

**“Rest for the Burdened”**  
**Matthew 11:20-30**  
**March 4, 2018**

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**INTRODUCTION:**

In the movie *Wild*, Reese Witherspoon stars as a troubled young woman who decides to hike the Pacific Coast Trail. Since she has no experience with backpacking, she heads off to her local outdoors store to get their advice on what she will need for her adventure. Though they warned her to be careful about how much weight she would be carrying, it seemed to her that everything she saw at the outdoors store was something that would come in handy. So she just bought it all, but never actually tested any of it. When the day came for her long trek to begin, she assembled her backpack from a motel room at the southern end of the PCT. But she had a problem: her backpack was too heavy for her to lift. It was something of a metaphor for her entire life, in which she had been accumulating burdens until it was too much to carry.

It is impossible to go through life without accumulating burdens. What burdens have you brought with you this morning? Some burdens are obvious. Some of you may be experiencing the burdens of economic hardship, marital struggles or significant health issues. Other burdens are less obvious, but no less real or heavy. I think, for example, of the burden of growing up without a father in the home or with an abusive father. There is a sense in which all of us carry burdens into adulthood resulting from being raised by sinful parents. And all of us who are parents will add burdens to our children as a result of our brokenness. There are many ways to accumulate burdens, but only one way to be rid of them.

Today’s passage is one of the most beloved and most oft-quoted in Matthew’s Gospel. Jesus invites us to come to him for rest. He has come not to be a burden but to relieve burdens. Let’s consider Jesus’ invitation to find rest by looking at the three main verbs of these verses.

**I. Come to Me**

It is essential that we recognize who it is we are coming to in this invitation. Who is the “me” to whom we are invited to come? If the “me” is someone unable to do anything about our burdens, it’s not much use going to him. But if he is a being of limitless power who cares deeply for us, then we come to him gladly and expectantly. Jesus is the latter. Consider what has just been revealed of him in the verses just prior to this invitation in verse 28.

Verses 20-24 reveal him to be the great Judge of the earth. He speaks a sobering word of judgment against the cities and towns where he had been teaching and performing his miracles. Apparently, they did not respond properly to Jesus' ministry, through a response of repentance. So Jesus pronounces a word of judgment. **“Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you.”** He then goes on to say the same about Capernaum, the Galilean headquarters of Jesus' ministry.

People today don't like talk of the judgment of God, but that doesn't change anything. It should sober us when we realize that this word of judgment is not spoken against people who knew nothing of Jesus, but rather against those who had the closest possible interactions with him. Being exposed to Jesus only serves to increase one's judgment if such exposure doesn't lead to repentance. And notice that this judgment is based on Jesus' complete knowledge. He knows not only what actually happens, but hypotheticals as well. He knows what these cities of Tyre, Sidon and Sodom would have done had they been exposed to the works and words of Jesus. They would have repented.

The warning of judgment is not the last word from Jesus. The invitation to come to him for rest is his last word. It is a kindness Jesus brings to us in this word of judgment, warning us of the thing most to be avoided in this life. When I am on a group bicycle ride, we warn one another of hazards we see all the time. Such things as potholes, gravel on the road, cars approaching from the rear, puddles of water, roadkill, and much else result in clear, unambiguous warnings. No one ever thinks, “I can't believe you're so unloving as to always be speaking of these negative things.” On the contrary, it would be unloving not to sound the warning. It is the same with Jesus. He sounds the warning in order to sound the invitation, all motivated by his love.

There is a second truth we find here about Jesus, and that is that he is the Sovereign one. Jesus could easily have been discouraged. John the Baptist was struggling with doubts, and those with the greatest exposure to his ministry of healing and teaching were remaining unrepentant. Though success seemed elusive to Jesus, he was not discouraged. To the contrary, he responded with praise and thanksgiving. **“I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children”** (v. 25). He drew comfort from the same thing many Christians have found to be of such comfort, the sovereign will of God the Father.

Jesus goes on to include himself as co-sovereign with God. **“All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son**

**except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him”** (v. 27). This verse seems to me to be revealing one of the most holy and amazing truths in the entire universe. Jesus is speaking of the intimate knowledge that exists among two members of the Trinity, the Father and the Son. When he speaks of the two of them knowing one another, he is speaking of relational intimacy, illustrated to us in marriage. And Jesus has authority to include us in that relational intimacy. Is there any greater blessing in the universe than this one?

This blessing comes only to those **“the Son chooses.”** This is the doctrine called election or predestination. Jesus says that the only ones who come to know the Father are those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Some object to this by asking, “But doesn’t that doctrine remove human choice and make us mere robots?” Jesus didn’t think so, because it is in the very next verse that he invites us to make a choice to come to him and take his yoke.

## **II. Take My Yoke**

What does it mean to come to Jesus? It means to take his yoke and learn from him. A yoke is an instrument that ties a pair of work animals together in such a way that allows them to pull a load. This strikes us initially as an odd invitation. Jesus is talking to people who are burdened already, and he offers them a device that is designed for labor. Isn’t what they really need a vacation? Sometimes we do simply need to take a break, but Jesus has something better in mind than a good vacation. What he offers is a different way to carry our loads, a way that leads to rest.

There are two assumptions made in this text that are crucial for us to understand. The first one is that we will always have burdens to carry. He is not promising the removal of all burdens but a way to carry our burdens that brings rest to our souls. It is critical that we understand this. If you are looking for the complete removal of your burdens, you will be disappointed. Many fall into the trap of thinking that the next stage of life is going to offer the burden-free stage. Those with babies look to the time when they can sleep through the night. Those with toddlers look forward to when they go to school. Those with school-age children look ahead to the empty-nest years, and everyone looks forward to retirement years. But anyone who’s been through these stages can tell you that none of them offer the burden-free life, because each one has its unique burdens.

A second assumption Jesus makes is that you are going to yoke yourself to something. He is inviting us to take up his yoke as opposed to some other yoke. Someone might be thinking, “I don’t want to yoke myself to anyone or anything. I just want to do what I want to do.” But to say that is to yoke yourself to self-satisfaction. Tom Brady is arguably the best quarterback ever to play in the

NFL, still playing at a very high level at 40 years of age. He has led his team to six Super Bowl appearances, winning four of those. In a 2016 interview on *60 Minutes*, Brady said, “Why do I have three super bowl rings and still think there’s something greater out there for me?... I mean this isn’t—this can’t be—all it’s cracked up to be... I love playing football... But at the same time, I think there are a lot of other parts about me that I’m trying to find.” Brady is expressing here dissatisfaction not with his career or his wife, but with himself. A man who has, in the eyes of many, everything anyone could possibly want is still dissatisfied. Everyone yokes himself to something, but only one of those yokes brings rest.

How does yoking ourselves to Jesus bring us rest? Picture two animals yoked together, one much stronger than the other. Two benefits come to the weaker animal. First, every bit of power the stronger animal puts toward moving the load is that much less power the weaker animal has to put toward doing so. And since there is no load too great for Jesus to pull, when we are yoked to him we can bear up under any load, no matter how great. Perhaps Paul was thinking of this verse when he wrote, **“I can do all things through him who strengthens me”** (Phil. 4:13).

The second benefit coming to the weaker animal is guidance. If you are yoked to Jesus, you’re going to go wherever he leads. I was encouraged by something Chris Granberry said at the Missions Conference three weeks ago. He said that they didn’t know what to do when they first showed up at the Yakima reservation fifteen years ago. Lacking an elaborate master plan, they simply set about helping people and telling them about Jesus. Haven’t you often been in the situation where you didn’t know what to do, what direction to take? When you’re yoked to Jesus, you simply follow him. He knows the direction your life needs to take. He can navigate all the twists and turns that are too much for us.

So what exactly is it that we do when we take up Jesus’ yoke? Two things are needed. First, we repent of yoking ourselves to other things. You yoke yourself to something by attaching yourself to it, confident that it will take you to where you need to go. Some have yoked themselves to a career, thinking that success in that career will take them to the destination they’ve always longed for. Others have done so with relationships, thinking that the approval of the right people can bring them what they really want. We could add money, children, comfort or an attractive appearance to this list. You can yoke yourself to one thing in life. It’s either Jesus or something of your own concoction.

The next thing we do to yoke ourselves to Jesus is to trust in him at a daily level. Remember that a yoke is a tool used in walking, which speaks to us of our daily lives. We take up Jesus’ yoke daily by living our daily life in dependence upon him. Most of the matters that come up in one’s daily life are not matters of exceptional consequence, but mundane issues. Children need

their baths, meals need to be prepared, bathrooms cleaned, expense reports filed, meetings attended, lesson plans completed. We don't wait for the extraordinary things to yoke ourselves to Jesus, but do so in the mundane. Jesus is offering to us here great joy and meaning in the most mundane events of life. When yoked with Jesus, we walk with him through the day, enjoying the sweetness of his presence.

Part of trusting Jesus is to "learn from" him. He doesn't say to learn *about* him, but *from* him. We place ourselves under his tutelage, listening to him and obeying him. Jesus becomes our tutor.

### **III. Find Rest**

The result of all this is that we find rest for our souls. Sabbath rest comes to us through Jesus. Hudson Taylor was an early missionary to China. His son and daughter-in-law wrote a book about a spiritual breakthrough in his life during his missionary service, a book called *Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret*.

He was a joyous man now, a bright happy Christian. He had been a toiling, burdened one before, with not much rest of soul. It was rest in Jesus now, and letting Him do the work—which makes all the difference. Whenever he spoke in meetings after that, a new power seemed to flow from him, and in the practical things of life a new peace possessed him. How was his faith strengthened? Not by striving after faith, but by resting on the Faithful One. (Taylor, *Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret*, 159)

### **CONCLUSION:**

So I want to invite you to think of the burden you are carrying right now. Don't make the mistake of thinking that if it's not a major burden that it doesn't count. But maybe it is a major burden. Maybe it's the burden of sin that is weighing you down. Jesus invites you to yoke yourself to him through dependence on him. Will you do that right now? Just say, "Jesus, walk with me in this burden. It is too much for me, but not for you. Help me to learn from you as you walk beside me. Replace my fatigue with joy in you."

**Small Group Discussion Questions**  
**Matthew 11:20-30**

1. Jesus invites those carrying heavy burdens in life to come to him for rest. Like Reese Witherspoon's character in the movie *Wild*, people tend to accumulate burdens as they live life. What are some of the burdens you are carrying now that you had no idea you would have to carry ten, twenty or more years ago?
2. What burdens are you carrying today?
3. Jesus invites us to come to him with our burdens. The Jesus we come to is both the Judge (11:20-24) and the Sovereign One (11:25-27). Does it encourage or discourage you to come to Jesus when you think of him as a Judge? What aspect of his role as Judge here encourages you to come to him with your burdens? [Hint: consider what Jesus knows in this passage and the goodness behind a warning]
4. Jesus' ministry was not a success by the normal measures of success. Yet his heart was filled with thanks when he considered the sovereignty of God in election. Has your heart ever been comforted by the sovereignty of God? Explain how that can happen.
5. Note here that Jesus doesn't offer to remove our burdens, but a different way of carrying our burdens that leads to rest. Think about the metaphor of the yoke and list all the things you can think of that are taught by that metaphor.
6. Is there some step God may be calling you to take as you consider this metaphor of being yoked to Christ?
7. Within the past month, two Oak Mountain High School students have committed suicide. If a teen you know comes to you and confesses they have been in such despair that they have thought about suicide, how would you use Jesus' promise here to help them? Be as specific as you can.