

An Uneasy Yoke and a Heavy Burden?

I have seen it in their eyes, I have heard it in their voices, and I have read between the proverbial lines of their letters and email. Sometimes they post it for everyone to see on their social networking. And although I have sat across the room in counsel, when this certain angst is confessed to me, I sometimes say within my heart, "I have experienced this same thing." What am I talking about? I am referring to claiming and believing the words of Jesus from Matthew 11:28-30 with unfulfilled longing, "*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.*" We lean on these precious and beautiful words, yet we find ourselves struggling to understand the reality. Much like the attitude of the late Erma Bombeck who said, "If life is a bowl of cherries, then why am I always in the pits?" Good question. There are times the yoke is not easy and the burden is crushing us. As pastor, I do not pretend to know all the answers, but I rejoice in the fact that I know where to find the answers. All of life's answers for time and eternity are found in the Word of God! Let's examine three reasons our yoke is not easy nor is our burden light.

1. Because the burden we carry is not His.

A good preacher friend of our family, Don Frazer who is now with the Lord said that whenever his mother would see him moping around the house with a burden, she would say, "Don, you're not carrying the Lord's burden, because if you were, you would not be acting like this, because the Lord promised His yoke is easy, His burden is light." Jesus said, "*A certain man made a great supper, and bade many: And sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready*" (Luke 14:16,17). Then our Lord said, "*And they all with one consent began to make excuse*" (Luke 14:18). People are still making the same excuses today. The first excuse was (1) Let me walk by sight. "*I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused*" (Luke 4:18b). The Bible answers: "*For we walk by faith, not by sight*" (II Corinthians 5:7). The second excuse was (2) Let me make sure my material possessions are safe. "*And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused*" (Luke 14:19). Contrariwise, Jesus said, "*...Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth*" (Luke 12:15). The third excuse was (3) Let me be approved by people I love. "*And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come*" (Luke 14:20). Our Lord said, "*And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me*" (Matthew 10:36-38). The parable I just quoted from has been named "The Parable of the Great Supper." It has humorously also been called, "The Parable of the Two Fools and the Henpecked Husband." In all three instances worry was the underlying theme. It was a weight of their own making! We have a promise from Christ that says, "*But*

seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33). Therefore, we can lay our burdens down because God's Word tells us, "*Be careful for nothing...*" (Philippians 4:6a). This means to not be worried, stressed out or bothered by anything or anyone.

II. Because we are carrying the burden incorrectly.

Have you ever been warned when you are about to pick up something heavy, "Lift it correctly, balance yourself and use your legs, not your back." If you have ever slipped a disc while lifting, you never have to be warned again. In Greek, the word for "yoke" is "ζυγός" (zugos), which means a yoke put upon laboring animals; any burden or bondage such as slavery. This word comes from a root word that means the *beam* of the balance (as connecting the scales); a pair of balances. When we are yoked up with Christ, He balances and frees us from overtaxing labor. The word our Lord uses for burden is "φορτίον" (phortion), which means a load of the freight or action involved in the loading of a ship. You have heard and probably used the expression metaphorically, "You are carrying too much baggage." I remember once having two suitcases for the airplane. One bag was overweight, which would have caused us to be charged extra. The helpful agent said, "Why don't you take some of your things from the overweight bag and put them in the lighter bag. We did so and the balance relieved us of extra charge.

The Pharisaical influence in the early church was putting too many restrictions and placing the members, especially the gentiles, under heavy bondage. Can you imagine the Judaizers trying to explain to these Romans and Greeks, "From now on no more pork chops, shrimp or catfish"? I appreciate the answer of the apostles in Acts 15:10, 28, "*Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?... For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things.*" God is encouraging us to carry a balanced load, lest we trip and fall beneath the load. "*There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it*" (I Corinthians 10:13).

III. Because we don't understand Christ is carrying us.

Once many years ago there was a man walking down the road carrying a fifty-pound bag of potatoes. A kind man in a wagon pulled along side of him and inquired, "Say, farmer, may I give you a ride?" The farmer replied, "Why, thank you!" When he got into the wagon, he sat down in the buckboard seat yet he continued holding his fifty-pound sack of potatoes. The wagon driver told him, "Neighbor, why don't you put your 'taters down?" The weary passenger answered, "It's enough that you carry me; I ain't going to ask you to carry my 'taters too!" You have no doubt already made the application. The wagon driver was already carrying the potatoes along with the man. How many times we fail to comprehend that Christ is carrying our load with us. There was a song written a few years ago that explains, "His strength is perfect when our strength is gone; He'll carry us when we can't carry on. Raised in His power, the weak become strong; His strength is perfect, His strength is perfect."

As the poem, Footprints in the Sand reminds us, the author was discouraged when in her dream she saw only one set (rather than two) of footprints. "...I said to the Lord, 'You promised me Lord, that if I followed you, you would walk with me always. But I have noticed that during the most trying periods of my life there have only been one set of footprints in the sand. Why, when I needed you most, you have not been there for me?' The Lord replied, 'The times when you have seen only one set of footprints, is when I carried you.'"

"The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms..." (Deuteronomy 33:27).

-Pastor Pope-