

Yokes Are Useful

TEXT—Matthew 11:29
Broadcast May 6, 1962

A radio announcer was promoting a special offer for subscriptions to *Life* magazine. His closing word was "Enjoy *Life* at half price."

Many of you are endeavoring to enjoy your life at half price. But you have found that it does not succeed. Half price; half joy. You get out of life what you put into it. Only that life is enjoyed to the fullest which is yoked to a noble, worthy purpose to which you can give the sum-total of your life's possibilities.

Therefore, let us consider our theme "Yokes Are Useful" as we note, first, the challenge; second, the condition; third, the consequence.

Consider the Challenge

"Come unto me . . .," said Jesus. This challenge is issued to three attitudes toward life: those who, like John, for the moment have lost sight of the goal; those who, like the multitude, are indifferent to the goal; those who, like the cities of Galilee, have chosen the wrong goal.

Look about you, and you will find the world filled with such people. There is that rare individual who staked his life on some noble purpose. In a moment of seeming frustration and failure his faith falters. Unwilling to wait to see what the centuries say against the hours, he takes his eye off his exalted goal.

Then there are the milling masses who seem to be going nowhere in a hurry, with nothing to do when they arrive. They have never so much as thought of a goal for life. Their ears are calloused to any call other than

the grim necessity of just getting along.

And there are those whose name is legion who spend every moment and every ounce of energy, early and late, in running the wrong way in the game of life, only to realize upon arrival that they aimed at the wrong goal.

Now Jesus describes all of these as those who "labour and are heavy laden." The former suggests active toil. The latter depicts endurance. The lack of rest entails frustration. There is no labor so wearisome, no burden so heavy, as that which ends in frustration.

Note that Jesus does not ascribe such an experience to the dumb or the vicious. They are the "wise and prudent." (Matt. 11:25) The "wise" are those who are gifted with practical skill, natural ability both to do and understand. They are the "prudent" who, literally, are able to put things together. They know that two plus two equal four. They think that they have all the answers to life, and are able to work the problems of life without outside assistance. In the vernacular of sports they "know where the ball is."

Yes, they may know where the ball is, but they are either indifferent or else ignorant as to what and where the goal is. So they strive ever so skillfully and energetically, but never attain. They never find "rest" for their souls or for the best that is in them.

Statistical tables tell a sordid story of the debris of such which are scat-

tered along the highway of life. Psychiatric couches, increased consumption of various narcotics, overcrowded mental institutions both public and private all tell the same story.

At the two extremes of this goalless rat-race are two meaningful but pitiful pictures. At one extreme are those who have not given up the struggle to read some meaning into their lives.

Doctor Roy McClain tells of a small, county-seat town whose two principal industries are an aspirin factory and a fertilizer plant. In the years 1956-1958 the tonnage of aspirin output exceeded that of fertilizer! The "national headache" creates a greater market than does agriculture. Sleeping tablets to go to sleep at night and forget it all, "pep" pills to get going in the morning, and tranquilizers in between. Thus we rush madly on toward no goal or the wrong goal.

Then there is the other extreme of those who have finished the race, exhausted, only to find that they ran the wrong way and wound up with nothing but "the worm, the canker, and the grief . . . alone." There is no way through but out.

Each year in America 16,000 men and women commit suicide, one every thirty-three minutes. Three men succeed in taking their lives for every one woman, although three times as many women as men attempt to do so. And Doctor McClain concludes these grim statistics by noting that most suicides occur not in the black, drab months of winter, but in the bright, cheery months of May and June. At a time when life should be the brightest, to them it is blackest.

Tragedy beyond expression at both ends of the race and in between. But it need not so be. For Jesus says, "When life eludes you, bruises you, or falls in on you, come unto me, and I will refresh, rejuvenate you."

Note the Condition

There is a condition to Jesus' challenge. "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me . . ." Now what is the yoke that Jesus offers?

Some see this as a double yoke whereby we put our necks in one side with Jesus on the other. Thus we pull together with our strength matching His. Or when our strength fails, He provides the lack.

But when Jesus spoke of a "yoke" He had another picture in mind. Note that He did not say, "Take my yoke, and pull with Me or for Me." He said, "Take my yoke, and *learn of me.*" (author's italics)

The figure is a Rabbinical one whereby when a pupil enrolled under a teacher he was said to take his yoke. So Jesus says, "Take my yoke, become my pupil or disciple, and learn of me." In so doing we do not place ourselves alongside Jesus. Instead He puts Himself within us, and through us He pulls the load of life. There are many truths involved in this picture.

There is the fact of *commitment*. It is a companion experience to that of the new birth. Jesus said, "Ye must be born again." The moment you are born again through faith in Christ you become a child of God.

Jesus said, "Take my yoke upon you . . ." The moment that you submit to His yoke you become His disciple. The figures are different, but the meaning is the same. You may be a disobedient child or a poor pupil, but these attitudes do not alter the fact that you have made the commitment. Taking the yoke of Christ you have placed yourself in His hands that He might develop you into the kind of a Christian character that He intends you to be.

Now this is not to be mistaken for a gradual intellectual process of educational evangelism. There must be a definite point of commitment. One

second you are not a pupil, the next second you are. So one second you are not a Christian, the next second you are. The difference is that split-second act of commitment through your faith in Christ as your Saviour, Teacher, and Master.

You are not an adult the second you are born. You are not a Doctor of Philosophy the moment you enroll in school. But you are a child, a pupil. Thenceforth there is growth, learning, and development into what you may become. You must *be* before you can *become*. And you come into being as a disciple or pupil of Christ the moment that you commit yourself to Him through your act of personal faith.

This infers the continuing purpose of *instruction* as you become in its fullness what you are in Christ. Paul expresses it thusly. "Till we all come in [into] the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge [full knowledge] of the Son of God, unto a perfect [complete, adult] man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." (Eph. 4:13)

A mother inquired of a violin teacher as to his fees for teaching her child to play the violin. Said he, "If he has never had lessons the charge will be three dollars per lesson. If he has had previous lessons the charge will be five dollars per lesson."

When asked as to the difference he said, "If someone else has taught him I must take out of his mind what another has put there, and then put in his mind what I want him to know. If no one else has taught him, then all I need to do is to teach him what I want him to know."

Thus we see the contrast made by Jesus between the "wise and prudent" and the "babes." (Matt. 11:25) The former thought that they had all the answers, and were not open to instruction. The latter, knowing that they did not have the answer, were

willing to be taught.

We are not to infer from this that you can by an intellectual process educate a child or a man into being a Christian. This great invitation of Jesus calls for a definite experience of grace described in John 3 as the new birth and here as enrollment as a disciple of Christ. The reference to teaching is that which follows this commitment. It is the instruction of one who by faith in Christ has already become His pupil or disciple.

But, even so, the teaching is a difficult process. For, like the violin pupil, another teacher, Satan, plants in the mind that which must be removed before Christ can put into the mind that which He wishes.

But the important thing is that you do not give up. Jesus never gives up on you. So why should you? Having enrolled in His school, having come under His yoke, having submitted yourself to Him, let Him remove from your mind and heart that which He wishes, and gradually you will come to have the mind of Christ.

Furthermore, the image of the yoke implies *discipline*. Taking Jesus' yoke means that you must not do as you will but as He wills. Perhaps the most forgotten of all Christian doctrines is the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Too many Christian people feel that in Christian liberty they can do as they please. Not so. You must do as Christ pleases. You must seek His will and way in all things.

No athlete excels in sports who does not pay the price of discipline. Paul drew on this fact to express one of his greatest truths with regard to the Christian life.

"Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things.

"Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.

I therefore run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air [or shadow boxing]: but I keep under by body [I beat my body black and blue in discipline], and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast-away." (I Cor. 9:24-27)

The issue here is not being saved or lost. In Paul's thought a non-Christian is not even in the game. The issue is that of failing or excelling in the Christian life. No athlete excels who does not discipline himself both in training and in playing by the rules of the game. The same is true of a Christian in the greater game of life.

Finally, taking Christ's yoke speaks of *purpose*. Under His yoke you are linked to His will and purpose. You are pulling something from somewhere to somewhere. So, I repeat, that more failures in life are due to lack of a sense of direction—and a goal—than to a lack of effort. Thus Jesus continues to say to you and me, "Come unto me . . . take my yoke upon you . . ."

Consider the Consequence

" . . . and ye shall find rest unto your souls." Literally, "I will refresh or rejuvenate you."

Have you, like John, lost sight of your goal? Or like the multitudes, never had one? Or like the cities of Galilee have expended your energies toward the wrong goal? Jesus offers

you hope, a sense of direction and purpose. What is more He offers you joy and strength in reaching His goal.

" . . . my yoke is easy, and my burden is light," says Jesus. This does not mean that He offers you a life free from toil or heartache—and sometimes frustration. In the process it may involve all. But it is a toil of joy and love, and heartache with His grace to bear it. Frustrations may come, but you do not face them alone.

Jesus' yoke is kindly to wear. It galls neither the neck nor the heart. In one sense it is the heaviest of yokes. Jesus makes strong demands. But for that reason His yoke is light. His ideals and their accomplishment remove the sense of wearisome toil and rugged endurance. Though Jesus asks much, He provides the power to respond. Both Teacher and pupil rejoice in the resultant achievements. And the toil of the road will seem as nothing when you reach the end, or goal of the way.

A machine that is not geared to a worthy task may well beat itself to pieces. A life which is not related to a worthy goal and purpose may do the same. That is why Jesus calls you to take His yoke of discipleship, to give yourself to His will and way. It is your only hope for life in its truest sense both here and hereafter.

In this moment of decision I pray that you will surrender your soul, your life and all of its powers to Him.

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