

Lay down your burdens: 9.7.23 Matt.11 vs16-19,25-30

A man went to his doctor complaining of constant headaches. The doctor conducted the usual tests: blood pressure, blood sugars, etc. All clear. So, he sent him for X-rays, MRI scans. All clear. But his headaches persisted. So, the doctor advised a change of lifestyle: quit smoking, drinking, take more exercise and accept a less stressful job. All this, the man faithfully did. The headaches persisted. Then the doctor had a light bulb moment! What size is your shirt collar - 15 inches. The doctor quickly ran a tape around the man's neck and found it to be 16 1/2 inches. Problem solved. In real life it isn't very often like that. Our problems and stresses go deep, right down into our very bones. They touch the very nerves of our security.

Last week, we looked at our treasures and how they can adversely affect our relationship with God. God may ask us to let them go, in faith and obedience, so that His blessings flow. Today we are going to look at our burdens and how Jesus says, come to him, release those burdens to him, and receive the blessing of rest in return.

Let's look at the back story to the passage we read. At the beginning of Chapter 11, John the Baptist is in prison and is beginning to have doubts about Jesus' Messiahship. Are you the one who was to come? Jesus sends John's disciples back with a reply. Report back to John what you hear and see. Jesus then addresses the crowd with him, about John's ministry and his own ministry and berates them for their lack of response. We pick up the story at our reading. Jesus likens the crowd to children sitting in the marketplace as they react to life around them. When they play happy music, eg at a wedding, some people won't dance. Yet when they sing sad songs, eg at a funeral, the same people won't cry. Jesus ties this analogy to John and himself. John's ascetic lifestyle was branded fanatical whereas Jesus convivial and approachable lifestyle was branded scandalous. The crowd failed to respond to either teacher or their message. Jesus warns that God's salvation plan, his wisdom, would not be thwarted as both John and himself had a specific role to play in that plan. The crowd should listen to his teaching because of his intimate and unique relationship as Son to God the Father. It is only through Jesus the Messiah that God the Father is revealed to His believers. I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father, except through the Son. God's gracious revelation of salvation comes to those who humbly receive and accept it. Receives like a child. Jesus warns that it will be difficult for worldly wise, proud, and independent people who feel they know it all to accept and receive God's salvation.

So, we come to the text we want to explore this morning. Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, 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. We all know a yoke is an aid to help an individual carry a heavy load or to help a pair of animals share heavy work like ploughing. But there are deeper connotations for this 1st century Jewish crowd. Rabbis taught the yoke of the Torah was a gift of God to be celebrated. It was a road map on how to live a blessed life. They spoke of taking on the yoke of the law, under their direction. They would say to potential students take my yoke which meant, join my school, become my pupil, accept my teaching. But the people of Jesus' day we're wearied by rules regulations laws and commandments and burdened by self-righteous religious rulers. We tend to think of the law of Moses as just the 10

commandments. In fact it was supplemented by 613 statutes that's 365 "do's" for every day of the year and 248 "do not's" representing the bones and organs in the body. These statutes were supplemented by even more rules on how to practically adhere to those statutes. They were based on human opinion and often varied from rabbi to rabbi. E.g. you were not allowed to carry a stick on the Sabbath in case you dragged it behind you and were guilty of ploughing. Of course, no work was permitted on the Sabbath. (Just like swings in our parks and even swings in our budgie cages.)

No wonder Jesus said of the teachers of the law, and the Pharisees, they tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them. The teachers of the day were, aloof, proud, harsh, and supercilious. Whereas Jesus was gentle and humble.. He led by example. Learn from me, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light. Instead of 613 statutes and a plethora of additional rules, Jesus distils a life pleasing to God into one simple command. If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My command is this, love one another as I have loved you. Act out of faith and obedience and Jesus promises the crowd the blessing of rest. Not absence of physical activity, but rest for the soul, contentment, and peace. That promise holds for us today because Christ is not dead. He is risen and is seated at the right hand of the Father where he is now are eternal high priest and our mediator with God. He is not physically with us, but we are not orphans. Through the baptism and in-filling of the Holy Spirit we can in a spiritual sense still walk with Christ and be taught the scriptures- just like the disciples on the road to Emmaus; we can have our griefs consoled – just as Mary's was at the tomb: our doubts removed- just like Thomas's; we can still expect miraculous provision – the disciples breakfast with the risen Jesus; and our remorse and repentance accepted- like Peters at the lakeside.

The resurrection is the guarantee that nothing can or will separate us from the love of God, his provision, his care, and his power to overcome in times of crisis. To receive his promise of peace and rest, we must respond to his invitation to come, to take his yoke and learn from him. This invitation is open to all: those weary of the world, it's wars, it's strife, it poverty and sickness. Even the delights of the world: fame, success, riches can become burdensome as well. The Beatles sang, boy you're gonna carry that weight a long time. Those anxious, fearful, lonely, carrying emotional hurts. Finally, those burdened by guilt, shame, and feeling alienated from God. All are invited to come. Jesus says come, submit to me, trust in me, give all your burdens to me. But it's not come to church ritual, or vows of chastity poverty and penance, it's not come to good deeds, or spiritual enlightenment. It's come to me the Lord Jesus Christ as personal Saviour.

John Stott (bible teacher, author, rector of All Soul's Church) in his book, Why I am a Christian, says it is possible for some to come to church to be baptised and confirmed, to a pastor to seek his counsel, to study the Bible. It is possible to engage in all these comings without our ever coming to Jesus Christ himself. Don't stumble over the simplicity of Christ's invitation. Nothing keeps us out of the Kingdom of God more surely than our pride and self-sufficiency. I can deal with any problem myself. When we come to Jesus, submit to Jesus, we are yoked to him. Come and take my yoke upon you. If you are worn out and beaten down, how can you find rest by taking up another yoke - because of the nature of the yoke and the person we are yoked to.

Jesus takes all our burdens and worries and takes them on himself. He also takes the full force of God's law that would crush us. It's now resting on his shoulders through his perfect sacrifice for our sins on the cross. We are resting in him. We can rest because our relationship, with our Father God, has been restored. In place of our burdens, we take his yoke, his teaching, which is easy and light. He calls us in discipleship to love Him and love our neighbour and to serve in love. In his service, we find freedom. We are now free from the burden of self-improvement, self-effort, and the constant struggle to overcome the guilt of our shortcomings. Finally, we are called to learn from him. Learn from the one who is gentle and humble in heart. Just as the invitation to come is personal to you, so your tuition will be personal: no dramas, no condemnation, no you're a thicket you'll never amount to anything. It's tailored to meet your needs. Learn by walking with him, working with him, watching him in the spirit. Learn what it means to be his disciple through the infilling of the Holy Spirit through the scriptures, through prayer and quiet times. Then we will truly find rest for our souls.

Remember Jesus didn't come to earth to establish a new religion, he came to restore a broken relationship with our Father God. Come to Him and know rest and know the peace of God and peace from God. Shalom or peace means nothing missing nothing broken everything restored in our relationship with God. Amen