

The Rest of Faith

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”
—Matthew 11:28-30

THIS INVITATION WHICH

Jesus extended to all who are “heavy laden” was addressed in the first instance to the people of Israel, being the closing remarks of a short sermon in which he exposed the pride and hypocrisy of their religious rulers. He gave a brief explanation of John the Baptist’s ministry, saying that to those who could accept him and his message, he fulfilled the prophecy of Mala-

chi concerning the coming of a symbolic Elijah, who would perform a work of reformation in Israel. (Mal. 3:1; 4:5,6; Matt. 11:7-10,14) However, not many were thus affected by John’s ministry, so Israel as a whole, held tight under the leadership of the scribes and Pharisees, remained unconverted.

Jesus likened the Israelites to “children sitting in the markets, calling unto their fellows, And saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented. For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they

say, He hath a devil. The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners.” (Matt. 11:16-19) Under the direction of their religious rulers, the Israelites as a whole were not prepared to accept any teachings or leadership which were not in harmony with their humanly conceived traditions.

Jesus knew that this was true. At the same time, however, he realized that there was a remnant of the people who were sincerely looking for help. There was a minority who were not satisfied with their rulers, and who were more or less crushed under the burdensome load which had been thrust upon them. Jesus referred to this on another occasion and severely rebuked the hypocritical religious leaders, saying, “Ye lade men with burdens grievous to be borne, and ye yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers.”—Luke 11:46

The Pharisees had manufactured an excuse to prejudice the people against John the Baptist. Simply because he was extremely temperate in his eating, they said he was possessed of a devil. When, on the other hand, it was observed that Jesus followed the usual eating habits of his time, they said he was a glutton and an excessive wine-drinker. This was their worldly-wise and prudent method of preventing the people from giving serious attention to Jesus’ teachings. The Master recognized their sham, and in prayer to his Father said, “I thank thee, ... because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.”—Matt. 11:25

It was to these “babes” that Jesus especially addressed the words of our text: “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden.” Being sincere

of heart, they longed to be released from the burden of the Mosaic Law, and the still heavier weight of human traditions and burdens laid upon them by the hypocritical leadership of the Pharisees. Such humble and sincere ones must have rejoiced when they heard Jesus' invitation, although at the time they could but partially comprehend its meaning. Not until the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost did they begin to understand the full depth of meaning contained in these wonderful words of the Master.

THE BURDEN OF SIN

It is only those who "labour and are heavy laden" that are seeking relief from their load. The Law which was given to Israel at the hands of Moses, while a perfect expression of God's righteous requirements was, nevertheless, burdensome to the Israelites, for it was beyond their ability to keep. In addition, the religious rulers of Israel had heaped additional burdens upon the people. Their inability to keep God's law was the result of sin. In reality, the people's inherited sin was the real burden which prevented them from keeping the Law, and which eventually led, for each one individually, to death.—Rom. 3:10,23; 7:10-14

The whole world of mankind is likewise weighted down with sin. The psalmist wrote, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me." (Ps. 51:5) Like David, any person who is sincere of heart, and honestly endeavoring to live a righteous life, realizes how imperfection hinders him from attaining the goal which he seeks. He is "heavy laden" and realizes that he cannot be wholly pleasing to God while laboring under the load of sin. To these

Jesus says in his invitation, “Come unto me, ... and I will give you rest.”

A REFRESHING REST

The Greek word translated “rest” in Jesus’ promise means, by implication, “to refresh.” What a refreshing experience it is for all who, wearied with their endless yet futile struggle against sin and its degrading influence in their lives, recognize Jesus as the great sin-bearer. As prophesied by Isaiah, God laid upon Jesus “the iniquity of us all,” making possible freedom from the burden of sin. (Isa. 53:6) This does not mean a release from the responsibility of doing the best we can to struggle against the weight of Adamic imperfection. God expects us to do this. Our rest of heart and mind is in the assurance that if we do the best we can, our sincere and honest efforts, though imperfect, will be acceptable to the Heavenly Father through the redemptive work of our beloved Redeemer.

In Hebrews 4:10, the Apostle Paul speaks of a “rest” into which we have the privilege of entering. This is a rest based on faith in Christ, and the apostle explains that those who enter into it cease from their own works, “as God did from his.” God ceased from his work pertaining to the human creation in the sense of assigning the further accomplishment of his purposes to Jesus, with full confidence in the willingness and ability of his Son to complete it. We, too, put our trust in Jesus, knowing that through him every provision has been made whereby we can serve the Heavenly Father’s cause acceptably.

In Paul’s reference to the Christian’s rest he uses a Greek word which conveys the thought of a “resting

place,” or “abode.” It suggests the idea of permanency, and not merely a temporary refreshing rest. We are indeed greatly refreshed by accepting Jesus’ invitation, “come unto me.” However, if by faith we continue to lean upon the Master and upon the divine promises which are made sure through the value of his shed blood, this first refreshing experience will grow into a life of continuous peace and satisfaction from dwelling in the “abode” of the Lord.

This rest does not mean freedom from trials. Neither does it imply inactivity, nor a ceasing from laboring in the Lord’s vineyard. It does not remove the experiences of difficulty and hardship associated with the “good works” for which all of God’s people are to be zealous. (Tit. 2:14) Indeed, the Apostle Paul had entered into this spiritual rest of faith, but he wrote to the church at Corinth saying, “When we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears.”—II Cor. 7:5

Similarly, our rest does not come from having all trouble and cause for worry removed, but from the assurance that the Heavenly Father will be with us and strengthen us in our every time of need. God allowed Paul to be “troubled on every side,” but he did not leave him comfortless, for in the next verse the apostle writes, “Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus.”—vs. 6

God has unlimited ways by which he comforts and strengthens his people in their troubles, and it is important to watch carefully for his providences on our behalf in order to be in a position to obtain the greatest possible blessing from them. Paul saw in

the coming of Titus a manifestation of God's love and care. Let us be on the alert to recognize those he may send to comfort us in our times of need. It may indeed be a brother or sister who, with a good "word spoken in due season," helps to lift a burden from our hearts, or to comfort us in a great trial. (Prov. 15:23) It also may be a refreshing and encouraging experience which the Lord permits us to enjoy—some evidence, perhaps, that he is blessing our labors in his vineyard.

HIS GRACE SUFFICIENT

No true child of God ever feels satisfied with what he is able to accomplish in the Lord's service. We are all handicapped by imperfections of one sort or another. Our time and strength are limited, and while we sing, "O for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise," we are ever conscious of the fact that the one tongue we do have is greatly deficient. At best, it is a "stammering tongue" which fails to declare the glory of the Lord as we so earnestly long to do.—Isa. 33:19

All the other aspects of our fallen human nature are likewise imperfect. Quoting the words of another hymn, we may desire to have our feet "swift on errands, Lord, for thee," yet we frequently stumble. Our hands, also, often fail to respond to the desires of our hearts as we would like when we endeavor to put them to work for the Lord. What great rest of soul there is, however, in the realization that God is looking upon our hearts. In his merciful kindness he "remembereth that we are dust," members of the sin-cursed and dying race, and so does not expect us to serve him

perfectly according to our outward efforts.—Ps. 103:14

In one of the Apostle Paul's experiences, we have a good example of the Lord's viewpoint in this respect. At the time of his conversion, he was blinded by the dazzling brightness of that "light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun." (Acts 26:13) Although a few days later when visited by Ananias, Paul received a restoration of his sight, it is likely that he had poor vision for the remainder of his life. Naturally this would be a great handicap, especially in his studies and writing. This is likely what he referred to as a "thorn in the flesh," and about which he prayed earnestly to the Lord that it might be removed. Paul believed that he could serve God much better if his eyesight were fully restored.—II Cor. 12:7,8

The answer to Paul's prayer, and the apostle's humble submission to the divine will should be of great encouragement to us. The Lord said to him, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness." Paul's reaction to these reassuring words of the Lord should serve to guide and comfort us when we feel the limitations imposed upon us by our imperfections. He wrote, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."—vs. 9

HIS YOKE

Our wonderful rest in Christ can be understood and appreciated better when considered in association with his invitation to take upon ourselves another burden, described as a "yoke." Jesus said, "Take my yoke upon you." (Matt. 11:29) To be made free from sin and imperfection does not imply a life

of idleness, nor does it mean a carefree, aimless sort of existence. We come out from the bondage of sin that we might become servants of righteousness by taking Jesus' yoke upon us. It is in this yoke that we find our abiding rest.

It is through Christ's yoke that we become united with him. He shares the load, bearing all of it that exceeds our own strength and ability. This is the thought suggested by Paul when he said that because of his infirmities the "power of Christ" would rest upon him. Paul would like to have done more and better work in the Lord's service, and he believed that this would be possible if his eyesight were fully restored. However, since this was not the Lord's will, and because he was assured that divine grace would be sufficient for him, he not only could rest, but also "glory" in his infirmities, because the power of Christ could thus be more fully demonstrated.

"LEARN OF ME"

Jesus' invitation, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me," suggests that it is only by being yoked together with him that we can truly discover that he was indeed "meek and lowly in heart." Furthermore, it is these very qualities of his character which make his yoke easy and his burden light. The scribes and Pharisees were arrogant and domineering. They were overconfident about their positions of authority, and had instituted harsh, repressive measures in an effort to maintain their lordship. This meant that their yoke was heavy and burdensome, yet they refused to lift as much as a finger to help those who were struggling under its load.

How different it was with Jesus! He was meek and lowly. He had sympathy for the people and was always ready to extend mercy to erring ones who recognized their sins and sought forgiveness. He was “touched with the feeling” of the people’s infirmities. (Heb. 4:15) In spite of the “contradiction of sinners,” Jesus maintained his humble attitude of heart, and was composed before his enemies. The “joy that was set before him” of being with his Father in his throne gave him strength to endure unjust humiliation and disgrace in the eyes of his fellow Israelites. (Heb. 12:2,3) He was glad to humble himself, knowing that God, in his own time and way, would bless him beyond measure.

Now we are yoked together with this meek and lowly one. We are weak, but he is strong. He knows our every imperfection, our every limitation, and will allow just that portion of the load to come upon us which we are able to bear. The remainder he will carry himself, doing so in the spirit of true understanding and sympathy. Jesus knows our every weakness and adjusts our load according to our ability to bear. In this way his yoke is easy and his burden is light.

The Christian way, according to the flesh, is not an easy one. It is “narrow” and difficult. (Matt. 7:14) When we think of Paul’s experiences, for example, we realize that he did not have a life of ease, nor was the burden of the work which he bore a light one. From the standpoint of the flesh, Paul was seemingly crushed under the weight of the burden which was given him to bear. Nevertheless, he viewed his load as a “new creature” in Christ Jesus. This enabled him to refer to his burden as a “light

affliction,” which was only “for a moment,” and to express full confidence that it was working out for him “a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”—II Cor. 4:17

Despite the fact that Paul endured troubles on every hand, he enjoyed that blessed rest which Jesus promised to all those who go to him in sincerity and humility, who learn of him, and take his yoke. It is important for all who are yoked together with Christ to be guided by his example of meekness and lowliness. Indeed, our agreement to take his yoke implies humble submission to his will.

If we are not meek and lowly we will want to walk in our own way rather than follow the leadings of the Master. To the extent that we do, we will be working against Jesus instead of working with him. Instead of lightening our burdens, we will increase them due to self-will until, under the direction of divine providence, we are brought back into full submission and cooperation as yokefellows with the Lord. Thus it is that trials which are borne in humility and submission to God’s will are “light,” while possibly the same experiences, if mixed with the will of the flesh, could be very burdensome.

Paul wore Christ’s yoke in the spirit of true meekness. He did not attempt to guide himself, but humbly placed himself under subjection to Christ, walking together with him in humble obedience. Sometimes the pathway led to prison and the stocks; other times to public beatings and stonings which left him near death. He encountered perils of the sea and perils of the land. Tiring labor and painful toil also often were his lot. Yet he viewed his yoke as “easy” and his burden as “light,” because Christ was with him.

Thus Paul had peace, rest and joy, even while he suffered, and finally died.

A REST OF MIND

Many of the Lord's dear people can testify that they, like Paul, have enjoyed a sweet and blessed rest, even in the midst of distress, sickness, persecution, and when surrounded on every hand by enemies of Christ. Certainly, it is not a rest of the body, but of the mind and heart. The Prophet Isaiah wrote, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee."—Isa. 26:3

None can know the blessedness of this rest until it is experienced, and none can experience it except by taking the Master's yoke, and learning of him. Doing so, we learn what an understanding and gracious partner he is. We learn how sympathetically he bears every burden which is too great for us. We learn in every time of trial as he comforts us with the assurance that his grace will be sufficient for all our needs.

The world is feverishly seeking rest, security and happiness in various ways, but not finding them. Some are looking to wealth, thinking that therein is the secret of contentment and rest. Others try to forget their burdens by burying themselves in worldly pleasures, only to find their efforts futile and that their cup of pleasure turns to bitterness and disappointment.

We are in the world, but not of it, and by being yoked with Christ we find a rest that is genuine and abiding. The fullness of this rest will be attained only if we seek it in a "meek and quiet spirit." (I Pet. 3:4)

Jesus himself enjoyed peace and rest of heart and mind because he meekly and quietly yielded his all to the doing of his Father's will. (John 5:30) To the extent we come short along this line, our rest will not be complete, and the burden we are called upon to bear will seem heavy.

Let us cultivate the graces of meekness and patient submission to the will of God. To do this we will need to have confidence in his love and care, and to realize that in his infinite wisdom he knows what is best for us. This will not be easy for the flesh, but as New Creatures our joy will increase. In looking back and noting the blessings which have accrued from walking with the Lord, we will be able to praise the way he has led us day by day.

THE PROPER MOTIVE

Another important secret of true rest as we are yoked with Christ is to have the proper motive, which is love. To the extent we view our experiences from any other standpoint, we will be unsuccessful in attaining the full rest for which we labor. Love "beareth all things," Paul wrote. (I Cor. 13:7) If love prompted our consecration to God, and in love we are laying down our lives as Jesus did, trials and abuses which may come upon us will be seen in their true perspective—as pertaining only to our fleshly interests. Thus, as we truly love the Lord and his will, we will be able to "bear" all things.

Many of our burdensome experiences of life result from the loss of something. It may be our health, reputation, friends, money, or something else considered by the flesh to be valuable and important. Our consecration, however, calls for giving up all of

these. Hence, we should be concerned only with walking faithfully as true yokefellows with Christ. The loss of these things, therefore, should indeed be looked upon as a “light affliction,” insignificant when compared with the joys and blessings which come to us as a result of taking the Master’s yoke and learning of him.

From whatever proper standpoint we may consider it, the Master’s yoke is easy and his burden is light. There is no other path that is so rich in meaning and so satisfying in daily experience as the Christian way, yoked together with Christ. However, even after yielding our wills to him and taking his yoke, our complete rest and joy will be realized only by maintaining a humble submission to him, strengthened in this by a full confidence that his way is best, and that eventually it will lead to an eternity of rest beyond the veil. (Ps. 18:30-32; 32:8) “There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest.”
—Heb.4:9,11 ■