

## **“Take a Load Off”**

### **Matthew 11:25-30**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

“Come on in and take a load off!” If you show up to a friend’s house for a visit, it’s very likely that you’ll hear these words from your host. The point they are making is now that you are at their house, kick back and relax. Let the cares of the world leave you for a short time and enjoy some much needed “R&R.” Have a drink, kick up your feet, and leave your cares at the door. Everyone needs a release from the daily grind of life. When you find yourself worn down by the cares of the world, it’s good to have friends, family, and downtime to bring your stress down and your joy up. But what about when your soul is weary and you need a break from the despair of sin in your life? Where is it that you can find relief? In today’s Gospel lesson, the Lord says that in Him you can find rest, but not for your body—for your soul. In His infinite kindness, He welcomes you in peace to “take a load off,” because the load has been borne by Him for you upon the cross.

If you’ve been tracking the trajectory of the Gospel lessons for the last few weeks, you may be quite confused by what Jesus is saying to you this morning. There’s quite a definitive theme that has carried throughout them—Being a Christian is hard, full of persecution, and hatred from the world. And all of that is the lot of every Christian that remains faithful to the truth of Christ and His Word. Matthew’s Gospel account hasn’t seemed to be one of peace and rest up to this point, and yet, here we are. Since the Lord called His disciples and sent them out in chapter 10, He has promised nothing but pain and suffering for their fidelity to Him and His teaching. So, how can He now say that His yoke is easy, and His burden one that is light? He just finished telling us that your families will hate you, that He brings a sword and not peace, and that you will be rejected when you bring the Word of salvation into the world. Well, the reason He can say that in Him you will find rest is because He cares for your everlasting soul.

Modern Christianity makes the yoke of Christ heavy and burdensome, completely contrary to the words of Jesus in our text, because they believe they have the ability to achieve peace and rest here in this life. But, as has already been pointed out, there is no peace for the Christian on this side of heaven, at least in worldly terms. There is no perfect version of the world that can be created by a utopian society or perfectly applying God’s Law to your daily lives. “Just live like Jesus, and everything will be fine.” If that were possible, then they aren’t wrong, but as we know from Scripture, we cannot live like Jesus. Paul says in our Epistle lesson today, “For I know that nothing good dwells in me,

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that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.” The old man still dwells in you as those who are descended from Adam, and that prevents you from living a life that is pleasing to God as you dwell in the sinful flesh. The Law of God, though good and right, condemns you for your inability to keep it, and that yoke is one that is indeed heavy. If it is on you to remake the world and live like Jesus, then you face only the condemnation of the Law, and the work of Jesus is brought to nothing.

With all that work to do in order to appease an angry God, if you abide in works-righteousness, it is easy to see how that burden would become too much to bear for anyone. Many see the righteous requirements of the Law and say, “There’s no way I can do that!” And so, they abandon the faith knowing that God will never be pleased with them in the flesh. That is the danger of turning to the self for the answer to your sin problem. It is one that you cannot escape, because the entire purpose of God’s Law is not to show you what to do in order to please God, but to show you your inability to keep His Law and your inability to please Him. It shows you your sin, and your need for your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ—the One who has kept that Law perfectly on your behalf.

But it is important to note that Jesus does not say, “My yoke doesn’t exist and there is no burden.” His yoke is still a yoke (though, an easy one) and His burden is still a burden, but a light one. You also cannot go the other direction into antinomianism, believing that somehow God’s Law is not necessary or needed for the Christian. As Christ says in the Sermon on the Mount, “Until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.” The Law serves to show you your sin, but not only that. Its other purpose is to point you to Christ as the relief from your sin. As those who have been baptized into the death of Christ, your inner being has been reborn, and its desire is to follow God’s Law. If only the sinful flesh was not in the way, then by virtue of that inner being, whose will is aligned with God’s, you would have the ability to abide in it perfectly. Yet, as Luther says in the Small Catechism:

God threatens to punish all who break these commandments. Therefore, we should fear His wrath and not do anything against them. But He promises grace and every blessing to all who keep these commandments. Therefore, we should also love and trust in Him and gladly do what He commands.

And fidelity to the Law of your good and gracious God will lead to great burdens, at least as far as your sinful flesh is concerned. Last week, the Gospel focused on turmoil among your own family for such faithfulness. Even though it cannot be kept perfectly, those who seek to do the good Luther describes will face turmoil and hatred for holding

yourself to such a godly standard. That standard draws the ire of the world, because the Law of God is also written on their hearts. The difference between the persecuted and the persecutors is that the persecuted find relief from the accusing Word of the Law. Christ has removed the curse of the Law from believing hearts by becoming that curse for you. You don't have to face the world alone as it seeks to tear you down and make your burden as heavy as possible. The evil one wants you to believe that you are alone, but you face this world as one who bears the mark of Jesus in your baptism, and His Spirit dwells within you as your Advocate and your Helper.

All of those burdens seem like insurmountable mountains that require you to do all kinds of things in order to overcome them. But remember the words of your Savior that His yoke is easy and His burden is light. Compared to the forgiveness of your sins, all the burdens of this world are a pittance for you. The burden you must bear for that great gift of grace is light, but the burden which He bore for you was the heaviest of all. Jesus went to the cross to bear the burden of your sin, to be the salvation which you so desperately need. He has taken your every care, your every persecution, and your every pain upon Himself and felt them for you as He died there upon that tree to be your redemption. He made the yoke of being His child light by making his own the heaviest burden of the world's sin. The work of Christ has made you righteous in the sight of your Heavenly Father, and for the sake of Jesus, He has revealed that truth to you as His little children.

There is nothing for you to do because Christ has done all of the work on your behalf. You are not an ox shackled to a yoke of burden to work your way through the field of this life. You have been called to faith in Jesus, and by the work of the Holy Spirit your faith has brought rest for your soul in Him. You are justified because of the work of Christ—because of the yoke of burden that He has borne for you. The hardest thing that anyone of us must do as we bear the light burden of Jesus' yoke is simply to exist as those who are in the faith—to be present here to receive His gifts of grace and mercy. In the proclamation of His Gospel, you hear the truth that you are forgiven for all of your sins by His blood that was shed for you. In receiving that very blood and His body given for you in His Holy Supper, you are assured of the salvation that His death and resurrection have won for you as His holy child. The only way you can know these truths is by what He has revealed to you. They are hidden things to the world, but as those who are His little children, the Father has shown you His mercy in His only begotten Son.

In the promise of forgiveness, life, and salvation by the blood of Jesus shed for you, received at His table, the Lord says to you, "Take a load off." He has brought you

the one thing that you need to find eternal rest from the labors of this life and the heavy burdens of sin and death. Though you will occasionally find rest in this life in body, the rest that the Lord of all things promises is a rest for your everlasting soul. That's what His meal points you toward, and the goal of your faith in the one true God. The burden of His yoke is not easy, but it is light. He bore all of the weight that should have been yours when He went to the cross, and there upon that tree, He made you righteous despite your unworthiness. That is the great truth about His easy yoke. There is no pulling and prodding to get you moving, only grace, mercy, and Christ for you. What joy there is to be had for the one who has faith in such a merciful Savior!

The love of God in Christ Jesus is yours because of what He has done, and that makes the difficulties of this life pale in comparison. You have eternal rest in the arms of your Lord and Savior, having been declared righteous for His sake and worthy to stand before your Father in heaven as His beloved son. You know the truth of that salvation because Jesus has revealed it to you. He has revealed the Father to you as one who has received faith by the work of the Holy Spirit, and there is no reason for you to despair of this world any longer. Your hope lies in the resurrection that is to come, when all will be reunited in body and soul, and those who have gone ahead of you in Christ will dwell among you once more and for eternity. There, in the house of your Father, you will truly have His easy yoke, for sin will be no more, and eternal joy and bliss in His heavenly presence is all you will ever know. Amen.