

God's Story – Our Story
On Earth as it is in Heaven – Inside Out
September 29, 2024

Overarching Theme: 2024 – A Year in God's Story

Instructions:

When using this resource as teacher, feel free to discern the points you want to emphasize in the lesson. See "The Grand Sweep" material for additional information.

Core Point: 2024 can be a year of living into God's Story as we journey from Genesis to Revelation together.

Reflect on this Scripture: Matthew 11:25-30 *²⁵At that time Jesus said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; ²⁶yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. ²⁷All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. ²⁸"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."*

Commentary: In this passage, Jesus thanks his Father because he has "hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and revealed them to infants." The "wise and intelligent" may refer to any who summarily reject Jesus, but especially to the religious elite, whom Jesus often rebukes for their self-righteousness, hypocrisy, and judgmental attitudes. He criticizes their meticulous legal observances that miss the law's essence - justice, mercy, and faith (23:23). The "infants," on the other hand, are those on the margins - the poor in spirit, the meek, the merciful, the persecuted, all whom Jesus calls blessed (5:3-12). They are the sick and the lame, the lepers and demon-oppressed, the tax collectors and sinners, the harassed and helpless ones who crowd around this unconventional, merciful Rabbi for healing of body and spirit. It is God's gracious will to confound the "wise" (whose minds are already made up) and reveal himself to the "infants" who are open to how Jesus reveals the Father (11:27).

Jesus' prayer then turns to invitation: "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest" (11:28).

Who are the ones laboring wearily and heavily burdened? Later in Matthew Jesus clues us in by chastising the scribes and Pharisees because "they tie

up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them" (23:4). The heavy burden they lay on the people is not the law *per se*; it is rather their particular, meticulous interpretation of the law which hypocritically neglects the "weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith" (23:23).

To all those laboring under harsh religious and political systems (Roman taxation and tyranny), Jesus says, "*Come to me... and I will give you rest.*" In promising "rest," Jesus promises a shalom-shaped life under God's reign in the new world that he is bringing into being. Jesus further invites the weary: "*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*" (11:29-30).

What is the yoke Jesus offers? We might infer that this agrarian image refers to his way of discipleship, which is not burdensome but life-giving. He invites the weary to learn from him, for he is not a tyrant who lords it over his disciples, but is "gentle and humble in heart." His yoke is easy (also translated "kind") and his burden is light. While Jesus is not offering a life of ease, it is an invitation to walk with him (as oxen might be yoked together in a field) in a life of service under God's gracious and merciful reign, free from the burden of sin, secure in God's grace.

-Adapted from online commentary by Elizabeth Johnson

Questions to Ponder for Accountability in the Group:

1. In verse 25 Jesus thanks his Father for things hidden from the 'wise and intelligent' and yet are revealed to 'infants.' What do you think he means by that?
2. In Jesus' day, there were expectations to obey not just Moses' law, but the precise interpretation of that law according to leading religious teachers (Pharisees). In Jesus' view, weighing people down with external legal obligations did not lead to inner flourishing. What do you think Jesus offered instead?
3. Jesus invites people to come to him and learn – to be yoked to him as a team of oxen are yoked together. How would being 'yoked' to Jesus reduce the heavy burden that the people were under? What inner strength can Jesus offer?
4. Jesus concludes by saying "*my yoke is easy and my burden light.*" Some might interpret this statement to mean that Jesus is promising an easy life. How would you respond?

Activity for the Life of a Disciple:

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMCC.
2. Ponder and pray on this scripture this week: Matt 11:28-29
²⁸"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.