

INTRODUCING THE YOKE AND THE CROSS

by Wayne Benjamin, YPM Executive Director 1994-2001

"Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." **Matthew 11:28-30 NKJV**



ORIGINAL LOGO

If you look at the original logo for YPM, you will see the yoke and the cross. We, as Christians, know the story of the cross and what it stands for. It was there our Lord and Savior was crucified for the sins of mankind. Jesus knew the way of the cross and also that He was to die on the cross for our sins.

But what about the yoke? What does that mean? What does it have to do with us as Christians? Is the yoke something that is important and identified with Jesus? It seems that our knowledge about the yoke is not as clear and yet in Matthew 11:28-30, we read three verses that are familiar to all of us. This is a message of primary importance to the Christian. It has to do with being a disciple, a follower of Jesus Christ, and it launches us on our journey into discipleship. Just as the cross is identified with Jesus and we know what that means, so the yoke is identified with the Christian and we should know what it means.

Let's take a closer look at what importance the yoke is to the Christian from Matthew 11:28-30. My prayer is that the Holy Spirit will establish these words of truth and comfort as you read the following; enabling you to walk closer with the Lord in these days before His second coming. You will then be able to more fully understand the call to discipleship.

Verse 28 begins with an invitation by Jesus saying, "Come unto Me." Our lord is inviting us to come to Him for He knows we need Him. Before coming to Jesus, our life didn't have purpose nor did we even know why we were born or what purpose God had for our life on earth. Now in the new covenant, this means believing in Christ and becoming His

disciple or follower. He takes us from where we are, to where we need to be.

When we come to Jesus, accepting His invitation, He promises that He will give us rest. Notice this promise and the invitation in verse 28 are all inclusive. Jesus invites **all** who are weary and heavy laden to come to Him.

This depicts a man who has a great load laid upon him, which he must carry to a certain place. Every step he takes reduces his strength and renders his load more oppressive. However, it must be carried on, and he labors, using his utmost exertion, to reach the place where it is to be laid down. A kind person passing by, seeing his distress, offers to ease him of his load that he may rest.

So **all** are invited to come to Jesus and receive rest from life's troubles and burdens. **Sinners**, wearied in the ways of iniquity are invited to come to Christ and find speedy relief.

Remember the TV commercial that asked how do you spell "relief", R-O-L-A-I-D-S, but to the Christian it is spelled "J-E-S-U-S".

Also **penitents**, burdened with the guilt of their crimes, may come to Jesus and find rest plus instant pardon. **Believers**, solely tempted, and oppressed by the remains of the carnal mind, may come to this blood, that cleanses from all unrighteousness and purifies from all sin, they will also find uninterrupted rest in Jesus.

In verse 29, Jesus says to "Take my yoke upon you." It may seem strange that a man weary and under a burden should take on another burden of a heavy yoke, but in verse 30 we read that Jesus says, "My yoke is easy." By this we find that He means His gospel imposes nothing that is difficult.

In fact quite the contrary, it provides removal of all which oppresses and renders man free from sin, the legalism that oppressed the Pharisees, the do's and don'ts of many of today's religions and all the uselessness of care free living.

If an ox does not have a yoke, he cannot be attached to a plow, and cannot plow a field. When the yoke is placed around his neck, a plow can be attached, and the field will be plowed with ease. The yoke is necessary for any work to be done.

So it is with us. By accepting His invitation, take His yoke which is easy and His load that is light, leaving behind the heavy burdens we were carrying. What a difference as we plow through the fields of life with this yoke around us and our Lord leading us. Then as we learn from Him and the truth in His Word, we study the Bible knowing He is gentle and humble in heart, and then our souls will finally find rest.

There are three conditions which are required when taking the yoke:

1. Come **voluntarily** without force or influence.
2. **Renounce** all prejudices, errors, idolatry, everything concerned with false religion, separate from your most intimate friends and acquaintances. Something not easy to do, but when done this leaves way for new birth and the new man. (Editor's Note: Biblical separation is not a popular doctrine today, but the Bible clearly and repeatedly states we are not to be "partners" with those living in darkness (Eph 5:8) and warns us to keep away from believers who are not living according to the Word (2 Thess 3:6.) Sometimes we **do** need to make hard decisions about family and close friends.)
3. **Submit** to the yoke, allow Jesus to come in, become committed, make Him Lord of your life being aware then of suffering and persecution that might come into your new life.

The yoke involves instruction under discipline, yet it is easily compared to the former life or the legalism that the Scribes and Pharisees enforced. The yoke requires subjection. As we take the yoke our Lord offers us, we then are subject to His discipline and leadership.

Jesus says, "My yoke is easy." The word easy in Greek is "chrestos", which can mean well-fitting. In Palestine the ox-yokes "were made of wood; each ox was fitted with a yoke. It was carefully adjusted, so that it would fit well, and not gall the neck of the patient beast. The yoke was tailor-made to fit the ox.

There is a legend that Jesus made the best ox-yokes in all Galilee in His carpenter shop. From all over the country men came to buy the best yokes that skill could make. Shops had signs above the door and it has been suggested that the sign above the carpenter's shop in Nazareth said, "My yokes fit well."

Jesus means that the life He gives you is not a burden to gall you, but your task is made to fit you. There is rest and comfort in knowing that. Whatever God sends us is "tailor-made" to fit our needs and our abilities exactly.

Jesus says, "My load is light." It isn't that the burden is easy to carry; it is laid on us in love; it is meant to be carried in love; love makes even the heaviest burden light.

The only way we can find rest for soul is to come to Jesus at His invitation and take His yoke -- and yet Jesus carried the burden of humanity when He carried His own cross. What a love our Lord has for us to take our burdens, give us His yoke and then carry us through the fields of life that our souls may find rest.

This is the way we become His disciple, by denying ourselves and taking up our cross and following Jesus (Matthew 15:24) - for Jesus said, "I have given you an example that you should do as I have done for you." (John 13:15) So let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith who for the joy set before Him endured the cross. (Hebrews 12:2) Because to this you were called, since Christ suffered for you, leaving an example that you should follow in His steps. (1 Peter 2:21) What better reason to do it than....."Because He Lives."