

THE YOKE OF THE LORD JESUS

"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." Matthew 11:29.

It is the five short words in the beginning of verse twenty-nine on which I want to speak to you: "Take my yoke upon you." That is Christ's word to those who have already come to Him and been saved by Him. If those of you who are Christians will truly heed His word and respond aright to this appeal, it will mark a pivotal point in your Christian life.

Today, as in the days of our Saviour's earthly life, the people in the countries of the East make yokes and use them on the oxen. A yoke is a wood bar that lays across the necks of two oxen, fastened underneath, linking the oxen together in order that they may pull together. The neck of an ox is placed in one end of the yoke, and the neck of another is placed in the other end of the yoke. The yoking of the oxen is not capricious or done merely at the whim of the owner. Instead, he sees a piece of land to be plowed or a piece of work to be done, and for that purpose he says in effect to his beasts: "Take my yoke upon you." Naturally, this implies surrender by one and mastery by another. It is the master who puts the yoke on the necks of the oxen.

Our Lord was speaking to people who were thoroughly acquainted with yokes, not merely from the agricultural scene that surrounded them, but from the moral experience of their lives; there were yokes from which they longed to be free. They needed to be set free from the pressure of yokes that were heavy and hard to bear, and from which they longed for release, in order that they might come under the new yoke with Christ.

The Lord Jesus was a carpenter at Nazareth and made plows and yokes for oxen. Christ is still a yokemaker, yoking the servant to the sphere; yoking the privilege and the responsibility, so that the appreciation of the privilege finds its obligation in the responsibility; above all, yoking the disciple to Himself. We have the idea of being yoked with Christ in order that we might walk with Him and work with Him.

Jesus Christ has a definite purpose for your life, and the greatest tragedy that can befall you is that you should miss that purpose. He wants you to avoid this tragedy and to accomplish fully His purpose for your life. After searching your heart and by His grace making it right with Him, He now asks you to put your life fully under His yoke.

When the Romans conquered some rebellious tribe or nation, they made the vanquished pass under the yoke. It is not surprising, therefore, that those who were conquered were said to be under the yoke of their conquerors. So, our Lord, Who had seen the legions marching and was quite familiar with the figure, said, "Take my yoke upon you." Thus He calls us to a personal transaction with Himself. He wants a personal surrender to Him in the totality of our being. Nothing is more magnificent in Christ than the way in which He demands of us a full surrender. He does not claim just a part of our lives. He claims them in their entirety.

Various yokes are of the wrong kind. Some people, for instance, are bound to their tasks only by the yoke of sheer necessity. Life is for them a relentless taskmaster, and they resent the chain. It is not surprising that they fret and worry. Others

are bound to their work by personal ambition. They want to make money, to win a certain position or to maintain certain standards. They do not have any real interest in their work. But, even if it did create a little interest, such an ambition opens the door to worry, to jealousy or to fear; and these, like sand in delicate machinery, set up inner friction and strain. Still others may be thinking of reputation, keeping up a good appearance, and that naturally brings a sense of strain. When we think of countless things for which people strive, such as health, comfort, success and the good opinion of others, it is no wonder that life sometimes becomes too much for them.

The way of release for them is to change yokes. It is to learn from Christ the right attitude toward their tasks and burdens. It is to take His yoke. What does Christ mean by His yoke? How was He bound to His task? When we look into His life, we find that it was ruled by two simple principles. One of these principles is that the chief business of life is to do the will of God. That aim, like the melody in a great symphony, is always breaking through that we may catch its music. He said, "I came not to do mine own will but the will of Him that sent me." Whatever came to Him, therein He sought to do the will of God. His own concern was to obey the Father, leaving all else to Him. Love was the motive of His obedience to God. The other principle was that God can be trusted to take care of us. If we are doing His will, there is nothing to fear or about which to be anxious. All that concerns our lives and those whom we love is safe in God's hands. He is adequate for all our needs.

Christ would have all to cast off the yoke of the law, receive Him as their personal Saviour, become His disciples, learn from Him and work for Him. The yoke of Christ means His personal rule over us. He Who died to redeem us now lives to reign over us. He Who came to set us free from the old master, who caused us so much misery while we were in bondage to him, is now our new Master in whom we have found perfect liberty and restfulness. What a blessed experience! Self has retreated, and the Lord has taken the throne. The truly victorious life has begun for one when he has been conquered by Christ.

Our Saviour and Master cordially invites us to take His yoke. I should like to mention three things about this yoke which He invites us to take.

I. The Fellowship Of It.

In all His tenderness Christ says to you and me, "I saved you and gave you eternal life, but that is only the beginning. Now the path along which you are to travel is My will. If you are to walk in that will, take my yoke upon you." Such a surrender to anybody else would mean the warping of the personality, but it never means that with Christ.

Our Saviour was fully surrendered to the will of God. He was obedient to the Father every step of the way. To you and me he says, "Come along the path I trod. Take my yoke upon you." To do so will mean sacrifice and suffering. His yoke means the way of unpopularity. Your surrender to Him means unpopularity in this world because His way is that of separation. It is the way of true humility; He was meek and lowly in heart, living only that God's name might be exalted and His will be done. You, too, will live like that if you take His yoke upon you. To surrender your life to Christ means the constant crucifixion of self. The yoke of Christ means precious companionship as we go forward step by step with Him in full and glad surrender.

"Take my yoke upon you" is a figurative way of saying, "Become My disciple or pupil and submit yourself to My instruction." There are rules in Christ's school. You must enter His school on Christ's own terms. You must enthrone Him as your Lord. "Take my yoke." You can refuse it. Many Christians do refuse it. Christ will not force His yoke upon anyone, any more than He forces His salvation upon a person. We are not oxen. We are not compelled to take the yoke of the Master. He invites us to take His yoke, but He does not force us to take it.

Take the yoke of the Lord Jesus upon you. Get under it with Him. It is just Christ and you. How lovely and precious ! Christ and you linked together inseparably, to walk and to work together. Oh, what fellowship! How sweet it is !

II. The Feel Of It.

There were plenty of yokes in our Lord's day that frayed the necks of oxen. But when Christ made a yoke it fitted perfectly. He said "My yoke is easy." Now that does not mean that in the life of the faithful Christian there will never be any difficulties, but it does mean that the yoke fits. This yoke is kind, helpful and lined with love. The feel of this yoke is just right.

III. The Fruit Of It.

What is the fruit of wearing this yoke?

1. Character.

This is indicated very clearly by His invitation, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart." The person who is truly yoked with Christ will become more and more like Him. As soon as we are yoked with Christ, The gracious Holy Spirit begins to make us like Him, and the longer we walk with Him and work with Him the more like Him we become.

2. Service.

When our Lord was in Palestine in the flesh, the oxen were yoked together in order that they might work together. The yoke of the Lord Jesus suggests the idea of service. Christ wants us to take His yoke, put it on, walk with Him and work with Him.

Surrender to Christ involves service for Him. Many years ago, in an evening service in a Belfast church, a young man seated in the choir listened to a simple, searching and stirring appeal for foreign missions. As a result of that appeal a great offering was made for foreign missionary work. This young man did not have much to give, but when the collection plate came by he dropped in it a piece of paper. When they opened it afterwards they found one word written on it, in his own handwriting, "myself." It was all he had to give, and so he gave all. Of course, the life of service followed; as a life-long blessed missionary work in Manchuria testified. That young man was Dr. T. C. Fulton. There is no way past this personal and complete acceptance of the yoke of Christ in one's heart, if there is to be full Christian living.

Christ does not promise you idleness and ease, but He offers you a life of burden-bearing and of service. It is not of rest from service that He speaks, but it is of rest in service. It is of rest that comes when care and worry vanish, and the burden no longer irritates. A yoke is made for two, and it is eloquent with the fellowship of the believer with his Lord. When once the yoke of Christ is on the shoulders you go along with Him. You will come to rejoice in the yoke as a privilege and the badge of service. To take Christ's yoke means that one becomes His co-worker. It is not always easy for the Christian to serve Christ, but being yoked with Him, He makes the burden light for His yoke is padded with divine love. Working with Christ, we find rest in service from keeping step with Him. No place can be too difficult since He and we are together in the work.

We should take His yoke upon us because our lives as Christians will be weary and unsatisfactory apart from complete surrender to Christ. There is no full and complete and effectively satisfying life for the Christian save in the yoke of Jesus Christ. Take His yoke upon you whatever it costs and whatever it means. It is His blood-bought right that we should be His and that our lives should be given in full surrender to Him for His full possession and purpose. He has that right, and we do not have any right to hold back.

Years ago in the south of Europe one morning, a tall, slender, boyish-faced fellow, with a Jewish cast of feature, entered one of the old cathedrals. The cathedral was famous for its organ and was yet more famous for the organist who brought the music from its pipes. But, the years had gone and the strength had gone, and a young man was appointed to do the heavy work, while the old man was appointed the Custodian of the Keys. He spent most of his waking hours in the cathedral with the old organ that he loved as a mother loves her baby.

The young fellow who entered the cathedral that morning seemed to know the story. He sought out the old man and said, "I hear you have got a wonderful organ here." That was enough; the old man's eyes danced and gleamed. "It's the finest in the Fatherland," he said. "I have heard so," said the young fellow, "and I thought I would like to try it. Will you loan me the key?" The old man drew himself back. "I could not do that," he said, with the continental politeness; "you will pardon me, sir, but you know it is a very wonderful organ, and we are very careful who touches it; I could not give you the keys." But, the young fellow persisted. He said, "I love music. I have traveled a good many miles to see this organ of yours. I play a little. Please loan me the key." So he persisted, and persistence usually wins. By and by he had the key and opened the manual, and drew out some stops, and turned on the power, while the old man stood back there against the pillar, wondering how that key got out of his fingers.

Then the music began, and he forgot everything else. He found himself saying, "I thought I knew all the music our organ had in it. I did not know it had such exquisite music in it as this man is bringing out. Who can he be?" He stood there spellbound, with his eyes big, listening. The music began very softly, just like the sighing of the zephyr breeze in the tree tops, then it rose up and rolled out. Then the storm broke, the thunder roared, and the lightning nearly blinded him as the old man listened. It was all so real

to him. Then the storm passed, and the birds were singing. Then the music grew soft, just like a baby breathing in its sleep in its mother's arms. At last the music stopped, and the young fellow locked up the organ, and brought back the key, and said, "Thank you. It is a wonderful organ. I am very grateful to you."

But the old man, not taking the key, said, "Who are you? What is your name?" The young fellow modestly dropped his eyes and said, "My name is Felix Mendelssohn, sir." The old man's eyes filled up, and he said, "To think the master was here (the master, as he was, of music in his day), and I refused him the keys."

The Master is here! He asks for the keys, the complete control. Have you, half unconsciously, been holding back the keys? I ask you -- are there any discords in your life, any flats, any sharps, any jagling of the notes? If the Master-hand might sweep the keyboard! Every human is a music box full of the rarest harmonies, made so by the Creator. But only the Master-hand, the scarred, pierced hand, can sweep the strings, and bring out the music. Give Him the keys.