

# Back to School

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Date: 18 August 2024

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, if we could, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling this morning, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read, the Gospel according to Matthew, Matthew chapter 11.

Matthew chapter 11. And we're going to read the well-known words of verse 28 to the end of the chapter. Matthew chapter 11 and verse 28.

Where Jesus says to all of us, Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 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. It's that time of year again.

The summer holidays are over. The children have gone back to school. And I'm sure Thursday, for some pupils, it was a day that they were dreading to see.

[ 1 : 16 ] And I'm sure for some parents, it was a day that they were delighted to see. I'm trying not to smile too much. But, you know, six weeks, as you know, it's a long time. And although, as a child, and probably as a teacher too, you don't feel the summer long.

You never feel that it's long enough. But now that the holidays are over, and it's back to school, back to the early starts, back to the alarm clock going off, back to the packed lunches, and back to the homework when it's going to be coming home.

But going back to school, it's always an exciting time. And for many children, it's a new term. And for other children, it's a new experience.

They're beginning school. The little tots are beginning life in the school. Those who have moved up into the primary school, there's others who are starting secondary. And there's those who have left secondary.

They're now looking to work, or they're wanting further education in university, or, like myself, becoming an apprentice. It's an exciting time for each and every age and every stage.

[ 2 : 18 ] And, you know, next to our health service, having a free education, it's probably one of the greatest privileges that we have in our nation. In fact, it was following the free church disruption in 1843 that Thomas Chalmers, he was one of the founding fathers of the free church, he emphasized the need to have a church and a school in every parish in Scotland.

And I think I'm right in saying this. I'm sure Margaret Joan will correct me later on if I'm wrong, that the free church actually built the old school here in Barvis. And even though the education system in Scotland, even though as the years have gone on, it's been marred by secularism, we are still the beneficiaries of Chalmers' vision.

Which is why we ought to be thankful for our local schools, and even continue to pray for our children in school and also the teachers, as they navigate all the changes and all the challenges that are facing our society.

But, you know, as important as our national education is, our Bible reminds us that there's an education that everyone in every parish, in every generation needs to receive.

But this education, it comes not from the university of life, but from a school that has been established for over 2,000 years. And once you enroll in the education of this school, you're in it for life.

[ 3 : 46 ] More than that, this school, it provides an education that's second to none. It's second to none because it's actually an education that will give you an eternal perspective.

And what's amazing is for this school, entry is free, the education is flawless, and the teacher is faultless. And that's what I want us to see this morning from these well-known words in Matthew's Gospel.

I want us to see the greatest teacher giving to us the greatest lesson in what you could say is the best classroom in the school of Christ. And from this teacher, we see that his lesson plan for this morning is very simple.

His lesson plan is very straightforward. Because what he says to us from these three verses is, Listen to me, lean upon me, and learn from me.

That's what Jesus, our teacher, is saying to us this morning. Listen to me, lean upon me, and learn from me. So first of all, Jesus, our teacher, he says, Listen to me.

[ 4 : 53 ] Listen to me. Verse 28. Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. You know, like me, I'm sure that when you were young, you were told by parents or grandparents, you were probably told that school is the best years of your life.

School is the best years of your life. And for those of you who are still in school, you probably think that's nonsense. But you know, later on in life, at our age or older, you know, we didn't, when we look back, we realize, well, we didn't actually acknowledge it or appreciate it at the time.

That school was actually the best years of our life. Because we were young, we were carefree, we had no concerns, we had no commitments, no dependents, no distractions, there were no pressures, no bills to pay.

School was, and I'm sure still is, the best years of our life. But of course, we all have to grow up. We all have to graduate onto the next chapter in our lives.

And yet, when it comes to the school of Christ, you never grow out of it. And you never graduate from it. Because you're always learning.

[ 6 : 06 ] As a Christian, you're always learning. Even in eternity, you'll still be learning. In eternity, you could say there's further education about the wonder and glory of who God is and what God has done through His Son, Jesus Christ.

But even as a Christian, you could say with the old saying, every day is a school day and you learn something new every day. Every day is a school day and you learn something new every day.

And that's certainly true as a Christian in the school of Christ. Because when you're enrolled and when you enter into the best school, you have the best teacher and the best education and the best lessons and they are the best years of your life.

And yet, you know, about this school, there are so many of you here this morning. You know all about this school and yet you refuse to enter it.

You refuse to enroll yourself in the school of Christ. Maybe you think that Sunday school was enough for you. Maybe you think that sitting in church on a Sunday morning is enough for you.

Maybe you think that the university of life has taught you everything you need to know.

[ 7 : 19 ] But you know, what you don't realize is that the school of Christ, it provides an education that will not only give you the best years of your life, and I promise you that, the best years of your life in the school of Christ, but more than that, it will give you an eternal perspective on your life.

It will not only give you the best years of your life, it will give you an eternal perspective on your life that you are not going to live forever. You need to make preparations for further education in glory.

And amazingly, this school, as Jesus says, it's available to all, and it's for all. This school is for you, regardless of your age, regardless of your background, your upbringing, your nationality, your gender, or even your previous education in life.

This school, as Jesus says, is available for all, and it's to all. Enrollment and entry into this school is free. Education is flawless.

The teacher is absolutely faultless. Faultless. That's why the first point in this teacher's lesson plan, Jesus, our teacher, the first point in his lesson plan to his pupils is listen to me.

[ 8 : 40 ] Listen to me. Because as you know, especially sitting in a classroom, listening is the only way that you learn. I know you can be hands-on, but listening is the way that you learn.

Talking over the teacher, that's no use. Telling the teacher what to do, well, we all know that's never a good thing to do. It's not right. Therefore, listening is the way that we learn.

And so this call to listen from Jesus, it's a call to be a learner. It's a call to be a disciple, which, as you know, that's what the word disciple means. It means learner, because we learn by listening.

We learn by listening. In fact, our Bible teaches us, our Bible tells us so clearly, that faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

Do you know, my friend, if you want to be in the school of Christ, be a listener in church. But don't just be a listener in church on a Sunday morning. Be a listener in church on Sunday evening.

[ 9 : 46 ] Be a listener in church midweek. Be a listener in church. If you want to be a disciple, be a listener, because we learn by listening. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

And you know, I often think that that's why God said about Jesus at his baptism. Remember the baptism of Jesus? God the Father speaks. And what does he say?

This is my beloved Son. Listen to him. Listen to him. And when Jesus began telling the parable of the sower, one of my favorite parables, the way Jesus began telling the parable of the sower is that he shouted the word, listen.

Listen. And then he says, a sower went out to sow. And Jesus shouted, listen, because he knew that how you hear affects your heart.

How you hear affects your heart. Because as Jesus teaches us in the parable of the sower, our heart must not be a hardened heart. It must not be a hollow heart. It must not be a hungry heart.

[ 10 : 52 ] But our heart needs to be a healthy heart that listens to God's word and learns from Jesus. So listen. Listen. Because the call to listen is a call to learn.

It's a call to be a learner, to be a disciple, to be a pupil in the school of Christ. But you know, when we listen to what the teacher is saying, well, what is he saying? It says there in verse 28, he says, come.

Come. Come. Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. So the call to listen, to enroll and enter into the school of Christ, it's a call to come to Christ.

In fact, Jesus actually commands us to come to him. He commands you to come to him. And the amazing thing is, he's not commanding you to just come to a place of worship.

He's not commanding you to just come to listen to a preacher. No, he's commanding you to come to himself, to a person, the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. And you know, my friend, you might have come to church this morning wondering, is Jesus speaking to me?

[ 12 : 09 ] Do you know, I sit in church, maybe you think this, I sit in church and I don't really hear much, I don't take in much, I don't really listen. And you might wonder, is Jesus speaking to me?

And the answer from what Jesus says here is yes. But how can Jesus be speaking to me? I'm not good enough. I'm not worthy enough.

I don't know enough. And yet the call and the command to come to Christ is clear. Because he says it. Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

The call and the command is clear. And it's clear to all. It's an offer to all. It's a command to all. And that's why you know that Jesus is speaking to you this morning.

And he's saying to you, listen to me and come to me. Listen to me and come to me. Because as Jesus emphasizes and explains in this verse, the qualification to come to him, it's not am I good enough or am I worthy enough or do I know enough?

[ 13 : 23 ] No, the qualification Jesus says, he says, come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden. That's the qualification. So Jesus wants to know this morning, are you worried or are you weary?

Then come to me. Are you burdened about something? Come to me. Are you backslidden in your faith? Come to me. Are you distressed? Are you distraught? Do you feel like a failure?

Are you anxious about something? Are you agitated about your providence? Are you troubled in your heart? Are you tired in your mind? Are you restless? Are you repentant? Are you struggling with whether it's sin or sickness or stress or suffering or sorrow?

Whatever it is, Jesus says, come to me. Come to me. Come to me and I will give you rest.

Do you know, my friend, the call and command to come is to all. And do you know why it's to all? Because we all need this Jesus.

[ 14 : 30 ] We all need this Jesus. There's not a single one of us here this morning who has it all together. It doesn't matter what superficial front or facade we present and portray to others on a Sunday morning.

The reality is we are all broken people living broken lives in this broken world. We are all restless and that's why Jesus says, come to me and you will find rest.

We are all restless, my friend, and we're all in need of this rest. And you know, the emphasis Jesus actually makes in that verse, verse 28, is not on the all.

He wants all of us to come to him. That's without a doubt. But the emphasis he gives here in that verse is not on the all but on the I. The I.

I will give you rest. I will give you rest. Nobody else. Nothing else. No amount of fun or food or family or friendships or football or Facebook or finance or flirting or even fitness.

[ 15 : 39 ] none of it will give you rest for your undying soul. None of it. That's why Jesus says, listen to me and come to me.

Come to me. And so in the classroom of the school of Christ, the lesson planned for this morning, Jesus says, listen to me. Then he says, secondly, lean upon me.

Lean upon me. He says, verse 29, take my yoke upon you. Learn from me for I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls.

So having called all of us, having commanded all of us to come to him, saying, he says, listen to me. Jesus now issues another imperative. Lean upon me.

Lean upon me, he says. Take my yoke upon you. Take my yoke upon you. Now, of course, when Jesus mentions his yoke, he's not referring to the soft, runny kind that comes from the egg, but he's drawing our attention to the harness, a harness that will be worn by an ox or a horse used to pull a cart or a plow where the animals, they would be yoked together, as you know, by this wooden beam that was carved to fit their neck.

[ 17 : 01 ] And you know, this image and this illustration of being yoked together or under a yoke is repeatedly mentioned throughout the Bible. But when it's mentioned, especially in the Old Testament, when it's mentioned, it's more often used in a negative sense of surrender and submission where you're placed under this heavy yoke of slavery.

We see that particularly in the book of Jeremiah where this Old Testament prophet, he's a prophet who actually preached with a yoke upon his back. He wore this yoke around his neck in order to illustrate the yoke of slavery that the people of Israel were under.

But even though the yoke of, or the yoke of slavery is often used as an illustration, the promise of the Old Testament was that the coming Messiah would break our yoke of slavery.

That was the promise. The coming Messiah would break the yoke of slavery. And the Apostle Paul in the New Testament, he picks it up and he says to us that Jesus Christ has set us free from our yoke of slavery to sin.

Which teaches us that we're only free in Christ when we take his yoke upon us. We are only free when we come under the yoke of Jesus.

[ 18 : 23 ] And that's what Jesus is teaching us here. Take my yoke upon you. Take my yoke upon you. And of course, the yoke which Jesus offers is not a yoke of slavery.

It's a yoke of salvation. And Jesus' yoke of salvation is not burdensome. It's not heavy and hard to bear. No, as Jesus says there in verse 29, his yoke is easy.

Verse 30, his yoke is easy and his burden is light. And you know, my friend, you may be wondering this morning, how do I free myself from this yoke of slavery?

I realize that I'm under this yoke of slavery to sin. How do I free myself from this yoke of slavery to sin? How do I yoke myself under this yoke of salvation through Jesus?

And what does Jesus say to us in his lesson plan? Lean upon me. Lean upon me. Stop trying to do it yourself.

[ 19 : 32 ] Lean upon me. In other words, don't submit and surrender your life as a slave to sin. Submit and surrender your life to me, the Savior of sinners.

And you know, when you take his yoke upon you, it's not a heavy yoke. It doesn't weigh you down. The amazing thing about the yoke of Jesus is that there's freedom and there's forgiveness.

Freedom and forgiveness. And yet, the irony is so many people don't see becoming a Christian as freedom and forgiveness. They think that Christianity, becoming a Christian, is all about rules and regulations, all about do's and don'ts and boundaries and barriers.

church. But you know, that's not the case at all. I hope none of you think that Christianity is like that. Christianity is not a religion about Jesus.

It's a relationship with Jesus. It's living life every day with Jesus as the best friend you could ever have, the best teacher you could ever have, the best shepherd you could ever follow.

[ 20 : 41 ] And when you follow Jesus, when you're in the school of Christ, when you're walking with Jesus, you live by faith, not fear. You serve him out of duty, not demand.

You work in obedience, not obligation. And you're led by the Spirit, not self. He must increase. We must decrease. That's why Jesus says to us, listen to me and lean upon me.

lean upon me. You know, far too often we listen to the outlook and the opinion of other people. Far too often we lean upon self or someone else other than Jesus.

But the call and command of Jesus here in the school of Christ is very clear. He says there, verse 29, take my yoke upon you, learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Literally, he says there that his yoke, the yoke that were to come under, this yoke of salvation, his yoke, he says, is gracious and pleasant.

[ 21 : 52 ] Gracious and pleasant. It's not burdensome. It's not heavy. It's not hard. It's gracious and pleasant. And you know, that's why Psalm 46, that's why we're singing it a wee while earlier.

Psalm 46 proclaims to us that God is our refuge and our strength, a very present help in time of trouble. And the word help is the same image that Jesus is using here.

Because the word help in Psalm 46, it gives to us the image and the illustration of being yoked together with God. Under God's yoke, where we are yoked together with God, God is bearing the burden, God is walking side by side with us, God is taking the strain.

And that's why the psalmist could say, God is our refuge and our strength, a very present help in time of trouble. He's carrying the burden. He's taking the strain.

And here's Jesus here in Matthew chapter 11. He's presenting to us his school, his lesson plan.

And here is the God-man and he's saying to us, he's telling us that he's our refuge.

[ 23 : 07 ] He's our strength. And his yoke is easy. His burden is light. His yoke is gracious. His yoke is pleasant because he's a very present help in time of trouble.

And you know, people often say that. You often find Christians who say that, that when they enter those painful providences of sorrow or sickness, it's then that they find grace to help in time of need. It's then that they experience Jesus bearing the burden with them, walking with them, carrying them almost. Because that's what he promises in his word.

He came to bear our griefs and carry our sorrows. Jesus. And you know, my friend, as a Christian now, I can't understand how anyone can get through life or even face the reality of death without Jesus.

I don't know how anybody can do it. They talk about inner strength or other people around them. but when other people aren't around them, when the inner strength fades, who do they have?

[ 24 : 33 ] Who is there to bear the griefs? Who is there to carry the sorrows? Who is there to pull the burden? That's why Jesus promises never to leave and never to forsake.

And that's why Jesus is saying to all of us this morning, he's saying to us so simply in his lesson plan, listen to me, lean upon me, learn from me. You make sure you enter the school of Christ, he's saying.

Because the last thing he says here is learn from me. So listen to me, lean upon me, learn from me, learn from me. Jesus says to us this morning, come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

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.

And you know, as the best school, the school of Christ, as the best teacher, and the best education, and the best lessons that promise to be the best years of your life, you know, it's no wonder Jesus calls and commands us and says to us, learn from me.

[ 25 : 42 ] Learn from me. But of course, we can only learn from Jesus if we're listening to Jesus, and if we're leaning upon Jesus. We can only learn from Jesus if we come under his yoke, if we submit and surrender our lives to him.

But if we refuse, if we reject Jesus, if we put it off, do you know what the Bible describes you as? Stiff-necked.

That's what the Bible says you are. Stiff-necked. You imagine an ox or a horse, unable to be tamed, unable to be controlled, unable to submit or unwilling to submit and surrender.

Stiff-necked. That's the terms often used when an ox would reject or refuse the master's yoke. They were stiff-necked. That's how the Lord described the Israelites in the wilderness.

When they refused to follow the Lord and they rejected the Lord's commandments, the Lord called them a stiff-necked people. Which is why Jesus is saying this morning, he's saying to us so clearly, so simply, don't be stiff-necked.

[ 26 : 58 ] Stop this nonsense of refusing and rejecting. Don't refuse my call, don't resist my commandment to come and to call upon me and to commit your life to me.

No, take my yoke upon you, submit to me, surrender your life to me, listen to me, lean upon me, learn from me. Learn from me.

And you know, with this Jesus, he continues this image, this illustration of two oxen being yoked together. Because what would often happen as oxen were chosen to work together is that there would always be one that was older and one that was younger.

The older and the younger. There would be the older experienced ox and it would be yoked together with the younger, inexperienced ox. And of course, the older was to lead the younger. The younger was to learn from the older. The older was to teach and to train and to tutor the younger. And by being yoked together, both knowledge and experience would be shared.

[ 28 : 05 ] With the younger ox, it would be led and it would learn from the older ox. discipleship. And you know, the image and illustration that Jesus is giving to us is actually the biblical principle of discipleship.

Even here, Jesus is teaching us about the importance of discipleship. Because as we said, when you enter the school of Christ, you don't know it all. You don't know it all.

You're only in P1. And yet, when you enter the school of Christ, you're a disciple. You're a learner. And so when you come under the yoke of Jesus, when you submit your life to Jesus, when you surrender to Jesus, you listen to Jesus, you lean upon Jesus, you learn from Jesus, you become a learner, you become a disciple.

Every day is a school day. And you learn something new every day. And even as a Christian, you learn something new every day. You learn something about yourself, and you learn something about your wonderful Savior.

But what you also learn is to imitate and emulate the example of Jesus. You learn to follow in his footsteps. You learn from the character of Jesus, and the conduct of Jesus, and the conversations of Jesus.

[ 29 : 24 ] You learn about the care of Jesus. You learn about the compassion of Jesus. You learn all about the cross of Jesus, how Jesus was so selfless, and so sacrificial.

When you enter and enroll in the school of Christ, my friend, you know it's not a one-of lesson. It's a lifelong lesson. It's a lifetime of learning from Jesus, and also learning from one another.

And the amazing thing is, like that illustration of the older ox and the younger ox that were yoked together, we're to see, and you know we can't miss this, because it's so important as a congregation, as a church family, that the older disciple, the older Christian, the elder Christian. You have a role and you have a responsibility towards the younger disciples in our congregation, because as an older Christian, you're to get alongside the younger Christian.

As an older disciple, you're to get alongside the younger disciple. You're to yoke yourself together. And the older disciple is to encourage and enable the younger disciple to grow in their faith.

[ 30 : 37 ] The older disciple is to teach and train and tutor the younger disciple. Can't all be left up to the minister, because the principle, the biblical principle and pattern of discipleship is that the older will lead, and the younger will learn, and both will walk together, side by side, following in the footsteps of Jesus.

And you know, my friend, what better school to be in than this school, the school of Christ?

Because in the classroom of the school of Christ this morning, the lesson plan for us from Jesus is very simple.

Listen to me. So I hope you're listening. Lean upon me. Start leaning upon him, my friend. And learn from me.

Learn from me, he says. Not from anyone else. Not by following in the footsteps of the world, but from me. Listen to me.

Lean upon me. Learn from me. My friend, Jesus is the best teacher. But is he your teacher? Is he your teacher?

[ 31 : 55 ] Well, may the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. Our Father in heaven, we give thanks for being able to sit under the teaching of Jesus and to know that what he has to say to us is always powerful, but it's also personal.

And we pray that we would hear his voice. We would truly listen to him. And that by listening to him, we would realize that we cannot lean upon anybody else, but upon him alone.

And Lord, help us then to learn from him, to follow in his footsteps, to be yoked with him, knowing that his yoke is easy and his burden is light. O Father, teach us, we pray, to be more like thy son.

Help us to disciple one another. Help us to learn from one another. Help us to build one another up and to bring glory to thy name. Encourage us then, we pray.

Bless us, we ask, for we ask it in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen. Amen. We're going to bring our service to a conclusion by singing the words of Psalm 119.

[ 33 : 11 ] Psalm 119. It's on page 400 in the Scottish Psalter. Psalm 119. We're singing from verse 9 down to the verse Mark 12.

As you know, Psalm 119, it's the longest psalm in the Bible. A psalm that emphasizes the importance of God's word in our life. And you cannot stress that enough.

There are so many voices, and yet this is the one true voice that's able to speak into our life. And how do we learn? That's what the psalmist asks. How do we learn?

By what means, he says in verse 9, by what means shall a young man learn his way to purify?

What does he say? If he, according to thy word, thereto attentive be.

So if he gives attention to God's word in his life. Unfeignedly thee have I sought with all my soul and heart. O let me not from the right path of thy commands depart.

[ 34 : 21 ] Thy word I in my heart have hid, that I offend not thee. O Lord, thou ever blessed art. Thy statutes teach thou me. So we'll sing these verses of Psalm 119.

And we'll stand to sing, if you're able, to God's praise. Amen. By what means shall a young man learn this way to purify?

other day of pain. is by his being.

Other day of pain. Heal, thou my soul, with all my soul and heart.

O let me know from the right path, all thy love must depart.

[ 35 : 52 ] Thy word die in my heart, thou can't, but I know there not be.

O Lord, thou ever blessed are, thy sound to thee, thou me.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forevermore. Amen. Amen.