

MATTHEW 11:25-30

HEAVY OR LIGHT

There's an old song, "He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother" written by Bobby Scott and Bob Russell, originally recorded by Kelly Gordon in 1969. The song became a worldwide hit for the Hollies later that year and also a hit for Neil Diamond in 1970. Yet, the saying goes back a lot longer than that.

In 1918 it has been recorded that a boy named Reuben Granger carried another boy, Howard Loomis, who had polio, up a set of stairs. When asked if it was difficult, Reuben replied to a priest, "He ain't heavy, Father, he's my brother"

Yet, even before that, in his 1884 book *"The Parables of Jesus"*, James Wells, Moderator of the United Free Church of Scotland tells the story of a little girl carrying a big baby boy. Seeing her struggling, someone asked if she wasn't tired. With surprise she replied: "No, he's not heavy; he's my brother."

The phrase "He ain't heavy, he's my brother" came to mind while contemplating this text. There are heavy burdens and light burdens in this text. It might be hard for you to see which are the heavy burdens, and which are the light burdens. It's truly hard for most people to judge accurately what is heavy and what is light in life. Jesus even says at the beginning of our reading that God His Father hides this discernment from wise people and reveals His truths to little children.

So, if you'd like to learn about God you must wonder, 'Who are the little children?'. And I assume, since you're here, that you do want to know about God. A chapter earlier Jesus referred to those who follow Him as "little ones" (10:42). Even after His resurrection Jesus referred to His disciples as children. So, if you follow Jesus then you're one of those little children whom Jesus is referring to here, revealing things to.

Here Jesus is speaking of worldly wisdom, which is hostile towards God's truth, which includes both Law and Gospel. Those who cling to worldly wisdom, and judge all things on the basis of such wisdom, exclude themselves from the kingdom of God. In 1 Corinthians, quoting Isaiah, Paul wrote, "For it is written, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.'" (1:19). Isaiah recorded God saying, "Therefore, behold, I will again do wonderful things with this people, with wonder upon wonder; and the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the discernment of their discerning men shall be hidden" (Isaiah 29:14).

Paul then goes on to remind us Christians, "Consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the

strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (1 Corinthians 1:26-30).

In other words, saving faith isn't an accomplishment possible only for the educated people of this world. Even a little child can believe and be saved. Of course, saving faith is a gift of the Holy Spirit through the power of the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. Worldly wisdom may be an obstacle to such faith, but little children don't have that problem.

Take Baptism for example, something many Christians struggle to believe in because they say that babies and children can't believe. Thus, in Baptism we need to think of who's doing the action. Is it the person getting baptized – the child or adult? Or is it the One who's baptizing, meaning God?

In Romans 6, Paul openly shows how, through your Baptism, you are joined to Christ's death — signifying that, you, too, through Baptism, die to sin once and for all and are raised up with Christ to newness of life. As Luther puts it, “in Baptism sin is taken away by spiritual means.”

Baptism creates faith in Christ and opens the door to heaven. Through Baptism, God delivers you from the guilt and punishment for your sin, death and the devil and receives you into Christ's kingdom (John 3:5).

Baptism isn't your work, it's a work of God, commanded by Him with His promise attached to it (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:16). It includes all sinners, even infants, for they, too, are born in sin under the Law, subject to death and of course beneath the wrath of God. Baptism of infants is pleasing to Christ, for it takes all the merit from man and ascribes it to Christ alone. Luther, while teaching on infant Baptism, had this to say: “When the word is added to the water, baptism is valid, even though faith is lacking. For my faith does not make baptism” (LC IV). Thanks be to God, your Baptism is bound to God's Word and not to you. Even in infants, the Word of God still creates and sustains Spirit-given faith, because God's Word does what it says!

So, what is God's Word saying here in our reading that Jesus wishes to do for you? Jesus said, “Come to Me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light” (11:28-30). How has your worldly wisdom made sense of Jesus' Words? What is being Spiritually revealed to us here?

The quick and simple answer is that the heavy burden is Sin and the Law, and the light burden is the Gospel. Jesus is your Brother, and He's not

heavy. So, let's reflect upon that.

We're all wearied and burdened by Sin and the Law. There's the anxiety over sin and the fear of death. Come to Jesus. He calls to you. He calls to the poor in spirit, the meek, and those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. When you acknowledge your sinfulness and realize that you carry a burden too heavy for you to bear and it seeks to drag you down to hell, and it will drag you down to hell if you seek to carry it by yourself, then turn to Jesus. He promises you rest. Jesus says, "I will give you rest." God's Word does what it says! As it does so in Baptism giving you the gift of the Holy Spirit and the forgiveness of sins, it does so here, giving you rest.

We all want rest. So how does this work? Our worldly wisdom doesn't answer us. A yoke is a heavy thing. Animals carry them to drag plows. Slaves and prisoners carry them to prevent them from escaping. My sinful nature doesn't want to be yoked to anyone. I don't want that burden. Yet Jesus says that this is a light and restful burden. I don't understand. Do you?

To be yoked with Jesus is to be yoked to His Gospel, and no longer yoked to the Law. When sin has been forgiven and the conscience has been liberated from the burden and the sting of sin, then a Christian can bear everything easily. Jesus has carried all of your sins and sorrows to the cross. The heavy yoke of the Law isn't the way to salvation, but rather the light yoke of the Gospel guarantees true rest in heaven.

Yet, that doesn't mean that as Christians that we can cast the Law away. What it means is that Christianity is about being before doing. First you're a child of God by Baptism and faith. Then you live as a child of God in God's law, trying to fulfill it and giving thanks and praise to God for forgiving you when you don't fulfill the Law.

Sure, stories about little girls carrying big baby brothers, or friends carrying friends with polio can be uplifting and turned into inspirational stories about Christianity and inspiring songs. But what if they stumbled and dropped the baby, or the boy with polio? There is forgiveness. We struggle at times to forgive ourselves for what we've done, or forgive what others have done to us, yet, no matter how bad of a thing you may have done in life there is forgiveness with Jesus. When you receive this Gospel message of Jesus dying for all of your sins so that you may have forgiveness before God your heavenly Father Jesus' yoke truly is easy and light.

Yes, Jesus is your Brother, and He ain't heavy. He does truly remove all your heavy burdens of sin. Come to Him. Return to Him. He lightens your sin like the mist, floating it away and disappearing it forever, redeeming you from all punishment so that you may enter heaven sinless and righteous, and find rest for your souls (Isaiah 44:22). Amen.