

Matthew 11:25-30

²⁵At that time Jesus said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; ²⁶yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. ²⁷All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

²⁸Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Matthew 11:25-30, 2017

At this point in the gospel of Mathew we reach a turning point. It is a point in time from which the direction of Jesus' story takes him to the cross,

and for us, we look ahead and anticipate our arrival at the cross and discern what that cross,

and what we learn there about Jesus and who he is means to us, and how that shapes the rest of our lives.

It is reminiscent of a passage from Jeremiah 16:

Thus says the LORD: Stand at the crossroads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way lies; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls.

Matthew began his telling the story of Jesus emphasizing God's initiative in commissioning Jesus in chapters 1 through 4:16.

Beginning at 4:17 he showed Jesus faithfully carrying out this commission in the words he speaks (chapters 5-7 and 10), and by his actions in chapters 8-9.

In chapters 11:2 through 16:20 Matthew puts forth the necessity of discerning Jesus' identity from his word and actions,

and the necessity of responding with commitment or rejection.

"Come to me, Take my yoke upon you and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Yeah, right!

Oh God, You seem to require so much of us. You want our time, our energy, our money, our children, our entire life Lord and yet you say,
take my yoke it is easy, my burden is light!

How can a passage that is supposed to bring such comfort, peace, and assurance get so loaded up with the weight of divine expectation and demand?

This is the ancient struggle between law and Gospel.

I can remember experiencing the weight of the command, or demand,
come to me and take my yoke upon you.

And that was just the point,

I was hearing the promise of rest and peace as a command to do something.

I was hearing the promise of the gospel, **the good news**, as if it were law which is not necessarily such good news.

Paul speaks to us about the law from his 7th chapter of Romans. He writes:

So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

This passage speaks to the hope and promise that comes alive in Paul's encounter and struggle to understand the role of the law in this new faith He has been called to be an apostle of.

And in that struggle Paul is finally able to say,

Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

But how does he get there?

When we recall the stories about Paul's life in ministry we remember the floggings, the beatings, the imprisonment and all the other hardships he suffered and we have to ask the question

“Is this the yoke that is easy, the burden that is light?”

When we see the suffering and sacrifice of people who have given their lives to God; when we experience suffering ourselves as the people of God,

how can we bring reality to this passage of the gospel?

The passages we read from Romans help us to understand what Jesus is saying here as they take us right to the critical point in Paul's life when he was converted to faith in Jesus Christ the risen Lord whom he had,

up until that time considered to be nothing more than a dead, failed messiah.

Before his conversion you remember that Paul, who then went by the name of Saul, zealously persecuted the people of the Way, the new Christians.

At that time Paul, being a Pharisee of the highest caliber, was a man of the law. The Jews believed that you were saved by the law.

If you kept the law, did all the things you were supposed to do, you would be saved.

Paul, in his persecutions was keeping the synagogues free of this new fanaticism called the Way which was threatening the faith he had been taught, that he lived in,

that he was blameless in for he had kept the law to the letter.

Then Paul came to that moment along the road on the way to Damascus when He meets the risen Lord, the one he believed was dead and is confronted with the question of the validity of what he believes, the validity of the law.

On the one hand there was the law he knew and believed telling him to persecute the people of the Way,

and on the other, the Lord calling, Why are you persecuting me? come to me, be my apostle.

Paul learned a new way to understand the law after his conversion. It is a Christian understanding of the law that could not save him. Paul shares what he learned with us through his writings.

1. The law makes us aware of our sin. Without it we don't know when we have done wrong.

2. The law cannot prevent sin and in fact can become the tool of the power of sin just as it did with Paul in his persecution of Jesus and his followers.
3. The law is not just a moral code we are to live by or live up to. Sin is not just breaking a rule of God, it is betraying, or distorting the relationship we have with God.

The law points beyond itself to God and the relationship we are to live in with Him.

Paul knows at the time he writes this letter to the Romans that it is Christ who has broken the power of sin,

it is Christ who has delivered him from his enslavement to sin and the law, and for that he is forever grateful,

he has rest for his soul, the yoke and burden of Jesus which is easy and light.

This can reshape our thinking about the law, and allow us to live free from the condemnation of the law and in the grace won by Jesus as he died and was resurrected.

"Come to me, Take my yoke upon you and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

In these words Jesus speaks to the ones who have exhausted themselves in their search for God.

In the 29th verse though, Jesus invites his people to learn from him in taking up his yoke;

to learn gentleness and humbleness that brings rest for your souls.

For Jesus the yoke he gives is well fitting and the life he gives is not a burden to bring you to despair, but is made exactly to fit your needs and abilities.

Not that the burden is easy to carry, but it is laid on you in love, meant to be carried in love and love makes the heaviest burden seem light.

A little boy was carrying a still smaller boy on his back when a man passing by said, “That is a heavy burden you carry.”

The boy replied, “That’s no burden, that’s my little brother.”

The passage translated the Greek word describing the burden as “easy.”

But that word generally means, “well adapted to fulfill a purpose.”

It also means useful, excellent, and when speaking of people, kind, obliging, benevolent and gracious.

In Jesus day a good yoke was fitted to each animal to make the work easier.

It didn’t diminish the weight or provide for rest from inactivity. It didn’t provide a vacation to Hawaii.

In Jesus’ words he doesn’t diminish the weight of accountability to God but helps us bear the responsibility in a couple of ways.

He invites us to learn from him.

He wants us to learn not just to think, but to do;
not just by listening, but by watching;
and he invites us to become his yoke mate.

Quite often yokes were made for two animals to work together and he invites you to learn to pull the load beside him, to watch and see how he does it;
to let him make the load seem lighter when you allow him to help you with it.

As we go forward from this passage in the Gospel of Matthew, and in our lives day to day,

we enter into a time of discernment of Jesus identity revealed by his words and actions,

and a time to respond with commitment or rejection.

So you will come to a point, this Y in the road where we come to the cross of Jesus. How will you respond?

Thus says the LORD: Stand at the crossroads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way lies; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls.