

The Easy Yoke

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 02 October 1994

Preacher: Darrell Johnson

[0 : 00] Come to me, to a person. Jesus calls us to himself. Come to me. All you who labor and are heavy laden.

In the English language, verbs can function in two voices, active and passive. But in the Greek language, verbs can function in three voices, active, passive, and middle.

Active, I wash. Passive, I am washed. Middle, I wash myself. Heavy laden is in the middle voice.

Come unto me, all who are weary and who have heavy laden themselves. Come unto me, all who are weary and have overburdened themselves.

Jesus is saying to us that our weariness, for the most part, is our own doing. And I will give you rest. Literally, I will rest you.

[1 : 04] Isn't that much more inviting? I will rest you. It's much more personal. It expresses the personal involvement of the rest giver. The translation, I will give you rest, could lead us to think that rest is something that we can experience apart from Jesus Christ.

That rest is something that he gives us that we can take and walk off by ourselves. I will rest you suggests the personal involvement of the rest giver. Rest. Rest. Rest.

Rest. Rest. Rest. Rest. Rest. Rest. Rest. Rest. The word takes us back to the very beginning.

Genesis 2, 3. The Lord blessed the seventh day and sanctified it because on it God rested from all his work.

What does it mean that God rested? Does it mean that God ceased from all his activity? That God shifted into neutral, so to speak? No. No. God rested means that God entered into the reason for his creation.

Thus, on the seventh day, there is no concluding line, and there was evening and morning day seven. You know that throughout Genesis 1, there is this refrain, evening and morning, day one, evening and morning, day two, evening and morning, day three, day four, day five, day six, but no such conclusion is given to the seventh day.

[2 : 25] That's because we were created for a forever seventh. God rested means God now entered into the whole reason for which he created, which is why on the seventh day, on the Sabbath, Jesus does his works of healing.

He is bringing creation back to its original condition, back to wholeness. God rested means God entered into the wholeness, which he wills for creation.

Come to me, all who are weary and who have overburdened yourselves, and I will rest you. I, Jesus, will rest us.

Here is the Lord of the Sabbath. Here is the Lord of the forever seventh. Here is the Lord of creation coming into our broken world with wonderfully good news.

Come to me, and I will lead you into the wholeness for which you were originally created. A better translation, then, for the word rest is refresh.

[3 : 32] Come to me, and I will refresh you. An even better translation for the word rest is fulfill. Come to me, and I will fulfill you.

How? The answer is what we are not hearing. The answer is what we need to hear again for the first time. Listen. Come to me, all who are weary and have overburdened themselves, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you, and you will find refreshment for your souls. Take my yoke upon you.

The rest of God is found in picking up a yoke and putting it upon us. A yoke?

A yoke? A yoke is going to rest me? It's a startling antidote to weariness, for the yoke is a symbol of work.

[4 : 34] It's a symbol of being able to do a lot of hard work. Indeed, it's a symbol of captivity. In the Old Testament, to break the yoke is to be set free from bondage.

Isaiah 9, The people walk in darkness will see a great light. Those who live in a dark land, on them a light will shine, for you will break the yoke of their burden. In the first century, taking up a yoke and putting it on our neck, a weary and overburdened people, was what was least expected.

In some places, the yoke was placed upon an animal like an oxen to enable the oxen to even do greater work. Come to me, and I will rest you. Take my yoke upon you.

And you will find refreshment for your souls. Surprising words, are they not? How in heaven's name does taking up a new yoke alleviate excessive weariness?

Here's Jesus' point. Here's Jesus' point, which we are not getting. I shouldn't put that trip on you, which I am not getting. Jesus is telling us that we are weary because we are wearing the wrong yoke.

[5 : 50] And he offers us refreshment by the transfer of yokes. You see, the question is never, will I wear a yoke? The question is never, will I wear a yoke?

Every human being wears a yoke. There is no unyoked human being. The question is never, will I wear a yoke? The question is always, whose yoke will I wear? We place yokes on our shoulders or we accept the yokes that others place on our shoulders that are killing us.

Yes, we can find a certain degree of rest by taking the yokes off for a while and lying down in quiet streams by green pastures.

But that will never really bring the refreshment we need. For when we get up, we simply go back to the old routines and put the old yokes back on us again, right?

Come to me, all who are weary and who have overburdened themselves and switch yokes. Take the yoke off your neck that is killing you and take my yoke upon you.

[7 : 02] Now, why does his yoke bring rest, refreshment, fulfillment? What is different about his yoke? The answer, it's easy.

The yoke of Jesus is easy. Easy? The yoke of Jesus Christ is easy?

What's he saying to us? Two questions. What is Jesus' yoke and why is it easy? My yoke, he says. That is, it's a yoke that he himself wears. I want to say that again. That's key to understanding this text. The yoke that he calls us to wear is the yoke that he himself wears.

The first group of disciples could see that, and they could see the difference it made in his life.

Jesus was never excessively weary and overladen. My burden.

[8 : 09] That is, it's the burden that Jesus himself bears. And the first group of disciples could see it, and they could see the consequence in his life.

What then is the yoke that Jesus wears? What is this burden that he bears? The answer is right here in the text that we just read.

It's in the verses that precede the familiar words. You see, the come unto me, take my yoke does not just happen in thin air, so to speak.

It follows right on the heels of a prayer of praise and an affirmation of faith, a great declaration.

Come unto me, take my yoke flows out of.

No one knows the Son but the Father. No one knows the Father but the Son and those to whom he wills to reveal the Father. Come unto me, take my yoke flows out of.

[9 : 11] All things have been handed over to me by the Father. Come unto me, take my yoke flows out of. Yes, Father, it was well-pleasing in your sight to do this.

Come unto me, take my yoke flows out of. I praise you, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you hid these things from the wise and the intelligent and revealed them to babes.

Jesus is speaking to his Father. Jesus is praising his Father for his sovereignty. Jesus then reveals the great mystery of the living God, that there is within God a love relationship, the Father and the Son, the Son and the Father.

And then out of that praise and out of that affirmation of the mystery, Jesus issues his call to come and take up his yoke. The point? His yoke is his relationship with the Father.

His yoke, which he wears, is his relationship with the Father. As he says in John's gospel, I and the Father are one. I and the Father are yoked.

[10 : 23] Jesus' yoke is simply the yoke of sonship. Jesus' yoke is this eternal and intimate relationship with the Father. And his burden?

It is to please the Father. All I do, I do to please the Father, he says in another place. My food is to do the will of him who sent me.

I only do what I see the Father doing. I only say what I hear the Father saying. Behold, I have come. It is written in the book, I delight to do your will, O God. According to the gospel of Luke, the first recorded words out of the mouth of Jesus were those he spoke to his earthly parents when he was only 12 years old.

Did you not know that I needed to be about my Father's business? And according to Luke, the last recorded words of Jesus were those on the cross, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit. Jesus' yoke is his relationship with the Father. Jesus' burden is pleasing the Father. And he calls the yoke easy and the burden light.

[11 : 36] Why easy? Why light? Because of his understanding of the Father. Because of his view of the Father.

I praise you, O Father. Father, he says this in a context which would, for most of us, generate the opposite response. Just before this I praise you, Jesus speaks of the way that the cities of Palestine were rejecting him and his message of the kingdom.

Corazon, Bethsaida, Capernaum had all turned on Jesus. And yet he offers praise to the Father whom he calls Lord of heaven and earth. What's going on here?

Jesus rejoices even in the face of adversity. Indeed, in the face of apparent defeat because he knows the Father. And he knows that the Father's will will be done.

He knows that the Father is never the victim of circumstances. Psalm 135, verses 5 to 6. Isaiah 46, verses 9 to 10.

[12 : 54] I am God, there is no other. I am God, there is no one like me. Declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things which had not yet been done, saying, my purpose will be established.

I will accomplish all my good pleasure. Jesus knows that the Father has no deficiencies which keep him from fulfilling his good pleasure.

Jesus knows that there are no powers, not even human rebellion, that can finally thwart the Father fulfilling his good pleasure. If I can know that Father, I can rest.

You see, there's nowhere in the Gospels where we find Jesus in a panic.

Jesus never panicked. That's because he knows the Father. Have you not heard? Do you not know?

[13 : 56] The everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, does not become weary or tired. The Father of the Lord Jesus is never overwhelmed. Nothing is finally out of his control.

Even in that moment, when it appeared that the Father had lost control, and when evil man took his Son and nailed him to the cross, he was not out of control. In that moment, the Lord of heaven and earth was fulfilling his good pleasure.

Jesus praised the Father even in the face of the rejection of the cities of Corazon, Bethsaida, and Capernaum because somehow he knew that the Father's will was being worked out even in that rejection.

Nothing gets by the Father. Nothing overcomes the Father. You see, the trouble with us is that we do not know the Father as Jesus knows him.

If we knew the Father as he does, we too would rest in his sovereignty. British preacher G. Campbell Morgan says, all your restlessness is godlessness.

[15 : 09] Or as I would put it in light of the text, all our restlessness is fatherlessness. If we just knew the Father.

Come unto me, all who are weary and who have overburdened themselves, and I will rest you. Take my yoke upon you. My yoke is easy and my burden is light. Of course it is for him.

Of course it's easy for him because he is by nature the Son of the Father. But for us, this is easy? Yes, it is. You see, the word translated easy in the text is the word krestus, C-H-R-E-S-T-U-S.

Krestus is related to the word Christos, Christ. The yoke of Christos is krestus. Now, krestus means kind or kindly when used of people.

When it's used of things, it means good of its kind or well-fitting. The yoke of Jesus is easy because it fits well.

[16 : 21] It's the only yoke that fits the human species well. We are weary because we are wearing yokes which, although seem easier than Jesus' yokes, turn out to be much harder because they do not fit.

They are not krestus. They rub our shoulders wrong. They tear at our flesh and drain our souls. Undoubtedly, Jesus was taught by Joseph how to make these wooden yoke for oxen.

According to William Barclay, there's even a legend that Jesus made the best yokes in all of Galilee. According to William Barclay, above the door of his shop, there may well have been a sign that said, my yokes fit well.

Krestus. The yoke of Christ is krestus. It fits him well and it fits us well because we were created for a relationship with his father.

Way back in eternity, when God was alone, he was not alone. From all eternity, God has been father and son. From all eternity, God has been infinitely happy.

[17 : 38] The father enjoying the son, the son enjoying the father. At one point, apparently, they said to one another, this is too good to keep for ourselves. We're going to need to make some creatures in our image to enjoy the joy that we have in one another.

And so God made us. The Westminster Confession of Faith asked, what is the chief end of humanity? And you know the answer. The chief end of humanity is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

Or, as it should be put in light of Scripture, the chief end of humanity is to glorify God by enjoying Him forever. We were made for a relationship with the father.

We were made for a relationship to enjoy the father as the son does. When we were too stubborn and in our foolishness turned away, he did not let us go.

He came all the way down in the person of his son to bring us back. The yoke that Jesus wears is easy because it fits well. It's what we were made for.

[18 : 41] No other yoke ever fits well. And His burden is light. The word that Jesus uses here is a comparison word.

Light by comparison. His burden is light by comparison to all the other burdens we carry. His burden? To please the father. Jesus did not worry about pleasing Pharisees and Sadducees or Herod or Pilate.

Jesus did not worry about pleasing Peter and John or Mary or Joanna. He had one burden. To please the father. His agenda was not written for him by all the insatiable demands of those around him.

His agenda was written by the desire to please the father. and he calls this burden light for him and for us. Light pleasing God is light.

Yes. It's much lighter than trying to please human beings. The attempt to please other people is terribly heavy. Right? Am I right?

[19 : 49] Who are you trying to please today? Mom? Dad? Self? Horrible burdens. Are they not?

Pleasing the father of the Lord Jesus Christ is so much lighter. Lighter? Pleasing God is lighter?

Yes, because, get this, what pleases the father is trust.

That's all. Coming to him with empty hands and banking on his mercy and grace. What pleases the father is coming to him with empty hands and receiving the gift of his son and his spirit.

What pleases the father is throwing ourselves on the finished work of his son and opening ourselves to the healing work of the spirit. The yoke that Jesus wears is his filial relationship with God.

The burden that Jesus bears is doing and saying what pleases God. And he calls you and me to join him under that yoke and burden. The yoke is easy.

[20 : 51] It fits the species well. The burden is light because that is what we are made for. Am I making sense? That's why Jesus then goes on to say learn from me.

What he's telling us is we do not know the father. We are weary and we are overburdened in ourselves because we do not know the father. Many of us are afraid of the father.

Many of us have distorted images of our earthly fathers which we translate into distorted images of the heavenly father. Learn from me. Come to me and learn from me.

I'll show you the father. The father is as good as me. And I will show you how to please the father. Which is what he does in the series of sayings we call the Sermon on the Mount.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus is simply showing us what it looks like to follow him in pleasing the father. That's all. There are two key lines in the Sermon on the Mount.

[21 : 55] One is in order that you may be the sons and daughters of your father who is in heaven. And the other is you will be perfect or whole as your heavenly father is perfect or whole.

And then he teaches us to be quick to reconcile with those who have hurt us. Not to lust after other people. To let our yes be yes and our no be no.

To love our enemies. To pray for those who persecute us. To forgive our debtors however we want to be treated by others to treat them. This is easy? This is light, Jesus?

Yes it is. It's infinitely more easy. It's infinitely more light than all the other alternatives. You see, the world is so weary because it is wearing those other yokes.

The yoke of anger is crushing us. The yoke of lust is eating our soul. The yoke of lying and deceit is destroying human community. The yoke of revenge is literally killing us.

[22 : 53] Where has the yoke of hating our enemies got us? Look at Haiti. Where has that yoke got Haiti? Or the inner cities of America or the San Fernando Valley?

Not living Jesus' hard way turns out to be much harder. Not living Jesus' heavy words is much heavier. Jesus' word and way emerges out of His relationship with the Father.

Jesus' teachings and behavior emerge out of His wanting to please the Father. It fits Him and it fits us. Nothing else will. We are weary and overburdened because we are wearing yokes that will never fit.

Come to me and I'll rest you by switching yokes. Let me press this just a bit more deeply by asking a practical question.

How does Jesus keep this relationship with the Father intact? That is, in His earthly life as one of us, how does He nurture this relationship?

[24 : 04] What does this yoke look like in 24-hour terms? Answer? Habits. His yoke is made up of habits of His heart, if you will.

Jesus acted the way He did in any given situation because He practiced disciplines which kept Him close to the Father.

He regularly participated in worship services in the synagogue. He regularly studied and meditated upon the law and the prophets. He regularly prayed using the Psalms as His prayer book.

Jesus used the Psalms as His prayer book. He regularly spent time with others in fellowship. He regularly slipped away to be alone in the mountains. He regularly rose before sunrise to be still and listen to the Father.

Come to Me and learn. I will teach you ways to stay in touch with the Father. Come to Me and learn and I will teach you ways to listen and grow in intimacy with the Father.

[25 : 09] By the way, on November 5th, Dr. Doug Gregg, who is becoming a cherished friend of mine, will lead us on a Saturday conference where he will lead us through some concrete ways that we can become like Jesus in His relationship with the Father.

Doug is going to help us with specific disciplines that help us with listening and intimacy. Take my yoke upon you. Learn from me means let me teach you a new lifestyle.

Let me teach you my lifestyle. Let me help you rearrange your priorities so that you can be about the kinds of things that connect you to the Father and empower you to please the Father.

It's hard at first, but it soon becomes natural. That's because it fits well. That's because it draws us into the presence of God.

There's one more thing to say about Jesus' easy yoke, and it makes all the difference in the world when we are too weary to even experiment with His yoke. And it is that Jesus' easy yoke is a shared yoke.

[26 : 29] The word that Jesus uses here refers to these double yokes, these pieces of wood that are built to bind two oxen together. Jesus' yoke binds us to Him, which means that He carries the load with us.

In fact, it turns out that because we are bound to Him, He lifts us as He carries the load. And we discover that instead of carrying, we are being carried.

Instead of pulling, we are being pulled. In 1986, Corrie Aquino, housewife, became president of the Philippines. A huge burden.

But you know, in the years that I lived in the Philippines and watched Mrs. Aquino, she never looked burdened. Why is that? Because Mrs. Aquino knew the secret of the double yoke.

She ended her inauguration address by quoting the words of a song that was popular at the time. If He carried the weight of the world on His shoulders, then my brothers and sisters, He can carry you.

[27 : 41] Excessive weariness is a sign that I have gotten out from under the double yoke of Jesus. When I stay in my place, yoked to Him, I experience His refreshment.

That's why Bernard of Clairvaux of the third century could sing, O blessed burden that makes all burdens light, blessed yoke that bears the bearer up.

Come unto me, all who are weary and who have overburdened themselves, and I will rest you by showing you the Father. Take my yoke upon you.

Enter into my relationship with the Father. Learn from me about the goodness, faithfulness, sovereignty, power of the Father.

My yoke is easy because it fits. And my burden is light because it lifts. I once saw a poster it said, God's favorite word is come.

[28 : 58] Come.