

“The Load Made Easy”

Matthew 11:25-30

Dr. Randy Working
Christ Presbyterian Church
July 19, 2009

Introduction

There's a song by the Beatles that goes,

I'm so tired, I haven't slept a wink
I'm so tired, my mind is on the blink
I wonder should I get up and fix myself a drink?
No, no, no.

Can you relate? A lot of people around us go around chronically tired, discouraged, stressed, and worried. That's what Jesus is addressing this morning.

So far, Jesus has given us a lot of challenge in his teaching. He told us we have to face persecution for him, and we have to be salt and light in the world. He told us if we break even the least commandment, we'll be the least in the kingdom. He told us murder and adultery are matters of the heart, and he told us to love our enemy instead of take vengeance. He told us if we love even our mother or father more than we love him we're not worthy of him. And he told us to be perfect even as our Father in heaven is perfect—and if we want to follow him, we have to make the kingdom our number one priority.

More than our personal comfort, more than our privilege, what matters is what glorifies God and makes known Jesus Christ. What a mountain of challenge! It feels like more we can handle.

The priority of the kingdom, and the fact that we gain life by giving it up, it's counter-intuitive, and it's counter-cultural. Maybe that's why Jesus said God has hidden these things from the “wise and learned, and revealed them to little children” (Matthew 11:25). Indeed, for us to come to faith at all is a miracle of God's work in our lives. Jesus continued,

"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. (11:27)

Maybe all that leaves you feeling a little helpless. Are you ready for some good news?

It turns out it *is* good news, and the passage for this morning shows why.

Jesus is talking to people who feel crushed by all the do's and don'ts of legalistic religion. We have plenty of that kind of religion around in our day. But Jesus warned people about legalistic ways. Did you know the religious leaders in Jesus' time did what's called “fencing the Torah,” adding hundreds of things you had to do or could not do in order to protect the Law, so to speak. They wanted to make absolutely sure they didn't break the commandments of God, so better not come close. That led people to think, “You want to have God love you? You better be good enough!” That's works righteousness. The problem with that, according to Jesus, is that it misses the heart of the Law.

If you followed the Law of Moses, the Old Testament, you were said to be *yoked* to Moses. In the same way, if you were under the authority of the Pharisees, you were said to be *yoked* to them. Peter uses that term in Acts 15 when he says,

“Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear?” (Acts 15:10).

God doesn't give us a yoke we're unable to bear. That's good the good news of our passage.

Jesus Invites Us To Himself.

In chapter 4, Jesus called people to be his disciples, and he said:

"Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men.
(Matthew 4:19)

But here, Jesus says it more directly:

“Come to *me*, all who are weary and burdened” (11:28a)

Jesus is pleading with us, “Come to me.” It's the passion of his compassionate heart to give us relief from oppression. Whatever it is we've been crushed with, we can come to him. Come to him, trust in him, and find relief. He doesn't say, “Obey my system,” or “Know these doctrines,” or “Submit to me,” “Follow the rules,” but simply, “Come to me.” What is he getting at?

He's saying that the faith is all about a relationship with Jesus. It isn't a call to a program, or a church, or any human leader, but to know and be known, to love and be loved, by Jesus. Sometimes we end up trying to make copies of ourselves rather than helping people grow to look like Jesus. We communicate, “Agree with me, think like me, dress like me, and you'll have success.” But Christianity is an intimate relationship with Jesus.

Jesus' Invitation Is For Everyone Who Feels Burdened.

Everyone who comes to him will be saved, because he's not willing for anyone to be lost. Jesus is God's mission to the whole world. Specifically, he's calling those who are weary and heavy-burdened. Who are these people?

The short answer is, “All of us.” Life is tough, and at times all of us feel the burden. But I think Jesus is especially thinking of those who feel crushed under the legalistic system of the Pharisees.

The word Jesus uses for heavy burdened means to put a load on, like what you'd put on the back of an ox. It can also mean to oppress by legal burdens. Like in Luke, Jesus says,

“The teachers of the law and the Pharisees”—that's like saying, the professors and pastors of the day—“tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them” (Matthew 23:2, 4)

But Jesus wasn't just talking to people struggling to measure up to a religious system in the first century. His words are also for everyone who doesn't know Jesus, who is not in intimate fellowship with him as his learning disciples. If you're not walking with him, you're going to be heavy burdened, and if you're heavy burdened, you're going to be weary.

That burden is like the burden all of us carry until we're free from the guilt of sin, and there's no way to get out from under it apart from Jesus Christ. If you try anything else, you only end up frustrated and exhausted. That leads to the next thing.

Jesus Promises Rest For The Weary.

“And I will give you rest” (11:28b)

It's like the picture of Christian in *The Pilgrim's Progress*.¹ He wanders through a dismal landscape carrying a burden, a huge pack on his back that represents his sin. Christian meets Mr. Worldly Wiseman, who tells him he can get rid of it by following the Law. But he can't get rid of it until he meets Jesus himself. The Lord appears in the person of Good Will, who brings him to Calvary, “the place of deliverance.” The straps on the burden break, the burden falls, and it rolls into the empty tomb of Jesus. Christian is set free.

When Jesus says “I,” that reminds us that for true rest for our souls we need a person, and that person is Jesus. There's no way we can be satisfied without a personal relationship with him.

It's almost like Jesus' solution doesn't seem like a solution at all. After all, a yoke is a yoke, right? And what is his yoke, his burden?

The Rest Jesus Offers Is By Being Yoked To Him.

“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me” (11:29a)

Notice what Jesus doesn't say. He doesn't say, “Come to me, and I will remove all yokes.” Instead, he says, “learn from me,” or keep on learning. It's a journey with him and a process of becoming more like him.

See, the question is not, “*Will I wear a yoke?*” Instead, the question is, “*Who or what am I going to be yoked to?*” Jesus says we only find rest and relief when we take up his yoke.

He helps us understand what that is when he says “learn” from me, and the word he uses is *manthano*, a form of *mathetes*, “disciple.” It means to learn to be like someone, learning not so much through instruction as through experience. It's not just getting information, but learning the habits of the heart. It's not just being interested in Jesus like you scan the headlines of *People Magazine* at the supermarket checkout. Christian faith isn't just a hobby or a nice avocation or icing on the cake. It's becoming Jesus' apprentice and learning his life, making his own life your own.

The Yoke Jesus Wants Us To Wear

Next, Jesus says,

“For I am gentle and humble, and you shall find rest ... and My load is light” (11:29b-30)

So, what is the yoke Jesus wants us to wear?

He says in verse 27,

“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.” (11:27)

And later in chapter twelve, Matthew applies an Old Testament quote from the prophet Isaiah to Jesus, when he writes,

¹ John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, W.R. Owens, ed., Oxford World's Classics, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003)

“Here is my servant whom I have chosen, *the one I love, in whom I delight*” (12:18).

So, his yoke is simply this: the relationship he shares with the Father.

His yoke is being connected to the love and delight and joy and glory that’s always inflamed the Trinity. When you’re close to the heart of God, you’re close to the source of life and strength and wholeness. It’s what he’s talking about in John 17 when he says,

May they also be in us that that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me” (John 17:21).

That’s why Jesus can describe his yoke as easy, and why his burden isn’t really a burden at all. It’s not a command to go and do things, but to be in fellowship with him. The word used for easy is *chrestos*, which sounds like *christos*, Christ. It means, “useful, manageable, that which fills a need and is well fitting.” He’s saying, “My yoke fits well. It’s not going to chafe you or crush you under. It’s designed to fit you. It’s tailor-made.”

That’s why Jesus can describe his yoke as light, which means it’s not burdensome or overbearing. He says, “Don’t be afraid of my yoke. I’m not like other masters. I’m gentle and humble. The loads that crush you under their weight are from the world, from sin, and the devil, but they’re not from me.”

So what does it mean to take Jesus’ yoke of his relationship to the Father? It means to trust him as the one who best knows how to care for us. It means to put yourself under his lead, to join yourself to him. It means he shares the yoke with you, and that’s how he gives you rest.

It’s like if you were to harness our Black Lab and our Chihuahua to the same wagon. Guess who’d be doing all the work of pulling the weight? Our Black Lab would tower over the Chihuahua, and actually do all the work. When we’re yoked with Jesus, he carries the load, and we get to share in the joy and the sense of accomplishment without carrying the burden of the yoke.

Conclusion

So, Jesus calls us to serve, yes, but that flows out of a relationship with him. and the only time that becomes a burden is when we try to pull the weight ourselves. Sometimes we don’t trust that he’s gentle and good. We get scared of the yoke when we look at it, and we forget it’s designed to fit us perfectly, and that the yoke is simply the life-giving relationship he enjoys with the Father.

Jesus says, my yoke fits well, my load is light. And I’ll always be there with you to bear the burden.