

Walking with Jesus

August 28th, 2016

As we inch up to the end of the summer, I'd like to **throw a question out at you** that I hope **we'll all process a bit over the next few weeks** as we head into the Fall.

- It's an important question, because how we answer it will inevitably impact the way we live out our day-to-day lives.
- So, here it is... **What do you think it means to trust Jesus?**
- **When you think about trusting Jesus**, what is it that comes to your mind?

Now, when you heard me ask that question, maybe **you looked inward a bit...** asking yourself whether you feel you've been trusting Him or not.

- Others of you may have heard the question and **started to think about what it really means to trust Jesus**;
- While some **others may be thinking about the impact of trusting Him**... like walking in deeper friendship & intimacy with Him.

But as we unpack *what the Bible says* about this, my hope is that we'd leave here this morning with an understanding of "trusting Jesus" **that's at least a little deeper** than when we got here.

So, what does it mean to trust Jesus? Well, we'll unpack that more as we go on,

- But, in a way, what it means to trust Jesus is to **buy into the reality that *He is right*...** that **all that He's taught** us is right...
- Eternal things like *heaven & salvation & prayer*;
- As well as everyday things like money, anger, sex, worry, fear, work, generosity, & relationships.

While sitting with a pastor friend of mine at Starbucks last week, we started talking about our "younger days" as Christians, back in college.

- One of the things I was telling him about was **what me and some of my friends called** "Kill the Giants" week,
- where we'd have a contest to see who could share with the most people in one week.

- As ridiculous as it sounds (and was), we could get really competitive about this!!

One time, a friend and I found a funeral home willing to lend us an old, but unused casket.

- We then put mirrors inside the casket and left it open in front of the student center **so when people walked by and looked into the casket**, they'd see themselves!
- After which, we'd ask them that classic question... "*What if you were to die tonight?*"
- And, believe it or not, that would lead into some amazing conversations!

But, as I got a little older I discovered another question that, at least for me, was just as relevant as "*What if you were to die tonight?*"

- And that is, "*What if you don't die tonight?*" I mean... what if you wake up tomorrow and you are **still alive**?
- How are you going to live? **Who are you going to trust?** Who are you going to follow?

You see, we talk a lot about embracing Jesus as our *personal Savior*, which is right and good.

- But the question I want to focus on this morning is, "*Have you made Jesus your personal teacher?*"
- Have you chosen to trust him **not simply for the future...** but for your **life today...** for your *relationships*, your *careers*, and your *finances*?
- Have you chosen to trust him as your personal teacher... your rabbi... as you walk out your day-to-day life?

Now keep in mind that back in Jesus' day, a **rabbi's job** was to basically help people **understand** and **live out** what was written in the Torah.

- And so, as you can imagine, that made them some of the most honored and important people in Jewish society...
- because they helped people **not only interpret the Torah...** but helped them **understand what God was calling them to do and be.**

Now keep in mind that back in Jesus' day, **rabbis were not only scholars** who devoted their lives to the study of the Torah,

- but **spiritual advisors of sorts** who would help those who followed them to **understand all that God was calling them to do and be**.
- And so, as you can imagine, that made them some of the most honored & important people in Jewish society...
- because they helped people **not only interpret the Torah...** but helped them **understand how "live out" the Torah** in their everyday lives.

And so, as a first century Jewish man or woman, **you'd know, for example, that the Torah says** you shouldn't work on the Sabbath.

- And yet, how do you know what counts as work? **Is working outside in your garden** considered work even though it relaxes you?
- Is it work to take a long walk in the countryside?

Well, what you'd do in a case like that would be to ask your rabbi. **But not all rabbis had the same interpretation.**

- One might say that you can walk as long as you want **as long as it's not for business**.
- Another might say that it is ok **as long as it restores you** rather than frustrates you.

You see, every rabbi would have a different set of teachings, a particular perspective on the Torah,

- which defined **what things they approved of** and **what things they didn't**.
- And, this "perspective"... this *set of teachings* each rabbi had... was known as a rabbi's **yoke**.

And so, if you followed a rabbi (which any religious person would have),

- it was said that you were **taking up your rabbi's yoke**—taking up that rabbi's teachings and his way of life.
- You would do this because you **not only trusted him...** but because you thought that his teachings would help you be the

man or woman God wanted you to be. Now...

Normally, the way that a rabbi taught was to **cite precedence** of how other great rabbis before him had interpreted the Torah...

- So, if you went to your rabbi, he might say that **Rabbi Hillel** taught this interpretation of a command, but **Rabbi Shami** taught that interpretation.
- But every once in a while, a rabbi would come along who would teach **a new way of understanding** the Torah, who would teach **a new yoke!**

Now keep in mind that this would be no small thing. In fact, **in such a traditional society** like that, it rarely happened...

- Because in order to offer a new interpretation of the Torah, **you'd essentially be saying** that the most respected rabbis of the past were all wrong.
- And so, obviously, the **only way to pull that off** would be to have a lot of respect and authority behind you.
- And the Hebrew word for this authority was the word **shmekha**.

Can you say that word out loud? Shmekha! *(If you've spit on the person in front of you, then you probably pronounced it correctly)*

- But again... in your entire life you might not ever *hear* about a rabbi... let alone *meet* a rabbi who had this kind of **shmekha**;
- Who claimed to have a **clearer understanding of the Law** and the Torah than the great rabbis before him.

Truth is... everything we believe, everything the Bible teaches, **centers around a rabbi like this...**

- a rabbi whose teaching lead those around him either to deafening silence... or to all out revolt.
- People were literally stunned as this man from Nazareth began teaching... teaching like no one they had ever seen or heard of before.

In fact, Jesus would often begin his teachings saying, **"You've heard it said, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, but I say to you..."** (Matthew 5:38-39)

- You see, rabbis didn't say that kind of thing unless they had what? **Shmekha!**

*"You have heard it said, love your neighbor hate your enemy... **but, I say to you, love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you...**"*
(Matthew 5:43)

*"You have heard the commandment that says, 'You must not commit adultery.' **But I say to you, anyone who even looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.**"* (Matthew 5: 27)

You have heard it said... **but I say to you!** You see, *now that* is some serious Shmekha!

- As Jesus is offering his Sermon on the Mount, for example, what He's doing is laying out a **new yoke...**
- and when he's done... were told that **"the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority (Shmekha), and not as their teachers of the law"** (Matthew 7:28-29).

Now keep in mind, when Matthew says, *"he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law,"*

- he wasn't necessarily being critical of the teachers of the law.
- In fact, the rabbis were just doing what they understood their role to be... to cite precedence.
- It's a little like in our day with the process of finding **justices** to serve on the **Supreme Court**.

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- When George W. Bush nominated *Samuel Alito* and *John Roberts* as Justices to the Supreme Court...
- Or when President Obama nominated Sonia Sotomayor and Elena Kagan, they all had to sit through grueling hearings.

And as they were getting grilled through those long Senate hearings, **what was expected was** that they cite precedence from all kinds of previous cases.

- **That was what was expected of them.** You see, we don't expect one of these nominees to say,
- *"You know, the Constitution says there should be freedom of speech, but I say to you that sounds like a bad idea. I think there are some people we ought to put a muzzle on just b/c we don't like what they say."*

So obviously, Jesus seemed to have something the teachers of the law didn't seem to have... and what was that? Yes... **Shmekha!**

- In **Luke 4:32** we read, *"The people were amazed at his teaching, for He spoke with authority."*
- They were so amazed that, in **Mark 1:27**, they asked each other, *"What is this? A new teaching, a new yoke—and with authority!"* Shmekha!

And let me tell you... when you find a rabbi with authority like that you're left with only question. ***Will I trust him? Will I do what he says?***

Did you ever have a teacher that really had authority in your life? I remember my wrestling coach from back in junior high school.

- Yes... I wrestled in 9th and 10th grades... and it was terrible. **Actually, it was me that was terrible!**
- I've told you before but, to this day, **I can tell you what the ceiling looks like** in every gym in the county I lived in... b/c I got pinned in every gym in Bergen County, NJ.

I remember several people trying to encourage me... telling me that it was building character. Are you kidding me?

- But that wrestling coach... he had authority! When he told you to do something... you just did it.
- And if you felt a bit defiant... you'd find yourself doing a few hundred stand-ups and pushups!

I remember him showing me a new move to get a guy down to the mat... but I just wasn't aggressive enough to **aim** for my opponent where he wanted me to aim.

- So, after a few failed attempts, he walked up to me and said, ***"No... do it this way!"***

- And all I can say... is that I was speaking about **three octaves higher** for the rest of that week!
- The guy had a good dose of *shmekha*! And yet after a few years with this guy... I decided to end what might just be the worst wrestling career in history!

But Jesus was obviously different from that coach of mine. **Taking on Jesus' yoke** was **unlike anything** anyone had ever seen before.

- But again, when a rabbi with real *shmekha* comes along, the obvious question in people's minds would be,
- *"how do we know this rabbi is teaching the truth? How do we know he is not crazy?"*
- *"I mean, this guy seems to be challenging what some of the greatest rabbis in our history has said. How do we know we can trust his authority?"*

So, as kind of a **protective device** built into the Jewish religious system, **two rabbis**, who had the respect of the people & other rabbis, would have to **validate** his ministry.

- And **they would do this by placing their hands** on this rabbi, which would **acknowledge their recognition of his shmekha**.
- So, was **Jesus' authority validated?**

Well, one day as He was teaching the people in the temple courts, the **chief priests** and the **teachers** of the law, together with the **elders**,

- came up to Jesus and said, in **Luke 20:1-3, "Tell us by what authority you are doing these things."**
- In other words, by asking Jesus by what authority he was doing these things, they were really asking, **"Who validated this ministry of yours... who gave you this authority?"**

Jesus replied, **"I will also ask you a question. Tell me, John's baptism—was it from heaven, or from men?"**

- Now why would Jesus, almost out of nowhere, bring up John the Baptist?
- You see, John the Baptist was clearly understood to have been bona fide prophet... sent by God.
- There was no way the religious leaders would disrespect John the

baptist... especially in public like that.

- And so, as soon as they recognized John's authority as coming from heaven, Jesus had them in a corner...

Remember... they wanted to know... "*Who gave Jesus this authority, this shmekha? Who validated His ministry?*"

- Well **Jesus got them to answer their own question...** because everyone knew that this bona fide prophet of God...
- **not only baptized Jesus** but gave him an **endorsement** probably no other man had ever received.

To all those around him, he said, "***Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This one who is coming after me is greater than I***" (John 1:29).

- You see, what John's doing? He is validating the ministry of Jesus. "*Here comes one with shmekha, with authority.*"
- He said, "*This one who is coming after me, I am not worthy to loosen His sandals*" (Luke 3:16).

But **that's only one source** of validation for Jesus' authority. Do you remember who else validated Jesus' authority?

- After Jesus was baptized, do you remember who spoke next? God.
- We read in **Matthew 3:17** that a voice from heaven said, "***This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.***"

Then, in **Matthew 17:5**, after Jesus was on the Mount of Transfiguration, a voice comes from heaven and says:

- "*This is My Son, with whom I am well pleased. Listen to Him.*"
- You see, Jesus is validated **not only by the last of the Old Testament prophets**, John the Baptist...
- **But by God Himself!** Now, call me crazy... but that's some serious **Shmekha!**

And yet, even the most sincere amongst the religious leaders remained suspect. I mean let's be real...

- Jesus was a long way from fitting the mold of someone with this kind of authority.

- **For one thing**, He didn't come with the right credentials. In **John 7**, Jesus went up to the temple and began to teach.
- The leaders were amazed saying "***How does this Man have such learning when He has never been taught?***" (John 7: 14-15)
- Now, what do they mean by that, that He has never been taught?

Well, in that day, there was a clear system in Israel whereby rabbis were formed and shaped and educated.

- The Apostle Paul came up in that system. Paul himself tells us how he sat at *the feet of Gamaliel*... one of the great rabbis & scholars of the ancient world.
- Well... Jesus didn't have a diploma like Paul did. He didn't have those credentials.

But not only did Jesus lack the right credentials... He also **didn't come from the right place.**

- He didn't come from a very dignified part of Israel... certainly not any kind of center of education.
- Did you ever notice that, **after Peter denies Jesus three times**, those standing near him went up to him and said, "*Surely you are one of them. Your accent gives you away.*"
- Then, a little later, other bystanders came up to Peter and said, "*Surely you are one of them, for even the way you talk gives you away.*" (Matthew 26:73)

You see, they're in Jerusalem... but **Peter and the disciples of Jesus are from Galilee.** And people from Galilee spoke with an accent.

- In fact, we know historically that the Galilean accent was considered so unappealing that someone from Galilee was **not allowed to pronounce the benediction** at the end of a service in a synagogue.
- In a way, Jesus spoke with an accent that may, for us today, sound a bit "hill-billyish"

And so, Jesus came from the **wrong family** (known to have been born out of wedlock), had the **wrong accent**, and had **no credentials.**

- And yet, **when Jesus spoke**... it took their breath away. So much so that even the leaders were saying, in John 7:14-15...

- *“How does this Man have such learning when He has never been taught?”*

His teachings were so powerful that thousands of people would gather together to hear Him.

- In fact, at one time, **there were so many people** who came to hear him that He had to teach from a boat...
- because there was **no other way for Him to be visible & audible** to everybody.

One time He was in a house and **it was so crowded they actually tore down part of the roof** so that they could lower people down in order to be closer to Him.

- One of **chief tax collectors in Jerusalem** was so desperate to see him that he threw away all dignity and climbed a tree... just to get a better view.

His teaching was so powerful that when the Chief Priests and Scribes heard about Him...

- about some of the claims Jesus had made, **they kept looking for a way to kill Him...**
- They wanted to kill Him because, we know from **Mark 11:18**, that it was clear *to them* just how taken the crowds were *with Him...*
- how **blown away people were** to finally, in their lives, meet a teacher with that kind of authority.

You see, guys... that's the One... that's the Rabbi... we follow. And now Jesus comes to us as he did in **Matthew 11**, and says what he said to them 2000 years earlier...

- ***“Come to Me all of you who are weary—you who are heavy laden—and take My yoke upon you.”***
- Believe me... there wasn't a person there that day who didn't know exactly what Jesus was saying...
- ***“take My yoke... take My way and learn from Me, trust Me, become one of My disciples.”***

Listen... everybody has a manner in which they live their life; Everyone

is guided by something or someone whom they've given authority to.

- So, the question for us, just as it was to them 2000 years ago, is... *Will you trust Him? Will you follow Him? Will you take up the rabbi's yoke?*
- But remember that back then, **what you couldn't do** was to choose a number of rabbis.

You couldn't follow one rabbi b/c you **agree with him in one area...** but choose another rabbi because you prefer his ideas in another area.

- In other words, **to follow a rabbi...** to take on his yoke... was to trust him... to trust that he is right;
- **Not in one area...** but in every area of life... whether you're talking about eternity or about how to act at work.

When Jesus asked Peter to follow Him, to take up His yoke... Peter knew what that meant.

- **Jesus was asking Peter to trust him with everything...** his family, his future... everything.
- Honestly, what if Peter would have said to Jesus... *"Well, I'll trust you for the eternal salvation thing... but other than that, I've got a job, a mortgage, and a golf game to win... so I'll just take a pass on loving those around me."*
- **How do you think that would go?**

Can you imagine anybody saying that to Jesus? Have you ever said anything like that to Jesus?

- Did Jesus ever offer that kind of invitation? Of course not!
- What He offers is **His yoke...** leaving it up to us to **accept it & live by it...** Not some of it, but all of it in our lives.
- And yet, **there are two sides of taking on the yoke of Jesus.**

In **Matthew 11:28**, Jesus said, *"Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light."*

Now, you know that a "yoke" is a kind of harness that connects a pair of

oxen. And so what Jesus is promising here is that you'll never be alone again.

- You see, **yokes are made for two, not one**. By wearing his yoke, we can walk through life with the most incredible man in history... **we can walk hand-in-hand through life with God!**
- And yet, if you've ever suffered in life, if you've ever struggled in your faith, you may have asked yourself whether His yoke really is easy to bear.

But keep in mind that Jesus is talking to people who have been **beaten down & burdened** because, in their weaknesses,

- they felt like they could **never walk with God**... that they were **never good enough** for God.
- They were beaten down b/c **the yoke of their religious leaders** weighed them down till they felt completely unloved by God.

Look at how Jesus describes these leaders in **Matthew 23:4,13**. He says, *"⁴They crush people with impossible religious demands and never lift a finger to ease the burden... ¹³What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you shut the door of the Kingdom of Heaven in people's faces..."*

And so Jesus looks to those who have become **so beaten down by the heavy yokes of their leaders**...

- And He says... *"Take My yoke because My yoke isn't about following the letter of the law. It's about walking in relationship & intimacy with Me."*
- So, maybe you've been **feeling the yoke of the world**, which says that your value is based on **your looks** or your **salary** or your **waste size** or the **kind of car you drive**.

You know, **the world values things based on how much they're worth**... and, how much something is worth is based on how much you'll pay for it.

- If you would trade in the world's yoke for Jesus'... than you could walk hand-in-hand through life...
- with Someone who has already demonstrated your worth by paying the ultimate price of His own life so you could **walk**

forever, together in intimacy.

And so, whatever yoke **you have been carrying around**; maybe it's a yoke of sin or guilt, of fear or greed or ambition or worry,

- **just trade in your yoke for Jesus' yoke...**
- Because, there really is a sense in which Jesus' yoke is easy and it's burden is life.
- By taking on Jesus's yoke, **you'll never be alone again...** And **you'll always have His complete, unconditional love.**

And yet, of course, there's clearly another sense in which His yoke is anything but easy.

- **In Luke 9:23, Jesus says... "If anyone would come after me... he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."**
- You see, while Jesus' disciples understood His yoke to be light... they also understood that they were being called to trust Him...
- Not with a part of their lives, but with all of their heart, mind, soul, and strength.

It's why **Dietrich Bonhoeffer** wrote, "*When Christ bids you come, He bids you come and die.*"

- The disciples knew that following Jesus... taking on His yoke... would not always lead them down the easiest path.
- But they also knew that, without any safety nets... without any "plan-B," they could trust Him no matter what.

And, Jesus is asking the same of us... to trust Him... to take on His yoke.

- So, the question is this: Will we put our trust in Him... not only for the eternal things like salvation...
- but with everyday things like our singleness, our marriages, our finances, our struggles, our time?

To accept Jesus is to accept His yoke... to trust Him... that He is right... that His intentions are right...

- By taking His yoke, we're agreeing to embrace Jesus not only as our **Savior...** but as our **Teacher...** our Rabbi!

- Have you done that? Have you taken on the yoke of Jesus... have you made the choice to walk in the way of your Rabbi?
 - As we step out of one season into another, are you willing to begin a whole new adventure of walking together in His yoke?
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Ministry Time

- Remember, a yoke is designed for two. There will always be tension if one wants to go another way!
- To walk with Jesus is to surrender to His direction.