

REST FOR THE WEARY



COME TO ME, ALL YOU THAT ARE WEARY AND ARE CARRYING HEAVY BURDENS, AND I WILL GIVE YOU REST. FOR MY YOKE IS EASY, AND MY BURDEN IS LIGHT.

Scripture:

Matthew 11:20-30

Woes to Unrepentant Cities

²⁰Then he began to reproach the cities in which most of his deeds of power had been done, because they did not repent. ²¹‘Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. ²²But I tell you, on the day of judgment it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon than for you. ²³And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? No, you will be brought down to Hades. For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. ²⁴But I tell you that on the day of judgment it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom than for you.’ ²⁵At that time Jesus said, ‘I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; ²⁶yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. ²⁷All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

Come Unto Me

²⁸‘Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.’



AFFLICTION AND COMFORT

In our scripture today, we have some comfort for the afflicted, but also some affliction for the comfortable. We have judgment and condemnation of three cities of the New Testament: Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, and Jesus said it would be better to live in hell than to live in any of them. But in the next paragraph, Jesus invites the weary to him for comfort, and invites them to share the yoke of a life of ministry together with him.

will begin using them next Sunday for our early morning Family Bible Study in Bowen Hall. However, we have been using them for the last two weeks, so by the time you crack open your own new Bible, you will already be on lesson three. We are getting a head start.

LET ME REMIND YOU OF THE SCHEDULE FOR NEXT WEEK:

- Continental breakfast is served at 8:15. You don't have to eat on Sunday morning; you just have to get yourself to church, and we will feed you.

SERENDIPITY STUDIES PART 2

Today is the second of a series drawn from the scripture and notes of the Serendipity Bible. The Bibles arrived this week, and are in my office. We

- Althea will be warming up her fingers to start our morning with hymns around the piano. We will have lecture and small group Bible study for about forty-five minutes. I want to ask each of you to make a ten week commitment to improve your life, and improve the life of our church as we study together in groups. I don't want to be the pastor who asked too little of his congregation. So I want to give you a good arm twisting this morning.
- Continental breakfast at 8:15, Bible study at 8:30. Be there or be square.

THE CITIES

Today's lesson begins with the unrepentant cities. I've been to them all. Let's start with a picture of the remains of the beautiful synagogue at Capernaum. There is no doubt that Jesus worshipped and taught here. There is no doubt that he spent many nights at the home of Peter and his mother, less than a hundred yards away from this location.



Capernaum was the city where Jesus spent most of his time after leaving Nazareth, and it became his new home town. It was on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, and it was on the Via Mares, the main trade route between Egypt and the Mesopotamia. It was a fishing town, but it was also a trade town. It wasn't very big; perhaps several hundred people lived there, including Peter and his mother, and Jesus often stayed with them. This was his headquarters for three years. He always returned there. It is a spiritual place, and many in his footsteps have gone

to Galilee in search of spiritual gifts. Chorazim is a mile or so away, and Bethsaida, home of many of the disciples, a few miles beyond that at the place where one of the three tributaries of the Sea of Galilee enters the lake.

YOUR FAVORITE CITY

So, ask the authors of our Serendipity studies, if that was Jesus' favorite city, what's yours?

- And if Jesus later condemned the people as slow and unresponsive, what is your least favorite city?
- And what happened that Jesus' list of favorites became his list of the damned?

We learn something everywhere we go, and the lessons of "the places" we have lived make a better discussion than it does a lecture. So we'll have to save that one as our ice breaker next time.

Our city is the context for our life. It used to be that people stayed in the same city all of their lives, but now hardly anyone does. We pick our cities, more than ever, as we pick our destiny.

We've talked about the three cities Jesus cursed before, and I could describe each of them to you. But what is important about them is that they saw Jesus and what he did. They were witnesses to the healing, they were the audiences for the sermons, they were the places of miracles. They were cities where he lay down at night.

THEY KNEW THE MESSIAH, AND THEY WERE NOT MOVED BY HIS TEACHING.

So he said, "You had your chance." Wouldn't that be sad for you and me, to say we knew the man, we heard about him, but we didn't invite him in? We never made him part of our lives; he was just a teacher and a relic.

So the simple lesson is: Faith is not a museum of facts. It is loving your neighbor as yourself, and it is loving the Lord your God with all your heart.

THE SECOND PART OF THE MATTHEW SCRIPTURE LESSON

But for today, I think we have done a satisfactory job of afflicting the comfortable. But I want to take you to the second part of the scripture.

²⁸‘Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.’

BURDENS AND REST

If you grew up around animals, you know about yokes. But we are city people, and this is not our way of life. So before we can think about yokes we have to think about our leisure.

Inactivity makes many of us nervous. Even in retirement inactivity is far different than "rest unto your soul."

Inactivity is not rest. In describing the spiritual life, I am more comfortable with the word "leisure" than inactivity, and so was Jesus.

- Leisure is our discretionary time.
- Leisure is our reflective time.
- Leisure is our creative time.
- Leisure time comes when we are finished with compulsory time.

How sad it would be if compulsory time crowded out leisure time.

How sad it is when the telephone crowds out a relationship.

In modern families, compulsory time is winning. Discretionary time is losing.

After preschool it's a trip to the store. After work, it's getting someone to soccer. After work it's mowing the lawn.

WHAT ABOUT FAITH?

Faith time is discretionary time.

**Nothing is more important than the time you set aside for prayer, meditation, reflection, and spiritual studies.
From what I have seen, I can tell you first hand that the best time to learn to pray is not in the emergency room.**

So how much faith time and how much compulsory time is there in your day? That is another place where discussion is called for from the lesson planners of our study.

Public parks were initially set aside for recreation and leisure.

Leisure or **free time** is a period of time spent out of work and away from essential domestic activity. It is recreational – re-creating is the origin of recreation. After eating and sleeping, going to work or running a business, attending school and doing homework, household chores, and day-to-day stress, comes discretionary time.

Capitalist societies often view active leisure activities positively, because active leisure activities require the purchase of equipment and services, which stimulates the economy.

Workaholics are those who work compulsively at the expense of other activities. They prefer to work rather than spend time socializing and engaging in other leisure activities. Many see this as a necessary sacrifice to attain high-ranking corporate positions.

SO OUR LAST LESSON IS ONE OF BALANCE

A **yoke** is a wooden beam which is used between a pair of oxen to allow them to pull a load (oxen almost always work in pairs). It can be used to help plow fields. There are several types, used in different cultures, and for different types of oxen. A pair of oxen is also called a *yoke of oxen*, and yoke is also used as a verb: "to *yoke* a pair of oxen."

JESUS SAYS, "LET ME SHARE THE YOKE WITH YOU."

Later Paul says, (Philippians 4:3-4) And I entreat you also, true "yokefellow," help those women who labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with my other fellow laborers, whose names are in the book of life.

They were probably talking about withers yoke used by oxen, and maybe mules. A *withers yoke* is a yoke that fits just in front of the withers of the oxen. The yoke is held in position by straps, either alone or with a pair of wooden staves either side of the ox's withers; the pull is however from the yoke itself, not from the staves. Withers yokes particularly suit cattle, which have high humps on their withers.

So, spiritually, be careful who you yoke to. Pick someone who can help. Pick a partner who carries a portion of the load.

Patti Masterman wrote a poem about sharing a yoke. She called it "The burden is easy and the yoke is light."

The burden is easy and the yoke is light,
When the enemy is deathless night. How
light the burden; being gently kind And how
pale that yoke, next a civilized mind - A
loving world worth countenancing, More than
pointless verbal prancing. For what is gained
by loss of trust When our common end is
always dust? Make the moments of your life
an altar; And raise up your brother, that he
not falter.

"YOKEFELLOWS"

The word is used by Greek writers describing those united by any bond, such as marriage, relationship, office, labor, study or business; hence, a yokefellow, consort, comrade, colleague or partner. A mentor or advocate would be a great yokefellow for most of us.

Paul may have been referring to a specific person here. But there are yokefellows that think of themselves as an organization. For me, it is the people who share the load of Christian leadership and service.

They are the ones who help you share the load, rather than head for the hills when there are challenges. I thank God for them.

BLOOM WHERE YOU ARE PLANTED

I have one more image, for you. It is not about cursing the city in which you live, but it is about growing in the city where you live. I call this picture "bloom where you are planted." This is a flower that appears to be planted in cracked cement. It's beautiful. I can sense great determination below. I sense an unconquerable spirit. And it reminds me of the faith I have seen in hospital beds, and it reminds me of the faith of people who live in far more difficult conditions that most of us live in. It reminds me that "easy" is not always "best," and it reminds me that love will find a way.



"Rest for the weary" is not just an afternoon nap. It is a reason to get up from the nap and do God's work wherever you have been planted, and whenever a spirit calls out to you for help.

*Make the moments of your life an altar;
And raise up your brother, that he not falter.*

Ok, "Yokefellows," that's it for this morning.

'See you at 8:15 next Sunday for Breakfast and Bible Study. We'll pick up with lesson three, and maybe by Christmas we won't know how we ever got along without it.



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September 26, 2010**