

**April 28, 2019**

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**Jesus in the Nitty-Gritty: Jesus Lightens Our Load**

**Scripture: Matthew 11: 1-6, 25-30**

If you were to search the phrase **“A better night’s sleep”** you would get back About **157 million** results from a Google Search.

Say you were having enough problems that you’re looking for a solution, you type in **“gadgets to help me sleep”** and you’d get About **81 million** results. You’d have a lot to choose from. **[Put up picture]**

But type in the two words **“More rest”** and you will get about **1.85 Billion** results in less than  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a second.

Brothers and sisters, I don’t want to point out the obvious here, but I think **we live in a day and age when we all wish we could just get a little more sleep and a lot more rest**—however you define it.

**The question though, is all about the “why”. Why do we have such an overwhelming desire for ‘more rest’.**

One school of thought says we are simply **sleep deprived**. And we are. Human beings are the only living creatures that intentionally limit their sleep. We are the only ones who control going to sleep, waking up, and how long we slumber.

Another school of thought says that having our faces perpetually stuck in front of a video screen of one kind or another—combined with a sedentary lifestyle—that messes with our hormone levels.

And of course, there is the economics of two income families, single parent families, family support systems that used to be down the block which are now spread through-out the country—there is so much to do and so little help in getting it done.

So it is little wonder that there is a powerful magnetism when Jesus says, **“Come to me, all of you who are tired and overburdened; and I will give you rest. Accept my teachings [*Literally Take my yoke upon you*] and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. The teachings that I ask you to accept are easy; the load I give you to carry is light.”**

The wording I just used takes the phrase “my yoke” and translates it as “my teachings” because “yoke” was a phrase used by rabbis that meant: ‘My way of living out the Torah, the commandments of God;’ ‘My school of interpretation or my path toward understanding of the relationship of who we are to God and how that plays out in our daily lives.’

The most faithful religious people of Jesus' day were crazy scrupulous in crossing all their T's and dotting all their I's when it came to obeying the commandments of God. As Bryan and I have both said recently, obeying all 613 of the daily laws made it almost impossible to hold a full-time job, and certainly excluded day laborers and tenant farmers which meant the vast majority of Judean Jews.

It was all well intended, of course. The Pharisees and teachers of the law wanted to be able to go to bed at night and check off every box they could possibly think to check—satisfied that they'd performed their religious duties as faithfully as possibly. The problem, of course, is that there was always been one more box that got skipped over. No matter how hard they worked at it, it was never enough. There was always more that could be done.

**Those first century religious leaders, not unlike a lot of 21<sup>st</sup> century Christians, found themselves stuck** in what we're going to call this morning a **performance trap**. By the way, I am using a fair number of insights this morning from David Seamand's wonderful book, **Freedom From the Performance Trap**. (*I won't cite them all this morning, so just assume the good stuff is his.*) Seamands describes the Performance Trap as **living your life with an underlying sense of "I ought to, I should, I could, I try, but I never seem to be able to do enough."** He describes that experience as **"an inescapable bondage, the vicious circle from which there is no escape through bigger and better performance."**

Think about how much emphasis we put on performance, or the mastery of simple skills or the kind of achievements that make headlines.

- We teach our children to please us as their parents and reward them when they behave, punish them when they don't.
- Teachers use grades to evaluate progress but it feels as if they are judging the 'value' of their students.
- Coaches motivate athletes by emphasizing winners and losers.
- What do you do to get a job or keep a job—or earn a stellar annual evaluation?
- With everything from credit scores to likes on Facebook we are constantly being asked whether we are *measuring up, making the grade, passing muster, amounting to something, or worth the effort.*

**You can understand how this might work.** If I believe that I have to earn my parent's acceptance and trust every day, (and that's a big IF) then the affection and approval I get from them is conditional on my behavior. The more I am the perfect son, the more approval I receive and the more privileges are

showered upon me. Likewise, the more I fail to live up to their expectations of being a vivacious, popular, athletic, and academically successful daughter the they withhold their affection and curtail my privileges. Now if that's also how I think how my relationship with God works—then I'm going to be a driven, potentially neurotic person who projects the same perfectionistic expectations on my friends, spouse, and children. It's not a pretty picture.

And as far as Jesus is concerned all of that is based on a lie. **This lie insists that *everything* depends on how well we perform:**

- **our salvation and status, our relationship with God**
- **our sense of self-worth, our relationship with ourselves**
- **our sense of security and belonging, our relationship with others**
- **our sense of achievement and success, our relationship with society**

Jesus says *My Yoke—my path of understanding and way living is not based upon what we've done lately, it's based upon who we are*. Yes, God has laid out in his command-ments the best way for us to live: we need rest and thus a Sabbath; we need to be able to resist the pull of money and thus a tithe; we need the support of community, thus the church; we crave the stability of life-long love, thus the unconditional commitment of marriage. All this and more is laid out for us in God's law. But we follow that law--not because *we ought to* or because *things will go badly for us if we don't* but rather because we *enjoy a fuller relationship* with our heavenly Father when we do.

**The apostle Paul knew all about the Performance Trap, or he might have called it the Perfection Trap, because he lived it in the fullest sense of the word before he met Jesus.** He admits that he was a Pharisee's Pharisee and excelled in following the letter of the law as much as was humanly possible. He also admits that he still found himself coming up short no matter how hard he tried. The very best he could do to placate God—under the law—was never good enough. But looking back he wrote this: Galatians 4:4-7

**But when the fulfillment of the time came, God sent his Son, born through a woman, and born under the Law. This was so he could redeem those under the Law so that we could be adopted. Because you are sons and daughters, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Papa, Father!" Therefore, you are no longer a slave but a son or daughter, and if you are his child, then you are also an heir through God.**

**In other words, the way that Jesus lightens our load and brings us the deepest kind of rest is by making it clear that we are neither servants nor slaves, but we have been adopted as Sons and Daughters. God has signed the**

adoption papers right there on the stone, rolled away from the empty tomb. We no longer have to bow our heads and hold our hands together as a slave in chains might. We can raise our heads, lift up our hands and cry out “Papa, Father, hear the prayer of your child!”

**Imagine you’re a poor Victorian Oliver Twist kind of orphan, and with luck beyond luck, you are picked to be in the service**—chosen to be trained as a footman in one of the fine manor houses in the English countryside. It would be quite a step up from the workhouse, though it would still be quite a hard life.

As a servant, you would get up before the family, light their fires, lay out their clothes, prepare and serve their meals before you ate yours, you would of course avoid eye contact, speak when spoken to, do whatever was asked of you without delay, and be happy with whatever meager pay and whatever small amount of time off you were given. Despite what you might have seen on Downton Abbey, servants were not usually treated as members of the family. You could be out on the street, without references, at a moment’s notice, for the smallest mistake or perceived slight.

Now compare the life of that servant with the life of a child, born into the aristocratic family who owned that manor house.

**New slide**

**The servant is accepted and appreciated on the basis of *what he does*, the child on **the basis of *who he is***.**

**New slide**

**The servant starts the day *anxious and worried*, wondering if his work will really please his master. The child *rest in the secure love* of his family.**

**New slide**

**The servant is accepted because of his *workmanship*, the son or daughter because of a *relationship*.**

**New slide**

**The servant is accepted because of his *productivity and performance*. The child belongs because of his *position as a person*.**

**New slide**

At the end of the day, the servant has peace of mind only if he is sure he has *proven his worth by his work*. *The next morning his anxiety begins again*. The child can be *secure all day, and know that tomorrow won't change his status*.

### New slide

When a servant *fails, his whole position is at stake*; he might lose his job. When a child fails, he will be grieved because he has hurt his parents, and he will be corrected and disciplined. But *he is not afraid of being thrown out*. *His basic confidence is in belonging and being loved, and his performance does not change the stability of his position*.

If I were a downstairs servant and God were some kind of sanctimonious upstairs Victorian Lord I don't think I'd ever be able to let down my guard long enough to find the rest my soul really needs. I don't know that I could long endure someone following along after my ever move with the moral equivalent of a white glove, looking disapprovingly for the smallest speck of sin to gather on the end of his finger then point it right under my nose. I wouldn't make it very long.

Jesus said, if you are weary and burdened, come to me and I will give you rest. Take my yoke and learn from me, and I will help you find rest for your soul.

What Jesus implies but does not say is that:

You are someone of incredible value

You are loved

Your worst is forgiven

And in the end it's not about what you've done lately—it's about who you are eternally. And who you are is a beloved child of God.

May you find peace and rest in that truth, now and always.

### **Benediction:**

'Come to Me, when you are weary and over burdened, and I will give you rest. Let me share your load and show you a better way. When you partner with Me, your weary soul will find rest. Following me through life is easier and less burdensome than trying to please, appease, or meet the expectations of a graceless world.

—Jesus

Papa, dear Father, I am Your child, always have been and always will be. Help me feel like Your child, as I live like Your child, today and every day. Amen.