

Taking the Yoke Meditation on Matthew 11:25-30

Matthew 11:25-30

²⁵ At that time Jesus said, 'I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; ²⁶ yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. ²⁷ All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

²⁸ 'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 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.'

Galatians 3:10-14

¹⁰ For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the things written in the book of the law.' ¹¹ Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law; for 'The one who is righteous will live by faith.' ¹² But the law does not rest on faith; on the contrary, 'Whoever does the works of the law will live by them.' ¹³ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree'— ¹⁴ in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Video: That's My King Dr S.M. Lockridge <https://youtu.be/yzqTFNfeDnE>

Intro

That's a hard act to follow! What a preacher! But what an amazing description of an indescribable God! The preacher in the video, Dr Lockridge, used over 100 descriptions of Jesus in his original sermon. He starts to paint a picture of what Jesus is like. He starts to form an idea of the One who we as Christ's disciples are following. And that's the focus of our worship series right now: 'the Path of the Disciple: Learning to Grow'.

As disciples we have heard Christ's call, we are learning from him, we are following his leading, and as we grow we are learning to do what he does and be like he is.

Now in our Bible passage today we come across one of Jesus' teachings. Matthew 11:28-30:

²⁸ 'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 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.'

At first this passage is simple and comforting. We all know what it feels like to be weary, and we all know what rest is. But what is a yoke? And what does a yoke have to do with resting?

Well, here's a sneak preview: it's to do with rules, laws and freedom!

Rules in sport

Here's a question for you: Who here likes to play sport? I wonder if there are any football fans in the room? But is there anyone here who could explain the off-side rule for me? It's a little complicated to explain...

Now, talking of obscure rules, who here knows which sport the LBW rule belongs to?
(Answer: the Leg Before Wicket rule in cricket)

And are there any chess players here? I know there are lots of rules in chess. And the rules are taken so seriously that they are even called the *laws* of chess!

We live in a world of rules and laws. Rules mean we can play a game fairly and it's clear who the winner is. Laws help people to live together, to give order, to keep us safe.

God's Law

In the history of God's people, there were also laws. God gave Adam and Eve one instruction: don't eat from that one tree! Later, God gave Moses and the Israelites Ten Commandments. Quite quickly those ten got expanded to include lots more detailed do's and don't's: about work and rest, about worship and offerings, about cleanliness and circumcision, about food and festivals, about money and property...

These laws spelled out what it meant for the Israelites to be a holy people of a holy God.

The Jewish religious leaders would instruct the people on how to follow the Law. Each Jewish religious teacher would have their own interpretations of the laws. And so over the centuries, more and more details were added. And the people were obliged to keep every single aspect of the Law. If they got one thing wrong, they had broken the Law and had to make amends. It was a heavy burden.

Yoke

Can you imagine having to learn all the rules of football, all the rules of cricket, all the laws of chess, plus a hundred other games, and keeping them all, all of the time? It would be an impossible task.

It was equally impossible for the people of Israel to keep all the Law. In Judaism, the word 'yoke' was often used to refer to the law. A yoke is a wooden farming tool, fitted on oxen so they can pull heavy loads. And so 'yoke' became an apt metaphor for the law and the religious legalism they lived under.

The Yoke of the Law had become difficult, heavy, tiresome, a burden. But that was life. That was their very identity as a holy, chosen people.

Are you carrying a heavy yoke?

Dear sisters and brothers, I don't know if you can relate to this feeling? Do you feel like you are carrying a heavy yoke?

I think sometimes we can create heavy yokes for ourselves. We can create rules and expectations for ourselves. And we can come to believe that our identity and our value are linked to our ability to keep these unspoken rules.

"I have to do this to be a good sister."

"I have to behave in this way, otherwise my friends won't like me."

I know from personal experience that it can be absolutely exhausting to always be trying so hard to do the right thing, and then one mistake can feel like your world is ending.

We all at points in our lives put pressure on ourselves . To be the reliable one. To be the funny one. To be the sensible one. To be the clever one. To be the sporty one. To be the witty one. To be the brave one. To be the unshakable one.

And at some point it gets too much. It becomes a burden. Because that's not who we really are.

And when we apply this thinking to our relationship with God ("If I don't behave in a certain way, or if I don't believe X,Y or Z, God won't really love me."), when we think like this, our Christian life becomes a burden and we lose the spark.

Jesus offers rest

And then we encounter Jesus, a Jewish religious teacher, who offers relief to those who are carrying heavy burdens. Jesus offers rest to those who are weary and tired. No more struggling under the weight of expectations. No more struggling to reach impossibly high standards. No more battling to achieve perfection. No more fear of failure. No more shame of exposure.

Jesus came to make clear to us that the secrets of God's kingdom do not depend on us being clever, or religious, or experienced, or approved, or even trying hard enough. No, God's gracious will is for the simple, humble ones to know him. Sinners, tax-collectors, children; the sick who are searching for a doctor; the lost who are searching for a saviour.

Jesus' yoke is easy. Jesus' explanation of how to be a holy people of a holy God is simple: we are to love God and love one another. The time of detailed micro-laws is over. The time of freedom is here. Galatians 5:1: *For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.*

In God's kingdom, we are offered freedom from having to perform. We are offered freedom from having to follow all the rules. In God's kingdom, the yoke is easy and the burden is light.

Did you notice something about the yoke? It's still there! The yoke of God's Law wasn't broken, but Jesus took the heavy load off us. Jesus came to teach us about God, and he also

came to open up the way to God, by perfectly fulfilling the law so that we don't have to. Jesus was the Great High Priest as defined in the Law, and Jesus was the sacrificial lamb as required by the Law.

Being a disciple of Christ is not being totally free of all responsibility. We live under the law of love.

We've already heard the many words of Dr Lockridge who tried to describe the indescribable nature of Jesus. Remember those descriptions. Because this is the same Jesus who says to us:

Come to me, all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.

So come to Jesus with your worries, your expectations, your standards, your failures, your track-record, your hopes, yours deadlines, your anxieties, your heartaches, your muscle aches, your problems, your reputation. Come heavy, come worn out and worn down, come fed up, come exhausted. Come as you are, and he will give you rest.

Jesus says: **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.**

This rest comforts the soul. This rest softens the heart. This rest heals the hurt. This rest eases the suffering. This rest offers companionship with Jesus. This rest moves us forward step by step. This rest is genuine, and safe, and dynamic.

For, as Jesus says: my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

We're not dozing off here. We're not awarded days off for hard work. This is restful living, restful working. This is deep peace in the midst of busy life. This is the life of the disciple. Taking the yoke means we are willing to learn to grow.

Come, disciples of Christ. Bring your burdens, take up his yoke, and find rest with Jesus.

Amen