

“Rest for the Weary”—Matthew 11:28-30

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Rest for the Weary”, is Matthew 11:28-30 → Jesus says: *Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

*Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord* (cf. 1Timothy 1:2). Amen.

Of all the promises of the Bible, these words of Jesus in our text are amongst the favorite for many Christians. Why? It could be a feeling that life, with its constant demands and responsibilities, can leave you feeling weary much of the time. The pressure to follow work protocols and procedures; the emotional and mental stress which accompanies striving to please others in various relationships; the feelings of frustration when you work so hard, striving to meet other people’s (or your own) expectations and fail; and experiencing a constant burden of guilt when you fall into sin, failing to keep God’s Laws perfectly. The desire for some kind of relief in the midst of your wearisome life truly weighs heavy upon your mind and spirit, many times leaving you with

the feeling that there is no rest for the weary.

One can easily see how Jesus' words in verse 28 of our text—*come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, **and I will give you rest***—are so appealing while living under the load of a crushed spirit. Since you and every other human being were created to live in a peaceful relationship with God, Jesus came to give you a specific kind of *rest*. He refers to it as *rest for your souls* which *you will find* only in Him (verse 29).

The people to whom Jesus was talking knew the impact of His promise in light of their *labor*. The system of Judaism under which they lived demanded strict adherence to God's Law **and** the interpretation of it according to *the scribes and the Pharisees*. Jesus told His disciples to respect these religious leaders and their teaching as the stewards of the written Old Testament Scriptures (cf. Matthew 23:2-3). However, He also condemned their hypocrisy, saying in Matthew 23:4 → *They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger*. They constantly watched people's actions, pointing out their failures to live according to their picky interpretations of God's Law (cf. Matthew 12:1-14; Luke 13:10-17; John 5:1-11), referred to as the oral tradition. We might perceive them in our day as "spiritual micro managers."

The people's *labor* at trying to keep all the minute details of God's Law as interpreted by these religious leaders left them *heavy laden*

indeed. When you work so hard trying to do the impossible you will be *heavy laden*, always coming up as a failure. When this happens in connection with your obedience to God's Law (let alone some picky interpretation of it) you always come up seeing your sin. You are *heavy laden* in guilt with eternal consequences for your soul. It is easy to see how satan strives to get a foothold on you under such helplessness, tempting you into sin to lead you away from Jesus, the only One Who can give you *rest for your soul*.

How do you receive *rest for your souls* in this life of faith in God according to verse 29 of our text? Jesus says: *Take My yoke upon you . . . Wait! Take His **yoke** upon us? Isn't a yoke a heavy wooden bar or frame placed on the necks of animals in order to subdue them into working together at your direction? Or isn't it a frame fitted to a person's shoulders to carry a heavy load in two equal proportions? How can taking Jesus' yoke upon you give you *rest for your souls*? Sounds like more work and heavy burden, let alone being forced into doing it.*

Whenever you have a team of animals yoked together there will always be one who is dominant. This animal will take the best feed, be the first one to drink at a watering space, and dominate the other animal by force. Whatever direction it goes, it forces the other animal to go with it.

However, notice what Jesus says about His *yoke* in our text: *Take My*

*yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.* Jesus did not come into this world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through *Him* (cf. John 3:17). He functioned as a servant (cf. John 13:1-17); He did not retaliate when sinned against (cf. 1 Peter 2:21-23); He came as God's suffering Servant (cf. Isaiah 52:12-53), humbling *Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross* (cf. Philippians 2:5-9). His gentleness was pictured by entering Jerusalem where He bore that cross for your sin, *humble, and mounted on a donkey . . . a beast of burden* (cf. Matthew 21:5).

His *lowly . . . heart* and gentleness was revealed by His compassion upon people, whose faith was like a *bruised plant and a faintly burning wick* (cf. Isaiah 42:3), crushed in spirit, *heavy laden* under their sin. Instead of ignoring them like a worthless plant to be thrown out, or condemning them like a smoldering wick which needs to be snuffed out, He provided the means to fan their spark of faith back into flame and bring forth life from their sin-sick lives. When you take Jesus' *yoke upon you* by trusting in His perfect obedience to God's Law **for you**, and His perfect sacrificial death on the cross **for the forgiveness of your sins**, and His resurrection from the dead **to give you new life eternally**, you experience what He says in verse 30 of our text: *My yoke is easy, and*

*My burden is light.*

When you are yoked with Jesus He takes the lead, not by force but by grace. Knowing that you cannot be able to sufficiently bear the *labor* of God's Law with the burdens of guilt such inability brings, He bore them for you in His earthly ministry. His promise in our text is that He also continues to bear them for you as He leads you each day in your struggle with the presence of sin. Thus, His *yoke* upon you *is easy* because He does it all for you. Thus, His *burden is light* because He bore all the punishment which your sins deserved upon Himself so you can stand before God righteous, holy and blameless in His sight! This is truly *rest for your souls!*

This *rest for your soul in Christ* should be of first priority in your life. Every human being's soul is weary and *heavy laden* under the burden of sin, whether they realize it or not. People strive to find some "rest" under such a soul condition by many avenues, seeking relief and release. They may seek such "rest" in addictions, only to feel more enslaved, weary and burdened. They may seek this rest in relationships, only to be disappointed that they can't do the impossible (i.e. make them give them the peace they need). While they may get release for a moment there is no permanent relief in their search for "rest" and peace in these ways.

Jesus says to you: *Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden,*

*and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.* Under His yoke—His work for you—you will be able to live each day in the vocations of your life with the desire to serve others as He walks with you. You will take this *rest for your weary* soul into your vocations, relationships and conversations, bringing peace into them rather than looking for them to give you what they're not built to give. You don't have to fight for control because He is Lord! He is in total control **for you**. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,  
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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