

Being Yoked to Jesus

Pete Burak

Hi, I'm Pete Burak. Let's pray.

Opening Prayer

In the name of the father and the of the son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen. Jesus, we love you. We praise you. We ask you to be with us now. Part your Holy Spirit upon us Lord that we might walk with you closely, intimate, united to your heart and to your will. Lord, help us to become like you. Amen. Amen. In father, son, Holy Spirit, amen.

The Idea of Being Yoked to Jesus

All right, so today's session is being yoked to Jesus. What does it mean to be yoked to Jesus? Now this, this is a pretty captivating image, right? This idea of being yoked. Where do we get this from? I didn't grow up on a farm so I did a little research to figure out what it looks like to be yoked and my understanding is that a yoke, right, is this big kind of wooden thing that connects generally to oxen as they pull a plow or they do some sort of work on the farm. So, let's just call it a plow.

So, you have like two oxen, two beasts of labor that you yoke together with this instrument that keeps them united, that keeps them moving, that makes sure that they're going in the same direction. That they're accomplishing the same thing. That they are doing some sort of work together. And the more research I did it's very interesting that generally farmers would try to the best of their ability to yoke a kind of more experienced ox with one of the younger oxes and often they would even sometimes have, the yoke wouldn't even be balanced.

There would be a heavier part of the yoke that would go on the heavier, the stronger, more experienced ox and then there would be a lighter part that would go on the younger cow so as to really train them in the work that they were about. So, sometimes it would be kind of equal parts but very often there would be an experienced one that kind of is doing the brunt of the work and a more juvenile ox that is learning and as it grows it can take on more and more of the responsibility. But ultimately every yoked oxen they are working together and they're trying to be one unit accomplishing a common task and that task for the farmer is usually to plow the field or to you know, pull out a rock, or do something that makes the field more ready and able to bear the fruit or the produce, the harvest that the field is for.

So, this is, when we say, when Jesus says "My yoke is easy and my burdens light" many of us have certainly heard that before and if you're like me actually sometimes you're like, actually Jesus, it kind of feels like your yoke is very difficult and your burden is very heavy which unto itself is, that's the place you're in will beg a question about, are we actually yoked to Jesus? Or are we yoked to something else and we're calling it Jesus? Or are we assuming we're yoked to Him but we're actually doing it on our own? Because ultimately the way I want to frame being yoked with Jesus is more in the realm of what we'd call discipleship. So, to be yoked with the Lord is to be in intimate relationship with Him trying to become like

Him to accomplish together the things that the heavenly Father has asked us to accomplish. So, what is discipleship? Well, discipleship very simply put is to become like Jesus. To become a disciple of Jesus is to say, I want to become Jesus. One favorite, one of my favorite definitions of discipleship is to live as Jesus would live if He were you. To live as Jesus would live if He were you.

What Is Discipleship?

You know, in the ancient days when a master or a guru or a rabbi would invite people to become his disciple, what that meant was not simply that they just would listen to everything that the master said, not simply just they kind of observe what the master was doing but they would actually come and begin to model their life after the master. They would do everything that the master did. So, the master would walk this way the disciples would follow. The master would sit, the disciples would sit. They would, and again they were not just like receiving some sort of head knowledge. They were not just trying to come up with like a philosophical way to live.

A disciple of somebody was really trying to become that person. To become a little version of them and this is what we mean by like Christians, right? Little Christs that as we yoke ourselves to Jesus, as we hear His personal call to say, come follow me. As we make a conscious personal decision to say, yes Lord, I'm going to follow you. I'm going to learn from you. It's not just learn in the academic sense. It's to learn the totality of who this person is to learn in the holistic sense of, I'm going to learn your life, who you are, what you do, how you think, how you act, how you speak, that's what I'm going to learn and I'm going to model myself after you. Such that when somebody sees me they see the master.

So, to become a disciple of Jesus Christ is to develop both his character and his competencies. To become him in his eternal life and his virtue and his connection to the Father filled with the power of the Holy Spirit and his competencies. To be able to go do the things that Jesus does. And did. Another way to put it, the second Vatican council puts it this way that every single baptized person has two fundamental calls on their life. First is the universal call to holiness. The great commandment. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and love your neighbor as yourself. No baptized person is dispensed from the responsibility and the call, the invitation to become holy. It's not for a select few. It's not for a particular vocational status. That all of us through our baptisms have become temples of the Holy Spirit and he who is holy comes and makes a home in us and when we cooperate with that grace, when we say yes to that grace, when we desire holiness, he who is holy makes us holy.

We are holy because God is holy and God who is holy comes and make a home in us and transforms us. So, that's first, universal call to holiness. We call that to grow, to grow in holiness and then the second universal call is the universal call to mission. The great commission. Go therefor and make disciples of all nations. We're all called to grow in holiness but we're all called to go make disciples. And I can't put it a whole lot simpler than that. You've got grow and go. The way I like to talk about it is two legs of a person. You've got your grow leg and your go leg. If you're only growing, you're limping. Similarly if you're only going you're limping. The more we grow the more we need to give it away and the more we give it away the more we need to grow. In this, that routine, that rhythm of growing and

going, character and competency being transformed by the Holy Spirit to be Jesus, to live as Jesus would live if he were us is what it means to be part of the body of Christ. What it means to bring Jesus to the world that everywhere we go, when we're yoked with Him we're not going on our own, we're going with Him and just like the farmers would do with an experienced ox and a juvenile ox, this is what Jesus does. He unites Himself to us and He leads us and He guides us and He walks with us and He bears the brunt of the challenge so that we might learn Him, we might learn His ways, we might learn how to overcome the challenges and all that through the power of his Holy Spirit. To what end? So that we might accomplish the task, the mission that is set before us.

So, what I'd like to offer then is four things we should focus on this Lent. Four ways, four reminders maybe of how if we do these things we will be more yoked to Jesus. 'Cause I think it's a beautiful consideration that maybe the most important thing you could do this Lent is to be more yoked to Jesus. To become more like Jesus. To look more like Jesus. To sound more like Jesus. To act more like Jesus. To move where Jesus is moving. To accomplish things with Jesus.

Okay, so four reminders. And I'm going to warn you, some of these, you're going to be like, wow yeah I already knew that. You know what, you probably did but they invited me to give this talk so here you are. So, deal with it, okay.

Solitude and Silence

The first reminder, first way we can be more yoked to Jesus is to cultivate everyday time for solitude and silence. Solitude and silence. What do I mean? We can't be yoked with Jesus if we don't spend time with Jesus. If we don't look at Jesus and allow Him to look back at us. And in a world that is so busy and so noisy and so distracting and there's so many opportunities to look at anything else, to listen to anyone else, if we don't intentionally cultivate time in our hearts and in our minds where our best energy is focused on the Lord where we are giving Him our true attention, our best attention, we run the risk,

as I said in the beginning of this of actually unconsciously yoking ourselves to all sorts of other things thinking that they're Jesus or wondering why it feels so heavy and hard and in reality we've yoked ourselves to a political movement. We've yoked ourselves to entertainment. We've yoked ourselves to a particular type of substance. We've yoked ourselves to finances. We've yoked ourselves to our job. We've yoked ourselves to so many other things. And the fact of the matter is a lot of those other things, those other good things like vocation and finances and transforming the world and all that are what we pull as we are yoked with Him. But if we're not yoked with Him first we end up trying to pull and move with something or someone who isn't Jesus and we're not going to go very far and we're certainly not going to plow a straight path.

So, solitude and silence. Alone time with Jesus where we can look at Him and He can look at us. Where our hearts can be seen. Where we can be known. Where we can be loved. Where we can be challenged and convicted. And if you're anything like me this is extremely hard. I'm a father of five kids. The idea of silence is a bit of a like, you know, figment of my imagination. It's like, yeah I think, I think silence is possible but I haven't experienced it in a long time and so it was very difficult for me in the midst of business of family life and work

life and everything to cultivate this time and you know what? Where I found the best place for solitude and silence? It's about that 15 minutes after I drop the kids off at school. It's about a 15 minute drive from the school to the office. And you might be saying, Pete, that's not a very solitude. You're driving through traffic. Yes, I am. I'm technically driving my vehicle but I'll tell you what, my best energy and my attention can be given to the Lord while my body is getting me to where I need to go.

My mind and my heart can be focused on Jesus and I'm focused on the road too, of course but the point is this, that if I don't turn on the podcast or I don't turn on the radio or I don't turn on the audio book or make a phone call, if I give those 15 minutes to the Lord it's amazing how often I'll hear Him speak to me in those times. Another place is in the shower. I'm alone, I'm silent, and it's a great opportunity, I mean I can't even tell you how many times I've heard the Lord speak to me in the shower as I'm just kind of giving my day to Him. Lamenting to Him, sometimes griping with Him. Just being with Him.

To be yoked with Jesus is to be intimate with Jesus, to be connected with Jesus and you cannot be connected to Jesus if you don't give Him time. You cannot pray always unless you pray sometimes. The analogy we use of course is something like a marriage. Where if you're not spending time with your best attention on your spouse the relationship will suffer and there will be plenty of other times when you're doing other things and you can certainly watch movies and take care of the kids and there's family dinners and all that, yes, yes, yes, but if there isn't regular time where your wife or your husband knows that you are focused on them first, that they're getting your best energy, the relationship will suffer and the yoking in a marriage can splinter when that alone time isn't maintained and the same is true with the Lord. So, that's the first one, solitude and silence.

Redemptive Suffering and Fasting

Second way that we can be yoked with Jesus is to suffer with Jesus and one of the ways we suffer with the Lord and kind of participate in His redemptive suffering is through fasting. And Lent is the perfect time to either double down on fasting, institute new fasting, or just be recommitted to the idea that conscious intentional submission of my desires, saying no to something so as to say yes for something else or to say, I really want this but I'm going to offer this desire to you Lord so that you might work through it.

I'm going to generate a little bit of fleshly suffering for spiritual gain is a tremendous way that we can unite ourselves to the Lord. And it doesn't have to be big and dramatic. It doesn't have to be, yeah I mean I don't know, there's very simple ways that we can fast that can help us be more yoked to the Lord. Like, fast from your snooze button on the alarm clock. Fast from social media after 10 p.m. Fast from breakfast one morning during the week. Fast from alcohol for the rest of Lent, whatever it is, but here's the thing, all fasts should originate from heaven.

What do I mean by that? It means that the instinct to fast shouldn't be a fleshly desire. It shouldn't just be me generating something that I think would be good to do. Fasting in the spiritual sense is not the same thing as just like, I should go on a diet because I'm overweight. Fasting is something that the Lord is generating in us. He's putting in our heart an intention or a desire or an outcome and we're saying I'm going to demonstrate my seriousness in uniting

to your will, Lord. I'm going to respond to what you're inviting me to by submitting to this fast. So, every fast should come from the throne room. Every fast should be a discerned conversation. Lord, what are you asking of me and what are you hoping to see accomplished in me? What do you need to purify me from? What sort of breakthrough are you looking for in somebody else's life? That's what I'm going to fast for. I'm going to unite myself for you.

So, it's not just like a human endeavor. Oh, I'm just doing this because it makes sense or you know, it's easy to do. Right now, I'm in a fast, a long fast that the Lord asked me to do. I've given up chocolate for my children. Just so you know, I do like chocolate. In fact, I love chocolate and it's amazing how many things chocolate has found its way into. Smoothies and protein bars and all sorts of things but I, early on in my fatherhood I felt like the Lord said, I want you to fast for the purity and chastity of your children. And so, I've been giving up chocolate ever since. It wasn't my idea, it was His but it's something that I'm, it's a way of being yoked to Jesus in the mission of helping these young children of mine grow as saints.

Be With Your Community

Okay, so first solitude and silence, second fasting, third is, one of the ways we're yoked to Jesus is that we recognize that Jesus, one of the ways that He has manifested in the world is through His body, The Church, community. You cannot be yoked to Jesus if you're not also yoked to His people. So, we focus on the Lord and in focusing on the Lord we find each other. So, if you found yourself in this Lent isolated, alone, or kind of cast off from the community or not desiring community there's a real red flag. If you aren't interested in or drawn to the people of God, it's a big red flag as to whether or not you're actually interested in and drawn to the person of Jesus.

We need to be part of a body here on Earth. Whether it's a small group or your parish or whatever. To cultivate during this Lent. Saying, Lord I am pursuing you and I want to be united to you and I know that in being united to you means that you're going to call me to be united to other people who also are united to you. This is, think about it, this is what the Eucharist is. It's the source and summit of our Christian life. It is Holy Communion. Communion with what? Between us and God as we receive Him but then us and each other as we come to the one table, one Lord, one meal, one bread, one body, one cup.

We receive Him together and we are united together. But the mass is by definition a communal activity that the Eucharist again is uniting us to God but is uniting us to each other. So, you cannot be yoked to Jesus if you're also not yoked to His people. No man is an island unto himself, right? The Lord is not calling you to run this journey alone. He's not calling you to plow this field alone. He's calling you to plow this field with Him and through Him, other people who are saying yes to Him as well.

Say Yes to The Power of the Holy Spirit

So, that's the third one and then the fourth is, you want to be more yoked to Jesus, you need to say more and more wholeheartedly yes to the power of the Holy Spirit in your life. You need to let Pentecost be alive in your heart. Jesus in His wisdom and in His mercy and in His generosity pours out His Spirit on us that we might be transformed by that Spirit. That again we are holy because He is Holy and the Holy Spirit is the one who makes us holy and the

Holy Spirit is the one who empowers us to go out and make disciples of all nations. The Holy Spirit is the very breath of God that breathes into us and animates us and allows us to be alive in the Lord so as to be united with the Lord but then to also accomplish the works of the Lord. There is no evangelization without the Holy Spirit. Pope Paul the sixth said, there is no making of disciples. You cannot be a holy, excuse me, you cannot be a disciple of Jesus without the Holy Spirit.

What does scripture tell us? Nobody says Jesus is Lord without the Holy Spirit and you are not a disciple unless Jesus is the Lord of your life. So, to be able to have the faith to proclaim His Lordship, His majesty, to have the faith to believe Him. To have the faith to love Him. To have the faith to obey Him, is a gift of the Holy Spirit. Is a cooperation with the power of God and the third person of the blessed trinity. So, if you're feeling disconnected from Jesus just ask yourself, are you spending time with Him? Focused on Him? Are you sacrificing for Him and suffering with Him? Are you in a community of other people who believe in Him and want to follow Him? And are you open to more and more of the power of the Holy Spirit?

And if any of those questions are no or if you're looking at it and saying, you're taking an audit of your life, you're like no I'm actually, I'm not really spending quality time with Jesus. I'm not spending alone time with Him. Well then, you're probably not going to feel yoked to Him. You're not going to experience the joy of His yoke. I'm not, I'm not participating in His suffering. I'm not uniting my suffering to His. I'm not actually asking His opinion about what he wants to see accomplished in my life and I'm just kind of doing it on my own strength. Well, that would be something we should do something about. Or, no I'm just kind of doing it on my own.

Yeah, I love Jesus but I don't really need His people. I don't really have anybody who really knows what's going on in my life. Sure, my wife or my kids or my friends have some sense but nobody really deeply, intimately knows what's going on, well then, without the people of God it's hard to have intimacy with God. And then finally, am I open to all that the Holy Spirit wants to do to me? Have I given the Holy Spirit to just blow into my heart and transform me? To light up every corner with His love in His truth.

So, this Lent let's be yoked to Jesus. What does that mean again? To be His disciple. To grow in His character and His competency. To be completely united to the belief that He wants to become us and we become Him. That God became man so that we might become god. St. Thomas once said. And through this Lent is a great opportunity to put to death the old man so that new man might live. So, as St. Paul says, I've been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me. So, Jesus come have your way in us. Let's pray together.

Closing Prayer

Jesus, we give you our lives. We offer ourselves to you. We climb up onto the altar as a living sacrifice. Lord that we might die that you might live in us. That the old man and woman would be put to death. The old man and woman of sin and bondage would be put to death so that the new man in Christ might live to the glory of your name and for the billing of your kingdom. Amen.