

<sup>28</sup> *“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> 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. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”*

Urban Meyer was well known before he came to be the head football coach at Ohio State University. But do you know the story that led to his arrival [information found documented in several sources]. It's rather amazing he ever lived to see the day. You see, he was crippled under a burden that almost killed him first.

Go back in his story and you might wonder: where is the problem? He had moved up the ranks of college football's head coaches, until he arrived at the University of Florida. He led the Florida Gators to back-to-back national championships. Then anxiety hit. It built up until it became unbearable. Why? Anything but #1 would be a disappointment. Anything but perfect would seem a failure – to him.

I wonder if there is anything in your life that leads you to say, “Oh-h-h-h, I can understand that.” Does winning ever seem to mean everything to you? Or, is it your job performance that you want to *perfect*? Or does a desire for popularity propel you so, that you fear the slightest mistake will “undo” you?

If anything-but-perfect won't do, if that's the level of performance that you're expecting of yourself – or that someone else is pressing on you... you can't live like that forever. You just can't. The burden is unbearable. If your worth/identity/value is based on such a standard, you'll end in hopelessness. No one can live under the burden of perfection forever.

In the case of Urban Meyer, anxiety literally – physically – drove him to his knees. He resigned from his position at Florida. He took some time off. He eventually took up the coaching spot at Ohio State, which I mentioned earlier. But along the way – I want you to hear this – Urban Meyer's response to a striking part of a meaningful book to him is über-revealing. The book read:

*“Why do people persist in their self-destructive behavior, ignoring the blatant fact that what they've been doing for many years hasn't solved their problems? They think that they need to do it even more fervently or frequently, as if they were doing the right thing but simply had to try even harder.”*  
[Change or Die]

His response was: “Blatant fact. Wow. ... It should have my picture.” Urban Meyer's eyes had been opened. He had been brought out of the hopelessness of his perfectionism and performance-ism.

Carry this thought into the spiritual. All humanity shares something in common: we start out life strapped with a heavy, wearying burden bearing down upon our souls. Sin - Its guilt - Its curse - The death of hell. All strung together... they form the yoke which weighs on fallen humanity. How heavy!

Certainly, people's hearts are heavy with many things in life. People get worn out. They seek rest from work, rest from the heat, rest from some monotony they endure, rest from a debilitating illness, rest from personality clashes, rest from the violence that swarms this world. But ultimately, the biggest need we

have – the one that is universal in scope and supreme in importance – is: the need for our souls to be at rest, to be unburdened from sin & its guilt & its damning curse. Look all around and you'll see evidence of this. Peace with God is what we seek. That's what matters in the end.

Faced with that realization, humankind comes up with their own ideas for how to gain rest for their souls. I say ideas, but they all really merge into one at their core. In man's systems, the burden is on the person's shoulders: "it falls upon me – God's Laws to obey well enough – my sins to make up for."

But how could this ever lead to rest from sin's burden and freedom from the curse it brings? The description has been given: This is like running for a finish line that doesn't exist. That's what work-righteousness is, right? People running for an impossible finish line. Remember the quote I shared with you a moment ago. Think of it now as being spoken about a person who thinks the burden is on their shoulders to get right with God:

*"Why do people persist in their self-destructive behavior, ignoring the blatant fact that what they've been doing for many years hasn't solved their problems? They think that they need to do it even more fervently or frequently, as if they were doing the right thing but simply had to try even harder."* [Change or Die]

God says: "*Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the book of the law*" (Galatians 3). If you are striving to gain rest by your effort, the yoke of sin and its curse remains on you through life and will ultimately bar you from entrance through the door to eternal life.

Jesus says, "*Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy burdened, and I will give you rest – rest for your souls.*"

Jesus came to remove the yoke upon us. The Lord used Isaiah to record an awesomely detailed prophecy of Jesus' coming & work: "*The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned*" - "*For to us a child is born, to us a son is given... And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*" Right in the center of those words, this – maybe less familiar, but just as awesome description of the Savior's work – is given: "*You have shattered the yoke that burdens them [us], the bar across their shoulders*" (Isaiah 9:4).

The yoke of sin, & its guilt, & its curse that had been hanging around our necks, dragging us down – all the way to hell - has been shattered off of us! How? Jesus bore all of it. Like some beast of burden absorbing the weight of an astounding (inhuman) load, Jesus came to bear the yoke. He truly is "*humble in heart.*" He humbled himself: taking the very nature of a servant – he became fully human. We couldn't live under the law perfectly. So He did (Galatians 4:4). He gladly obeyed every command of God through a life where he faced every temptation the devil & world could heap on him. He didn't falter along the way. He didn't throw off the least part of God's law. He fulfilled it – all! Then he went to his death. Not any ordinary death. The nails piercing Jesus to the cross were nothing compared to the crushing yoke of all our sin and all our guilt. Hell bore down upon his soul. He took it all.

What does this mean? It means rest for all who trust in Him. Jesus says, “*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest - rest for your souls.*”

So maybe then you’re wondering: What does Jesus mean when he says, “*Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me... for my yoke is easy [– literally: pleasant]”*?

This doesn’t mean *yoked* to him in order to help him get us to heaven. He has already carried that full burden to its completion. “*My soul finds rest in God alone - My salvation comes from him*” (Psalm 62). Our soul’s rest does not depend on us in any way.

You and I put our hope in Jesus’ accomplishments, not ours. We rely on Jesus’ strength, not our own. We trust in God’s way, which is his grace to us in Jesus Christ: “*Christ is the end of the law, so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes*” (Romans 10:4).

So with that burden all removed, think about the only part of the imagery of being “yoked” that is remaining.

Jesus’ words here indicate blessing. Two individuals that are yoked together are side-by-side. What a blessing! Yoked to Jesus, you enjoy Jesus’ companionship along life’s road. What a life! Connected to Jesus, you walk with him, being guided by Him and his Word, being kept close to Him. And so, you are safe. How could you ever be in need? He is with you all the way.

The Christian life, life side-by-side with Jesus, is truly *pleasant*. That doesn’t mean we’ll experience no troubles. That doesn’t mean we’ll face no battle with temptation.

But when you feel the pain, sadness, or the guilt of times you have “*done the evil you don’t want to do*” (as we heard in Romans 7 earlier)... turn your eyes upon the One who has not left your side. See there your Advocate (1 John 2). And say once again: “*Thanks be to God!*” He fulfilled the law. He lifted away all your sin. Your guilt is removed. You are forgiven. Be at rest. You are at peace with your God.

When you feel strain or weariness from some setback or from some stressful circumstance in life, find rest in the guarantee that Jesus is still shepherding you through life’s many troubles, on the way to your eternal home of rest (Psalm 23).

When you feel doubt or fear swirling because of uncertain and uncontrollable factors in your life, find rest in the unchanging nature of the One at your side, the One Constant in life. “*Jesus,*” with his love & care, “*is the same yesterday, today, and forever*” (Hebrews 13). And so, find strength to echo the Psalm writer: “*Be at rest, once more, o my soul – for the Lord has been good to you*” (Psalm 116).

The Christian life, life side-by-side with Jesus, is truly *pleasant*. Here’s another aspect of that:

With souls at rest, you and I are free to serve our Lord. It’s not a life of “I have to do good, or else!” But I have the desire to do good (Romans 7). I want to honor, love and serve my God, because he has loved and saved me (1 John 4).

Think that through in light of the main truth we're looking at today: "rest." When we go on vacation, we speak of "getting some R & R" – rest and relaxation. I suppose, then, you sit and do nothing the whole time, right? "No," you say? You mean that on vacation you're free to do what you'd like. That's liberating! It's truly pleasant. You do things by choice, because you want to and not because you have to. When you do something, it isn't tedious or burdensome. It is fun. It brings joy.

This is the life for us as ones who enjoy the rest that Jesus gives: rest for our souls. The rest that Jesus provides isn't something merely "off in the distance." Do look forward to that eternal rest in heaven, indeed! But Jesus gives more than that – he gives us rest that doesn't need to wait until our bodies rest in their tombs. Dear Christian, His rest is yours now – it has been for all the time you've known him & trusted in him. His rest is a constant for you. Amen.