

Yoked to Christ

HN/SS 24/10/04 am

Reading: Matthew 11, Hebrews 4

Study: Matthew 11:28-30

Psalms: 23, 119:105-107, & 111-112, 34:17-22, 119:1-4

In India there are some tractors but not many. As you travel through the country you will see farmers using oxen to plough their fields. Tall, humped backed animals are yoked together with wooden beam. The pair of oxen draws a single-tine plough through the soil to prepare it for sowing. A similar scene may well have been seen in Palestine in Jesus day.

In our text Jesus used the picture of a yoke to describe the believer's relationship with Christ. In the epistles the same picture is used negatively to describe bondage to the law (Galatians 5:1) and also a relationship between a believer and unbeliever (II Corinthians 6:14). It is a powerful image describing a closeness which is a blessing if it is with Christ, but a curse if it is with anyone other than Him or one of his.

Context

Jesus spoke the words of our text within the context of answering a question (11:25). However, just what that question was or who he was answering we are not told. Yet when we turn to Luke 10 we find that Jesus was speaking after the return of *the seventy* whom he had sent out to preach the Kingdom of God. They came back full of joy because they had cast out demons in the name of Jesus. Jesus also *rejoiced in the Spirit* and spoke this prayer to his Father before inviting the people to come to him for rest.

Jesus thanked the Lord of heaven and earth, the God who created all things and rules over all. He thanked him for revealing this great mystery, this truth, to babes, to little children, even as the wise and learned refused to listen and believe. What was this mystery? It was about the power of God and about the salvation that has come in Jesus Christ. In the name of Jesus we have the victory; in his name we have life.

It is not that wise and learned people cannot come to Jesus. He says come to me **all** who are burdened. Whosoever believes in him shall have eternal life. The wonderful truth here is that even little ones can believe because it does not require a great education to come to Jesus – faith is all that is needed. Jesus said unless you become like a little child you will not see the kingdom of heaven (18:3), meaning that even great men and women must humble themselves before Jesus and believe in him if they are to be saved.

Jesus goes on to tell that He is the only way to the Father. *No one knows the Father except the Son and those whom the Son wills to reveal him* to. He told the Jewish leaders that they could not honour the Father if they did not honour him – and later *all that the Father gives to me will come to me* (John6:37). Here is truth of election; here is the sovereignty of God.

And in the very next verse we see the free offer of the gospel with the invitation to all- come to me and I will give you rest.

Come to me

How these words of Jesus must have resonated among the people of his day. He spoke to a people who were oppressed. They were oppressed by foreigners, the Romans, and by their own religious leaders. The religious leaders were heaping great burdens upon them as they added detail upon detail to the Law of Moses (23:4). The ecclesiastical police were watching them all the time ready to grab them whenever they broke the law.

And these words of Jesus have resonated in the hearts of millions down through the centuries. How cheering and comfortable are these words wrote J.C.Ryle over a century ago. 'Unrest, he wrote, is one great characteristics of the world – hurry, vexation, failure, and disappointment stare us in the face on every side'.

And we thought we were the ones living in crazy world. We are told how the life is changing so rapidly that it is difficult for many to keep up. It is true indeed, but it has always been true. What does this mean? It means that it is not the world that is our problem it is ourselves! Remember just a few years back how we were told that technology would make life so much easier and we would have to find new ways to fill our leisure time. What leisure time you ask? People are spending more time at work than ever before.

When Jesus went through the villages he described the people as being weary and scattered, harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. They were lost and did not know where they were going. Here he calls to those who *labour and are heavy laden*. Those who are burdened by problems and the worries of life. Remember Mary as she rushed about getting things ready for him.

How would Jesus describe your life? How do you see your life? Contented, no worries? Oh but it will get better you when this or that happens. Oh yeah! Only in Jesus do we find peace and rest for our weary souls. Do you have that peace and the assurance of eternal life in him? Even as believers we are still vulnerable to these very human feelings – but we must learn to come to Jesus casting our cares upon him.

But in the world of unbelief what do we see. Violent crime is on the increase, road rage is on the increase, drug use is on the increase and so on. Dig just a little into the life of anyone and you will find dissatisfaction, frustration, weariness, if not bitterness and hatred in some form.

Why is this? Why can't we be satisfied, content and happy all the time? It is because of sin. Sin does not allow us to rest. Sinful hearts are troubled hearts. And while ever sin rules in our hearts they will remain troubled and restless.

I want to obey the law said Paul but I can't. *What I hate that I do* (Romans 7). *The good that I will to do, I do not do*. He was frustrated and restless man seeking to do good but finding he could not. Why was this? Because he was trying to do good, trying to obey the law in his own strength.

This then is the burden and the heaven load that Jesus speaks about. The law was no help – it made the burden of sin even worse. Remember in the story of Pilgrims progress the burden that

poor Christian carried. It was sin. And like Paul it was not until he came to Christ that the burden was removed. *Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord* (Romans 7).

Rest for the weary soul can only be found in Jesus Christ. Have you come to him and found that rest. Do you have peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ? This is the rest, this is the peace you must have, not as the world gives – peace that is but for a moment through drink, drugs or some other fix.

Take my yoke

Coming to Jesus is not just for a moment. It is not just a ritual we perform when we feel stressed. Coming to church or praying is not like a visit to a therapist. Coming to Jesus means entering into a relationship with a person, the person who is the Son of God. It means entering into lifelong relationship, indeed an eternal relationship.

Take my yoke upon you says Jesus and learn from me. This yoke is not a burden. It is a yoke that actually lightens our load and makes our path easy. But how can a yoke be easy? We want to be free you say, we don't want to be yoked to anyone or anything.

But think what it would be like for one ox to draw the plough. It would be very, difficult. That is why the farmer yokes two together. And he yokes them together because they are doing the same task – or are supposed to be. Oh yes, the young ox wants to get the plough and take off by himself. He will not go in a straight line; he will tear through the rocks and quickly run out of steam.

A young ox is always yoked to a mature ox to learn from it how to plough. The old ox knows the way to go, the path to follow. The yoke keeps the young ox from wandering off and getting into rocky ground. The young ox will tire as the day goes on. The yoke enables the old ox to take the burden during the heat of the day. The yoke becomes easy and light for the one that is learning.

Yes being yoked with Christ keeps us on the right path. Being yoked with Christ helps us when the going gets tough.

You will find rest for your souls. This rest is not of inactivity but of refreshment. Coming to Christ does not mean rest from work but rest **in** work. We are saved unto good works, works that are done in God. If you will be yoked to Him you will find serving him a joy and pleasure. The going may be tough but with Christ by your side you will not notice. He will carry you through.

Have you taken the yoke of Christ upon you? Do you find peace and joy in being united with Him in this way. Do you find him gentle and lowly in heart even as he guides you along the path of life? Yoked to Him you can be sure that you will make it through the day and at the end of the day will enter in His glory.

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