a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance"? Some of us desire to delight in the truth of it. "Born a Babe, by birth mysterious," He dwelt on earth as "verily Man", "verily God" in our nature. And what did He do? As "verily Man" He was made under the Law which says: "Do this"; "Do not do that"; and on our behalf (as we humbly hope) He kept it in every jot and tittle of its requirements.

"In Him the Father never saw
The least transgression of His law;
In Him we then perfection view—
The saints in Him are perfect too."

As "verily Man", yet God in our nature He went up to Calvary to die "the Just for the unjust". "Christ died for the ungodly" (Romans 5 : 6). Then those great words echoed around the world, shaking also the confines of hell, reaching into heaven itself: "It is finished". Glorious truth.

"It is finished, cried the Lord,
In His dying minute;
Holy Ghost, repeat the word—
Full salvation's in it."

Now the Gospel can be preached with authority, blessed be God; yea, with a "Thus saith the Lord". He, who is the Author of it, and the sum and substance of it, says therein to poor sinners: "Come unto *Me*, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "Come, just as you are, labouring in want of God, you are welcome."

"No sinner was ever yet empty sent back,
Who came seeking mercy for Jesus' sake."

I would like, as the Lord shall help me, to look at our text from three viewpoints. The Saviour says: "All ye that labour and are heavy laden". First of all I want you to remember, as it may be helpful to you, this word is addressed to *the living*, not the dead. The dead do not know anything about being heavy laden, do they? They cannot be conscious of what it is to labour. I would have you understand the word "labour" to mean soul travail. You may well read it like this: "Come unto Me, all ye that are exercised unto godli-

ness; all ye who desire to win Christ and be found in Him". I would like to hope a goodly number of you here know such labour. Such is the character referred to. It is the living who will lay these things to heart.

How did you come up to worship God? Was there any special concern? Anything going on between God and your soul as you came along? Have there been any sighs, and cries, and groans, if so be you might get a "Jabez portion"; "O that Thou wouldest bless me indeed?" Has there been any soul travail? The text says: "All ye that labour", not just listen. Just a word concerning this labour. Solomon tells us: "The labour of the righteous tendeth to life" (Proverbs 10 : 16), and it is so with all who are born again. How glad some of you would be if you could only feel sure that you are alive in things Divine. You will have a labour concerning this. You will be longing at times that God will put the great question out of question, and assure you that He *has* saved you with an everlasting salvation. You will echo the hymn writer's words:

"Assure my conscience of her part
In the Redeemer's blood;
And bear the witness with my heart,
That I am born of God."

You do not always feel as you want to feel about it, do you? Some of us who try to preach the Gospel are not always as sure as we should like to be. You must not think that men sent to preach, especially if they are pastors, are always living just outside the gates of pearl in their soul's experience. No! Sometimes poor preachers are hard put to it to reduce their preaching to practice, and feel as one hymn writer expresses it:

"Temptations sore obstruct my way,
And ills I cannot flee;
O give me strength, Lord, as my day;
For good, remember me."

Some of you have had your names on a Church roll a long time, and it causes you searchings of heart. I was baptized at the age of nineteen, and that seems a long time ago, yet by the grace of God, you and I have been helped along as a rule, "here a little, and there a little". Sometimes we have felt: "As dying, and behold, we live", but there has been a labour. It is a solemn consideration that we must all appear before God.

"O solemn thing, a saint to appear,
Grow up with wheat, and be a tare."

And this raises the question: "Am I made a real Christian?" I want to be one more than in the name. For a long time I have had in my mind a picture, a standard, of what it is to be a *real* Christian, but as I grow older, and have to weigh up matters more and more, I have to say regarding being a real Christian: "It is so high, I cannot attain unto it." "The good that I would I do not, and the evil I would not, that, alas, I do" (Romans 7 : 19). I hope underneath it all there is a labour to be a real Christian. When one looks within, and has to say: "Can ever God dwell here?" how well this word fits in: "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and

I will give you rest." This word is so alluring. Search the Scriptures, and you will see how many a poor sinner had to *come*. "Leave not my soul destitute" (Psalm 141 : 8) said one; "Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me" (Psalm 51 : 11) said another; "O Lord, I am oppressed, undertake for me" (Isaiah 38 : 14) said Hezekiah. Again and again you will see poor sinners labouring with a solemn concern to get in touch with God, and know the truth aright in its power and preciousness. "Come unto Me," says Jesus, to all such labouring ones, "and I will give you rest."

In the early dealings of God with His dear people, when first they are convinced of sin, there is a labour under the Law. Often the immediate reaction of a sinner born again under a sense of sin, and his want of righteousness such as the Law demands, is that he thinks he must begin to *do* something inasmuch as the Law says: "Do this", and "Do that". The poor sinner looks around to see if he *can* do something about it, and he begins to reform his life, and renovate it; he leaves off this and that in the world at large, and tries to do this and that in the things of God, but finds with all that he does, or does not do, he can do nothing acceptable to God. What he wants, and cannot find under the Law is *rest*. Ease for his guilty conscience; peace for his troubled mind; blessing and healing for his sin-sick soul. He finds at length he is like a man in a bog, the more he struggles to get out, the deeper he sinks into it, and he is reduced to utter helplessness. So a poor sinner convinced of sin, labouring under the Law, learns he can do nothing whatever to save himself.

How fitting then is the word to such a one: "Come unto Me, all ye that labour under the Law to gather some righteousness, and are heavy laden with a deep consciousness of your guiltiness before God, and your hell-deserving state; Come unto Me, and I will give you rest. I am Jehovah—Tsiddkenu—"The Lord our Righteousness"; I have righteousness to clothe the poor sinners who feel they have none of their own wherein to appear before God. Come unto *Me*."

Poor sinner, you will never obtain any rest at Sinai's Mount. All you will gain there is a deeper sense of your hell-deserving state, and at length you will come to this conclusion:

"And if my soul is sent to hell,
Thy righteous law approves it well."

The Lord help you to go to Calvary's cross, and there you will find the Law's loud thunders are hushed. Jesus Christ there made peace by the blood of His cross for such poor sinners as I have tried to describe. "Through this Man there is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins" (Acts 13 : 38). "And this Man shall be the peace" (Micah 5 : 5). "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

How many among you dear people this Sabbath morning are in this burdened state? Is there a poor sinner here weighed down because he is such a *poor* sinner? Let such a one take courage, and thank God He has made you to be such a character. Remember this:

"Sinner, if thou art taught to see
How great thy guilt and misery—
In every thought and act impure—
The blood of Christ thy soul can cure."

Jesus says: "Come unto Me."

If God is pleased to lead you into His truth He will cause you to learn it in *His* way. Do not think that is just an elementary statement. I sometimes feel when we pray: "Lead me into Thy truth, and teach me, we do not realize what the answer to the petition may be. We like to be led into truth that is comforting, but God may reveal truth that is cutting and painful to learn—truth that further convinces us of sin, and brings us in guilty before Him. "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick" (Matthew 9 : 12). As you get older you will be searched more and more by the truth of God, and it will not always be comforting. I was impressed a little while ago in reading a sermon of John Bunyan's, and in it the dear man said to his hearers: "Can you find in your soul a thimbleful of religion that is of God?" You and I, at times, may feel to have about as much as that, and no more. Do you inquire what a thimbleful of religion means. To feel like the hymnwriter when he says:

"My soul into Thy arms I cast,
I trust I shall be saved at last."

To say with Jonah: "Though I am cast out of Thy sight, I will look again toward Thy holy temple" (Jonah 2 : 4). How glad you will be to remember the Psalmist's word: "He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer" (Psalm 102 : 17).

As I have said, some of us have had our names on a Church roll for many years, but you cannot build up a hope of heaven on the strength of a long profession, although by the grace of God you have been enabled to live a life consistent therewith. Such a foundation will not do to build on for eternity. As you journey on through life things are narrowed down, and a labour goes on in one's heart as life's eventide comes on. Some of us are made aware that Time is shortening behind us, and Eternity is before us, and there are solemn moments when things have to be weighed up lest "Tekel" should be stamped upon us, our religion, and our profession. Oh, how solemn at the last to be weighed in the balances and found wanting the hall-mark of Divine teaching. This causes an exercise unto godliness and soul travail. "All ye that labour," says Jesus, "Come unto Me." Sometimes you are helped to do it like this:

"A guilty, weak, and helpless worm,
On Thy kind arms I fall;
Be Thou my strength and righteousness,
My Jesus, and my All."

Again, "From Me is thy fruit found" (Hosea 14 : 8) Jesus declares, but you and I look within and without, and what fruit can be seen? I look back over my life, and it seems a sad catalogue of sins and shortcomings, and failures and backslidings; and how glad one is to stand alongside the publican, and say feelingly: "God be merciful to me a sinner." That is *coming*. You come aright when you come just as you are, and you cannot come otherwise. Like the woman in the Gospel, you fall down at Jesus' feet, and tell Him all the truth,

"To Thee I come, a sinner great,
And well Thou knowest all my state";

and it is encouraging to feel that Jesus knows the exact truth of our case as we come. "O Lord, Thou knowest" sometimes brings relief to a labouring soul. Sometimes Ezra's petition is very reasonable: "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to Thee, my God" (Ezra 9 : 6). Conscious of what you are as a sinner, and poverty stricken in your profession—such experience makes you glad to remember: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2 : 8-9). And how that great truth shines in your eyes: "Salvation is of the Lord" (Jonah 2 : 9). "Come unto Me all ye that labour to know the salvation of God".

Also there is a labour concerning life's duties and difficulties, a concern to handle matters wisely. What a labour there is to run home life according to the Scripture pattern. I often think how a godly wife and mother labours in *her* everyday life, each day's work often a replica of the day before. She has to labour on, conscious of what she is by nature, and may be weary in body, and jaded in mind, and sometimes saying, as David did, "O my God, my soul is cast down within me." She desires, as does her husband, to train up the children God has given them in the way wherein they should go. Great is her responsibility in *her* sphere, while her husband is elsewhere earning the bread which perisheth. Such labour in home life is sometimes so wearing and painful that you feel to come, oh, so short in your religion that you sorrowfully wonder if you possess any that is of God. I expect some of you who labour before God under the responsibilities of parenthood, often find what you are by nature sometimes comes to the top, and you are like a leaf tossed to and fro, troubled in mind, and needing Divine aid to labour against a turbulent and fretful spirit. It may be *your* name is on the Church roll, and you *do* desire to live the life of the righteous, but, alas, it is not always uppermost. In this soul travail the devil may tempt you, and suggest your name ought not to be on the Church roll, and, if the members only knew you, they would not accept you as a real Christian. So the devil will argue, but do not believe what he suggests.

"He tells us we're weak, our hope is in vain;
The good that we seek, we ne'er shall obtain."

Poor labouring sinner, listen to what Jesus says: "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Yes, all ye that labour under a painful sense of failure; ye husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, heavy laden with life's responsibilities; ye who have to lament that you cannot do the things in your heart to do, and you cannot be what you want to be, and what God knows you want to be—a real Christian.

Jesus takes pleasure in such poor sinners, and says: "Come unto Me, I have everything to bestow that your soul needs; righteousness to clothe you, and precious blood to cleanse you. I have salvation to make you meet to be a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light." Yes:

"A fullness resides in Jesus our Head,
And ever abides to answer our need."

Jesus says, "Come unto Me and obtain it". What further does He say? "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For everyone that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." How wonderful is the Gospel of Christ set forth in our text: "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Great Inviter; gracious invitation.

"Approach my soul the Mercy Seat,
Where Jesus answers prayer;
And humbly lie at His dear feet,
For none can perish there."

Amen.
