

## Welcome and Notices

**Praise:** To God be the glory  
To God be the glory  
Great things He has done  
So loved He the world that He gave us His Son  
Who yielded His life an atonement for sin  
And opened the life-gate that all may go in

*Praise the Lord, praise the Lord  
Let the earth hear His voice  
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord  
Let the people rejoice  
Come to the Father  
Through Jesus the Son  
Give Him the glory  
Great things He has done*

O perfect redemption, the purchase of blood  
To every believer the promise of God  
The vilest offender who truly believes  
That moment from Jesus a pardon receives

Great things He has taught us, great things He has done  
And great our rejoicing through Jesus the Son  
But purer, and higher, and greater will be  
Our wonder, our worship, when Jesus we see

### All Age reflection

Lots been enjoying a few more bike rides, walks, on the canal with canoes, or spending time in the garden. These forms of exercise can be quite exhausting, so it's always good to stop and take a break. (water bottle / shade)

Grown-ups need time to rest from the busyness and rushing around of everyday life. Sometimes we have our favourite places we like going to because that helps us to relax even more.

In the Bible Jesus said come to me anyone who is tired and carrying a heavy load and I will give you rest. It's always good to know that Jesus is there to help us when we are worried about something, that we can talk to him about it and know that he will always listen.

Some of you have send in photos of special places where you like relaxing and reflecting, so let's take a look at this video which Sharon has prepared for us...

### Rest awhile video

**Praise:** 7 days a week

### Prayer

We come before you,  
with all our cares and worries,  
laying them down before you.

We come before you,  
setting aside this time to worship,  
opening up ourselves to you.

We come before you,  
in the expectation that you will take and transform us,  
before we return to the world once again,  
ready to face all that comes our way.  
We trust in you and in your promises,  
for you are gentle and humble in heart,  
your yoke is easy and the burden you place upon us is light.  
And you grant us rest.

Merciful God, forgive us our sins,  
for we are frail and weak.  
We do what we know we should not do.  
We fail to do those things that we ought to do.  
And we do not understand our frailty.  
We over-indulge and under-exercise.  
We do not do that which is good for us.  
And we do not understand our weakness.  
But you, O God, know us all too well,  
and you love us and forgive us.  
God of many names,  
gracious in your loving,  
merciful in your judgements,  
steadfast in your faithfulness to us,  
compassionate to all:  
may we always be thankful for all you have done,  
from creation to the end of time,  
and into the eternity of your rest;  
may we always sing your praises,  
speak of your greatness,  
and bring glory to you by our actions.  
Gracious, merciful, steadfast, compassionate, loving God.  
**Amen.**

### **Lord's Prayer video**

**Reading:** Genesis 24:34 – 38; 42 – 51; 61 - 67

**Message:** "An easy yoke?"

My strongest memory of today's text dates back to my year as a military chaplain, when I conducted Sunday services in a tiny makeshift tent chapel in a base camp in northern Namibia.

Every Sunday morning the troops would gather for worship, and one of the few posters I inherited as Base chaplain was one with these words - Come unto me, all ye who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

It is a wonderful promise, a comforting promise to which many of us turn when our burdens seem impossible to bear, when our best efforts to cope with them have failed and we are close to collapse. It is a promise that offers hope of help, hope of a God who will lift the sweaty loads off our backs and replace them with a lighter one. As we've been going through this pandemic, this verse has probably taken on even greater significance for us all.

Back in the day, this passage meant something very different. In spite of Roman occupation, the towns and cities were doing okay. Both their local economies and their religious institutions were

still working. They were not looking for help from Jesus or anyone else, and whatever gifts he had hoped to give to them, they declined to take.

This Galilean mission was a failure, in other words, and in the passage at hand we hear Jesus response to that failure. After heaping some powerful rebukes on those who did not welcome him, he thanks God for showing things to simple people that wise and understanding people cannot see.

Next Jesus offers to lighten the load of all who are carrying heavy burdens, some of which have presumably been laid on the shoulders of the simple people by the wise and understanding ones. In the first century, this burden might have been literal sacks and bricks, the increasing weight of Rome, or the more invisible load of any life's grief and fear. But there was more. Jesus was also referring to religious burdens as well.

By the time Matthew sat down to write, the first Jewish revolt had failed and the Temple was in ruins. With the Sadducees out of business and the Zealots in full retreat, the Pharisees were the only religious party left standing, with the future of Judaism in their hands. This placed them on a collision course with the Jesus party, and in many ways Matthews Gospel is a record of their struggle.

Both parties shared the same Torah, the same prophets, the same devotion to the same God. At issue were not only who had authority to speak for God but also what those authorities said about the kind of yoke God placed on humankind.

Then, as now, some proposed weightier requirements than others. Then, as now, some placed more weight on their own view of those requirements than others. That debate continues to happen right now, wherever religious people meet to decide what it means to know God.

From our reading of Pauls letters, Christians identify this struggle as one between works and grace. When Jesus offered his heavy-laden listeners a lighter yoke, he was offering them a religion of grace to replace the religion of works under which they were labouring.

The truth is that every human being who longs to know God lives with the tension between grace and works.

I may believe that I live by God's grace, but I act like a cub scout collecting merit badges. I have a list of things to do that is a mile long, and while there are a number of things on the list that I genuinely want to do, the majority of them are things I think I ought to do, that I should do, that I had better do or God will not love me anymore.

Do you know what I mean? Human beings have a perverse way of turning Jesus easy yoke back into a hard one again, by driving ourselves to do, do, do more and whipping ourselves to be, be, be more when all God has ever asked is that we belong to him. That comes first; everything else follows that, but we so often get the order reversed. If this lockdown has taught me anything it is this – I need to give more time to be, simply to be and known that God is with me and loves me no matter what.

The trouble with believing we need to do more, be better, try harder, prove ourselves, is that it is so tiring and it is never done.

Sometimes the only way to find rest for our souls is to stop, to lay down our list of doings to do and be, the heavy yokes we have designed for ourselves, and to accept the lighter ones God has made for us instead.

If you are a keen viewer of travel documentaries that explore the lifestyle and culture of faraway lands, you may have learnt that there are two basic kinds of yokes that can be used to bear burdens - single ones and shared ones. The single ones are very efficient.

By placing a yoke across the shoulders and fitting buckets hung from poles on each side, human beings can carry almost as much as donkeys. They will tire easily and have to sit down to rest, and their shoulders will ache all the time – their backs may even give out - but still it is possible to move great loads from one place to another using a single creature under a single yoke.

A shared yoke works quite differently. It requires twice as many creatures for one thing, but if they are a well-matched pair they can work all day, because under a shared yoke one can rest a little while the other pulls. They can take turns bearing the brunt of the load; they can cover for each other without ever laying their burden down because their yoke is a shared one. They have company all day long, and when the day is done both may be tired but neither is exhausted, because they are a team.

Plenty of us labour under the illusion that our yokes are single ones, that we have got to go it alone, that the only way to please God is to load ourselves down with heavy requirements - good deeds, pure thoughts, blameless lives, perfect obedience – all those rules we make and break and make and break, while all the time Jesus is standing right there in front of us, half of a shared yoke across his own shoulders, the other half ready open and waiting for us, a yoke that requires no more than that we step into it and become part of a team.

Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. No wonder those words have weathered the centuries so well; no wonder they are still music to our ears.

They assure us that those who please God are not those who can carry the heaviest loads alone but those who are willing to share their loads, who are willing to share their yokes by entering into relationship with the one whose invitation is a standing one. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

**Praise:** Be still for the presence  
Be still, for the presence of the Lord,  
The holy One, is here;  
Come bow before him now  
With reverence and fear  
In him no sin is found  
We stand on holy ground.  
Be still, for the presence of the Lord,  
The holy One, is here.

Be still, for the glory of the Lord  
Is shining all around;  
He burns with holy fire,  
With splendour he is crowned:  
How awesome is the sight  
Our radiant king of light!

Be still, for the glory of the Lord  
Is shining all around.  
Be still, for the power of the Lord  
Is moving in this place:  
He comes to cleanse and heal,  
To minister his grace -

No work too hard for him.  
In faith receive from him.  
Be still, for the power of the Lord  
Is moving in this place.

### **Prayers of Intercession**

Let us pray for those:  
who are tired of life and all it throws at them,  
or who are exhausted by the daily struggle for survival,  
or who are wearied by worry and anxiety.

**May they find the rest they need.**

Let us pray for those:  
burdened by memories of the past,  
or weighed down by the expectations of others,  
or who carry more than their fair share of responsibility.

**May they find the release they long for.**

Let us pray for those:  
who are oppressed by those in power,  
or who are suffocated by the demands of work,  
or who are silenced in the face of injustice.

**May they find the freedom they seek.**

**Amen.**

### **Communion**

**Praise:** Christ our hope in life and death  
What is our hope in life and death?  
Christ alone, Christ alone  
What is our only confidence?  
That our souls to Him belong  
Who holds our days within His hand?  
What comes, apart from His command?  
And what will keep us to the end?  
The love of Christ, in which we stand

*O sing hallelujah!  
Our hope springs eternal  
O sing hallelujah!  
Now and ever we confess  
Christ our hope in life and death*

What truth can calm the troubled soul?  
God is good, God is good  
Where is His grace and goodness known?  
In our great Redeemer's blood  
Who holds our faith when fears arise?  
Who stands above the stormy trial?  
Who sends the waves that bring us night  
Unto the shore, the rock of Christ?

*O sing hallelujah!*

Unto the grave, what will we sing?  
"Christ, He lives; Christ, He lives!"

And what reward will heaven bring?  
Everlasting life with Him  
There we will rise to meet the Lord  
Then sin and death will be destroyed  
And we will feast in endless joy  
When Christ is ours forevermore

*O sing hallelujah!*

O sing hallelujah!  
Our hope springs eternal;  
O sing hallelujah!  
Now and ever we confess  
Christ our hope in life and death  
Now and ever we confess  
Christ our hope in life and death

**Benediction**