

Matthew 11:28-30

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Preacher: Paul Levy

[0 : 00] Let me read to you just the last three verses of Matthew chapter 11.! Come to me all you who labour 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 yourselves. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Anyone weary? Anyone heavy laden? These words are for you aren't they? There's a Greek laden about a man who was given a task to do by the gods.

It was a particularly criminal punishment in the afterlife. And this man's punishment was that for all eternity he would have to push a boulder up a hill. And each time he got to the top of the hill the boulder would slip through his fingers.

And it would go right to the bottom of the hill and he'd have to start all over again. And I suppose after a few hundred years of pushing that boulder up that hill he would be weary wouldn't he?

[1 : 16] Weary from trying but never succeeding. Weary of doing the same thing again and again and again but not succeeding. And sometimes life is like that. You get up in the morning.

You grab yourself some breakfast. You get on the bus. Particularly Broadway. You get on the tube. You buy coffee on the way to work. You work all morning.

You dash out of the office for a sandwich. You get back to work in the afternoon. You end up working later than you'd hoped. You get a tube which is delayed home.

You get the bus back home. You have your dinner. You maybe come out for a church meeting. You watch TV. You go to bed. You get up the following morning. You make some coffee.

You grab some breakfast. You get the bus to the tube. You get the tube into work. Grab a coffee on the way to work. Work in the morning. You wish you did lunch time but you haven't got time. So you grab a sandwich and work all afternoon.

[2 : 15] You thought you'd finish early but you've worked late. And so you get the tube home. You get the bus. You get home. You maybe go to a church meeting. You watch the TV. You have some dinner. You go to bed.

Again and again and again. Life seems to keep on going back to where it's been. And you never seem to be getting anywhere.

Matthew Arnold. I talked about a foiled, circuitous wanderer. Round and round we go. Only to come back to where we started before. And sometimes life is like that, isn't it? Sometimes life is like trying to push a boulder up a hill.

And religion doesn't help either. Jesus said about the religious leaders of his day. Let me read it to you from chapter 23, verses 1-4.

Let me read what he says. Jesus said of them. He said, He loved the places of honour at feasts and the best seats in the synagogue.

[3 : 38] It's what religion does. What God intended to be a blessing for the whole of mankind so often becomes a burden. And that's how it was under the yoke of the Pharisees. It's at the time of the Reformation.

Under the medieval church. The message of the gospel which was supposed to have been a great blessing. Religion had become a tolerable burden. And it's often how it is today. That we can make Christianity into a religion which becomes a burden.

Like, bop it. You do this and you don't do that. And it's a burden that we put on people's shoulders and they're not meant to carry it. Because it's not religion that we need as human beings.

It's a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. And that's what's so wonderful about the invitation that I read at the start of this service. Isn't it? It's an invitation to you to come into a relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

So let me read it to you again. Where Jesus says, Come to me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

[4 : 42] Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for yourselves. It is a remarkable invitation. But what I want you to see this morning is it is full of the most remarkable paradoxes.

Two truths which seem to be contradictory, but actually they fit together. So the first thing is the invitation of who it's from. The invitation is from the master who is slave.

Can you see that? When you get an invitation, you find out who it's from, don't you? And Jesus says, come to me, verse 28, come to me, because I am gentle and humble in heart.

Those words, gentle and humble, they are servant words. And the invitation is from someone with a servant heart. It's not from a tyrant, but from somebody who has got your best interests at heart. He is gentle, he says, and he is humble. And those words reveal to us the heart of Jesus. And it's a servant heart.

[5 : 44] But when you look at the context, and you go back to verse 27, there's a great paradox of the way Jesus describes himself. Look at verse 27. He says, all things have been given to me by the Father.

This invitation comes from a man who says, I am humble and I am gentle. And the verse before he says, all things have been given to me.

So here is someone with a servant heart who is humble and gentle and kind. And yet he claims to be the master of the universe, the Lord of all. That's a huge paradox, isn't it?

That is the paradox of biblical Christianity. A lot of people think that Christianity is about us serving God. But it's not primarily about that.

It is primarily about God serving us. Let me read to you from Philippians 2. It spoke about the Lord Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, he was God.

[6 : 44] He did not account equality with God, a thing to be grasped. He wasn't like Adam in the book of Genesis, grasping. But verse 7 of Philippians 2, when he emptied himself and he took on the form of his servant.

And he humbled himself. Becoming obedient to death, even to death on the cross. So the Lord of all has become the servant of all.

And that is who sends the invitation to you. Let's explore this paradox. Jesus is presenting himself to you as the world's burden bearer.

Notice that it's a global invitation, isn't it? In Hebrews 11. And it's much bigger than you or me and us in the UK. It is a great global invitation. And Jesus is inviting everyone to come to him with their problems.

Look at verse 28. Come to me, all you who labour. On a heavy ladle. And we all know people, don't we, who've got the weight of the world on their shoulders.

[7 : 48] It's often good to avoid people like that. But here is Jesus and he invites the whole world to come to him. All of you come to me. All of you who are weary and burdened.

And he offers to take the weight of the whole world on his shoulders. That's a massive claim for anyone to make, isn't it? For anyone to take.

Come to me with all your problems and all your worries and all your anxieties and all your cares.

And the unnerving thing is, the unassuming way which he makes this claim.

Come to me, all of you. Do it right down through the centuries. Right across the world. Whenever you're weary and heavy laden. I know a little bit of what that's like. It's a past day you get people coming to you with their problems.

And there are times when that can be emotionally and psychologically draining. But here is Jesus inviting the whole world to come to him with their problems. And the question that we've got to ask, well, can he handle it?

[8 : 50] Is he up to it? It's a massive claim, isn't it? How do you know that you can trust Jesus this morning with whatever's weighing you down all the way to this world? How do I know that you can trust Jesus with your problems?

We all do have problems. And burdens. And we all carry loads around with us. And there are times out there when they seem too much to bear.

What British psychiatrists have said, two-thirds are suffering from anxiety. In the UK. It's a huge weight to carry, isn't it? Fear, anxiety. Anxiety. Do you know what it is to be anxious and fearful

about life?

The burden about myself. Malcolm Baggage was a cynical atheist before he became a Christian. And he said this about himself. I felt myself to be a prisoner of my own self-centeredness. That is what sin is. The dark little dungeon of my ego. He says to be turned in on oneself. Imprisoned in one's own egocentricity.

[9 : 57] Oh, what a burden. What a bondage that is. Sting of the police. Another great philosopher said, In this desert that I call my soul, I always play the starring role.

Do you agree with that? Cranmer, in their book of common prayer, A better theologian than this thing, Calls this an intolerable burden. My sin is an intolerable burden more than I can bear. Doesn't your conscience feel guilty? Doesn't your heart get bowed down with a sense of shame and failure? Yeah? Well, I'm very glad you're here this morning.

Because this promise is for you. And if you haven't got any problems, And life is just a breeze, Well, you've come to the wrong place this morning. But if you're weary and burdened, And carrying loads that you can't carry, And you feel that you don't live up to your own standards, Let alone anyone else's standards, And let alone God's standards, Jesus says, verse 28, Come to me, All you who labour.

Now how do we know that he can do that? Well, let's go back to the verses earlier. And I want you to notice something strange in verse 25. The whole passage is full of paradoxes. Look at verse 25.

[11 : 11] At that time, Jesus, the clearly, speaks aloud, And he says, I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, That you've hidden these things from the wise and understanding, And you've revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for such was your gracious will, your purpose.

Verse 27, All things have been handed over to you by my Father, And no one knows the Son except the Father, And no one knows the Father except the Son, And anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Now that doesn't sound very humble, does it?

Look at the end of verse 27. Think about what Jesus is saying there. He's saying, Nobody knows anything about God except me. That isn't very humble. That's what he's saying.

Nobody knows anything about God except me, And those I choose to reveal him to. And that is a huge paradox. It is an outrageous thing to say. How does that swear with being gentle and humble? Well, I think C.S. Lewis expressed this better than anyone. He said, Jesus is worse than Hitler or Stalin. He's a megalomaniac of the first order if this isn't true.

[12 : 13] The whole world belongs to me. The Father has put everything to me. And no one can know God unless I reveal God to them. So Mohammed doesn't know anything about God.

Buddha doesn't know anything about God. Nobody knows God except me. That's what Jesus is saying. And the only way anyone can start to know about God is if I decide to share that knowledge. To reveal him. It doesn't sound very humble. That is outrageous. C.S. Lewis says, If you ask Buddha, Are you the son of Rama? He would have said, You're still in the veil of illusion. If you ask Socrates, Are you Zeus?

He would have laughed at you. If you ask Mohammed, Are you Allah? He would have beheaded you for blasphemy. But here Jesus is saying, Well look what he says in verse 27. All things have been handed over to me by my Father.

And no one knows the Son except the Father. And no one knows the Father except the Son. And anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. It's an outrageous thing to say. It's an absolute and exclusive claim.

[13 : 15] Let's think about it a little bit more. On one of the church directories a long time ago, Paul Hosea's mobile number, Which I don't think he had, My mobile number was under Paul Hosea's mobile number.

And so occasionally people would ring me and say, Hi Paul. And I would say, Hi. How are you? And then suddenly they would realise we sounded just a little bit different. It was a case of a mistake in the identity.

Same name, but different people. I think that happens a lot in our culture. Because when a Christian and a non-Christian have a discussion about God, We assume that we're talking about the same person.

But we're not. People say, Well surely we all believe in the same God. Don't we? Monotheist religions. We're not a monotheist religion. Surely we're all talking about the same God.

But we're not. Not according to Jesus. The only way that you can possibly know God is to come to Jesus. And if you haven't come to Jesus, you can't know God. That's the claim Jesus is making this way.

[14:15] If I put it this way. God doesn't put himself in the public domain. He hides himself from the wise and the learned. Look at verse 25. Who does he reveal himself to? Two little children.

Babies. And so that's really important. You cannot put God in a test tube. In a laboratory. Discover him there. God can only be known in Jesus.

And to those whom Jesus makes himself known to. So a school girl wrote to an Anglican information office. And said we're doing God this term.

Please send all the leaflets and pamphlets you've got. But we can't do that. We can't know God that way. You can't know God just by studying theology.

God will only allow himself to be known in Jesus. It's an outrageous thing what Jesus is saying. It's an absolutely exclusive claim.

[15:16] But it's also universal. Because he says come to me all of you. All of you are wearied and burdened. And you can't cope in this fallen world. And in this broken city.

Because you are rebels against his authority. All of you come to me. And you'll find rest. And so God is not an object of inquiry.

For you to study. But he is somebody who calls to you. In Christ. And the only way you can come to know God. Is to come to Jesus. Which is the one thing.

Isn't it? The angry atheists won't do. It's the one thing the Muslims won't do. God refuses to be known in that way.

He hides himself. And so if you want to know God. Look at what he says. He reveals himself to babies. Babies who come in simple repentance. And dependence of faith.

[16:10] They cry out to Jesus. Lift our load. And the answer to our human need. Is not religion. It is a relationship. And have you noticed how these words.

What these words are that are used in this passage. They're family words aren't they? Father. Son. Babies. You see. The invitation to come to Jesus.

Is to join the family. When those people became members. Members isn't a bad word. It's not a great word. You see. What happened this morning. Is they're not joining a club are they?

It's not like they get a tie. For joining the church. You know. When you come to Jesus. You join the family. Brothers and sisters. Coming into the family.

Jesus is saying. It's not a philosophy that you need this morning. It's a family that you need. And the only way that you can come to God. Jesus says. Is if you come to me. It's outrageous. It's a huge paradox.

[17:09] I'm gentle. I'm humble. I'm meek. And I'm mild. But I'm the only one you'll ever know God. I'm the one to whom God has committed absolutely everything. And I'm the only one who can lift your load. So come to me and I will give you rest.

That's the first thing to understand. Where the invitation is coming from. It comes from the master of the universe. The CEO of the universe. Who loves you so much. That he's taken human form. And he's gone to the cross.

And he's taken the whole load of your sin. And he's put it on his shoulders. And the Lord of all has become the servant of all. And God can only be known in him. But God has made himself known in Jesus.

And so our job as Christians. Is to make Jesus known. To get people seeing Jesus. Our job as people. Who've come to understand the gospel.

Is to know Jesus and make him known. The second paradox. He is the master who is slave. And he calls you to the work which is rest. Who is this invitation from?

[18:07] It's from the slave. The master who is slave. And what is the invitation to? What's it about? It's about the work which is rest. It's about what Jesus says. Taking his yoke upon you.

What is a yoke? It's a farming implement. It's how they used to plough fields. You put the yoke over the two cows. And they carried. The cart that was behind them.

And they ploughed the field. And the stronger animal. Could lift the load for the smaller and younger animal. And he would guide the way. For the less experienced animal.

And Jesus said to me. That is what it looks like. If you're going to come to me. You're going to come under my yoke. You're going to take my authority. Upon you.

You're going to come under my control. You're going to come under my sway. That's so important isn't it? But to come to Jesus means. That you will live under his authority.

[19 : 05] It is as if you're playing a game. I don't know. What is it? PS4 or Game Boy. Whatever those things they are. And you're playing it. And it is as if. You are playing the game.

But you're going to hand it over to someone else. And you are no longer going to be able to play it. Because you've handed the controls over. And that is what being a Christian is. It's work.

Jesus says. I think probably that's why you're not a Christian. If you're not a Christian this morning. Because. It's not because you don't think it's true. It's not because you think it's irrelevant.

If you know anything about the gospel of the Lord Jesus. It is relevant. You'll know that there's nothing more relevant. Surely. In our world. Than to be gentle and humble in heart. And to serve one another in love.

In our dog eat dog world. That is the message we need to hear. It's not because of it. Nobody in their right mind. Who never studied it. Thinks Christianity. It's irrelevant. You know the problem is this.

[20 : 00] It's too hard isn't it? It's not the issue. Gandhi said. I'd become a Christian if I could find one. He admired Jesus Christ.

He admired the teaching of Jesus. But he thought that Jesus set the bar too high. And maybe you're here this morning. And you. It's not that you don't believe it's true. And it's not that you don't believe it's irrelevant.

But you just think. I can't do it. I can't keep it up. What Jesus asks is impossible. So let's think about that. What does he ask?

We come under his yoke. And that means. To submit to him mentally and morally. And that means. That we allow Jesus. To. Dictate our beliefs.

For us. That he is the one that dictates our behaviour. And so that means. You've got to stop. Sleeping around. Because. You'll know that sex outside of marriage.

[21 : 00] Is. Not in accordance with Christ's commands. And you might say. Well that's far too harsh. What planet are you living on? You dinosaur. But the one who is the master of all.

Is the slave of all. And he is gentle and kind. And he is the one who made you. And he made you for himself. And he said. Come and take my yoke upon you. Because my yoke is easy.

And you know when you. Put on a new pair of shoes. They hate new shoes. Don't you? They can't stand new shoes. You put on new shoes. If they're good shoes. They hurt. They pinch.

You get blisters. They don't fit at all. It's not like that. Jesus is saying. Take my yoke upon you. It's not like that. It's not like putting on a new pair of shoes. He's saying.

My morals actually fit. Because I am the moral governor of the universe. And if Jesus says. That sex outside of marriage. Between a man and a woman. Is wrong.

[22 : 04] You better listen to him. And you better listen to him. Why? Because he is gentle. And he is kind. And he's got your best interest at heart. And what you'll find. Is that as you take. His yoke upon your shoulders.

You might stand out like a sore thumb. Amongst your friends. But you will find out. That as you follow Jesus. As it fits. So think about.

How many damaged relationships. Would have been avoided. In my generation. And about three generations before me. If they had taken. The yoke of Christ upon them.

Rather than run riot. And thrown that off. How people's health. Would have been saved from the STDs. How much less mental illness. There would be. If we had taken the yoke of Christ upon us. The devastation. That has been wreaked in families and homes. Forgiveness is another one. Isn't it? Jesus calls us to forgive one another in love. And it's so difficult. But what's the alternative?

[23 : 02] Holding a grudge. What does that do to you? What does that do to the people around you? You know. It is hard. Isn't it? To take the yoke of Jesus. On our shoulders. And to live as a Christian in the world.

But Jesus says. When you do that. You'll find that it fits. And my yoke is easy. Think of the apostle Paul. He speaks about this in Philippians chapter 4.

And he describes what this yoke of Christ is like. And sort of tells us. He says. Philippians chapter 4. And verses 12 and 13.

He says. I know how to be brought low. That's what he's learnt. And I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance.

I've learnt the secret of facing plenty. Of hunger. And abundance. And need. And I can do all things. Through him who strengthens me. That's what it means.

[23 : 59] To come under the yoke of Christ. That when you become a Christian. Your life isn't your own anymore. You're on the Christ's yoke. And he can direct you where you're going. And so. He might change the direction of your life radically.

But if he does that. You can do it. And he will enable you to do it. Whatever call he makes on my life. Whatever direction. He wants me to take. Whatever demands he makes upon me.

His burden is light. I love the quote from the Puritans. I've used it loads. About taking Jesus' yoke upon me. He says. It's no more burdensome. Than wings are to a bird.

Or a wedding ring to a bride. That's what. The Christian life. No more burdensome. Yeah there are demands. There are certain demands.

But we're no longer our own. And it means that Jesus calls the shots. But it's not wearisome.

Imagine a bird flying. Or over this building. Is it? Flapping its wings. That's not how birds fly.

[25 : 00] Birds don't see their wings. As a heavy burden. Or the new bride. Rachel comes back from her honeymoon with Ollie. And he said to Rachel. How are you? It's this ring.

It's weighing me down. It's a terrible thing. No of course. That's not how brides are. And yet so many of us as Christians. We go around. Don't we? With long faces. On the ground.

Dragging ourselves about. Saying oh it's so hard to be a Christian. It's a great privilege to be a

Christian. It's a great great privilege. Take my yoke upon you. Because Jesus says. Learn of me.

And you will find my yoke is easy. And my burden is light. His demands fit. And now the third thing.

Who is for this salvation? Where's the invitation?

Come from? It comes from the master or slave. It's inviting you to the work which is rest. And

thirdly. It is for losers. Losers. Who win. Losers who win.

[25 : 58] Last week. It was the Golden Globes. Last Sunday. It's another. It's BAFTA's isn't it? This week. I got no interest. Couldn't care less. About Oscars. BAFTA's. But you go on the BBC website.

Those of you went on it. And you. They say. Photos from Golden Globes. For some unknown reason. You end up looking at how. Clowns. Dressed up. I don't know.

There's something there. Isn't there? You end up looking at the kind of in people. The cool. The itch

crowd. The movers. And the shakers. Everybody likes to be seen with a winner. Don't they?

Everybody likes to be seen with a nominee. On awards night. Jesus mixes with losers. Like you and me. Come to me.

All of you who struggle. We haven't got your act together. You can't do what God wants. And you fail him again and again. And come to me. Jesus says. And I can do that. Come under my yunk.

[26 : 55] And I'll help you shoulder this load. Come to me. Jesus identifies with little babies. Verse 25 and 26. He distinguishes there. Between the wise. And the learned. And the little babies. Who would you rather be with? Somebody knows a little bit about something.

That would make, wouldn't it? For an interesting dinner party. Or would you rather be in the creche with snotty nosed kids? And Jesus says. God hides the truth from the wise and the learned.

And he reveals the truth to snotty nosed kids. Little babies literally. What does that mean? Is it

positive discrimination for the under 12? Is this anti-intellectualism?

Is Christianity anti-intellectual? Obscurantist? We don't use our minds. We don't think about it. We just feel the vibe. Is that what it's all about?

No. No. It's not what it's all about. If that was the case. What about someone like the Apostle Paul.

Or Blaise Pascal. Or some of the greatest minds that have ever lived have been Christians.

[27 : 54] No. It's not about intellectual powers. That's not what Jesus is talking about. It's about your intellectual pride. Because if you're so wise in your own eyes.

If you're self-sufficient. And you look down at your nose at poor Christians. Who've got this crush to lean on. And it's only for the feeble minded Christianity. The weak. If that's your attitude.

If you're too wise and too learned. And you can cope with life just fine. And you don't need this prop called Christianity. Well this invitation is not for you this morning. Jesus has got some very other things.

Lots of other things to say to you. But they're not very nice. They're not comfortable. I love this illustration. Somebody was in a maze in Australia.

And as they went round the maze. You know there's one in Bunny Park. There's a massive maze.

They went round the maze. But there was an exit. In the maze.

[28 : 53] With a sign on it. For the elderly and disabled. And those who've given up. And what you didn't know. When you went round that maze. Is that was the only way out. And the only alternative.

Was to keep going round. And round. And round. Until you got the message. That the only way out of the maze. Was to admit you were disabled. And elderly. The only. Way to get out.

Was to give up. And the only way. Of the treadmill of life. The only way. To enter into the rest. Which Jesus offers. The only way.

To have God's presence. In your life. The only way. To enter into that rest. Is to admit to this morning. You haven't got your act together. There's a lovely story.

About Rabbi Duncan. Rabbi Duncan was a professor. At the Free Church College. In Edinburgh. He was so good at Hebrew. He would preach from his Hebrew Bible. With no notes. And his students thought.

[29 : 51] I bet when he goes to bed at night. He prays in Hebrew. And so they thought. To check it out. One night. They snuck up into the corridor. And they listened. At his bedroom door. And imagine. How surprised they were.

To hear him pray. Gentle Jesus. Meek and mild. Look upon a little child. Pity my simplicity.

Suffer me to come to thee. Have you done that? Have you got on your knees. Beside your bed. And said. Gentle Jesus. Meek and mild.

Master of the universe. But meek and mild. Humble and gentle and kind. Lord of all. Who has become the servant of all. The one who flung stars into space. Became the burden bearer for your sin.

And shouldered the weight of human sin. And rebellion. And he put it on his own shoulders. Gentle Jesus. Meek and mild. Look upon a little child. Pity my simplicity.

[30 : 51] Suffer me to come to thee. And so will you come to him this morning. If you've not come to him before. You know it's true. Don't you? You know it's relevant. Perhaps. You thought.

Well I've got to do it on my own. But you don't. It's an invitation. From Jesus. But the thing is. What invitations. Is that. Those invitations require a response. As the Dutch company.

This is an awful illustration. I don't think our Dutch people are here. So. They won't get offended.

And at the end of an invitational wedding. At the bottom of the wedding said.

RSVP. At the bottom. They didn't know what that meant in Dutch. And the wife said. RSVP. What is RSVP? And the husband said.

Remember send wedding presents. Sorry. A lot of people make that mistake.

[31 : 55] About the gospel. That they think. That Christianity. You may think this morning. Jesus is making a demand of you. That he's some kind of tyrant. Who's demanding something of you. No.

You're under the yoke of a master. Who is slave. Who is gentle. And he's humble of heart. And he's saying to you. Respond. A student play. He's saying. Please respond.

There's a great paradox here. Listen. I haven't got time to look at it this morning. But the one who chooses. Who is going to respond. He chooses. Who is going to respond. And yet at the same time. He says. Will you choose.

Will you choose to come to him. And I don't know how you hold those two things together. And neither do you. And neither does anyone in church history. But you must hold them both together.

Very firmly. So will you come this morning. If you never come before. Come unto me all you who labor. And a heavy laden. And I will give you rest.

[32 : 55] Let's pray.