

Matthew 11:28-30

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Jesus offers His easy and light yoke to everyone who is tired from trying to bear the heavy burdens of the religious establishment.

This teaching is unparalleled in the other gospel accounts.

At the end of this dialogue, Jesus gave a personal and astonishing invitation to the infants whom the Father has revealed His Son (Matthew 11:25). *Come to Me*, He offers to *all who are weary and heavy-laden*.

To be *weary* is to be tired not just in your body, but in your “psuche” (soul). It describes not just exhaustion, but exhaustion plus exasperation. It is a state of mental and emotional fatigue. It can be a dull or acute. And when it is felt, it increases the temptation to give up and succumb to apathy or depression. *Heavy-laden* means to be carrying a *heavy* load, possibly for some time. *Heavy-laden* is a cause for people to be *weary*. This could include anxiety and hopelessness. *Rest* is what *weary* people seek. *Rest* restores the vigor and strength necessary to carry on and enjoy life.

To *all who are weary and heavy-laden* that *come to* Jesus, He promises *I will give you rest*.

Jesus likely uses this language to describe a people *who are weary and heavy-laden* from the unbearable demands of the scribes and Pharisees. These religious heroes of the people, who sat in Moses’s seat, failed and defrauded their people. They set the moral bar so high that even they themselves could not keep it (even though they pretended to do so). If the *weary and heavy laden* are “the infants” whom the Father revealed His Son, then “the wise and intelligent” are the scribes and Pharisees whom the Father has hidden His Son (Matthew 11:25). Later on, Jesus would condemn their hypocrisy with strong words.

“And they tie up heavy burdens and lay them on people’s shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as their finger. And they do all their deeds to be noticed by other people; for they broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels of their garments. And they love the place of honor at banquets, and the seats of honor in the synagogues, and personal greetings in the marketplaces, and being called Rabbi by the people.”
(Matthew 23:4-7)

Anyone who did not keep their rules were shamed. They could even be cast out of the synagogues and religious community if they did not measure up and meet their approval (John 9:22). Their standards were impossibly high, and their legalistic set of rules was void of mercy. Many of the people beneath them wished to please God with their lives, but they were being crushed by their spiritual leaders. These spiritually oppressed people were *weary and heavy-laden*. And their only apparent options were to keep pressing on beneath the unbearable weight or accept their rejection and live as a social outcast among the sinners and Gentiles.

Jesus could also be using the language of being *weary and heavy-laden* to represent those who are burdened by living in sin. Sin is an encumbrance to living a fulfilled life (Hebrews 12:1). Paul described false teachers preying on women who were “weighed down” with sin (2 Timothy 3:6). In that particular instance, they were a slave of their own appetites. This fits with Paul’s description of sin in Romans 6 as being that which enslaves us. We are like a slave chained to the oar of a galley ship. We are trapped in a prison of appetites and illusions. To either the immense weight of licentiousness or legalism, Jesus provides an answer.

By way of an agricultural metaphor, Jesus continues to explain His offer as an appealing alternative for *all who are weary and heavy-laden*. He says *Take My yoke upon You*. A *yoke* is a harness for animals, such as horses, donkeys, oxen. A *yoke* enabled these beasts of *burden* to pull carts or plows. Because He adds *and learn from Me*, He likely has oxen in mind. Young oxen learned to how to pull plows by being yoked with a seasoned ox. Whenever a young ox suddenly tried to turn, the seasoned ox would stand still until the young buck was ready to continue. In this way the young ox learned *from* the seasoned ox with whom he was yoked as the two bore the *burden* together.

In essence, Jesus invites *all who are weary and heavy-laden* to be yoked with Him. This would include those weighed down by the yoke of legalism as well as those weighed down by the yoke of licentious living. It is key to note that Jesus is not saying “stop” but rather “replace.” When we replace the weight of the world with the yoke of Jesus, this brings two immediate benefits.

The first benefit is that we can *learn from* Jesus. As we go through life with Jesus and encounter circumstances that are new or scary to us and want to turn away, we can *learn from* His experience to discover the best way forward. Unlike the scribes and Pharisees who were severe proud teachers, Jesus says *I am gentle and humble in heart*. He understands our fears and *burdens* (Hebrews 2:17-18). He helps those *who are* yoked to Him *learn* to live life as God intended for us to live it. He is a sympathetic High Priest, who has endured temptation just as we have (Hebrews 4:15).

The second benefit is that we *will find rest for* our “psuches” (*souls*). When we are yoked with Jesus, He helps shoulder the *burden*. When we are yoked with Jesus, we are no longer carrying our burdens alone. Like Paul, we are able to “do all things through Him who strengthens [us]” (Philippians 4:13). Peter invites us to “cast all your anxiety on Him, because He cares about you” (1 Peter 5:7). Jesus’s invitation to *Come to Me* was for *all who were weary* to set aside the *heavy-laden yoke* of the Pharisees in exchange for *My yoke* which is *easy* and *My burden* which is *light*.

Jesus says His *yoke is easy*, because anyone can *come to* Him and *learn from* Him. He says His *burden is light*, because His strength helps lighten the *burden* and His *burden* is unlike that of the scribes or of the world.

But there is a third benefit to taking His *yoke* that Jesus implies with this metaphor. And it is this: the partnership and relationship we get to share with Jesus as we go through life together. This is a personal and sweet opportunity to all who are tired of never being good enough, or tired of chasing the illusions of the world.

Jesus offers *all who are weary* to *come to* Him and *learn* how to live life to the fullest; *rest* from the futile and crushing *burdens* from fraudulent religious systems, and an opportunity to partner and *yoke* with Him in the ventures of our lives.

Biblical Text

11:28-30 Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, 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.