

Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 252

Christ's Easy Yoke

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Thursday, 6th July, 2006**

Text: *“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. 29, 30).*

It was said of the Lord Jesus when He was here on earth, “Never man spake like this Man.” There are some amazing things the Lord spoke in this chapter. The mystery of divine sovereignty: “I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.” It is a solemn thing if you and I are left among the wise and prudent of this world. For who by searching can find out God? May we be found amongst the babes to whom salvation is revealed. “Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in Thy sight.” We think of the little hymn which was once so popular:

“What was there in you that could merit esteem
Or give the Creator delight?
‘Twas even so Father! you ever must sing,
Because it seemed good in Thy sight.”

And then the mystery of divine sovereignty: “All things are delivered unto Me of My Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him.”

And then follows one of the most beautiful scriptures in the whole Bible: “Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” – burdened souls sweetly invited to come to the Saviour; the wonderful promise that their burden will be removed; the wonderful promise, “I will give you rest.” “Come unto Me.” Sometimes I think of this beautiful word as if it were spoken from the cross, spoken from Calvary by a dear, dying Saviour. “Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” And sometimes I think of it as spoken by Christ exalted, a great and glorious High Priest, Jesus the Son of God, able to save even to the uttermost. “Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

I wonder if there are any here this evening, those who labour and are heavy laden. You have a burden. Let us be clear: whatever the burden

is, the Lord does not limit it just to any one burden. It is like that word in the Psalms: “Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee.” *Thy burden*, that which weighs most heavily upon you. What is your burden? Some of you may have things at work, or problems at home, or things in your relationships with other people, or your ill health, or your fear of tomorrow. Well, the Lord Jesus says, “Come unto Me,” as if He would say, Tell Me everything; do not hold anything back. “Come unto Me.” Do not just go to a friend. “Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

“He welcomes the weary to come and be blessed
With ease from their burdens, in Jesus to rest.”

But beloved friends, the great point here is the great burden of our souls’ immortal concerns, the judgment day, our sin, a never-ending eternity. Now does that lie heavily with you? Is that your burden? Is it, “Still seeking rest, but finding none”? Often in the beginning of a work of grace, we try to shake that burden away, to shrug it off, to settle down in the world. Now the Lord will never, never, never let you find rest in the world or in your old way of life. There will be a thorn there. It will prick you. It will cry out, “This is not your rest.” You will not be able to find rest anywhere short of Christ. “There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.” But how lovingly and tenderly and graciously He looks on this weary soul, this heavy-laden soul, this labouring soul, and He says, “Come unto Me!”

“Come, guilty souls, and flee away
To Christ, and heal your wounds;
This is the welcome gospel-day
Wherein free grace abounds.”

“Come unto Me.” Now I know what Satan will be tempting a lot of you with: well, you might not be one of the elect, and how does this fit in with election? Because Satan can quote Scripture; he can quote doctrine. The point very simply is this: that God has a people whom He chose, a people for whom Christ died, and the time comes when the Holy Spirit works in their hearts in the new birth, calls them by His grace, and then they begin to feel the weight and the burden of sin and their soul and eternity. So these are the elect, but they do not know they are the elect. “The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever.” They do not

know they are the Lord's chosen. But with Newton they say, "Yet I weary am, I know, and the weary long for rest." So the Lord Jesus says, "Come unto Me," ye weary ones, ye burdened ones. So the sinner, in obedience to the Saviour's call and sweet invitation, ventures on mercy's ground, on the ground of the promise, for Jesus' sake – not because he knows he is a child of God, not because he knows he is chosen, not because he knows Jesus died for him – but because he is weary and heavy laden and because the Saviour invites such. And so he comes as this weary, heavy-laden sinner to the Saviour, seeking rest, finding rest, and so he makes his calling and his election sure.

"Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." And this is the only place a sinner can find rest – in Christ. So often I quote Bunyan and his pilgrim at the cross. That is where he lost his burden. That is where he found rest. "He hath given me rest by His sorrow, and life by His death."

"Blest cross! Blest sepulchre! Blest rather be
The Man who there was put to shame for me."

It is on mercy's ground. The sinner comes just as he is. He does not come with any claim, with any merit. He does not come claiming he has a soft heart. He comes just as he is, that burdened soul seeking, longing to find rest. And the Saviour promises it and the Saviour gives it. "In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength." Our hymnwriter says,

"I heard the voice of Jesus say,
'Come unto Me and rest.'"

Well, may some of you this evening hear the voice of Jesus and may you hear Him saying, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden." And may your soul obey the almighty call and flee for this relief, and there may you find peace and may you find a resting place in believing, and your only resting place will be in the Person and merits of Jesus. It is the Son of God who speaks. It is He who is almighty to save. It is He who loves His people with an everlasting love. It is He who is full of mercy and compassion. It is He who is able to save even unto the uttermost. Joseph Hart says,

"He is able, *He is able*,
He is willing; doubt no more."

“Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” So here is this burdened sinner, led and taught by the Spirit of God, obeying the Saviour’s word, fleeing for refuge to Jesus, finding hope and peace and rest there. O what a mercy, what a blessing! Now then, this is not the end. In one sense it is only the beginning. There is a life that has to be lived now. There is a wilderness journey that has to be walked out. And as you know the Lord Jesus as your Saviour, then you know Him as your Lord and your Master. You *cannot* separate the offices of Christ. If a sinner finds Christ as his Saviour, then he knows Christ as his Master and his Lord.

When I was young, almost the whole of English evangelical teaching was the very opposite of this – that you could come and, as they said, accept Christ as your Saviour, and so you would be saved, but you were still a “carnal Christian.” There had to be a second step, accepting Christ as your Lord. So there were great conventions like the Keswick Convention, and the great point was the inner life, the victorious life, the urging of those who had only accepted Christ as Saviour now to accept Him as their Lord and Master and King. But it seems to me from what I hear that that teaching has disappeared today. I understand even Keswick no longer believes the old Keswick doctrine. Well, it was not scriptural and it did not work and so much was wrong. If you are brought as a sinner by faith to receive the Saviour, you receive Him as your Saviour, but also you receive Him as your Lord and your God and your King and your Master. That is why the Saviour not only says, “Come unto Me,” but to those who have been sweetly enabled to come to Him by faith, sweetly enabled to find this rest and peace in believing, He now says, “Take My yoke upon you.” You are no longer your own. You have a Lord and Master now, a loving Lord, a kind Master, but you are now called to the pathway of submission, the pathway of obedience, the pathway of discipleship. “Take My yoke upon you.”

We have this expression of the yoke throughout Scripture in many different places. You all know what the yoke was. It was a piece of wood which would be used to put over the necks of two bullocks or two oxen, either pulling a plough or pulling a cart. It would fasten them together and it would fasten them to the plough and to the cart. They were under control. *The yoke*. In ancient times, in Bible days, the people lived very close to the soil and they knew what the yoke was. When the yoke was

mentioned, they all knew what it was: something which was laid on these animals to bring them under control, to bring them into submission.

So in a figurative sense you have it again and again in Scripture. But usually it is *a heavy yoke*, and sometimes it is a *severe yoke*. In the minor prophets you sometimes read of an iron yoke, an iron yoke of submission to these cruel kings who so dreadfully treated Israel. We have the yoke so often, but usually it is a hard yoke. Satan's yoke is a hard yoke. Sinners do not think it is; sinners think they can do what they want and what they wish. But John Newton speaks of being "Satan's blind slave," and he might equally have said of being under Satan's heavy yoke. By nature we are under control, but it is under the control of Satan and sin and the world, and it is a hard yoke, a cruel yoke. It will not bring any rest; it will not bring any peace; it will not bring any joy. There is the yoke of the law, and that is a heavy yoke. No sinner can bear the weight of the law. It cannot save. It can only condemn. Its terms are so rigorous. It is a heavy yoke. And then in the days when the Lord Jesus was speaking, the scribes and the Pharisees and the rabbis laid such a yoke upon the Jewish people. It was a heavy yoke. It was an unbearable yoke. There was nothing pleasant in it.

Now the Lord Jesus says, "Take My yoke upon you ... for My yoke is easy, and My burden is light." None of the Lord's dear children complain about Christ's easy yoke. They are willing disciples. It is willing submission. Willingly they acknowledge that One is their Master, even Christ.

"Emptied of earth I fain would be,
The world, myself, and all but Thee;
Only reserved for Christ that died,
Surrendered to the Crucified."

That sinner receives Christ's easy yoke. It is one of the paradoxes of the Word of God, one of the paradoxes of the gospel. We read of the yoke, and right through Scripture the yoke is hard and severe and heavy, and then the Lord says, "Take My yoke upon you." O but He says, "My yoke is easy, and My burden is light." The beloved disciple, who well knew what it was to bear Christ's easy yoke, how he declared, "His commandments are not grievous!" "Take My yoke upon you ... for My yoke is easy, and My burden is light." The old Church of England prayer book had a prayer which said this: "Thy service is perfect freedom." I think some of you

know what that means. We think by nature we are free. Man boasts of his free will, but he is in darkness and bondage. He is under Satan's yoke. But when brought to serve the Lord, "Thy service is perfect freedom."

"Take My yoke upon you ... for My yoke is easy, and My burden is light." We take Christ's yoke upon us in an open profession of His name. And do not forget what the Word of God declares: "It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth." We take Christ's yoke upon us when we acknowledge Him as our Lord and Master and seek to walk in obedience to His will. We take Christ's yoke upon us when, made willing in the day of His power, we follow Him.

O, "Take My yoke upon you ... for My yoke is easy, and My burden is light." What is it that yokes a sinner to Christ? Well, I know it is a different figure, but Toplady, speaking of the cross of Christ, speaks of being "fastened ... by holy love's resistless chain." That is it: love's resistless chain. Christ's easy yoke is a yoke of love. It is a yoke the child of God willingly bears. Willingly is he bound to the Saviour. Willingly is he united to the Saviour. Willingly does he say, "All Thy ways I'd well approve." And so in a lesser sense he is yoked to the people of God. Those two oxen, those two bullocks in the yoke, they are fixed and fastened one to another. "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren."

"Thus may we abide in union
With each other and the Lord;
And possess, in sweet communion,
Joys which earth cannot afford."

"Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me." So this is the loving yoke of discipleship. A disciple is one who sits at Jesus' feet, who wants to be taught. Like Mary of Bethany, she did not find Christ's yoke heavy, irksome, but easy. She knew that Christ's yoke was easy and His burden light. And our hymnwriter says, "Behold, I sit, in willing bonds, at Jesus' feet." "Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me." That is, those who bear the yoke are true followers of the Lord the Lamb. They are fastened to Him by this yoke of love. Those who take Christ's yoke upon them are made real Christians, washed in the Redeemer's blood, and those who take Christ's yoke upon them want Him to teach them. "All thy children shall be taught of the Lord." "That which I see not teach Thou me." They want to learn more of the Saviour. They do not think they know everything;

they feel how little they know. They want to learn the Lord's will. They want to learn the way in which they are to go. They want to learn obedience to Him. "Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me." That is why they love the Word of God, and that is why they love the preaching of the gospel, and that is why they love the Lord's day, and that is why they love the house of God. They are fastened there by this easy yoke of love, love to the Saviour. And as they come, it is that they might be graciously taught, that they might learn of Him.

"Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me" – not just learn from a friend or from the preaching – "Learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart." That is why His yoke is easy and that is why His burden is light. He was "meek and lowly in heart" when He said, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden." And He is meek and lowly in heart when He says, "Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart."

Beloved friends, this is the only place in all Scripture where is mentioned the *heart* of Jesus. (I know the Roman Catholics talk about "the sacred heart of Jesus," and some of their picture are almost frightening). Our hymnwriter says,

"His tender, loving heart
The vilest will embrace;
And freely to them will impart
The riches of His grace."

"I am meek and lowly in heart." Never forget this is He who is true, almighty God. Never forget this is He who in creation spoke the world into being. Do not forget this is He who in the great day shall judge the world in righteousness.

O but the matchless condescension of the Son of God! You have it in Philippians 2: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Now that is the meek and lowly Jesus. And didn't He reveal Himself like that when He was here on earth! That poor leper, he was not afraid to venture. "If Thou wilt, Thou canst." The meek and

lowly Jesus. And poor Bartimaeus, and the woman with the issue of blood, and the one who said, “Lord, help me,” and the centurion, and Jairus. You can go on and on. Why were they not afraid, not afraid to come, not afraid to tell their case? Because they knew Him as the meek and lowly Jesus, but they believed He was almighty God, because they wanted Him to do miracles for them, impossible things. They came, and didn’t He lovingly receive them?

“Why art thou afraid to come?
Why afraid to tell thy case?
He will not pronounce thy doom;
Smiles are seated on His face.”

It is the almighty Saviour, but it is His tender heart, His compassion, His love, His tenderness, His mercy, that the poor, unworthy sinner can go to Him and say, “Lord, I am sorry; I am sorry I have sinned against Thee,” and He is not displeased.

“He kindly listens while they tell
The bitter pangs they feel within.”

He will not break the bruised reed; He will not quench the smoking flax. “Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him. For He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust.”

“I am meek and lowly in heart.” Meek and lowly in heart when He says to this poor, burdened soul, “Come unto Me ... and I will give you rest.” Meek and lowly in heart when He says to this one who has found rest, “Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart.... For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.”

“And ye shall find rest unto your souls.” *Ye shall*. Not only in the venture of faith when you come with your burden, to be eased of it, to be rid of it, but when you are enabled by faith to take upon your shoulders Christ’s yoke. It is the opposite of nature. It is the opposite of the flesh. When those poor oxen or bullocks have that heavy yoke put on them, there is no rest. They are longing for their ploughing or their pulling to be finished, and then at night they can lie down and find rest. It is the opposite way round with a child of God. In Christ’s service, in obedience to Him, in seeking to follow Him, in acknowledging Him as their Lord and Master, there “Ye shall find rest unto your souls.”

So beloved friends, you find so much in the Epistles, in the analogy here, of Christ's easy yoke, the loving precepts of the gospel. They are not legal; they are not harsh. There are no harsh commands, harsh conditions. "If ye love Me, keep My commandments." "Ye are not your own. For ye are bought with a price" – the price the Saviour's blood – "Therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." So this is Christ's easy yoke: "Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." This is Christ's easy yoke: "Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us." Christ's easy yoke. And in keeping His commandments – not *for* keeping His commandments, not in a legal sense – but *in* keeping His commandments, *in* keeping them, there is great reward. And this is part of that great reward: "Ye shall find rest unto your souls."

"Lord, I believe a rest remains
To all Thy people known;
A rest where pure enjoyment reigns,
And Thou art loved alone.

"O that I now the rest might know,
Believe and enter in!"

And if you go right through to the end of that beautiful hymn, it is walking in loving obedience to the Saviour. It is a beautiful word. There is a yoke. There is a yoke for every sinner saved by grace. But it is not an iron yoke, a heavy yoke; it is Christ's easy yoke. There is nothing harsh about it, nothing unkind, nothing cruel. It is all in love, and the saved sinner receives Christ's yoke in love, and there he finds rest for his soul.

"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."