

Being Yoked with Christ

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, 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.” Matthew 11:28-30

What kind of yoke are you wearing today? You may not get up in the morning and put on a wooden harness like oxen wear, but we are daily yoking ourselves in some way or the other to something. We all yoke ourselves to someone or something! And that can be good or bad, it can be helpful or hurtful, it can be a delight or destroy us completely! For many of us, our yokes become more burdens than blessings. That yoke that once seemed like a life giver, now feels like iron chains. Because you see that yoke always contains two animals, two oxen. And one will always be stronger than the other, intentionally so. The idea is to yoke a weaker ox to a strong ox who knows the field and the direction to go. And the weaker ox will follow. Through walking side by side, the weaker will learn the ways of the stronger until he too becomes like his harness mate and will go that same direction.

Who or what we are willing to yoke ourselves to, that is the direction we will go and the identity we will become? The world is filled with yokes that are deceptively pretty but can pull our lives in directions away from Jesus. But we all choose our yokes. Even if we believe ourselves to be leaders, we still all follow someone or something—power, money, career, marriage, prestige, position or a life filled with Jesus.

The yoke you choose will in some way or another define your direction in life, and will affect your well-being, the well-being of your mind, body, heart, and soul. Your private life, your public life, your spending habits, your relationships, your addictions.... your yoke becomes your identity. And the yoke you choose will either strengthen or weaken your authentic self. Some yokes have stronger pulls than others. Some pull you in a direction you may not want to go. Others may guide you into good or not so good directions—and their resulting consequences. Who or what you follow, ascribe to, the voice you listen to, the things you put your heart and soul into will form the basis of who and what you become in life. It will also determine your joy, peace, and eternal life.

The Good News of the Gospel is that Jesus offers us Yoke that will lead us in paths of righteousness on a road to peace. But it starts with Repentance! Repentance is not just something you do when you’ve done something wrong. Repentance is burning the yoke you are bearing, sacrificing your life and livelihood to God, putting on the yoke of discipleship, and following God instead. Throughout the scriptures, we read that Jesus has come to set us free from the burdens we are carrying from the yokes we are bearing, from the slavery to sin and death we have ascribed to. Jesus tells us, “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 light.” (Matthew 11:29-30)

Jesus’ “WAY” is the yoke He offers—a “WAY” of life in which we follow Him, and He leads us into green pastures and by still waters, a way of life filled with adventure but also the promises of peace, love, and eternal life. Jesus offers us the yoke of discipleship with Him and the cloak of righteousness that will usher us into the kingdom of heaven. In the Jewish rabbinic tradition, the rabbi’s “yoke” is the way of learning that transforms the student into a teacher, disciple into friend. It is the ultimate gift—the offer to walk side by side through life with your mentor and teacher, learning as you go. We are all learners. We are all followers. We all choose yokes. Which will you choose? The yoke that destroys? Or the yoke that saves?

The yoke that saves has a name: that name is J E S U S.