# Hard Warnings and the Easy Yoke

Will Fitzgerald  
Kalamazoo Mennonite Fellowship  
July 3, 2011

16 “But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another,

17 ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance;

we wailed, and you did not mourn.’

18 For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon’; 19 the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.”

20 Then he began to reproach the cities in which most of his deeds of power had been done, because they did not repent. 21 “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. 22 But I tell you, on the day of judgment it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon than for you. 23 And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven?

No, you will be brought down to Hades.

For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. 24 But I tell you that on the day of judgment it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom than for you.”

25 At that time Jesus said, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; 26 yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. 27 All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

28 “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29 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. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” [[1]](#footnote-1)

Today, we finish our series on the hard sayings of Jesus. We’ll look at one hard saying, but then hear a word of comfort. But even the word of comfort will have a bit of difficulty in it. I look forward to hearing what you think of these verses.

I think there is a common perception that the Christian life is either all difficulty, or all ease. One the one hand, we have people view us as judgmental Puritans who are afraid that someone, somewhere, is having a good time (who said this? Mencken?). On the other hand, people think we should be people who “judge not lest ye be judged,” who value toleration and acceptance above all. There is some echo of this in Jesus’s words. John the Puritan—er, Baptist came wailing, but people, by and large, did not mourn. Jesus came to bring life, and that more abundantly, but people, by and large, did not dance. They did not recognize what God was doing through John, and they did not recognize what God was doing through Jesus. Jesus has hard words for the cities near the north end of the Sea of Galilee where he centered his teaching and ministry.[[2]](#footnote-2) The miracles were not enough, the proclamation of the Kingdom of God was not enough. Other, more evil places might have more excuse than they, who had Jesus himself in their midst.

And how much more this is true for us, right? For we know the next parts of the story: how Jesus was so rejected that he was killed by the powers that be with most of the common people cheering it on. And yet, Jesus was raised in power to live again, and brought his Spirit to rest on his church, which has spread to every land.

But who are we? What is the true church? Who are the real followers of Jesus? Has not the body of Christ been torn asunder in a thousand, a hundred thousand ways? Has not much of the church made its peace with the world and the culture, so that “Christian,” or “Catholic,” or “Orthodox” or “Mennonite” mean little more than labels for particular political and cultural social groups, each with its own set of agenda and desire for power?

Perhaps it will be more tolerable for Bethsaida and Chorazin and Capernaum that it will be for the Mennonites and the Catholics and the Christians. Will we be exalted to the skies? Or will be thrown into the garbage pit of hell for our bad faith?

Who can bear the burden of this terrible message?

But.

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29 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. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Our failure is a heavy, heavy burden, but Jesus promises rest from it. He is asking us, inviting us, to learn from him. He has work for us to do, but it is not hard. It is the call of a gentle and humble teacher, a God who is willing to be yoked with us despite, or even because, of our failure. For who else will repair us? Can we do it through political power, or technology, or entertainment, or science, or wealth, or bodily pleasures? I think we will agree that it hasn’t happened yet. We live in the most powerful nation in the history of the world, with the most complex and amazing technology; we have access to many means of entertainment, we—despite the current recession—are wealthier than ever, healthier than ever. Pleasures surround us, and everything is built to tickle our fancies. If any people should be happy, it should be the American church; but we are not happy.

We need to return to our humble teacher, to do what he calls us to do, no more; no less. Only then will we rest. Only then will we exchange our burdened souls for rested souls. The author of the letter to the Hebrews writes, “Strive to enter that Rest,”—work hard to be a Sabbath people. I will admit that I do not understand all of what this means, but I hope, God helping me, to understand it better.

Want to come along?

1. *The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Mt 11:16–30). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Carson, D. A. (1994). *New Bible commentary : 21st century edition* (4th ed.) (Mt 11:20–24). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)