

Hugh Hamilton  
Trinity Presbyterian Church - Pensacola, FL  
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### **GOD BECKONS: “COME ...4. AND FIND REST”**

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30 Psalm 42

A fellow named Harry was looking to find a wife and settle down. Being quite an outdoorsman, his one criteria in a wife was that she pass a "fitness" test, which included spelunking (cave exploring) and being able to carry her end of a canoe from the car to the river. No woman had passed the test. Then Harry met Barbara. She matched him step for step and she figured out what he was doing. So she set up a test of her own. Barbara was a rock hound, so off they went to find rocks. As she made her discoveries, she would slip them into Harry's backpack, and off she would go, leading the hike over steep trails and across mountain streams - a rock here, a rock there, his backpack getting heavier and heavier.

Soon macho Harry became weary from the weight of all these rocks digging into his back, but he was too proud to complain or to ask Barb to carry backpack. He insisted it was "No Problem!" but he grimaced as he walked. She saw he was struggling, and she chuckled to herself, wondering when he'd give up this silly charade. When they got back to the campsite, he heaved a sigh of relief when he dropped the backpack full of rocks off his shoulders onto the picnic table and learned that HE had passed a test that Barb created for HIM!

So often we carry unnecessary burdens that weigh us down and sap our strength.

Jesus saw his contemporaries lugging huge loads of spiritual garbage. The Pharisees had over loaded everyone with RULES, and OBLIGATIONS, GUILT AND SHAME. Joyfully obeying God was near to impossible and the burden was overwhelming. In contrast, Jesus called folks into a yoke of discipleship that enriches life rather than destroys it, is. Jesus wants to share your load, not increase it.

What weighs heavy on your heart?

- Do the "oughtas" and "shoulda, coulda, woulda's" of life trouble you?
- Do nagging voices, "I ought to do this...I should have done that... Why didn't I do this instead of that?" haunt you?
- Do memories and fears weigh heavy on your soul? Lay them down!
- Is your calendar overloaded with things to do? Lay it down!
- Is the TV eating up too much of your time? Lay it down!
- Do nagging memories of bad acts in your past consume your thoughts and energies? Lay them down!
- Are you obsessed about getting ahead in life, about growing older, passing that exam at school or how to raise children in this crazy world? Lay them down! Lay them ALL down at the feet of Jesus! Then rest your spirit and your body a bit. Let Jesus help you carry your burdens. Share his yoke. Let him help you to deal with the load you must bear, but need not bear alone.

According to an old legend, the angels in heaven decided that Satan had too much power, too much freedom, too many ways of "tempting" God's people. So the angels took action. They resolved to limit Satan to one temptation. Just one. That's all Satan would have - one temptation - but to his benefit, the angels let Satan choose his one weapon.

So what do you think Satan chose? After thinking it over a moment, Satan said, "I choose to retain the power of depression." Smirking, Satan knew he had surrendered nothing. Depression is despair. Under despair, the world seems chaotic and undependable, un-remitting, life becomes a burden and we become preoccupied with hopelessness. It's painful to think about yesterday and impossible to think about tomorrow. When hope dies, all seems lost.

Hear the good news of Jesus' invitation: *"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest."*

"Come unto me..." Stop right there. Those three words are enough, don't go any further. Just three words. Come unto me, Jesus said. When your heart is broken and you have no where else to turn; if you can't face going at it one more day alone; if loneliness is getting you down; if grief has cast a pall over your life; if you think no one cares about you, then come unto Jesus.

He invites you - Come!

Don't stay where you are - Come!

Don't live content with "woe is me" - Come!

Don't become stagnant - Come! Jesus says, Let me set you free!

When we're stressed out, burned out, overloaded, losing it, despairing, Jesus stands ready to rescue us. And he's talking about real rest - not just time out - but the comfort of knowing Jesus is there to take charge. "Come ... and I will give you rest."

When Jesus says, "Come unto me," you realize, don't you, that Jesus is inviting you into relationship, not just offering to take away your burden? Religion is relationship. Psalm 42 which we read earlier says, *"As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God."* We need relationship, companionship.

Our biggest burden may not be having too much to do, but not having anything worthwhile to do, not having any purpose in what we're doing. When Jesus says "come unto me and I will give you rest," he's not inviting us to a vacation, lounging around the pool, napping in a hammock. Instead, Jesus throws us a curve -- "Take my yoke upon you." A yoke? One of those heavy harnesses that goes on oxen, or horses, or even on people to help them carry loads on their shoulders? Wait a minute...Jesus invites us to unload our burden on him, but he puts his burden on us. Where's the rest in that? But Jesus adds, "My yoke is easy and my burden is light." An easy yoke and a light burden...how so?

Maybe "Light and easy" means that Jesus' yoke doesn't demand too much. Can we be disciples and not have to do anything?

Can we enjoy all the benefits of Jesus without any demands on our lives?

No, that's not the case.

The same Jesus who said who says his yoke is easy and his burden is light is the one who warns that we will be persecuted for his sake and that we must also pick up and bear our crosses, as we follow him. An easy yoke? A light burden? Boy, there's an oxymoron!

No, "light and easy" does not mean no demands, no sacrifices, no hardship, no cost, no risk, no disappointment. If we take Jesus seriously, if our faith is more than a hobby, we'll encounter demands aplenty. There will be sacrifices, tears, conflicts, and heartaches.

So, once again I ask you: how is the yoke "easy" how is the burden light? Tom Long, my preaching professor back in seminary, shares this story that might help you understand.

During the civil rights movement and the Montgomery, AL bus boycott, one of the supporters of the bus boycott was an elderly Black woman, known affectionately as "Mother" Pollard. Mother Pollard was walking many miles each day to and from work instead of riding the bus. Because of her old age and health problems, the boycott leaders encouraged her to ride the bus and save her strength. She refused, however, saying "My feet is tired, but my soul is rested." (Long)

In her hunger and thirst for righteousness, in her struggle to carry her cross, in her calling to follow Jesus, Ms. Pollard endured hardship and sacrifice. She paid the cost. Her feet were tired, but her soul was rested. Why? Because Jesus was with her. In spite of the demands she knew his rest, his hope, his strength. She knew her efforts would make a difference, because they made a difference to God, and they would benefit other people.

Sometimes we have to give up having things our way, doing what we want, having what we have, because it will be better for the group, better for the greater whole than for us alone.

Jesus' yoke is not light and easy because it makes no demands on us. It's light and easy because we do not bear alone. We bear it with each other. We bear it with Jesus who yokes himself to us, adding to our strength HIS strength, adding to our efforts HIS efforts, bringing us direction and bringing us into step with Him.

Jesus calls us to work right here as a congregation and as individuals. He challenges us to spread the gospel, to make our own people disciples, to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to put our hearts and pocketbooks and our very souls on the line for His cause.

"Take my yoke upon you." That's a demanding challenge, and it's a challenge for the rest of your life. But it is still easy and the burden is still light because it's Jesus' yoke, and because of who are our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Now, I know my limits as your preacher. I can't MAKE you trust Jesus to bear your burdens. I know I can't MAKE you believe his yoke is easy or light. I can't make you take up the yoke Jesus is calling you to carry.

What I CAN do is tell you that Jesus is faithful and true to me and that Jesus has helped me accomplish things I never thought I could manage. Jesus has seen me through conflicts and difficult times I could not have predicted. Jesus has helped me shoulder burdens I did not want to carry and then as I accomplished what Jesus called me to do, I have experienced Jesus present beyond a shadow of a doubt and I have seen lives blessed by what we encountered in Christ.

The longer I am in the ministry, the more I realize you cannot "explain" the joy of discipleship, but you can experience it. When people get a taste of the joy of their salvation and the joy of working hard to benefit someone else, the paradox of the "easy" yoke makes perfect sense. It runs against the grain of so much of our culture, but it is real and it is satisfying when you know God has worked in your life.

I can assure you that there is nothing you cannot handle when yoked to Christ. His strength and companionship and power will see you through. And you will love it! You will thank God for it! You will want other people to have what you have found in Christ. You'll do whatever it takes to bring the joy of Christ to others!

Lay your burdens down before Jesus.

Let him pick you up in his arms and carry you a while.

He will nurse your wounds with his love.

He will hold you close to his heart.

He will heal you of your brokenness and make you whole.

He will set you free to do the right thing, as difficult as that may be!

Your feet will be tired, but your soul will be rested! Amen!

#### Sources Cited

Long, Thomas. Word and Witness, Pentecost 6, July 4, 1999, Vol.99:4, 103.