

The Yoke of Jesus 10-17-04

Matthew 11:20-30 (NIV)

²⁰ Then Jesus began to denounce the cities in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent. ²¹ "Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. ²² But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. ²³ And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. ²⁴ But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you."

²⁵ At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. ²⁶ Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure. ²⁷ "All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. ²⁸ "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, 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."

The bulk of Jesus' ministry was performed in the little triangle formed by these three towns, Capernaum, Bethsaida, and Korazin. They are only a few miles from one another. The Bible does not record any of the miracles performed in Korazin and Bethsaida, but they must have been incredible! It reminds us of John's declaration that there were many miracles other than those recorded. (John 20:30) However, in spite of the miracles, Jesus' message met with an apathetic response.

If you asked a Jewish person of Jesus' day, "What are the most wicked cities of all time?" The answer would most likely be, "Sodom and Gomorrah as well as Tyre and Sidon." (Amos 1:9) These cities were destroyed by God to end the pain that man was causing to man. The men of Sodom were in such bondage to perversion that even when blinded, they still tried to get to the angels in Lot's home to sodomize them. (Genesis 19:5, 11) The king of ancient Tyre was so wicked that he was compared with Satan himself. (Ezekiel 28:12-15) Yet, Jesus was saying judgment would be more bearable for them than for the cities of Northern Galilee.

Jesus uses some pretty shocking statements, as we have seen before. Shaking off the dust toward those who would not receive the message (Matthew 10:14-15), and now, this comparison with the most wicked of cities should have shocked the people out of their ingrained cultural and religious lethargy and caused their jaws to drop. "What? More merciful for those cities than our towns? Why? What is our great crime?" The crime is apathy! The crime is that after the Son of God personally spent His time teaching in the streets and synagogues, plainly showing them truth out of their sacred Scripture, and performing unsurpassed miracles that were the fulfillment of the very Scriptures in which they placed their hope, these people were

Commented [notes1]: ³⁰ Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. John 20:30 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: ⁹ This is what the LORD says: "For three sins of Tyre, even for four, I will not turn back [my wrath]. Because she sold whole communities of captives to Edom, Amos 1:9 (NIV)

Commented [notes3]: ⁵ They called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them." Genesis 19:5 (NIV)

Commented [notes5]: ¹² "Son of man, take up a lament concerning the king of Tyre and say to him: "This is what the Sovereign LORD says: "You were the model of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.

¹³ You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone adorned you: ruby, topaz and emerald, chrysolite, onyx and jasper, sapphire, turquoise and beryl. Your settings and mountings were made of gold; on the day you were created they were prepared.

¹⁴ You were anointed as a guardian cherub, for so I ordained you. You were on the holy mount of God; you walked among the fiery stones.

¹⁵ You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you. Ezekiel 28:12-15 (NIV)

Commented [notes6]: ¹⁴ If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town.

¹⁵ I tell you the truth, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town. Matthew 10:14-15 (NIV)

not moved. (John 15:24) Excited, entertained, in awe, yes, but their lives were not changed. To whom much is given, much will be required. (Luke 12:48b)

Has any town ever had a greater witness than the very life of the Messiah Jesus Christ? Yet, instead of repenting, they went about their business as usual. They claimed their life was about God. They daily quoted the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4-5) about loving God. They wore Scriptures about God and even had them posted on the entrance of their doors. They kissed the Law every Sabbath and bowed before it, but when He walked into their towns, they acted as if He was only there to heal and feed the body. (John 6:26-27) They would take from the Son of Man, but they would not give up their will and ways. They were more than willing to receive, but wanted nothing to do with His Lordship.

How will it be for our town in the Day of Judgment? Jesus believed in a day of judgment, and that whole towns would be judged together. We Americans like to think individually. The ancient Jewish culture had much more of a group mentality. They knew the reality of the individual and their affect overall. How will it be for our town? How much has been given to you? How culpable are you for the condition of your city?

We have had great Christian programs that presented the Gospel. We have had the truth preached week after week in our churches. We hear the full testimony of Jesus, not just His work in Capernaum, but His testimony in other cities, His work in Jerusalem, how He endured the cross, rose again and appeared to the disciples. We have read about His ascension into heaven, His sending of the Holy Spirit. We have the history of the church, the testimonies of hundreds of martyrs, and the witness of lives transformed in our very communities and even in our own homes. We have radio stations and television presenting to us some of the greatest preachers and teachers of our day. How will we fare on the Day of Judgment? It depends on our response to what we have heard and seen. How much has been given to you? To whom much has been given, much shall be required.

When I look at what has been given to us as Americans, compared to 95% of the world, it appears to me that we have the very best in ministry, resources, and opportunities. How will we fare on the Day of Judgment? We would like to hide behind the fact that we have received Christ, and certainly, that will save the true believer from the wrath of God, but Jesus also said that every man would be rewarded according to his actions. (Matthew 16:27)

Do you think we will escape the fate of these cities if after having Bibles in our homes, churches to attend, the testimonies of the saints, and enough leisure and provision to make the most of it and instead seek worldly gain and pleasure? Do you think that would be fair to the folks in Bethsaida? You say, "Well, they saw Jesus personally heal people." And you haven't?

They did not have Bibles in their homes. They worked six full days a week and barely had enough to exist, yet Jesus expected more than apathy from them. The early church had a seven-day workweek. What do you think He feels about us? God

Commented [notes7]: ²⁴ If I had not done among them what no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. But now they have seen these miracles, and yet they have hated both me and my Father. John 15:24 (NIV)

Commented [notes8]: From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked. Luke 12:48 (NIV)

Commented [notes9]: ⁴ Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.

⁵ Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. Deuteronomy 6:4-5 (NIV)

Commented [notes10]: ²⁶ Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill.

²⁷ Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval."

John 6:26-27 (NIV)

Commented [notes11]: ²⁷ For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.

Matthew 16:27 (NIV)

help us realize that living for self means, we have not experienced the Lordship of Christ and there will be consequences. "Follow me!" Jesus says, and we respond, "Just as soon as my favorite show is over." You know what Jesus said about lukewarm believers, but do you believe it, and what are you doing to get red hot? (Revelation 3:15-16)

That is the warning portion of our passage for today, the warning of judgment, and it is followed by the path to mercy. Rarely do the prophets or psalmists write of judgment without following it with the sure mercies of God. His heart in telling us our condition is always with the hope of turning us to Him for transformation and expectation of the highest hopes. (Jeremiah 29:11)

²⁵ At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. ²⁶ Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.

The wise and learned in this world are so full of their estimation of themselves and worldly wisdom that they cannot humble themselves and submit God. Instead, those who realize we are but children, in God's eyes, have the mysteries of faith revealed to them. They are the ones that look beyond the miracles to what the miracles say about the love and grace of God.

Jesus thanked God that learned people did not see. Why? They would be more accountable. They would be judged more severely. They were not willing to give up their prideful ways, so it is better to have truth hidden from their eyes. At the same time, Jesus is also praising the Father for opening the eyes of the humble. The extent of the revelation you receive is in proportion to your humility before God. (Psalm 25:9) That is God's pleasure. That keeps the proud from a more severe judgment, and opens the path of life to those who are willing to receive it.

²⁷ "All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

This is quite a declaration. Everything has been entrusted to Jesus! All things are in His hands. That should give us confidence that He can supply what we need when we need it.

What does He do with all things given to Him? The thought continues from the last verse, He reveals God to the humble. He serves those who are humble enough to receive Him. (John 13:3-4) That is what we do as His servants. He has revealed Himself to us. We do not force the Gospel on those who claim to be too wise for such "foolishness". (1 Corinthians 1:18) We share with and serve the humble that are willing to receive. We do this entirely unselfishly out of love for Jesus, just as Jesus served us entirely unselfishly because of His love for the Father.

Christian believer, the Word declares that He has given us everything! In both Romans 8:32 and 1 Corinthians 3:21-23 we are told that everything is ours! We must do the same with all things as Christ did, reveal Jesus to the humble. Having "all things" doesn't mean that we are must be outlandishly wealthy, but that

Commented [notes12]: ¹⁵ I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other!

¹⁶ So, because you are lukewarm--neither hot nor cold-- I am about to spit you out of my mouth.
Revelation 3:15-16 (NIV)

Commented [notes13]: ¹¹ For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.
Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV)

Commented [notes14]: ⁹ He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way.
Psalms 25:9 (NIV)

Commented [notes15]: ³ Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God;
⁴ so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist.
John 13:3-4 (NIV)

Commented [notes16]: ¹⁸ For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.
1 Corinthians 1:18 (NIV)

Commented [notes17]: ³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all--how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?
Romans 8:32 (NIV)

Commented [notes18]: ²¹ So then, no more boasting about men! All things are yours,
²² whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future--all are yours,
²³ and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.
1 Corinthians 3:21-23 (NIV)

everything we need to do God's will is made available to us if we will but ask. Do you need wisdom? James tells us to just ask God who will give it to us generously. (James 1:5) Do you need the words to speak? Jesus said the Holy Spirit would give them to you. (Matthew 10:19-20) Ask and you will receive so that you can reveal Jesus to the humble. (Matthew 7:7)

²⁸ *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.* After the woeful warnings to the cities of Northern Galilee, Jesus spoke on revealing Himself to the humble. Then He uttered these most comforting of words to the human condition. This world is under the curse on sin. Part of the curse on Adam's transgression was that man would earn his living by the sweat of his brow. (Genesis 3:17-19) I remember in the 50s there was talk about the shortening workweek. It was predicted that because of efficiency and modern machines we would eventually get down to a work week of 3 or 4 days with a month off for vacation every year. The curse is as strong as the day it was pronounced. However, there is a place of rest for our weary souls in Jesus. He lifts the burden when we do everything as unto the Lord.

The Jews were burdened down with their hundreds of religious laws. They could not do a single action without wondering if they were breaking some law making them unfit to worship. The religious leaders added rules to help protect the laws making it even more burdensome. (Matthew 23:4) There was one way out of the heavy burden of the Law. Go to the One who would live it in your place. Rest in Him.

If you have been trying to please God with your efforts to be good, you probably find yourself just as tired as the orthodox Jews. Jesus lived the perfect life for you. He offers you His righteousness, but just as wonderfully, He offers to live in you. (John 17:26) Then goodness flows from an inexhaustible source. Go to Him and find the rest for which you have been longing. (Psalm 116:7)

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.* There are a million different yokes to choose from. There are yokes of religion, of good works, of pride, of self-esteem, of the opinions of men, of selfish pleasure, and on and on. None of us goes through life without a yoke of some kind or another. The Jew saw the yoke as submission to something. We all submit to something. (Romans 6:16) Even if it is personal pleasure, it is a yoke. Jesus is telling us that every yoke in the world is wearisome and a burden. There is only one that you can choose that will not bring you to the end of life tired and worn. It is the yoke of Jesus. It is submission to Him.

Now I ask you to please hear me. If your soul is not at rest, you have taken up a yoke that is not Jesus. You may have grabbed one that you thought was Jesus; it may have had Jesus written on it, but it is probably religion or good works or an organization. I can say that without hesitation because Jesus said it. I can say that with conviction because I have worn different yokes that I thought were Jesus, only to find myself weary and heavy laden. Let Jesus cut you free from that yoke and put on the yoke of submission to Him. It begins by learning from Him. Learn from the way He lived as declared in the Gospels. Learn how He leaned on the Father and got

Commented [notes19]: ⁵ If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. James 1:5 (NIV)

Commented [notes20]: ¹⁹ But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, ²⁰ for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Matthew 10:19-20 (NIV)

Commented [notes21]: ⁷ "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. Matthew 7:7 (NIV)

Commented [notes22]: ¹⁷ To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,' "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. ¹⁸ It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. ¹⁹ By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return." Genesis 3:17-19 (NIV)

Commented [notes23]: ⁴ They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them. Matthew 23:4 (NIV)

Commented [notes24]: ²⁶ I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them." John 17:26 (NIV)

Commented [notes25]: ⁷ Be at rest once more, O my soul, for the LORD has been good to you. Psalms 116:7 (NIV)

Commented [notes26]: ¹⁶ Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey--whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? Romans 6:16 (NIV)

His daily direction from Him. Learn how He applied the Word of God to His every need. Learn of His gentleness and humility. When you do, you will find rest for your souls. The search will be over, finding that for which it began, the pearl of great price, Jesus. (Matthew 13:46)

³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

"He says, 'My yoke is easy.' The word 'easy' is in Greek *chrestos*, which can mean 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 wigs brought back to have the yoke tried on. The yoke was carefully adjusted, so that it would fit well, and not gall the neck of the patient beast. 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 fit well.' It may well be that Jesus is here using a picture from the carpenter's shop in Nazareth where he had worked throughout the silent years.

Jesus says, 'My yoke fits well.' What he means is: 'The life I give you is not a burden to gall you; your task is made to measure to fit you.' Whatever God sends us is made to fit our needs and our abilities exactly." —Barclay's Daily Study Bible (NT)

Religion has given the impression that submitting to Jesus is a weary life of drudgery. Taking up the cross is seen as the end of really living. Nothing could be further from the truth. I think God may even allow it to appear that way so that it is a greater step of faith. However, if we stop there, we miss the other half of the bargain. To lose your life is to truly find it. (Matthew 10:39) To take the yoke of submission is to find a yoke that fits. It replaces an old heavy ill shaped one. It is to go from a life of dreariness and drudgery to one of excitement and joy unspeakable and full of glory. (1 Peter 1:8-9) The most joyful Christians are the most truly submitted ones. Your depth of joy speaks of your level of submission.

Some speak of submission, but wear a frown that tells us their submission is to duty. They are constantly complaining about the difficulties and inequities of life. Do not fall for that. His yoke is easy and His burden is light! Have you submitted your life to the person of Jesus Christ? Are you learning of Him? Are you experiencing rest for your soul? The invitation goes out today just as it did 2000 years ago. "Come unto me," Jesus pleads, "and I will give you rest." It is a promise you can count on.

Commented [notes27]: ⁴⁶ Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.
Matthew 13:46 (KJV)

Commented [notes28]: ³⁹ Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.
Matthew 10:39 (NIV)

Commented [notes29]: ⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy,
⁹ for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.
1 Peter 1:8-9 (NIV)