

The Easy Yoke – Matthew 11:28-30
Sermon – Pastor Joe Davis
Union Baptist Church – October 14, 2018

Let's reflect for a moment on a very familiar passage of Scripture. It's one we've been seeking to memorize recently. This passage is found in Romans chapter 10, verses 9 to 14. This is how it goes: *The righteousness that is based on faith, says this:*

...The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Are you saved today? Have you called on the name of Jesus Christ for salvation? Have you confessed with your mouth that Jesus is Lord – that he is both Lord of all and Lord of your life – in other words, the One directing and setting the course for your life from here? Have you believed in your heart that God raised him from the dead? Isn't it wonderful that when we do this – when we surrender our hearts and lives to Jesus in simple repentance and faith – he begins bestowing his riches on us and saves us forever?! We will not be put to shame or be disappointed when this life is over and we come into the visible presence of our Lord and Savior. He is everything we're longing for and so much more.

But until that day when we see Jesus visibly face to face at his glorious return, are we just waiting...just surviving...just keeping busy with life as usual? Is Jesus distant and inaccessible or just offering bits and pieces of himself to tide us over for now? Is his invitation to see and enter God's powerful and life-giving kingdom right now – a kingdom that is at hand, all around us – is that invitation just a pretty word picture that has very little or no practical effect on our day to day lives?

Well, for those who have believed in Jesus and confessed him as their Lord, we know from Scripture that Jesus didn't advise them to continue with life as normal, just thankful that the salvation issue is at least taken care of now. No. Instead Jesus offered and is still offering an amazing invitation, one which I would dare say sounds intensely appealing to most of us in this room. He says, in Matthew 11:28-30 – a passage that keeps echoing through my mind when I find myself burdened and overworked and exhausted and feeling like I'm the one responsible to make something happen here – into those moments Jesus says:

28 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

What a contrast with the way I, and I'm sure many of you, often feel in life. What a contrast with the way we tend to go through life in the 21st century. Is there anyone here today who doesn't think this invitation from Jesus sounds like something you want? This is the way of the easy yoke and the light burden. This is the path to rest for our souls...rest that endures through the hard times and challenges of life that will always be there in the broken world we live in...rest that can be present while we diligently work hard and seek to walk in God's purposes. And, my friends, I fully believe that this enduring rest for our souls is available right now today; not just in heaven someday. It can become a way of life for each of us, but it doesn't just happen automatically just because we're saved. The momentum of salvation moves us and call us in this direction, but without changes in the way we live our day-to-day lives we'll miss the way of the easy yoke and the light burden.

Looking again at the words of Jesus in Matthew 11:28-30, what do we need to do to accept his invitation to the easy yoke and the light burden? Notice that Jesus gives us 3 things to do: 1) come to me; 2) take my yoke upon you; and 3) learn from me. First: *Come to me*. This is a conscious choice to turn our eyes to Jesus and move into close proximity to him. This choice arises out of a heart belief that he is what you really want in life...the gentle and lowly in heart shepherd of your soul who loves you and longs to be with you, and is ready to guide you to a much better way of living life...one sustained by streams of living water and bringing lasting rest for your soul. Can you think of a better place to live?

Secondly Jesus says: *Take my yoke upon you.* Attach yourself to me. Don't just look at me occasionally and then go your way. Instead, let's do everything together as I lead you and carry the weight, and walk you into the good and God-glorifying purposes I have for your life. I have good news: my yoke is easy and my burden is light. This is going to be a very good thing that will relieve that load and that heavy burden you're bearing every day...the one that's wearing you out and leaving you exhausted continually. Come to me and hold on tightly. Let me lead you and empower you as we do everything together and as you trust me to bring the results.

And finally, Jesus says: As you do this – as you come to me and yoke up with me – **LEARN FROM ME. In this directive, I hear Jesus saying something like this:**

Look at how I lived my life while I was on earth and learn from it. What was important to me? How did I spend my time? What were things I did that made it possible for me to effectively accomplish God's will in the face of vicious attacks from Satan and sinful, hard-hearted people who were constantly trying to kill me. Would you currently be able to respond the way I did if the same thing were happening to you? Come to me and learn from me and I will make you into a person who can do that.

Did you notice I was never in a hurry? Did you notice that I often withdrew from the crowds to re-fuel and commune with my Father? Did you notice how the Word of God was a part of me and informed everything I did in life? I had to meditate on it and study it and memorize just like you do. Did you notice that I did nothing on my own initiative, but only what the Father directed me to do? Did you notice that I only concerned myself with doing what the Father and the Spirit directed me to do and say and I didn't worry if other people agreed with how I spent my time or had other expectations of me? I just concerned myself with seeking and following the Father's will as revealed by the Spirit and the Word.

Learn from me. Meditate on and absorb my teachings and the teachings of my disciples as recorded in the rest of the New Testament. Mull them over in your mind as the Spirit guides you. Think about what would happen in your life if you actually put them into practice. These teachings are true you know, and are meant to actually be lived in your real life right now. I can

tell you they will be of precious little benefit to you until you actually do put them into practice. But by the power of the Spirit living in you, as you come to me and take up my way of living connected with me, you can actually become more and more like me in very practical ways in your real life right now.

I'll make you into a person who can actually live out that beautiful directive in Philippians 4:6-7:

6 do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

*How will you be able to put aside anxiety? The anxious feelings will still arise – though hopefully less and less the more you walk with me and learn from me – but when they do you'll be able to hand them off to me because you'll know and believe that I truly am at hand...right next to you...with you...in you. **The Lord is at hand.** You're with me, yoked up to me, filled with my Spirit, secure in me, and I will give you what you need no matter what may come. And in the things we're accomplishing together, you'll know that I'm responsible for the results and the changing of hearts and the fruit that will grow. You'll just follow me as we do my will together and you'll leave the results to me. As you learn to live this way with me and empowered by my Spirit, you'll find anxiety slipping away and rest for your soul rising up.*

And as you come to me and learn from me, you'll become a person who can love your enemies and pray for them...a person who can forgive those who've hurt you and still haven't made it right...a person who can be rebuked, but not get angry and defensive and hold a bitter grudge...you'll become a person who can boldly speak the truth in love even when it's not well-received and may subject you to persecution... you'll become a person who gives up trying to manipulate people to get what you want, who's yes is yes and who's no is no...you'll become a person who can function in integrity and honesty no matter what it costs you...you'll become a person

who loves others with the love you're receiving from me and invites them to follow me just like you have.

My friends, this is an invitation to be, not just someone who believes in Jesus and faithfully comes to church every Sunday, but a fully engaged disciple of Jesus – a person who comes to Jesus, yokes up with him and diligently learns from him how to live life the way he did. This invitation to live life with Jesus like Jesus is not just for the super-Christians, or the full-time ministry people, or the missionaries. It's for everyone who's been saved by calling on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And the idea of salvation without this kind of discipleship is totally foreign to Scripture.

Just before Jesus ascended to heaven, 40 days after his resurrection, he told his *disciples* to, in his power and authority, go make more *disciples*, baptizing people as they believed in Jesus and confessed him as Lord, and then teaching them to obey everything Jesus commanded. We see in these final words of Jesus both the moment of salvation through repentance and belief in Christ signified in baptism, but also a radically different life that results when these saved people yoke up with Jesus, go everywhere with him and learn from him how to live as he lived it.

In our recently adopted mission statement here at Union Baptist, this is what we see God calling us to be about as the body of Christ in Union, Oregon:

Immersed in the love of Christ and filled with the Spirit

That's discipleship, my friends. Come to me and live with me in my love, yoke up with me and let me lead and empower you and teach you to live like I did. And as we do that and begin to experience life as it was meant to be, what will we want to do? We'll want to invite and help others do the same.

Birth the Body

Make Christ followers, disciples of Christ – other people who will come to Jesus, yoke up with him and learn to live life his way by his power.

You may have noticed that I took a slight detour from our planned passage of Scripture today, but I want you to know that I did it intentionally and for a very good purpose. I simply wanted to encourage a shift in our thinking about life as

we currently know it. The opportunity to fully yoke up with Jesus in the easy yoke, going with him everywhere and learning from him is here now. The invitation stands. His way of living life works and it will bring rest for our souls and great fruitfulness and joy as we watch his power and transformation work in and through us.

But to fully take that opportunity, to be his disciple, will require some changes in our lives and in our priorities. As we'll see next week in Matthew 4, verses 18 to 22, those who became Jesus' disciples had to let a few things go, had to disappoint a few people, had to reorganize the way they spent their time and what was important to them. But they were happy to do this because they were convinced that Jesus really was what they wanted and they recognized that being with him and learning from him was the best thing they could ever do with their lives.

As I close this morning, my prayer is a familiar one: that God will fill each of us ***with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding***. That he will use this simple invitation to discipleship from Jesus to open our eyes to how wonderful, gentle, powerful and good Jesus is and how full pursuit of him as a surrendered disciple is what we really want and need in life – it's God's good and perfect will for us. And that God would open our eyes to see and feel how much Jesus wants to give us himself and show us the way to rest for our souls in yoke with him.

What can you do right now to respond to Jesus invitation? A good place to start is a simple and honest assessment before God of your own life. Is there space in your life to listen to God and meditate on his word daily? Or is your life so jam-packed with activity that there's little or no room for Jesus, for seeking of his kingdom? If so, what needs to change in your priorities and commitments and the way you spend your time? How can you arrange your life so that you have space to diligently seek after Jesus and learn from him?...So that the pace you move through life allows you to communicate with him continually and be sensitive to his leading throughout each day? These are some questions that may be a good starting place for some of us.

Another question to ask is this:

Do you believe that Jesus' commandments and the priorities he had in his life can actually be lived in your own life here in the 21st century? Or do you tell yourself that's they're just not realistic for real life. I'm not talking about quitting your job and walking around the Grande Ronde Valley in sandals. We live in a much different time and place. Also, remember Jesus worked in carpentry for the majority of his life until the Spirit led him to begin his full-time public ministry leading to the cross. But I am talking about taking a good look at Jesus' life as recorded for us in 4 different historical accounts...looking at what Jesus did with his time and energies and how he prepared and trained himself so that in the moments of pressure and persecution and temptation he was ready to respond in godly ways and draw on God's strength.

These a just a few questions you can process and think through as you seek to respond to Jesus' invitation to yoke up with him and learn from him as you do everything in life together. This is the invitation to life connected with God in his kingdom, and it's here now. There's nothing better and nothing else that will lead us to enduring rest for our souls...a life of heart- soul- and mind-peace with **the Prince of Peace**, as opposed to an anxiety, burden-filled, wearisome life where we drain all our energies on the empty pursuits of the world or try to do God's work for him in our own strength and human wisdom.

May God lead us there as we pray together:

Jesus, we look to you, we come to you, we fix our eyes on you as the One who loves us more than we can imagine and who has everything we want and need for life. We want to be with you continually and to learn from you how to live life like you lived it. Lead us there. Show us the secret of the easy yoke and the light burden and enduring rest for our souls.