

## “Come Unto Me ...”

We meet together each week to memorialise the sacrifice of our Redeemer, and to focus our attention upon spiritual things. As we seek to build each other up in our most holy faith, it is also a time for an inward inspection, to reassess our priorities and strengthen our resolve to seek first the Kingdom of God and His Righteousness (Mat. 6:33). During such a consideration of how we stand in relation to the high calling which we have received, we must realign our lives to divine things. Rather than to be distracted by worldly pursuits and the cares of this life, we resolve to serve Yahweh with all of our heart, soul and might. We seek to “lay aside every weight, and the sin that so easily beset us” (Heb. 12:1) and give attendance to those things that pertain to eternal life.

The Prophet Isaiah describes how we must turn from vanities to serve the only Living and True God:

“Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. ***Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? And your labour for that which satisfieth not?*** Harken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live ...” (Isa. 55:1-3).

Rather than to exert our energies and resources on “that which satisfieth not”, we must give ear to the Holy Writ, inspired by God for our learning and admonition. Concerning the futility of labouring for natural things, the wise king Solomon similarly wrote:

***“Labour not to be rich:*** cease from thine own wisdom. Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? For riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven” (Prov. 23:4-5).

The pursuit of wisdom is far more worthwhile than the pursuit of this world’s goods, as it is written:

“the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies: and all the things that thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her ...” (Prov. 3:13-15).

The world around us abounds with men and women who desire to be “successful” in this life, yet who are ignorant of that wisdom which can give life. Choosing the broad way that can only lead to ultimate ruin and destruction, the masses pay scant regard to the narrow path that leads to life eternal. True “success” will be measured at the judgment seat of Christ, when those who have sowed to the spirit shall reap life eternal. A man’s life consists not of the abundance of the things which he possesseth (Lu. 12:15), and an abundance of this world’s goods will not help us in the final analysis.

The burden of a self-seeking outlook is something that needs to be “laid aside”, with all of its vexations, troubles, and problems. To direct our attention towards spiritual things enables us to endure the trials of life with renewed vigour, and enthusiasm. We may be burdened with many cares and worries; we may falter under the weight of daily troubles, but if we look to the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, we can see an example of one who bore a terrible burden – the burden of the Cross that he carried, yet overcame. And as we look to him, we are inspired to do likewise. It is not the case that if we look to Christ that the problems and trials of our lives will disappear – we have no immunity from difficulties in life. But rather, with a clear focus upon things that are eternal, the transient troubles of this life somehow seem to diminish in importance, with the confident anticipation of the promised day of rest.

In Matthew chapter 11, the Master instructs us regarding this aspect of things:

“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” (Mat. 11:28-30).

These words of Messiah are comforting yet challenging. The comfort is that if we come to Christ, we can lay aside the weight of worldly cares, and look towards the coming day of rest. But the challenge is to take up the yoke of Christ and live a life of self-denial even as he did. It is these two aspects that we wish to examine in some more detail.

In Psalm 55, king David was moved by the Spirit to write in a similar vein: “Cast thy burden upon Yahweh, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved” (Psa. 55:22). Whatever burden it is that we must carry in the days of our mortal weakness, we can trust in Yahweh, and His power to save. Casting all of our cares upon him, the priorities of our lives will change. No longer will we be preoccupied with the cares of this life, for by seeking the kingdom to come our main focus will be on spiritual things that pertain to eternity.

There is also a need for the brethren and sisters to help one another, and share their burdens, as it is written:

“bear ye one another’s burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2).

But a few verses later on, the apostle continues:

“for every man shall bear his own burden” (Gal. 6:5).

The question arises: how is it that we shall bear on own burdens, but yet have the help of our brethren and sisters in bearing the burden for us?

The answer lies in the exhortation of our Master:

“... if any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Mat. 16:24).

This is the burden which is “light” and the yoke which is “easy” – it is taking up our cross, and following the Master - an aspect which we will come to shortly. As always, we have the Lord Jesus Christ to look towards, as one “who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:2). He endured the cross – but he did not carry it alone: “as they led him away, they laid hold upon one Simon, a Cyrenian, coming out of the country, and on him they laid the cross, *that he might bear it after Jesus*” (Lu. 23:26). Evidently it wasn’t the case that our Lord laid down the cross, and that Simon took it up instead, and carried it to the place of crucifixion: rather, they carried it *together*, with Messiah leading the way, and Simon bearing it after him. Even so, when we “take up” our “cross,” we sometimes need the help of our brethren and sisters, to bear our troubles with us. We must bear each other’s burdens: that is, to carry the cross together, as we follow the Lord Jesus Christ through suffering into glory.

**“ ... I WILL GIVE YOU REST...”**

The prophet Jeremiah spoke of the importance of seeking the way of life, or “the good way”:

“Thus saith Yahweh, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for *the old paths*, were is the good way, and walk therein, and *ye shall find rest* for your souls ...” (Jer. 6:16).

Our souls, therefore, can only find rest by our walking along the good way, which comprises the “old paths” that the fathers of old walked along. This is something which is particularly important in our day when folk speak of “progress”, and modernism. Those of us who seek after “the old paths” are considered outdated, and old fashioned in our outlook. But in actual fact, the opposite is true: we seek to live the standards of a coming age. Our focus is upon the coming Kingdom of God: we are therefore, ahead of our times! We seek the old paths that Abraham and the other patriarchs walked along – and therefore share the same faith and confidence that what Yahweh has promised, He will surely perform. Hence we become heirs of the salvation promised to Abraham, as it is written concerning the word of promise:

“Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but *to that also which is of the faith of Abraham*; who is the father of us all” (Rom. 4:16)

Here is the irony, the principles of the “new covenant” are older than the Mosaic law it was designed to replace: we walk along the old paths in order to inherit the promises which can only be fulfilled in the future, when Messiah comes again.

There is also another important point to consider when examining the promised “rest”. The allusion is back to Genesis, and the way in which Yahweh Himself performed 6 days of work, and then ceased on the seventh day, which subsequently became memorialised as the Sabbath, or day of rest. But it logically follows that if we want to be privileged to be granted a “rest”, we must first work, and labour in our Masters’ service:

“Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left us of entering *into his rest*, any of you should seem to come short of it” (Heb. 4:1).

Again:

“Let us *labour therefore to enter into that rest*, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief” (Heb. 4:11).

If we are found resting now, when we should be labouring, there will be no rest for us when the Master comes again!

### **“TAKE MY YOKE UPON YOU”**

The Master continues:

“take my yoke upon you ... For my yoke is *easy*, and my burden is *light*” (Mat. 11:28, 30).

A similar sentiment is expressed by John:

“this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and *his commandments are not grievous ...*” (1 Jno. 5:3).

But when we consider how much brethren of old suffered for Christ’s sake, how can it be said that his yoke is “easy” and his burden is “light”? How is it that the commandments are not “grievous”? Under the present constitution of things, righteousness is imputed to believers without obedience to law. In this sense therefore, the commandments of Christ are not “grievous”, for the blessing they will provide is not dependent upon an unerring adherence to them. The principles of the Mosaic Law, being a “ministration of condemnation”, was a yoke which was unbearable, as Peter showed:

“Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put *a yoke* upon the neck of the disciples, which *neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?*” (Acts 15:10).

By contrast, the yoke of Christ is “easy” and “light.” Sometimes in life however, it might not seem to be so. Our understanding must be balanced with the other principle that it is “through much tribulation” that we will enter the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22). How can the two principles be reconciled? The aspects of “easy” and “light” are relative things. It is “easy” when compared to something which is hard, and virtually impossible. It is “light” when compared to the weight of Glory laid up for those who bear the cross of Christ. The Apostle Paul also spoke in terms of his present circumstances being “light”:

“our light affliction, which is but for a moment worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory: While we look not at the things which are seen for the things which are not seen are temporal: but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Cor. 4:17-18).

When we compare the sufferings of the present with the “exceeding weight of glory” that is laid up for us, their importance diminishes in our minds. We can be confident that the problems that loom so large for us in our mortal weakness can be overcome at the last by trusting in Yahweh’s power to save. Consider for a moment the prospect of Immortality. Our mortal lifespan can be anywhere up to 70-80 years of age, with some more and some less. But imagine what it would be like being immortal! Having lived for thousands of years, when we look back to our mortal days how truly they will seem to be but a few days by comparison! The secret to survival is to see things in their proper context and perspective: when we experience trials and tribulations, let us transport ourselves in our minds to the future days of immortality and try to consider the things which are eternal. Then, the temporal afflictions will seem to be truly but a “light affliction”.

### ***“I AM MEEK AND LOWLY IN HEART”***

The Lord Jesus Christ was not desirous of this world’s wealth. His heart was not lifted up after the fashion of the majority of men and women. He continued to say:

“... Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart ...”

The spirit of Christ in the Psalmist spoke likewise:

“Yahweh, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty: neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me ...” (Psa. 131:1).

Humility is a quality which is naturally difficult to learn. As it is written: “Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness: but a faithful man who can find?” (Prov. 20:6). To gain the admiration of men is something that is appealing to the old man of the flesh – and the pursuit of acceptance by Christ appeals to the new man of the Spirit. “Most men” engaged in the warfare of faith will struggle with this: how much more One who was the Son of the Most High God? Yet it is written that he “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” (Phil. 2:7-8).

Here we see one who was truly “meek and lowly in heart”, an example for us to emulate. Returning to the aspect of not being desirous of worldly goods, James writes:

“Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: But the rich, in that he is made low ...” (Jas. 1:9-10).

In Christ, there is an equality. The rich are not held in higher regard than the poor: all come together in their common need for a saviour. We must all become meek and lowly in heart, as James continues:

“Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and overflow of evil, and receive **with meekness** the implanted Word which is able to save our souls” (Jas. 1:21).

The Lord Jesus Christ, whose sacrifice we meet to memorialise, epitomised all of the positive principles that we have considered above:

“Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might become rich” (2 Cor. 8:9)

Let us therefore consider our standing before the throne of Grace. Let us resolve to cast aside every sin and the weight of anxiety that do so easily beset us, trusting in the Master’s power to save. Bearing the yoke with joy and gladness, we look forward to the time of coming glory, when the cares of this life will become but a fading memory as we will live perpetually as one Spirit with our master throughout the ages to come.

*Christopher Maddocks*