

**COME AND REST**  
**Matthew 11:25-12:14; Mark 7:1-13**  
 Chadron Berean Church

It's that time of year when many of us have rest and relaxation on our minds. We can't wait for vacation. We long for rest. And you know, I want that for us as a church. I really want this summer to be a summer of rest and refreshment for us. But I would submit this morning that there is a type of rest that we need that no vacation can ever satisfy. We're talking about a rest of the soul. But there is a restlessness that no vacation can even start to address because it's a restlessness of the soul. Many people today live with a deep-seated angst and anger and apathy and weariness. They're searching for rest. Searching for that one thing that will bring them satisfaction, happiness, joy, meaning, and freedom. So today we want to ask, "Where can our soul find rest?" We'll answer that question today from **Matthew 11:28-30** and look at several "yokes" that weigh us down and make us weary.

To give us context, this is the great turning point in Matthew's Gospel. At this point, John, Jesus, and Jesus' disciples have proclaimed the kingdom of God to national Israel but they have rejected Him and it's at this point where Jesus turns and offers one of the greatest personal invitations of all time. You've heard of the great commission. Well, this is the great invitation.

*28 "Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 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. 30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."*

**I. JESUS INVITES THE WEARY & BURDENED TO COME TO HIM. (VV. 28-30)**

This is a famous invitation from Jesus. It's cherished because we see the gentle, shepherd-heart that Jesus has for people. He cares about the weary and the burdened, the needy, the outcast, and the desperate. And specifically, the **weary** and **burdened** people in this context are those who are weighed down by a yoke that the Jewish religious leaders are placing upon them, and Jesus wants to exchange that yoke for His yoke that is **easier** and **lighter**.

A **yoke** is something that you might put on the shoulders of a pair of animals like oxen to plow with or pull with. Apparently being "yoked" today is slang for being stacked—having well-defined muscles. But to take up a "yoke" in Jesus' day was metaphorical as well. It meant to become a disciple of some teacher or rabbi.<sup>1</sup> You take that rabbi's yoke/teaching upon yourself and start to apply them to your life and do life their way. In rabbinic Judaism, making a yoke as heavy as possible was a good thing. It was a demonstration of piety.<sup>2</sup> And so Jesus is saying to the crowds, "*Come to Me and take My yoke instead of the heavy, wearying religious yoke of these spiritual leaders.*" But what made the yoke of the people heavy in this day was primarily two things: the **Law of Moses** and the **Oral Law**, but mostly the oral law, which rabbis promised that if you kept the minutia of, you would find rest.

**1. The Yoke of the Law of Moses.**

The **Law of Moses** is something most people are familiar with. It's that Law code that was given to Moses on Mt. Sinai for Israel to keep in accordance with the Old Covenant. It contained the Ten Commandments and the national law codes for Israel. While there was a sacrificial system to meet sinful failures under the Law, it was difficult to keep. I think Paul explains the experience of a Jew living under the Law in Romans 7 (vv. 13-24). It could be summarized as a life of **defeat**. You just couldn't keep it, and the problem wasn't with the Law, but with sin in us. In what many consider the first church council in Acts 15, Peter called the Law a yoke that neither they nor their forefathers were able to bear (v. 10) and thus, they should not place that yoke on the Gentiles who were being added to their number.

## 2. **The Yoke of the Oral Law.**

The **Oral Law** is something that we need to get a handle on if we're going to understand the Gospels and Jesus' interactions with the Jewish leaders in them. This "law" was something that wasn't written down. It was oral—spoken—laws and traditions of the religious leaders that were passed down through repetition and memorization. It was a cultural code of conduct. In our journey through Mark we often called the oral law the "613 Fence" because sometimes it is referred to as the "fence" and for each of the 613 original "laws" or "commands" in the Law of Moses, the Jewish leaders had come up with more laws that acted as a fence to keep you from breaking an original law or command in the Law of Moses. It's kind of confusing but basically, by adding all these manmade laws and traditions the people were now more concerned about breaking the manmade Oral Law and not God's Law. So when confronted, Jesus was always taking the religious leaders back to God's Word saying, "*Have you not read...?*" and "*It is written...*" Jesus called them out on it. In **Mark 7:6-9, 13**, "*Rightly did Isaiah prophesy about you hypocrites, as it is written: 'This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far away from Me. 7 And in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.' 8 Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.*"<sup>9</sup> *He was also saying to them, "You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition.... 13 thereby invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that."* The Word of God was subverted by man's word.

But because there were so many more laws to keep, the people were terribly burdened. The spiritual conditions could be summed up as **exhausting**. Between the Law and the oral law, many people were weary of trying to keep up, trying to be good enough, trying to meet standards, only to continually fall short and feeling it deep down. They knew in their soul that they weren't worthy. Jesus calls these weary and dependent people "**infants**" in the preceding verses. They are humble and know they need a Savior (vv. 25-27). The "**wise and intelligent**" are the religious individuals, many leaders, who have rejected Him because they think they don't see their need of Jesus. They are keeping their laws and have a righteousness of their own.

If you keep reading in Matthew 12, you see an example of this debate over the Oral Law. I'll summarize it. Jesus and the disciples are called out by the Jewish leaders for **picking heads of grain and eating on the Sabbath**. According to the Law of Moses, that was perfectly fine (Deut. 23:25). They weren't working. They were just eating. The Law said you couldn't get out your sickle and harvest your fields on the Sabbath—it was a day when ordinary work ceased—but you could eat. No big deal. Pharisaic tradition, however, viewed this as harvesting work

because they said, “By plucking the corn they were guilty of reaping; by rubbing it in their hands they were guilty of threshing; by separating the grain and the chaff they were guilty of winnowing; and by the whole process they were guilty of preparing a meal on the Sabbath day.”<sup>3</sup> If you brushed up against some standing grain with your skirt and it knocked some grain to the ground, you were harvesting. If you spit in the dirt and stepped in it, you were making mud and thus, working. So they took this command of not doing any ordinary work on the Sabbath basically made people immobile. Everything became work. You couldn’t do much of anything and could hardly go anywhere. People were counting their steps.

In many ways, this is just as rigorous today in some Jewish quarters. I’ve mentioned more than once how Jewish family in Brooklyn died in a house fire because they refused to “work” by unplugging a hot plate. The house burned down. They won’t drive on the Sabbath because that’s “starting a fire” in the engine. The **Sabbath** was designed to be a day of rest. God rested on the Sabbath day. Sabbath basically means “rest”. But now there were so many regulations on the Sabbath that it had become the most burdensome day of the week. Jesus called them out again in **Matthew 23:4** saying woe unto you for “*tie up burdens and lay them on men’s shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger.*” Before we pick on these Jews too much though, think about all the churches out there with manmade religious observances—catechisms and doctrines and rituals that have no umbilical cord attached to the Bible and subvert the Word of God and the gospel of grace. But that what happens when you place tradition on the same level as Scripture—the Scripture, God’s Word, is invalidated by man’s word.

To better understand how burdensome their yoke was and give you a little insight into the first century world of Jesus, I want to compare **Mark 7:1-5** with the **Mishnah**, the first major work of rabbinic literature that records some of these oral traditions. The Mishnah has several different sections, or seders (orders/tractates), relating to things like the sabbath, agriculture, holidays, purity rituals, etc. explaining what you can and cannot do. Even though the Mishnah was written AD 200, there’s a lot of legal opinions in it that are similar to what we see going on in the Gospels with the debates between Jesus and the religious leaders.

*7:1 The Pharisees and some of the scribes gathered to Him after they came from Jerusalem, 2 and saw that some of His disciples were eating their bread with unholy hands, that is, unwashed. 3 (For the Pharisees and all the other Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, thereby holding firmly to the tradition of the elders; 4 and when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they completely cleanse themselves [because they’d been around Gentiles]; and there are many other things which they have received as traditions to firmly hold, such as the washing of cups, pitchers, and copper pots.) 5 And the Pharisees and the scribes asked Him, “Why do Your disciples not walk in accordance with the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with unholy hands?”* This where Jesus finishes with the quote from Isaiah about them being hypocrites. They weren’t concerned with hygiene. This was just manmade, religious purity rituals. In the Law, the priests at times had to perform similar cleansing rituals, but they took that and blew it up and extended it to all, all the time. They were meticulous about it, and wondered why Jesus and the disciples didn’t do the same.

And we see here the religious leaders giving Jesus and the disciples a hard time about ritual washings—**washing their hands** and **ritual immersion (baths)**. Concerning ritual immersion, if you go to Jerusalem today, you'll see many **stepped ritual baths** (often cut into bedrock) called **mikvaoth** (plural; or miqvaot), or **mikvah** (singular). In a Jewish person's home, be it in the second century BC or even today, you might find one too.<sup>4</sup> They're not much different than any baptismals today or those from the Byzantine Period. They might even have a divider in the middle of the steps where you walk in and walk out on the other side of the divider to separate the clean from the unclean.<sup>5</sup> Supposedly, some 700 have been uncovered in Israel and 200 in Jerusalem.<sup>6</sup> More than 50 of these are within a stone's throw of the temple mount. At Qumran alone (a small fort by the Dead Sea where they found the Dead Sea Scrolls) there are 10 mikvaoth, though could have been used for water storage too. Rivers, streams, the pools of Siloam & Bethesda, and the abundant mikvaoth I think help explain where early Christians would have practiced immersion. A lot of it's evidence that wasn't uncovered until recent decades. But the abundance of these pools and mikvaoth tell us how observant they were of purity rituals. There's an entire tractate in the Mishnah on how to use them.

There's also a tractate called **Yadayim**, referring to the **hands**. You had to be very meticulous with how you cleansed your hands. **Yadayim 1:1**, "*[A minimum of] a quarter [of a log] of water must be poured over the hands for one [person] and even for two. A minimum of half a log must be poured over the hands for three or four persons. A minimum of one log [is sufficient] for five, ten, or one hundred persons. Rabbi Yose says: as long as there is not less than a quarter of a log left for the last person among them. More [water] may be added to the second water, but more may not be added to the first water.*" If you're like me, you're wondering what a log is. One Mishnah commentator and Jerusalem native said that "*a log is about 1/2 a liter of water. So the basic amount of 1/4 log works out to about 100 grams of water, a third of a can of Coke for those who drink that stuff.*" I really enjoy that commentator btw.

Many Jews today are required to wash their hands after returning from a cemetery, before getting out of bed, or eating any meal that includes bread or matzah (unleavened bread).<sup>7</sup> They call the ritual **netilat yadayim**. It's why you find hand-washing stations around Israel. To do it, you make sure that your hands are already clean, and rings are off so that nothing comes between your hand and the water. Then you'll take a two handled cup, picking it up with the right hand (dominant hand), then passing it to the left, pouring twice (or 3x depending on the stream of Judaism) on the right hand (making sure to cover your entire hand up to the joint); pass it to the right hand and pouring twice (or 3x) on the left. And then you would lift your hands chest-high recite a Jewish prayer, "*Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with Your commandments, and commanded us concerning the washing of the hands.*" Remember, none of this is actually prescribed by God, though it's claimed to be.

There are different degrees of uncleanness. In some cases, like **Yadayim 1:5** gets into, you need for an external power source to wash with. "*All are fit to pour water over the hands, even a deaf-mute, an imbecile, or a minor. A person may place the jug between his knees and pour out the water, or he may turn the jug on its side and pour it out. A monkey may pour water over the hands. [But] Rabbi Yose declares these [latter] two cases invalid.*" Some of that is just plain hard to understand or comical. The Mishnah is full of disagreements over what is allowed or not allowed according to the various opinions of the rabbis. There are even disputes between the

Pharisees and Sadducees in it. But I show this to us because it gives us insight into the NT and the bondage. But it's only a small sample of the religious yokes out there.

Many of you personally know what it's like to come out of a system with all of its manmade traditions and observances because you read the Bible and discovered the truth about the sufficiency of Christ. Every religion that is not authentic Christianity says "Do" and the cross says, "Done." And if we don't understand that, we too will get sucked into some form of trying to please God, trying to be good enough, trying to do some sort of religious works. Even a believer can get sucked into religious yokes that name the name of Christ if they aren't grounded in the gospel of grace. The yoke of religion is heavy and will always leave you without assurance of salvation and with guilt. You're never good enough. The works never stops. There are some other "yokes" that we can place on ourselves that I want to look at quickly.

### **3. The Yoke of Stuff.**

This is the yoke of trying to find happiness in the things of the world. It's materialism. Trying to keep up with the Jones's. But sometimes the more stuff you have, the more it owns you. I can't help but think about vacations. I think that taking some time off now and then makes you even better at what you do. I think they're important. But you know, you can save up for a big expensive vacation and with the packing and details and travel, it can become even more stressful and exhausting than being at work if we're not careful. Sometimes we look for rest in things of the world that only Jesus can provide. So this yoke will always leave you empty.

### **4. The Yoke of Sin.**

Many today think that by throwing off all moral restraints and pretending like God doesn't exist, they'll be free. On the contrary, they just become slaves to sin. Sin becomes your master, and it's not a nice master. It destroys your life. You lose control of yourself. A man is not "free in sin" any more than a fish is "free" out of water or a train is "free" when it derailed or a tree is "free" when it is uprooted. It's not a good freedom. No soul is free when it's living in rebellion against its Creator either. This yoke is ultimately shackling and self-destructive. Real freedom comes when we are slaves to Christ (Rom. 6) and we're who we were made to be.

### **5. The Yoke of Self.**

What I mean by this is that we think that by living for ourselves and our agenda, that we'll be free. We operate in the fear of man and try to please everybody or just live for ourselves all the time. It's always about me and what I want (idolatry). But when you are the "lord" of your life, you end up frustrated, angry, or depressed at every turn because you're trying to call the shots and you don't have that control. There are things out of your control that frustrate you at every turn and you experience friction with other people who are doing the same. The yoke of self will leave you angry and frustrated. Real rest comes when you submit to Christ as Lord and take His yoke. You trust Him to guide you in life. You trust Him when things go your way and don't go your way. It's not about you, but about Christ and how you can serve Him and serve others.

### **6. The Yoke of Jesus.**

In a religious, empty, and exhausting world, Jesus invites us to come *to Him* and rest. **Hebrews 9:14** says “no more dead works”: “*How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?*” In Christ, we are accepted. He provides us with **immediate salvation rest** the moment we come to faith in Christ. We’re no longer trying to appease God by our religious works, trying to be good enough. We know that He paid it all and provides us with His Spirit to set us free from sin and the Law (Rom. 6-8). We stand in His grace and have peace with God (Rom. 5:1). There is no condemnation in Christ (Rom. 8:1). Therefore, we can worship. We serve like we were created to do. And we can do it with joy because through the gospel, we’ve been given new hearts that delight in obeying God. As the Apostle John put it, we keep His commands and they’re not burdensome (1 John 5:3). So this is the yoke of rest and grace and forgiveness and life. We have rest for our souls because even though we might not have anything else in this world, we have Christ.

As we come to the communion table this morning, we remind ourselves that this is not some empty religious work. It’s a time of repentance and celebration. In repentance today, let’s lay aside the yokes we’ve been trying to find rest in that are not Christ. And let’s celebrate because Jesus is sufficient. We are accepted in Him. He invites us to come. If you have never done so, I encourage you to accept His invitation to “Come.” Right here and now, call out to Christ in your heart, acknowledging your need for a Savior from sin and of your desire to walk with Him and take up His yoke.

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<sup>1</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: New Testament* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2007), 34.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on Matthew*, 2023 ed., <https://planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/matthew.pdf>, 324.

<sup>3</sup> William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew* (2d ed.; Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1964), 2:24-25

<sup>4</sup> Meyers and Chancey, “The Advent of Hellenism Under the Greek Kingdoms and the Hasmoneans” in *Alexander to Constantine: Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*, (3 vols.; Yale University, 2012), 3:31.

<sup>5</sup> Sidnie White Crawford, *Scribes and Scrolls at Qumran* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2019), 202-205.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.timesofisrael.com/on-the-mikveh-trail-follow-the-rugged-path-of-jeruselems-ancient-pilgrims/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/hand-washing/>