# THE GOSPEL IN US 1 CORINTHIANS 15:1

The power of Christianity is the gospel. The gospel is not good news because it makes us feel good about ourselves it usually doesn't. The gospel is 1<sup>st</sup> a message of repentance. Its initial message is that we are broken as individuals and as societies. This can only be solved when we as individuals admit we are thinking wrong and bring our thoughts, actions and relationships into alignment with God's mind and purpose – this is repentance. The problem is that humans all have a sin nature and desire selfaggrandizement, self-fulfillment and selfish pleasures. Then we tend to elevate these desires of our sin nature above the will of God. The gospel is the answer to this problem.

For of the Gospel 5tr Romans 1:16

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# 1 CORINTHIANS 15:1

**1 Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand**, 2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you — unless you believed in vain.

3 For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. 6 After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. 7 After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles.

8 Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.

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Oxen yokes are among the oldest inventions of humanity that are still widely in use. Series: The Gospel In Us – 1 Cor. 15:1

The placing of a yoke on someone in the ancient world was usually a sign of derision. This was especially true of the Roman world where defeated armies were forced to walk under a yoke to indicate subservience and humiliation. In Matthew 11:28-30 Jesus turns the concept on its head and invites his disciples to take his yoke upon them and learn of him. For the Christian it is a sign of service and responsibility. Discipleship is a part of the gospel.

# MATTHEW 11:28-30

28 "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.
29 "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.
30 "For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."



In Matthew 11 Jesus has just sent away the 12 on their missionary journey. John the Baptist's disciples have come questioning him on John's account. The crowd disappoints Jesus because of its fickleness of mind and heart. He expresses his thankfulness that God reveals Himself to "babes" rather than the wise and prudent. It is in this context that Jesus shares his call to discipleship.

Oxen yokes are among the oldest inventions of humanity that are still widely in use. Series: The Gospel In Us – 1 Cor. 15:1



This hotel in Bordeaux France bears the name of the original Roman City of Burdigala. It was a Celtic fortress in 107 BC when the Hevetii Celts defeated a Roman army of 40,000.

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By the time of Jesus, the concept of going under the yoke was a clearly defined idea in both the Jewish and Roman world. In the Old Testament in Deuteronomy chapter 28, Moses under the direction of the God tells the Israelites that if they fail to keep their covenant that they will be placed "under the yoke of invaders". Later this is amplified by Jeremiah in chapter 27 when he instructs the Jewish people and other nations to accept the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar because he was God's chosen instrument of justice. In the Old Testament when the term "yoke" was used in relation to a person it indicated slavery and involuntary servitude. Deuteronomy 28:47-48

# DEUTERONOMY 28:47-48

47 "Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joy and gladness of heart, for the abundance of everything, 48 therefore you shall serve your enemies, whom the LORD will send against you, in hunger, in thirst, in nakedness, and in need of everything; and He will put a yoke of iron on your neck until He has destroyed you.



Fresco of Samnite soldiers from an Italian tomb. This painting dates to the time of the Samnite Wars 343-290 BC.

The Romans before the time of Christ had experienced 2 defeats that had led to Roman armies being humiliated by going under the yoke an act of surrender. The 2 defeats were separated by over 200 years. During campaigns by the Romans to unite Italy under their control they came into conflict with the the Samnites, a neighbor. This series of wars with the Romans lasted almost 70 years. It was during 2<sup>nd</sup> period of hostilities that the the event known as "the Battle of the Caudine Forks" [321 BC] happened. The Roman army was trapped in a pass by the Samnite army. They were forced into a surrender.

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Fresco of Samnite soldiers from an Italian tomb. This painting dates to the time of the Samnite Wars 343-290 BC. When the General of the Samnites asked an advisor what to do about the Romans he was given 2 answers, either release them unharmed or kill everyone of them. Seeking a middle way, he forced the Roman army to "go under the Yoke". The Roman people never forgot the humiliation and eventually inflicted a severe and brutal peace on the Samnites.

In 1 Kings 12 King Rehoboam insults and humiliates the leadership of the norther Israelite tribes by threatening to make their **yoke** of taxation and corvee heavier, rather than lessen it as the elders of Israel had requested.

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"Romans Under the Yoke" by Charles-Gleyre, 1858. This recounts the defeat and humiliation of the Roman army at Burdigala by the Celtic Helvetii alliance in 107 BC.

# THE WEIGHT AND JOY OF DISCIPLESHIP MATTHEW 11:28-30

The next occasion happened at the modern French city of Bordeaux, known at the time as Burdigala, a Celtic fortress. In 107 BC the Roman army was locked in a struggle with a celtic alliance known as the Helvettiito control the southern part of France. The Romans experienced defeat after defeat. In 107 the Roman Senate sent a 40,000 man army. At first, they had success until they reached Burdigala which was heavily fortified. Due to rivalries between the commanders the army entered the battle wholly unprepared, 10,000 Romans were killed. The commander of the Roman camp was forced to surrender the majority of their forces. They humiliated the Roman army by forcing it to go "under the yoke". The war would drag on another 6 years. The Roman General, Marius completely reorganized the the Roman army in 102 and defeated the Helvettii and Cimbri. Marius' army would eventually annihilate the Celtics the following year. Celtic women their children and committed suicide to avoid Roman slavery. Garrison COG May 2, 2021 Series: The Gospel In Us – 1 Cor. 15:1



8 'And it shall be, that the nation and kingdom which will not serve Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, and which will not put its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, that nation I will punish,' says the LORD, 'with the sword, the famine, and the pestilence, until I have consumed them by his hand.
9 'Therefore do not listen to your prophets, your diviners, your dreamers, your soothsayers, or your sorcerers, who speak to you, arming, "Way shall not says the king of Babylon,"

saying, "You shall not serve the king of Babylon."



"Elijah and Elisha" by Abraham Bloemaert [1564-1651]

For both the Jews and Romans who heard Jesus' statement in Matthew 11, it was a vivid and difficult image to accept. We live in a world that often finds the gospel difficult to accept. We don't want to admit we have a "sin nature" or that our intentions are often bad. The beginning of the good news of the gospel is that we are indeed sinners and we have offended God and been self-willed and self-centered. Jesus' call to repentance requires us to face this reality in ourselves and admit our failure before God. We are not innocent victims of society. Rather our broken world reflects our brokenness. Paul tells us in Romans that there a war between our conscience and our carnal desires within. He describes this as "wretched". **Series: The Gospel In Us – 1 Cor. 15:1** 



"Elijah and Elisha" by Abraham Bloemaert [1564-1651]

In 1 Kings 19 a fascinating story is told. In the story a young wealthy heir of a family is directing 11 yoke of oxen, he himself plows with the final team as they plow. A weathered dusty man walks up behind him and puts his cloak over the young man's shoulders and walks away. The young man looks over his shoulder to see the Prophet walking away. He halts his team and runs after the retreating figure. "Wait, Sir, let me take care business and say farewell to my family and I will come."

The elder man says "Why? Come if you want."

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"Elijah and Elisha" by Abraham Bloemaert [1564-1651]

The young man runs back quickly, said his good byes, broke the yoke and killed the oxen to provide a meal celebrating his new life. He became a servant for nearly 15 years to an eccentric wild-eyed prophet. Looking on, many must have thought Elisha was making a stupid mistake. He had the world at his fingertips; he was wealthy; he was set to inherit the family business; he was intelligent. And he was throwing it all away. But Elisha wanted more, he wanted to be God's man. To become that person he had to submit to the yoke of service so that he would be ready for the empowerment and the decades of purpose ahead of him. 1 Kings 19:19-21

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# 1 KINGS 19:19-21

19 So he departed from there, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he was with the twelfth. Then Elijah passed by him and threw his mantle on him. 20 And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah, and said, "Please let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you." And he said to him, "Go back again, for what have I done to you?" 21 So Elisha turned back from him, and took a yoke of oxen and slaughtered them and boiled their flesh, using the oxen's equipment, and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he arose and followed Elijah, and became his servant.



"La Conversion de Saint Paul" by Luca Giordano 1690

Paul would make a similar decision on the road to Damascus. Jesus tells him on that occasion that he is like an ox who is fighting the yoke and ignoring the prodding of the ox-goad. Paul nearing the end of his life in Romans 1 said he was not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God to save [1:14-17]. For Him the gospel was a transformative lifestyle and worth the commitment of living under the Lordship of Christ.

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# ROMANS 1:14-16

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14 I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise.

15 So, as much as is in me, *I* am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also.

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.

17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

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Taking the yoke of Christ means discipleship.

In modern Christianity we balk at the concept of Jesus Christ's Lordship. This demands that we accept the call to follow him and allow his word to guide our values, purpose and direction in life. We have a growing group of people who wish to be called Christian without accepting the Lordship of Jesus Christ in their life. There are all kinds of excuses for this behavior. One of the biggest is the doctrines and values of Christianity are exclusionary, yes they are. They exclude false ideas about God, false ideas about humans and false ideas about sin. The gospel does not permit me to make up things as I go, I must be submissive to the will of Jesus as it is revealed in the Bible. There are things in scripture that are debatable, but the basics of doctrine and morality are not. 2 Corinthians 10:36 Series: The Gospel In Us – 1 Cor. 15:1

# 2 CORINTHIANS 10:36

3 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh.

4 For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, 5 casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, 6 and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.



Taking the yoke of Christ means discipleship.

We have often heard the phrase "what would Jesus do?" as a question to evaluate our behavior, but I believe we would be better to ask, "does this please Jesus?" In the first case my opinion is what drives the evaluation of my actions, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> case Jesus' opinion drives my decision. In Isaiah 55 God invites us to come to him and drink freely allowing his living water to infuse our being. As we seek him our lives transform to become what God wants us to be. Isaiah 58:6-9

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## ISAIAH 58:6-9

6 "Is this not the fast that I have chosen: To loose the bonds of wickedness, To undo the heavy burdens, To let the oppressed go free, And that you break every yoke?

- 7 Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, And that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; When you see the naked, that you cover him, And not hide yourself from your own flesh?
- 8 Then your light shall break forth like the morning, Your healing shall spring forth speedily, And your righteousness shall go before you; The glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.
- 9 Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; You shall cry, and He will say, 'Here I *am*.' "If you take away the yoke from your midst, The pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness,...

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Taking the yoke of Christ means discipleship.

Elisha could not become the man who separated the Jordan, raised the dead, spoke for God and guided the moral and ethical tenor of a nation had he not submitted to the yoke of servanthood to Elijah. In the Bible the term yoke is often used as a euphemism for servanthood or slavery. There is little difference in the work involved in either word, the real difference is in the attitude of the one doing service. Jesus invites us to take upon ourselves the yoke of service to Him. It means dying to self and living for him. In this process of discipleship we will begin to see things and people as Jesus does. Luke 6:40

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THE WEIGHT AND JOY OF DISCIPLESHIP MATTHEW 11:28-30 Luke 6:40 "A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher.

We are invited to commit ourselves to discipleship; a position that has both struggles and joy.

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