

FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

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SERMON: *The Easy Yoke*

SERIES: *Hurry Up*

SCRIPTURES: *Matthew 11:28-30*

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**Credit to John Mark Comer (Ruthless Elimination of Hurry); Rob Bell (Velvet Elvis); Dallas Willard (Renovation of the Heart)*

Well good morning, it so great to worship with you. Want to say welcome to all of you gathered on-line, at home, tuning to the live stream.

Last week we started this series (**SERMON GRAPHIC**) talking about the most significant threat to our spiritual lives...and it's not secularism or materialism or threats religious freedom...according to Dallas Willard it is our hurried, overly-scheduled life-styles.

Willard writes that **“Hurry is the great enemy of Spirituality in our day. You must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your lives.”**

And again just want to give credit to John Mark Comer for his book The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry as one of our primary sources for this series.

And so last week we took some time to talk about our hurry problem. It is an epidemic. It is everywhere in our world.

This morning, we're heading straight to the words of Jesus, the Master Teacher and what has to tell us about this all-important threat to our lives.

So if you have a Bible turn with me to **Matthew 11:28-30**. Jesus says, ²⁸ **“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened...**

Pause here for just a moment...Anybody have a to-do list that is regularly getting longer, not shorter? Do you have deadlines you are trying to meet? Emails or hard conversations hanging over your head? Do you have this nagging sense you should be eating better, exercising more? Do you worry about your kids and their life decisions? Do you worry about the state of our world, global relationships, political relationships? Do you have a list of “things you’ll do” when life finally slows?

And so your living life in a hurried, frantic, tense, anxious state (hurry sickness)...just trying to keep up, get it done, get on to the next thing...hoping one day it will stop, slow down but wondering deep down if that’s even possible.

In your mind’s eye, there is this life you envision yourself having or this person you can envision you’re becoming... I’ll go for walks again. Sleep in everyone once in a while. Are you weary? Burdened?

Well if that’s you. You’re not alone and you’ve come to the right place...let’s listen to the words of Jesus...

²⁸ **“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened...and I will give you rest.**

²⁹ **Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”**

“This is an invitation for all the tired, the burned out, the stressed, and all those stuck in traffic and behind on their to-do lists, reaching for another cup of coffee just to make it through the day...” (Comer 79)

Jesus words in Matthew 11 may just be one of the greatest invitations ever offered humanity. Certainly one of the greatest invitations for the hurried world we live in today.

And so I just want to take a few minutes today and talk about what exactly the easy yoke is and how we receive it. So that we can find rest for our souls. Don't you want that? Jesus offers that. Alright, so first...

I. What is the easy yoke that Jesus offers?

Now, to understand what Jesus is talking about in this passage, you need a little bit of background.

First, Jesus was a **Rabbi**. Aramaic word, meaning **teacher**.

Mark 9:5 - ⁵ Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here.

John 1:38-39 - ³⁸ Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, “What do you want?” They said, “Rabbi” (which means “Teacher”), “where are you staying?”

Rabbis were teachers of the Jewish law (Torah) and Scriptures. What we call the Old Testament. Their primary responsibility is to know, even memorize the Jewish Scriptures.

“Under the age of six we do not receive a child as a pupil; from six upwards accept him and stuff him (with Torah) like an ox.” (Bell)

In addition, Rabbis were also **interpreter's** of **the Scriptures**. They didn't just know what it said, they tried to explain what it meant. Remember the Jewish Scriptures

are intended as rules for how to live life. And so the Rabbi's explained the meaning of the laws so people could live by them.

For example. The Jewish Scriptures have a section called the 10 Commandments. You've heard of these, right? One of the commands says,

Exodus 20:8 - "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns.

Know the law and do it.

But do you see the problem? What exactly does it mean to **do no regular work**? Is it ok to milk the cows on the Sabbath? Is it ok to feed the chickens on the Sabbath? Is it ok feed the family on the Sabbath? Is it ok to ride the family donkey to the Temple? (Did you see the command? Not even animals are to work on the Sabbath.)

To this day we still have different opinions about how to explain or interpret that law. Is it ok, to mow your lawn on the Sabbath? Is it ok to go out for dinner? Then mom doesn't have to cook, but someone else does have to cook? Is it ok to go to Wal-Mart? Can you go for a walk on Sunday? How much effort can you exert and it's ok before it becomes work?

Do you see the challenge with knowing the law and putting it into practice? You have to interpret what you read.

And just a little side note here. You might think, God should have been a little more clear in letting us know exactly what he wanted. But sometimes I think God is less concerned about us getting those kinds of details exactly right and He's more

concerned about the kind of person we are becoming as we wrestle with, and try to understand who He is. How we interact with and graciously learn from those with whom we disagree or see things differently. Sadly many of the disagreements, arguments, broken fellowships that happen in churches and among church people today happen over “our human interpretations” of Biblical texts.

Now in learning the laws, different rabbi’s had different ways of interpreting the laws. Some Rabbi’s said, the Sabbath law was not intended to keep you from feeding the chickens or milking the cows. Other Rabbi’s said that’s exactly what this law was forbidding?

Some Rabbi’s said you can take 3,723 steps on the Sabbath. That’s not work. But if you take 3,724 steps on the Sabbath...that’s work and you’ve broken the law.

So Rabbi’s learn the Scriptures and interpret the Scriptures.

Now follow me on this, a rabbi’s interpretation of Scripture was called a rabbi’s **yoke!**

Every rabbi had a yoke...(image of oxen). The imagery of a yoke is two oxen tied together...this a yoke. It keeps the oxen together, in place, walking the same pattern.

So a yoke was an expression in the first century for “**a rabbi’s way of reading the Torah**”...his interpretation of the laws. It was his understanding for how to live life based on the laws. Rules for...marriage, business, government, conflict resolution, prayer, money, sex, spirituality.

If you took up a Rabbi’s yoke, it meant you were following his way. Walking through life his way.

Jesus was a rabbi. Jesus had a yoke, his rule for doing life...his understanding of God’s law’s.

Now where do you learn about Jesus' yoke? Remember two years ago we did a sermon series on the "Sermon on the Mount." Jesus preaches a sermon Matthew 5-7...this is the clearest expression of the yoke of Jesus. The Sermon on the Mount is Jesus interpretation of the law...his rule of life.

The whole way through the sermon Jesus says things like...

You have heard that it was said...and he goes on to quote from the Old Testament and then he adds...**but I say to you.** This is my yoke. This is my understanding of the way of life.

Two things about the yoke of Jesus. First of all,

A. Jesus' YOKE is authoritative.

Jesus was teaching the best understanding for life. Jesus yoke is not one to be considered "another option" in the many options of choosing yokes and ways of doing life.

Jesus has something other Rabbi's yokes don't..."**shmika**". Everybody say that with me. Shmika carries the idea of rabbinical authority (Velvet Elvis). The one who get's the last word.

When somebody tells you to do something...what's the first thing you want to know... "Who said so? Do I have to listen? Is it important, is the source reliable, is it really true."

Authority matters.

I think I've shared with you all before that we love Star Wars at our house. I remember this incident from several of years ago. Our older son Landon used to like playing Lego Star Wars video game on the wii. He used to get very serious about it. When he was playing he would literally take on the personality of the characters as he is playing the game.

I remember one time he was down there playing, really getting into and it's time for dinner. So I told Keagan, he's a few years younger than Landon, I said, go down and tell Landon it's time for dinner.

So Keagan goes down the steps and opens the door and walks into Star Wars world and tries interrupt Landon's playing. "Landon it's time to stop playing and come up for dinner." Well Landon is not interested in listening to his little brother. "Leave me alone, I don't want to stop." Keagan tries again. Landon is not listening. Keagan tries yelling louder. You can just picture the tension building. Finally, Landon turns and looks at Keagan, he gets this very stern look on his face and put's his hand in the air and he says, **"Keagan, you are not my father."**

No I'm just kidding, he didn't actually say that. But do you know what he did say, **"Who said?"** "Who said I have to stop playing and come for dinner?" Landon's saying, "Keagan you don't have the shmikah to tell me what to do."

After his Sermon the Mount do you know what Matthew's very next line is...Matthew 7, **"When Jesus had finished saying all of these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching because He taught as one who had authority and not as their teachers of the law."**

Jesus taught with shmika. Jesus even said on another occasion...

"All authority, on heaven and earth, has been given to me..."

Jesus says **“I am the way, the truth and the life...”** My way of life, is the best way. My yoke is authoritative

Jesus rule is the right rule, the best rule, the truest rule about how to live life.

You just need to know, there are a lot of people trying to sell their yoke on life in our world. We are bombarded every day with the yokes of Oprah and Dr. Phil and Judge Judy, Taylor Swift and Billy Eilish...We are so easily influenced on our way of life by Nike and Tik-Tok, Youtube, Twitter and posts on Facebook and social media.

And there are some really great authors and Bible teachers whom I dearly love like Dallas Willard and John Mark Comer. They have great things to say, great things to teach. But on matters of life, what matters most in life, and how we should live...there is one primary and ultimate authority and that's Jesus.

Jesus is saying, if you are weary, burdened, by life, the world...if you are suffering from hurry sickness. Give up the yokes that the world offers and take up my yoke.

Second...

B. Jesus' YOKE is EASY.

“My yoke is easy...” Now, this is really important to understand. Jesus does not mean that life is easy. Some people get this mixed up. Jesus is not talking about your life circumstances being easier, if you decide to follow him.

In case, you haven't noticed...life is hard. Just turn to the person next to you and remind them “life is hard.” Jesus didn't say that life would be easy.

In fact what did Jesus say...**“In this world you will have trouble...”**

In the Bible, God never gives anyone an easy life. God never comes to Moses or David or Esther or Ruth and says, *“I’d like you to do me a favor, but it really shouldn’t take much time. I wouldn’t want to inconvenience you. It’s not really that big of a deal.”*

God does not recruit like someone from the PTA. He is always intrusive, demanding, exhausting.

He says we should expect that the world will be hard.

Easy, rather, is a soul word, not a circumstance word.

“Jesus is not the giver of the easy job (life). He is the giver of the easy yoke. In other words, easy doesn't come from the outside (circumstances), easy comes from the inside (soul). Easy does not describe the problem I will face, easy describes the strength from beyond myself, with which I can carry my problems.” (Ortberg)

The soul was not made for an easy life. The soul was made for an easy yoke...tied to Jesus.

Jesus says, give your life to me... “lose your life for my sake”...and I will give you, I will grow in you a soul filled with power, strength, joy, contentment, peace, perseverance in the midst of life’s hard circumstances.”

This is why even Paul in the midst of persecution, imprisonment, said things like **“I’ve learned the secret of contentment regardless of my circumstances.”**

It kind of reminded me of what Harvey Payne said a couple of weeks ago...he said, when you follow Jesus “suffering doesn’t go away, but I live with some **inside information** (security in Jesus) that gives me strength beyond myself (peace that passes understanding) to face the suffering.”

Dallas Willard describes what happens in our lives when we take up the easy yoke of Jesus...

“Am I undertaking some task? Then I in faith do it with God, assuming and finding his power to be involved with me. That is the nature of his Kingdom. Is there an emergency? I will meet it with the knowledge that God is in the midst of it with me and will be calm in a center of intense prayer. Am I praised? My thoughts (and feelings) will move immediately to the goodness of God in my life. Am I condemned or reproached? I know that God is supporting me and helping me because he loves me and has a future for me. Am I disappointed and frustrated? I rest in the knowledge that God is over all and that he is working things out – that “all things work together for good to those who love God and are called into the fulfillment of his purposes.”

(Willard 109)

The Easy Yoke of Jesus, means a transformed soul, character, will that carries you through difficult circumstances.

Sounds good, right? I know what you're thinking...how do I get it?

II. How do you take up the yoke of Jesus?

Now, really that's what the next three weeks are going to be about. Practical steps to take up the yoke of Jesus in your life. But this morning just want to give us the basic outline for understanding what the purpose of the next three weeks is. In general taking up the yoke of Jesus means **imitating Jesus with your life**. Let me explain...

Every Rabbi also had **disciples** or followers...Jesus had followers before Twitter ever did. They were called **Talmidim**. Or perhaps a better translation is “apprentices” (See Gary Moon Apprenticeship with Jesus.) Goal of a talmidim is

1. To be with the rabbi, every moment of every day,
2. so he could learn the yoke (way of life) of his rabbi.
3. So that he could become like his rabbi.

It wasn't just about knowing what the rabbi taught, but it was about starting to live your life like the rabbi. In fact there is an ancient phrase, the very first sermon I ever preached I talked about this concept... **“Covered in the dust of your rabbi.”**

The concept comes from the Mishnah, which is an old Jewish text, by Rabbi's explaining the law and oral teaching of Judaism. Anyway the Mishnah (Avot 1:4; Yose Ben Yoehzer), says...

***Let thy house be a meeting-house for the wise;
and powder thyself in the dust of their feet...***

Carries the idea of “powdering yourself” by walking through clouds of dust billowing up along a dirt roadway as you follow behind someone.

Apostle Paul says that he was educated “at the feet of Gamaliel” (Acts 22:3). The fact that Mary “sat at Jesus’ feet” in Luke 10:39 suggests that she was learning from him as a disciple.

Basic concept was, that in the ancient world, these talmidim or disciples would follow their rabbi, literally everywhere and end up “walking in their teacher’s dust.”

And this concept is not hyperbole by the way, there are stories of talmidim, disciples following their rabbi even into the rest room, if that’s where he goes. Learning be like the rabbi down to the smallest detail of your life.

But if you really did this, on the dirty, dusty roads Israel...you would soon find yourself covered in the dust of your rabbi.

To take up Jesus yoke, means to begin living like Jesus. To follow him so closely you are covered in his dust.

This is why Jesus invitation all throughout the New Testament is: "Come, follow me." He doesn't say, come and learn about the law from me. He doesn't say "come and believe in me." He doesn't say "Go to church." He doesn't say "ask me into your heart." He says, "follow me."

We receive the easy yoke of Jesus by modeling our lives after his.

If you want the life of Jesus, you must practice the lifestyle of Jesus. (Comer).

If you want the easy yoke. It's not mostly about going to church on Sunday morning at 9:30am. It's not mostly about praying a prayer. It's deciding that you are going to live Jesus way of life above all else, and in every moment of every day.

Do you ever look at somebody who is extremely skilled at something and think man, I want that? I want to be able do what they do.

Back when I was little, in the 90's there's was this amazing basketball player...Michael Jordan. Yes, better than LeBron James. Most people wanted to be like Michael Jordan. So much so they actually had this commercial "Like Mike".

Now, many people want the life of Michael Jordan. The ability and skill. The wealth. The fame and notoriety. The billboards. The commercials. The mansion. The private Jet. The signature Nike shoes. The greatness. Many want the life of Michael Jordan but not everyone wants the lifestyle it took become Michael Jordan.

See when your alarm goes off at 5am and it's time to get out of bed and head for the gym. Many of us choose to sleep for 2 more hours.

But if you really want the life of Michael Jordan, you have to practice the lifestyle of Michael Jordan. In my case you also need about 1 foot of growth, legs that can jump a little higher...but you get the idea.

There are a lot of people want the life of Jesus and the benefits that come with it. Peace, joy, contentment, rest, salvation, eternal life...There are a lot of people who want the life of Jesus. But far less who want the life-style of Jesus. Far less, who look at Jesus yoke and say...yes I'm willing to live that way. Because the yoke of Jesus is...

“Blessed are the poor, the meek, the merciful, the peacemakers...”

“Anyone who is angry with a brother or sister is subject to judgement...”

“Anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery in his heart...”

“Simply let your yes be yes and no be no...”

Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...

If someone forces you to go one mile, go two...

If someone slaps you on the right cheek, turn the other cheek...

When you give do not announce it...

When you fast...

When you pray...

Do to all others, what you have them do to you...

Do not judge...

Do not store up treasure on earth...

That is the yoke of Jesus in a nutshell.

If you want the life of Jesus, you must practice the lifestyle of Jesus. (Comer).

No, see I think many people in our world, want Jesus' life, we want rest for our souls...we want an easy yoke...we want the life of Jesus without his lifestyle.

“You must arrange your days so that you are experiencing total contentment, joy and confidence in your everyday life with God – that and that alone is what makes a soul healthy.” (Dallas Willard)

How do I arrange my days, my life, my schedule in such a manner that I am experiencing total contentment, joy and confidence...rest? That's what the next three weeks are all about.