

**Matthew 11:28-30**

**July 9, 2023**

Have you ever seen someone, I guess it would be two people, wearing a yoke? You've probably seen pictures of oxen yoked to each other. But I seriously doubt that you have seen humans wearing such a yoke.

You know, of course, that a yoke is a sturdy wooden beam that fits over the neck. A metal piece goes around and under the neck to keep the yoke in place. Its purpose is to keep the animals together. They walk together. They work together. They are unable to separate from each other until the yoke is removed.

We can say that a husband and wife are yoked to each other in marriage. And let not a husband ever call this yoke a pain in the neck. By God's design, the yoke of marriage is a beautiful thing. The husband and wife live tother. They walk together and raise a family together. The yoke of marriage is not to be seen as a burden, but as something that gives joy. And even more, it is a wonderful picture, both to those who are married and to those who are single, of what Jesus does for us in baptism – He yokes us to Himself, He being the Husband and we the Bride. And of this yoke, He says in our text: *“My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.”*

How easy and how light? To answer this, we need to compare Jesus' yoke with the yoke that is on our necks when we are born. The yoke of the Law, God's Law. A heavy yoke. A yoke that truly is a pain in the neck, for the demands of the Law are unyielding. *“You must be perfect, as I the Lord your God am perfect!” “Whoever keeps the whole Law, but fails in one point, has become accountable for all of it.”* And then this, *“The soul that sins, it shall die!”* Yes, the yoke of the Law is very heavy.

Now since God's demanding and accusing Law is the yoke we wear, what does it yoke us to? A yoke is placed around two necks, not just one. Your neck and my neck are in one part of the yoke of the Law. What is in the other part? Exactly what does the Law yoke us to?

Let's allow St. Paul to answer this question from our Epistle in Romans 7: *“I find it to be a law,”* he says, *“that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand... making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.”*

Do you hear how Paul answers our question? You and I are yoked to sin! *“Evil lies close at hand,”* cries Paul. How close? We are yoked to it. It is yoked to us so tightly that we live with sin, we walk with sin, we work and raise our families with sin right there next to us and even within us.

And we cannot get away from it. The yoke of the Law is too sturdy, too demanding. Since we fail, not just in one point, but in all points of the Law, we are yoked to sin 24/7 for our entire life, and even beyond.

Now Paul also says somewhere, *“Do not be unequally yoked.”* A small donkey and a large ox should not be yoked together. They would be unequally yoked. The ox would pull the donkey wherever the ox wanted to go. It would even drag the donkey when the donkey could not keep up with the ox.

Well, your sin and mine is that large ox, and we are the donkey. Sin has its way with us because we are yoked to it. It drags us into temptation. It causes us to cry with Paul, "*The evil I (hate) is what I keep on doing!*" It's because we are yoked, yes unequally yoked, to sin. It is neck breaking. It is unbearable for us who do not want to sin. And it causes us to cry with Paul, "*Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me?*"

That's a great question. Who will deliver Paul? Who will deliver you and me? Who? Jesus. Hear His inviting words in our text: "*Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you... For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.*"

Why is Jesus' yoke easy? Why is His burden light? Because He is not demanding, as is the Law. He is not your Accuser. He is your Savior from the Law that accuses you. He does not break your neck, as does the yoke of the Law, because Jesus' yoke is peace, joy, forgiveness, and salvation. It is *rest* for us who are heavily laden with the burden of our sins.

You see, Jesus took your burden from you. He went to Calvary and was yoked to your sin by the nails of the cross. He suffered the penalty you and I deserve. Jesus became Paul's *wretched man* as He hung from the cross to deliver you from sin, death, and damnation.

Therefore, the yoke of the Law is no longer over your neck. You are no longer yoked to your sin. In your baptism you are yoked to Jesus. And so, the Law cannot condemn you because you are forgiven of your sins. Each one of you is forgiven because Jesus felt the yoke of the cross for each one of you. And I mean *each and every one of you!* Do you hear His kind invitation? "*Come to Me, all!*" Not some, but all of you who labor and are heavily laden under the yoke of the Law.

You will never live up to the Law. But rejoice in this, that Jesus lived up to the Law in your place. And so, you are not declared guilty by the Law. Jesus, in your baptism, gives you His innocence.

Go ahead and feel the back of your neck. Is the heavy yoke of the Law there? Not if you believe these precious words of Jesus to you. Rather, you will feel, by faith, His gentle hand, His loving touch. And even more, you will feel the water of your baptism which never leaves you. Your head, your neck, every part of you, is always wet with the blood of Christ which covers you.

Go in peace, my forgiven friend. You are yoked to Jesus now and forever. Amen.