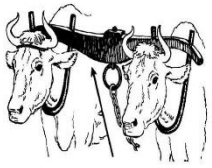
THE NEW SHOFAR

Christ's invitation to the weary and heavy-laden is a call to begin life over again upon a new principle--upon His own principle. "Watch My way of doing things," He says. "Follow Me. Take life as I take it. Be meek and lowly, and you will find Rest. ***- Henry Drummond***

July 5, 2026

I broke the bars of your yoke and enabled you to walk with heads held high

With an invitation found only in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus invites, *Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you res*t. Jesus had called Peter and Andrew with a similar expression (4:19), but there it was (lit.) "Come *after* me," while here it is "Come *to* me," a tender call to intimacy with him for all those who are weary and burdened. "Weary" evokes the image of persons exhausted from their work or journey, while "burdened" indicates persons weighted down with heavy loads. They are like the crowds whom Jesus said earlier are harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd (9:36).



Jesus, our Yoke

He extends the invitation by saying, *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*. The "**yoke**" (*zygos*) was the wooden frame joining two animals (usually oxen) for pulling heavy loads; this image was used metaphorically to describe one individual's subjection to another. In that latter sense, the yoke is a common metaphor in Judaism for the law.

The Book of Ecclesiasticus **196–175 BC** invited people to the yoke of studying Torah through personified wisdom: *Acquire wisdom for yourselves without money. Put your neck under her yoke and let your souls receive instruction; it is to be found close by* (51:25–26). The Sirach passage is often cited as the background for Jesus' statement. But the contrast between Sirach and Jesus' saying is distinct. Sirach invites his readers to the "house of instruction" for the study of Torah (Sir. 51:23). The developing rabbinic tradition understood discipleship to entail learning from Pharisaic authorities and carrying out scrupulous observance of the oral law. Because the oral law was of divine origin, its massive obligations became far more burdensome than Scripture itself, and with the passing of years and the addition of more and more prescriptions.

In addition, the yoke is also a familiar metaphor in the Old Testament to describe Israel's subjection to foreign oppression: *With a yoke on our necks we are hard driven; we are weary, we are given no rest* (Lam. 5:5). Israel's return from the Egyptian captivity is described as release from the heavy yoke of servitude: *I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt so that you would no longer be slaves to the Egyptians; I broke the bars of your yoke and enabled you to walk with heads held high* (Lev. 26:13; cf. Ex. 6:6–8). And the prophets promised a time when God would break off the yoke of foreign oppression and give rest to the people of Israel when they repented and were restored to the land (Isa. 14:25).

Jesus' invitation is in stark contrast to the religious burden of Pharisaism or the militaristic burden of foreign oppressors. His yoke—a metaphor for **discipleship to him**—promises rest from the weariness and burden of religious regulation and human oppression, because it is none other than commitment to him. His disciples learn directly from him. As the messianic inaugurator of the kingdom of heaven, Jesus offers rest in himself for their souls through his authoritative understanding of God's truth. His yoke will bring true learning, which

takes us back to the Sermon on the Mount, where he declares that has come to fulfill the Law. To learn from Jesus is to learn from his revelation of what the Law truly intend.

The yoke of discipleship brings rest <u>because</u> Jesus is "gentle and humble in heart"

Jesus exemplifies the very characteristics his disciples will display as members of the kingdom of heaven—gentleness (5:5) and humility (James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5). He has castigated the scribes and the Pharisees for their hypocritical self-righteousness (5:20; 6:1–18) and will condemn them for their prideful religious regalia, places of privilege, and elitist titles (23:5–7). But Jesus does not need to strut his authority. He has come gently, preaching and teaching the good news of the arrival of the kingdom of heaven, and in humble human form he has brought healing to sin-sick humanity. This is the true End Time (eschatological rest) for which Israel has long hoped, a realisation of a deep existential peace, a *shalom*, or sense of ultimate well-being with regard to one's relationship to God and his commandments. Jesus' teaching is the true fulfillment of the Law, and those who come to him will enter into a discipleship that produces rest for the soul (cf. Jer. 6:16).

While discipleship to Jesus brings relief from the burden of Pharisaic regulations, it is not lawlessness. He goes on to say, *For my yoke is easy and my burden is light*. These two clauses are in parallel to emphasise Jesus' way of discipleship. His discipleship is an easy or serviceable yoke because his teaching equips us most effectively to live out God's will in the way life was designed to be lived. Furthermore, his discipleship is not the oppressive burden of Pharisaic legalism (23:4) but instead turns the load of life into one that is manageable (cf. Gal. 6:5). Jesus does not release his disciples from burdens, just as he did not escape the burdens of human life in his Incarnation. Illness and calamity and tragedy remain a part of this fallen world until the final renewal, but for those in the kingdom of heaven there is a promise of Jesus' sustaining help as we carry his yoke of discipleship.

In fact, in Jesus' interpretation of the Law the challenge of following him may be seen as even more demanding than the Pharisees, because he calls us to fulfill the Law from the obedience of the heart, not simply through external obedience (5:21–47), and he calls his disciples to be perfect, as their heavenly Father is perfect (5:48). But Jesus' demands are still a yoke that is easy to bear and a burden that is light to carry, because in the coming of the kingdom and the inauguration of the new covenant, his Spirit provides the same strength to carry the load that Jesus himself relied upon to carry his own load of redemptive service to humanity.

Discipleship to Jesus is not essentially a religious obligation

In the quest to learn from Jesus how to live God's truth, it is critical to remember that Jesus' disciples can also turn his yoke into an unbearable burden unless we consciously recognize that discipleship to Jesus is not essentially a religious obligation. Rather, ours is an intimate relationship with the One who calls, *Come to me* and *learn from me*. As complicated as life may become, discipleship is at heart simply walking with Jesus in the real world and having him teach us moment by moment how to live life his way.