

Lightening the Load

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In my mid-twenties, I traveled to Australia to train some youth leaders. When we landed after a 25-hour flight, a gentleman from Australia said to me, "Are you here on a holiday?" I said, "What?" We repeated this interaction 3 times. I finally responded by saying that I was not here on a holiday. Rather, I was here to do some teaching and then I will take some vacation days. The other pastor with me just shook his head as the Australian gentleman looked at me with a puzzled face. Finally, the other pastor who was traveling with me said, "Holiday means vacation here." I thought, "Great, I am an idiot on two continents now!"

When we left the airport, we jumped into a car and I immediately felt disoriented because the driving wheel was on the opposite side of the car. Our first stop was at the currency exchange office. The exchange rate was very favorable to Americans at that time and I ended up with a lot more money than I brought. This, too, was an opposite experience from my normal life. I exchanged my money with old dead men's pictures on it for bills with a woman's picture on it who is still very much alive. Once again, a lot of opposites happening in a short amount of time. And throughout that whole day, I kept having the Australians repeat what they were saying because I could not understand their accent, while at the same time, they loved my slow drawl and could understand everything that I was saying. Once again, completely opposite from my normal everyday life. It was literally an "opposite day" for me and it was a surreal experience.

I can't help but to think about how everyday with Jesus while he was on this earth must have felt like opposite day to those who were listening to his teaching and observing his ministry. Blind people could see, the paralyzed could suddenly walk and so on. Jesus would teach with this phrase often, "You have heard it said this way, but now, I tell you..." "You have heard that it's said to hate your enemies, but I tell you to love your enemies and to pray for those who persecute you." This was just one example of what they were told by Jesus that was completely opposite from what they had been taught their whole lives.

I wish that Arnold from Diff'rent Strokes would have been a disciple just so after each time Jesus taught we could read, "After Jesus taught, the Disciple known as Arnold spoke up saying, 'Whatcha talking 'bout Jesus?'"

What possibly struck the Jewish listener's most about Jesus was about how opposite he was compared to their priests and rabbis. It's even mentioned in the Bible that the people were amazed because he did not teach like their religious leaders. The religious leaders of that day were *notorious for focusing on performance*. They focused heavily on looking the part and acting the part when it came to their faith. It was all

about doing this or that so that God and your fellow man would approve of you. They were in the performance trap. This was a huge burden to live under.

Jesus was aware of this performance trap and offered an opposite way to live life. Jesus offered to lighten their load and remove the burdens that they were carrying in life, which was, once again, opposite from the religious leaders of that day who burdened the people with a call to perform for God and this world. **Matthew 11:** *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.”*

The first thing we see is an invitation to us to receive rest from Christ from the performance trap. The culture during the time of Jesus was unique. They were *obsessed with perfection*. They became so obsessed with perfection that they built rules around their rules for how to live out their life. They took a good thing, which was wanting to live a righteous life before God and their community, and turned it into distorted life of performing for God and others in hopes of gaining their approval.

Jesus draws attention to this in his famous teaching of the opposite, called the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 6 tells us, *² “So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others.”* Did you catch that? They wanted to be honored by others while doing a good work. *⁵ “And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others.”* Here we have them performing in the church and in public for what? To be seen by others. *¹⁶ “When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting.”* Here we see that they literally were showing off for others. Jesus knew the performance trap had caught the people of God in its snare and he then calls His followers to a different way of living.

Jesus teaches that He can give us rest from the performance trap that had weighed down their lives and brought undue burdens. How can this happen? Let's look at the pathway that Jesus offers. **Matthew 11:** *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.* Jesus says we can find rest from the performance trap once we take up his yoke and we begin to learn from him.

What does he mean by taking up his yoke? A yoke was a farming tool that was put on larger animals so that they would go in the direction the farmer led them. Jesus calls on us to bring ourselves under his Lordship and receive his salvation. He asks for us to resign from plowing our way through life and allow him to lead us and direct us.

The **yoke of Jesus** encompasses **the ways and teachings of Jesus**. They are His example and His leading. Yet, let's pay attention to what Jesus says that we must

learn from Him. He says, ²⁹ *“...learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart,”* Jesus says that if we want to take up his yoke we must learn to be humble like him. In other words, humble ourselves before the Lord and allow God to call the shots in our life. Resign from doing things our way and come under His lordship. It's by humbling ourselves that we will find peace. This Humility that Jesus models leads to rest. This Humility of Christ sets us free from the performance trap. Our world teaches us that the humble are looked over and left behind, while Jesus teaches us that through humbling ourselves before God we will find the true life. The good life.

Let's take a few minutes and talk about what happens when we learn to live in humility like Christ. First, **humility unburdens us of pride.** Pride is an elevated view of ourselves and our status in this world and it places a tremendous burden on us. During the time of Christ, people took pride in how they lived out a perfect religious life. Religion engrossed every domain in the life of the first century Jew. As we jump ahead 2000 years, pride still burdens us. It's an Americanized version, however, which is focused more on individualism and an elevated stature in the eyes of our fellow man. The 2017 Americanized version of pride says that I am the boss of my life. Since pride calls us to be entrepreneurs of the business we call self; the goals are self-serving. Would you like my business card...it's just a picture of me. We desire status, power, praise, and anything that's better or bigger than our neighbor has.

And when anyone slights us...beware. Pride burdens our soul because when someone injures us with any insult, we are troubled greatly by it. Instead, we should take it to our prayer closet and ask God to show us if there is any truth in it so that we can grow to be more like Jesus. Pride burdens us with unnecessary anger when anyone pushes against our agenda instead of us being like Christ who came to serve others and not himself. Pride scoffs at the teaching of Paul that says to consider others more important than ourselves. Pride holds the performance trap up in the air like a trophy to be admired by others. Look at how hard I work. Look at my success. Look at what I have accomplished.

Whereas, the humility of Christ can't wait to give other people credit and to turn the attention away from one's self. Pride demands credit for any idea or good thing that we do. For example: Once upon a time there was a frog who lived in the north and wanted to go south for the winter as the swans did. Each year that frog watched the swans fly south while he shivered in the snow and cold. Then he got an idea. He went to the swans and asked to go with them. "You can't fly," they responded.

"I know," the frog said, "but I have a wonderful idea. Let me get a stick and if two of you will help me, I can go with you. Two of you could keep the ends of the stick in your beaks and I could hang on to the middle of the stick and get out of this miserable cold weather." So, two of his swan friends agreed to help and it worked beautifully for many miles. However, as they were flying low over the farmlands of North Carolina, a farmer looked up and saw the frog holding onto the stick. "Look at that!" he shouted to a friend, "That's amazing! Wonder whose idea that was?" The frog, quite proud of his

incredible idea, opened his mouth to tell them. And of course, his pride resulted in his fall.

Pride chases praise from this world. Jesus calls us to learn to be humble like He is. The pride in our life that comes from wanting to be seen or perceived as perfect is too heavy of a burden for any of us to bear, especially when Jesus says it's unnecessary. Christ offers to show us a different way.

Secondly, **humility unburdens us from pretense**. Pretense is similar to the words pretend or pretentiousness. Another way to say it would be that pretense is the makeup we cover over the blemishes of our life so that we appear to be perfect. The burden of pretense causes us to create an image of our self to the world in hopes that the world sees us in a perfect light. The culture that Christ came and spoke to was caught up in religious pretentiousness. Everything was for an outward show.

Jesus once said that the people focused so much on cleaning the outside of the bowl while the inside remained sinful. They were pretending to be perfect so that people would admire them and God would approve of them. Jesus offered to lift this burden off the people through the way of humility. Humility says that any good that comes from me is because of the good that Jesus is doing in me.

Our culture has become obsessed with the image that we portray to the world. This burden of pretense has consumed our culture and made us a people who are overwhelmingly insecure. Once again, Jesus calls us to a different life. An opposite life. Has the performance trap weighed you down in life? Do you feel the pressure? Does pride rear its ugly head up in your life? Does pretense have a hold of you?

When Jesus came to this earth, he looked around at his beloved creation and he saw them running around chasing after things that they believed really mattered. He saw them devoting their lives to trying to impress everyone with achievements and a life that looked good from the outside. His reaction to this was opposite from what they expected. When Jesus came to this earth he didn't put more expectations on them. Instead he offered to lighten their load. He offered rest from the performance trap. He offered his love. He taught that what really mattered was that you loved him and that you loved others.

This was opposite from the performance trap that they were in where they were trying to perform for God and the people around them so that they would be loved. Instead, Jesus showed us how much God loves us; that He died for us even when we were still in our sin. How do you perform to get a love that is offered to you when you are at your worst? You can't. It doesn't work that way. It's a gift.

So, what's our response? **Matthew 11** where Jesus says, *"Take my yoke."* **Exchange the yoke of performance for the yoke of Christ.** Exchange the yoke of the world, and take. You receive this by faith. In other words, humble yourself before Christ. The truth of the reality is that when we take, when we enter a life of discipleship, there is

a leaving behind as well. **Taking demands leaving.** I will say that again. Taking demands leaving.

So, we see in Matthew, as Jesus called the disciples, they take him and leave their nets, boats, and tax booths. To take on the yoke of Jesus, we must at the same time leave certain things behind. We leave our pride behind. We leave pretense behind. I'm here to tell you by way of experience that there's nothing in this life that could even compare with Jesus. That to leave the things that this world says are important pales in comparison to what we will find in God's son.

A story is told of a very wealthy man who had one child. It was a beloved son in whom he loved deeply. Tragically this son died at a very young age. This man was filled with grief. As a coping mechanism, he began to travel the world, and as he traveled the world he began to buy pieces, rare pieces of art, and over the years he amassed an impressive rare art collection. Some years later his wife would die. Another grief would strike his heart, and then soon after that he would die. According to the stipulations of his will, because it had no heir, his estate had to go up for auction.

People from all across the world gathered at this man's estate auction. They were excited about the rare pieces of artwork that they would have a chance of getting their hands on. When the auction started, the auctioneer took his gavel and banged it. He said, "This auction will commence. Here's the first piece." They carry it out. It is simply called, *The Son*. It was a picture of a little boy. The people in the crowd who had come from all across the world began to murmur because they were unimpressed. They had never seen this picture before. Its author was unknown. So the auctioneer said, "We'll start the bidding at five dollars." No one raised their hands until a few moments later when an elderly woman made her way down the aisle waving five dollars. She said, "I'll take it. I want it. Give me this painting called, *The Son*." The auctioneer said, "Going once. Going twice. Going to the elderly lady for five bucks. It is sold." Then moments later he banged his gavel again and said, "This auction is now over."

People were in pandemonium. They said, "What in the world do you mean this auction is over? We've come from all across the world to be here. Where are the Monets? Where are the Picassos? That's what we want." The auctioneer explained, "According to the stipulations of the owner's estate in his will, the first painting was actually painted by the father and the child depicted was his son. He stipulated that whoever has the son has it all."

That's the message of Jesus. He who has the Son, Jesus, has it all. There's nothing in this life that could remotely compare to Jesus Christ. No amount of status, significance, or anything like that can compare with the Son. **When we have Jesus; we have it all.**

Take up Jesus' yoke, his way of life and lay your burdens down. There you will find rest from this chaotic chase we call the performance trap.