

THE PURPOSE OF TESTING #7

“The School of Christ”

I. Introduction

Tonight’s teaching is titled “The School of Christ”.
I know of no message more critical to the Christian because it answers one of our greatest questions:

“Why does God allow us to experience so much trouble and trial in our lives?”

Let me see if I can sum up the answer with something simple...

Theme

Christianity comes with an automatic enrollment in the “School of Christ”; a lifelong learning experience where God uses our tests and trials to reveal Himself to us in ways we can learn of Him in no other way.

II. The School of Christ

A. Text

Matthew 11:28-30

Come to Me, all you who labor 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.”

1. I want us to focus on one little phrase from these verses...

Matthew 11:29

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me...

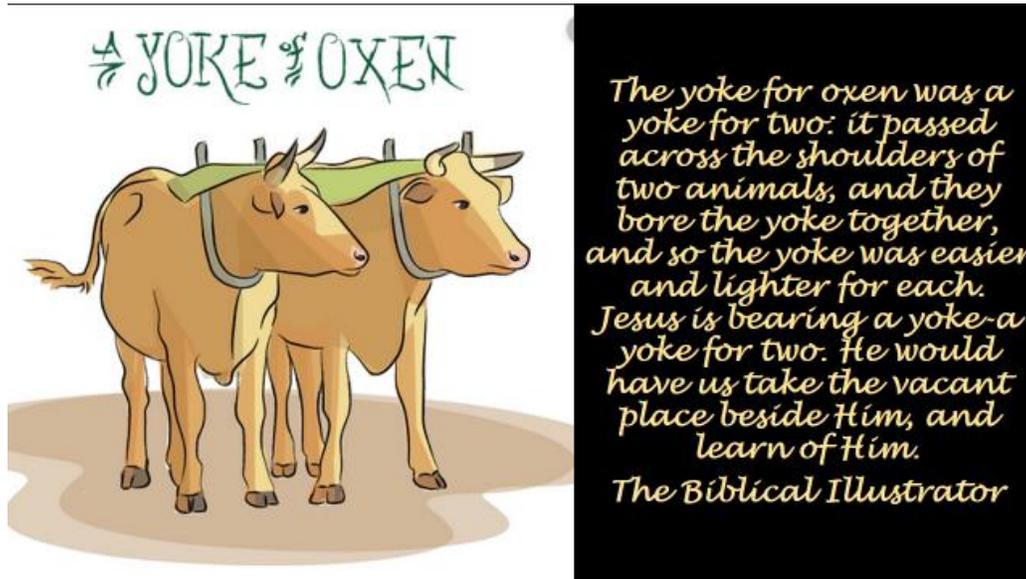
2. First of all, notice that the goal is to “learn of Him”.

Matthew Henry

“We must come to Jesus Christ as our Teacher, and set ourselves to learn of him. Christ has erected a great school, and has invited us to be his scholars.”
(Christianity is a lifelong learning about Jesus)

3. But notice there is a *condition*; something we DO before we can LEARN. We must “take His yoke upon us” before we can “learn of Him.”

4. Everyone in Jesus’ day understood what He meant; but modern minds may ask, “What is a ‘yoke’?” I found this picture:



5. The “yoke” is metaphor; it is a word picture of a spiritual truth; we cannot fully know the Lord without entering into His “yoke”.

Matthew Henry

“Christ has a yoke for our necks, as well as a crown for our heads, and this yoke he expects we should take upon us and draw in. A yoke speaks of some hardship, but it come, the yoke helps us.”

6. As we take His yoke upon us , we come into the “School of Christ”:

- We feel the burdens that He bares
- We come to care for what He cares for
- And we can only truly know Him when we share life experience with Him.

Dennis Peacocke

“It takes one to know one. We only learn Christ as we enter into His work with Him; when we experience what He experienced.”

7. Few men truly knew Christ as the Apostle Paul knew Him; and to know Him was worth all he went through.

Excerpted from 1 Corinthians 3:8-10

Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him...that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings...

a. Paul says that his knowledge of Christ came as he entered the yoke and came to know Him in the “fellowship of His sufferings”!

b. Paul learned Christ as He revealed Himself to Paul in the things Paul went through with Him.

B. The Journey of Joseph

1. In our last study, we saw the same principle in the journey of Joseph in the Old Testament; the man whose life most foreshadowed the life of Jesus:

TYPE/ANTITYPE	JOSEPH	JESUS
Both had a Dream of Future Exaltation	Genesis 37:3-11	Matthew 26:64
His father’s favorite son	Gen 37:4	Matthew 3:17
Hated by his brethren	Gen 37:4	John 7:7
Envied by his brethren	Gen 37:11	Matthew 27:18
Betrayed by his brethren	Gen 37:18	John 13:2
Sold for Silver	Gen 37:28	Matthew 26:15-16
Stripped of his raiment	Gen 37:23	Matthew 27:27-28
Thrown in a pit	Gen 37:24	Matthew 12:40
Falsely accused	Gen 39:17-18	Mark 14:57
Refused to defend self	Gen 39	Mark 14:61
Raised from a Pit	Gen 41:14	John 21:14
Promoted to Reign	Gen 45:9	Acts 2:36
Saved the World	From famine Gen 41:57	From sin Matthew 1:21

a. Betrayed by his brothers; sold out for silver; falsely accused; imprisoned for 13 years! But his prison was a preparation for promotion!

2. In his book “The School of Christ”, the great T. Austin Sparks shows us how God revealed Himself to Joseph through his trials and gave him an education he could receive in no other way. I will quote at length:

T. Austin Sparks

“Consider for a moment his position, and you will see the purpose of his trials. A youth educated amidst all the quiet simplicity of the early patriarchal life, he was haunted by dream visions of a mighty destiny. But the quietude of that shepherd life was not the preparation for the fulfilment of his promised destiny.”

a. Living in his father’s tent was not the right school!

T. Austin Sparks

“The education that would form the man who could withstand the temptations of Egyptian life and the education that would form the ruler whose clear eye should judge between the good and the evil, and discern the course of safety in the hour of a nation's peril could not be gained under the shadow of his father's tent; it must come through trial, and through trial arising from the very promise of God in which he believed.”

b. Notice that you cannot separate the education from the trial; because the trial arose out of the very promise God had given him!

T. Austin Sparks

“When the word of deliverance came, the man came forth, strong through trial, to fulfil his glorious destiny of ruling Egypt in the name of God, and securing for it the blessings of heaven. Thus his trial by the word of the Lord — his temptation to doubt its truth — was a divine discipline preparing him for the fulfilment of the promise.

c. The higher the calling the tougher the courses! And so with us!

T. Austin Sparks

“God will take us through the depths. It is not college preparation; it is not training in schools; it is a secret history with God. True ministry comes out of a secret history with God, and it cannot be effective beyond the measure of what has been wrought in the secret place with God.”

“Personality and character are only developed in the secret place with God.”

3. So what is “the secret place with God”? Is it when we sit on a throne? No! I believe it is in the yoke-when God is giving us our training in the School of Christ.

a. For Joseph, the secret place was the pit where his brothers threw him; later, it was the Egyptian prison where he languished for 13 years!

Psalm 105:17-19

He sent a man before them — Joseph — who was sold as a slave. They hurt his feet with fetters, He was laid in irons. Until the time that his word came to pass, the word of the Lord tested him.

b. The literal Hebrew for “he was laid in irons” is: “iron came into his soul”!

F.B. Meyer

“Iron entered into his soul. The iron crown of suffering precedes the golden crown of glory. And it may be that, God counts a human life of seventy years of suffering not too long an education for a soul which may serve Him through the eternities.”

c. Something happened in the prison that could never have happened if he was still dwelling at home in his father’s tent!

d. God used the very chains of iron that shackled him to work character into him he could come to no other way.

F.B. Meyer

”Joseph’s prison cell was his mount of vision, from the height of which he saw, as he had never seen before, the panorama of Divine loving-kindness. It were well worth his while to go to prison to learn that. It was in prison that Bunyan wrote ‘Pilgrim’s Progress’, where St. Paul met the Lord, and where St. John looked through heaven’s open door. God has no chance to show His mercy to some of us except when we are in some sore sorrow.”

4. Have you ever been there? Are you there now? Rejoice! You’re in the School of Christ! Take the yoke-and God will reveal Himself to you as He could in no other way!

William Kay

“Joseph was imprisoned ‘until the time that his word came’. But when the discipline was perfected, he came forth out of the ordeal as gold from the refining pot, more pure and lustrous, ready for his mission.”

5. How could the young 17 year old shepherd boy every sit on the throne of Egypt? And if he did, what kind of ruler would he be? But now we have a 30 year old man, tested by fire, ready to rule in wisdom and grace! The best we can be comes out of the worst we’ve gone through!

T. Austin Sparks

“There are those who have gone through the depths, been tested, been tried, been taken from place to place, been subjected to experiences of intense severity; and in the fires have learned Christ and are now themselves the embodiment of the knowledge of Christ.”

C. Personal Testimony

1. I will always remember 1995-one of the hardest years of my life.
2. I felt betrayed; abandoned; and falsely accused. And very, very alone.
3. My experience was not matching my theology; so God changed my theology. Early one dark morning I read this verse:

Psalm 119:71 NKJV

It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes.

4. My Christian education was: “It is bad for me that I have been afflicted”:
 - I must be doing something wrong
 - This must be from the devil
 - These church people are crazy
5. But no; the Psalmist says there is a purpose for the testing; the affliction is good because I will learn something about God that I could learn in no other way!
6. It took a long time to come out the other side of that season. But today I can say...

Ps 119:71 The Message Bible

My troubles turned out all for the best. They forced me to learn from your textbook.

7. That season of affliction turned out to make me a better minister. Pastoring people in the past meant helping people find out what they were doing wrong. (Of course there is still a place for that).

8. But now I could teach God's people what the great Charles Spurgeon taught his people...

Charles Spurgeon

“Every good man is not only tested by trial, but is the better for it. To the evil man affliction brings evil, he rebels against the Lord, his heart is hardened. But to the Christian it is good to be afflicted, for, when sanctified by the Spirit, trial is a means of instruction to him second to none in value.”

III. Conclusion

A. A Big Problem in the American Church

1. My personal opinion is that one of the biggest problems in the American church is our failure to teach how our loving God is at work for our good in all things.

a. The great Baptist minister Alexander MacLaren said this about the ups and downs in the life of Joseph:

Alexander MacLaren

“The chief lesson to be learned from the swift and violent alternations of fortune, to which he was subject, is not that men are like shuttlecocks, tossed up and down by random blows, either of blind chance or of hostile men, but that they are moved and guided by one loving will, which weaves malice and murderous intents into its great web, and uses unconscious men and women to effect its purposes.

b. God works all things together for good; whether we are up or down.

Alexander MacLaren

The point of a wheel that is at the top at one moment, is at the bottom at the next; but the wheel moves on steadily on its course, and the revolutions advance it to its goal.

a. Here is the wisdom of Solomon on the subject:

Ecclesiastes 7:14 NKJV

**In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider:
Surely God has appointed the one as well as the other...**

The Message Bible

God arranges for both kinds of days so that we won't take anything for granted.

2. Blessings will always come; but it is how we treat our troubles that determines how our troubles will treat us. An old Puritan Bible scholar said...

The Biblical Illustrator

Adversity is a ladder, up or down, as we will. You can do what you like with your troubles, or let them do what they like with you. They shall either be stepping stones, upon which you shall rise to a clearer, higher view of God and life; or they shall be stones of stumbling and rocks of offence to cast you down to that limbo where the cowardly whimper their lives away.

Review

3. Jesus invited us into His yoke so we can learn of Him; the yoke is where we feel what He felt and experience what He experienced; it is “The School of Christ”...

The “School of Christ” is a lifelong learning experience where God uses our tests and trials to reveal Himself to us in ways we can learn in no other way.