

[Finding Our Rhythm](#)

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Read [Matthew 11:25-30](#)



Our reading today is one of the most beautiful and comforting encouragements found within all literature, let alone the Bible. But we can only begin to understand its real depths and richness within its proper context.

Jesus is talking to... who? Actually, it's not clear in the text who makes up his audience at this particular point. We are in the midst of a number of sayings and events in Jesus' life that are in some ways disconnected from the main thrust of the narrative; an ad-break in the middle of the drama, as it were. Matthew, in chronicling Jesus' ministry, is doing a bit of mopping up, taking the opportunity to tie up some loose threads.

We've moved on from the drama of a multitude of miraculous healings and Jesus sending his followers out to have a go themselves. While they are away (we don't hear of their return, but we assume that they report back in a similar fashion to Luke's account of a similar event), Matthew presents these mini-episodes as we bide our time with Jesus.

Jesus spends some of his time with John's disciples, reflecting on his relative's ministry that has been curtailed by prison. He then takes a kind of "spiritual audit" of the impact that his work has had thus far. This takes the form of a damning indictment pronounced on the cities that he's visited. Sadly, they're found wanting, with no signs of spiritual renewal, of Nineveh-style mass repentances. Woe upon woe is heaped on these cities.

We now turn to the reading for this morning. Against this backdrop of reflection and review, Jesus raises his voice to heaven before addressing some unknown audience. Instead of bad news though, Jesus is in full encouragement mode. Not only does he express his gratitude for those who have received the fullness of the Father's message through him, but then he gives voice to words that continue to resonate today, words of comfort and solace.

In one sense, the answer to the question of *who* Jesus is speaking to is in *what* he says. If you count yourself as one who feels weighed down by a burden of care, worry, work, stress, or anything else that occupies your waking and interrupts your sleeping, join the audience around Jesus' feet. This is for you.

This may be deliberate on Matthew's part; in not specifying an audience for Jesus, or a setting, he may want to encourage any of his contemporary readers to include themselves as Jesus' audience. We get clues that Matthew wants to include his audience at other times (the false report by the sentries at the tomb still being believed during his time being another case in point – Matthew 28:15). But we're also allowed into this scene. If this is Matthew encouraging his audience to place themselves in the story attending to Jesus' words, then welcome in! Join me in the presence of the one who speaks directly into today from the ancient text.

So, what is Jesus saying to us who are feeling the strain of life? Firstly, he invites us in. "Come," he says. This is a welcome that requires no ceremony, no seeking permission, just a willingness to attend. We might point at ourselves and say "Who, me?" astonished that the Saviour of the World includes us, but yes, he does. With all the baggage that we drag behind us: our worries about family that we haven't seen for weeks, fears for our future employment, our children, grandchildren, the lovely old lady down the street who has just been rushed into hospital – everyone and everything.

Come, sit at the feet of the King in his throne room of ordinariness.

Be still in the presence of the Lord, the holy one is listening.

Rest a while with the one who hears as you pour out your worries, your concerns and all that you carry with you.

Let's face it, it wasn't as if Jesus wasn't burdened by his own worries. He had just been having a pop at the unresponsive cities that he seemingly wasted his time in. What's the point in going to these places if they reject the Good News? And yet he went because there was a need there. Each person whose life he touched, whose ailment he healed, whose life was transformed, was worth his visit. Even if the rest of the city didn't get it, didn't understand and certainly didn't make the redemptive steps that they should in response.

That's Jesus' burden that he carried and that he still carries.

So, what is Jesus saying here? Is he saying that his burden is any less than yours? Is he saying that our problems are greater than his, so that by off-loading them onto him we get an easier ride in exchange?

I would think that's unlikely as Jesus is weighed down by the burden of all the sins of the world. His burden is for yesterday, today and tomorrow. And yet at other points he tells us not to worry about tomorrow, or indeed many of the things that weigh us down (Matthew 6:25-34).

Jesus is encouraging us that our burden isn't borne alone. If we understand Jesus' "yoke" from its use in the world of agriculture, then we see this more clearly. The yoke, laid across the shoulders of beasts of burden such as oxen, enables ploughs to be pulled across difficult ground by working together. Only by sharing the effort will the work be achieved.

So, what Jesus *isn't* saying is that we get off scot-free. There's no "Get out of jail free" card to be played here. But neither are we abandoned to our fate. Rather, Jesus is saying that with him we have a better chance of coping with the burdens of the day.

In the words of the Message paraphrase, Jesus encourages us to "learn the unforced rhythms of grace". This beautifully poetic rendering by Eugene Peterson adds a level of simple complexity to Jesus' invitation. Grace is freely offered to all who would receive it, not in exchange for our cares and concerns, but as a means by which those same cares and concerns can be borne. The rhythm that Jesus is setting is one that will sustain us as we bear the burdens of life together.

Returning to our picture of agricultural graft, the oxen are in step as they team up under the weight of the yoke to plough the field. The rhythm of their plodding across the ground keeps them working together. Even when one of them hits particularly uneven ground, or a deeper ditch that needs traversing, they know that they will get back to their rhythm again. One of the oxen may need to take more of the load for a short time while the other one sorts itself out, but the yoke keeps them together.

Jesus graciously volunteers himself to help bear our burden by inviting us to share his. His burden of compassion for the world that still turns its back on him, his burden of grace that is still offered in spite of rejection. The global burdens that he shares with us as we share our personal burdens with him. There are no pain-free answers to either, except to understand that we continue together. Could that be the rhythm by which we walk through our current crisis?

Amen.

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