

Following Jesus (4) - Students of Jesus

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[0 : 0 0] To thirty, come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

I heard the voice of Jesus say, come unto me and rest. Lay down, O weary one, lay down your head upon my breast. I came to Jesus as I was, weary and worn and sad, and found in him a resting place, and he has made me glad. His words of that hymn by Horatius Boner are obviously based on this passage of Scripture, where we find Jesus inviting his hearers at that time and inviting us today through the gospel to come and find our rest in him. And so we're taking the passage as another of our studies as we go on looking at what it is to follow Jesus, because the passage contains details that are relevant to following Jesus. And as you see, the main emphasis in the passage is that Jesus will give rest to those who come to him. I will give you rest, he says, and you will find rest. He repeats this twice, the rest that he promises to those who will come to himself. But you'll notice the rest is actually something that's done by coming to him, but also taking his yoke upon us, which we'll see in a minute refers to our coming under his leadership, but especially under his teaching. And you need to take both of these together. It's not just that we receive rest by coming to Jesus without taking account of taking his yoke, putting on his yoke, coming under his teaching, being directed in our life by him. Not as it just a matter of taking his yoke upon us and coming to be taught, for example, through reading the Bible, through coming to church like we're doing today, but without coming to himself.

You have to take both parts of the passage here together. Come to me, take my yoke upon you. These are the two imperatives, and they belong together, and we must never separate them because it's important that we see the whole thing as the means by which we come to experience the rest that Jesus promised.

So we look at those two, come to me and take my yoke upon you, as the two main headings for today. Come to me. Who is it who are invited? Who are invited to come to Jesus? Well, he explains it himself. He mentions, come to me all who labor and are heavy laden. He specifies these are the ones especially that he's addressing as he addresses the crowd. Come to me, all of you who are heavy laden, who have burdens. Come to me and find rest in me. Now, his initial audience, of course, would have been very used to and oppressed by the weights that their religion had placed upon them.

Not so much their religion itself, but the Pharisees' version of it and how these religious leaders had imposed so many, many regulations and laws and procedures that were not at all required by Scripture, by the Old Testament as they had it then. These were regulations. These were laws that they had imposed themselves. And Jesus, frequently in the Gospels, you find him accusing the Pharisees of requiring so much of the people. Now, people under that sort of regime, under all of those minute laws that they were required or had to keep or were supposed to keep, anybody, any people, any person would become very easily wearied, exasperated, discouraged under that sort of system.

[4 : 08] And as he's addressing the crowd, that's especially what Jesus has in mind. He knows what they're going through. He knows their burden. He knows they're discouraged. He knows they're exasperated by all of these rules and regulations that are man-made. And so he calls upon them to come to himself and to find relief from that burden, to come to find their rest in himself. And of course, that's always how it is with what you can call a do-it-yourself salvation. When you try and please God by your own efforts, which I'm sure most of us at one time tried to do, you come to realize very soon or somewhere along the line, you come to realize that you just can't do that. And you keep breaking the things that you had placed before yourself as rules or maybe even the commandments of God as you find them in the Bible, and you become exasperated. And you realize that this just isn't working. You become discouraged. And as time goes on, you hopefully come to realize that that's not how we come to be saved at all, that that's simply a legalistic self-righteousness that we're attempting, which is only going to burden us increasingly the more we try it.

But of course, what Jesus says here applies to all of life's burdens. We mustn't even taking account of the focus in the passage on the time of Jesus himself and who he was referring to, especially. We mustn't narrow it down just to leave it at that as if that's the only application we have to the text, to this passage. He is today speaking to all of us. He's speaking to all those who hear the gospel and have specific burdens, whatever these burdens might be. And I'm sure every single one of us here today will confess that somewhere or other in our life there is a burden. There is something that is weighing us down, something that is making us anxious, something that we would love to be rid of, something we want relief from. Whatever it is today, your burden, whatever you're carrying, whatever burden you're conscious of, whether it's in your own life or on behalf of somebody else, every single one of us here today has a burden. And what Jesus is saying is, you come to me, bring yourself to me, bring yourself with your burdens. Maybe you're here today burdened over your sin, burdened over with a sense of guilt, burdened over the fact that you know you have not closed in with Jesus despite the many times you've heard the offer in the gospel of coming to himself.

Maybe you're burdened today with the fact that this is the case, that you have not yet come to him in order to be saved, that you're still seeking to carry this yourself, that it's not going away and yet you haven't actually rolled it over onto Christ. Well, that's what he's saying to you today. Why go on wearing yourself if that's really the case? Why go on carrying that burden when he is there to carry you and that burden and take it from you? Come to me, all you who are wearied and heavily burdened, whatever that burden is today, God and Christ will give you rest from it when you come to him. You come to him specifically to lay your burdens upon himself.

And he then takes care and manages your life rather than yourself. But then you see he is saying, come to me. Who is it who are invited? Those who are burdened and are heavy laden. And it's to himself.

Come to me. Take my yoke upon you. He's presenting himself there to the people as the one that will take the burdens off them. But who is this? Well, it's interesting and significant that the passage, just the verses before that, when Jesus is addressing the Father in heaven, he's giving thanks to the Father there in verse 25. But he goes on in verse 26 and 27, all things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father.

[8 : 22] No one knows the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal them. These are massive words. This is a massive claim on the part of Jesus. Just imagine those people listening to him there and hearing him saying, all things have been handed over to me by my Father.

He's referring to God, and he's saying, God has actually put in my possession all things that are necessary for the disposing of this world and all that will happen in this world and people's lives within this world. All of that has been handed over to me. I am the executor of the Father's will and of the Father's salvation, the Father's government. It's a staggering claim. Yet that's the fact of the matter. And also he goes on to say that he is the only one, Jesus himself, who knows the Father.

There are such depths, of course, to the being of God, to the will of God. Even the things that are revealed to us in the Bible, we can't get to the bottom or to the top of many of those great truths about God himself. And Jesus is saying, I know him. I know them all. No one knows the Father except the Son.

And he goes on, no one knows the Son except the Father. There are such depths to Jesus himself, to the person of Jesus as God, to the union between God and human nature in Jesus, to comprise that one indivisible person of God and human, divine and human in his own person, who can possibly understand how that can be, how they exist together and coexist.

Well, Jesus is saying, the Father knows that, and I know the Father. But he goes on also to say, no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

[10 : 34] Because what he's concerned for is that people will come to himself as the way to the Father, as the way to God, as the way to experience who God is and what God does for his people.

In other words, he's really saying to us today, come to me because I am the one who actually will bring you to know the Father. It's wonderful to think that when Jesus comes to change your life, whether it's in a sudden way or in a gradual way, that's at his own disposal. Whatever he does to reveal himself to us or reveal God to us, that's really in his own hands. He is the only one who can bring us to know God. As he says in John, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except by me. And so coming to Jesus is an indispensable, indispensable to, in order to know God. You imagine when Jesus comes into a person's life, it's as if he's coming and saying, now I'm going to a very special palace with you. I'm going to God the Father. I'm going to introduce you to him. You'll know him as God, your Father. And I will say to him, here's another one, Father, that I have saved. Here's another one that you've become Father to through me.

Come to me. Come to me. All you who are burdened and heavy laden, come to me and I will give you rest.

It's such a simple thing, isn't it? Such a clear thing that we come to Jesus himself. Part of the following of Jesus begins by when we come to him. And when we come to him, that's the beginning of our spiritual journey that goes on then through life and into eternity.

That's why it's such an important thing today for me to ask myself and for you to ask yourself as you listen to the voice of grace, the voice of God's grace through Jesus Christ saying, come to me.

[12 : 53] It's such an important thing to ask myself and to ask yourself, have you done this? Are you still standing at a distance from Jesus? Are you still standing in a way that's not quite yet taken him and come to him? Have you taken his word but not taken himself? Have you come to listen to the gospel today but not come to Jesus himself? Well, this was very often how Jesus spoke to those that he was preaching to and those who listened to him. They were convinced that they had in the scriptures that they had the word of God. You are searching the scriptures, he said to them. In John's gospel, we had a record of that. You are searching the scriptures. This is something good that you're doing. For you think in them that you have eternal life. Of course, they were right up to an extent.

The Jews believed that that's what God had given them, that he had deposited his word in their midst, that he had given this to them. And through it that they came to know eternal life. But he said, you will not come to me that you might have life.

Most of us have more than one Bible in our homes. But do we have Jesus in our hearts? Have we come to himself? Have we given over our life to him? As he's inviting us and indeed commanding us to do you. Although these are invitations, come to me, take my yoke upon you.

They're invitations that come to us with the force of an imperative. They're very genuine invitations, very open invitations, very sincere invitations. But you can see that they have the force of an imperative because it's God. It is the Son of God. It is the Lord who is speaking in these terms. And when he says, come, it's not just an invitation. It's a command. It's an imperative.

It's something that addresses us with the force of his command, with his authority. And yet, it's all the same a wonderful open invitation. Come to me, then he's saying. And the second thing is, take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. Well, not only does Jesus want to welcome sinners to himself, and that's very much the case with this open invitation, he's also concerned to train disciples because that's what following him means. From the moment that you come to him, not only do you follow him then, and not only does he then guide your life, but he trains you as a disciple. He trains us as his people because that's exactly what a disciple is. It's somebody who has come under the trainership of Jesus, under the tutorship of Jesus. He becomes their tutor.

[15 : 51] That's what a disciple is. That's why in these days, a rabbi used to have, important rabbis certainly would have a group of followers taught by them known as disciples. And in that sense, Jesus was no different. He had a group around him who were his disciples specifically, chosen by himself, the twelve, and others that followed him and listened to him as well. But there's what a disciple is. And that was a very common way of referring to becoming a disciple. You took the yoke, a yoke being the piece of wood that was used generally to bind a pair of oxen together when they went out to plow the fields or whatever. This wood that was laid over their shoulders meant that they could be kept tightly bound together, but also controlled by the person who was guiding them and plowing behind them. So the yoke was placed onto the shoulders of the oxen. And they came under the guidance, the tutorship, if you like, of the one who owned them and was plowing with them. And Jesus, the term then, as Jesus uses it here, was used of becoming a disciple. When you became a disciple of a rabbi, you took that yoke upon you.

And sometimes it was used even of the law of God. When you came to be taught the things of God, when you came to be taught the law of God, you were taking the yoke of the law and placing it upon yourself. And of course, remember, as we said at the beginning, that he's addressing those who labor and are heavy laden. Because depending on the kind of yoke and depending on who has placed it on you and how the control is going, how it's set about the control, it's either going to be very burdensome indeed and very tiring to actually bear it, or else it's going to be the opposite. And what Jesus is saying, take my yoke upon you, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light. Well, if you join the disciples of Jesus, if you come to himself, when you come to himself, you become his disciple.

And disciples learn together. That's what's leaving us here today, isn't it? We are here as disciples of the Lord. We are here under his yoke. We are here because we want to be taught by him, want to be further taught by him to understand his will, to understand his word. And as you enroll in that school of discipleship, as you become a follower of Jesus, you're doing that by willingly submitting to his teaching. Now, he describes not only his yoke, but he describes himself. Learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart. I don't know about you, but when I was going through school, especially through secondary school, before each term or certainly before each year, we would also be interested to find out who was going to be teaching us maths or English or whatever else it was. And sometimes when you found out who the teacher was, you'd be saying, oh no, she is really a control freak or she's really a disciplinarian or he is this or he is that.

The character of the teacher is so important in the relationship between the teacher and student. And Jesus is saying, if you take my yoke upon you, learn of me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart.

He is the great teacher. There's no other teacher like him. Because his character means that when you take his yoke upon you, you learn from him as one who is genuinely interested in your well-being.

[19 : 48] I am not saying teachers in school weren't that, of course, but they were mere human beings. They did their best. But the character of the teacher is so important to the pupil who is learning.

And the more that character is an attractive character, a dedicated character, a character that you can see is lovingly committed to your teaching, to teaching you the things that are in their remit to teach, the more likely it is that you're going to learn. The only way you're not going to learn with that kind of teacher is just to willingly neglect being taught. And what Jesus is saying is that if you take my yoke upon you, learn of me, learn from me, because I am gentle or meek and lowly in heart. He is the most humble, the meekest, the most gentle, and therefore the most effective teacher that you could get. And it reminds us too, doesn't it, that our relationship, our salvation rather, is a matter of our relationship to a person, not just being in a school formally, not just being a disciple in the sense of being taught and nothing more than that, because ordinarily when you're taught in this life, whether it's university or school, whatever it is, you're taught by whoever it is that's teaching you, different types of teachers, and then you go home and that's it until the next time you're in class. But with Jesus, it's always an ongoing relationship with himself. And that's what salvation is really about, coming to know Jesus for yourself.

I remember in John chapter 4, the people of that town in Samaria that the woman went to, and she told them about this person that she'd met at the well.

Is not this the Christ? He told me all things that ever I did, ever I did, come and see this man. So off they went out, they went to see him. They took her at her word, and they went out to listen to him.

And then he stayed with them at their request for a further time. And then they said to the woman, now we believe, not because of your word. It didn't mean that they weren't accepting her word anymore, but not primarily for your word, for we have heard him for ourselves, and we know that this indeed is the Christ. There's the key to the issue. They had heard about him from the woman, but now they had heard him for themselves. They had heard himself. He himself had spoken to them.

[22 : 31] He had taught them. That's what a disciple of Jesus is. That's what it is to follow Jesus. That's what daily life is like with Jesus. You want to hear his own voice when you get up in the morning, before you go to bed at night, and through the day. You want to take him to work with you so that you're actually listening to him. You'll read the Bible with a prayer that God will speak to you, that he will actually address you, that these words will come off the page, and you will realize again that Jesus is speaking directly with you. And that's really such an amazing privilege when we deserve the very opposite of all that. And here is Jesus today saying, I am gentle and lowly in heart. But he also says, my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. And that seems a bit surprising, really, doesn't it? Because the teaching of Jesus, when you consider the whole of the teaching that Jesus gives us through the Scriptures, you might say, well, I don't see that as being easy or light. And what he means, of course, is comparing it with the yoke of the Pharisees, comparing it with legalism, comparing it with just a do-it-yourself salvation, this is not burdensome.

Because for one thing, when you come to Jesus, one of the first things you actually are aware of is a sense of relief, isn't it? A sense of relief. The burden has gone off your back.

You're no longer left trying to do it yourself. And that relief is so important to you, because you realize somebody else has taken over the control of your life. Somebody else has actually come and managed your life for you. My yoke is easy. My burden is light. Well, this word reminds us that when we come to himself, and when we come to take his yoke upon us, compared to every other teaching, compared to every other relationship, this one is comforting.

This one is special. This one is unlike any other. You know, sometimes we hear people saying that they were converted to Christianity. And they'll say, when I was converted to Christianity. And of course, in many respects, these people are not saying they're not genuinely converted. But it's not the best way of putting it, is it? When people say, when I was converted to Christianity. Because we're not converted to a religion, even to Christianity. We're converted to Christ. We're converted to a person.

We come to be joined to him, not merely to his teaching, not merely to the Bible, not just to Christianity or to any creed. When I was converted to Christ. Come to me. Take my yoke upon you. And when you come to be yoked to himself and take the yoke of his teaching, that is the most special relationship that exists between a disciple and Jesus. And you will find rest for your souls. Come to me and I will give you rest. And you will find rest for your souls when you take my yoke upon you.

[25 : 56] That's a great relief, as I've said. And this rest, the word rest there really, it includes also the idea of refreshment. Of getting refreshment. Something that really refreshes you physically.

Whatever it is, is something that you really value greatly. When you need refreshment and you take something that refreshes you or some means or other by which you're refreshed. When you're tired, when your head is hanging down, when you get refreshment. It's a very special experience. And Jesus is using this word rest in that sense as well. It includes the idea of refreshment. Because when you come to him, and when you take his yoke upon you, what you're experiencing really is new life.

New life. Your soul is refreshed. You come to be revived, vivified, quickened with new life.

That doesn't mean, of course, as we're seeing in these studies, that the way is going to be very easy. It doesn't mean that at all when he's saying, my yoke is easy, my burden is light. It doesn't at all suggest, as you very well know, that the problems in your life are going to disappear. That the things that will cause you pain will not exist anymore in your life.

But he is saying this, I'm carrying the yoke with you. I'm beside you. I'm with you. I'm in you. You're special to me, he's saying. And so I will remember you when you come into all of these experiences. It's not going to be without me. It's going to be by my grace and by my presence. That you're going to go on living as my disciple.

[27 : 44] As Horatius Bonner put it in another verse from that hymn, I heard the voice of Jesus say, Behold, I freely give. The living water, thirsty one, stoop down and drink and live. I came to Jesus and I drank of that life-giving stream.

My thirst was quenched, my soul revived, and now I live in him. Or in the words of Augustine, who in a prayer he said, words which are often quoted, as he was addressing God, thou hast made us for thyself. And our soul can find no rest until we find our rest in thee. How is it with yourself? Are you at rest today? Are you at rest in Christ?

Are you at rest with Christ? Or have you not yet come and taken his yoke upon you? Let's pray.

Lord, our gracious God, forgive us for our reluctance, we pray. Our reluctance to accept your will. Our reluctance to obey. Our reluctance to come to you. Our reluctance to leave confidence in ourselves or in others. Our reluctance also to take your yoke upon us. For it is not something that we do once in a while, O Lord, we are conscious that each day that passes is a day of opportunity for us, a day of responsibility to take your yoke upon us, to learn from you, to be taught by you.

O Lord, we pray that our hearts will increasingly be molded by you and shaped and conformed to your will and help us gladly to carry that yoke of your teaching and help us to rejoice in the fact of being yoked together with you. For we know that way that we are never going to be on our own again and that you will be with us even through life and death and into eternity. So receive us, we pray now, and continue with us throughout this day and be with us in the evening as we expect again to come to worship you. We ask it all for Jesus' sake. Amen. Our closing psalm today is Psalm 119.

[30 : 14] 119 from the Sing Psalms Version. And this is on page 165. We're singing verses 129 to 136. Your statutes, Lord, are wonderful, so I obey them from my heart. Your words as they unfold give light and truth to simple minds, and truth to simple minds, in part. Through to verse 136.

Your statutes, Lord, are wonderful. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen.

[32 : 01] Amen. Teach me the statute you have made.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. increase 3000 classical son'.

Amen. Amen. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and evermore.

Amen.