

## 2CH Sunday at 7.30

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### Rest for the weary and burdened

Presented by Leo Douma

From time to time you will notice, as you look closely at people, that they look tired and worn out. The cause of their tiredness and tension can be symbolised by a set of scales. That is, the need to keep everything in balance. We need to keep in balance what we spend with what we earn. We need to keep in balance our time at work and our family time. This need of keeping up the balance, can be heard in these pieces of conversation I have heard over the years “Look, I have given all I can in this marriage. But she has not given what I need. Why shouldn’t I leave?” “Why shouldn’t I get even with that bloke? You don’t know half of what he has done to me.” How would you feel if being right with God was a matter of making sure that our good deeds weighed more on the scales than our sin and failure?

How would it be if God were to carry on like we often do? “Unless you come up with the appropriate number of good deeds and do the right thing by me, I don’t want to know you” If God acted that way, what hope would we have? I ask you to consider this, so you can get a sense of the struggle of the weary and burdened that Jesus speak to in Matthew 11 – where he says “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened”.

The average Joseph and Mary in first century Palestine knew what “weary and burdened” was. They were taxed to the hilt. Corruption was rife. The poor grew poorer. On top of all this, the rabbis added heavier burdens. Instead of comfort and support, the Pharisees laid down rule up rule. They taught that getting into God’s good books was a matter of obeying the law – and all the extra rules that they tacked on. They even impressed into the minds of the people, the idea of a set of scales. They taught “Your good works must outweigh your sin. Otherwise, at the end of your life you will slide off the scales and straight into hell”. It was to these people that Jesus said “come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest”.

This was absolutely stunning to the people of his time. You see, Jesus was quoting the old Testament and placing himself in the position of God. In exodus 33, God says to Moses, “My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” Jesus does not say “come to God and he will give you rest.....” but “come to me.....”

You begin to grasp what Jesus is getting at, with his Jewish listeners.

In Jesus is the “presence” of God. They desire to be good enough to reach up to heaven. And now God as Jesus says “I have reached down to you. I dwell with you in the midst of your burden – the taxes, the struggle with life, the battle with sin and suffering - and I will give you rest.

You notice what it is to be a Christian. It is coming to Jesus, and coming to know him personally. Even though Jesus is not physically in front of us as he was with those people, he is there, waiting to be contacted.

Jesus promises that when we come to him, he will give us rest. There are actually two aspects to this rest. There is rest that is given, and there is a rest that is discovered. When we come to Jesus we are given rest. We are reassured that, in Jesus, we are at peace with God. We do not have to struggle to be right with God. Jesus does it all for us. He was obedient all the way to the cross, all the way to hell and death. And God grants us Jesus' obedience. It is given to us through faith. If we think of the scales, a one hundred pound lead weight is placed on our side, so that no matter how often we fail God, Christ's good outweighs our wrong. In other words, through what Jesus suffered on the cross, Jesus has paid the penalty for all our failure. Do God looks at us who come, sorry for the wrong we have done, believing in Jesus, as being completely free of all wrong.

There is also the "rest" to be discovered. Sometimes when we think of the world "rest", we picture being on holidays and being free to do whatever we want. But that is not the setup here. Once we have come to Jesus as Saviour, we also realise that in deep gratitude, we want to serve him as Lord. Notice what else he says – "Take my yoke from me and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble at heart, and you will find rest for your soul". Here is the rest that we discover. There is a close link between doing things God's way, that is, living in obedience to God, and finding a "rest" for our souls. When God sets us free from sin, he also sets us free to find fulfilment. That is, fulfilment of true living comes by obedience to his word. That's why Christ's call to rest is also a call to a "yoke".

The yoke is a symbol of discipleship or labour. The oxen that pulled the carts had a yoke laid across their shoulders. Jesus learned his trade of carpentry from his step-father Joseph. He would have learned how to fit yokes for oxen so they could pull their load. It was also common in those days for rabbis to refer to their central teaching, or core belief, as a yoke. It was on this core teaching that they would hang all the rest of their teaching and practice. To take the rabbi's yoke was to accept his teachings. So Jesus, as the Jewish rabbi, is using that language as well.

The people knew what he meant when he said "take my yoke upon and learn from me". Now Jesus says that his "yoke is easy" and his "burden is light". Why is being Jesus' disciple and learning from him and obeying him "easy and light"? Because we do it out of gratitude and joy. We do it because we are saved. The Pharisees with all their rules and regulations were crushing the people. Jesus encourages us to live in obedience of God's way, in the knowledge that we are already God's children if we have faith in him. We are forgiven of all our sin, because of Jesus' suffering on the cross. We strive for Jesus, not out of fear and dread, but out of joy and hope.

Jesus' yoke is easy, because instead of putting rules before us, he says "learn from me". Christian living is not about rules, it's about walking with Jesus. A new translation of the New Testament called "the Message" puts it like this: "Come to me, get away with me, and you will discover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me, and work with me. Watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me, and you'll learn to live freely and lightly".

Isn't that a wonderful and powerful image? That's what Jesus wants to do with us. A man once told of visiting his farmer friend who was ploughing his field with a team of oxen. He writes" that one of them

seemed to be a little bigger than the others. I asked the farmer about why he put the two together. He replied that the big animal was an older animal that was well trained, and the smaller one was a young animal that was new to the paddock. He said that the older ox was the best ox he'd ever had – he knew his way around the paddock. The reason that the farmer put the older and younger oxen together was to teach the younger one to plow.

“If I never put them together, the younger ox would pull himself to death, but together he learns to cooperate and let the older ox help him” That’s what Jesus wants to do with us.

Come to Jesus – that is how we will find “rest for our souls”. When we actually start living life in God’s ways, following Jesus, we discover the secret of true life. We begin to understand ourselves, why people act the way they do, what is really going on in the world. And we discover that fulfilling life is not by all we can buy or achieve. It comes by living graciously, gently and humbly, quietly obeying God, doing things his way.

Have you come to accept the grace of Jesus? If not, why not do it now.