

Proper 9 A  
Matthew 11:16-19; 25-30  
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St. George's Bolton  
Fr. Chris

## Burdens Lifted

*"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, 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."*

This is one of my favorite passages from the New Testament. It is an invitation that is welcome, and one, which reflects that God knows how we feel sometimes: weary and burdened.

The medicine, which is offered for this condition, is rest. Rest is healing. Rest is restorative. The rest that God offers is not only these things, but it is also liberating. It liberates us from the weary feeling because the burdens are lifted from our backs and minds. Rest is what we do on vacations—I had a very restful one last weekend. Rest is what happens during Sabbath times. But burdens can impede rest and rob us of the sleep we need.

What do you suppose are those burdens? All of us are well aware of the weight we carry around in life: there are many daily reminders of it. I am reminded of the ghost "Marley" who visits Ebenezer Scrooge in the Christmas Carol, who carried about a visible chain of burdens which go unseen in a life unexamined. Is it any wonder that back problems account for many of the visits to our local doctors? What makes you weary?

Whatever is weighing heavily on your mind; whatever you are anxious about; whatever shames you: these are the burdens we feel each day and which make us weary.

Debt is one of the big worries many people have. Debt can be a crushing weight. Debt can chain us to a job we are unhappy with because we have to continue to work to pay them off, sometimes for many years. What seemed like a good idea back then has brought us many burdens. The promise of '*buy now and pay later*' is so tempting, and we feel debt is at times necessary to allow us to have what we want. Yet it is difficult to count the cost of this way of living, and before you know it, the burden is breaking your back. The most insidious debt is the high interest, some times 20% or more, of credit card debt. What is so insidious about this kind of debt is that it is often built up upon very small purchases: a dinner here, a coffee there, a movie, some gas, a six pack, and so on, and ten or twenty dollars quickly adds up to over \$500.00. At rates as low as 20 % the interest on that is \$100.00. That doesn't sound so good now, does it? Yet this is the burden that many carry through a greater portion of their lives. When you count the cost in time spent paying for this burden, it is incalculable and immeasurable and way more than the small purchase should cost us. It is a form of modern slavery and indentured servitude, that which we looked down upon when we were listening to and reading descriptions about it in High School. It can easily be described as a polished form of modern usury.

Sometimes the debt comes from buying more car or more house than you need. But for a while, these things brought the elusive happiness we were seeking until the burden outweighed the utility of the former object of our happiness. The saddest thing is when these things lose their happiness factor and become part of the blur of life passing us by, or as in the case

of the fancy car, merely a tool to transport you to the place of work in the salt mines where you will labor hard for a long time to pay for it.

But debt is not the only heavy burden we carry around in this life. One of the heaviest burdens comes from shame and embarrassment, gifts that keep on giving for many years. Shame can come from failure or poor choices, and adds much weight to our backs and minds. Shame comes from things which we have done that embarrassed us or others. We so wish we could go back and change those decisions, but we cannot. We instead live with the consequences. It can come from feeling your actions caused your team to lose the baseball game. It can come from losing your temper when you should have controlled it, particularly when you are out in public. It can come because your actions provoked someone else to lose theirs. Sometimes shame comes from issues beyond our control, like those of someone else in our family who drinks too much or who has embarrassed everyone by their actions which have been touted in the newspaper. Sometimes shame comes from the TV set in carefully crafted commercials that make us worry about body odor or bad breath or bad hair. Maybe the commercial tells us that we should feel singled out for wearing last year's clothing styles or not driving a cool car. These things sound silly, but are not. We spend a lot of money and time worrying after seeing these issues raised by the commercials. We may sit in a meeting worried that our breath is slaying those sitting near us, or that we chose the wrong deodorant. As a result, we are not present to what is happening in the room because we are consumed by our learned anxieties.

Other burdens we may carry have nothing to do with our bad choices or over-use of credit cards. They come from the cards we have been dealt in life, the most common of which is

poverty. Being born in poverty can be a tremendous burden to bear because it robs you of opportunity and choices and often limits you to a life filled with marginal labors just to sustain your life. Another burden, which can weigh a person down, are physical limitations or illness that take away sight, hearing or mobility. And then there is the burden of mental illness. None of these things are by personal choice. Even though there are many modern ways to help provide relief from them, only God hears the prayers of those inflicted with these burdens, many of whom would trade almost anything to be free of them. We can try and guess on our own those prayers being offered up and join them with our own, doing what we can to make their burden lighter for them.

However, shame is not even the heaviest burden or the most common. That one I have saved for last. That is the burden of wrong-doing and sin. We cannot help but add to this on an almost daily basis! What do you do with the memories and burdens of those things done or left undone which we carry around with us? These are things said or done which we wish with all our heart we could take back or undo, yet the frustrating part of this burden is that they are like water pouring over a spillway on a dam: once it has reached the edge and runs down toward that river, there is no way, no amount of bailing and wailing that can bring it back. What is done is done and we cannot go back, try as we might. Sometimes we crawl back to the person we have hurt, extending our heartfelt apologies and sorrow, and they may or may not forgive us as they choose, depending on how badly they have been hurt by our sin. Yet even if they do forgive us, can we forgive ourselves and let this burden go? Sin is often caused by focusing on our own wants and desires, and not taking into account the feelings of those around us, in particular, the victims of our sin. Wouldn't it be freeing and

more than nice of this burden could be finally lifted from your back?

This is what Jesus holds out to us: Take upon you the yoke of his forgiveness and love, the yoke of being a Christian. Yoke is an apt metaphor. We think of the device that oxen and work-horses wore over their heads. Yet this device, extended by God to us, is far lighter than these burdens that we have loaded onto our backs. The yoke of Jesus isn't about dragging a plow through a stubborn New England field filled with boulders and tree roots. The field God asks us to plow and till is the mission field, to bring others to the well, the oasis, for a deep drink of cold water and a place of rest on their journey.

Jesus describes God as gentle and lowly, humble, prepared to meet us where we are and to lift those burdens from our minds and our lives. God does not draw back from stooping down to lift those weights from your life. God offers real and lasting forgiveness for those sins. God offers healing of broken bodies, bringing hope and possibility to lives long without it. God will guide us and show us the way out of indebtedness to new freedom in a simpler life focused upon how and why we were created to live: and that is not to collect treasures here. Where true love is found, there happiness and bliss will be. True love can be found with and through God.

Most of all, Jesus extends the promise of rest for our "weary souls" along the journey home to God. Burdens lifted, lives and souls freed to be who we are meant to be, we travel on, our loads lightened, our anxieties reduced and our hearts full.

AMEN

