

## Working Under Jesus' Yoke

From the Theology of Work Bible Commentary on Matthew

In Matthew chapter 10, Jesus sends out his disciples to proclaim the coming kingdom and to demonstrate it through powerful deeds of mercy and compassion. He instructs them to make no provision for their needs but instead to depend on the generosity of others. He is clear that the gospel is not to become a matter of commerce, “You received without payment; give without payment” (Matthew 10:8).

Earning money and thinking about finances are not bad; indeed, it is through labor that God provides for us, for “the laborers deserve their food” (Matthew 10:10). But the warning is against allowing our earnings to become our primary focus at work. As workers under the Lord of the new kingdom, our primary focus is on the value of work, not on the paycheck. Jesus' instructions here are meant to keep God in the forefront of our hearts. Whatever the signature at the bottom of our paycheck, God is ultimately underwriting it all.

Jesus describes this form of labor as a yoke that a pair of oxen might pull together. One part of the yoke is around us, and the other is on Jesus' shoulders. Jesus, like the lead ox in a team, determines our bearing, pace, and path, and we submit to his leadership. Through his yoke, we feel his pull, his guidance, his direction. Far from being a burden on us, Jesus describes this type of work as restful.

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 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. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30)

When God gave work to Adam in the Garden of Eden, the work was easy and the burden light under God's authority. When the human pair rebelled against their Maker, the character of work changed to hard labor against thorns and thistles. Jesus invites us to again work within a relationship that will give us fulfillment and rest. If we do our work yoked to Jesus, we will be pulled into good relationships with God and people.

In working with Jesus we will find true rest, but perhaps not rest as we imagine it. Indeed, one of the chief areas of conflict between Jesus and his opponents was in keeping the Sabbath. For example, Jesus was criticized by religious leaders for allowing his followers to pluck and eat grain on the Sabbath. The Pharisees regarded this as work, which was forbidden on the

Sabbath. Jesus dismisses both their interpretation and their motivation. He argues that plucking just enough grain to satisfy immediate hunger does not break the Sabbath, because both King David and the temple priests did so without incurring God's rebuke. Moreover, true adherence to the Law of Moses should be motivated by compassion and mercy. God's love of mercy is higher than God's desire for sacrifice. Jesus promises us a day of rest each week, and also relief from our daily hunger.