



water from rock

Selah: Stop, Look, Listen- January 3, 2023

The Lord be with you.

I hope you had a wonderful Christmas, wonderful celebration of Jesus as Immanuel, God is with us. And now as we're off into a new year, I'm wondering how the new year is going for you. Is 2023 feeling, well, a little bit like 2022? Maybe you're feeling a little burdened today, a little stressed by the weight of a new year. Let the words of Jesus flow over you as in Matthew chapter 11 verses 28 through 30, Jesus invites you and me with these words. "Come to me, all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 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, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Notice that twice in this one scripture that Jesus is promising rest. I will give you rest. You will find rest for your souls. And notice who it is that Jesus is inviting to experience this rest. Jesus says, all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens.

A few nights ago, I was lying in bed wide awake, feeling, well, feeling weary, feeling some burdens, and I sensed Jesus saying to me, hey, Tim, why are you carrying the weight of all of that? Why don't you let me carry it? And in that moment, I began to feel God's peace, a peace that scripture calls a peace that passes human understanding, the peace of knowing that God never made you or me to bear life's burdens alone.

God created us, intending us to live with him, Immanuel, God is with us. In these verses, as Jesus invites us to take his yoke and learn from him, Jesus is actually using the language of a first century Jewish rabbi. As at that time, a rabbi would search out looking for a few good men who were the best and the brightest, and he would call them to take up his yoke. That's what they called a rabbi's teaching. It was a yoke. It was about how to live, how to keep Torah. They called it a yoke, and let me tell you, that yoke was a long list of do's and don'ts, a list of rules, and that meant that people who were already weighed down by life, weighed down by legalism, religion, rule keeping. And then here comes Jesus, who instead of calling just a few select people, Jesus invites all, all, Jesus says, all. I mean, that's you and me, that we don't have to be the best and the brightest, but all who are weary and carrying heavy burdens. Jesus says, I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart.

And I hope that you know Jesus as just that, gentle and humble in heart. The religious leaders of



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Jesus' day, well, they were demanding, harsh. Jesus is gentle and humble in heart, and with Jesus, we will find rest for our souls.

Now, Jesus does an interesting thing here. With the turn of a phrase Jesus goes from talking like a first century rabbi offering a yoke to bear. Jesus goes to talking like a first century carpenter. I mean, Jesus was a carpenter, you know, and he goes to using the language of a village carpenter who knows something about making the kind of yoke that an ox wore. Now, here's where we need to learn a little bit from a man named Justin Martyr. Justin the Martyr. He earned his last name by being one of the early Christian martyrs. And Justin the Martyr, he was an early church father who grew up near the Jordan River. And right in the early second century, Justin the Martyr tells of Jesus who, and I quote him, he says, "Jesus was deemed the carpenter because he was in the habit of working as a carpenter making plows and yokes."

Did you get that last part? Making plows and yokes. And that tells us that as a village carpenter, Jesus knew about measuring an ox, measuring an ox for a well-fitted yoke, a yoke that in wearing it, it would not rub or irritate the oxen's neck. And notice what Jesus says here. What he says about the yoke that he offers, he says, my yoke is easy. Now, the Greek word translated here as easy is the Greek word *chrestos*, C-H-R-E-S-T-O-S. And *chrestos* means, it means a well-fitted yoke, a suitable yoke, a yoke that is sized and tailor-made for the individual oxen. I mean, a good carpenter would never make a one size fits all yoke. And as a village carpenter, Jesus knew, he knew how to measure an ox, how to carve a yoke to fit each individual ox so that the yoke would not chafe or rub against the animal's neck. Jesus' yoke was easy, well-fitted.

So today in the opening days of 2022-23, Jesus is inviting you and me to take his yoke, a yoke perfectly fitted for each of us. Take my yoke and learn from me for my yoke is *chrestos*, easy, special made for each one of us so that we will find Jesus' yoke easy and his burden light.

Jesus never asked you or me to do something that is too hard for us, something that is not perfectly fitted individually for each of us. One of my seminary professors, the late Dwight Pentecost, told his students one day about when he himself was a student many years earlier, that he would go out to preach at a small country church. And one day as he was in that little community, he saw a farmer plowing a team of oxen. I mean, we're going back some years here. But he saw something that he thought was strange as he saw one full-grown ox yoke together with a much smaller, younger ox. And that didn't make any sense to my professor. And so he asked the farmer, he said, why are you plowing with an ox of two different sizes? And the farmer said, well, you look close. Look at the little ox there, and you see that his line is actually not connected to the plow. The little one is not pulling any weight at all, rather the little ox is learning how to walk in a yoke with another ox.

So the other night, when I was feeling burden, overloaded, Jesus said to me, well, take my yoke upon you. Learn to walk in the yoke with me, that I'm the one carrying the weight. I am the one taking your burden. So you see, there is rest in coming to Jesus. So if you're feeling burdened way down today by life, Jesus says, take all of that to him. Give it to him, and you will find rest for your souls. And I say that from experience.



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I am Tim Smith, a fellow traveler. Thank you for listening. Until next time...