

HOW HEAVY IS YOUR BURDEN?

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30 Text vs. 30 *“My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”*

The past few weeks we have been following Jesus after He crossed the Sea of Galilee in a boat with His disciples and returned to His boyhood hometown of Nazareth. Jesus was brought up there by Mary and Joseph in a home built into a rocky hillside. Nazareth’s synagogue is where He preached the sermon that led to His rejection by the townspeople who wanted to throw Him off a cliff. (John 2) After two days there, He departed and went into Galilee and testified that a prophet has no honor in his hometown. Nazareth was held in low esteem by the Jews. Their contempt was seen in Nathanael’s question *“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”* (John 1:46) which reveals just how little the Jews thought about the town of Nazareth and the people in it. That low view of Nazareth is important, because it helps understand Matthew’s claim Jesus *“fulfilled what was said through the prophets that He would be called a Nazarene.”* (Matthew 2:23)

Nothing is said in the Old Testament about Jesus being from Nazareth. Matthew was probably referring to prophecies of how others would despise Him and treat Him poorly. (Psalm 22:6–7; Isaiah 53:3) In John 1:35 as Jesus began calling His first disciples, He called Philip who later went to Nathanael and told him, *“We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph”* (John 1:45) Nathanael showed his skepticism when he said, *“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”* (John 1:46)

Now, last week we learned how Jesus instructed His disciples to go to just the cities of Israel and tell the people about Him. He was preparing His disciples for the day He would give them His *Great Commission* to go into the whole world and tell the people about Him. His words and actions had demonstrated God’s power in His life. And His instructions made those men ready to take on the calling of Jesus. His calling was now their calling. His task was now their task. His ministry was now their ministry. And that’s not something they took lightly. Nor was it something they were given half-heartedly. The *Great Commission* came at a price for them. And it still does.

People go to events today called *Tractor Pulls*. That’s where the floor of an arena is covered with dirt for souped-up tractors to compete and see which can pull the heaviest load. That’s nothing new. Before the arrival of modern farm equipment, most of the heavy farm work was done by oxen, horses, or other strong, powerful animals. The farmer would link two animals together using heavy U-shaped pieces of wood called a yoke. Placing one upside down upon each animal’s neck he attached them to a pole hooked to a plow. Then, they would as a team pull the plow to till the soil and prepare it for planting. Those animals were known as *beasts of burden*. They carried the weight of the job for the farmer. Then Jesus, the master teacher that He was, used this word-picture about those animals to make a point. He said, *“Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you. 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.”* (Matthew 11:28-30)

What Jesus was saying is, you Jews must realize your religious leaders have created so many man-made laws, rules, and regulations about how you are to live your life day-by-day, that you are overwhelmed. And He said, *“you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry. And you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them.”* (Luke 11:46) Jesus made it *very* clear. There was a distinct difference between what *He offered* to people, and what the religious leaders *required* of them. It was an easy choice. You can keep your heavy burdens. Or you can have rest for your soul! Think about that!

Every religious belief system, except Christianity, is based on some type of works system, *“What you do helps you earn your salvation.”* Do this. Do that. And what does it produce? Heavy burdens. You’re always left wondering, *“Have I done enough to be accepted, or worthy to be saved?”* Now apply that to the *yoke of Christ*. You can bear those heavy loads yourself. Your sin. Your guilt. Your despair. Your shortcomings. Or you can join up with Jesus inside His yoke to help you carry them. Soon, He can lift them from you. Think how much strength He has! He’s the strong One. You’re the weak one. Remember that first song you learned as a child? *“Jesus loves me, this I know; for the Bible tells me so; little ones to Him belong, we are weak, but He is strong!”* With Jesus, you can never do enough to be worthy of Him.

But the Good News of the Gospel says, *Jesus has already done the work for you!* Salvation can’t be obtained by “good works.” *“It is by grace you have been saved. Through faith. And this is not from yourselves. It is the gift of God.”* (Ephesians 2:8) His offer to *“give you rest”* is available if you want it. In fact, He wants to give it to you right now! He never grows tired of giving. So, how do you get it? Many people are looking for *“steps to improvement.”* 8 Simple Steps for Losing Weight. 10 Steps To Successfully Become Wealthy. People use the A.A. *Twelve-step Program* to sobriety. People like the idea of an instruction manual. If it’s followed, it will bring results. Another example is Islam with its *Five Pillars*. Obey the Five Pillars, and salvation will be granted. The idea of a step-by-step program to salvation appeals to many Christians. But the mistake is showing salvation as the result of a step-by-step process. Roman Catholicism has seven sacraments. Baptism, Eucharist, Confirmation, Reconciliation, Anointing of the Sick, Marriage and Holy Orders. Other

Christian denominations add baptism, public confession, turning from sin, and speaking in tongues as steps to salvation. But the Bible has only *one step* to salvation. When the Philippian jailer asked Paul, “*What must I do to be saved?*” Paul answered, “*Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.*” (Acts 16:30-31) Faith in Jesus as your Savior is the **only** “*step*” to salvation.

The Bible makes that absolutely clear! All have sinned against God. (Romans 3:23) And because of sin, all deserve to be eternally separated from God. (Romans 6:23) But because of His love, God took on human form and died in our place. (John 3:16) Jesus took the punishment we all deserve. (Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:21) And God promised forgiveness of sins and eternal life in heaven to all who by faith profess Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. (John 1:12; 3:16; 5:24; Acts 16:31) Salvation is not just about certain steps you must follow to earn salvation. Yes, Christians should be baptized. Yes, Christians should publicly profess Jesus Christ as Savior. Yes, Christians should turn from sin. Yes, Christians should commit their lives to obeying God.

However, these are *not* steps to salvation. They are the *results* of salvation! Because of your sin you can't in *any way* earn salvation. You could follow 1000 steps and it still wouldn't be enough. That's why Jesus had to die in your place. You are incapable of paying your own sin debt to God. Or cleansing yourself from sin. Only God can complete your salvation. And He did! God Himself completed the “*steps*” and offers salvation to anyone who will believe it. Salvation and forgiveness of sins is not about following steps. It's about following Jesus Christ as Savior and recognizing He has done all the work for you. God requires only that *one step*. Receive Jesus Christ as your Savior from sin. Fully trust Him *alone* for your salvation.

That's what separates the Christian faith from all other world religions! Each has a list of steps that must be followed if salvation is to be received. Christians recognize God has already completed those steps and calls on you to simply receive Him in faith. That's when He lifts the burdens you are carrying. That's when He gives you eternal life. A life that never ends. In fact, eternal life really has nothing to do with time.

The Bible says *everyone* lives forever. The saint and the sinner. But it's the quality of that life is what should concern you. Heaven is eternal life *with* God. Hell is eternal life *without* God. Life continues after death, as outlined in *The Apostles' Creed* to which you just testified a while ago: “*I believe in the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting.*” *The Apostles' Creed* doesn't guarantee your salvation if you just recite it. Reciting the *Creed* without having a spiritual foundation can't help you. If you don't *believe* God is your Father, that Jesus Christ is His Son and your savior, and that the Holy Spirit is your guide through life, then the *Apostle's Creed* will never be a blessing to you. But if you have faith, and your faith comes alive within you, and your spiritual life becomes stronger, then as you say the words, they will help relieve you of your burden, because “*It is by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not from yourselves. It is the gift of God.*” “*My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*” Revelation 21:4 says, “*He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.*”

James Weldon Johnson wrote a poem that is my favorite. It expresses how your burden will be lifted when your time comes, and your burden will be no more. Listen!

Weep not, weep not,
She is not dead;
She's resting in the bosom of Jesus.
Heart-broken husband--weep no more;
Grief-stricken son--weep no more;
Left-lonesome daughter --weep no more;
She's only just gone home.

AMEN