

Coming Back to Jesus

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Date: 19 April 2026

Preacher: Sam Bunnell

[0 : 00] All right. We are going to look at Jesus today. I think that's something that we should be doing every week, every Sunday, certainly in church.

But as the people of God, we should be doing that all the time. So what I want to talk to you about today is the idea of coming back to Jesus. I think the further away we get from Jesus and who he's about, who he was about, who he still is about today, what he did, what he said, how he lived. That's the safest place for us to be as his disciples, his followers. If we truly want to call ourselves Christians, then that means we have to be like Christ.

Otherwise, we're not very Christian. So let's look back at the person of Jesus and see what is it exactly that Jesus would have us to be like if we're going to call ourselves Christian.

Let me ask you this. How many of you have been on a hike where you packed way too much? Anybody? I see some hands sort of tentatively raised like, yeah, that was me.

[1 : 11] I'm notorious for that. I have all kinds of grand ideas in my mind about how the hike is going to go and how we're going to find some peaceful meadow by a waterfall. And we're going to spread out a picnic and enjoy ourselves and maybe take a nap and, you know, all these wonderful things.

In reality, hikes are often exhausting. And the best you could do is just kind of sit on a rock somewhere and eat a granola bar or something. So sometimes I've been known to overpack, and it's a lot of regret about halfway through the hike.

At the beginning, it's fine, right? The backpack is fine. At mile 5, the straps start to dig in. At mile 10, you're not really enjoying or appreciating the scenery anymore.

You're just trying to get through this mission that you gave yourself. So it's fun. I enjoyed hiking. Now, we don't do quite as much hiking here as we did when we lived in Reno, Nevada.

Do you know what's near Reno, Nevada? Anybody? Lake Tahoe. There we go. Thank you, Bill. Lake Tahoe, one of the most beautiful places in America, North America, I think, is right near Lake Tahoe.

[2 : 23] And we would do a lot of hiking up in that area. It was a lot of fun. And that's where I had some of my regret happen when I would pack too much. But listen, the truth is we have a lot of things that we carry with us that we don't always need.

Now, I'm not going to say that women are necessarily worse than this than men. But now that I put that thought in your mind, when you're packing for vacation or you're packing for a trip, who is it in your house that overpacks?

Why did I hear mom? Look, I'm not dividing between the genders there and saying one. I'll just let y'all do that if you want.

Anyway, but it's true. I think most of us have had some kind of experience where you overpacked or you brought more than you needed. And sometimes it's fine.

If you're driving, it's probably not as big a deal. But if you overpack at the airport, that tends to be a problem when you're trying to check your bags, right? How many of you have had to open up your suitcases and take things out, transfer?

[3 : 29] Yeah, that's no fun. And it's always embarrassing. It's like, don't look at what I packed and how I packed it. We tend to do this in life. We carry too much weight with us.

Everywhere we go, we carry too many burdens. We packed our backpack too heavy. We put too much in the suitcase that we're trying to drag through life with us.

I want to remind you back on Easter Sunday, we looked at the resurrection. We also looked back at another signature event in the life of Jesus here on earth, and that was the transfiguration.

It's when Jesus and Peter and James and John went up to Mount Tabor. And on the mountain, God shined his holy light around Jesus.

And he appeared there with Moses and Elijah. And this incredible moment happened. We heard the Father's command, God the Father. His voice came out of heaven, and it said, this is my beloved Son.

[4 : 33] Listen to him. That was in Matthew chapter 17. If the Father himself points us to Jesus above all other voices, even biblical voices, even Moses and Elijah, even men that he used mightily to point us forward to God, then God himself came.

And God said, listen to him. If the Father points us to the Son, it's because the Son is where life is. The Son is where relief is.

And we're going to follow that commandment from the Father today. We're going to stop striving with all these weights that we're carrying and lugging around. We're going to simply listen to what the Son of God, Jesus himself, has to say to those of us who might find ourselves a little tired, if not flat out exhausted.

So number one, we have the divine invitation. Let's go in your Bibles, if you would, to Matthew chapter 11. Matthew chapter 11.

In 2025, we preached in Matthew more than any other part of the scriptures. We're going to stay there for this Sunday. Matthew chapter 11.

[5 : 55] And we're going to look down at verse 28. Jesus is praying and he said, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, thank you for hiding these things.

What things is he talking about? Anybody know? Yes. His burdens.

It's a good guess. That was an in-context guess. That was good. It's not the right answer. But that's okay. That was a good guess, man. But it was interesting because in Matthew chapter 11, Jesus had been talking.

Jesus and John the Baptist had this interaction. And then his disciples. And then he goes down and he starts talking about Moses. And he starts talking about judgment for unbelievers.

And he's denouncing these places where he had done all these miracles. And they hadn't repented and turned to God. And he says, God, I thank you that you've hidden these things.

[6 : 56] The things he's talking about are the spiritual things of God. The truth about him. About who he was. The truth about God. The truth about rejecting man-made religion and embracing this new kind of religion that Jesus was offering.

He said, you've hidden these things from those who think themselves wise and clever. And you've revealed them to those who are childlike. Yes, Father, it's pleased you to do it this way. He says, my Father has entrusted everything to me.

No one truly knows the Father except the Son. No one truly knows the Son except the Father. And those who know the Father are the ones to whom the Son has chosen to reveal him.

Then Jesus says in verse 28. You ready? Come to me, all of you who are weary. All of you who carry heavy burdens. And I will give you, what's that word?

Rest. Let's say it together. I will give you rest. Rest. How many of y'all, a rest feels nice right now? You could go for a nice rest. Yeah. Just, you can rest while I'm preaching.

[7 : 56] Just maybe try not to fall asleep. I'll do the best to do my part in that. But y'all play along if you would. So I will give you rest. So I love that. That's a great promise.

How do we get it? Well, we got to take his burden. The next verse sheds more light on it. Take my, what's that word? Yoke upon you.

And let me teach you. Because I'm humble. I'm gentle. Your Bible might say, gentle and lowly in heart. Humble. You will find, what's that word again?

Rest for your souls. There's nothing you want more when you're lugging heavy burdens around than rest. And then he finishes it in verse 30 by saying, for my yoke is easy to bear.

And the burden I give you is light. We often think of religion as a set of directions, instructions.

[9 : 02] Go here. Do this. Fix that about yourself. But Jesus' primary way of communicating was not through directions and instructions. It was through this invitation.

And he wasn't inviting people into a system. He was inviting them to himself, to a person, to a meaningful relationship. So the divine invitation that we're talking about is come.

It's the word come. Come to me. That's how he started it there in verse 28. He said, come to me. That has always been God's invitation to mankind.

Back with his chosen people, the Israelite people, who were kind of the sample of what was going to come. The illustration of when he was going to eventually open it up to all people to be part of his people, part of his children.

But initially it was this Israelite people. But his invitation to all of them was to come. What was fascinating was even back then, he would also invite Gentiles to come and share that faith of the Hebrew people in their one true God.

[10:09] The reality is Jesus doesn't say, come to my lectures. He says, come to me.

He doesn't even say in this situation, come to my temple. He says, come to me. I think you should go to church. But if you haven't been with Jesus first, if you don't encounter him at church, it's not going to do you any good.

There were lots of people who went to the temple religiously, faithfully, but they could not ever find faith in Jesus.

And I'm afraid that's the way it is sometimes in the American church today. You'll have people who show up to church week after week or when they can, but they don't encounter Jesus.

His invitation is come to me. Then church will mean so much more to you. You'll get so much more out of it. You'll want to be with other people who are encountering Jesus and you can get together and talk about him and you can share your experiences that you've had with him and you can sharpen each other and encourage each other and uplift each other and help.

[11:28] Ready? Bear each other's burdens. Help carry each other's heavy weights that you're carrying through this life. But we're jumping ahead a little bit. But Jesus' invitation is come to him first.

It has to start with him. And his invitation is warm. It's not cold. How many of you like warm people instead of cold people? You know what I'm talking about?

I'm not even talking about body temperature. All right? We don't need to get into it. But how many of you like warm personalities instead of cold personalities? You'd rather be around somebody who's like nice and fun and enjoyable and, you know, gives off the vibe that they're happy that you're talking to them.

How many of you like to go into a store or a restaurant and have the employee there encounter you in a warm way rather than a cold way? Rather than a, why are you in this store taking up my time? I'm on the clock. Don't bother me. It's like, wait a minute. Isn't that your job? We do a whole lot better with warm people. And Jesus, the one consistent feature we see in his personality when he's dealing with whomever.

[12:45] He was warm. He was engaging. He was approachable. He was personal. That is who Jesus is.

So if we want to be like him, we have to respond to his invitation and accept and embrace that warmth that he's showing us. He's not waiting for us to meet his standards before we can approach him.

He says, you just come to me. I'll help you get to where you need to be. I'll help you raise your game. I'll help you meet the standards. I'll help you get there.

You just come to me. Just be with me. That's all I really want. He's the starting line. He's not the finish line. He's going to help you get to the finish line.

He's going to give you, take you every step of the way. He's there with you from the beginning. He's the sanctuary where we finally stop running. If you've been around this church for a while, you know we called, what do we call this room right here?

[13:43] The sanctuary. The sanctuary. I made a mistake my first Sunday here and I called it the auditorium. I said, no, this is not an auditorium. It's a sanctuary. And you know, I kind of like that because Jesus is a sanctuary.

What's the difference? An auditorium is a large room where meetings are held, right? A sanctuary is a safe place. It's a holy place. It's a place where you go and you quiet your soul and you encounter Jesus there.

That's what Jesus actually is to us. He's our sanctuary. And he invites you to come to his sanctuary. The sanctuary of him. Then you'll encounter him wherever you go.

Whether you're in this sanctuary or whether you're at home or at work or encountering a difficult person out there in the world. Whatever your situation will be. You'll have the sanctuary of Jesus that you can always run to.

So the invitation is not to a religious system, but to a two-way relationship. That's what Jesus is inviting you to. When you read in Matthew 11, 28, come to me.

[14:52] He's inviting you into a two-way relationship. You come to me. I come to you. We embrace. And I'll be with you forever.

Then number two is the great exchange. The great exchange. He talks about this in Matthew 11. He says, take my yoke upon you.

He says, you carry heavy burdens. I will give you rest. Give me your burdens and take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you because I'm humble and I'm gentle in heart.

Do you know what this word yoke is? Do you know what this word burdens is? It's the word in the Greek fortizo.

Fortizo. I took a couple semesters in Greek back when I was doing theological training. And I will never be one of the world's leading Greek scholars. I promise you that. But I got enough of a basic understanding of it.

[15:52] And then they have wonderful resources on the internet to help refresh you when you've forgotten a lot of things. But this word fortizo means load. Now, you ready for this?

It's also found in another passage of scripture. Luke 11 and verse 46. Jesus uses this word in Luke 11, 46 to rebuke the religious experts.

Pharisees, the Sadducees, the people who were holding the people captive religiously. They were making them live up to all their laws and expectations that were even beyond what God had ever asked them to do.

And he says, woe to you, you experts in religious law. You crush people with unbearable religious demands and you never lift a finger to ease the burden.

Anybody know anybody like that? Somebody puts all kinds of demands on somebody else and they never ever lift a finger to help them. Don't say the name. Okay.

[16:54] Especially if they're in this room right now. But look, this is often too far too often the case with religion. Religion has often presented itself this way to people.

Well, that's not Jesus religion. That's man-made religion. It might call itself Jesus religion, but it's not because it's not who Jesus was. It's not what he did.

It's actually the opposite. It's what he taught against. So he says, you experts in religious law, you crush people. You know what Greek word he used there? A form of fortizo.

Fortizo. Unbearable religious demands. Too heavy for you to bear or to carry. You know what Greek word he used there? A form of fortizo. And then even the word demands, religious demands, the demands and the expectations that you put on somebody else.

That's another form of the word fortizo. And you never lift a finger to ease the fortizo or the burden. Jesus knows you're carrying a heavy fortizo through this life.

[18:02] And he knows that it comes from all kinds of different places. It comes from expectations from your family. It comes from expectations you put on yourself.

It's a load. It's a burden. It's a weight. This fortizo that you're carrying around. God says, give me your fortizo and I'll give you mine.

Mine is way better. Trust me on this. And we're going to get there. But back in Matthew 11, 28, he says, come to me all you who are heavy fortizo'd.

Heavy burdened. The contrast is a direct before and after. The world will put heavy fortizo's on you. Teenagers in school, they'll put heavy expectations on you. Your peers, your friends, other people will put heavy expectations on you. To talk a certain way, to dress a certain way, to act a certain way.

[19:12] Your family will put heavy fortizo's on you. Sometimes religion, church, well-meaning people will put heavy demands on you.

But Jesus uses that same word to identify with you in your fatigue, your pain, and say, let's trade. You give me that load. You give me that burden. And I will give you mine. And that takes us to number three. And I should have put number three there, but I had number two. It's number three, all right?

He says, this is what I want to exchange with you. You give me your heavy burden, and I will give you my easy yoke. My easy yoke.

That same word, yoke, is that word fortizo. But it was the form that they knew exactly what he was talking about. They were talking about a yoke. Let's look at Acts 15, 10. We see that word again.

[20 : 14] The author of Acts goes, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, the four gospel records that we have in the New Testament that reveal Jesus to us. They talk about his life and his story.

And then right after that, the very next book of the Bible is the book of Acts. And that gives the record of how this, the church, started. How it took off. How after Jesus died and was resurrected, raised back from the dead by God's power.

That's why we all believe in him, okay? By the way, in case you weren't aware, we don't just think he was a great person. We know and we see, according to historical record, that Jesus was killed on a cross and that he rose back to life by the power of God.

And he really is who he says he is. And he was seen by thousands after his resurrection. This was the single greatest moment in human history. And that's why you've still got these churches in Henrietta, in Clay County, in Texas, the United States, and all around this world celebrating and worshipping and praying to the same God.

The same Jesus. So this same Jesus, who God raised from the dead, you get to read about how his church started in the book of Acts. Well, in the 15th chapter, Peter is talking.

[21 : 32] Peter was the guy who walked with Jesus, right? One of his chief disciples there. He was the guy who kind of Jesus tabbed as seemingly as the leader of the group. And Peter says, why are you now challenging God by burdening the Gentile believers with a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors were able to bear?

You know who he's talking to here? He's talking to leaders in that early church. The early days of Jesus' followers, they were already getting off message.

They were already getting away from who Jesus was and what he taught. They were getting back to what they knew and what Jesus came to fight against, which was that religion that oppresses people.

So Peter said, slow down. What you're actually doing is challenging God. When you try to put fortizos on people, what they were actually doing was when the non-Jewish believers would convert to Jesus, faith, convert to faith in Jesus Christ.

So soon after he was raised from the dead, his movement was spreading all around the world. Nobody could stop it. Governments tried to stop it. Say, no, it's illegal to worship that guy.

[22 : 47] You can't have those churches, et cetera, et cetera. Well, they would go underground and they would meet however they could. They just kept spreading. It spread like wildfire. And as it spread, so many non-Jewish people jumped in and said, yeah, we believe in Jesus too.

Well, the Jewish Christians didn't like that. So what are we going to do about that? This is a problem. Well, we're glad that they have faith in Jesus, but they don't look like us.

They don't think like us. They don't talk like us. They certainly don't act like us. We are God's chosen people. We're the Jews. We're the Hebrews. We're the ones who were here first.

They kind of had the older brother syndrome from the prodigal son story. So Peter says, as you put fortizos on people, you're not acting like Jesus did.

He came to lift them. He came to take them away. What you're doing is you're going to war with God when you do that. Because you're trying to hijack the Jesus movement.

[23 : 57] You're trying to hijack who he was and make it about what you think is most important. Y'all, let's not be a church that does that. Let's not be a church that when you see a visitor walk in and they've got a hat on their head and they're sitting in here, you go up and tell them, take it off, please.

That's putting a fortizo on somebody. Now listen, if you want to raise your children not to wear hats in church, that's between you and God. But let's not go put our demand or our fortizo on somebody else because that could be the very last time that person ever walks in the doors of this church.

Say, I knew I wasn't good enough for those people. Forget it. You don't see Jesus doing that. And that's one example. We could fill a book with plenty of other examples of ways that we well-meaning people of God have put unnecessary demands or fortizos or load, burdens on people that prevented them from coming to Jesus.

So, don't put a yoke on anybody, including yourself.

God never asked you to bear. Instead, take his yoke. Because if you're carrying any burden, God didn't ask you to bear, you're challenging God.

[25 : 23] Saying, I think this is better than what you're asking me to carry. God, trust me, we need all this. God, trust me, I need all this stuff in my backpack. At some point on this hike, we're going to

need this.

But God, what if we allow people to wear hats in church? What's going to happen next? See, we can talk ourselves into anything. We can try to convince God, yeah, I understand that you came and you were a God of love and peace and forgiveness and joy and hope and all this.

But God, we've got to have some rules around here. Because if we don't, we're going to have problems. You're challenging the person of Jesus.

He's saying, trust me with the rules. Trust my Holy Spirit. You don't need to make up your own. My spirit will be far more effective at moralizing people, far more effective at making people truly good than your rules will ever be.

The best people who follow your rules often are the people who are furthest from me in their hearts. Sometimes the people you think are not following the rules, those are the people actually pursuing me in their hearts.

[26 : 43] Jesus taught this stuff. It's hard for us to accept. But religious burdening is actually a way of challenging God. Paul echoes this in Galatians 5.1.

He says, don't let yourselves be burdened again. There's that word again, fortizo, with a yoke.

There it is again, of slavery. Paul recognized this.

He was deeply involved in those early days of the church when everybody was going around trying to throw religious fortizos back on everybody that Jesus came to fight against. And he said, no, don't let it happen. Don't let anybody do this to you.

He couldn't be at all the churches at once. So he's writing letters to these churches. He would go and visit them and he would try to teach them according to what Jesus had revealed to him. But then he had to go along.

And so the road to the next place and he would leave him a letter and he would send a letter back and say, don't let people come in and undo everything I just taught you. Don't let them put these burdens on you.

[27 : 42] Don't let them do it. So instead, what do we do? We take the yoke that Jesus designed for us. This is what it looks like. He said, my fortizo, my yoke, is easy.

When you're yoked with Jesus, which one do you think he is? Okay, I'll face the same way y'all are facing. Do you think he's on the left?

Or on the right? I think you're right. Did you get that? I think he's on the left. When you're yoked, there's two carrying the burden.

It's Jesus and it's you. Jesus is going to do the heavy lifting. He says, that's why it's easy. I'll help you.

This life isn't suddenly going to become sunshine and rainbows, but I'll help carry the burden through it. People are still going to try to put burdens on you. But I will help carry those burdens.

[28 : 49] You can hand them off to me. I'm not asking that of you. I'm just asking you to walk side by side. I will make sure that the load you're carrying is not more than you can bear with me yoked with you.

So a yoke is designed for two. It's Jesus and it's you. We aren't pulling the plow alone. Following Jesus is not about straining.

It's about surrendering to him. It's the difference between trying to swim upstream and then letting the current of his grace carry you instead.

It's the difference. So if you're tired of trying, then stop trying. It's probably two years ago, preached a sermon series here that I'd heard from somebody else.

And I just love the concept so much. I had to share it with you all. And it was God's not asking us to try. Instead, he's training us. So stop trying and start training.

[29 : 55] That's what training looks like. Get in here in this yoke with me and let's get through this life together. The Father spoke from the heavens to tell us one thing. Look at my son.

Listen to my son. And the son speaks to us today to say one thing. I am here with you and I love you. So let that be enough for this week.

Let that be enough for today. If you feel loaded down by all the extra four teetsos that you've put on yourself or that other people have put on you, remember that this world will continue to load you up, load you down.

But Jesus can lift you up. Jesus can ease that burden. And he's saying to you, I'm here with you. My yoke is easy. My burden is light. Come to me and find rest.

What's that last word? Come to me and find rest. God, would you give us rest today? Would you give us rest in our souls, in our hearts? Our minds get so hyperactive, so distracted, so cluttered. [31 : 09] Mind can be the devil's playground. He can get to us there. He lies to us so effectively. We can only discern the truth by your spirit.

Open our eyes to how easy your yoke is as you carry it with us, as you lift it with us. You lead us forward down this path of life.

Molding us, shaping us, changing us more and more into your image. Help us to lay down every burden, every load, every fortitzo that people try to put on us.

That expectations and deep-rooted anxieties and fears and pride makes us carry ourselves. We so often make ourselves just pick up a load that you never asked us to carry.

Whatever's on people's hearts this morning, God, whatever load they walked in with today, let them surrender it to you. It might be the load of sin, keeping them from having a relationship with you.

[32 : 19] And they need to turn it away. Let it go. Say, I lay it down. I'm tired of fighting and trying to make myself stop sinning or stop living this way or meet people's expectations.

I've got to just turn to Jesus and say, would you help? I'm putting my faith in you. I believe that you are God. I believe that you are good and you are perfect. And you did die on that cross.

And you did raise from the dead. And so I'm going to put my faith in you to forgive me that you love me in spite of my sin. That you died for me even when I was a sinner. That you rose from the dead for me even though I'm not perfect.

I want to carry the load that you're offering. I'm worn down with the load I've been carrying. If that's you, would you slip your hand up now and say, I want to put my faith in Jesus today to forgive me of my sin.

I can become a child of God. I'd love to pray with you. Slip your hand up right now if that's you. Let me ask you this question. How many of you say there's a load I walked in with today that I want to hand over to God?

[33 : 25] I don't know if it's going to be as easy as that. But I want to hand that load to God and exchange it for his yoke. Would you slip your hand up as well and I pray for you as well. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. God, you see these hands and you know what's going on in every heart. I pray that right now in your spirit, in your still small voice, you would speak truth to them.

You would speak love to them. You would show them how light your load is, how easy your load is compared to that heavy burden that we drag around through this life.

Let us be people that you are changing to be more like you by releasing these burdens that we carry. It's in Jesus' name we pray.