

## Sermon for January 7, 2024 - Leah's Confirmation

Matthew 11:28-30 (NIV84)

Theme: **Come and take what Jesus offers you:**

- 1) Rest for your soul.
- 2) A yoke that is light.

*<sup>28</sup> "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> 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. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."*

Leah, the verses you chose for your confirmation are beautiful. I pray that you keep them in mind so they guide you throughout your life. Why? Because they summarize Jesus' will for you: He wants your soul to be at peace and rest in him, regardless of the difficulties that come your way. He wants you to remain connected and learning from him as he rescues you from every evil work and brings you safely to his heavenly kingdom.<sup>i</sup>

And what Jesus wants for you, he desires for all. Therefore, with Leah's confirmation verses as our guide, let us prayerfully meditate on Jesus' call under the theme: **Come and take what Jesus offers you:** 1) Rest for your soul. 2) A yoke that is light.

Part One: Rest for your soul.

Jesus says: <sup>28</sup> *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."*

What a beautiful invitation! Jesus doesn't just invite people of Jewish heritage, nor does he limit his call by age, sex, ethnicity, or intellectual or physical capability. No, Jesus invites all. Most importantly, he invites you.

But Jesus does have one qualifier: you need to be weary and burdened; that is to say, repentant – confessing how broken you are because of sin and in need of his forgiving love. You see, Jesus takes no pleasure in the self-righteous: those who don't recognize their sinfulness and need for his forgiveness. To that point, Jesus once told a parable about a Pharisee and a tax collector who visited the temple. The Pharisee bragged about how much better he was than others – pointing to everything he did for God. The tax collector beat his breast and prayed: "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." Jesus said the tax collector went home righteous before God, not the Pharisee. Why? Because the tax collector humbled himself before the LORD in repentant faith – confessing his need for mercy. The Pharisee, however, did not.<sup>ii</sup>

Jesus did not come to save the self-righteous but sinners. Sadly, many people would rather ignore or view their sins as self-solvable. That's why their problem of a broken relationship with God persists unresolved. They remain God's enemies – unable to receive the reconciliation and peace Jesus was born to bring.

Therefore, Leah, my prayer for you and all who hear this sermon is that the Holy Spirit keeps you conscious of your need for him - holding the mirror of his law before your eyes so you never think too highly of yourself. May he always lead you to heed Jesus' invitation to come to him - confessing your sins and trusting in his mercy to forgive. Don't be afraid to repentantly lay before Jesus all your feelings of guilt, shame, frustrations, worries, fears, and tears. Why? Because He promises to help and save you. He promises *I will give you rest.*

But what is the rest Jesus offers? Primarily, it is a restored relationship with God. Jesus paid for the guilt of all your sins - reconciling you to His Father through his perfect life, innocent death, and glorious resurrection. Not only that, but when the LORD baptized you, he washed away all your shame, sent the Holy Spirit to awaken faith in your heart, clothed you with Christ, and declared you his beloved child. How do I know that? Because God's Word says: <sup>26</sup> *You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus,* <sup>27</sup> *for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.*<sup>iii</sup>

The rest Jesus offers you in the Gospel is everlasting life with the LORD through the forgiveness of all your sins. And if we have that gift, then we have everything we need. How so? Because we can face all the other problems that arise in life - trusting that they *are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.*<sup>iv</sup> Not only that, but the LORD promises that absolutely nothing in all creation will be able to separate us from the love He has for us in Jesus.<sup>v</sup> I mean, if God *did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all-- how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?*<sup>vi</sup> Yes, because of Jesus, we can be sure the LORD will answer all our prayers – trusting that God works for our good in all things, just as he promised!<sup>vii</sup>

As you can see, Jesus offers us a fantastic rest, but how do we get it? Listen to him tell us:

Part Two: A yoke that is light.

<sup>29</sup> *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.*

A *yoke* is a wooden crosspiece used to help a person or animal carry a load. Yokes were also used to link a pair of oxen together so they could plow through rough terrain. With that picture in mind, understand that Jewish rabbis used the phrase “taking up a yoke” as a metaphor to refer to becoming a disciple. Therefore, when Jesus says, *take my yoke upon you and learn from me*, he invites you to be bound to him as his disciple – always learning from him.

And what is the first thing Jesus wants us to know about himself? That he is gentle and humble in heart. Don't misunderstand Jesus' words: he is not saying he is gullible or a pushover with no power. No, Jesus is the eternal Son of God to whom all authority has been given. He is perfectly righteous and terrifyingly powerful, and we should respect him as such.

At the same time, He is not like the pagan gods of the ancient world, who were nothing but self-serving and selfish. No, Jesus is self-sacrificing – not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to repent and know the truth.<sup>viii</sup> He is gentle and loving towards all, as the Bible says: *a smoldering wick he will not put out, until he leads justice to victory.*<sup>ix</sup>

Because Jesus is so gentle, you can find rest for your soul in him. How so? Because you can be sure that he will not turn you away as you come to him in repentance but will forgive you for his mercy's sake. He will listen and empathize with you because he understands the temptations, shame, and sorrow you feel - having experienced them all himself with one exception: he remained sinless. Moreover, he invites you to walk through life with him as his disciple. He says:

*<sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. "*

Remember how I said that a yoke often bound two animals together so they could carry a heavy burden? I imagine Jesus to mean this when I think about our text: Jesus gives us a yoke that binds us to him – our almighty, loving God. And because we are bound to him, he helps us through every difficulty that pops up in life – using his loving power to overcome and lead us through them.

But what is the yoke that binds us to him? It's the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. Through these means, the Holy Spirit brings us to Christ, and Christ comes to us. He instructs us with his law on how we can genuinely love him and others – bringing glory to his name. He comforts us with his Gospel – reassuring us of his forgiveness when we fall. He uses the sacrament of Holy Baptism to remind us of our true identity as his children when the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh try to confuse us. He uses Holy Communion to give us the very body and blood he used to save us – thereby reassuring us with his love and presence.

Yes, God's Word and Sacraments are the yoke that binds you to Christ, and what an easy yoke they are to take up. Sadly, your sinful flesh is always trying to prevent you from using these means of grace – making them seem like a burden. It tempts you with thoughts like, "Ugh, do I have to go to Church and sit through another boring service? I know this stuff already; can't I worship by myself at home? Do I need to go to a Bible class? They can be so long and repetitious. Do I need to read my Bible at home? It's so hard to understand."

Yes, your sinful flesh enjoys making the yoke that binds you to Jesus seem hard and heavy, but it's not. Don't listen to your sinful flesh. Instead, remembering that you only find true rest from life's real burdens in Jesus, joyfully take of Christ's yoke by constantly meditating on God's Word and using his Sacraments. Why? Because the more you learn from Jesus through these means of grace, the more you will understand Jesus' encouragement to take them up– finding rest and refreshment in him regardless of what the devil throws your way.

Therefore, Leah, my confirmation prayer for you is this: May the Holy Spirit ever move you to heed Jesus' invitation to come and take what He offers you through his Word and Sacraments: Rest for your soul and a light yoke that binds you to him as his dearly loved disciple. Amen

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<sup>i</sup> Cf. 2 Timothy 4:18

<sup>ii</sup> Cf. Luke 18:10-14

<sup>iii</sup> Galatians 3:26-27 NIV84

<sup>iv</sup> Roman 8:18 NIV84

<sup>v</sup> Cf. Roman 8:38-39

<sup>vi</sup> Roman 8:32 NIV84

<sup>vii</sup> Cf Romans 8:28

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viii Cf. 1 Timothy 2:4  
ix Matthew 12:20 EHV