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Transcript

Making Life Easier – Part 10 – My Burden is Light

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We're continuing our series, *Making Life Easier*. This is the tenth and last part. It has to do with a promise Jesus made about making life easier. Let's read it. In Matthew 11:28, Jesus said:

Matthew 11:28-30 – *Come to me, all who labor and are heavy burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*

Jesus' statement can bring up so much confusion. These words were spoken by someone who knew He was going to be crucified. He considered God's way – crucifixion and all – to be less burdensome than the lives of the people around Him. How can that be? He said this to encourage us – to show us the way to peace of mind. This incredible paradox shows us the way into perfect Christianity as well.

As Jesus was saying, it opens the doors of our mind to understand what we need to do to be at peace, in spite of the world we live in. It shines the light of God on it for us so we can see. Without it, we would be poor, blind beggars, feeling hopelessly in the dark about how to be at peace with God.

As we explore His statement about an easy yoke and a light burden, we need to keep the long-view in mind. If we can look at what was going on – the context of His comments – we can see what prompted His statement. Let's read in Matthew 11:16:

Matthew 11:16-20 – *“But to what shall I compare this generation?”* He says. *“It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their playmates, ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.’ For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds”* – or, lack thereof. And they were not willing to understand. They weren't even trying to – just resisting.

Here's another paradox He points His disciples toward – verse 20:

V-20-24 – *Then he began to denounce the cities where most of his mighty works had been done, because they did not repent. “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! – Jewish cities. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon – Gentile cities – they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you.”* His disciples marveled that the Samaritans readily accepted Christ, while their people – the Jews – resisted and persecuted Jesus at every turn. Even the apostle Paul, years later, was troubled by it. God's people rejecting the Messiah and the Gentiles accepting Him – a paradox, if there ever was one. This is a paradox between two worlds.

The Bible speaks of two worlds. One, the spirit world, where God is. And two, our world, which is the only one we can experience with the senses. Jesus, while He was here, gave us a glimpse into God's world. And one of the tools He used to explain it was the paradox. Here are some examples:

The poor in spirit will inherit the Kingdom of God. So, people who are poor in spirit here are going to inherit the Kingdom of God then.

Mourning here will be comforted there.

Those who are starving for righteousness here will be filled with it there.

If we're merciful here, we will receive mercy there, as opposed to the Pharisees who thought rigid judgment was the way to mercy there.

The pure in heart here will see God there, instead of hypocritically professing righteousness here.

Instead of trying to force or arguing people into following God, the peacemaker will end up being God's immoral children.

When we're persecuted and disrespected because we follow God now, we will be highly respected then.

So, I hope you caught that these were the beatitudes Jesus used during His first formal teaching to His disciples – the attitudes they needed to ensure a spiritually successful life. He contrasted the physical way with the spiritual to form a paradox for each one. The reason they are paradoxes

to us is that they don't seem to be real in our world. And yet, He's telling us they work here to get us where we want to go. Of course, to see the truth of these, we can see that each one of them takes us back to our first *Making Life Easier – Skill, the Long-view*. If you missed that one, you can find it on our Website by going to the series page and finding it alphabetically on the list, *Making Life Easier*.

Now, let's loop back to His statement – Matthew 11:28:

V-28 – *“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”*

The full gravity of this statement is illuminated by another one Jesus made later. We can read it in Matthew 23:37.

Matthew 23:37 – *“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’”*

Now, we're looking at the long-view here. When will all the Jews say to Jesus, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord?” Well, we don't read that until we get to Revelation 20, verse 5, where Jesus tells us through John:

Revelation 20:5 – *The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.*

So, that's a long way out for us, but to Christ, it's a done deal – or, as good as done.

Jesus would look out at the stubborn resistance to God's message and be filled with compassion for the haters. It's in this empathic caring – heart overflowing with love attitude – that He makes His statement – His invitation to all of us to take the easy way.

Let's take a closer look at that. Let's unpack that a bit. The *yoke*. What is that? Well, the yoke is the law of God. It's another paradox. He's speaking about submitting to God. And throughout time, non-believers – and many people who profess Christ, as well – have thought God's law is a terrible restriction. That's why, even today, they find any way possible, any flimsy excuse, any twisting of the scriptures to avoid doing what God tells us to do – so much so, that the Christian church today looks very little like it did when Christ died. If we're ever to understand and find the peace Jesus is talking about, we have to get over the restriction thing and see the true meaning.

Let's ask, "What is a yoke?" Have you ever seen one of these things people put around their neck, and rests on their shoulders, and they can put two buckets of water on? That's a yoke. It's a tool to make carrying heavy burdens possible. One side of the yoke has a weight, and the other side is an equal amount, and so it balances. You can carry two buckets, instead of one. Another kind of yoke is where two animals are joined by a yoke that goes over their necks, so two can pull at the same time. That was probably the kind of yoke Jesus had in mind. We don't see them much today, but they were all over the place in His day and age. So, what's the main function of that kind of yoke? Well, it was to join two animals together, so that they could pull together.

So, when He says, "Take My yoke..." it's an invitation to get harnessed up with Him. It's a point of connection. It's a way to be close to God. And the law is the yoke! In Christianity today, they don't like to talk about obeying the law. They talk about following Jesus. Well, they are the same thing. But they don't like to talk about the law, because it reminds people that, to follow Him, we have to do that yoking up thing with Him. The perfect law-keeper. That means we have to obey the law, which we think is a restriction.

So, what does it actually do for us – to be yoked with Christ? Well, let's run through the progression again. In 1 John 5:2, John says:

1 John 5:2 – *By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.* See, John is already way out in front of our burdensome idea. That's not how they thought about it back then – at least, the truly converted people.

"This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments." That's how we get yoked. We're pulling together. Christ is pulling with us to obey His law. And, instead of being burdensome, those laws show us what love is, and what God is, because He's love and He is the law. That's how He operates in the universe and beyond.

Jesus said the whole law could be summed up in two thoughts: love God and love neighbor. What do you think Jesus is talking mostly about when He tells us put on His yoke? Is it to love God or to love man most? Well, He doesn't say it, but the yoke He's talking about is to be in connection with Him. Right? So, we get in the yoke with Him and we pull together. It's about our relationship with God. He's not in the cart back there, whipping us to go faster. He's beside us, pulling with us.

Now, who do you think is doing most of the pulling? Well, He does. He's stronger. But we're not pulling all on our own. We have Him to help, and He's way stronger than we are. God and Jesus, when we have the Holy Spirit, live *in* us. There has to be a connection with us there. And that connection point is doing what They say to do. That's what Jesus said His connection point to the Father was. He said God revealed all these things to Him, because He did what He was told. And that's the same for us too. And that's hard for us, but the pulling is easier than it is going it alone

when we have Christ with us. That's why He said He would give us rest for our souls. And that's why He said His yoke was easy. Jesus is easy-going, kind, gentle – not a rigid taskmaster. So, going with Him is a lot easier than going it on our own.

Another thing to think about is that, if we look at the context again, He started talking about Jewish cities that would not accept Him. They rejected Christ and were going it alone, doing it the hard way, kicking against the goads, trying to keep not only God's laws, but a lot of foolish, rigid laws they made up to where Paul said, "Neither they nor their fathers were able to keep." But under Christ we will become gentle and humble like He is, and submissive to His Father's will. When we do that, everything gets easier, especially getting into His Kingdom. He's already done the hardest thing. And He did that for us.

Now, let's look at the *burden* we carry. We had the yoke, now the burden. What is that? Well, let's go to 2 Corinthians 4:10.

2 Corinthians 4:10 – *...always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.* We know that, though He never sinned, He was still afflicted in His body for us. So, we're going to be afflicted, too, like He was.

In 2 Corinthians 4:8, it says:

V-8-11 – *We are afflicted in every way – you know, the furnace of affliction – but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed – difficulty, but it doesn't crush us – always carrying in the body the death of Jesus – who was crushed for us – so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.* We're supposed to be an example. When you look at us, you should be able to see Christ. Most of us are far from that. *For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.* Now, in the biblical context, over the course of history, many Christians have died for their faith as martyrs. That's true. But all of us – all Christians who have lived so far – whether they're martyrs or not – have been given over to death. That's given to everybody. Right? Some Christians die from heart attacks, others from cancer, some auto accidents, and many, many, many other ways.

Now, dying, most of the time, is hard. But, we can't be in the resurrection without it. Right? You have die before you can be resurrected. In living our lives, and in dying, our burden is to exemplify Jesus Christ's life by the way we live and the way we die. Now, that all sounds hard, not easier, right? Heavy, not light. So, what makes it easy? Well, that is the whole point of His comment – what He wants us to see – the spiritual thing to grab on to. Even though we see through a glass darkly – spiritual concepts – what is there? What is it that makes the burden light? Well, we might say, "Grace." Yes, that's certainly true. We already looked at that. But what else? Let's go to Philippians 2:6.

Philippians 2:6-11 – ...*who* – speaking of Christ, Paul says – *though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.* So, that’s what Jesus said makes it easier. *Therefore* – verse 9 – *Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

The greatest paradox of all – Jesus willingly obeyed His Father, even though it cost Him His physical life. He told His disciples He earnestly desired to eat the Passover with them, knowing it pictured His own death the next day. How could He do that? Well, He was taking the long-view. He knew it also opened the door for them to be born into God’s Kingdom – and also you and me. Completely submissive to His Father, His meat, He said – His power, His energy, His nourishment – came from doing the will of God. It energized Him to do the hard thing. So, how many ways did He say that to us? All those paradoxes, the whole Sermon on the Mount, and so many other things. But it’s so hard for us to understand it.

I found a quote in the Jamison, Faucet and Brown *Commentary* – one of the oldest and best commentaries I know of. The language is of 200 years, plus years ago, and yet, the thought is so clear. Here it is. First, he quotes:

“Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Incomparable, ravishing sounds these. If ever were such heard in this weary groaning world, what gentleness, what sweetness is there in the very style of the invitation. Hither to me, and in the words, all you that toil and are burdened. The universal wretchedness of man is depicted on its both sides – the active and the passive forms of it. Take My yoke upon you – the yoke of subjection to Christ – and learn from Me – learn how by submitting to My Father, is what He’s saying. For I am meek and lowly in heart, and you shall find rest for your souls. In Christ’s willingness to empty Himself to the uttermost of His Father’s requirements was the spring of an effable pose to His own Spirit. So, in the same track, does He invite all of us to follow Him with the assurance of the same experience. For My yoke is easy and My burn is light. Matchless paradox, even among the paradox if we couch maxims in which our Lord delights. That rest, which the soul experiences when once safe under Christ’s wings, make all yokes easy, all burdens light.”

So, the challenge for you and me today is, can we take it in? Will we make it our own? And the answer is, on our own, in our feebleness and weakness, no, but with God’s help and God’s love, yes! And when we do that, life is easier.

This is Bill Jacobs for LifeResource Ministries, serving children, families and the Church of God.