

INTRODUCTION

I've got to admit I am REALLY excited about sharing this message with you! This is one of my favorite passages of scripture in the Bible and I've quoted it hundreds of times, but I've never devoted an entire message to it. Now, I realize sometimes people who hear me preach aren't as excited as I am to preach it! It reminds me of the lady who showed up in the foyer of the church. The usher didn't recognize her, so he assumed she was a guest. He offered to help her find a seat. She said, "Yes, I'd like to sit right down in front of the preacher." The usher said, "Ma'am, I wouldn't advise that because our preacher is REALLY boring." The lady said, "Do you know who I am?" The usher said, "No." She said, "I'm the preacher's mother and I don't appreciate your comment." The usher said, "Well, do you know who I am?" The lady said, "No." The usher said, "Good!" And he walked away.

So I hope you'll be excited as I am about this message. I noticed not too many of you are sitting down front though!

In this series, I'm highlighting all the parables and miracles in the Gospel According to Matthew. That means I am intentionally skipping some passages because they don't contain a parable or a miracle. This doesn't mean those verses aren't important: They are. It's just my intent in this series is to focus only on parables and miracles. I brought eight messages from the ninth chapter of Matthew because it was full of parables and miracles. There were three messages from Matthew 10, but this is this is the only message from Matthew 11.

In these verses we witness the simple, natural, prayer life of Jesus. Then He makes a theological statement followed by His invitation for us to wear His yoke. He's serious, because as the title of this message says, "Taking His Yoke is No Joke!"

Matthew 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. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.' 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. Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 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. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

See how easily Jesus broke into a prayer of praise? Jesus spoke in parables and metaphors so the wise would be confounded and the simple-minded children would understand, and that gave pleasure to God.

This is such a favorite passage of mine that I have it printed on the cards I send to people. But these words are so much more than just a nice quotation to print on a card, needlepoint or a picture to hang on your wall. Jesus is here today and if you'll truly open your heart you'll hear Him saying to you, "Come to me and I will give you rest." There are five aspects of this passage I'd like to explore with you. First, there's:

1. SOMETHING TO DO: Come to Jesus

Jesus says, "Come to me, ALL you who are weary ..." I read once that the entire Christian life can be summarized in three simple commands of Jesus. First, He says, "Come to me." Next, He says, "Follow me." And finally, He says, "Abide in me." Jesus didn't say, "Come to church and you'll find rest." He said, "Come to me." And He didn't say, "Come to me, some of you." He said, "All of you."

The only thing we have to do to be saved is to come to Jesus. In Acts 16 a jailer asked Paul, "What must I do to be saved?" He said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved." (Acts 16:31) Paul didn't tell him to do anything other than believe.

Ask a Muslim what they must do to go to paradise and they will tell you to observe the five pillars of Islam which includes praying five times a day and fasting one month every year during daylight hours. Ask an Orthodox Jew what you must do to go to be righteous and he will give you a long list of things to do: Don't prepare dairy and meat in the same kitchen. Don't push an elevator button on the Sabbath, and many other do's and don'ts. Ask a Hindu how to be reincarnated into a higher existence and he will tell you to make an offering at your household shrine three times a day.

But for a Christian, there's really nothing to do. Because salvation isn't a program, or a performance, it's a *person*. Jesus didn't say, "Come to religion" He said, "Come to *me*."

Have you ever received an invitation to a party or a wedding? It makes you feel good because it means someone thinks enough of you to invite you. There is often the four letters "RSVP" on the invitation. That's an abbreviation for a French phrase "Repondez S'il Vous Plait." This means, "Respond, please." If you receive any invitation containing, "RSVP," you should let the host know of your intentions. It would be rude to respond by saying, "Maybe" or "I'll try." It would be an insult to ignore the invitation. The only proper way to respond to an invitation is by a simple, "yes," or "no."

If I sent you a hand-written note that said, "Please come to my house for supper Friday night," and I added I added RSVP, I believe most of you would respond to that invitation. You'd say, "Yes" or "I'm sorry I can't come." You wouldn't ignore it. Why don't we show Jesus the same respect?

This passage is often called the "World's Greatest Invitation." Jesus says, "Come to me." What's your response? Don't ignore it. Don't say, "Maybe." Simply say, "Yes, Jesus, I'll come to you." Or "No thanks, Jesus. I think I can handle life all by myself." He won't drag you to Himself. Jesus is a gentleman and He simply offers this gracious invitation. Will you accept it?

2. SOMETHING TO LEAVE: Your burdens

Jesus says, "All you who are weary and BURDENED, and I will give you rest." If you accepted my invitation to join me for dinner I would greet you at the front door and the first thing I would

do is to relieve you of your burdens. If you had a coat, hat, or purse I'd say, "Can I take that from you?"

That's exactly what Jesus offers to do. If you are weary and burdened, He wants to relieve you of your burdens. Hopefully, when you left my house I'd return your coat! But when you come to Jesus, He removes your burdens and you don't have to pick them up again.

We live in a world where people are so busy that they are stressed out. *Time Magazine* recently published an article about the increase in stress among American workers. They cited a study about American workers that was conducted by a U.S. Senate subcommittee in the 1960s. A so-called expert testified at these hearings that advances in technology over the next 50 years would radically change how many hours a week people would have to work. This study predicted that instead of working 40 hours a week, that American workers could expect to work an average of 22 hours a week by the 1980s and that this amount would be reduced to 15 hours a week by the beginning of the 20th century. This report said the greatest challenge for American workers would be figuring out what to do with all the "leisure time" they would have. Were they ever wrong!

Is there anybody here whose biggest challenge is figuring out to do with your excess time? I didn't think so. We live in a fast-paced rat race where people are busier than ever and working more hours than ever before. And this is creating a lot of stress. Let's take a group quiz and see how many of you can complete these statements: "I'm at the end of my..."; "I'm ready to throw in the..."; "I'm a bundle of..."; "My life is falling..."; "I'm at wit's..."; "Sometimes I just want to resign from the human..."; If you ever feel that way, it's an indication you may be stressed out from competing in the rat race. And remember, whoever wins the rat race is still a rat!

On my visits to China I've seen workmen riding bicycles carrying huge loads of supplies. It's not uncommon to see a man riding a bicycle carrying 200 pounds of lumber balanced across his handlebars. I've seen them carrying loads of concrete blocks so large that we would use a pick-up truck. I've seen old women carrying loads of laundry on their heads that I know that I couldn't even pick up. I've shaken my head in wonder at the loads they carry. But then I come back to America and I see people who are carrying emotional burdens that would put those Chinese to shame. Are you burdened today? Jesus is inviting you to leave your burden with Him.

3. SOMETHING TO TAKE: The Yoke of Jesus

Jesus says, "Take my YOKE upon you..." Few of us have a cultural point of reference to understand what a yoke is because farmers seldom use animals anymore. But a yoke was a wooden harness that was used to join two animals together. The word always means "two." If a single animal is linked to a load, it's not called a yoke, it's a harness. The word yoke has the idea of "coupling" two animals together. In Bible times and even up until the middle of the 20th Century farmers yoked two animals together to pull loads or to plow a field.

It is still common today in the rural areas of China and other countries to see you oxen yoked together. Wise farmers always yoke an older, wiser animal with a stronger, younger animal. The

older ox knows the voice commands of the farmer and will turn according to the commands. The younger ox is supplying the power and learns to respond to the direction changes of the older ox.

I once read that sometimes farmers yoked a donkey with an ox because a donkey was smart and the ox was strong. That didn't make sense to me and I really didn't believe it. But on one of my trips to Israel as we were driving toward the Dead Sea near Jericho, I saw a farmer plowing with a donkey and an ox. I had the bus driver stop and I jumped off the bus and took a picture of a donkey and an ox yoked together.

But in this metaphor, Jesus gives both the wisdom and the power. So the picture Jesus is using here is that we link up with Jesus, He supplies both the direction and the power.

4. SOMETHING TO FIND: Rest for your soul

Jesus says, "You will find REST for your soul..." Jesus didn't promise to give you rest for your body. He isn't talking about sitting down and becoming lazy because you don't do anything. He promised rest for your soul. That speaks of an emotional, spiritual rest. One of the words that best describes our culture today is restless. There's a TV soap opera called "The Young and the Restless," but it could easily be "The Old and the Restless" too!

The word for "rest" there is the word for Sabbath. It means to rest from your labors of trying to earn your salvation. Many souls are troubled because they are working hard for their salvation, but Jesus has already done all the work necessary for our salvation so we can rest in the finished work of Calvary. There are two ways to spell salvation. One is "DO." I can earn salvation by what I DO. If I DO enough good things then I can find rest. But the other way to spell salvation is "DONE." We rest in the finished work of Jesus on the cross. My body may sometimes get tired, but my soul finds rest in the cross.

We're all aware of what's happened in Tiger Wood's life since Thanksgiving weekend. I agree with Britt Hume that Tiger needs Jesus. On Friday, Tiger publicly confessed his mistakes and admitted he needs to return to the Buddhist religion that his mother taught him. I cringed when I heard Tiger mention Buddhism because he has so much influence. Google reported over a million searches in the first 24 hours after Tiger's confession.

But there was something he said that really struck me. He said, "I have a lot to atone for." That's the exact word he used: ATONE. When I heard him say that I thought, "Thank God that I don't have to atone for any of my mistakes. Jesus is my atonement." Hebrews 2:17 says that through the blood of the cross, Jesus made atonement for our sins. Good luck, Tiger, because Buddhism is a religion of works, and unlike Jesus, Buddha is dead. He can't give you power to resist temptation. Like millions of other people, Tiger is struggling and straining to be better and do better to try to atone for their sins. And the only place we'll ever find rest for our souls is in Jesus!

5. SOMETHING TO LEARN: Surrendering to Jesus makes life easier!

Jesus says, "Learn from me...for my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Some of you are wearing a yoke today, but it's not the yoke Jesus offers. The other time a yoke is used as spiritual metaphor is found in Galatians where Paul accuses some members of that church being under the yoke of slavery to religious legalism. A few years ago when I was doing the Grace Robbers series from Colossians 2, I brought a metal yoke on stage and put it around my neck to symbolize the yoke of religious legalism. At the end of the message I pulled it off and threw it across the stage to symbolize that Jesus has liberated us from the heavy yoke of religious legalism that weighs us down. And Jesus offers to replace that yoke with His yoke—and His yoke is easy and His burden is light. There are plenty of challenges in life. Sometimes it's hard to move forward when you feel like you're trying to pull a heavy load of pain and trouble.

Some people like going to events called Tractor Pulls. This is when they cover the floor of an arena with dirt and guys in souped-up tractors compete to see who can pull the heaviest loads. That's nothing new because long before the internal combustion engine, farmers were competing with animals to see which one was strongest. They still have competitions in which workhorses compete. The beautiful Clydesdales breed has always been one of the strongest horses. Long before the Budweiser wagon, Clydesdales were pulling heavy loads. In these competitions, competitors made an interesting discovery. A single horse could pull a heavy load, but when yoked with another horse, together, they could pull more than the sum of the amount that each horse could pull alone.

For instance, let's say a single Clydesdale can pull a sled holding two tons of weight. And another Clydesdale can pull three tons. You would think that when yoked together, the most they could pull would be five tons. But in reality when these two horses are yoked together, they can actually pull seven tons! You may think that's not possible, but this phenomenon has been proven many times. It's called synergy. Two pulling together can accomplish more than the sum of the two parts. Now apply that principle to the yoke of Christ. You can try bearing the heavy load yourself, but Jesus invites you to join Him inside His yoke. Think about how much strength He has! He's the strong One and I'm the weaker partner. Remember that first song you learned as a child? "Jesus loves me, this I know; for the Bible tells me so; little ones to Him belong, they (we) are weak but He is strong!"

Have you ever been struggling with a heavy load and you think, "I'm just not strong enough to bear this load?" Congratulations. You're right where you need to be to depend on the strength of Jesus. The Bible says, "His power is made perfect in our weakness." (2 Corinthians 12:9). In other words, as long as you struggle alone you're going to feel like you're trying to drag an aircraft carrier across a desert—you can't budge that load. But the moment you surrender to the strength of Jesus Christ, the burden is easy and the load is light.

I've been around some believers who suffer from what I call "spiritual hernias," because for too long they have struggled, strived, moaned and groaned. You can often recognize them for the grimace on their countenance as they say, "If you only knew how hard it is on me." No, Jesus says, "Give up. Stop trying and start trusting. My yoke is easy and my burden is light." You may be thinking, "But Pastor, a burden is still a burden. I don't want to be weighed down by anything."

One of the most influential Christians of history was the man who is often called St. Augustine. He was pastor of a church in North Africa. The Bible says we're all saints, so let me read you a quote from Pastor Augustine about the yoke of Jesus: "Any other burden oppresses and crushes you, but Christ's yoke takes weight off you. Any other burden weighs you down, but Christ's gives you wings. If you take a bird's wings away, you might seem to be taking weight off it. But the more weight you take off, the more you tie it down to the earth. Give it back the weight of its wings and you will see how it flies." The yoke of Christ is not a burden; it's like getting the ability to fly.

CONCLUSION

My wish for every follower of Jesus is that you could learn this revolutionary truth Jesus is teaching. It's the KEY to life. There are many names for it. Some call it the full gospel, others call it the Spirit-filled life, or the Victorious Christian life, or the Surrendered Life, or the Christ-in-you life. There's an entire movement from England called the Keswick movement that's based on this truth. It's the same truth Jesus is teaching here because we link up with Him in a yoke, He provides all the strength we need to live.

Here's this truth in a nutshell: The Christian life is NOT me trying to live like Jesus; it is Jesus living His life in me. It isn't me trying to do great things for Jesus; it is Jesus doing normal things through me. When I made that discovery in 1972 it literally changed my life. There is no way I could do all the things I do unless Jesus was living in me. It is not I, but Christ in me.

The question boils down to a simple one: Who do you think can live a better Christian life, you or Jesus? If you think you can, then go ahead, don't take His yoke. But if you think Jesus can live a better Christian life than you can, then stop trying to imitate Him and simply start surrendering to His power and presence in your life.

I grew up on Lake Jackson, which borders Alabama and Florida. It is the largest natural lake in Alabama, perfectly round. It is a water-filled crater created by a meteorite that struck millions of years ago. One day a high school buddy and I decided to go fishing. We borrowed a boat from another one of our friends and we weren't familiar with it. It didn't look like a fishing boat. It had a rudder at the back that was lifted up and tied down, and it had a small, round hole in the middle of the boat. I figured it was a cup holder or something. But there was small outboard motor attached to the stern so we cranked it up and headed for the other side of the lake where the fishing was better. Halfway across the lake, the outboard stopped. We pulled on the rope repeatedly to start it, but it refused to turn over. Being the high school geniuses we were, we decided to check for gas. I picked up the portable gas tank and knew as soon as I felt how light it was that we were out of gas.

The shore was a long way off. We looked under one of the seats and found one paddle. We were young, strong guys so we figured we wouldn't have any trouble paddling back to shore. So we started paddling away. Because we only had one oar, we took turns. In order to keep the boat doing in a straight line, we had to paddle a few strokes on one side and then on the other side. We had been working for an hour and the shore didn't seem to be getting much closer. There was a strong wind blowing us sideways, which made it even harder. Before long, we were too

tired to keep paddling, so we took a break. Then we started paddling harder to try to increase our pace, but what started out to be an adventure turned into hard work, and we realized it was going to be a long time before we'd make it to shore. We took another break and I decided to look for another paddle. There was a long storage compartment on one side of the boat that I figured had fishing rods in it. I lifted the cover and found that there was a mast and a sail inside. I finally realized what that small hole in the middle of the boat was for. So we took the short mast and mounted in the hole and threaded the sail through the rope and hoisted it. Immediately the wind filled the sail and we were moving fast toward the shore. What had become a difficult task suddenly became an enjoyable adventure. I can remember sitting back thinking, "This is easy!" So we enjoyed the sun and the breeze and after a few maneuvers to tack into the wind we soon arrived back at the shore.

As I think about that experience, it reminds me of the Christian life. Some people are trying to live the Christian life like us when we had that paddle. To them the Christian life involves a lot of strain, sweat, and struggle. They work hard every day to become a better and better Christian and all they have to show is tired spiritual muscles, blistered hands and spiritual fatigue.

But for those of us who have surrendered to Jesus and taken His yoke, it's like sailing compared to rowing. Did you know that in the New Testament, the word for Spirit, *pneuma*, is the same word for wind? The Spirit-filled life means you stop struggling to please God and you allow the Holy Spirit to fill your sail and drive you toward God's shore. Which picture best describes your Christian life right now? Rowing or sailing? Rowing is hard, but sailing is easy.

Stuart Brisco once wrote that he went through four stages in his Christian life. When he first heard the gospel and learned what it meant to follow Jesus he said, "No problem. I can DO this." That was stage one. Then he came to stage two as he began to read the requirements of God in the Bible. He said, "Whoa. This is HARD!" That's where some of you are today. Then after many attempts of failure to live up to the requirements in the Bible, he came to stage three. He said, "This is IMPOSSIBLE." When he realized that, he surrendered to Jesus Christ and the filling of the Spirit and he came to stage four. He said, "This is exciting!" Where are you now, at the HARD stage? That's rowing. Or are you at the EXCITING stage? That's sailing!

Right now some of you are carrying a burden on your shoulders that is too heavy for you to bear. It may be something from your past. It may be a problem with a family member or a persistent sin in your life. You know what your burden is. I don't have to name it. The only question is, will you unload it onto Jesus today? So why don't you fill in this last blank for yourself. You've carried this burden long enough. Why don't you say: "Today I am unloading this burden for Jesus to shoulder _____."

Jesus said, "Take my yoke upon you and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Taking His yoke is no joke!

OUTLINE

1. SOMETHING TO DO: Come to Jesus
2. SOMETHING TO LEAVE: Your burdens
3. SOMETHING TO TAKE: The Yoke of Jesus
4. SOMETHING TO FIND: Rest for your soul
5. SOMETHING TO LEARN: Surrendering to Jesus makes life easier!

Today I am unloading this
burden for Jesus to shoulder:

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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes