

## THE BURDEN THAT'S LIGHT - MATT. 11:28-30

### Learning from Life's Problems #2

They owned a bakery in Bridgeport, Connecticut in 1940. But they not only enjoyed their work of baking bread and pies and pastries, they also enjoyed life as well. So as they were driving about, making their deliveries, they often stopped at a park for a lunch break. Bakers have to get up in the wee hours of the morning so that their product is fresh. By noon, in the middle of their deliveries, they had already put in a good day's work. So they felt justified in spending a while in the park, eating their sandwiches which were always made with their freshly baked bread, just kicking back and relaxing. One day, one of the younger brothers began to amuse himself by tossing one of the pie plates around, scaling it through the air. Another family member joined in, and soon they were tossing that pie plate back and forth. In time, this game that they had thought up became a daily ritual. They would relax for a while eating their sandwiches and then float a pie plate through the air, playing catch with it for a while, before finishing up their deliveries.

Now the park where they routinely stopped was adjacent to Yale University. And the college students would often stop and watch with envious eyes at those bakers having such a good time playing catch with their pie plates. One day, the temptation just became too great for some of the students, and they came over to join in. The game was so much fun that they purchased a pie plate so that they could play the game themselves. It wasn't too long until this game of playing catch with the Bridgeport Baker's pie plates had migrated to Princeton, and then to the other Ivy league schools as well.

It was 10 years later that Fred Morrison, an alert Californian, was visiting in New England and spotted the Ivy League college craze - tossing the Bridgeport Baker's pie plates. He began manufacturing these pie plates, but making them out of plastic so that they would be lighter and float more easily in the air. He named his product after the Bridgeport Bakers who had originally thought of the idea, the ones who had their names stamped across the bottoms of the original pie plates that were used, the Frisbees.

In the hustle and bustle of a busy life, it is important to take time out to relax, isn't it? Especially in these days when stress is such a major issue - people need to balance the stresses and pressures of work with times of relaxation and unwinding.

We hear a great deal about the rat race of life today. But as Lily Tomlin says, the trouble with the rat race is that even if you win it, you're still a rat. There are millions of Americans every day who become disillusioned with the rat race of their life. They might have gotten the promotions that they so eagerly sought, but they are finding that the price they paid was much too high - perhaps their marriage, or their health, or enslavement to some addiction. The American Institute of Stress in Yonkers, N.Y. estimates that

from 75 - 90% of visits to doctors in the U.S. today are stress related at an estimated cost of 200 - 300 Billion dollars per year.

Now everyone faces a measure of stress. Stress is unavoidable in life. Older people face the stresses of financial pressures living with a fixed income, grieving over the loss of friends, and personal physical disorders. People in the work place face the stresses of meeting deadlines, pleasing bosses who often are unpleasable, and dealing with the constant demands of the public. Sharon Collins who is a receptionist in a doctor's office had to chuckle as she read the medical form that a new patient had just filled out. In answer to the question, *have you ever been exposed to a toxic substance in the workplace?* this teacher had answered, *Yes, adolescent hormones.* Ultimately, almost every person in the work place deals with people - and working with people produces stress. Even children face stress. Pressures of school, disagreements with playmates, and tension at home produce stress in the lives of even the youngest children. Judith Viorst writes of children's stresses in her classic book, *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day.* She begins by writing, *I went to sleep with gum in my mouth and now there's gum in my hair and when I got out of bed this morning I tripped on the skateboard and by mistake dropped my sweater in the sink while the water was running and I could tell it was going to be a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day.*

In the midst of a life that is filled with stress and pressure, the Lord Jesus Christ comes with an invitation for rest. And this is not just physical rest - but it is spiritual rest that brings an inner peace and contentment to the soul, a rest that involves every other aspect of our lives, giving us a different perspective on life itself.

Listen to the invitation of the Lord Jesus Christ recorded by the Apostle Matthew in Matthew 11:28-30:

28. *Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*

29. *Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.*

30. *For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*

Now Jesus gives 3 invitations to us in his statement – 3 invitations that will lead us to find rest for our souls. I would invite you to look at these 3 invitations with me.

1. The first invitation is to come to him. *Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened.*

That word *come* was a favorite word for Jesus. He usually gave it in inviting individuals to accept his message and follow him. Jesus invited Simon and Andrew to *come, follow me, and I will make you to be fishers of men (Mark1:17).* And he made similar offers to the other disciples. As Jesus consistently used this term in his ministry, it was clear that he was inviting people to believe on him, to believe his claims and to

follow after him. This is brought out most clearly in the parallel structure that is found in John 6:35. *Then Jesus declared, I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.*

To come is to believe. Jesus says that coming to him is essential in our finding spiritual rest. Now who is to come and what is to be believed? These are critical questions, aren't they? But both answers are found right here in our text.

Jesus invites 2 groups to come to him – the weary and the burdened. The word that is used here for weary is simply one that implies hard work. Those who are exerting great effort – those who are involved in heavy lifting. This is an energetic and active term. The word that is used for burdened is quite different in that it is more passive in nature. It pictures one who is bearing a heavy load, one who is laden down with a great weight. The burden is not necessarily his fault – he just has to bear it. Both our labor and the weariness that comes from it and the burdens that are placed upon our shoulders in life through no fault of our own can rob us of spiritual rest. We can become so involved in our labors that they take all of our time, energies and concentrations. And the burdens that we must bear simply because we are alive can take so much of our strength. And quite often, we have very little control over our labors and burdens in life. We must work and burdens come upon us.

Sometimes it seems like we are a football in the game of life. We have all seen a football game and we know the vital part that the football plays. You could not have a game without it. And we have all seen a team carefully and methodically move down the field towards the end zone. The football does its part – it stays inflated, it doesn't jump out of the player's arms, it doesn't swerve and deviate in its course, it does everything that could be asked of a football. But what thanks does the football get as the player crosses the goal line? Does he stop and thank the ball for its cooperation? No, we've all seen what most players do. They take the ball the spike it down to the turf, slamming it against the ground.

Too often, that's the way life is. We do our best- we try to be faithful – and we often get kicked in the teeth for our efforts. We feel buried under the pressures of our labors and burdens. Happily, Jesus says these people are just the ones who are candidates for restful souls. So if you are weary and burdened this morning, Christ's invitation is for you. You need only to believe.

But what are we to believe? The end of verse 28 gives the answer. A very literal translation of this phrase would be *I will rest you or I myself will rest you.* The emphasis is upon the person of Jesus Christ, and this is important for us to note. Too often we have the idea that spiritual rest is something out there that Jesus gives to those who follow him, like a coat given to one who is cold or a drink given to someone who is

thirsty. The point of this verse is that the rest being offered is not something out there but rather Jesus Christ himself. He is our rest – he is our source of spiritual tranquility. We must start by believing this to be true. We must stop looking around for the secret something that can bring us spiritual rest and realize where the true source of rest is – the person of Jesus Christ. So we find that the first step is to come to the Lord Jesus Christ, believing that he alone is our source of spiritual rest. All of us who meet the qualifications – who are weary and burdened – can believe that Jesus is our spiritual rest and that he can rest us, that he can be a source of spiritual rest to us. We must begin here for in order to find something, we must look for it in the right place.

2. The 2<sup>nd</sup> invitation that leads to spiritual rest is found in verse 29 – *take my yoke upon you*. Now at first glance we might be confused by this invitation for there appears to be a contradiction in reasoning. Jesus has just called to himself those who are weary and burdened and now he begins to speak of giving them a yoke. This sounds a bit like exchanging one burden for another. Why would someone who is burdened under great pressure what to exchange one load for another?

Well, one reason why we have trouble understanding this is the fact that most of us are so far removed from the agrarian lifestyle that Christ's generation was so familiar with. I am the son of a farmer who became a preacher, but I have never lived on a farm myself. I've always lived in cities so I have to study farming practices in order to begin to understand them. In studying the nature and use of a yoke, I found some insights that were interesting to me. When we normally hear the term *yoke* we automatically think of work, a burden. But the yoke was not worn by the ox or donkey in order to be an extra burden to it, but it was rather worn to make a burden bearable. If an ox or mule had to carry a large wagon filled with produce upon its back it would be crushed beneath the load. So the farmer made a yoke for it. And it's interesting that in Biblical times these yokes were handcrafted and fitted to the individual animals. In fact, if a farmer used 2 animals of differing sizes to pull a load, he many times would craft the yokes of differing sizes and weights so that they would be tailor made to each animal. The yokes would not only fit correctly, but each animal would have just the pressure and weight that it would be able to bear. So the yoke was not worn to be a burden, rather the yoke was worn to relieve the burden, to make the burden bearable. An animal with a properly fitted yoke could pull loads that would otherwise be unbearable all day long without becoming overly fatigued. The yoke was not an instrument of torture, but an instrument of mercy. It was not meant to give pain, it was meant to lessen pain. In his invitation to take his yoke upon us, Jesus is not promising to make all burdens disappear as we come to him believing that he is our rest. He is rather asking that we allow him to carve an individual yoke just for us, a yoke that would be tailor made to our personalities and mental

and emotional capabilities. Christ is inviting us to take his yoke so that we will be able to bear loads that would otherwise crush us. He is inviting us to take a yoke that will enable us to pull the loads that we have in life in the easiest possible manner. So the Lord Jesus Christ invites those who are weary and burdened, inviting them to believe that he is their rest. And then he invites them to trust in his sovereignty, that he has not given them more than they can bear, but rather to allow him to tailor make a yoke that will allow them to pull the load in the easiest possible manner.

3. And that brings us to the 3<sup>rd</sup> invitation – *come to me, take my yoke upon you, and . . . learn from me.*

This passage is important for several reasons. One of them is the fact that this statement gives one of the few autobiographical statements that Jesus made concerning his inner self, how he looked at himself. Now I realize that Jesus taught many things concerning his nature – that he was one with the Father. And he said many things about himself in a figurative way – he was the door, he was the bread of life, he was the living water, etc. But here we find one of the very few times that Jesus opened up his inner self and revealed how he viewed himself in an autobiographical way. While many people can write a biography of an individual, only one person can write the autobiography. Only one person knows the inner thoughts of the mind and feelings of the heart. Now what are we to learn from Christ in order to have restful souls? *Learn from me that I am gentle and humble in heart,* Jesus said. One of the secrets to having a restful soul is learning Christ's gentleness and humility.

Have you ever been reading part of the gospels and wondered how Jesus could accomplish all that he did in a single day with so much calmness, peace and efficiency? I do this all the time. I have come home from studying a day in Christ's life exhausted just from following him around wondering how in the world he could accomplish so much. Just the other day I was reading in Mark's gospel. This single day in Christ's life begins in Mark 11:20 and ends in Mark 14:2 – almost 4 chapters, one day. It was the final Tuesday before Jesus went to the cross. It includes his teaching the disciples concerning faith and forgiveness, the final lesson of the withered fig tree, a very emotional confrontation with the chief priests, scribes and elders in the temple area, his giving forth many teaching parables, another confrontation with the Herodians concerning what should be given to God and what one's responsibility as a citizen, still another confrontation with the Sadducees concerning divorce and resurrection, a complete discourse on the law and greatest commandment in the law, a further confrontation with the Pharisees concerning his Messiah ship and their hypocrisy, his shorter commentary on the widow who gave all that she possessed in the temple offering, his great and lengthy Olivet discourse on eschatological events including detailed descriptions of the

tribulation period and his second coming with practical applications, plus all of the other materials that Mark doesn't give that are included in the other synoptic gospels. Out of curiosity, I just went through and sectioned this day as if I were going to preach a series on it and I found that if I were to just cover the bare essentials of what Jesus did on that Tuesday, I would have to preach on this day for the next 5 months.

Unbelievable, isn't it? How could anyone stand up to those pressures in life? And this wasn't just one day. Constantly throughout his ministry he was under the emotional stress of being with people, teaching them, healing them, being around illness, he was continuously involved in personal conflicts with the religious leaders. He seemed to labor continuously under what we would think would be the strain of physical and emotional exhaustion. And perhaps the greatest burden of all was the weight of being the Messiah, the Son of God, with the burden of that potential and the knowledge of his unique mission in life with the mission of saving the human race on his shoulders. You talk about somebody who had the potential of being weary and burdened – how could he ever do it?

Well, Jesus reminded us over and over again of his secret throughout his life. He never lost sight of his purpose. He constantly reminded himself and others that he came to be a servant, to ministry to others, to do the will of His Father. And he not only said it, but he lived it. He lived the life of a servant. He was gentle and humble in heart – doing the will of the Father in heaven. This was his secret.

You see, the servant should not feel the pressure. The master should get all the pressure – after all, he is the one who is ultimately responsible. The servant only has one concern – that is to obey the direction of the master. So the good servant has his eyes on the master and is following along doing exactly the bidding of the master. He is not overly concerned with paying the bills of the estate, his food, his shelter, his investments and business ventures. He is not overly concerned with all of the oversight of the personnel and solving all the conflicts and problems. No, the servant realizes that all of these things are ultimately the responsibility of the master. The master will handle all of these matters. The faithful servant's only concern is what the master wants him to do at this moment. He is content with doing the will of the master.

Jesus Christ was the perfect servant. He was gentle and humble in heart. These are descriptions of a servant. And he says to us, if we learn from him, if we learn how to be gentle and humble in heart, if we learn what it truly means to be a servant of God, then we will have rest for our souls – we will be freed from stress in life.

Part of the problem what most of us as Americans face today stems from the fact that we are primarily concerned with being freed from stress and having restful souls. This is our central goal. And this can easily develop into a selfish obsession, a right that we feel that we should have. Personal gratification in peaceful,

restful souls. Jesus Christ would remind us that the restful soul is the by-product obtained in the path of duty. It is not the end in itself, it is not the goal. No, faithful servant hood should be the goal. But as we fulfill the goal of being a faithful servant, as we heed the invitations of coming to Christ, taking his yoke upon us and learning from him, the fringe benefit is that we find rest for our souls as well. Just as the Lord Jesus Christ was able to function under the greatest stress that could possibly be imagined with a restful soul, so we too will find rest for our souls.

It's similar in a sense to obtaining physical rest. Have you ever tried to force yourself to sleep? You lie there in bed, and you try to will yourself to sleep? It doesn't work does it? No, when the proper conditions are met – when we work hard, eat well, exercise, and then get ourselves into a comfortable, prone position – we just fall into sleep.

So it can be with restful souls. The Lord Jesus Christ offers rest for our souls. He invites us to come to him – to believe that he himself can be rest for our souls; to take his yoke upon us – to follow him as a disciple, to allow him to tailor make a yoke for us that will allow us to pull the burdens of life in the easiest way possible, to not try to shirk our responsibilities but allow him to help us to bear them; and the learn from him – to learn of his gentleness and humility, to emulate his example being a servant to His Father. Jesus the promises that the result of our heeding and obeying his invitations will be finding rest for our souls.

*"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."*