

Rest: Life in the Easy Yoke of Jesus!
Part 1 of an 8-part Teaching on Matthew 11:28-30

Message #1: “You are invited!”

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The rest Jesus offers you is for your whole being—all of you, every day, in every season of life, in any job you are doing, in whatever relational status you are experiencing! For this is why you were redeemed—to shine the light of Christ by bearing God’s image in a fallen creation!

Jesus is inviting you... **“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.”** Next week, we will continue by looking at rest of verse 28.

As we continue to dig into Jesus’ invitations of “Come to Me” and “Follow Me”, we learn that Jesus is drawing from the heritage of Israel’s faith and covenant promises.

The very first usage of “come to Me” is in Genesis 18:21 when God describes how the prayers of His people come to Him: “And the LORD said, “The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is indeed great, and their sin is exceedingly grave. I will go down now, and see if they have done entirely according to its outcry, which has come to Me; and if not, I will know.”¹

Again in Exodus 3:9, the emphasis again is upon the LORD hearing from His people (the cries of our suffering go to God), “Now, behold, the cry of the sons of Israel has come to Me; furthermore, I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians are oppressing them.”²

In 1 Samuel 9:16, God is talking to the prophet Samuel about providing a king for Israel, “For I have regarded My people, because their cry has come to Me.”³

God hears the prayers and the cries of His people and God responds. God keeps His promises to provide for His people according to His covenant faithfulness. Listen to the covenant implications of the Old Testament usage in Isaiah 55:3, “Incline your ear and come to Me. Listen, that you may live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, *according to* the faithful mercies shown to David.”⁴ The connection would not have been lost on Jesus’ Jewish audience to which He was speaking and to which Matthew is writing his gospel.

One more time, let’s go a step deeper by looking at how the Greek word δεῖτε was used in the Greek translation of the OT, called the Septuagint, which was where Matthew took his OT

1 Ibid., Ge 18:20–21.

2 Ibid., Ex 3:9.

3 Ibid., 1 Sa 9:16.

4 Ibid., Is 55:3.

quotes. Even more significantly, this Greek word is the translation of the profound Hebrew word הלך (*hālakh*) in the Hebrew text of OT.⁵

הלך (δεῦτε) is used in Isaiah 1:18-20, “‘**Come** now, and let us reason together,’ Says the LORD, ‘Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool. If you consent and obey, you will eat the best of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword. Truly, the mouth of the LORD has spoken.’”⁶

And twice in this significant passage from Isaiah 2:1-5, “The word which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. Now it will come about that in the last days the mountain of the house of the LORD will be established as the chief of the mountains, and will be raised above the hills; and all the nations will stream to it. And many peoples will come and say, ‘**Come**, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that He may teach us concerning His ways and that we may walk in His paths.’ For the law will go forth from Zion and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And He will judge between the nations, and will render decisions for many peoples; and they will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, and never again will they learn war. **Come**, house of Jacob, and let us walk in the light of the LORD.”⁷

The implications on Jesus’ word selection of “Come to Me” has profound implications. He not only directly (by word choice that is unmistakable to the original audience) aligns His general invitation of Matthew 11:28-30 with His more specific call of discipleship (“Follow Me”), but He also connects these to the ancients promises of Yahweh’s redeemed rule over all nations and the Messiah’s eternal reign over all of God’s creation.⁸

Jesus is inviting humanity to return to our original call of the divine work as God’s Image-Bearers. In this easy yoke, we find rest for our souls.

⁵ See additional word study resources at the ends of this study on this Hebrew word. A connection will be made with Jesus’ quotation of Jeremiah 6:16 in Matthew 11:29 in a future sermon.

⁶ Ibid., Is 1:18–20.

⁷ Ibid., Is 2:1–5.

⁸ Jesus proclaimed in Mark 1:15, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” Much more on this in future sermons.

Word Study Information

This understanding implies the metaphorical use of *hālakh*, in which the spatial element recedes into the background, albeit not its dynamic, purposeful character. The goals may be different; what they have in common is that they are reached by certain ways, i.e., by certain courses, while certain criteria are taken into account.

When Moses is to show the judges the way in which they must walk and the works they must do (Ex. 18:20), we are dealing with instructions about what they are to do and how they are to do it. In both cases, which are clearly set in parallel, we are dealing with the actions of the judges. When someone “goes,” when he undertakes something, when he acts, he follows certain criteria. In his choice of these criteria he can go astray—therefore the warning to Israel not to follow the customs of the Egyptians and Canaanites, not to act according to them (Lev. 18:3; 20:23; cf. Isa. 8:11; 57:17; Jer. 23:17; Ezk. 13:3; 16:47; 20:18; Mic. 6:16; Ps. 1:1; Job 31:5, 7; Prov. 6:12; etc.). When someone “goes” he undertakes something (Gen. 28:15; Josh. 1:7, 9; Jgs. 18:5; 2 S. 7:9; 8:6, 14; etc.), he has a purpose (Dt. 10:11; 17:3; Josh. 23:16; Jgs. 8:1; etc.). His going has a goal. Viewed in this light, all human life is a journey (1 S. 12:2), including the life of the sojourner who lives or dwells in the midst of Israel (Josh. 8:35).

The dynamic aspect of *hālakh* appears clearly in the metaphorical meaning “grow, increase, progress” (Gen. 26:13; Ex. 19:19; Jgs. 4:24; 1 S. 2:26; 14:16, 19; 19:23; 2 S. 3:1; 5:10; 15:12; Jonah 1:11, 13; Est. 9:4; Prov. 4:18). All human undertakings finally come to an end when a man departs, when he dies (Gen. 15:2; 25:32; Hos. 6:4; 13:3; Ps. 39:7[6], 14[13]; 58:9[8]; 109:23; Eccl. 3:20; Job 7:9; etc.), when he goes the way of all the earth (Josh. 23:14; 1 K. 2:2). Here we are dealing not with “an euphemistic substitute for dying,” but with the representation of human life as a journey.⁹

Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic history have a propensity for using the general term “way” (→ דֶּרֶךְ *derekh*) in a theological sense. It is in these circles, most likely, that we should localize the theological use of *hālakh*, which takes the ways of Yahweh as his commandments and the walking of men in these ways as life according to these commandments. This interpretation is taken up by P, who expresses walking before Yahweh as an imperative (Gen. 17:1) and interprets Noah’s walking with God (6:9) as referring to his ethical and religious integrity. This is in line with the use of the expression “walking in the ordinances of Yahweh” in preaching, probably levitical.

Another tradition, represented initially by J and E, understands “walking before Yahweh” as the experience of God’s benevolent presence (Gen. 24:40 [J]; 48:15 [E]; cf. Ps. 56:14[13]; 116:9). Both interpretations meet in the description of a happy human life exclusively in the presence of God. Both share the view of human life as a journey, a heritage from the days “when Israel was a child” (Hos. 11:1).¹⁰

⁹ F. J. Helfmeyer, “הֲלַךְ and הֲלִיכָה,” ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. David E. Green, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), 391–392.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 403.

From the human standpoint, obedient following after Yahweh corresponds to God's movement toward his people to accompany them and guide them (cf. F. J. Helfmeyer, *Die Nachfolge Gottes im AT* [1967]). The expression *hlk 'ah^arê* "to follow after" is immediately and fully comprehensible to Israelites conversant with nomadic life and can consequently be used to describe the totality of the communal and individual life-style. But only a few passages, chiefly in Dtr texts, refer to following after Yahweh (Deut 13:5; 1 Kgs 14:8; 2 Kgs 23:3 = 2 Chron 34:31; also Jer 2:2 in the picture of bridal courtship; Hos 11:10; cf. also 1 Kgs 19:20f. "to follow after a prophet"; on synonymous expressions, cf. Helfmeyer, op. cit. 93–122). More often, this behavior refers to apostasy, and thereby to following after strange gods (Baal, etc.: Deut 4:3; 6:14; 8:19; 11:28; 13:3; 28:14; Judg 2:12, 19; 1 Kgs 11:5, 10; 18:18; 21:26; 2 Kgs 13:2; 17:15 = Jer 2:5; Jer 2:8, 23, 25; 7:6, 9; 8:2; 9:13; 11:10; 13:10; 16:11; 25:6; 35:15; Ezek 20:16; cf. N. Lohfink, *Das Hauptgebot* [1963], 76f.) and some illusions and delusions (Jer 3:17; 16:12; 18:12; Ezek 13:3; 33:31). The act of following after other gods always includes apostasy from Yahweh too, as 1 Kgs 9:6; 18:21; and Jer 5:23 clearly express.¹¹

At any rate, it is noteworthy that the pious Israelite's attitude toward Yahweh is primarily oriented to keeping Yahweh's commandments. A multitude of expressions are available to the OT for describing this posture, expressions that also sometimes speak of going in the ways (→ *derek*), in the commandments and instructions of Yahweh, etc. (so too Helfmeyer, op. cit.). One should remember that apostasy and walking in the ways of strange gods can be discussed together because, at least for the Israelites, Yahweh's ways were clearly prescribed by the revealed commandments, while apostasy is characterized by the negation of these very commandments. Now, although during the wilderness wanderings and the conquest the notion of following after the divine Lord was more prominent, this idea was replaced in the period of settlement by the knowledge that Yahweh dwells in the midst of his people. Any apostasy was, then, estrangement from Yahweh and synonymous with following after strange gods. Thus life *with* Yahweh can be described with *hlk* alone (without *'ah^arê*) in conjunction with words like *š^edāqôt* (Isa 33:15 "in righteousness"), *hašnēa'* (Mic 6:8 "humbly"), or *tāmîm* (Psa 15:2 "blamelessly"). The hitp. particularly expresses this relationship. The pious walks "with God" (thus P: Gen 5:22, 24; 6:9) or "before" him, i.e., face-to-face with him and in responsibility to him (Gen 17:1; 24:40; 48:15; 1 Sam 2:30; 2 Kgs 20:3 = Isa 38:3; Psa 26:3; 56:14; 101:2; 116:9; Prov 6:22; 20:7; in the qal also 1 Kgs 2:4; 3:6; 8:23, 25 [bis]; 9:4).¹²

11 Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 369.

12 Ibid., 370.