

## NEW TESTAMENT LESSON #10

# Take My Yoke upon You, and Learn of Me

Reading: Matt. 11:28; 12:1-13; 7:36-50; 13:10-17

by Ted L. Gibbons

**INTRODUCTION:** We took the scouts of the Snowflake, Arizona Stake 3<sup>rd</sup> ward into the Grand Canyon for an activity. We drove to the South Rim and hiked into Havasupai for a few days of camping and cooking and playing. They told me the hike was about 8 miles. They forgot the zero. Maybe they forgot two zeros. I had a new backpack on my back and in it enough food for a week. I had a significant collection of other necessary and unnecessary supplies, I had purchased an expensive new pair of hiking shoes for the trip. I had a canteen that held enough water for a decent bath. I thought I was prepared. But I did not know how heavy a 54 lb. pack could get in 8 miles. And I did not know that the shifting straps would rub the skin from shoulders and draw blood under my shirt. And I did not know that the front part of the soles of my new shoes would come loose in the first four miles, and then flop and fold unceasingly for the rest of the trip.

Finally one of those incredibly fit scouts offered to help. He shifted his sleeping bag and tent and some of his food to my pack, and then he carried my pack and I carried his for the remainder of the trip. He marched merrily off, and I followed lightly in his wake. His burden was light. The next Sunday we talked about Matthew 11:28-30 in teacher's quorum. I bore my testimony about how good it felt to receive help with an unbearable burden.

## I. JESUS INVITES US TO TAKE HIS YOKE UPON US AND LEARN OF HIM

**Matthew 11:28-30:** 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.

There are three verbs in these verses that deserve attention. They are *come*, *take*, and *learn*. They provide the pattern for shifting spiritual burdens.

1) Come to the Savior. Don't bother trying to see how long you can tough it out.

Don't drive yourself into spiritual and mental exhaustion by trying to carry on all the way to the campground. Come to the Savior. Bring your problems and your pains and your praise and seek him. We talked earlier in these lessons about the woman with the issue of blood who endured for twelve years before making her way to the savior. To those of us who struggle on under similar burdens the Savior's invitation is a guiding beacon showing us the way home. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy-laden . . ." Not some of you, not most of you—"ALL ye that labour " are invited.

2) "Take my yoke upon you . . ." For many years people in this culture bought and displayed a painting of the savior accompanied by the caption, "I never said it would be easy; I only said it would be worth it." At least one of the messages of Matthew 11:28-30 is that this is not true. Compared to the burdens people without Christ carry, it is easy. His yoke requires covenants and obedience and sacrifice, but in return he removes the burdens of sin and uncertainty and darkness, burdens infinitely greater in scope and weight. He shows us where we are going and gives us the power to get there. The paralytic lowered through the roof had a bed to carry home after his healing (Mark 2:2-12) but the bed cannot have weighed more than the infirmity the Savior removed from him. The peace that came to Alma following his repentance and conversion required a lifetime of sacrifice and service, but it required less of him than the pain he felt when he came face to face with his own rebellion. "Yea, and I had murdered many of his children, or rather led them away unto destruction; yea, and in fine so great had been my iniquities, that the very thought of coming into the presence of my God did rack my soul with inexpressible horror." (Alma 36:14)

3) "Learn of me . . ." The lessons we must learn about him we can only learn after we have taken his yoke. Without the covenants and without obedience, the sacrifices required of us will make little if any sense at all. To learn of him we must follow him. We cannot come to this knowledge while we follow the ways of the world. But we do not have to learn everything for the power to come to us. President Boyd K. Packer said, "You need not know everything before the power of the atonement will work for you. Have faith in Christ; it begins to work the day you ask." (*Ensign*, May 1997, p. 10)

President Howard W. Hunter, spoke of these verses in a way that has touched my heart deeply. He said,

In Biblical times, the yoke was a device of great assistance to those who tilled the field. It allowed the strength of a second animal to be linked and coupled with the strength of a single animal, sharing and reducing the heavy labor of the plow or wagon. A burden that was overwhelming or perhaps impossible for one could be equitably and comfortably borne by two bound together with a common yoke . . .

Why face life's burdens alone, Christ asks, or why face them with temporal support that will quickly falter. To the heavy laden it is Christ's yoke, it is the power and peace of standing side by side with a God that will provide the support, balance, and strength to meet our challenges and endure our tasks here in the hardpan field of mortality. (Conference Report, October 1990, p. 20)

## **II. JESUS DECLARES THAT HE IS THE LORD OF THE SABBATH**

Deuteronomy 23:25 commands,

When thou comest into the standing corn of thy neighbour, then thou mayest pluck the ears with thine hand; but thou shalt not move a sickle unto thy neighbour's standing corn.

Therefore the Pharisee who rebuked the Savior because his disciples plucked and ate the ears of corn had no quarrel with the fact that this corn came from another's property. His only concern was that they did it on the Sabbath. But before we address that lesson, consider the circumstances. The Savior is almost constantly surrounded by multitudes anxious for the miracles and (we hope) the message. But there are others around, like jackals circling. The Scribes and Pharisees, and sometimes the Sadducees, watch him constantly, but for very a different reason. They watch him when he is walking in the fields on the Sabbath. They watch him when he is talking and teaching and eating. Why? They are waiting for him to make a mistake. How many lives could bear that kind of scrutiny? His enemies follow him everywhere, waiting and scrutinizing, hoping for an error of action or doctrine that they can use to discredit him. And on this Sabbath, they they think they have found one.

At that time Jesus went on the sabbath day through the corn; and his

disciples were an hundred, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat. But when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto him, Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath day.  
(Matthew 12:1,2)

His responses? He offers three of them. 1) David did something you consider unlawful, yet you revere him as a national hero. The priests break the law in the temple on the sabbath and you consider them blameless. But I am more important than the temple! (see Matt. 12:3-5). 2) He quotes Hosea 6:6. “I will have mercy, and not sacrifice . . .” That is, “If you knew what the gospel is really all about, you would not condemn the guiltless when they ignore your non-scriptural, suffocating, and useless laws” (Matt. 12:7). 3) “For the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath day.” (Matthew 12:8) In other words, “I gave the law! Don’t presume to tell me how to keep it!” It must have been a terribly frustrating duty to bring accusations against the Son of God. In virtually every case in the Gospels, his answers seem to silence them and enrage them. (See Luke 13:17) Even when he was twelve he was smarter than they were. IN Luke 2:46, JST, we read, “And it came to pass, that after three days [his parents] found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, and they were hearing him, and asking him questions.”

On another Sabbath (see Luke 6:6), his adversaries tried to set a trap for him.

And, behold, there was a man which had his hand withered. And they asked him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath days? that they might accuse him.” (Matthew 12:10).

This verse is eloquent testimony of the compassion of the Savior. The Pharisees knew he would heal the man, Even though he knew their thoughts (their motives—see Luke 6:8), they knew that he would not send this man away crippled. And so they challenged him on the Sabbath day.

But he knew their thoughts, and said to the man which had the withered hand, Rise up, and stand forth in the midst. And he arose and stood forth. Then said Jesus unto them, I will ask you one thing; Is it lawful on the sabbath days to do good . . . ? (Luke 6:8,9)

This may be the finest Sabbath question ever asked. “Is it lawful on the sabbath

days to do good . . .?” How would you answer that question? What if it is “good” that could wait for another day? With the woman in Luke 13 it had already been 18 years. Would another day matter? Certainly in an emergency we would act regardless of the day of the week. But what about when there is no emergency? In D&C 59:12, the Lord commanded, “But remember that on this, the Lord's day, thou shalt offer thine oblations and thy sacraments unto the Most High, confessing thy sins unto thy brethren, and before the Lord.” The footnote for “oblations” says, “offerings, whether of time, talents, or means, in service of God and fellowman.”

The Savior again offers three answers to his question, “Is it lawful on the sabbath days to do good . . . ?” (Luke 6:9).

1) He says, you would do this for an animal. “And he said unto them, What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out?” (Matthew 12:11)

2) He answers the question. It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath. “How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days.” (Matthew 12:12)

3) He himself did good on the Sabbath when he healed the man. “Then saith he to the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it forth; and it was restored whole, like as the other.” (Matthew 12:13)

On another Sabbath the Savior repeated his lesson. The story is found in Luke 13:10-17.

And he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath.

And, behold, there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself.

And when Jesus saw her, he called her to him, and said unto her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity.

And he laid his hands on her: and immediately she was made straight,

and glorified God.

And the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because that Jesus had healed on the sabbath day, and said unto the people, There are six days in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the sabbath day.

The Lord then answered him, and said, Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering?

And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day?

And when he had said these things, all his adversaries were ashamed: and all the people rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by him. (Luke 13:10-17.)

One of the themes of the Savior's ministry seems to have been to teach the truth about the Sabbath. When the Jews returned from exile, Nehemiah made Sabbath observance a central issue in his reformation (see Nehemiah 10:31; 13:15-22). The strictness with which the Sabbath was observed became a measure of righteousness, and as the years passed and questions were asked and answered, a myriad of new restrictions and regulations were adopted. For the Pharisees these man-made interpolations had the same weight as the scriptures. But not for the Savior. It was to these man-made regulations that the Savior refused to offer respect. His efforts to teach correct principles about the Sabbath may well be another example of his efforts to replace heavy burdens with lighter ones. His success is indicated by the response of his adversaries and the joy of his followers (Luke 13:17, above)

Jewish law in Jesus' day forbade thirty-nine chief or principal types of work. These were: (1) sowing, (2) ploughing, (3) reaping (4) binding sheaves, (5) threshing, (6) winnowing, (7) sifting (selecting), (8) grinding, (9) sifting in a sieve, (10) kneading, (11) baking—all of which restrictions had to do with the preparation of bread; (12) shearing the wool, (13) washing it, (14) beating it, (15) dyeing it, (16)

spinning, (17) putting it on the weaver's beam, (18) making two thrum threads, (19) weaving two threads, (20) separating two threads, (21) making a knot, (22) undoing a knot, (23) sewing two stitches, (24) tearing in order to sew two stitches—all of which restrictions had to do with dress; (25) catching deer, (26) killing, (27) skinning, (28) salting it, (29) preparing its skin, (30) scraping off its hair, (31) cutting it up, (32) writing two letters, (33) scraping in order to write two letters—all of which are connected with hunting and writing; (34) building, (35) pulling down, (36) extinguishing fire, (37) lighting fire, (38) beating with the hammer, and (39) carrying from one possession into the other all of which appertain to the work necessary for a private house. Each of these thirty-nine principal prohibitions contained within itself numerous related items that were banned on the Sabbath day (Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah*, Vol.1, p.206).

Elder McConkie quoted Edersheim on the matter of the Jewish laws of Sabbath Observance.

"If a woman were to roll wheat to take away the husks, she would be guilty of sifting with a sieve. If she were rubbing the ends of the stalks, she would be guilty of threshing. If she were cleansing what adheres to the side of a stalk, she would be guilty of sifting. If she were bruising the stalk, she would be guilty of grinding. If she were throwing it up in her hands, she would be guilty of winnowing. Distinctions like the following are made: A radish may be dipped into salt, but not left in it too long, since this would be to make pickle. A new dress might be put on, irrespective of the danger that in so doing it might be torn. Mud on the dress might be crushed in the hand and shaken off, but the dress must not be rubbed (for fear of affecting the material). If a person took a bath, opinions are divided, whether the whole body should be dried at once, or limb after limb. If water had fallen on the dress, some allowed the dress to be shaken but not wrung; others, to be wrung but not shaken. One Rabbi allowed to spit into the handkerchief, and that although it may necessitate the compressing of what had been wetted; but there is a grave discussion whether it was lawful to spit on the ground, and then to rub it with the foot, because thereby the earth may be scratched. It may, however, be done on stones. In the labour of

grinding would be included such an act as crushing salt. To sweep, or to water the ground, would involve the same sin as beating out the corn. To lay on a plaster would be a grievous sin; to scratch out a big letter, leaving room for two small ones, would be a sin, but to write one big letter occupying the room of two small letters was no sin. To change one letter to another might imply a double sin. And so on through endless details!" (Alfred Edersheim: *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, (1972) 2:783.)

Perhaps the Savior's most revealing declaration about the Sabbath is found in Mark 2:26 JST: "Wherefore the Sabbath was given unto man for a day of rest; and also that man should glorify God . . ." When our emphasis on Sunday changes from resting from our labors and glorifying God to proving our piety and righteousness by our outward show of discipline, we have picked up a burden the Lord never intended for us to carry.

### **III. JESUS FORGIVES A WOMAN IN THE HOUSE OF SIMON THE PHARISEE.**

Simon the Pharisee invited the Savior to eat with him, but then neglected or refused to extend even the most minimal of hospitality (Luke 7:44-46). James E. Talmage taught:

It was the custom of the times to treat a distinguished guest with marked attention; to receive him with a kiss of welcome, to provide water for washing the dust from his feet, and oil for anointing the hair of the head and the beard. All these courteous attentions were omitted by Simon. (*Jesus the Christ*, p. 261)

It may well be that Simon hoped to observe (or contrive) some event in which he could find cause to turn the multitudes away from Christ. But a woman, a sinner, learned of Christ's presence and came to him. She represents all of us with our burdens, making our way to the one true source of rest and relief. Knowing that ridicule might well follow her entrance into the eating chamber, knowing that her reputation would accompany her, and knowing that she would not be welcomed by some within, still she entered. She was heavy-laden with the recognition of her sins and the downward spiral of her life. Like Alma of old, by her coming and by her



anointing and by her weeping and her wiping, she cried out, “O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me, who am in the gall of bitterness, and am encircled about by the everlasting chains of death.” (Alma 36:18) And the Savior, because of her faith (Luke 7:50) lifted her burden (Luke 7:48) and sent her away in peace.

The little parable, designed to teach Simon something about sinners when he made unspoken accusations against his guest, shows us the feelings of those who come to Christ with huge burdens—whose backpacks are weighed down with all manner massive and useless luggage.

And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on. There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged. (Luke 7:40-43)

## **CONCLUSION**

Sometimes we are overwhelmed with the requirements for exaltation. There are so many commandments, so many restrictions, so many duties. We come again and again to the word “endure,” and we tremble. We read the command “be ye therefore perfect” and we despair. We remember that the Lord warned Joseph Smith of future trials and tragedies and then said “hold on thy way” (D&C 122:9) and we wonder if we can. But with all of this come the other promises, the other insights. Exaltation is not as easy as catching fish at a hatchery, but it is much easier than the alternative. Isaiah said of the Savior, “He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.” (Isaiah 40:11) He also said, “Hearken unto me, O house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, which are borne by me from the belly, which are carried from the womb:

And even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you. (Isaiah 46:3,4)

Alma said to Helaman, “O my son, do not let us be slothful because of the easiness of the way . . .” (Alma 37:46) And the Savior himself said, “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. (Matthew 11:28-30)

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