

The Lord's Yoke

Matthew 11: 16-19, 25-30.

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I can divide what I have to say under four headings. First of all, a few words about the exceeding grace and beauty of *the One who speaks* these matchless words, then the *invitation* that He issues; the *instructions* He gives, and lastly the *assurance* that He offers.

The Speaker we all know. "At that time Jesus answered and said" He was named Jesus before He came on the scene because, as the angel said, "He shall save His people from their sins." His miraculous birth took place that the word of the prophet might be fulfilled, "They shall call His name Emmanuel," which being interpreted is, God with us." It is indeed a marvellous thing that God should come amongst us thus; that there should appear a Man — a proper, a genuine, a perfect Man — and yet that Man should be Emmanuel.

When we come to this eleventh chapter we find Him accepting the fact of His rejection. There are no plaudits from the people; the multitude is not moved in His favour; there is a singular lack of appreciation both of Himself and of everything He brought. The same spirit had been manifested in regard to His forerunner, John the Baptist. He was the one who "mourned" unto them, for he had about him that severity of aspect that had marked Elijah. He was austere and separate and in his ministry continually put his finger upon the weakest spots in the lives of his hearers. They paid no real attention to him and did not "lament." Then came the blessed Lord Jesus Christ with tidings of grace. He mixed with men, He went to their feasts, He wrought miraculously in grace on their behalf. John did no miracle, you remember, though he said the most searching things, for his ministry was pungent to the last degree. Jesus in word and in deed was overflowing with grace.

The woman had said, "If I may but touch His garment, I shall be whole." She was right, for Jesus was like a vessel full to the brim with water and the least touch will cause it to overflow. She was one of the few exceptions; the great mass saw nothing desirable in Him, and would not "dance" to His "piping." Yet He was "God with us."

Just at that time, when we might have expected Him to assert Himself and force men to pay Him attention, Jesus looked up to the Father as the Lord of heaven and earth and accepted this rejection as from His hands. The Pharisees and scribes were the wise and prudent folk who saw nothing in Him save a new teacher of religion who was both unauthorized and objectionable. The "babes" were the people of a simple and child-like spirit, uninstructed according to human standards, yet with opened eyes, seeing something of what the Father was making known. All this Jesus accepted in the fullest way. Manhood in perfection is seen in Him — lowliness of mind, and absolute subjection to the Father's will.

This is the more wonderful as at the same moment He spoke of all things being delivered into His hands of the Father. Most wonderful words! Here stood the One who had a whole universe of glory at His finger-tips. Ten thousand times ten thousand worlds were His, and ten thousand thousand more. All things came from His hands in creation at the outset. Now He is on earth that He may accomplish redemption, and all things are delivered to Him of the Father. He it is Who becomes the Revealer of the Father.

The word, "knoweth," which the Lord used twice in verse 27 is a very strong one, meaning to know thoroughly. But though the Father and the Son cannot be thoroughly known by creature minds, the Son is the Revealer of the Father. He came forth for that very purpose, and has accomplished it to perfection.

Two revelations are mentioned, in verses 25 and 27, and I think we can differentiate between them. There is the revelation made by the Father to the babes, and also the revelation of the Father made by the Son on earth. This latter is an objective revelation, inasmuch as the Son is before us as the Object in whom the Father is made known. The former is a subjective revelation, the things of God being made effective in those who are the subjects of the Father's work. The taking of a photograph may illustrate the difference. The sitter is the object and his face is accurately revealed if the lens is a good one. But so long as the lens only reveals the sitter's face on the screen of ground glass there is no subjective revelation: no picture is captured, nothing is retained. Put in a sensitized plate, make the suitable exposure, and under proper chemical treatment the subjective revelation is made.

That is only an imperfect illustration, but it may help us to see that only in and through the Son can the Father be known; and also that only by the Father's work do the babes receive the revelation into their hearts. The hearts of the scribes and Pharisees were hard and unresponsive, the babes possessed the humble, simple, child-like spirit that made them ready to receive. All this was the Father's will and the Father's work, and in it Jesus delighted, having not one thought apart from the Father's will. He rendered thanks to the Father in it all.

Now this is the One who issues *the invitation*, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." We will consider these choice words in the light of the situation that existed at the moment they were uttered, and in so doing we shall not for one instant rob them of their gospel application today. Who were these labouring and heavy laden people whom the Lord addressed? He spoke in the midst of a people who for many generations had been under the law of Moses. They knew it well, for as James said in the council, "Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day." Moreover the scribes and Pharisees bound the law as a heavy burden upon men's shoulders, while they themselves did not touch it with one of their fingers.

The godless and indifferent in Israel paid but lip service to the law; the God-fearing ones made a conscientious attempt to keep it. The "babes" of whom the Lord spoke were doubtless just these simple souls who listened to the holy law of God, applied it to themselves, and consequently became burdened. They laboured to keep the law, and were constantly convicted of failure. It was to just these that the Lord Jesus opened wide the arms of His invitation, bidding them come to Him that He might give them rest. There was no rest in the law nor in themselves. There was rest in Himself and in the work He was about to accomplish. It is just the same for us today.

Then notice *the instruction* He gave in saying, "Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me." Now in that council in Jerusalem Peter spoke of the law as "a yoke . . . which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear." This was a very graphic figure. Many years ago I remember seeing the huge South African wagons drawn by twelve or even sixteen oxen yoked in pairs. They were magnificent beasts with mighty horns, but they seemed to groan as they lumbered forward with heads pressed down by the yoke. They looked desperately uncomfortable, but not more so than many a sinner borne down in conscience under the holy law of God.

In these circumstances how welcome is the Lord's gracious invitation that we should come to Him! But we must not dissociate it from His instruction that we take His yoke upon us; that is, that we

wholly and unreservedly bow to His supreme authority. A moment must come in the history of each of us when we realize and acknowledge that He is our Lord and when we whole-heartedly accept His control. Has that moment come with each one of us here?

Taking His yoke upon us we may learn of Him. Sometimes we hear Christians both old and young bemoaning themselves as to the slowness with which they learn. Why have I learned so little of Christ? These words of our Lord may discover the reason to us. He said, "Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me," and we cannot reverse the order of the two parts of the sentence. He did not say — learn of Me, and ultimately you may take My yoke upon you. The taking of His yoke is the preliminary to the learning of Him. Even in earthly matters things work in that way. Except a lad submits to the rule of his master he is not likely to learn anything from him. Our hearts must be bowed in the presence of Jesus as our Lord, for the taking of His yoke is the preliminary to learning of Him. Our Lord has no use for triflers.

Have we all of us known a moment when, alone and in His presence, our souls have bowed before Him saying, "Lord Jesus, Thou hast an absolute right to me? I am a creature of Thy hand, and not only that, I have been redeemed as the fruit of the travail of Thy soul. Let me be loyally Thine, now and for ever." I am not coming to my last point for a moment yet, for I am going to say that even had His yoke been as heavy as the yoke of the law, it would have still been only right that we should wear it on our necks. Only as we do wear it do we learn of Him, the meek One and lowly in heart.

The exact opposite of the meek man is the self-assertive man, and the opposite of the one who is lowly in heart is the one who is highminded. We were all of us highminded and self-assertive according to nature, and these features were specially prominent in Saul of Tarsus, for looking back he writes of himself as "a blasphemer and persecutor, and an insolent, overbearing man" (1 Tim. 1: 13. N. Trans.). In the same passage he called himself "the chief of sinners." He was a born leader, and he did not scruple to use his powers to assert himself. Jesus was Emmanuel — God with us — yet He did such a thing never, NEVER. God dwelt among us in Manhood, and so we see Manhood in its own proper perfection, for He was meek and lowly in heart.

The prophet had said that when the King came He should be meek and having salvation. It is not the self-assertive man who brings salvation, but the meek One; and in keeping with this we are told in Heb. 5 that the Son, who learned obedience by the things He suffered, having been perfected, became the Author of eternal salvation to all those who obey Him. King George V., when a young man, did a full naval course from a midshipman upwards, and thus learned naval obedience. The Son had ever commanded obedience from His creatures; now having become Man, He learns obedience, though ever the perfect One. We obey the One who was obedient unto the death of the cross, and find salvation in Him. It is the yoke of the obedient One, meek and lowly in heart, that we take upon us.

The first man, Adam, travelled on the up line of self-assertion. A crash is the inevitable outcome. for there are accidents on that line! We all have travelled on it too. There is only One who has travelled on the down line from the outset, and in perfection. He is now gone up into the heights far above all others. His yoke it is that we are to take upon us.

Once more I must appeal to you young Christians. Have you ever had a moment in your history when quietly and on bended knee you have spoken to your Lord and have told Him that you are absolutely His through grace from that moment to the days of eternity? Some of us need a moment like that. If I had not had such a moment in my young days I could not speak to you thus — though I have to confess how very feebly I have followed it up through life. If you have never yet had such a moment, see that you have it to-day. It will make a big difference in your life, and set you free from other yokes.

The yoke of the world still rests upon too many of us. The yoke of worldly customs still lies heavy upon this one; the yoke of fashion upon that one. But the ways of the world are not to have any authority with me. The word of my Lord is the only authority that is to command my heart. If He says it, then I am to gladly obey. I do not regulate my thinkings, religious or otherwise, by what even the scientists say. If all the scientists of earth, multiplied ten thousand times, contradict my Lord, I believe my Lord and not the scientists.

Why is it that we so often hang back and do not heartily take His yoke upon us? Often, I suppose, because we have a feeling that He will tell us to do something that we do not wish to do. He may indeed direct you to many things that run counter to the desires of the flesh and the ways of the world, but never counter to that new nature which is yours as newly created in Christ Jesus. Upon that fact is based *the assurance* that He offers in the last verse of the chapter — "My yoke is easy, and My burden is light." He will never lead you into any way that runs counter to the desires of that new nature which is yours; and more and more, as you walk in His ways, you will find how happy and delightful they are. You will come to love them, and so find His yoke and His burden easy and light.

Taking His yoke upon us we are yielded up to Him, and then can proceed to yield our members as instruments of righteousness unto God, as Romans 6: 13 puts it. Instead of doing our own wills, which would only be sin, we set out to do His will, and in that there is rest. The One whose yoke is upon us was in the perfect rest of subjection to the Father's will. We may know that rest, then our kickings against circumstances, our fretful irritations will be over, the questionings, the strivings, the anxious labourings will cease. Let us make that whole-hearted committal of ourselves to Him, which will ensure it.

Did you ever read that story of Carey, the missionary of a century ago? After long absence he came back to this country from India, a rather famous man. Someone, who was really an opponent, wishing to humiliate him, seized a very public occasion to say to him in loud tones something like this, "Let me see Mr. Carey, before you went to India you were a shoe-maker, were you not?" Carey at once replied with a completely unruffled spirit, "Oh! no. I could not say I was a shoe-maker. I was only a cobbler!" Under the yoke of Christ, he had learned something of the lowly mind.

That incident furnishes us with an example of a man who found a sufficiency in Christ and was content with lowly things. What trouble comes into our lives when we aspire to high things, especially when we do it in connection with Christian things. It is when we have the yoke of the meek and lowly One upon us, and we are learning of Him, that we have rest.

If the result of our meeting is that our hearts come more definitely and firmly under His gracious yoke, we shall indeed be greatly blessed.