

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

CHRIST'S YOKE AND BURDEN.

A Sermon

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DELIVERED BY

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“My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”—Matthew xi. 30.

OBSERVE, dear friends, that our Lord Jesus Christ does lay a yoke and a burden upon his followers. He uses those words that none may presume to enter his service without due consideration. Religion is not a matter for trifling. The service of the meek and lowly Christ is no child's play. There is a yoke that is to be borne by all his disciples, and the neck of self-will must be bent low to receive it. There is a burden to be carried for Christ, and all the strength that God gives us must be used for his honour and glory.

But, lest those words “yoke” and “burden” should sound harshly to our ears, and any of us should start back because we have aforetime had our shoulders galled by another yoke, and our backs bent beneath a very different burden, thê Master very graciously and sweetly says, “My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” It appears to me that he spoke thus so that none may despair, that despair may not even come near us, and that we may not despond as to the possibility of our salvation. Christ has a yoke for us to wear, so let us wear it seriously; but it is an easy yoke, so let us wear it hopefully. He has a burden for us to carry for him, so let us be in earnest in bearing it; but it is a light burden, so let us be full of joy at the very prospect of carrying it. Our Saviour's adjectives are always emphatic, and they are especially so here. His “yoke is *easy*,”—easy in the fullest sense; and his “burden is *light*,”—light in the most joyous meaning of the term lightness. You may always be sure that, in Christ's words, there is never less than he seems to say; and, more than that, you can scarcely ever be wrong in believing that every statement made by him contains far more than appears on the surface of it.

I want you to feel, at this time, that, whatever yoke and burden there may be connected with Christ, that yoke is easy, and that

burden is light. I hope you will not pervert this text as some people do. They misquote it by saying that "the yoke of Christianity is easy, and the burden of Christianity is light." I am not greatly concerned about the yoke or burden of Christianity; to me, the charm of our text is that, here, we have Christ himself saying to us, "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light." I want you to have before you, not some impalpable, visionary, imaginary thing, but the very Lord that bought us with his precious blood speaking with those lips which are as lilies dropping sweet-smelling myrrh, and pointing with his pierced hand to the yoke and to the burden which he calls especially his own, and saying, as he said when he was here upon the earth, "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Coming, then, to our text, I ask you to notice, first, that *the context explains it*; secondly, *a little word of distinction in the text clears it*; and, thirdly, *the experience of all who know the Lord proves it to be true*.

I. First, then, THE CONNECTION OF OUR TEXT EXPLAINS IT.

Our Saviour did not speak these two sentences by themselves; and, therefore, we may not take this verse by itself. It is true anyhow, but you may make it untrue to yourself unless you take it in its proper connection. How often shall we have to tell people that the Bible is not a mere collection of separate sentences which they may rend from their context just as they please? We are not to treat the verses of the Bible as pigeons might treat a bushel of peas; picking out one here, and another there, without any thought of the surroundings of that particular passage. No; this blessed Book was written for men to read right through; and if they would understand the meaning of it, they must read each sentence in the connection in which it is found.

So, keeping this truth in view, I begin by saying that *some of you would not find Christ's yoke easy, or his burden light*. That is the very last thing you would find them to be to you in your present condition; but you would find his yoke heavy, and his burden impossible for you to bear. Some of you are mere worldlings, "lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God;" it may be that some of you are self-righteous, and proud of that which should be your shame. Anyhow, if you are unregenerate, our text would not be true to you in your unconverted state. There is something else which must come before this. If any unsaved man thinks that he can, just as he is, shoulder Christ's cross, and yield himself up to be Christ's servant, he has made a great mistake. Before him, these burning sentences must flash, like Sinai's lightning, "Ye must be born again," "because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." God will not be served by men whose sins have not been washed away by the precious blood of his dear Son. He will have none to bear his burdens but those who have, first of all, received of his grace through faith in the great "Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." So you see where you have to begin. "Come unto me," saith Christ, "all ye that labour and are heavy laden." By that he

means, "Do not suppose that, because you are already labourers in another master's service, you can wear my yoke. Do not imagine that, because you are already heavily laden, you can bear my burden. You must first get rid of that which now makes you labour, you must first be rid of that which is a burden to you, for 'no man can serve two masters.' Your old, toilsome labour must be done with, for no man can carry the double burden of his own guilt and of the service of God. That cannot be."

So, dearly-beloved, if you wish to be servants of God, if in your heart there burns a holy desire to serve the Most High, begin at the right place. Christ directs you to the door of entrance into his service, and into everything else that is worth having, when he says, "*Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*" I will give it to you;—you are not to buy it, you are not to earn it, or deserve it,—I will give it to you freely, for nothing is freer than a gift. I will give it to you;—nobody else can do so, but I, in my own personality, will give to you who are the most weary with your labouring, and the most heavy laden with your sin,—I will give to you rest, and I will give it to you immediately, on the spot. Come to me now, by believing on me, by trusting wholly to me, by getting away from yourself, and forgetting for a while any hope you ever had in yourself, and just coming to me to find your all in me; and so coming, I will give you rest."

You cannot take Christ's yoke upon you, or bear his burdens,—and therefore you cannot prove them to be easy and light,—till first of all you have entered into this rest which he so freely gives. If you are first perfectly rested, then you can work. I have before told you how the change, which our Lord has made in the Sabbath, is indicative of the change which he has made in our life. The law says, "Work six days, and then observe the seventh as the Sabbath;" but, under the gospel, the arrangement is, "Rest on the first day before you have done a stroke of work. Just as the week begins, take your rest; and, after that, in the strength derived from it, and from the grateful motives which arise out of that one blessed day of rest, give to the Lord the six days of the week." There is a change from law to gospel indicated in that very change; so let it be with you. "Come unto me," saith Christ, "all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." When you have done that, the text will be true to you, "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

There is something more than that, however. We began with the Master's gracious invitation, "Come unto me;" now follows his command, "*Take my yoke upon you.*" You will prove that his yoke is easy when you take it upon you; but, instead of doing so, I know what a man often does. He draws his chair up, and sits down, and says, "I will consider what Christ requires of me; I will think of what it is to lead a Christian life,—all the self-denials and the struggles, and the conflicts, that will be involved in wearing his yoke, which seems to me a very hard one." Get up, sir, from that chair; and, instead of being a critic of Christ's yoke, put it on. "*Take my yoke upon you,*' says

the Lord Jesus. Take it upon your shoulder by a humble yet confident faith. First be rid of your old burden, and so get rest, and then take upon you this yoke of mine." Let me put it practically to you, and then see whether Christ's yoke is not easy, and his burden is not light. Suppose a number of persons say to me, "That mass of white substance yonder is salt." I say, "No, it is not salt; it is sugar." "But from this distance it looks like salt." I tell them that it is sweet, the very essence of sweetness, but they do not believe me. We may have a long talk over the matter, but we shall never get to the end of the controversy till they come to the sugar, and taste it; then, the controversy will be ended at once. So is it with men who have not proved the sweetness of Christ. They say, "There is nothing in religion except that which is burdensome and sad." It may seem so to you who do not know anything about it; but we who trust and love the Lord say to you, "Taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him." That is the test; come and prove it for yourselves, for there has never yet been a case in which a man has really taken Christ's yoke upon him, in which he has not, by that very fact, proved that Christ's yoke is easy, and his burden is light.

There is still more to follow, for the Saviour says, "*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.*" There are two rests for a Christian to enjoy. The first is the rest that Christ gives him when he believes, the next is the rest that he finds when he takes Christ's yoke upon him. These two rests will be distinctly enjoyed by anyone who truly comes to Christ, and learns of him, and no one will find Christ's yoke easy in any other way. To put it in humble phraseology, when we are bound to Christ, as apprentices are bound to their master, to learn of him, we shall find a new and yet deeper and fuller rest to our soul than we have ever known before, and this will prove to us that his yoke is easy, and his burden is light. There is a use and wont, in the service of Christ, that brings much sweetness with it. To the beginner, the yoke may seem strange, and perhaps galling, but, after a while, when we have learned of Christ,—even as he himself learned obedience when he made himself a servant for our sakes,—then we shall discover that his yoke is easy, and his burden is light.

There are some, even among real Christians, who do not yet know the joy of service for the Saviour, because they have not been long enough bound apprentice to the Master. See, that work is very hard to that young lad. He has been only two or three months in that workshop; and, though he is trying his best, he does not succeed at it yet. But if he remains long enough by his master's side, and learns of him, you will then see how deftly he will do it. Just as the master now does it, and makes little of it because he is accustomed to it, so will this lad, by-and-by, find it quite easy, and he will then wonder that he ever thought it to be difficult, and he will agree with his master that, after all, the yoke is easy, and the burden is light, because he has learned the knack of carrying it. When I am at Mentone, I frequently see women, with bare feet,

tripping down from the hills, carrying a basket, perhaps full of lemons, and very likely with a child on the top of it. They never put up a hand to steady it, but they swing along, knitting their stockings as they come down the hill, using all their fingers for their work, and cheerily saying, "Good morning," as they come by us. It is wonderful how they carry such a load. I could not even lift the basket which they carry on their heads. How is it that they can do it? I do not suppose they could tell you, but they have done it since they were girls, and they have kept doing it; and feeble as you would suppose them to be, their strength has seemed to grow with the burden, and they are able to carry their load easily and cheerfully. So, when you come to Christ, and get rid of your old burden, he puts upon you his burden, and you keep with him, and learn of him till, at last, you also prove that his yoke is easy, and his burden is light.

I must ask you to go one step further with me. *He who would enter to the full into the sweetness of this text must know Christ himself*; for, observe, the Master puts himself into it: "I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls." I do most firmly believe that there is nothing that makes such men of us as knowing the Son of man. After all, the sublimest science in the world is to know Christ; and, especially, to know the meaning of the wounds of Christ. The man, who has most studied the agony in the garden and on the cross, and who has most studied his Master in all conditions, will be the best fitted to be a burden-bearer,—either to serve or to suffer, according as God would have it. The very sight of Christ makes cowards brave. One glance at that blessed countenance of his, all besmeared with bloody sweat, makes us ashamed that we ever murmured, disgusted with ourselves that we counted anything a self-denial for his dear sake. When we see him so gentle under all reproaches, bearing even to be spit upon without an angry look or word, when we really begin to know his very heart,—that heart which was entirely subject to the will of God for our sakes,—ay, even for the sake of those who were his enemies, and who crucified him;—knowing him thus, his yoke becomes indeed easy, and his burden becomes light. When the cross of Christ was fresh in the memory of his Church, she bore martyrdom for him with joy. His yoke then became so desirable that men even pressed into the court of justice to avow themselves Christians with the hope that they would be martyred. Men, did I say? Yes, and women and children also flocked in, and seemed as though they courted torture, for Christ's yoke had grown so light and so easy, on account of their having known him, and his death being so fresh a thing. Oh, it was marvellous! They have handed down to us, by their traditions, enough to make us blush if ever we dream of shrinking from any service or suffering for the sake of the Master who loved us so much that he even died for us.

II. But now, secondly,—and may God the Holy Spirit help me to speak with power upon this important point!—THERE IS A LITTLE WORD OF DISTINCTION IN THE TEXT WHICH VERY MUCH HELPS TO CLEAR IT.

Perhaps somebody says, "I do not find the yoke of life easy, or

the burden of life light." Christ does not say that they are; what he does say is, "*My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*" What was Christ's light burden, and what was Christ's easy yoke? I believe that I might illustrate the text by saying that he thought thus of that yoke and that burden which he himself bore,—the yoke which rested upon the shoulders of "the Prince of the kings of the earth,"—the burden which lay on that blessed back which once wore the robe of universal empire. Never before was there such a yoke, or such a burden; but, for love of us, and for delight in what he should accomplish thereby, his yoke to him was easy, and his burden was light. For the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame. So, whenever you have to bear a yoke or a burden, count it easy for the same reason as Christ did. But it must be Christ's yoke that we carry, for that alone will be easy to us.

For, first, *the yoke of Christ is easy and light as compared with the yoke of others.* The yoke of Moses was heavy, the yoke of the law was burdensome to the Jews, so that neither they nor their fathers were able to bear it. But the yoke of Christ's law is easy, and the burden of Christ's command to his Church is light. The yoke of the world is heavy. If any man will wear it, he will find that he may serve this cruel taskmaster till he is grey, and then he will be discarded. Cardinal Wolsey lamented, all too late, that had he but served his God with half the zeal he served his king, he would not in his age have been left naked to his enemies. The yoke of sin—the yoke of selfishness, the yoke of greediness, the yoke of drunkenness, the yoke of unbelief,—is the heaviest yoke of all. The crux of infidelity is heavier than the cross of Christ. You may depend upon it, that Christ's yoke, compared with any other, or with all others, is truly easy and light.

But, then, *it is not easy if we are rebellious against it.* "I find it hard," says one, "to do the Master's will." Do you? I expect the hardness is the result of not doing the Master's will. If you really did it willingly, it would be easy. "Oh, but I find such-and-such a thing, which Christ requires of me, to be hard." No, you do not find that to be hard; it is your own heart that is hard. The hardness is in the sin that rebels against Christ. There would be no hardness in the tenderness that would yield to him, or that would come to you as the result of yielding. I struggle, and then the cords that bind me cut my flesh. I quietly yield, and then I do not injure myself. A man will float if he will lie still upon the top of the water, but he will drown if he begins to struggle. It is the complete yielding to Christ that makes the yoke to be easy; but the hardness comes when it is not his yoke that we take, but one made by our self-will. We must have everything according to our own will, we must do everything in our own way, and so Lord Will-be-will comes prancing down the street on his high horse, and then everything goes amiss. But Christ's yoke is easy, and his burden is light.

"Still, the burden of life is very heavy," says one. Yes, but how far is it Christ's yoke, and his burden? *It is not his yoke if we are*

burdened with forbidden cares, for his yoke is that we should be free from care because we have cast all our care upon him who careth for us. Has he not pointed us to ravens, and to lilies, and bidden us learn from them the lesson of living without care? Your cares, poor anxious one, are not Christ's yoke. They are a heavy yoke that is all of your own making; but if you took another kind of care.—the care of not caring,—then you would find Christ's yoke to be easy, his burden to be light, and your life would be joyous and happy.

Nor is it Christ's yoke when we add other burdens to the one he lays upon us. "Oh, but I want"—yes, I know; you want to get on, and to be rich, and to be famous, and all that. But is that Christ's yoke? He says, "I am meek and lowly in heart." Ambition is your own yoke, not his; and the lust of wealth, the desire for power, the craving for human love,—all that is a yoke of your own making; and if you will wear it, it will gall you. There is more joy in being unknown than in being known, and there is less care in having no wealth than in having much of it. We often go the wrong way to work in seeking true restfulness and happiness. We set our minds on getting this and that, and then blame our Master because we have a heavy burden on our backs. He meant that we should have a heavy burden if we would make one of our own; but if our only care was to seek his glory, to imitate him, to put our feet down into his footprints,—if, like him, we were submissive even in our greatest agony, and closed our most intense petitions with his own words, "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt," then we should find that his yoke is easy, and his burden is light. God grant us grace to prove the difference between his yoke and that which we make for ourselves.—between his burden and that which we pile up by our own wilfulness! The yoke of Christ is his word, his precepts, his commands, the following of his example, the bearing of suffering which he appoints, the persecution which comes to us for his sake. This is his yoke, and his burden, quite as much as we need desire to carry; so, let us be content that we are not our own masters, but that we are our Lord's servants, and that we have not even a pennyworth of our own to carry, but only mean to be carriers for him. We have hired ourselves out to carry the vessels of the sanctuary, and we will carry no other burden than that. You remember that Nehemiah gave orders to his servants "that there should be no burden brought in on the Sabbath day," and the Lord has graciously brought us to a divine "Sabbatismos" already. If we bear no burdens but his burdens, and do no service but his service, then we shall find that his yoke is easy, and his burden is light. May God the Holy Ghost lead us into this kind of life, and then indeed shall we be truly happy!

III. Our third point is to be that OUR EXPERIENCE PROVES THE TEXT TO BE TRUE. Many of us have proved that Christ's yoke is easy, and that his burden is light. In speaking upon this point, I must go over part of the ground I traversed just now.

Experience—that is to say, use and wont again,—*proves Christ's*

burden to be light. Those of you who have known the Lord these five-and-twenty, or thirty, or forty years,—what do you say about this matter? Do you not find things somewhat different from what they were when you first came to Christ? Then, he gave you rest, did he not?—and you have never lost it; but, since then, you have gone on bearing his cross, and learning of him, and you have found a more complete rest, have you not? I think that I shall describe your experience, as well as my own, when I say that we have now a calmness and serenity of spirit which we did not know at first. We have learnt to do, almost spontaneously, some things which used to cost us a great effort. We now, almost instantaneously, think and say what before would have caused us deliberation to think and say; and many a burden, that almost broke our backs then, is no burden at all to us now. See how it is with those who have been long sick. At first, they dread the thought of being a week without coming downstairs; but after being bed-ridden for twenty years, they get accustomed to it, and even smile when we pity them. Well, that is a strong illustration of what I mean. To those who are not sufferers, I might give other illustrations; but it is true that there is a sacred use and wont that comes to us through the grace of God. We say that “use is second nature;” and, being accustomed to bear this burden, we are like the bullock which at first is restive, and will not plough; but when, year after year, he has ploughed with his true yoke-fellow, he gets almost to love the yoke; and when he is brought out in the morning, he looks round for his yoke-fellow, and adjusts his neck so that he may bear his part of the yoke without distressing his companion that is to be yoked with him; and almost before the farmer bids them move, the two bullocks begin steadily to go their usual round. There is less need of the ox-goad now because they have become accustomed to the yoke. They seem to know when to turn at the end of the furrow, and how to do it all; and blessed is that Christian who, by experience, has acquired the blessed habit of serving or suffering as his Master wills. He finds that Christ’s yoke is easy, and his burden is light.

But, dear friends, we also, by experience, prove Christ’s yoke to be easy, and his burden to be light, *because of the motive that leads us to bear them.* What is the motive that leads a Christian to bear Christ’s yoke and burden? Why, the master-motive is love; and what will we not do for love? Things which no money could induce us to do are freely done out of love. Well does our poet sing,—

’Tis love that makes our willing feet
In swift obedience move.”

In our ordinary domestic life, nothing is too heavy, nothing is too demeaning, if it be done for love; and so is it with the yoke of Christ. When we come really to love him, we are willing to do or to suffer anything for his dear sake. His love makes the burden light, and the yoke easy.

Further, experience shows us that these things are light *because there is a new nature given us, with which we bear the burden and the*

yoke. Our old carnal nature cannot endure it; you might as soon try to yoke the sea or to harness the wind as seek to put the yoke of Christ upon a carnal man's shoulder, or make him open his mouth to receive the bit of the divine law. But God creates in us a new heart and a right spirit, and that new nature as naturally takes to obedience as the old nature took to rebellion; and so the yoke becomes easy, and the burden light. Is not that the true answer to the riddle? Is not that the great reason why that which otherwise would crush us becomes so light?

Then, Christ's yoke is easy, and his burden is light, *because the Divine Trinity comes to our help.* When the Trinity comes in, all thought of difficulty vanishes. If our Heavenly Father be with us, we can do or bear anything. The feeblest among us could stand, like Atlas with a world upon his shoulders, and never feel the strain, if God the Father were with him. Then, how uplifting is the sympathy of Christ! We can bear anything when he says to us,—

“ I feel at my heart all thy sighs and thy groans,
For thou art most near me, my flesh and my bones;
In all thy distresses thy Head feels the pain,
Yet all are most needful, not one is in vain.”

Dr. Watts wrote truly,—

“ Jesus can make a dying bed
Feel soft as downy pillows are.”

Then there is the blessed co-operation of the Holy Ghost. When he comes to us as Comforter, Quickener, Guide, Strengthener, and Friend, then the yoke is easy, and the burden is light; especially when he comes with manifestations of God to the soul, and when faith, and hope, and joy, are all shedding their benign influence over the heart. Well might the apostle say that he could do all things through Christ who strengthened him. And when the Holy Spirit comes, and reveals Christ in us, then nothing is hard, but everything is light and easy to us. Experience cracks this nut, which else might break our teeth. Have you ever tried it, brothers and sisters? If so, I know that you have proved Christ's word true to you, “ My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Another thing that helps to make Christ's yoke easy to some of us is *the consciousness of the benefits which we have derived from it.* I can bear my personal testimony that the best piece of furniture that I ever had in the house was a cross. I do not mean a material cross; I mean, the cross of affliction and trouble. I am sure that I have run more swiftly with a lame leg than I ever did with a sound one. I am certain that I have seen more in the dark than ever I saw in the light,—more stars, most certainly,—more things in heaven if fewer things on earth. The anvil, the fire, and the hammer, are the making of us; we do not get fashioned much by anything else. That heavy hammer falling on us helps to shape us; therefore, let affliction and trouble and trial come. Rutherford said that he thought Christ might almost be jealous of his cross, for he did love affliction so much; it had brought him so much

benefit that he began even to love the cross, it had drawn him so close to his Lord that they ran each other pretty evenly. Well, I do not think that there is much fear of that; but, really, Christ and his cross do so sweetly go together that I have sometimes felt like the man who had such blessed times in his sickness, and who became so dull when he recovered, that he said, "Take me back to bed again, let me have all my pains again, for then I proved the preciousness of Christ." Many an old Covenanter, when he met in the kirk in Edinburgh, and sat there in peace and quietness, had not half the fellowship with Christ which he had experienced when the cruel Claverhouse was after him; and he said, "Let me go back to the moors again, and worship God as I did when the text was read by the light of the lightning flash, for God was very near his people by the moss side and among the hills." It is certainly so still, brothers and sisters. Not only is Christ's yoke easy, and his burden light, but I have often felt as if his yoke were wings, and his burden feathers,—as if, by their help, I could mount and soar above all ordinary experiences. You know what weights are, and how they hold you down; but any engineer will tell you that there is a way of managing weights so as to make them lift you up, and our great Engineer lifts us by that which seems as if it would drag us down. Blessed be his name for this!

And, lastly, his yoke becomes easy, and his burden light, *as we think of what will come of them at last*. The deeper our sorrows, the louder we shall sing. Heaven will be all the brighter because of the darkness through which we have passed on the way to it. Oh, what a heaven it will be to the sick, and the poor, and the despised, and the afflicted, to burst their bonds, and soar away to everlasting bliss! It will not be long before you and I will be where Jesus is; wherefore, till then, let us patiently bear all that he lays upon us.

But this is not true of you all. Some of you have heavy burdens to carry, but you have nobody to help you. How do you manage to live without a God? O poor creatures! Perhaps you, sir, came here in a carriage and pair, but you are indeed a poor creature if you have not a God. You draw large dividends from the bank, but you are poor indeed if you have not Christ as your Saviour. As for me, I will take Christ and his cross, and count them greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt. The Lord bring you all to think and say the same; and if you ever do, then you can begin with, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest;" and you can go on to the text, and claim Christ's words as applying to you: "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light." The way of holiness is an easy way; may God the Holy Spirit graciously guide you to walk in it, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.