

My Yoke is Easy Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

Jesus had presented all the evidence that he was God's Christ and Israel's Messiah. John the Baptist had introduced him as King to the nation. Jesus had revealed His person, principles, and power. It was now up to the leaders of the nation to make their decision. But instead of receiving their King, they began to rebel against Him. But first they rejected His prophet. John the Baptist was in prison because he had courageously denounced the adulterous marriage of Herod Antipas and Herodias (Luke 3:19–20). It seems that the Jewish leaders would have opposed Herod and sought to free John, but they did nothing. Their attitude toward John reflected their feeling toward Jesus, for John had pointed to Jesus and honored Him.

The common people held John in high regard (Matt. 21:26), and many of them had repented and been baptized by John. But the leaders refused to honor John, and this proved their unbelief and hardness of heart. Instead of being childlike and humbling themselves, the leaders were childish and stubborn, like children pouting because they could not have their way. The parable in Matthew 11:16–19 revealed the spiritual condition of the leaders, and unfortunately it also reveals the hearts of unbelievers today.

Jesus was saddened by their disbelief and the stubbornness of human nature. To him people seemed to be like children playing in the village square. One group said to the other: "Come on and let's play at weddings," and the others said, "We don't feel like being happy today." Then the first group said, "All right; come on and let's play at funerals," and the others said, "We don't feel like being sad today." They were what the Scots call *contrary*. No matter what was suggested, they did not want to do it; and no matter what was offered, they found a fault in it.

John came, living in the desert, fasting and despising food, isolated from the society of people; and they said of him, “The man is crazy to cut himself off from human society and human pleasures like that.” Jesus came, mixing with all kinds of people, sharing in their sorrows and their joys, companying with them in their times of joy; and they said of him, “He is a socialite; he is a party-goer; he is the friend of outsiders with whom no decent person would have anything to do.” They called John’s simplicity madness; and they called Jesus’ friendliness slackness of morals. They found a ground of criticism either way.

The plain fact is that when people do not want to listen to the truth, they will find an excuse for not listening. They do not even try to be consistent in their criticisms; they will criticize the same person, and the same institution, from opposite grounds. If people are determined to make no response they will remain stubbornly unresponsive no matter what invitation is made to them. Grown men and women can be very like spoiled children who refuse to play no matter what the game is.

Then comes Jesus’ final sentence in this section: “Wisdom is shown to be right by her deeds.” The ultimate verdict lies not with the cantankerous and perverse critics but with events. The Jews might criticize John for his lonely isolation, but John had moved men’s hearts to God as they had not been moved for centuries; the Jews might criticize Jesus for mixing too much in ordinary life and with ordinary people, but in him people were finding a new life and a new goodness and a new power to live as they ought and a new access to God.

It would be well if we were to stop judging people and churches by our own prejudices; and if we were to begin to give thanks for any person and any church who can bring people nearer to God, even if their methods are not the methods which suit us.

Jesus issued a great call to those who in faith would turn to Him. Jesus had previously condemned that generation for their childish reactions (vv. 16-19). Here He declared that true discipleship can be enjoyed only by those who come to Him in childlike faith. There is a vast difference between the spoiled children who find fault with every suggestion and the submissive infants/children of verse 25. The Father reveals Himself to the Son, and the Son reveals Himself and the Father to those who are willing to come to the Son in faith. These verses indicate both the sovereignty of the Father and the responsibility of the sinner. Three commands summarize this invitation.

God in His good pleasure (cf. Eph. 1:5) had hidden the great mysteries of His wise dealings from the wise and learned the leaders of that day; but had revealed them to little children. Therefore Jesus issued a call to all . . . who are weary, “those tired from hard toil;” and burdened, “those loaded down”; to come to Him. Jesus spoke to people desperately trying to find God and desperately trying to be good, who were finding the tasks impossible and who were driven to weariness and to despair.

He says, “Come unto me all you who are exhausted.” His invitation is to those who are exhausted with the search for the truth. “*Come.*” The Pharisees all said “Do!” and tried to make the people follow Moses and the traditions. But true salvation is found only in a Person, Jesus Christ. To come to Him means to trust Him. This invitation is open to those who are exhausted and burdened down. That is exactly how the people felt under the yoke of pharisaical legalism (Matt. 23:4; Acts 15:10).

Even the Rabbis saw this. There is a parable of just how binding and constricting and burdensome and impossible the demands of the Law could be. “There was a poor widow in my neighborhood who had two daughters and a field. When she began to plough, Moses (i.e. the Law of Moses) said, ‘You must not

plough with an ox and a donkey together.’ When she began to sow, he said, ‘You must not sow your field with mingled seed.’ When she began to reap and to make stacks of corn, he said, ‘When you reap your harvest in your field, and have forgotten a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it’ (Deuteronomy 24:19), and ‘you shall not reap your field to its very border’ (Leviticus 19:9). She began to thresh, and he said, ‘Give me the heave-offering, and the first and second tithe.’ She accepted the ordinance and gave them all to him. What did the poor woman then do? She sold her field, and bought two sheep, to clothe herself from their fleece, and to have profit from their young. When they bore their young, Aaron (i.e. the demands of the priesthood) came and said, ‘Give me the first-born.’ So she accepted the decision, and gave them to him. When the shearing time came, and she sheared them, Aaron came and said, ‘Give me the first of the fleece of the sheep’ (Deuteronomy 18:4). Then she thought: ‘I cannot stand up against this man. I will slaughter the sheep and eat them.’ Then Aaron came and said, ‘Give me the shoulder and the two cheeks and the stomach’ (Deuteronomy 18:3). Then she said, ‘Even when I have killed them I am not safe from you. Behold they shall be *devoted*.’ Then Aaron said, ‘In that case they belong entirely to me’ (Numbers 18:14). He took them and went away and left her weeping with her two daughters.” The story is a parable of the continuous demands that the Law made upon men in every action and activity of life. These demands were indeed a burden.

“*Take*.” This is a deeper experience. When we come to Christ by faith, He gives us rest. When we take His yoke; yoke ourselves to Jesus; and learn, we find rest, that deeper rest of surrender and obedience. The first is “peace with God” (Rom. 5:1); the second is “the peace of God” (Phil. 4:6–8). To “take a yoke” in that day meant to become a disciple. When we submit to Christ, we are yoked to Him. His yoke is “well-fitting”; He has just the yoke that is tailor-made for our lives and needs. The burden of doing His will is not a heavy one (1 John 5:3).

Jesus invites us to take his yoke upon our shoulders. The Jews used the phrase *the yoke* for *entering into submission to*. They spoke of the yoke of the Law, the yoke of the commandments, the yoke of the Kingdom, the yoke of God. But Jesus said his yoke is *easy, well-fitting*. In Palestine ox-yokes were made of wood; the ox was brought, and the measurements were taken. The yoke was then roughed out, and the ox was brought back to have the yoke tried on. The yoke was carefully adjusted, so that it would fit well, and not harm the neck of the animal. The yoke was tailor-made to fit the ox.

There is a legend that Jesus made the best ox-yokes in all Galilee, and that from all over the country men came to him to buy the best yokes that skill could make. In those days, as now, shops had their signs above the door; and it has been suggested that the sign above the door of the carpenter's shop in Nazareth may well have been: "My yokes are easy, they fit well." Now he says to his disciples and us, "My yoke fits well." "The life I give you is not a burden to harm you; your task is made to measure to fit you." Whatever God sends us is made to fit our needs and our abilities exactly.

Jesus says, "My burden is light." Our tasks are given to us in love and we are to carry our burden in love. Our burden is to love God and to love our fellow humans. There is an old story which tells how a man came upon a little boy carrying a still smaller boy, who was lame, upon his back. "That's a heavy burden for you to carry," said the man. "That's no' a burden," came the answer. "That's my little brother." The burden which is given in love and carried in love is always light.¹

To learn from Him is to be His disciple. People can trade their heavy, tiring burdens for His yoke and burden, which by contrast are easy and light. To serve

¹ Barclay, William, lecturer in the University of Glasgow (Hrsg.): *The Gospel of Matthew : Volume 2*. Philadelphia : The Westminster Press, 2000, c1975 (The Daily Study Bible, Rev. Ed), S. 9

Him is no burden, for He, in contrast with those who reject Him, is gentle and humble.² To “*Learn*” is to step into a *process*. As we learn more about Him, we find a deeper peace, because we trust Him more. Life is simplified and unified around the person of Christ. This invitation is for “all”—not just the people of Israel (Matt. 10:5–6).³

Let us not be like the children in Jesus’ first parable. No matter how God invites His people to respond, they pout and mutter, “I don’t wanna’ play.” They didn’t like John—he was too strict—and they didn’t like Jesus—He’s too friendly with sinners. How foolish to ignore a message from God—and then blame the messenger!

Let us be the little children that accept God in simple faith. Jesus gives us rest: calm, comfort and refreshment. Being yoked to Christ means to rely on Him; to give Him our burdens; and to accept the necessity of walking with Him, side by side.⁴

²Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:44

³Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Mt 10:24

⁴Richards, Lawrence O.: *The Bible Readers Companion*. electronic ed. Wheaton : Victor Books, 1991; Published in electronic form by Logos Research Systems, 1996, S. 613