

Exegetical Paper Matthew 11:25-30

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Ever since I was a child I remember looking at the yoke that hung in my church lobby. Where most churches would probably have a cross, hung a wooden yoke that historically would have gone over two oxen. The yoke did not replace the cross by any means, but it stood as a different symbol of what it means to follow Jesus. This passage talks about a few significant points that are highly relevant to people in every context, as he is an eternal and unchanging God. In this passage we learn about the relationship held between God the Father and God the Son, how God chooses revelation for His people, and what the invitation to follow Jesus feels like in opposition to what we have already known apart from Jesus.

The book of Matthew is dated somewhere between 50AD and 70AD, “however there is insufficient evidence to be dogmatic about either view” (2011, p 1584). What we can assume given the lack of context to Jewish customs being exhibited in the book of Matthew, is that the audience would have been primarily Jewish and would not have needed the explanation (2011, p 1585). The book of Matthew is one of the four gospels, and the good news being taught in the gospels is of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In chapter 11 of Matthew we have already been told that Jesus is on ministry in Galilee, and by the time we get to chapter 11 we know that He is specifically in Capernaum as mentioned in Matthew 11:23. The audience has previously heard from John the Baptist, who is now in prison, and Jesus is giving both warning to unrepentant towns while giving full invitation to those who wish to know more about Jesus Christ.

Jesus’s ministry in the Holy land was to confirm himself as the messiah. One crucial way of doing this, for people who had already not believed the message from John the baptist was to reveal the Father through the Son. “The phrase ‘Son of God’ refers to Jesus as the heavenly, eternal Son who is equal to God” (2020, p 682). This would have been considered a blasphemous claim by the spiritual authorities of the Holy Lands. When Jesus says, “I praise you Father, Lord of heaven and earth,” he is declaring the sovereignty of God in a way that is

only found in scripture three times (2011, p1611). The other two appearances are in Luke 10:21 and Acts 17:24. The siting in Luke 10:21 mirrors the verses in Matthew almost word for word in reference to revealing the Father. In Luke it is in reference to the sovereignty of God and pointing to him as the creator of heaven and earth. In all three sitings, the purpose is to emphasize Jesus's sovereignty as equal to God the Father, revealed through the Son. "He could speak with the authority of God because he was fully God. He had all things delivered into his hands by the Father and the authority to reveal the Father to whomever he chose" (2020, p 684).

The second half of verse 25 and all of verse 26 say, "because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do" (2011, p1611). This is from the new international version, but in several different translations the truth remains the same. The new living translation says, "thank you for hiding the things from those who think themselves wise and clever, and for revealing them to the childlike." God is more interested in revealing himself to those who are dependent on him like a child. To showing his face to the ones who will embrace what is being revealed to them as truth and love as apposed to hearing it like information to be digested or confronted. In different translations the word "learned" is sometimes translated as, "intelligent", "clever", or "prudent". They all describe a person who is relying on their own abilities to govern their life and their future. In verse 26 when Jesus says, "what you were pleased to do" shows us God's grace and mercy. In other translations it says, "it pleased you to do it this way!", "your gracious will" and in the message it says, " that's the way you like to work." When I think of God wanting to reveal himself to the childlike, because it's the way he likes it work, it brings a smile to my face. "Jesus uses children, as elsewhere, as the paradigm of those whom the world regards as insignificant; but in this context they also represent those who are free from false preconceptions and so are open to the new light now being revealed to them" (2008). The dichotomy that arrises when we read about God hiding things from some

and revealing himself to others can be easily misconstrued. One might become upset and say that God has favorites or that he is not a loving God by hiding and revealing himself.

On the one hand, the community is called to perfection: as a city set on a hill, the community is to exemplify a rigorous standard of righteousness exceeding even that of the scribes and Pharisees. On the other hand, the community is called to interpret the Torah in light of a hermeneutic of mercy that leads them to subordinate the Law's specific commandments to its deeper intent; consequently, following the example of Jesus, the community must receive tax collectors and sinners and deal mercifully with human weakness and failure. Thus, rigor and mercy are set side by side in Matthew's story. How are these apparently contradictory demands to be held together in the life of the community? (1996).

Jesus's way of life was always something that posed a threat to "life as we know it". This was true in 50AD and it is true in 2023. God sent his son to create a way for humans to live in perfect unity with God the Father in heaven. Jesus lived a life contradictory to other spiritual leaders in his time.

Jesus's way of life was and still is an invitation. Matthew 11:28-30 says, "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." Jesus wants us to yoke our life to his. We do not get a description of what a yoke is or does in this passage, because at time and audience of Jesus's teaching they would have known instantly to picture "a harness used by oxen and other animals to ease the work of hauling a load. It was also meant as a designation of servitude and carrying the burden of a task or mission" (2022). It had also been mentioned that the world is a field in previous teachings. The agricultural comparisons were not unusual to the population, and made

sense in their context. What was unusual is the phrasing of what taking on Jesus' yoke would feel like experientially to the people of Capernaum.

Who take upon themselves Jesus' yoke are in effect taking up the yoke of Torah as interpreted by Jesus, but his yoke—in light of his hermeneutic of mercy—is not burdensome, in contrast to the systematic interpretations of the Torah being promulgated by Matthew's pharisaic rivals. (The invidious characterization of the Pharisees reflects a bitter conflict located in Matthew's specific historical setting, a point to which we must return below, but the reading of mercy as the real aim of the Law is a positive component of Matthew's moral vision) (1996).

Our current culture often struggles with reading scripture and hearing a set of rules and laws, very similarly to the pharisees. We hear that we will have to give something up, and we fail to hear the promise of God. When Jesus tells us that his yoke is easy and his burden is light, he is reminding us that when we follow his commands and his way of life we will actually find rest for our souls. In contemporary times, Christians often hear this passage and relate taking on the yoke of Jesus to spiritual disciplines and a way of life, but often times even the way people view spiritual disciplines is different than what Jesus is saying in Matthew 11. "Spiritual disciplines should always be means to spiritual ends, never ends in themselves. They are places of meeting God that do not have value in and of themselves. To treat them as if they did is to develop a spirituality that is external, self-energized and legalistic" (2015, p 29) Jesus does not call us to be legalistic or to follow a set of rules. He invites us into relationship with him. This does not mean we do whatever we want in relationship with him, "To come to him includes taking his yoke upon us, being subject to his direction and guidance, learning from him and being obedient to him. If we are unwilling to make such commitment, then we have not truly placed our trust in him" (2020, p 967). Jesus longs for us to trust

him and to walk in his ways. It pleases him to reveal His Father to us. Through grace and mercy we are able to be yoked to Jesus.

I used to view this passage as an invitation to rest. That even though life can be difficult, that life with Jesus is better. While these things are still true they are not the core of what Jesus is telling us in this passage. I found exploring the dynamics between the rigor and mercy of Matthew quite compelling. I loved the emphasis of Jesus as Lord and Savior, and the ways his omniscience is the pervasive quality that we should be in awe of, instead of our own wisdom or intelligence, and further more, how relying on our own abilities can actually inhibit us from experiencing the fullness of God. I do not want things to be hidden from me. I want to live with a child like faith and be able to experiencing the goodness of God in all things. I want to take His yoke upon me so that I may see experience the fullness of who God is as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I have already been able to speak into conversations about the mercy of God in tandem with the rigor of the gospel in conversations with friends, and I feel certain that this new understanding will continue to impact how I read the Bible and speak about the Gospel.

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