

## Answering Our Environment

### *God's sovereignty in our environment*

**G**od's sovereignty in our lives is found in our environment. That is, we see God's hand in the daily situations and environments He allows. Thus, our environment will always demand an answer and a response. How do we answer our environment? How do we respond to it? This is crucial.

In Matthew 11:25 the Lord Jesus absolutely accepted the environment the Father allowed: "At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth." The phrase "at that time" refers to the time connected with the negative events in the Lord's environment. This was the time when Jesus was being defamed and His ministry was being rejected. "At that time," Jesus responded and answered with thanks to the Father and confessed that He was the "Lord of heaven and earth."

In the context of Matthew 11, people were saying that John "had a demon" (v. 18), and they were calling the Lord "a gluttonous man and a winebibber" (v. 19). Then the Lord began to "upbraid" the cities (v. 20) because they had rejected His word and had not repented. Humanly speaking, the environment of the Lord Jesus at that moment was all negative. It was the exact opposite of anything that would naturally evoke a confession of thanks to the Father. Yet verse 25 says, "At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth."

When we read the word "answered," we may wonder whom the Lord was talking to. In the preceding verses, He was not talking to anyone. He was going through the

cities and they were rejecting Him. They would not repent. It was at this point that Jesus answered. What was He answering? Whom was He answering? He was answering His environment. He was answering what was being spoken to Him in His environment.

We must learn to answer our environment just as it is. How have you answered your environment? How have I answered my environment? Our environment requires answers. We cannot remain neutral. We cannot just cope with environment. We cannot blame environment. There is no progress in God that way. Not only will there be no progress, but we will go deeper into the flesh, deeper into our mind, and deeper into Satan. So we dare not answer the environment in that way.

When the Lord answered His environment, He was answering all the rejection. And what did He say? "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight" (Matt. 11:25-26). The Lord uttered this in His humanity after having a disappointing environment, an environment contrary to His expectation. The Lord answered with thankfulness from His inner being, saying, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good to You."

When we answer our environment under the mighty hand of God, and say, "You are sovereign, Lord. You have chosen to do it this way, for so it seemed good to You," our inner joy increases, however, our environment may not change. It may even get worse. It is this inner joy of abiding in God, deeper in God, that produces a contagious reality of Christ in our lives.

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In Matthew 11:27 the Lord says, "All things have been delivered to Me by My Father." This shows us the Lord's absolute realization that nothing was an accident. He is saying, "This environment was delivered to Me by My Father. It is not accidental. It is not someone else's fault. It has been delivered to Me by My Father." Then He continues, "And no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and he to whom the Son wills to reveal Him." So the Lord lived under the consciousness of the absoluteness of God's sovereignty in what was delivered to Him.

Do we live this way? Do we have this consciousness in our daily life? As the light shines brighter in us, we begin making the connections of God's sovereignty in our daily life. We see our environments as opportunities to fill up the sufferings of Christ, to go deeper into God. It is a matter of seeing beyond the surface things to the larger view from eternity. In our environments we realize God is saying, "I want you conformed to the image of My Son. I want His life manifested in you. That is what matters in this universe. And so I am processing you through various environments, all kinds of pressures, all kinds of trials, in order that you would just go deeper into Me."

### *Taking His yoke and learning from Him*

Answering our environment as the Lord did in Matthew 11:25-27 is directly related to taking His yoke and learning from Him in Matthew 11:28-30. If our self-life is to be dealt with when the calamities in our environments come, when the whirlwinds come, when "the thorns in the flesh" come, when the bizarre things come, we must respond and answer those environments with a deep inner "Amen!" to His yoke. It makes a big difference whether or not we will take the yoke. In Matthew 11:28-29, the Lord shows us the result of taking the yoke: <sup>28</sup> "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."

A yoke is what is laid upon two oxen. How those oxen respond to that yoke will determine the outcome to the oxen. They can resist the yoke, rubbing against it, trying to break away from it. Then the yoke is harsh. It is bitter. It hurts. But if the oxen simply submit to the yoke, all is well. What is the "yoke" the Lord is speaking of here in Matthew? The yoke is what God in His sovereignty has put on you. The yoke is simply the will of God in your environment.

How we respond to the yoke that God puts on us will determine the outcome in how much God gets expressed

through us and how much our self-life gets dealt with. Whether or not we take up the yoke — the calamities, the whirlwinds, the unexpected things that the Lord sends — determines whether the self-life gets touched or remains intact. To take up this yoke means to willingly accept the environment. In Psalm 40:8 the Lord says through David in spirit, "I delight to do Your will, O my God." This implies that we do not hold any reservation toward God and what He has allowed. We do not hold the view that there is something better that could be measured out to us, or that God could work in a different way. No! A thousand times, No! Your dear wife's disposition is the best that God could send you. And your husband is the best that you could have. Even the difficult financial situation you are in is the best. When we see God's sovereignty in our environment — everything is the best that it could be!

The Lord says, "Take My yoke." It is what He has laid "upon you." Take it upon you. Don't just put up with it, take it from God's hand (1 Pet. 5:6). And after you have taken it, He says, "Learn from Me." It is as if He is saying, "Stay under the yoke and start consulting with Me now. You are under the yoke. Do not resist it. Do not try to get out of it. Accept it in an absolute way, just as I took the yoke. I said, 'Thank You, Father, for the rejection. Praise You for the insults. Praise You despite the lack of response. Praise You for everything against Me, Father. You are Lord of heaven and earth. It was well-pleasing to You.' " This was the Lord taking the yoke. He just took it and He praised and thanked the Father for it. So now we take the yoke upon us and begin learning from Him.

### *The meaning of taking the yoke*

To take the Lord's yoke means to inwardly stay with Him and fellowship with Him while you are passing through the trial of your environment. Do not consult with your reasoning mind. Do not get caught in the web of your many thoughts that lust to scrutinize your environment (Prov. 3:5-6). You have to learn from the Lord. He says, "Learn from Me." So you begin asking, "Lord, what is in this calamity for me? Lord, what is in me that You are trying to touch by allowing this whirlwind to come?" Remain under the yoke. Do not resist it. The Lord is saying, "Inwardly learn from Me. Inwardly contact Me." Do not resort to all the questions in your mind and say, "This should not have happened." Do not live hoping for a better day. Do not blame. Instead, begin learning. Begin touching Him. Go directly to the Lord.

"Learn from Me," He says, "for I am meek and lowly in heart." To be meek means not to resist opposition. So

the Lord is saying, “I am a Person who does not resist. If you contact Me and learn from Me, while remaining under the yoke, then you will discover that My nature is not a resisting one. You will abide in Me. You will say, ‘Yes, Father. It seemed good to You. It seemed pleasing to You.’ I am not fighting. Also I am lowly. That means I am not proud. I am not asserting Myself. I am not vindicating or defending Myself. I am not trying to hold the self-life up. I am the One who is meek and lowly in heart.” This is the Lord Jesus in Matthew 11:25-30.

In our experience of the Lord, the self-life is dealt with when we do not resist the environment He sends. We simply stay submissive under the yoke, not resisting it, but learning from Him. We learn His meekness, His resignation, His absolute surrender. We learn His lowliness — that there is no place for the self or pride.

Then Matthew 11:29-30 says,<sup>29</sup> “and you will find rest for your souls.”<sup>30</sup> For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” This means that when we are in contact with the Lord, His yoke is pleasant, it is gentle, it is easy and light. Regardless of what yoke is laid upon us by the hand of God, when we learn from the Lord and stay with Him, we have an altogether different response. But the moment we step out of that realm everything is harsh, bitter, and cruel. You cannot understand why things are happening the way they are. You have more questions than answers. That is the realm of the unrenewed mind. So to have this inordinate self-life dealt with, we need to come to the Lord, stay with Him, and learn to rest in Him.

#### *Answering our environment by keeping the inward Sabbath*

The Lord answering His environment in Matthew 11:25-27, is followed by His words of how we are to answer our environments in verses 28-30. In brief, it is coming to Christ in the midst of all of our struggles and problems and learn to keep Him as our inward Sabbath. In the next chapter of Matthew, the Lord purposely broke the outward Sabbath (12:1-8) because He ushered in the keeping of the inward Sabbath, the inward rest (11:28-30).

The outward Sabbath is a picture of how the inward Sabbath is to be experienced. This means we do not work (Exo. 20:8-11), we do not gather sticks (Num. 15:32-36), we do not bear any burdens (Jer. 17:21-22), we do not pick up anything (John 5:9-10). Inwardly we come to Him and learn to rest in Him. Tell Him, “Lord, You are my Sabbath day. You are my rest. You are the One in whom all my self effort ends. You are the One operating in me to do it all. Lord do it as I now come to You as my rest, my Sabbath day!”

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Though the Lord broke the outward Sabbath in Matthew 12, He was keeping the inward Sabbath. What He did first of all was to have a feast (v. 1). When we keep the inward Sabbath, we feast. While keeping the inward Sabbath, the Lord also healed a withered hand (vv. 10, 13), and cast out demons (v. 22). So when we rest in the Lord, learn from Him, we enjoy a feast, we get healed, we get rid of the attacks of demons, and we learn to answer our environments in the One who knows how to rest our weary souls. This all happens by our keeping the inward Sabbath.

Learning to keep Christ Himself as our inward Sabbath is the secret of answering all our environments. We cease from our own works, and simply keep ourselves resting in the Lord. It is when we allow our environments to actually escort us to Him, and say, “Lord, I cannot change myself. I am just here under the yoke. I am learning from You. Then He gives rest to the soul. Thus, all of our environments are escorts into this Sabbath-rest — Christ Himself (Col. 2:16-17).

#### *Environment escorting us to Christ*

The environments which God allows in our lives make demands upon us that cause us to sense our frailty and weakness. They are intended by God for us to sense our need of Christ. How we meet our environments, answer them, and interact with them is used by God to escort us to Christ. Indeed, the interpretation and understanding of all your environments will be found in the apostle Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 — a richer, deeper, ever-increasing experience of Christ!

As we have seen, environments include many things: your husband, your wife, your children, your money, your job — all persons, matters, and things in your daily life that affect you. In fact, environment, according to the biblical understanding, is simply *that which affects us*. A stormy relationship can affect us, money problems can affect us, taking a thought about a past mistake can affect us. Whatever may affect us — this is environment.

Environment is like the law making a demand upon us that is beyond our capacity to handle. Just as the law escorts us to Christ (Gal. 3:24), God intends that our environmental trials would also escort us to Christ. This means that we accept the “all things” of Romans 8:28 as being under God’s sovereignty. Categorically, all things are working together for good, because under the mighty hand of God they escort us to Christ.

Environment, which is measured out by God, is always pushing us a little bit too far. We have environ-

ments that we cannot cope with in ourselves. We get discouraged, depressed, we turn inward upon ourselves — we sigh, “how can I go on?” or “I can’t make it.” Oh! that’s right! That’s exactly right! God intends that our environments push us beyond our limits. It is this very kind of “frustrating” experience that becomes our guide to escort us to Christ.

This was Paul’s experience in 2 Corinthians 1:8-10: <sup>8</sup> “For we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, of our affliction which befell us in Asia, that we were excessively burdened, beyond our power, so that we despaired even of living. <sup>9</sup> Indeed we ourselves had the response of death in ourselves, that we should not base our confidence on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead; <sup>10</sup> Who has delivered us out of so great a death, and will deliver us; in whom we have hoped that He will also yet deliver us.” Here Paul allowed his “despair of living” to escort him to the God who raises the dead, knowing that He would deliver him. Thus, again and again, every kind of demand in our environment is actually a divine escort in disguise to lead us to Christ.

God humbles us through environments that we can’t cope with. It’s at these junctures that we need to quickly recognize our escort! The feelings of not being able to cope *are* the escort. Our escorts which lead us to Christ come in the form of frustrations, desperate feelings, and failures. We need to recognize these escorts and allow them to guide us to enter into Christ, our Sabbath-rest!

Environments that push us beyond our capacity are God’s favor to us, because He is not leaving us to ourselves. He exhausts us. He allows us to be defeated and feel discouraged. But the problem is this — we do not readily see that discouragement *is* our escort to Christ! May the Lord open our eyes to see what is happening to us in the midst of our reactions, that we might “seize our discouragement” and let it escort us to Christ.

Have you had any escorts lately? There is great hope in our escorts. They turn defeat into hope. The most defeated can use their very defeat as an escort to Christ. Whatever the Lord may expose in our lives — our reasoning mind, our divided heart, our motives — causes us to feel undone, naked, and defeated before Him. We need to realize *at that time* that the Lord is simply escorting us to Himself. Paul indicates this in Hebrews 4:13: “And there is no creature that is not manifest before Him, but all things are naked and laid bare to the eyes of Him to whom we are to give our account.” Following this verse in which we are exposed to the core of our being, Paul says in Hebrews 4:16, “Let us therefore come forward with boldness to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace for *timely help*.” This speaks

of being escorted to Christ *at the very time* of being naked and laid bare. Thus, all the demands and all the defeats are our personal escorts to Christ.

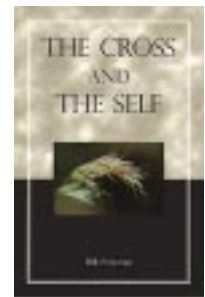
The demands of our environment are all arranged by God to lead us out of our own limited capacity and ability. God’s intention is to bring us into Another life. He wants us to touch the life that has already made it into glory! Touch the life Who is the victory! Touch the life that has now become our rest!

Now we need to answer our environments by turning to Christ in the midst of our problems and defeats. We need to partake of the One that our environments are escorting us to. Without this turn to Christ we will still languish in ourselves. But now, the Father is in the Son, the Son flows as the Spirit, and the Spirit is joined to our spirit. When we open our mouths to give thanks and praise Him, we open ourselves to all the riches of the Godhead as our supply. It is in this way that we answer our environments. Amen!\*

— Bill Freeman

## THE CROSS AND THE SELF

BY BILL FREEMAN



\* The above article is edited from the 6th chapter of *The Cross and the Self*, by Bill Freeman. This book of 317 pages may be ordered for \$15.95 post-paid from **Ministry Publications**, PO Box 1077, Moses Lake, WA 98837, or call (800) 573-4105; (509) 762-0400/ Email: [ministry@thechristian.org](mailto:ministry@thechristian.org).

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