

In the late 1700s... when he still was a teenager... English traders raided the African coast on the Gulf of Guinea... captured between 35,000 and 50,000 Africans - **every year** - and shipped them across the Atlantic... and sold them into slavery. ... It was a profitable business that many powerful people had become dependent upon.

By the late 1700s, the economics of slavery were so entrenched that only a handful of people thought anything could be done about it. - And amazingly... he was one of the handful of men.

I say “amazingly” because... this would have surprised those who knew him as a young man. You see... he grew up surrounded by wealth. He was educated at Cambridge... in England. But he wasn't a serious student. ... A college buddy of his at Cambridge wrote, "*When he returned late in the evening to his rooms, he would summon me to join him.... He was so winning and amusing that I often sat up half the night with him, much to the detriment of my attendance at lectures the next day.*"

Yet after college... he developed political ambitions and... with his family connections... he managed to win election to Parliament in 1780. ... Although he later admitted, "*The first years in Parliament I did nothing—nothing to any purpose. My own distinction was my darling object.*"

But he began to reflect deeply on his life... which led to a period of deep depression... and intense sorrow. ... Then... on Easter Sunday 1786... his unnatural gloom lifted. ... He had experienced a spiritual rebirth... through Christ.

He quit drinking and practiced a rigorous self-examination. He abhorred the socializing that went along with politics. He thought about the endless dinner parties... which he thought were full of vain and useless conversation:

"They disqualify me for every useful purpose in life, waste my time, impair my health, fill my mind with thoughts of resistance before and self-condemnation afterwards."

He began to see his life's purpose. As a committed Christian... he took on an overwhelming challenge... that no one expected could be accomplished. God had given him an influential position in politics... and felt that he had better use it... or step down.

Thus William Wilberforce launched his persistent attempts to abolish slavery in the British Empire. He made many attempts to get laws passed against it but was defeated... time... and time again... in 1789... 1791... 1792... 1793... 1797... 1798... 1799... and 1805.

When it became clear that Wilberforce was not going to let the issue die, pro-slavery forces targeted him. He was vilified. The opposition became so fierce... that one friend feared that one day he would read about Wilberforce's being torturously murdered and burned by fire... by the African slave merchants.

18 strenuous years later... his antislavery efforts finally bore fruit in 1807: Parliament abolished the slave trade in the British Empire. He heard three days before he died... that the final passage of the emancipation bill was about to pass.

William's son, Samuel, grew up to be a bishop in the church of England. Samuel Wilberforce wrote the first biography of his father. In it... he defined what a Christian is. This is what he wrote:

Christianity can be condensed into four words: admit, submit, commit, and transmit.

- Samuel Wilberforce

That is good... isn't it? "**Admit** (that you are a sinner and have offended God)... **Submit** (to the provision that Christ made for you by dying in your place to pay your penalty)... and submit your life to Him. **Commit** (your life to being His follower – even if it brings hardship and persecution)... and **Transmit** (the good news of this Gospel to others).

You and I can look at this definition of a Christian... and we can agree with it... (And I hope that you do. I think that it is an accurate definition.) "Yes, *that is what it means to be a Christian. Anything less is **not** what being a believer is about...*" But in the back of our minds... we carry such niggling little thoughts... that wonder if - **we** - fit this definition.

"OK... I admit that I am a sinner... and I need God's grace and forgiveness. I can even submit to the provision that God has made for me and trust only in what Jesus did to save me. ... But I hear stories of other Christians (like William Wilberforce)... and see others around me... and I know that I could never be as committed as them. That kind of commitment just has never been present in me. What's wrong with me? What is holding me back...? Why do I hear stories of great Christian men and women... and instead of feeling inspired... I have thoughts along the lines of... 'Well that is good for them... but that will never be me'...? ... And I know that I should be transmitting the Gospel to my friends and family more effectively. ... So why am I not...? Why am I so different...? I mean... I sometimes feel that I could be like that. But most of the time I am content being as I am.

If that has ever been your experience... then I believe God has directed you to be studying the passage of Scripture that we come to this morning.

This morning... our passage discusses committing to Christ – not just being enamored with Him... amazed by Him... intrigued by Him... but committed and submitted completely to Him.

We will first see the effects when people refuse to commit themselves to Christ. And then we will examine some basic reasons why we do not fully commit ourselves. Along the way... I hope to provide you with motivation and an effective antidote for a frivolous commitment to Christ. I want to show you why we frequently swing back and forth from a hot and cold relationship with Christ... and a way to stay more consistently hot.

As we continue our study through the Gospel of Matthew... let me remind you of the scene that we come upon today.

The people had seen the Messiah... and they had been amazed by Him. Some had even admired Him. Jesus had presented His credentials by performing miracles. ... He has preached the gospel that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. ... He has presented Himself... and John the Baptist... His forerunner had presented Him... but His people have rejected Him. So... today we'll see that their rejection has caused Him to make a decision... and He rejects them. ... He is the King... and the King always has the last word.

Matthew 11:20-24

Jesus moved beyond the scope of this general observation and began to rebuke the cities of Galilee and Judea. ... As we read the gospels... we see

that Jesus regularly entered the synagogues of these cities and showed them his identity... by the things he said. ... What He said... was confirmed by the miracles He did. ... However... He was often met with rejection.

All of the evidence of these miracles was accepted with awestruck wonder... but not with any meaningful change in the people's lives. Commitment to His Kingdom message was not there!

In the Gospel of John we read the condemning summary of this response:

John 1:10-11 (ESV)

He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.

Jesus first rebuked the villages of Chorazin and Bethsaida. Chorazin was located about two miles north of Capernaum on the west side of the Jordan River. Bethsaida lay about three miles east of Capernaum on the east side of the Jordan River.

Jesus contrasted these Jewish communities with the Gentile cities of Tyre and Sidon. These ancient cities were once the center of Phoenician commerce. They were the objects of prophetic warnings in the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. They lay north of Israel on the Mediterranean coastline.

In a shocking revelation by Israel's Messiah, Jesus declared that these Gentile havens of idolatrous worship were far more sensitive to the message of his kingdom than were their Jewish counterparts who worshiped the God of their fathers.

Capernaum had been "exalted to heaven" by being privileged to have the Messiah live there. Five of the ten miracles recorded in Matthew 8-9 were performed in Capernaum. The city of Capernaum functioned as Jesus' home base throughout his Galilean ministry. However, that did not matter. Although Capernaum had functioned as the operational center for the Messiah... God's judgment would send it down to hell.

As incomprehensible as it was... Jesus compared Capernaum with a city whose reputation represented the epitome of sin and sexual license Sodom! Yet... if this city had witnessed Jesus' mighty works as Capernaum had... it would not have been destroyed at all.

To the Jewish mind, this kind of theology was unthinkable. After all, they were God's chosen people and, as such, should be protected from the cruelties of the heathen nations that surrounded them, but Jesus had gone far beyond this concept of protection and declared that God's harshest judgment would fall upon them.

It has been a while since I have quoted J Vernon McGee. (There for a while... I was quoting him nearly every Sunday.) He sometimes has some things to say about a passage that brings good light to it. This is one of those times. In fact, I am going to quote him twice – with back-to-back excerpts. Here is the first...

Light creates responsibility. The Lord never had a ministry in Tyre or Sidon, nor did He have His headquarters there. But He spent a lot of time in the area of Chorazin and Bethsaida, and He holds them responsible for the light which He gave them. It is my understanding that there will be degrees of punishment as well as degrees of reward at the time of God's judgment. Even in our own day, there are many

folk who have had a glorious opportunity to receive Christ, but they have turned their backs on Him.

Without going into detail, let me say this: I do not know what God will do with that person on a little island in the South Pacific who has never heard the gospel and bows down and worships an image. I do know what God is going to do with that person who comes and sits in church Sunday after Sunday and hears the gospel and does nothing about it.

Now here is the second quote...

This is the harshest language of all. Remember it fell from the lips of the gentle Jesus. He speaks here as the Judge and King. This strong language ought to make us sit up and listen. I would much rather be a Hottentot in the darkness of a jungle without having heard the gospel than to be an officer in one of our modern churches, having a Bible but never truly having accepted Christ as Savior.

Coming back to our passage now... These three Galilean towns would face such severe judgment... because they had received such clear and sustained revelation. (LISTEN)... **With greater access to truth comes greater accountability to believe it.**

Jesus will damn the indifferent. The city where Jesus did more miracles than any other place during His earthly ministry... the place where He gave sight to the blind... healed demon-possessed men and paralytics... and even brought the dead to life - did *nothing* in response to Him. ... And Jesus says *that* that is worse... than the immorality of Sodom... for the people of Sodom... would have turned from their sin... and the city would have been spared.

We must be warned not to be indifferent to Christ. ... Have you been indifferent to the kind of commitment you know He wants you to have toward Him?

We consider ourselves to be the "chosen of God," washed in the blood of the Lamb. We believe that we have made a conscious commitment to follow Jesus... but as we look around us and within ourselves... we often discover a hard pit of resistance... that denies our full submission to the One we claim to be our Lord. ... In many ways... we behave just like the bratty children at play... that Jesus described in the verses... at the end of last week's passage (Matthew 11:17-19).

Churches can sometimes be filled with dissatisfied complainers... "*You are not behaving in the manner I want you to...*" ... Like those children... you are wrong if you conduct yourself this way... and your wrong if you don't.

We should examine ourselves very carefully and determine the extent of Jesus' possession of our lives. This passage should both warn and encourage us to walk consistently with our Lord... avoiding any worthless side trips... that fail to keep us in full commitment to the Lord.

It would be right for us to remember... that our nation has been given more light... than that which was given to Capernaum! ... We live on this side of the cross. ... We have a completed New Testament. ... The Holy Spirit has come. ... The church has been born. ... We can each hold a Bible in our lap... and can read it. Many of us have wonderful study notes and commentaries to help us understand it. Many of us have read other

books... and gone to conferences... and been exposed to wonderful Bible teaching. We have been given A LOT !!!

With greater access to truth comes greater accountability to believe it.
Jesus will damn the indifferent.

Matthew 11:25

Matthew's opening words in this verse... "*At that time*"... emphasizes the Lord's rejection. ... The cities where He had lived and worked... had added their denial of Him to all their other sins. ... His faithful forerunner had sent questions revealing doubt... discouragement... and despair. ... The Lord's own generation had become childish in its whining unreasonableness.

In light of all this... "at that time"... look what Jesus did. He turned to God. In the face of difficulty... the Lord worshiped and gave thanks. He might have said with Jacob, "All these things are against me" (Genesis 42:36). Or like Elijah He might have complained bitterly to God (1 Kings 19:10). Instead He worshiped. ... He praised His Father... Whom He affirmed as the Lord of Heaven and Earth.

When Jesus turned to His Heavenly Father... Jesus' mindset lands on the way in which the Kingdom works. It is the way by which salvation is offered to the masses of humanity.

The truth of Jesus' ministry would be discovered and understood completely and clearly... by those no one would never suspect. ... Those who are wise in their own conceitedness... will never understand. And the

truth of His gospel is so simple... that it can be understood by the simplest soul.

Matthew 11:26-27

The fact that the only way to know the Father... is through the Son... means that knowing God... comes only **by divine grace**. Verse 25 says that God has "*hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children.*" ... In His mercy... God must reveal Himself to us... which He does through the Son. ... And as God reveals Himself... we respond - not with unrepentance and indifference - but **through human faith**. ... We receive God's truth not with self-righteousness... nor with intellectual pride... but with the humble trust of a child... acknowledging our total dependence on the Father.

Why did the Jewish people and their leaders rebel against John and Jesus? ... Because they were intellectually and spiritually proud... and would not become little babes in humility and honesty. ...The Father reveals Himself to the Son... and the Son reveals Himself and the Father to those who are willing to come to the Son in faith.

Wait a minute! Where is the free will in this...? If God hides Himself from anyone... isn't their free will circumvented...? If Jesus reveals Himself only to those He chooses... then we don't chose Him – He chooses us! Free will doesn't exist. Is that what this is teaching us...?

No! Our free will is exercised by our laying aside pride and coming to Him with humility as a little child... in humility and honesty. (We have to choose to come to Him in this way.) And then He chooses to reveal Himself to us.

This is a marvelous passage that shows both free will and the sovereignty of God at work.

So we have an invitation in the next verse. "Come!" ... ("Lay aside your pride and come!") ... The Pharisees all said "**Do!**" and tried to make the people follow Moses and the traditions.... But true salvation happens only when we come... because it is only found in a Person... Jesus Christ. ... To come to Him means to trust Him. ... This invitation is open to those who are exhausted and burdened down. That is exactly how the people felt under the yoke of Pharisaical legalism.

Matthew 11:28-30

Notice that there are three parts to Jesus' invitation – Come... Take... and Learn. Becoming a Christian involves all three – come (trust Christ)... take (His yoke on you)... and learn (from Him.)

"Take." This is a deeper experience. ... To "take a yoke" in that day meant to become a disciple.

When a man carried a yoke he would carry it on his shoulders. Because of such passages as Jeremiah 27:2... Judaism applied this image of subjection to a yoke as obedience. Jewish people spoke of carrying the yoke of God's law... and the yoke of His kingdom... (which meant acknowledging that God was One... and keeping his commandments.) ... Jesus' words about rest... are a contrast with Pharisaic sabbath rules. ... The promise of "rest for your souls" comes from Jeremiah 6:16... where God promised to calm His wrath... if the people turn to Him... instead of the false religious leaders.

When we submit to Christ... we are yoked to Him. The imagery of a yoke is a heavy wooden bar that fits over the neck of an ox... so that it can pull a cart or a plow. ... The yoke could be put on one animal... or it could be shared between two animals. ... In a shared yoke... one of the oxen would often be much stronger than the other. ... The stronger ox was more schooled in the commands of the master... and so it would guide the other according to the master's commands. ... By coming into the yoke with the stronger ox... the weaker ox could learn to obey the master's voice.

This is Christianity explained - **we give Him the full weight of all our sin.** The original audience who Jesus gave these words to... were people so burdened... because they had failed over and over again to keep the law... and as leaders poured on more laws... the people felt more guilty. The weight of their sin became heavier... and they could not stand up under it.

The good news is that when we come... and take His yoke... **Jesus gives all He has to us....** He is the stronger One... the One Who alone is able to bear the weight of the Father's commands. ... This is the One who invites us into the yoke with Him.

When Jesus calls us to give Him the weight of our sin... we don't merely give Him some of it... but rather all of it. ... And it's not just the weight of our sin that we give to Jesus. ... **We give Him - our complete and utter inability to obey God.**

Having peace with God and the forgiveness of sins is an unspeakable privilege... but amazingly enough... that's not where Christianity stops.

When we come to Jesus... and take His yoke... **He gives us His - complete ability to obey God** ... in exchange for our inability. ... Jesus says... "Take up My yoke and learn from me." ... In other words... we obey God... not by our own strength... but with the very strength of Christ. ... In everything we do... it is Christ who is leading us... guiding us... enabling us... and teaching us.

... ..

This all sounds wonderful... but we might have a problem here. ... You see... Jesus said in verse 30... "*My yoke is easy*"... .. Is that true...? ... How can He say that...? ... Maybe you still remember what we studied in the previous chapter of Matthew...

Matthew 10:17-18, 21-22, 23, 34-36

Does this sound easy to you...? How can Jesus declare what He does in chapter ten... and then say His yoke is easy...? ... You may have had more than one difficult experience in your own life as a follower of Christ. Did you put the wrong yoke on...?

Maybe not! ... The word "easy" means "well-fitting." ... He has just the yoke that is tailor-made for our lives and needs. ... He has a specific plan for each of our lives. His call... is a call to submit to His tailor-made plan for us. ... Because it is designed uniquely for every individual... the burden of it is not a heavy one. It is not too heavy for you. You can accomplish it.

Do you know what makes it burdensome...? When we take Christ's specially made yoke off... or try to wear one that is not His design for us. We need to stay under His exclusive yoke (and remain in submission to His plan for our life).

Come... take on His special yoke... and (thirdly) learn. He is in the yoke with you. Learn from Him. ... Give yourself to a continuous process of learning. There has never been a believer on this side of Heaven who has learned enough... (that there is no more for him or her to learn.) ... You might be able to quote the Bible very accurately... you might have grown up in the church and heard every sermon idea ever preached... but you have not finished your learning. ... It is an ongoing... active process that we are all called to engage in... until He take us to Heaven. (And even then... I think we will still be learning.)

May I suggest to you... that an excellent place for you to involve yourself effectively in this learning process is in a small group Bible Study... Please involve yourself in one of the many studies here in our church.

When we come... take His yoke... and learn from Him... we find rest. This is “peace with God” that trying to follow the Old Testament law (or any code of rules) can never deliver.

Come... take... and learn. ... This involves commitment.

Do you remember that as we began this morning... we talked about our need to stay committed...? I promised that I would discuss with you a very practical way to keep your commitment strong.

Now I am not going to try and guilt you into some daily practice... although better spiritual disciplines (like prayer and Bible study) might be a good thing for you. ... Instead I would like to give you something that will make you WANT to do such things... and have a consistent commitment of keeping your yoke on... and learning from Him.

Here it is...

Our failure to readily follow God's leading... reflects a lack of deep confidence in His goodness. ... We are not quite sure that He wants to bless us... and perhaps we have some fear that He only wants to use us.

The problem with a lack of our willingness to fully commit ourselves to Him... is not a matter of our will. It is a matter of our belief. It is deficient. So the basic cure for a weak commitment is a renewed faith – not a re-dedicated effort that tries to gut it out.

Unless God's goodness is clearly established as the context for our commitment... we will never leave the hot again... cold again cycle of committing ourselves to the Lord's plan for us.

Putting ourselves under His yoke... without a vital sense of His goodness... only produces a labored commitment without any joy. It will be shallow and lifelessly academic.

Look at verse 29 with me again...

Matthew 11:29

The goodness of Christ can be seen here in His gentleness and meekness. He is not angry with you... and His intent is not to treat you as if He is a harsh task-master. His plan for your life really is the best plan. God wants the very best for you and I. The path that He has marked out may involve some difficulty – but He shares the yoke with us - as the stronger One... and He pulls so much of the weight... that your portion will always be bearable.

Come... commit... and learn.

Admit, Submit, Commit, and Transmit.