



THE NEW SHOFAR

Let God do to us whatever the Almighty desires

The fullness of life is to be found only in Christ

Christ our yoke

Is the burden of discipleship really ‘light’?

I would suspect some of us would see the challenge of fully living the Gospel demands of Jesus as being almost impossible. They represent ideals towards which we might strive but never expect to achieve. The demands of our modern world are just too heavy for us to be able to do and to live the expectations of the Gospel. But that would be a misguided interpretation. The teachings of Jesus allow for no exemptions. Discipleship does not allow for a softening of the Kingdom demands, insisting indeed that we live as Christ himself lived.

My yoke is easy and my burden light

We do not hear Jesus inviting disciples to come and to follow after him. What He is doing is inviting them to *come to me*. It is not even *come to God* and in the context, it is about teaching the only way to the Father is through living in the Son. Other philosophers of the time spoke of the centrality of truth as the way to god. Socrates for example spoke of the power of his own ideas...*If you will take my advice...* In this Gospel text, the divine truth is a person. He does not simply invite his disciples to *come to me* but rather **all of you** *who are struggling and carrying too much*...It is a universal invitation to all men and women. In the present verse, Jesus is addressing those who are exhausted by trying to keep the minute details of the Law. They desire to be the best and fullest people possible, but the effort exhausts them. There are simply too many “ways” to happiness, joy and a fullness of life. Pursuing all of them is draining. They are overwhelmed by the impossibility of it all.

The Bible is for universal application

Note the universal nature of this invitation – *all of you*. The truth is that all men and women struggle in their lives, at various times and in various ways. All need God and yet few manage to find him. This is because the Law had become a burden, an obstacle to faithful living. In coming to Jesus people will find *rest*. This word is about a refreshing new beginning to the way people live their lives and struggle with what is happening to them. This happens because of the invitation of Jesus to *take my yoke upon you*... The yoke is the instrument that is used by farmers that enables

Rest for the Jews meant the Sabbath Rest, the seventh day of creation. It means living in the “Garden of Eden” hand in hand with God and each other. It is where we are created to be, how we are meant to be living.

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them to carry larger burdens than their cattle would otherwise be able to manage. Here we see Jesus now presenting himself as the yoke. Not replacing the need for the people to carry the burden of obedience to the Law but making it possible for them to be refreshed and to have a whole new way of doing the will of God. This is no promise that there will be no burdens in life. The promise is that burdens (whether the burdens that come with being a part of a faith community or the basic burdens that come with being a human) are now shared with Jesus, taken up by Jesus. Having Jesus as a core element of life makes it possible to take up burdens with a new freshness, burdens we might have once thought were beyond our resources and our abilities. In Jesus, burdens are carried in a different way.

Life is a rose garden – it has thorns of its own

One of the fascinating insights we have into the message of Jesus, is how he does not say people who are suffering and staggering under their burdens can come to him and he will give them a mattress, or a holiday on the coast. What he offers them instead is a farming implement, a tool for working and for carrying burdens. A hoe is something engaging all of our bodily strength if we are to produce a crop.

The Gospel message is not a message about an easy life, about a life free from worries and woes. Jesus does not teach a Kingdom in which someone can hide from the realities of our fragile human existence and the natural difficulties of human relationships. What Jesus *is* offering is the presence and power of heaven. It is *as* they suffer; it is *while* they are trying to carry their burdens they find God. This God is not some observer who stands back and encourages them in their work, telling them what to do and what not to do. The God revealed in Jesus is the God who lends a hand in the hard work.

As the yoke bears the burden of the load being pulled by the bullock, so Jesus helps bear the burdens as we go about the work of living as disciples. The farmer straps the yoke onto the beast of burden and the disciple brings Jesus alive in the way they live. If a disciple wishes to find God, all that is needed is to look into the face of Jesus, for where Jesus is, there God is at work.

For this reason our creed proclaims how Jesus is *God from God, light from light, true God from true God...* No longer is it necessary to go to the Temple to find God; to leave behind our lives and all that is going on around us if we wish to seek the grace of God. It is *as we live* in Christ and model our lives on life and teachings of Jesus that we enjoy the blessings of his yoke.

We should not miss one of the great Biblical revelations repeated here. We worship God, give thanks to God, and offer sacrifices to God in and through the day to day activities of our everyday life. Work is a prayer when we acknowledge and respond to the divine presence all around us as we live in the world as men and women of faith.

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