

## YOKE-FELLOWS WITH CHRIST

**"Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me;...for My yoke is easy and My burden is light." – Matthew 11:29,30.**

OUR Lord was here addressing the Jews. He did not preach to the Gentiles, because the time for favor to the Gentiles had not yet come. He was not sent, He declared, "save to the lost sheep of the House of Israel." The Israelites were under the yoke of the nation of Rome, but we do not think that this was the yoke to which our Lord referred. They were under a religious yoke, the yoke of the Law.

A yoke signifies *servitude*. One who bears a yoke is a servant. For instance, oxen have a yoke put upon them, not that they may *bear* a *yoke*, but that they may be enabled by the yoke to bear the *burdens* which are to be laid upon them. Hence the yoke becomes the symbol of service, of burden-bearing. So with the Israelites; all the obligations of the Law Covenant were to be borne by them. They had agreed to become the servants of God under the conditions of this Law Covenant. But they found themselves so unbalanced and weak, as the result of sin, that they could not bear the burdens of the Law. No Jew could draw that Law Covenant load. "There is none righteous; no, not one" – none could meet the obligations of God's perfect Law.

Our Lord did not come to do away with the Law. On the contrary, He magnified the Law, and made it honorable. He showed that its requirements were neither unreasonable nor unjust, although by reason of their imperfection no man had been able to keep it. By keeping the Law perfectly Himself, our Lord proved that it is not beyond the possibility of the obedience of a perfect human being, but it is the full measure of a perfect man's ability. The Law did not prove too weighty a load for Him to bear; He was able fully to meet its every requirement, and did so.

But now He was inviting His disciples to come under a different yoke – a yoke of servitude with Him. He had a new Message – the Gospel, the Message of "good tidings." It spoke of release from the obligations of that Law Covenant which they were unable to bear, but which was designed to be a "schoolmaster, to lead them to Christ." He told them how they might have part in this wonderful new arrangement which was just opening up, of which He Himself was to be the Head. The arrangement was altogether of the Father, but the Son was to be His special Representative. His disciples might have a part by becoming dead to the Law Covenant, through believing in Jesus their Messiah and becoming united to Him. Thus they would be acceptable to God by Him, and would be begotten of the Holy Spirit and become sons of God.

### **THE NEW CREATURE FULFILLS THE LAW**

In this way they would become associates of the Messiah in the keeping of the Law of righteousness; for it would be quite possible for them to keep God's Law under this new kind of yoke and these new conditions. The new yoke would not be upon the old creature; the old creature had already demonstrated that it could not keep the Law's requirements. But the Divine arrangement was that in order to become New Creatures they must become dead, not to the Law Covenant alone, but to all earthly interests, hopes and prospects. The Apostle, speaking of such, says the righteousness of the Law is fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh, but *after* the Spirit. – Romans 8:4.

We are not only fulfilling the requirements of the Law, but we do more. We lay down our lives for the brethren. This is beyond what the Law could require. But it is the New Creature that does this. The old creature is dead, from God's standpoint. The New Creature must operate through the old body, the imperfections of which are all covered by the robe of Christ's righteousness. Hence the New Creature is, from the Divine viewpoint, fulfilling the righteousness

of the Law, for it abides faithful to the Lord and has continually the cleansing of the imputed merit of the blood of Christ for the imperfections of its body.

## **THE HEAVY YOKE OF THE LAW UPON ISRAEL**

It was for a purpose that the Master brought this figure of a yoke to the attention of the Jews. They knew [R5885 : page 118] something about the burdens of the Law under which they as a people had long groaned. They had learned that they were unable to gain the everlasting life which it promised on condition of perfect obedience to its requirements. For sixteen hundred years they had been trying to keep the Law, and had failed. They remembered that God had promised them the Messiah, and they knew that somehow or other He would bring in a new arrangement; but they did not know how or when. Through their Prophets God had foretold that He would take away the stony heart out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh. So the faithful ones had been watching and waiting with longing for this Messiah and all that had been promised through Him. And devout Jews are still waiting for the fulfilment of those promises.

But when Jesus came He began a work not clearly understood before. He did not then bring in the New Covenant which had been promised through the Prophets. (Jeremiah 31:31-34; 32:38-41; Ezekiel 11:19; 36:25-30.) [R5886 : page 118] He did not then take away their stony hearts and give them hearts of flesh. This was to be a still future work, the work of the Kingdom, when it should be set up in power and great glory over all the earth.

## **THE BEGINNING OF THE NEW CREATION**

But now, previous to all this, the Messiah had come for a different purpose; to do a preparatory work. He was instituting a new thing; He was starting a New Creation, and was inviting as many of the Jews as were in the proper attitude of heart to join with Him – not

waiting for the New Covenant of the future, but to have a part with Him in this matter of becoming sons of God. "Yoke up with Me," Jesus said. And His Message was appreciated by those who had been sincerely trying to keep the Law. "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28.) Here was a new proposition. It must have seemed very strange to them, even if they had fully understood the figure of speech which He used.

Although we who are Gentiles by nature were never under the yoke of the Jewish Law, yet, in another way, we have had a great burden which we were unable to bear – the burden of sin and death. Adam first came under the burden of sin which has brought so great a curse upon the world. We have all borne and felt the weight of sin and all its evil accompaniments. So the Master's words of hope and comfort have brought joy and refreshing to our hearts also, and we have found this offered rest – rest in Him, our true Yoke-Fellow.

All who are heavy-laden, who appreciate the nature and the bitterness of sin, who know and fear it and are striving against it – all these are invited to come to the Master. They are invited to take His yoke upon them and to learn of Him. They are assured that His yoke is easy. It is easy in the sense that it is possible to bear, and that it is not galling.

### **THE PERFECT, ADJUSTABLE YOKE**

We have seen oxen yoked. We have seen the great wooden yokes upon their necks bear down with heavy pressure upon the skin and muscles. A yoke that does not fit an animal will chafe him and cause restlessness; whereas a yoke that is properly fitted will be comfortable and will make the load much more easily drawn. Our Lord declares that He has a yoke that is easy, comfortable and enjoyable. His yoke is, so to speak, an elastic yoke. It meets the varied conditions of the different individuals who wear it. It is large for the large, small for the small, medium for the medium. It is a yoke by which the greatest, the highest and the most talented may yoke up

with the Lord – or the most insignificant, may do the same. The Lord is able to bear for us all that we lack ability to bear. There is no yoke which will enable one to bear burdens as this yoke does. True, it requires perfection to bear this yoke and we are weak and imperfect beings; but if we have only one-tenth of perfection, and nine-tenths of imperfection, our Lord will bear for us the lacking nine-tenths. If we have one-half imperfection, He will bear that. Thus the weakest are provided for, and the strongest get what they need. Here is the great opportunity of the Gospel Age.

Our Lord Jesus gave to the Apostle Paul the assurance, "My strength is made perfect in weakness." (2 Corinthians 12:9.) All things shall work together for good to us because we love Him, because we have taken His yoke, have become yoke-fellows with Him. We rejoice in the privilege of suffering with Him. The flesh may suffer, but the spirit rejoices. We shall not be tried beyond our strength. His burden is light. No one is required under this arrangement to do more than he is able to perform. If we have the right spirit we shall be glad to do all that we can accomplish. One who would not be willing to do all in his power would not be accounted by the Lord as faithful. The Master's burden is light if it be accepted in sincerity and in truth, and only those who so receive it can become yoke-fellows with Him.

