

Will you please turn to the Gospel According to Matthew. Matthew Chapter 11. We'll read from verse 28 to verse 30. These are very familiar verse. Matthew 11:28, "Come to me, all ye who labour and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest to your souls; for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Yoke

Dear Brothers and Sisters, this afternoon we would like to consider on the matter of "Yoked with Christ". Now when you hear the word *yoke*, what is your reaction? Probably our first reaction will be, "That's bad." We do not want to be under yoke. We have experienced the heaviness and the impossibilities of under iron yoke. But you know the word *yoke* itself is neutral. Yes. A yoke means a burden. A yoke means control. And a yoke means servitude. It can be good or it can be bad. If we are under the yoke of sin and of death, then that's terrible. But if we are under the yoke of God, then that's beautiful. The yoke that comes to us from the Enemy is heavy; but the yoke that comes from God is light and easy. If we are under the yoke of sin and death, we are hopeless and helpless. But if we are under the yoke of God, then the will of God in our lives can be fulfilled. So I hope we are not prejudice against this word *yoke*.

How Adam and Eve made their choice

You know when God created man, He created man free. He gave man a free will. In other words, man is free to make his choice. And since God has given us a free will, he will not interfere. He allows man to make his own choice. And this is what happened in the Garden of Eden. You remember how God planted the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and the Tree of Life in the mist of the Garden. And we all know that God put these two trees before man that man can make his own choice. And we find our forefathers Adam and Eve how they made their choice. Of course they were tempted by the Enemy. But on the other hand, we find that they made their choice. Instead of choosing the Tree of Life, they chose the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

Now why did they do this? I think probably one of the main reasons was they wanted to be free and wanted to be themselves. Even though they were created by God, and yet they wanted to be independent. They did not want to be under any control. They did not want to be under any authority. Since they were free, they wanted to be free. They wanted to be independent. They thought that by choosing that they would have a life without yoke. To their surprise, the result was just the opposite. They wanted to be free but they were bound. They were bound by the law of sin and of death. They were under an iron yoke.

They had no way to get out of it. If they should choose the Tree of Life, in one sense it meant they would live a life of dependence. They realized that they themselves were not enough. They needed to depend on God. They needed God's life in order to fulfill God's purpose for them. Now Brothers and Sisters remember this: God created man free. He created man according to His image and His likeness. But man was free.

In other words, God gave man the freedom to choose.

Behind that work there was God's purpose

Even though according to the purpose of God's creation. Now the work of God's creation He created man free. But behind that work there was God's purpose. And God's purpose was to use man. God's purpose was that man might serve His purpose. And if man should serve His purpose, he must be under God. As you read the Bible, even though the Bible does not come right out to say why God created man, even though God did not tell right away the reason for the creation of man, we all know man is a masterpiece of God. Because only in creating man, God created him in His own image and His own likeness. So there must be some reason behind it. Because God wanted man to serve His purpose. God had an enemy. The archangel rebelled against God. It was quite easy for God to put that archangel away. But if God should do it, there will be no glory of God. For a big man to beat a little child, it will be no glory there. For God Himself to deal with Satan right away there was no glory to God. So God for His glory's sake, He created man a little lower than the angels. He used David to beat Goliath.

Now if you read Psalm 8, you know there is a beautiful verse there. In Psalm 8 verse 2, "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou established praise because of thine adversaries, to still the enemy and the avenger." Here you find God used the babies and the sucklings to establish praise. For what reason? Because of His adversaries. To deal with the enemy and the avenger. So you find that behind the creation of man, God has a purpose to use man for His service. And by that God will get glory. And His enemy will be defeated. And for that reason, man has to put himself under God. Because outside of God, he couldn't do it. And if man would choose to be under the yoke of God, then God's purpose would be fulfilled. And God's glory will be manifested. But unfortunately our forefather did the opposite thing. He thought that by doing that he would be completely free to do whatever he liked. Not knowing that he was deceived. He was put under the yoke of Satan. And there was no way for him to get out.

Labored and of heavy laden

So dear Brothers and Sisters, before we believed in the Lord Jesus. We were all born out of Adam. Adam when he was created he was free. But when we were born, we were not free. We were under the bondage of sin and of death. We were under the dominion of the enemy of God. We were children of wrath. There was no hope in us. In other words, we were those labored and of heavy laden. You know during the war time, during the Sino-Japanese War, I was in the interior China, and you know those provinces of Yunnan, Guizhou, and Sichuan. These provinces are full of high mountains. And when we traveled, we didn't have cars like we have today. Because there was no gasoline, they just used charcoal. They used charcoal to run the buses, and these buses would climb the mountains. We were very fearful sat in the bus. While we were traveling, we notice some men. They started from Yunnan; they crossed the mountains to Guizhou and to Sichuan. And on their back there was a basket above their head, and it was filled of salt bricks. Because Yunnan has salt but Sichuan does not have salt. So salt was a necessity. So how did they transport salt from one province to another? It's carried on the back of people. And people had to help them to put the bag on their back. They

had a stick in their hands and they just walked across the mountains. When they were tired, they had to rest. But they couldn't take off the load, what did they do? They put the stick under the basket. And they stood there, resting. When our bus passed by, I felt so pitiful about these people. They were really heavy laden. They were under heavy labor. Their whole lives were just doing this. There was no hope. Now, this cannot compare with the heavy laden that all of us had before Christ delivered us. But thank God. Our Lord Jesus said, "Come unto me, all ye who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." Isn't it marvelous that we who are so heavy laden, our sins were above our heads, and there was no rest. But when we come to our Lord Jesus, we find the whole load rolled away. I can still remember the day my whole load rolled away.

Brothers and Sisters that was our experience. After we are delivered from the iron yoke, after our Lord Jesus breaks the iron yoke, how do you feel? You feel free! And you try to maintain your freedom. You want to have your own life now. You think that was the reason why our Lord set you free. He set me free that I may be free.

After the Israelis left Egypt

Brothers and Sisters, think of the children of Israel. God sent Moses to Egypt, to set His people free. And God told Moses to say to Pharaoh, "Let my people go." Why? "So they may serve me." They served Pharaoh; they were under the heavy yoke of Pharaoh. Not only were they doing all these hard labor, but there was no hope for them because all the baby boys had to be thrown into River Nile. And they cried to God. God delivered them. They came out of Egypt. They were a free people. God brought them to Mount Sinai. And God said, "If you keep my covenant, if you keep my law. You will be my people and I will be your God." And God supplied their every need in the wilderness. God was leading them into the Promised Land. But you know what happened? God set them free and they misused their freedom.

They really wanted to be free. Free from God. Free from the law of God. Free to murmur. Free from everything. Dear Brothers and Sisters that was not God's reason for setting them free. And how often we find we are doing the same thing. After we were freed by our Lord Jesus, how did you live from then on? Do you think that now you are free to live for yourself? Do you think that you can do anything you want to? You can live for yourself? If we think that way, we put ourselves once again under heavy yoke. You see the children of Israel got out of Egypt, but in the wilderness Egypt was still in them. Whenever they met any problem, they thought of Egypt. And that's the same thing with God's people today. We want to have a free sailing through life. Whenever anything happens against our will, we murmur. And we rebel. We want to have our own way. We want to return to the world. And we are under the bondage of the world and under the bondage of our flesh. Again we find ourselves under heavy burden.

The Lord set us free that we may choose to follow Him

How can we get out of it? And here you find our Lord Jesus call us, "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me. For I am meek and lowly in my heart and ye shall find rest in your soul."

Brothers and Sisters we need to realize one thing; our Lord Jesus delivers us from the heavy yoke of the enemy. Our Lord Jesus set us free that we may choose Him that we may choose to be under His yoke. Because this is the only true way to freedom. Do not think if you can have your own way then you are free. You will find if you do that then you are under the tyranny of yourself. Martin Luther said, "I'm not afraid of all the Popes and Cardinals. I'm not afraid of them. But I'm afraid of one Pope, myself." Brothers and Sisters, when we are under our own bondage that is an iron yoke. The Lord sets us free, that we may choose the right choice that we may choose to follow Him.

The lesson of Yoke

Now what is a yoke? I wonder if the young people know what a yoke are because today we use a tractor to tilt the field. In the old days when you try to tilt the field, you put an animal, an ox, a horse, or a mule, and you put a wooden bar upon its neck. You know the neck is very important. When you rebel, you have a stiff neck. So you find you have to have a board upon your neck that you may be under control. And you will plow the land.

You remember the young man Saul, when he was on the road to Damascus; he was going into Damascus to seize the Christians. But while he was near the city of Damascus, a light shone upon him. And he was smitten by that light to the ground. And hear a voice speaking to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goad." You know the horse, the mule or the ox has its own will. So you find that even under the yoke, they try to go their own way. So whenever such a thing happens, the farmer has a sharp instrument called a goad. And he will gently use the goad to touch the leg of the animal. But the horse, the mule, or the ox will kick back. And when it kicks back, it hurts. Now the farmer does not want to hurt the animal but just to remind the animal, "You have a master. You are doing my work." But the animal does not understand and it gets hurt. And after many hurts it learns the lesson. And that's exactly what we are.

Do you know that God created you for His work? Do you not know that He set you free that you may serve His purpose? Do you know you have a master? You have His work to fulfill. Now often times we do not have that kind of mind. We think we are free. Free to do whatever we want. But remember you are not created for that reason. And you are not saved for that reason. You are saved that you may really fulfill the purpose of God's purpose of creating you. But He will not force. He will warn you, yes, but He will not force you. He wants you to voluntarily take His yoke upon you. And this is what consecration really means.

Believers must consecrate himself to God

You know why believers must consecrate himself or herself to God. Now in the old days when I was saved even the minister did not understand the word of God. They thought consecration was just for a few people. Only those who want to be a preachers, a pastors, they need to consecrate their lives, ordinary believers don't need to do that. And the result was only a few served God, all other brothers and sisters can live their own lives. All you need to do was maybe to give tithes. And that's all you need. But it is a

wrong teaching.

Every believer, everyone who is saved, the Lord calls you, "Come and follow me." You remember when our Lord was on earth, how He called His disciples? He said, "Deny yourself, take up your cross, and come follow me. And I will make you fishers of man." Brothers and Sisters, the Lord is calling us to take His yoke upon us. A yoke is a burden but His burden is light. His yoke is easy. He calls us to be under His authority and to put ourselves under His control. That is the only way He can use us to complete the purpose of God in our lives. Brothers and Sisters, have you done that? Are you constrained by the love of Christ that you no longer want to live for yourself? You want to live for Him and for His will. You are willing to put yourself on the altar, allowing him to make you a vessel of honor and to serve His purpose.

Co-yoked with Christ

Now our Lord Jesus Himself shows us what is under yoke. You know He was with God, he was equal with God, and yet He emptied Himself. He took upon Himself the form of a bond slave. He took upon Himself the fashion of a man. He came to this world to demonstrate to us the man of God's heart. The man that God really wants. So you find throughout His life He put Himself under yoke of God. And because of this, God's purpose for the world was fulfilled. And now our Lord Jesus says, "Take my yoke upon you." You know Brothers and Sisters, whenever we talk about this matter of denying yourself, taking up the cross, and following the Lord, you find that it is too hard. How can I do it? It's impossible. And that's true. So far as we ourselves are concerned, we do not want to be under yoke. We do not want to deny ourselves. We do not want to be under any control. We do not want to be under any authorities. We do not want to serve anybody but ourselves. It's impossible with man and yet you find the calling is there. How can we respond to that? Where do we have the power, the strength to do that? Thank God. We are not called to take up the yoke of God by ourselves. We are called to take up the yoke of Christ. And that is to be co-yoked with Christ.

You know in the old days, when a farmer wants to tilt the ground, he uses more than one animal. He maybe will use two horses, two oxen, or two mules so that the work can be done quicker and better. What he usually did was, he will yoke a trained ox with an untrained ox. It's a double yoke. Why is it so? Because the trained ox has learned obedience. So it will follow faithfully the guidance of the master. But the untrained ox still has its own will, its will is not broken yet. So even with the yoke, it still wants to go its own way. But the trained ox is stronger and will pull it back. And gradually it learns the trained ox's character. And that is the way to fulfill God's eternal purpose in your life.

Meek and lowly in heart

So the Lord does not only call us to come and take up the yoke of God. The Lord says, "Come and take up my yoke. Co-yoke with me. You are not trained yet but I am trained. I am meek and lowly in heart"

Meek.

What is meekness? The Bible says Moses is the meekest of all men. In our mind,

Moses was very masculine, very powerful, and very strong. How can he be meek? But the Bible says he is the meekest of all men. Why? Because Moses has completely surrendered and obedient. Moses was a person who obeyed God in tiny little things. You know he was a trained architect. Because Egypt at that time was famous for its pyramids. And when God asked him to make a tent, it was too easy. And yet God told him that he couldn't do any little change. Every little item he had to obey God. That really humbles him. But he was faithful. He was the meekest of all men. Brothers and Sisters that was our Lord Jesus. How meek He was. He said, "I couldn't do anything by myself. I couldn't even say anything." To Him it is absolute obedience to His Father. That is a character that must be built up in our lives. Before we can talk about service, character has to be built. Because God's emphasis is not just to do a work. God's emphasis is to have the right person to do the right work.

So what is the meaning of under yoke? The first and primary meaning is the training of character. Naturally we are not fit to serve God. No matter how clever we are. No matter how capable we are. No matter how much charisma we have. We are not fit to do God's work. We cannot defeat the enemy; only the character of Christ can defeat the enemy. So it has to be built up in our lives. And the only way to have it built up is to yoke with Christ. When we try to rebel, we look at Christ and He will pull us over. Meek and lowly in heart.

Lowly

Now, what is lowly? Lowly simply means He never thinks of Himself. It is not an inferior complex. An inferior complex is still self-consciousness. But He is completely not conscious of Himself. He's only conscious of His Father. That is lowly in heart. So dear Brothers and Sisters, we thank God. The way that we can really be of used of God is to be yoked with Christ. To put it another way, it is to deny ourselves, take up the cross and follow the Lord. And that will enable us to be characterized with the character of Christ. And when that character is built, then God's work will be done. Spiritual ministry is based on character, not on teaching. It is not the outward things that really will bring down the enemy that will bring in the kingdom of God. It is the character of Christ that will defeat the enemy and build up God's kingdom. You remember in the Letter to the Philippians. The church in Philippi was a good church. And God was really using them. But, unfortunately there were two sisters there. They were leading sisters and they were used of God in the gospel. But in a way there was a rivalry between these two sisters. And they tried to be higher than the other, to have more influence among the sisters. Now, how can this problem be solved? It is not a matter of knowledge. They knew it. You remember what Paul did? He asked his yokefellow to help them. We do not know who that yokefellow was Paul referring to. But thank God there was a yokefellow there. One who had learned Christ. And because he had learned Christ, he was able to help these two sisters. Now that is real service.

Are you willing to be yoked with Christ?

So dear Brothers and Sisters, one thing I hope you'll remember: there is a yoke every child of God must learn to take up. It will not be forced upon you. The Lord says, "Take my yoke upon you." He asks us to take it on our initiative. Yes, He uses love to

constrain us. But He wants you to take the initiative. Are you willing to be yoked with Christ? Are you willing to learn of Him? Are you willing to fulfill God's purpose in your life? Are you willing to serve God in His way? And this is the real thing. So may the Lord help us.

Let's have a word of prayer. Dear Lord, how we praise and thank Thee. Because your thoughts are higher than our thoughts and your ways are higher than our ways. We thought that we wanted to be free. But we praise and thank Thee, Thou knowest better. And Thou hast called us to take Thy yoke that we may be yoked together and learn of Thee. Oh Lord, do teach us that we may all be usable in the hand of God. And it is all for Thy glory. We asked in the name of our Lord Jesus. Amen.