

Yoked for Freedom

Matthew 11:25-30

Introduction

Jesus' words in **verse 28** are so comforting: *"Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"* (**Matthew 11:28**). How many of us struggle through this world, living for Jesus while the world is so against us? But Jesus offers rest if we just come to Him. That would be great if He stopped there. But Jesus goes on to say, *"Take My yoke upon you"* (**v.29**). Wait—a yoke? I know what a yoke is for. People put a yoke on oxen so they can pull heavy loads or plow fields. That doesn't sound like rest at all. That sounds more like work. He even talks about His burden in **verse 30**. Granted, He says it's light, but it's still a burden. Carrying a burden is still work; what happened to the rest?

Christ Is Our Rest

The Hebrew word for rest we are most familiar with is "sabbath." Because God rested from His work of creating on the seventh day, He hallowed that day and made it a day of rest, the Sabbath. We don't keep Saturday as the Sabbath anymore because *Christ is our Sabbath*. As St. Paul says in **Colossians 2** (Read **Colossians 2:16-17**). *Christ is the substance; the former things are but a shadow* of what is to come, that is, Christ. We find our Sabbath, our rest in Him. But rest from what?

Rest from What?

The writer of **Hebrews** says in **chapter 4** (Read **Hebrews 4:9-10**). Resting in Christ is rest from our works of the flesh. That can be thought of two ways. First, we rest from our sinful works. We come to Christ and put our sinful past behind us. We rest from slavery to Satan. These works of the flesh are also the things we do to try to earn our salvation. When we come to Christ, we stop trying to merit favor with God. We can never earn our salvation, anyway. We rest in Christ, recognizing that we are forgiven for His sake. Being yoked to Christ, we are made free from sin and free from works; we are yoked for freedom.

How We Come to Christ

In the **Apology**, Melancthon says that this verse contains the two parts of repentance. The labor and burdens are the contrition, anxiety, and terrors of sin. Coming to Christ is faith, believing that we are forgiven for His sake. So, when we are weighed down by the world, Satan, and our own sinful natures, we come to Christ and He will give us rest from all that.

Yoked to Jesus

But then there is this whole thing about being yoked. Taking Christ's yoke upon ourselves is being yoked with Him. A yoke is a wooden structure that fits over the heads of two oxen to bind them together as a team. When we are yoked with Jesus, we receive His righteousness as He takes on our sinfulness. He accomplished all that for us on the cross, where He was made sin for us. That is the core of salvation. We appropriate that salvation by faith. But there is more to living the Christian life than basking in His righteousness.

A Yoke that Fits

We were created to work. When God created man and woman, the first thing He did was give them work to do. They were to *be fruitful and multiply, subdue the earth*, and *have dominion* over the animals (**Genesis 1:28**). This meant they were to raise a family and take care of the earth as God's representatives. He's given us a job as well, to *make disciples of all nations* (**Matthew 28:19**). It's a yoke that fits because it was made for us.

The Burden of Jesus

It's made for us because we share the burden of Jesus. His burden is love. He has given us this command, that *we love one another as [He] has loved [us]* (**John 13:34-35**). As we share the love of Christ with each other and the world, we are sharing in His burden.

A Yoke of Oxen

Here's the thing about a yoke. One ox by itself can pull its weight, 1500 to 3,000 pounds. But a well-trained yoke of oxen can pull up to 13,000 pounds. Together, they can pull twice what they could pull individually. When we are yoked with Jesus, the strength is all His. He's the one doing all the heavy lifting. In the **Large Catechism**, Luther says that we receive fresh comfort and strength from the Sacrament of the Altar. This is one of the main ways we come to Jesus and are yoked with Him, by receiving His body and blood here at the Table of the Lord. Partake of the Supper today and be yoked with Christ, be **YOKED FOR FREEDOM**.

*And the peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
