

Rev. Lex DeLong / General Adult

2025 Christmas / Christmas / Isaiah 9:6–7; Matthew 11:28–30

Primary Text: Matthew 11:28–30

Introduction

We plan, we strive, we perform, but we simply do not know what is going to happen tomorrow, let alone what might happen later on today. How many of you remember Y2K?

Y2K (Year 2000) refers to the potential computer glitch when dates rolled over from 1999 to 2000, stemming from programmers using two digits for years (e.g., '99') to save memory, fearing '00' would be read as 1900, causing widespread system failures. Of course, now we know that we survived, despite some glitches:

- The U.S. Naval Observatory showed the date as 19100
- Some lottery machines failed
- A nuclear plant had minor support system issues
- The Chicago Federal reserve Bank briefly couldn't transfer \$700,000 in tax revenue
- 150 Delaware Lottery slot machines stopped working
- Denmark's first "millennium baby" was initially registered as 100 years old
- One person in upstate New York was billed \$91,000 for a VHS movie that they rented

With all of that scare back then, we realized just how fragile and fallible humanity's rule and control is over everyday things. Nothing reminds us more of that fact than the couple of months after Christmas and the start of the New Year.

We spend the entire month of December ramping up. We buy the gifts, we cook the meals, we attend the parties, we forget about the worry of our everyday problems, and we sing about "Joy to the World." But for many of us, the moment the tree comes down, the crash hits. The adrenaline fades, the family goes home, and we are left with silence.

The decorations are packed away, but the burdens aren't. The bills are coming due. The relationship stress didn't disappear just because we sang "Silent Night." The fatigue of the last year is still sitting heavy on our shoulders. We sang "His Name Shall Be," but now we have to go back to living in a world that feels heavy.

Jesus looks out at a crowd that looks exactly like us. He sees people who have been trying to follow all the rules, trying to keep everyone happy, trying to "win" at life, and He diagnoses them with one word: *Weary*.

The Greek word here implies "working to the point of exhaustion." It's the kind of tired that sleep doesn't fix. It's soul-tired.

In the middle of that exhaustion, Jesus doesn't offer them a new set of rules. He doesn't say, "Try harder next year." He offers them a Gift. He says, "Come to me."

The song the worship team sang says, "*He came to lift the weary ones, give peace and perfect rest.*" Today, we are going to look at how He does that. We are going to see that the "Glorious Gift" of Christmas wasn't just a baby in a manger; it was an invitation to lay down the weight of the world.

Main Idea:

The Glorious gift of Christmas is not just that Jesus came to be with us, He came to rescue us.

Transition We often stop at the manger. We admire the baby, we sing the songs, and we feel warm about the fact that "God is with us." But *why* is He with us? He didn't come just to sit beside us while we struggle; He came to intervene. He saw us crushing ourselves under a weight we were never designed to carry—the crushing weight of performance, the weight of trying to be "good enough" on our own. The rescue mission of Christmas is a trade: He takes the burden of perfection that we could not bear, and He replaces it with the ease of bearing His grace. But for that exchange to happen, we have to look past the event of Christmas and engage with the King.

If we are going to escape out from under the burden of doing everything right, we must...

I. Accept the Person, Not Just the Birth

(Text: Matthew 11:28)

A. Turn from Your Self-Help Strategies to the Savior Himself

Jesus begins with a command that contradicts our human nature: "*Come to me.*"

When we are overwhelmed, our instinct is to go to a "plan." We look for a new calendar system, a financial strategy, or a self-help book. We treat rest like a project we have to

manage. But Jesus warns us that strategies cannot save us.

The "peace and perfect rest" **promised in this verse** is not found in a better procedure; it is found in a Presence of a person, Jesus Christ.

St. Augustine famously said,

"Thou hast made us for Thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in Thee."

You have to stop trusting your ability to figure it out and start trusting the Person who is calling you.

B. Confess Your Exhaustion to Access His Strength

The invitation is specific: *"All you who are weary and burdened."* To understand the weight of this, you have to understand the history. The religious leaders of Jesus' day taught that to please God, you had to take on what they called the "**Yoke of the Torah**" (*Ol Torah*). This wasn't just the Ten Commandments; it was thousands of additional man-defined rules about what you could eat, how far you could walk, and how you washed your hands.

Peter later described this legalism as "*a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors were able to bear*" (Acts 15:10). The people were spiritually crushed by the impossible weight of religious performance.

Instead of legalism, Matthew here uses a word that has been translated as "rest." It signals the opportunity we have with Jesus to take a break from the doing and instead, be refreshed by Jesus.

Jesus is teaching us here that you don't have to carry that anymore. The entry fee to His kingdom isn't your performance; it is your exhaustion. Stop hiding your struggle and bring your heavy burden into the light, because the "rest" is only for those who confess to God that they can't carry it anymore.

II. Exchange Your Heavy Burden for the Glorious Gift

(Text: Matthew 11:29)

A. Surrender the Yoke of Performance to Receive the Yoke of Grace

Jesus commands us to "*Take my yoke upon you.*" This is the critical exchange. You have

to stop believing the lie that you can handle life on your own and you can be good enough.

As long as you are the one holding the reins, you will be crushed by the "yoke" of worldly expectations—the need to be perfect, the need to please everyone, the need to secure your own future.

In fact, this was the yoke that the Jewish leadership of the day were placing on the shoulders of Israel, not just the burden of life in general, but the burden of religion itself, without first, relationship with God.

Matthew 23:4 NASB95

⁴ "They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with *so much as* a finger.

Justin Martyr, one of the earliest church leaders in the 2nd Century, recorded a tradition that Jesus made "ploughs and yokes" in his carpentry shop. We don't know for sure that is anything more than speculation, but imagine with me if it is. When Jesus speaks about a yoke, He wouldn't have been using a cliché; it would be a memory. He knew exactly how to shape a piece of wood so it wouldn't chafe.

The text instructs you to put down the yoke that has been weighing you down. He is offering a trade. He takes the heavy, impossible weight of your sin and striving, and He hands you the "Glorious Gift" of His coming along side you to partner with you in bearing that burden. Jesus is the stronger partner.

B. Rely on the Stronger Partner to Bear the Heavy Load

When Jesus says "Take my yoke," He isn't handing you a backpack to carry alone; He is inviting you into a double-yoke. A yoke is designed for two. He is not just giving you a tool; He is joining you in the furrow.

The Carpenter of Sepphoris* Archaeology gives us a fascinating insight here. During Jesus' youth, Herod Antipas was rebuilding a massive Roman city called **Sepphoris**, just four miles from Nazareth.

It is highly likely that Jesus, the 'tektōn' (builder), walked those four miles daily to haul heavy stones and massive timber beams for that construction. When Jesus speaks of a "heavy burden," He isn't guessing. He knows the physical ache of a load that cuts into your shoulder. He knows what it is to be weary.*

If we are to find rest, we must stop trying to pull the weight of our family, our finances, and our future by ourselves. **Scripture reveals** that Jesus is the Stronger Partner. In fact, Isaiah 9:6 calls Him **Mighty God**. Think about that: The One positioned on the

"strength side" of your yoke possesses inexhaustible, omnipotent power. Your job is not to pull harder; your job is to stay close to the Mighty God and let Him handle the heavy lifting while you learn from Him. If we keep Jesus at our side, we see Him in every situation in every moment of our lives. It is as we walk through those moments with Him that He teaches us through His presence.

Now that we have taken upon ourselves the lighter yoke of Jesus, we simply choose to...

III. Recognize [watch and learn] the Rhythm of His Rest

(Text: Matthew 11:29–30)

A. Reject the Unbearable Noise of the World to Learn the Gentle Strength of God

Jesus explicitly tells us the curriculum: "*Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble, compared to the harsh and arrogant nature of the Sanhedrin.*"

The world screams that you must be aggressive, loud, and frantic to survive. That noise has become unbearable, especially in this day of social media pressure to be an influencer, to grow a following. Jesus instructs us to unlearn that behavior.

[Hudson Taylor] *The famous missionary Hudson Taylor was once so exhausted by the demands of ministry that he could barely function. He wrote, "I cannot read, I cannot think, I cannot even pray; but I can trust."*

That is what it means to rely on the "rest" of Jesus and His yoke. Because you are yoked to Him, you must match His temperament, His steps, His pace. You cannot be frantic while He is steady; the yoke will chafe. If we want the "peace" that **this text** promises, we have to switch teachers.

We must stop trying to force open doors that God hasn't opened. Look at the Senior Partner in the yoke. Is He panicking? Is He rushing? No. He possesses "Gentle Strength." He is moving with absolute power but without anxiety. Learn to walk at His speed. He sees and knows what is coming next.

B. Cease Your Striving and Claim Rest for Your Soul

The promise is specific: "*You will find rest for your souls.*"

While the song the guys sung celebrates a "Glorious Gift," **verse 28 defines it.** It isn't

just a nap or a vacation; you can sleep for twelve hours and still wake up exhausted if your soul is restless.

[The Drowning Swimmer] *Lifeguards will tell you that the hardest person to save is the one who is thrashing in the water. As long as a drowning person is "striving" to save themselves, they are dangerous to themselves and the rescuer. Often, a lifeguard has to wait until the swimmer gives up and goes limp before they can wrap an arm around them and tow them to safety.*

We have to stop thrashing against God's plan so He can tow us to shore.

Our instruction today is to stop striving for approval and start living from approval. Anchor ourselves in the truth that, because He is pulling the weight, we don't have to carry the worry. The "Gift" is the ability to finally let go, let God, and exhale.

Conclusion

The presents are all opened. The paper is thrown away, but the text of Matthew 11 remains. For us, there is one Gift left under the tree—and it is the only one that will last through the dark days of January and February, in fact it will last and never fade. It is the Yoke of Jesus.

Some of you are dreading tomorrow, next week, next month. You are dreading the return to work, the return to the doctor's office, the return to reality. We are weary because we are trying to keep the "government" of our lives on *our* own shoulders (Isa. 9:6-7).

Isaiah 9:6 & The Assyrian Shadow, The prophet Isaiah told us, *"For to us a child is born... and the government will be on his shoulders."* In Isaiah's day, the "yoke" wasn't a metaphor; it referred to the **Assyrian Empire**—a crushing system of slavery and taxes that ruined the people. The promise of the Messiah was that He would break the yoke of slavery and take the weight of the government onto Himself. As God's created human race, we were never meant to develop of government of men to rule other men, we were meant to be ruled by God Himself. Mankind's government will always be a weight, but the government upon His shoulders will lift that weight and free us to find rest for our souls.

Christmas reminds us that the Government is supposed to be on *His* shoulders, so the Yoke can be on ours. You can finally rest because of *Who* you are yoked to and whose government you trust in:

- You don't need a new strategy; you have a Wonderful Counselor.
- You don't need to feel alone in your weakness; you have an Everlasting Father.
- You don't need to live in anxiety; you are yoked to the Prince of Peace.

As long as you are trying to be the King of your own life, you will be tired.

We all need to resign ourselves as King, let Jesus take the Government, and accept His Rest.

Main Idea:

The Glorious gift of Christmas is not just that Jesus came to be with us, He came to rescue us.

Let's pray:

I want you to picture in your mind whatever "burden" you are carrying into the New Year. Is it fear? Is it financial debt? Is it a broken relationship? The command of the text is to *"Come to me," to Jesus*. Imagine taking that heavy, crushing weight off your neck right now. Hear the Carpenter say, "Give that to me."

Take His yoke. Put on His grace.

Walk out of here not with a resolution to try harder, but with the confidence that you are not pulling the plow alone.

Remember, His Name Shall Be... Prince of Peace.

And because He is our Peace, we can finally Rest.