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THE YOKE

We have been studying the Gospel of St. Matthew in our adult Bible class, and this past week we considered the familiar passage of the yoke. "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (11:29, 30). There are four things, at least, to be thought about in this passage: the Lord himself, the yoke, the learning, and the rest. Let us bring them to mind one at a time.

"Take my yoke..." Before any other consideration is the fact that it is Jesus who offers us his yoke. Whatever meaning it has is his and bears that which he alone intends. Within the context of the passage, Jesus claims something astonishing. He professes an exclusive and intimate knowledge: first that the Father knows him with a fullness beyond that of humankind, and then equally, that he knows the Father with a reciprocal knowledge that comprehends all things. The King James Version translates "no one" as "no man," but it must be understood that the emphasis is not on the reality of humanity but on the fact of individual personhood. When Jesus says that "no man knoweth the Son but the Father" he does not mean that the Father is a man - a human being. The Greek word, translated in the King James as

"no man" means "no one," and while masculine in gender, conveys only the meaning of a knowing individual, who is, in this case, a divine person, God the Father.

"All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him (Matthew 11:27, KJV).

All things, then, include all that the Father has delivered to the Son - being, life, wisdom, power, goodness - all that the Father is, so that their knowing each other is entirely equal. If Jesus did not receive all things from the Father he could not be the only-begotten Son. The divine life and wisdom and power and goodness would be too much for him, and therefore Jesus could not know him in the intimate and unique way that he is said to know him. But because Jesus as the Son of God has received all things from his Father, he can know him in all his divine attributes. And then, because the Son of God is also the Son of Man, Jesus can reveal God to men in a way they can believe.

This is why Jesus can say, in true humility as a man, "Come unto me

all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). He acts out of the infinite goodness of God which he has received from his Father. It is the Father’s will, his goodness and mercy and justice, that sends the Son into the world to save mankind.

And so the Son comes primarily out of his love for the Father, and then secondarily out of his love for us. This is how it must be if love, which God is, is to be the end of all things. Jesus leaves us the first and great commandment to love God and then our neighbor because he has experienced this above all in his own life.

Well I have said something of the first point I want to make, namely, that the yoke is the Lord’s and bears the meaning that only he can give it.

As we turn to the yoke then, understanding that it is the Lord’s, we can begin to think about the meaning of the yoke.

The context would have us see at the start that the yoke has to do with the fact that Jesus has received all things from his Father, and that he has issued the great invitation for mankind to come to him as the Father’s Son. And thus what we take on as we take his yoke is all that he gives to us.

And what does he give us? He reveals God and the nature of God. And this means that the yoke, as his yoke, includes knowledge and mercy, truth and love, the compassion of God and the life of God. The yoke then is not simply, as one commentator put it, the teaching of Christ replacing the Law of Moses. St. Paul says, wonderfully, that in the freedom of Christ we are no longer to be entangled with the law as with a yoke of bondage (Galatians 5:1). The point is that Christ gives more than mere knowledge. He gives the freedom of a new life. The yoke of Jesus is easy and his burden light. It is comfortable to wear and an easy load, because the yoke is the freedom of love.

In the final analysis, the guiding principle of Jesus is love. And as we take his yoke, and are yoked together with him, we find his mission in the will of his Father a pleasure to do. On yes, there is sacrifice involved, even a cross, but the will, and the stamina, and the perseverance all draw their resolve and energy from the end - which is love - which God is.

(To be continued)

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