

# A Yoke of Love

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**Bible Text:** Matthew 11:28-30

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There was a time when the Son of Man carried a heavy load upon him. He struggled beneath it's weight and burden as he advanced towards Calvary. That heavy load was in the form of a cross on which the Prince of Glory died. In Hebrews it states, "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross despising the shame and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." It says that he endured the cross, friend. It was a yoke upon him, a yoke of love. He endured that awful suffering, the shame and scandal of the cross. He endured the nails driven into his holy hands. He endured the nails as they were pounded through the tender flesh of his beautiful feet. It was a yoke of pain, of suffering, of anguish, for he had to endure not only the public humiliation of hanging naked before a crowd alongside common criminals, he had to endure the physical agony of the torments of crucifixion which was Rome's cruelest form of execution and he had to endure the heartbreak of experiencing something he had never experienced before and that was the turned face of the Father because God could not look upon sin. Jesus became sin for us. He took the wrath of God upon him which should have been poured out on us. It was all a heavy yoke upon him but he bore it in love because of the joy that was set before him. It was a yoke of love.

That's the title of my message today, friends, "A Yoke of Love." Jesus speaks of a yoke in the gospel of Matthew as he makes first mention of the gospel invitation to poor sinners. Our text today is found in Matthew 11:28-30. As you turn in your Bibles to this important passage of Scripture, notice who Jesus is addressing: he is speaking to those who are heavy laden, someone under a burden of sin. You see, friends, the gospel is not for the self-righteous, the gospel of the Son of God is for the weary, the hungry and thirsty individual who sees a need for a remedy of sin in the person of Jesus Christ.

Let me read you our text today as found in Matthew 11:28-30,

"28 Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

We will examine this yoke today and what it represents in the Christian life. A yoke is something you place on a beast of burden to bind and control it. As the yoke was used to control animals, it also saw usage on humans when a yoke-bar was secured to a prisoner's neck and his hands were fastened at the two extreme ends. We see this in Jeremiah 27 whereby God displays his sovereignty over man and places a grievous yoke upon them, "I have put a yoke of iron upon the neck of all these nations." And God has laid his yoke upon his people Israel in a sovereignty covenant and his people either bore the yoke through obedience towards God or broke off the yoke in rebellion, putting on the yokes of other gods and serving them.

In Hebrew Scripture, the wearing of the yoke was viewed as the outward sign of an inward relationship. In fact, the Rabbinic Jew took upon himself the yoke of God's kingship where he declared God's sovereignty in his choice of direction. And by wearing this yoke, he was declaring his oneness with God in contrast to the many gods of the idolatrous nations. We see in the New Testament that the taking up of one's cross daily relates to this concept of the yoke.

Listen friends, you will find this very interesting: the very term for the crossbeam which Jesus is pictured as having carried to his place of execution is the same term frequently used for the crossbeam known as the yoke and early Christians would have recognized that specific relationship between the cross and the yoke. So, in essence, when Jesus bore his cross upon the back of his neck and shoulders as he struggled beneath its weight on his way to Calvary, he was under the yoke of God's sovereignty in obedience to the Father in the plan of redemption whereby he endured the cross and the despised the shame because of the joy that was set before him, the joy of seeing a hell-deserving sinner saved by grace.

Now I want to look at the yoke as it applies to us believers. First, to become a believer, you must realize your need of that yoke. What is this yoke of which I speak? The yoke of his Lordship upon your life for when a sinner comes savingly to Christ through repentance and faith, he takes that yoke of Lordship gladly upon him. You cannot be truly saved if you've only taken Jesus as a Savior and never surrendered to him as Lord. He is Lord and Savior.

The text in Hebrews that we read earlier says, "He is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." Jesus is a risen Lord, friend, and if you want him, you must take him there. As Lord, he sits at the right hand of the Father and he earned that right by way of a bloody cross.

Let us look at the aspects of the yoke of Christ upon the believer. First, it is a yoke of learning. Jesus declares, "Take my yoke upon you and learn of me." This is the yoke of discipleship whereby Jesus states, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." It is that understanding that the early Christians had of the harmony and connection between the cross and the yoke, the crossbeam, known as the yoke. So first, it is a yoke of learning.

Secondly, it is a light yoke, friends. It's not grievous to bear as an iron yoke of subjection, "For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." A yoke was employed at times by two animals to relieve the burden of the one by the other. It was a shared burden carried. When we come to Christ and we lay our sin burdens down and are washed in the blood and born of the Spirit, he gives us grace each day to live for him. It's a joy to serve him, not a burden; a light yoke that we gladly take upon us as a sign of ownership and servitude to a king, King Jesus.

Next, this yoke is a yoke of leading. A yoke is used to guide along a specific path. A beast of burden is guided along a field dragging a plow. God, through his Holy Spirit, guides us as we live under the discipline of the Holy Spirit through the Lordship of Jesus Christ in our lives.

Lastly, it is a yoke of love; a yoke lined with love, the love of the Father, the love of Calvary. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth on him shall not perish but have everlasting life." That's a yoke of love, friend. I gladly take that yoke upon me, that yoke of Lordship. That yoke keeps me out of trouble, out of danger, out of the grip of the evil one. That yoke keeps me; I am kept by God.

Sidlow Baxter used to tell the story of the deacon in his church upon whom he greeted one morning with, "Good morning, brother, how are you keeping?" Whereby the good deacon replied, "Keeping? No, my dear fellow, I am kept." And that's true, friends, when we have the yoke of the Lord Jesus Christ upon us, we are kept. In Romans we read, "For I am persuaded that neither death nor life nor angels nor principalities nor powers nor things present nor things to come nor height nor depth nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Did you hear that word "Lord"? If he is not your Lord, friend, he is not your Savior. You either submit your neck to his yoke of Lordship gladly or he will one day place his foot on your neck when he makes his enemies his footstool. To come to Christ savingly, you must throw down your shotgun of rebellion and lay your weapons of rebellion at the feet of a sovereign King. You must take up your cross daily in the form of that yoke of Lordship and live under the rule and reign of Jesus Christ in your life. When you come to Christ, your life is no longer your own for you are bought with a price and that price is his very blood. When you come to Christ, your life is not your own; your time is not your own; your body is not your own; your money is not your own. He must be a complete Master.

This concept of the Lordship of Christ is not new, friend. It's a biblical truth taught even by the Puritan writers. Listen to the words of the great Thomas Watson as he describes the difference between a hypocrite and a true believer.

"But how shall I know that I am making a right application of Christ? A hypocrite may think he applies when he does not. Baalim, though a sorcerer, still said, "My God." He who rightly applies Christ puts these

two together: Jesus and Lord; Christ Jesus, my Lord. Philippians 3:8. Many take Christ as Jesus but refuse him as Lord. Do you join Prince and Savior? Acts 5:31. Would you well be ruled by Christ's laws as saved by his blood? Christ is a priest upon his throne. Zechariah 6:13. He will never be a priest to intercede unless your heart is the throne where he sways his scepter. A true applying of Christ is when we so take him as a husband that we give up ourselves to him as Lord."

That's true, friend. You cannot take out your pocketknife and carve Jesus into two things, Savior and Lord. He is one and the same. He reigns on a throne of authority and he will have no rebels in his Kingdom.

But listen, friend, that yoke is not grievous. It is lined with love. It is for our own good, for our own welfare and protection. For our Christian growth through sanctification and the mortification of sin, we are to grow more and more like Jesus every day under that yoke of love. You cannot sit and rule on the throne of your life and still serve Jesus; one cannot have two masters. When you get saved, self is dethroned and another is enthroned there, the Lord Jesus Christ. But some cry out and say, "We will not have this man reign over us," and you deny the Lordship of Jesus Christ in your life and take him only as a Savior and you live your life for yourself and serve your sins and when you die, you die in your sins and he will say to you on that day, "Depart from me. I never knew you."

If that is your case, friend, and you have never come to Christ in complete surrender to his Lordship and reign over you, if there is a point in your life where you've driven a stake in the ground and said, "Jesus, I will take you only up to this point; I will only go so far with you. I am willing to have you save me from hell but I am unwilling to have you rule and reign over me while I live my life on this earth," then listen, friend, I say to you: repent immediately; you are in grave danger; you sit upon a false bottom. If you are unwilling to receive Christ as Lord, then you are unfit to be in his Kingdom and be called his child. You are self-deceived and in a perilous position. You can be removed from this world quite unexpectedly. The signs of death are all around you; people are being killed in your community all the time or dying from a sudden disease or sudden heart attack.

Listen, you may be a Sunday School teacher who has faithfully served your church for years but you've never really been awakened to your lost condition. You may be a deacon in the church and have great prominence in your community but you have no prominence with Christ Jesus because he was never your Lord. You may even be the pastor of the church and never realized before today what danger you lie in and what self-deception you've practiced that how can you preach to others when you, yourself, are a castaway; your faith is broken up on the rocks of unbelief. Or you may be a long time church member who is self-ruled; you live for self, to gratify your flesh. You are number one in your life and you cry out with the crowd, "We will not have this man reign over us."

There is a story about John Sung, the famous Chinese evangelist. One day he was preaching to a large crowd and in his sermon he said, "I sin every day." Well, later that

night, he was reprimanded by a missionary who said, “Dr. Sung, you told the crowd today that you sin every day. You erred, my brother. Jesus never preached a sinning religion. Jesus told the healed cripple, ‘Go and sin no more.’ Jesus declared, ‘If you love me, you will obey my commands.’”

Listen friends, the yoke of Lordship is the yoke of obedience. Christ was obedient to the Father in going to the cross. He wore that yoke for you. Will you not take up your cross and follow him? The gospel is for the hungry, the weary, the thirsty. Let me ask you: are you hungry for God? Are you weary of your sins? Are you thirsty for Christ and the new birth? Then come and listen to these invitations of the gospel. I pray that they come in power to you now. “Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.” “Seek ye the Lord while he may be found. Call ye upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts and let him return unto the Lord and he will have mercy upon him and to our God for he will abundantly pardon.” “And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Did you hear that, friend? His yoke is easy because it’s a yoke lined with love. Don’t sit on the throne of your life one moment longer. Come down, friend, and look up. Look up to the Lord Jesus Christ as he hangs on that bloody cross. Your sins nailed him to that tree, your sins and my sins. Lay down your weapons of rebellion and kneel at that cross and look unto him and ask him to be your Lord, to be your Savior. Ask him to place his yoke on your neck and receive it gladly for it is a yoke of love. May you come to the place savingly where you can say with the Apostle Paul, “Christ Jesus, my Lord.”