

My Yoke

Matthew 11:25-30 (EHV)

²⁵ At that time, Jesus continued, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from clever and learned people and have revealed them to little children. ²⁶ Yes, Father, because this was pleasing to you. ²⁷ Everything has been entrusted to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wants to reveal him. ²⁸ "Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

"Come to me all you who are weary and burdened..." (verse 28a) Weary and burdened... Is there anyone here who can't claim that right now? Life since about mid-March has been wearisome and burdensome. For the first time in my lifetime, a pandemic has actually come to where I live. It's affected all of us with change after change. We're told to "Stay safe, stay home." Many of you had to learn how to telecommute. Some of you lost your jobs. Schools went online – whether you could keep up with that or not. Salt Lake County now has a mandatory mask requirement. Will Davis County? Some are afraid to go to work, go to the grocery store, go outside, get within 6 feet of someone else. In person worship is done differently. We haven't seen some people in months as many are still utilizing online worship only. Add on top of social injustice, protests, riots, elections, economic downturn, fires. All of this change is wearisome and burdensome. We are cracking, the stress bubbling up underneath the surface ready to explode.

"Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." (verse 28) Yes, Jesus. Please, give us that rest. Let us just be done with all of this. "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, because 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." (verses 29-30) Wait, what? Jesus, you had me at rest, but you lost me at yoke. I want rest. I want to be done. I don't want to have to keep going through all this. I want to just sit around on some tropical paradise beach somewhere, sipping a cool drink, watching the waves comes crashing in with no more obligations, no more responsibilities, no more burdens, no more stress, no more anxiety. But then you go talking about a yoke. You mean, one of those wooden things you put on an ox or something like that, something that ties that animal down to a load that you're carrying for someone else? I don't want that, Jesus. I just want to be free from all this. I want you to take the burdens, take all the things that weary me. Don't give me a yoke.

But telling Jesus that we don't want a yoke, does that mean we don't have one? Right now, we are yoked with all those wearisome and burdensome changes and disruptions in our world. There's no choice in it; they are all part of the world we live in. So, we are stuck with them, yoked to them. You try to throw off those yokes and make your life happier and easier, and you find yourself alone and yoked with selfishness or laziness, that this is now what you are pulling around to try to get you through. We are yoked to whatever we are trusting to get us through this wearisome and burdensome life.

The people of Jesus' day were similarly yoked. They relied on their own intellect and cleverness to know who the Messiah truly was. In doing so, they missed what was right in front of them. They had seen Jesus give the blind sight, made the lame walk, the deaf hear, the incurably diseased healed, the dead brought back to life, but they would not believe that he was the one who would deliver them from their sins, that he as the Son of God and God himself would carry their load. Their intellect and cleverness had them disregard John the Baptist said while pointing to Jesus, "Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" Relying on themselves, they were carrying their own load, shouldering the responsibility alone of how to get through their lives.

When any of us try to throw off one yoke in life, something that we are tied down to and having to pull to get us through, we just take up a different yoke. In the end, all of these yokes are harnessing ourselves to pull the whole load of our life and our salvation on our own. If we reject what Jesus is offering, then we are going to pull our own weight and have to carry it all. Without Jesus' yoke, we yoke ourselves with the burden of perfection, an impossible load that we cannot pull. It's impossible because as soon as we make any mistake, do one thing that is wrong, fail to do something that is good, don't manage our time perfectly, when we sit on the couch when there is one more chore to do, we have failed. Yoked with this load, it will crush us. All these yokes make us weary and burdened and give us no rest. There is only one yoke that is different.

This is why Jesus extends to us this invitation: "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, because 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." (verses 28-30) God revealed to you a different yoke, an easy yoke, a light burden because it starts with the yoke Jesus took up. Jesus was yoked with the inescapable things of our life. He yoked himself with the burden of keeping God's law

perfectly for you. He carried that whole load without any help from us. He then yoked himself with the punishment of death, the punishment that all our imperfections and sins deserved. He shouldered that burden for us. We contributed nothing to our salvation, to our forgiveness of sins. We did not supply God with anything he needed. We didn't give him a break in carrying that load or pick up any slack for him, because he left no slack that anyone else to carry. Jesus yoked himself with the burden of our total salvation and carried that whole load for us. Because he did this, you and I have a rest waiting for us in heaven.

Since that is the yoke Jesus pulled, then what is this yoke that Jesus is offering to us? Jesus's yoke is the offer to pull through this life with us, already knowing that the load of perfection has been pulled for us and the punishment of our sins has been taken away. Jesus invites us to be bound with him, to go through life with him. To be yoked with Jesus means to live with him and for him. To be yoked with Jesus is not to bear a load with him as if you have to pull some of your own weight in order to be accepted by God, living by the false saying that God helps those who help themselves. No, to be yoked with Jesus is to live for him and with him out of the gratitude of everything he has done for you instead of trying to fulfill an obligation and carry our own loads to get through life. As you live yoked with Christ, you live out and do the good works that God has prepared for you. This is your load. This is your burden. You pull it not because you have to or need to, but because you want to, because you love your God so much for him yoking himself to the law and perfection pulling it for us.

As we are yoked with Jesus and living out our lives, we are doing it connected to someone who is gentle. He doesn't just drag you around like dead weight, not caring how you are handling living this life. He does not just throw a pandemic into our lives, disrupting all of it, in order to exhaust us and make us fail in the face of so many overwhelming issues that weary and burden us. Jesus knows you through and through. He knows your limitations. He knows what you can bear up under. He has put you here and has work for you to do. As long as you are on this earth, you will have a yoke. Jesus offers you his yoke because only his is not one that relies on you doing the work on your own strength. He is there beside us, harnessed on the other side, pulling along with us. He uses his strength to pull you and me through all these wearisome and burdensome times of our lives.

He also treats you with humility because he knows what it is to be tired, to be burdened, to be wearied. He knows what it feels like to face temptations to despair and give up and just be done because he himself faced them in the flesh. He gives you just what you need to keep going. He refreshes you with what he has already done for you, that being yoked to him, every time you look over, you see the nail marks and you remember the burden he shouldered for you, the rest you have with God because he has already lived the perfection for you. You are renewed and strengthened because you are yoked with Jesus, tied to him, and thus tied to the destination that he is taking us through this life to: heaven.

There is no escaping yokes in our lives. So, the question is: what's my yoke? Is it me? Am I going to pull this whole load myself or even partially? If that's what I do, I will fail and the weight of that load will crush me. While we go through this life with so many uncontrollable things thrust upon us, Jesus offers us who are wearied and burdened a different and unique yoke. He invites us to be yoked to him, to walk with him side by side through this topsy-turvy life. He offers complete and total rest in the end because he shouldered the burden of perfection and the punishment of our imperfection. Yoked with Jesus, he is gentle and humble with us, walking side by side with us to get us through all this and get us to heaven. This is what makes his yoke easy and his burden light. This is the yoke we want: Jesus and no one else to get us through all the wearisome and burdensome days. Amen.