

# "See Jesus as Your Burden Bearer"

*Matthew 11:25-30*

Last week we were in Hebrews 11-12, looking at an image that Jesus gives us of Himself as our greatest encourager, standing at the finish line of a marathon committed to staying there until we finish. But in case you left last Sunday thinking, 'That's great but I'm nowhere near the finish line yet. What's He doing for me now where I'm at? Well, Jesus is divine and isn't limited to standing at the finish line. It's an image, a word-picture. Someday that's the word picture we need. But its not the only one in the Bible.

Jesus gives us many word pictures to describe who He is and how He ministers to us. As the Good Shepherd He guides us along life's difficult paths and meets our needs. As the Vine He nourishes us branches with the nutrients we need to spiritually grow and produce fruit. As the light He's our hope and focal point. The one I want to focus on this morning comes from Matt. 11:25-30 where Jesus calls us to be yoked to Him. Our initial thought might be an agricultural picture where we allow Jesus to carry our weight and guide us along life's paths keeping on the straight course He has planned for us. And that's a powerful image because it illustrates Jesus' willingness to be with us everyday in the routines of life.

But there's another aspect to this 'yoke' image that I believe Jesus wants us to grasp. To 'yoke' yourself to someone was to join a Rabbi and follow him; to learn His teachings and how to apply them to life. This is what Jesus' hearers would have understood Him to say. The reason why Jesus shared this image was because many people had been forcibly yoked to the heavy-burdened teachings of the religious leaders of their day.

Why 'yoke' yourself to Jesus and His teachings? Because Jesus lifts our burdens whereas everyone else's teachings only adds burdens. Jesus wants us to experience His rest not just in eternity but everyday as we work, raise families and serve God. How will that happen? How can Jesus lift our burdens?

Here in Matthew 11 Jesus has been talking about John the Baptist who was in prison at the time. Jesus praised John and challenged the crowd to believe that John was the one whom the prophets prophesied about; the Elijah who was to precede the Messiah. But to believe John was the forerunner of the Messiah meant you have to believe Jesus was the Messiah. Which many did not. So Jesus rebukes the crowds and in particular the religious leaders who claimed Jesus was a drunk and a glutton because of His associations with 'sinners'. They rejected Him in spite of the miracles He had performed. So Jesus announces judgment on the local cities of Bethsaida, Chorazin and Capernaum who witnessed His miracles and rejected Him. Judgment that will be worse than Sodom and Gomorrah because they saw the power of God in Jesus and disbelieved He could be the Messiah.

Then Jesus praises God for opening up the minds of some, in particular the uneducated and oppressed in society:

*I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. <sup>26</sup> Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.*

<sup>27</sup> "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.

But lest we think Jesus excludes some from hearing, He then extends an invitation to anyone who wants to hear and

## **Jesus Offers to Ease our Burdens** **(11:25-28)**

<sup>28</sup> "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

When Jesus says 'come to me' the emphasis is on 'Me'. He is equating Himself as all authoritative, that in Him people will know God and find truth. What burden did people need to be freed from?

### ***He alone can keep us from the burden of rule-keeping (v.28)***

'Weary' refers to your own efforts and 'burdened' refers to the loads others have put on you. The main burden the people were weary from was trying to keep all the laws that the Pharisees had made up which were supposed to prove you were righteous. 'Weary' means to lose heart. It was impossible to keep all these laws and now they felt God wouldn't accept them. And the religious leaders continually burdened them by pointing out their illnesses and their poverty were proof of God's displeasure or unacceptance.

We know this is what Jesus is referring to because later in Ch. 23 He pronounces judgment on the Pharisees saying

*The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. <sup>3</sup> So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. <sup>4</sup> They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.*

The word 'loads' here is the same Greek word for burdened in 11:28. When the Apostle Peter addressed the Jerusalem council to defend that God was saving Gentiles by the gospel of grace, though the Jews wanted these Gentile believers to be circumcised, obey the Sabbath and festivals and eat kosher:

*Acts 15:10* Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear? <sup>11</sup> No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are."

And Paul, when he warned the Galatian believers who were listening to the same kind of talk from so-called Jewish believers said,

*Gal 5:1* It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

Rabbi Jesus, however, offers to ease the burdens of people who try to please God on their own efforts by offering a different path. Not only will He take on the burden of our own sins and die for

them but in following His teaching your whole life will be freer because He walks with You. Jesus wants to be yoked to us. The word 'yoke' literally means to balance the scales. There were two kinds of yokes. The one for animals when two oxen were yoked together to share the load of carrying or plowing. The other yoke was a yoke made for a human that rested on their neck and carried, usually two buckets or pails (Water or grain). The purpose of the yoke was to relieve stress, to share the burden. So then Jesus offer to ease our burdens means

### ***We need to trust Him to find rest (v.28b)***

The rest Jesus offers is not only the relief from having to carry the burden of our sins – which He died for – and the relief of sorrows, discouragements and worry that we carry around each day. Yoking ourselves to Jesus means to trust Him to give us relief, peace and rest. Future rest obviously when this life ends but He's talking more about peace with Him now. The peace that surpasses all understandings when we release our anxieties to Him and thank Him for who He is and what He's done for us. And this is why Jesus offers to yoke Himself to us because people were so needlessly burdened by the teachings of the religious leaders whose legalistic teaching essentially said 'You're not good enough for God' over and over. Which means the Pharisees misrepresented God. Because if you claim to be offering a way to God and its not according to the Bible then you are telling people lies about God. The people wrongly believed God was a harsh task-master never pleased with them and that's why they were poor or were crippled, blind, lame, lepers, disfigured, childless, bleeding problems, etc.

But Jesus offers to ease our burdens because

### ***In Jesus we see the heart of God (vv.25-27)***

Back up to vv.25-27. Jesus thanked God because God in His grace opened the hearts of the unwise and unacceptable in society. How come God didn't open their eyes when the Pharisees taught? Because they were lying about God. God wanted to open people's hearts that's why He sent Jesus. 'God so loved the world'. Jesus tells the truth about God. Yet many people have sat in churches where God has been misre-presented. *'The God of the Old testament is a God of anger and judgment but the God of the New Testament is a God of love. That's why we only follow the New Testament.'* So there must be two gods then? No. When Jesus taught about God's love and grace what part of the Bible did He use? The Old Testament – that's all he had. Listen to these two passages from the Law about the character of God:

*Ex. 33:12 Moses said to the LORD, "You have been telling me, 'Lead these people,' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. You have said, 'I know you by name and you have found favor with me.'<sup>13</sup> If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you. Remember that this nation is your people."* *<sup>14</sup> The LORD replied, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."*

When God is pleased with His people He offers them rest. Then Moses asks to see God's glory and God gives Moses a glimpse of His glory and as He passes by Moses He tells Moses what He's like,

*Ex. 34:6 And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness,<sup>7</sup> maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation."*

God is slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness. By the way, isn't this one of those angry sections in the Old Testament, when God threatened to remove Israel because of the Golden Calf? Yup, but He relents because He is patient and faithful to his Word. So to yoke with Jesus is to learn the heart of God who wants to give us rest. Jesus is making Old Testament allusions here and He's going to quote an Old Testament verse in v.29.

*<sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."*

Jesus is offering people a choice. He's a Rabbi calling people to follow Him. Not make a decision about Him, but to follow Him. It's a lifetime choice. So

## **Jesus Calls us to Choose to Yoke with Him** **(11:29-30)**

And even though 'yoke' means to balance the scales, its not a fair matching because Jesus will take it all on Himself and won't jerk us around because He's much stronger. He could but He doesn't. To yoke yourself to a Rabbi meant to

### ***Walk with Him daily to learn ... (v.29a)***

There was a saying in Jesus' day that one should walk so close to his rabbi that he should be covered in his dust. Seeing groups of disciples walking behind their Rabbi was a common sight in Jesus' day. To be a disciple meant to walk with your teacher and learn from Him. Listen to His teaching and how He applied it in their day-to-day travels and interactions with people. What is it Jesus wants us to learn from Him? It's not just knowledge but how to live by faith in God. Unlike the harsh, burden loading Pharisaic teaching Jesus wants us to walk with Him daily and learn

### ***... How to become like Him (v.29b)***

*Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart,*

"For" gives us the reason why we should yoke ourselves to Jesus and listen to Him every day. To be like Him, more gentle and humble. We are surrounded by harshness right now. Covid, race, sexual orientation are issues that people just can't discuss without anger and judgmental attitudes. The world needs to see grace and we as Jesus' disciples need to be learning from Jesus on how to be more kind and compassionate. The word 'gentle' is the same word as meek in the Sermon on the Mount. The beatitudes in Matt 5:3-12 are blessings to those who are willing to be like Jesus, the way God always intended His Law to teach people. If God and Jesus are slow to anger, compassionate and gracious so are we to display that to the world so they know who God and Jesus are. Let's not misrepresent God and Jesus ourselves by treating people harshly because we don't agree with their opinions.

The word 'humble' refers to lowly status. It's the same word Mary used when she sang her song of praise to God for being the mother of Jesus. She sang:

*Luke 1:52 He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. <sup>53</sup> He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.*

And elsewhere when James tells us to

*4:10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.*

The emphasis here is on position. Jesus never used His status as God's Son to lord it over people. He came down. He became one of us. He was earthly poor so He could relate to the lowly and despised in the world. This is what it means to learn from Him to become like Him, we seek to serve anyone and everyone not looking down on anyone.

*29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for 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."*

Here Jesus quotes part of Jer. 6:16 when Jeremiah, speaking for God said,

<sup>16</sup> This is what the LORD says:

*"Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls. But you said 'We will not walk in it' "*

What Jesus was saying was nothing new. He was peeling back the layers of untruth and rules so that people could see that they've been lied to. *'Are all these rules that the Pharisees want you to keep making you happy and giving you rest?'* No. Jesus invites us to yoke ourselves to Him to learn how to be like Him

### ***So we will experience eternal satisfaction (vv.29c-30)***

The idea of biblical rest is to not just stop working for a day, it's the day when your burdens are lifted. When you stop worrying about your work one day a week (it won't go away), when you gather with God's people to learn together what it means to become like Him and encourage one another by sharing burdens. And finding joy and satisfaction that you've got peace with God and you know He's in control of your life. The yoke of Jesus was open arms. The yoke of the Pharisees was finger pointing.

What kind of disciple are we? Whose yoke have we attached ourselves too? The finger pointers or the forgivers? The accusers or the accepters? When we choose to follow Jesus and seek to learn from Him every day we will stop pointing fingers less and welcoming people with open arms more, becoming gentle and humble.

And seeking to lift each other's burdens, like Jesus. Because what's the very next thing that happens in the text? Ch. 12:1-14, the Pharisees point their fingers at Jesus' disciples and say 'You're breaking the law by picking grains of wheat in your hands.' And then when they brought a man with a shrivelled hand and challenged Jesus whether it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not, Jesus points out that the Sabbath is a day for lifting burdens. If your sheep falls into a ditch on a Sabbath wont you get it out? How much more valuable is a human. And then he heals the man. The disciples were burdened by temporary hunger. Jesus allowed them to eat and lifted their burden. The man with a shrivelled hand was not allowed to worship. So Jesus lifted His burden freeing Him to worship.

So we are to walk with Jesus daily, learning from Him so that we start to look like Him as we 'collect His dust'. In doing so we find peace with God and eternal joy so that now we can

### ***Help others experience it too (12:1-14)***

People will know we hang around Jesus a lot by how we strive to lift one another's burdens, through encouraging them. That's the picture we had of Jesus last week, at the finish line, and surprise, surprise, that's the picture we have of Jesus here. Our encourager. Our burden lifter. And we're to be like Him and do the same.

That's why we come together on our Sabbath, to help lift one another's burdens by encouraging them with your presence and friendliness. By listening to them, praying for them, sharing Scripture with them and following up with them during the week. But we won't be like Jesus if we don't talk to people while we're here. If we come without interacting with people. If we busy ourselves with looking like we're doing ministry but we're really only avoiding people.

Jesus warned us not to only listen to His words but to put them into practice (Matt. 7:24). And James echoed Jesus' words when He said if we only listen to the Word and don't do what it says we deceive ourselves. Let's be encouraged today from Jesus' words and do what Jesus says by refreshing someone else today. Before we even leave this place. Let's make sure we got a little dusty today because we were following our Master closely.

*Father, I thank you for your grace and mercy to us. Each morning you wonderfully offer us new mercies and grace to handle the burdens of today. Jesus waits every day with open arms inviting us to yoke with Him so that He gives us relief and rest from our worries, pain and concern. And Lord, you then expect us to be Jesus to those around us. Forgive us Father when we only listen to your Word and not do what it says. When we're accusing more than we are accepting. When we've added to others burdens they don't need to carry instead of relieving them. Help us to find rest together this very day as we allow Jesus' gentle yoke to bring relief and joy to our lives.*

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please contact us  
at [olivet@rideau.net](mailto:olivet@rideau.net)