

THE EQUALIZER

“Come unto Me all you that toil and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, because I am meek and lowly in heart, and you shall find rest for your souls; for My yoke is gracious and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30).

Life is unfair! The world is unfair. It is full of “haves and have nots.” It is reeling with shock wave after shock wave of violence and tumult and tragedy. Tension on the international level threatens the very existence of the earth. The electronic marvels of instant coverage of world events brings, alas, the realities of this chaotic world into the homes and hearts of everyone in America. But, bringing the myriads of world crises into focus has put an intense burden upon the individual, especially when there are those who insist that we are all somehow responsible for world conditions. Many organizations have been quick to exploit this phenomenon by using guilt as the leverage for the extracting of money to promote their own private aims. Whether those aims be genuine or unscrupulous, the results are the same—an intensifying of an already overburdened and overstressed society. It is one thing to quote “love one’s neighbor,” and minister to the needs of those around one in keeping with one’s capacities. It is quite another thing to lay upon an individual a crushing burden of guilt for the entire world. It is too much! Who can bear it? It is so easy to write it into the script. It is quite another thing to assume the burdens thus imposed. When thousands of organizations clamor for their own particular causes, and one is bombarded on every hand by the priority claims of every cause. It becomes almost traumatic to the truly caring, who are the most vulnerable. No matter how much one is doing, it is always assumed that one can do more. In the midst of this clamor for commitment it is well to realize that after all, God made the world and accepted the risk of its present state. It is up to Him to orchestrate its recovery. And this He does in assigning to each one the task that He has gifted that one to do. It is extremely presumptuous for Christian leaders to assume that God is not able to see to this Himself. When humans take the responsibility of charging other humans with the task as they see it, they are in danger of overburdening in the flesh. We must trust the “Lord of the harvest,” to send forth the laborers, lest we become like the Pharisees, placing on people “burdens grievous to be borne.” It is so easy to assume that because people are not functioning as we think they ought to, they are not fulfilling God’s purpose.

In addition to the tensions produced by the international crises, concerning which it is quite certain that they will only increase as the coming of the Lord draws nearer, there are also the constantly increasing stresses on our everyday lives. The physical and psychological consequences of stress have become epidemic, in proportion. Generally speaking, the conventional wisdom of the medical profession is that at least 75 percent of all illnesses are emotionally induced. The demands upon the individuals are multiplying as the complexities of society increase. We are living in a highly competitive society, where performance is the constant criterion. The individual is measured only by productivity. Unfortunately, this spirit has permeated the church, where it is assumed that God Himself so measures the individual. The church at large, assigned the task of bringing the peace of Christ to the spirit, has instead

multiplied the burdens of its people by demands for performance. No matter how much one is doing, it is assumed by the leadership that one could and should be doing more. Not only in service, but also in circumstance is this burden levied upon them. If one is not “getting things from God”—feeling, prosperity, happy marriages, etc.—it is regarded as a reflection upon one’s faith or one’s fervor or one’s performance. It is assumed that if one is functioning adequately, one ought to have an “edenic,” trouble free existence. Of course, the performance is always rated on the basis of human criteria— especially, the criteria as established by the given group which aspires to be the interpreters of God’s will for all believers.

But what then ought the believer to do, in the midst of these stresses and tensions? What is the standard? What does Christ really want? What does God plan to do with the world? The text provides some very important clues. Jesus said, “Come unto me... and I will give you rest.” Rest from what? From all labor and responsibility? From all trouble and sorrows? From all discipline and self denial? Obviously not. He invites them not only to come to Him, but also to take His yoke. But, He contrasts His yoke with that of the Pharisees. The Pharisees imposed upon the people “burdens grievous to be borne.” In contrast, Jesus said that His yoke is easy (gracious). The Greek word is *chrestos*—literally, “cut to fit.” The yoke is there, but it is shaped to fit the shoulders of the individual bearer. When the yoke fits, the load is carried easily. But only Christ, “the Lord of the harvest,” knows the fit of each of His children. If we use human reasoning about need and responsibility, we are likely to make human errors of judgment. We are in danger of overloading and causing great damage. The besetting sin of leaders is the assumption that all Christians ought to be able to function as those who are gifted for leadership. A common misconception is that everyone ought to be “vocal,” about their faith. Or, that everyone ought to do public things if they really care about Christ and the world. There are more parts to the body than the “mouth.” As in the case of Esther of old, one task was her essential reason for existence. One “cup of cold water,” may be all that some have to give, but that is enough. The lad with the lunch of a few loaves and fishes, given to Christ, was enough to feed a multitude of people. But, it is important to observe that the lad did not undertake the feeding himself but gave what he had to Christ. Bring whatever you have to Christ. It will be enough. If one puts one’s life in the hands of Christ, one may be assured that before one’s life is over, Christ will have accomplished His purpose—a purpose that may be known to Christ alone. Jesus Himself said it—“If anyone will to do His will, he shall know..” If one does not wish to do the will of Christ, no amount of human persuasion will produce anything but a fleshly and misguided effort. The Lord’s people are called sheep and not cattle. Unfortunately, many religious leaders have become “cowboys” rather than “shepherds” and have only succeeded in driving the sheep into fleshly frenzy.

But what then is the “rest” that Christ promises to give? Taken in context, it is rest from the burdensome yoke of the Pharisees, which had been fashioned by man and not God. Religious leaders today are guilty of fashioning the yoke for the shoulders of the believers. Jesus comes with a “meek and lowly heart,” to offer peace to His people. He comes to make a family, not a legion of slaves. He comes with a gift and assignment to match, not with a monumental burden. Whenever the message, from whatever source, leads to greater burden, be assured that it is not from Christ. What Christ wants us to do, He will give both

the capacity and the desire to do. The yoke will fit comfortably. And one will be glad to wear it. It will not be without distress and difficulty, but as with the disciples, one will be glad to suffer for the cause of Christ. There will be rest in the Spirit.

And the worldwide tensions? What of them? In the first place, it is important to realize that no one can bear the weight of all the world's conflicts. Moreover, one is not responsible personally for the crises of the world. We can be sensitive to the needs of the world, without shouldering the crushing burden of solving the needs of the world. Moreover, we can contribute to the world what God has each of us to contribute, and thus tend to our own individual part. God made the world; it is up to Him to orchestrate its recovery. We have only to play our own individual instruments. If others do not do their part, that is God's affair. If we do not adopt this kind of attitude, we will be crushed under the crescendo of "guilt-mongers."

And what of our circumstances? The key word is "acceptance." Christ says, **"Take My yoke."** Jesus was the great example of this. Confronted with the cross, He said, **"The cup which my Father hath given Me shall I not drink it?"** And, remember, He said, **"My Yoke,"** if we accept the yoke that others would place upon us, we will be crushed. Again, it is a common error to assume that if one has the faith and faultlessness, one's circumstances would be smooth. All the apostles and prophets of old and the martyrs of history would rise up and challenge that claim. One never needs to be reluctant to accept from Christ the circumstances of one's life, however difficult, because He will always give the grace to bear it. Peter said that Christ has left us an example of suffering, that we should follow in His steps (I Peter 2:21). Paul said, **"The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared to the glory that will be revealed in us"** (Romans 8:18). If we suffer, we are following in the steps of Christ, and the ultimate end will be an unimaginable glory.

The world today is very much concerned about equality. But equality is really in the "cut of the yoke." For some, life is terribly burdensome; for others, apparently light and full of promise. But the grace of God is always equal to the burden, provided it is received from His hand. Christ is the great "equalizer." The yoke is cut to fit in the sense that when we put our lives in His hand, He tempers the trials to the capacity of the individual. However, it should be noted that grace is extended only as it is needed. God does not give grace to think about tomorrow's need.

So, rest in Christ comes, not from idleness, or ease, but from a life tailored by Him, both in assignment and circumstance to fit the individual capacity and need. Circumstances are burdensome when they have not been put in the Lord's hands. Service is burdensome only when it has come from human reason rather than Spirit guidance.

Inequality is a phenomenon of the flesh and the world—the domain of Satan. Equality is a reality of the Spirit realm over which Christ rules. Among His final words to His disciples Jesus said, **"These things have I spoken unto you that in Me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation [pressure] but, be of good cheer, I have overcome the world"** (John 16:33). When we truly commit our lives to Christ, whatever is, is likely to be what He

wants. If it is what He wants, we will be able to handle it. Christ is the Great Equalizer. He equalizes the burden with the strength to bear it.

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