

Meeting With Christ

Practical and Exegetical Studies on the Words of Jesus Christ

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Based on sermons of Pasteur Eric Chang

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MY YOKE IS EASY

Matthew 11:30-12:5

Let's open our Bible and look at the passage found in Matthew 11:25-30. This is what we read.

Matthew 11:25. At that time Jesus answered and said, "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes.

26 "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight.

27 "All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.

28 "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

29 "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

30 "For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

We have already studied this passage in a previous lesson. At that time, we spoke about the rest that Jesus gives us when we come to Him. And I particularly emphasized the three conditions that a disciple must meet if he is to experience the fullness of that rest in Christ.

A special kind of yoke

Today we want to concentrate our attention on one verse only, v. 30. The Lord Jesus says, *For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.* Remember what He said previously in v. 28. 'If anyone is heavy laden, burdened, crushed under the weight of sin, then come to Me and I will give you rest.' You see how the Lord Jesus is completely honest with us. He doesn't say, 'Come to me and you will have no burden at all.' The Lord Jesus never makes false pretense. What He says is that he is going to take away one burden and give us another burden. He is going to take away the yoke of sin and give us His own yoke.

You might say, 'How does that profit me? It is not a matter of being without a burden. It is a matter of changing one burden for another burden. It is changing one yoke for another.' Well, there is a difference. You read in v. 30, 'My yoke is not the same than what you had before. It is an easy yoke, a comfortable yoke.' The word 'easy' here means 'comfortable', a pleasant yoke to bear.

Now you say, 'What kind of yoke is easy to bear? A yoke is a yoke, right?' Well, the word 'yoke' in the Bible is a very interesting one. It can mean many things. It can mean 'oppression'. It can mean 'being under the authority of something or someone.'

But a yoke is also something that joins two persons together, just as it joins two animals together to plow the field. If we go into the Greek text, we can see that this word 'yoke' comes from the Greek word *zeugnymi* which means to connect, to join together. And for this reason, this word *zeugnymi*, to yoke, seems to be used of marriage. For example in Mark 10:9, the Lord Jesus says, ... *what God has **joined** together, let not man separate*. What God has yoked together, *zeugnymi*, let not man separate. This is a clear reference to the marital union.

Now look at Matthew 11:30 from this point of view. That to be yoked with Christ is to be united with Him in the same way in which a husband and a wife would be united to each other. So to take on the yoke of Jesus means to be united with Him. And in this sense, the yoke of Jesus is this union to Christ.

The 'yoke' of marriage

Let's consider this yoke of marriage. Do you think that marriage is a heavy yoke or a light yoke? Well, judging by the happiness and the enthusiasm that we normally express when we get married, it seems that people are very interested in this kind of yoke. Now I wonder why anybody likes to be yoked. Why do people like this kind of yoke around their neck?

You see, since your childhood, you were longing for freedom. You were telling yourself, 'One day when grow up, I will be free. And I will do whatever I want without having mom and dad after me all the time. Nobody to ask you, 'Where did you go? Why do you come back so late? What did you do with the money?'' O, freedom, freedom... And then, one day, when you actually get your freedom, what do you do? You go back under the yoke again! You meet this girl or this guy. And one day, you walk to the altar and surrender your freedom. You decide to take on your neck the yoke of marriage. What about the freedom that you longed for all your childhood? Now it is not your mother who is asking the questions. It is your spouse! 'Where have you been? Why are you home so late? What did you buy? How much did it cost?' O, freedom, freedom...

But were you sad on the day of your marriage? No, it was a wonderful day! You see, you don't freely surrender your freedom and commit yourself to a person in marriage unless there is a strong conviction deep down in your heart that this kind of yoke is comfortable, is pleasant. That it is a light yoke.

But what makes you so sure that this is a nice yoke? It is because you think that the other person is so wonderful. And because that person is so wonderful, you would like to be tied with that person. It is not because you like to be under a yoke as such. It is because you love the person you are going to be yoked to. That is why.

So becoming a Christian is just like that. Becoming a Christian is not that you believe in Jesus today and you get off tomorrow. It is to be united with Christ, being under His yoke. And as you discover how wonderful He is, you will find also that His yoke is so light. ... *My yoke is easy and My burden is light*.

You know, a human yoke can be very heavy because human beings are full of imperfections. The yoke of human beings is often made difficult because of our own imperfections. The love that binds a couple together can become very selfish. The husband and the wife can become very possessive and demanding of one another. And this puts a great strain upon the marriage. That's when the yoke of marriage becomes heavy.

United with God

To me, the most wonderful thing about becoming a Christian is that we, ordinary human beings that we are, can be united to the Most High, to God. If we could only understand this spiritual truth here, I tell you, it would transform our life. You know, people tend to rush into marriage because they think that the person they are going to marry is so wonderful. But how reluctant, how slow they are to commit themselves to Jesus. They are quick to give themselves to an imperfect human being but how slow they are to put themselves under the yoke of Christ when the Lord Jesus is infinitely more wonderful than any human being that you can love.

If only our eyes could see how wonderful is Jesus. You will long to be under His yoke. You will experience how easy and light is His yoke. It is a yoke that gives you rest and security because you are inseparably united to Him. Inseparable, i.e. from His point of view. He will never cast us out. That's why we read in 2Timothy 2:13 that *If we are faithless, He remains faithful; for He cannot deny Himself*. He cannot deny Himself because otherwise, He would be unfaithful to Himself. It is a principle of commitment. In other words, this yoke is our security, the security that we are bound to Him in spite of our failings and our weaknesses. And so long as we do not prove to be unfaithful to Him, i.e. we do not go into spiritual adultery, He will always be faithful to us.

Because you see, it is only by being under His yoke that you have Jesus. In the world, we understand this perfectly. You will not have that man until you are yoked to him. In the same way, you will not have that woman until you are yoked to her in marriage. Up to that point, you still have the freedom to change your mind and say, 'Good-bye', to him or to her. This yoke is what makes it possible for you to belong to that man or that woman, and to have that person fully. And so it is through this spiritual yoke that Jesus becomes mine because I have become His.

Under the authority of the Lord

Now let's consider this other question. What is this yoke that Jesus talks about? Simply this. To be under His yoke is to be under His authority. I have told you in a previous lesson that a yoke is in the shape of a cross. To take on the yoke is to take up His cross. And taking up the cross in plain language simply means to put your life completely under His authority. If at this moment you are not a Christian and you come before the Lord Jesus and you say, 'Lord Jesus, as of this moment, I commit myself totally under your authority', then you have taken the scriptural step of faith. That is what faith means. Here the Lord Jesus is offering you to come to Him, to take His yoke. 'Will you take My yoke?' And you say, 'Yes, Lord.' At that moment, you are united to Him.

How do two people get married? In the same way. One that day, the pastor will ask you, 'Will you marry this man or this woman?' And you say, 'Yes'. What has happened? In this transaction of the heart, two people have been united in a commitment to one another. In this marital union, you have committed yourself one to the other. In the Christian life, marriage is a picture of our union with Christ and, to a certain extent, baptism is equivalent to this wedding ceremony. And the yoke can be seen as a covenant, the covenant of marriage. You see the parallel?

Is it lawful?

As we go on into Matthew 12, we learn more about this relationship with Christ. The end of Matthew 11 talks about finding rest in Jesus. Matthew 12 continues to deal with this theme of rest and speaks of a situation where the law governing the Sabbath day, the day of rest, might have been broken. Let's read this passage, Matthew 12:1-5.

Matthew 12:1. At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. And His disciples were hungry, and began to pluck heads of grain and to eat.

2 And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to Him, "Look, Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath!"

3 But He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him:

4 "how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests?"

5 "Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless?"

We see from this passage that Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. But His disciples were hungry. So as they walk through the field, they began to eat of the corn that was growing in that field. It is important to understand that in the Scriptures, this is not stealing. Walking in somebody else's field and taking the corns is permitted by the Scriptures. You see that in Deuteronomy 23:25. *When you come into your neighbor's standing grain, you may pluck the heads with your hand, but you shall not use a sickle on your neighbor's standing grain.* You may not enter into somebody's field and cut down all his grains and take it home. That would be stealing. But if you are hungry, you may stand in the field and eat the grain of the corns on the spot. The law allows it as a matter of mercy and kindness, that people will learn to be kind to one another.

Now the Pharisees were watching them. And immediately, they were pointing their condemning fingers and said, *Look, Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath!* On the Sabbath day, you are not supposed to work. And plucking the ears of corns was considered as work. That's the crime that the disciples were accused of. The Pharisees thought of the Sabbath in terms of rules and regulations, in terms of what you are allowed to do and what you are not allowed to do. By regarding the Sabbath as an end in itself, the Pharisees allowed religion to have precedence over the needs of the people.

The word 'Sabbath' means 'rest'. The Hebrew word for 'Sabbath' actually means to come to an end of something. And to rest, one must stop from what was giving him toil before. So when we enter into Sabbath, it means that we come to an end (in the spiritual sense) of the toil of sin in the past. We make a complete break with our old life of sin in order to enter into a new life of rest, of Sabbath rest, in the Lord Jesus. When we become a Christian, we make a complete break with the past. We are finished with our old way of life.

Just like in marriage, when you get married, you are finished with your old way of life. You come to a completely new lifestyle. You are not a bachelor anymore. One of the first adjustments that any young couple will have to face is precisely to adapt themselves to the new lifestyle that comes with marriage. It is normal that out of habit, you bring some of your old lifestyle into your marriage at the beginning of your marriage. But it is not normal to be unwilling to change your old lifestyle to meet the demands of your married life. If you take your old life into your marriage with no desire to change, you are going to have a lot of friction in your marriage.

And this is one reason why a Christian struggles in his walk with God. A great deal of troubles in the Christian life are caused by the unwillingness of the Christian to change. This Christian has taken his old life of sin into his union with Christ. He continues to do things his own way. You can see all the friction that one can experience in a married life like this. I wonder how many people become Christians, claiming that they are under the yoke of Christ but in reality, living their lives as though they are separated from Christ. We don't see any difference between the new life and the old life.

Jesus' answer

Now the Lord Jesus answers the accusation of the Pharisees. He said in v. 3, *Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests?* When David and his men were hungry, they ate the bread which, under the law, they should have not been allowed to eat. And yet, they are never condemned for having done so. Why?

And look at the priests. V. 5: *Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless?* How can priests do work right through the Sabbath day and be guiltless? How do you answer that? The priests can fulfill their temple duties on a Sabbath day and be blameless because they are serving God. The principle is that serving God has precedence over the ceremonial observance of the law.

What about David? In this example, the Lord Jesus wanted to show that the law was never intended to be interpreted so literally that compassion is excluded in a situation of basic need like David's. That's why, when David ate the showbread in the tabernacle because he was hungry, he was held blameless. This means that human need has precedence over the ceremonial observance of the law. So when you serve God in a concern to meet human need, do it in such a way that you put the emphasis on mercy and compassion, rather than on religious sacrifice. That's why we read in v. 7 this OT quotation, *I desire mercy and not sacrifice.*

Serving God

Now, to serve God, you have to be under His yoke, to be subject to Him. In other words, it means an attitude of living for Him. Your energy, your time, your money, are all offered to God. Think again about the picture of the yoke. These animals are wearing a yoke in order to accomplish a task, i.e. to plow the field. The yoke is there for serving a purpose. And so, to take on the yoke of Christ means to serve Him. It means to live for Him day by day.

Let's talk more about that. Let's come back to the matter of marriage again. What exactly did you want to do in getting married? Is it to get something or also to be able to give something? You know, the truth of the matter is that when we just get married, we tend to think more about what I can get out of the marriage rather than how much I can put into it. And I think that we are all guilty of that. It is part of the adjustments that we have to face in getting married. But understand that you cannot have one person giving all the time and the other person always in the receiving end. That kind of marriage will break down sooner or later. And yet, some Christians experience their union with Christ strictly by seeking what they can get from the Lord. That kind of Christian life will not work out.

But your marriage will work out when you say, 'I'm going to see what I can do to help my wife or my husband to become the person that God wants him or her to be. I'm not coming to marriage just to get something. I'm coming to give whatever I can give for the benefit of the other person.' There is a commitment to serve the other person. Imagine a marriage in which both people share this kind of attitude, committed to minister to the needs of the other and hoping, but not demanding, the same thing in return. This kind of marriage has a bright future.

So in the same way, if we come into the Christian life thinking, 'Lord, you have done so much for me. What can I do for you? How can I serve you?' I tell you, this Christian will experience intimacy in his union with Christ. He will come to know the glory of Christ more and more fully. He will experience the joy of salvation, this rest in Christ.

Take this yoke upon you. And you will find that His yoke is easy, that it is a pleasant yoke.