

His Yoke



Matthew 11:16-30

Year A Proper 9

copyright © 2014

Freeman Ng

www.AuthorFreeman.com

Parts by scene

■ = large part ▲ = medium sized part ● = small part

		1	2	3
▲	Jesus	▲	▲	■
▲	Susanna - the more conventionally-minded friend of Joanna, who, like her friend, left her home to become a disciple	●	▲	▲
▲	John - the gentlest and most caring of the disciples	▲	▲	●
▲	Joanna - a wealthy woman with a perceptive and agile intellect who abandons her life as the co-manager of King Herod's household to follow Jesus	▲	▲	▲
▲	Judas - possibly the deepest thinker and best organizer, the one who usually sees the big picture most clearly, and also the disciple with the best sense of humor	▲	▲	●

Scene 1

Jesus , Joanna , John , Judas , Susanna

{Jesus and the disciples sit around their campfire.}

Jesus Well, we've had some good talk, but I think it's time to get to bed. It's been a long day.

Susanna I don't think I've ever walked so far in one day in my life. And that climb right at the end!

John It was worth it, though, to reach this spot.

Joanna The view is incredible. I'm already feeling compassion for the people of the town, seeing them all sleeping in their homes beneath us in the moonlight like this.

Jesus Is everything prepared for tomorrow?

Judas We're all set. We can take a turn at the synagogue of course, but we've also been invited specifically to speak to the crowd in the marketplace, and we'll be dining with several members of the town council. Plus, meetings with various contacts throughout the

day that I think could be useful.

Susanna What were the people like?

John Very receptive for the most part. Very anxious to hear what the rabbi has to say.

Joanna "For the most part"?

Judas There's always a little friction when dealing with people. We smoothed it over just fine, and I don't anticipate any problems tomorrow in the town.

Jesus What was nature of the friction this time?

{John and Judas look at each other for a moment, unwilling to talk about the problem.}

John Well, it was just some trickiness organizing the dinner.

Susanna Is there anything I can help with?

Joanna Susanna is the best dinner party organizer this side of the river Jordan.

Judas No, it wasn't that kind of problem.

Jesus Then what was it?

John Some of the council members just weren't sure if they could make it. That's all.

Jesus *[a little annoyed]* If they *could* make it? Or if they *would* make it?

Judas Okay: some of them got a little scandalized by the fact you have no problem socializing - their word was "partying" - with tax collectors and fallen women.

John But we made it clear that you've come to minister to all of Israel, to everyone who'll invite you to eat with them, and they accepted that.

Jesus *[a little angrily]* Unbelievable. And did you warn them that a former tax collector and a woman they'd consider "fallen" would be eating in one of their houses the very next day?

Judas Yeah, we made that very clear, and they were okay with it.

John It really was just a small misunderstanding. Very understandable.

Jesus *[with growing anger]* Oh, I understand it perfectly! It's like the children who sit in the marketplace and expect you to dance when they pipe a happy song or mourn when they sing a dirge. Judas, your former master was as ascetic as they come, and what did people say about him?

Judas A lot of them thought he was nuts.

Jesus And now the Son of Man comes to them eating and drinking, and what do they say? "He's a glutton and a drunk!" There's no winning!

Susanna But John and Judas got it all straightened out, right?

Jesus *[still smoldering]* Yes. The dignitaries of the town will hold their noses for one evening and suffer our band of sinners and outcasts to sully their doorways.

John It was only a few of them. A very small minority.

Joanna *[gently]* They're just afraid. We fear the unknown, and we hate what we fear. It's human nature.

Jesus *[exploding into anger again]* Don't tell me about human nature! Human nature will destroy this world! Human nature will send it to Hell! You have no idea what it's going to take to -

Judas *[interrupting sharply]* Rabbi!

{That causes Jesus to snap out of it, and there's a long silence.}

John *[gently]* Rabbi, shouldn't we all be getting to bed?

Jesus *[worn out]* Of course. Of course. Joanna, I apologize.

Joanna It's all right. Get some sleep. We'll all feel better in the morning.

Scene 2

Jesus , Joanna , John , Judas , Susanna

{Late that night, Joanna wakes some of the others.}

Joanna *[in an urgent whisper]* John! Judas! Wake up!

John *[blearily]* What is it? What's wrong?

Judas It's still dark! *[jokingly]* It better be the end of the world!

Joanna *[incoherent with desperation]* Please! Please!

John *[seriously]* I think it *is* the end of the world.

Judas All right, all right, we're coming.

{They get up and follow her.}

Joanna Hurry!

John What is it?

Joanna It's the rabbi. I don't think he went to bed at all. He's been up all this time, and now -

{At that moment, a shout pierces the air.}

Jesus *[shouting angrily down to the town throughout most of this scene]* Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida!

Judas Amazing! He kept himself at a boil all this time.

John He's going to make himself sick!

{They reach the spot that overlooks the town.}

Susanna Thank heavens you're here!

Joanna What's he been doing?

Susanna He was pacing back and forth like we found him, just stewing and muttering and arguing with imaginary foes, and he just started yelling as you came up.

Jesus Woe to you! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes!

John Rabbi! Rabbi, it's us.

Susanna He's raving!

Judas No he's not. What he said is actually absolutely true.

Jesus Truly I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you! And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted to the heavens? No! You will go down to Hell!

John This is awful!

Joanna He's not going to be in any shape for tomorrow if he doesn't calm down and get some sleep. And even if he makes it into the town for all his engagements, all he'll do is yell at them!

Judas That's a good point. We do need him calm - and rested - for tomorrow.

John Rabbi, let me take you back to bed. Please!

Susanna Rabbi, how about some warm milk? The fire's still smoldering; I'll fix you some!

Jesus If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. Truly I tell you: it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you! *[suddenly groans and faints]* Uhhhhh!

Joanna Rabbi!

Susanna He's fainted!

Judas John, help me with him. *[to the women]* Go and get his bed ready.

{The women exit and Judas and John help Jesus to his feet and begin leading him to bed.}

John Come on, rabbi, right this way.

Jesus *[mumbling wearily for the rest of the scene]* Where are we going?

Judas To bed. It's time to get some rest.

Jesus No rest for the wicked. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

John Not if you reach them first with your teaching.

Jesus So far to seek, and the paths all dark before my feet.

Judas That's how it's going to look at this hour. Things will look better in the morning.

Jesus The light shone in the darkness, and the darkness saw it not.
{They arrive at Jesus' tent.}

John Here you go, rabbi. Into the bed.
{Judas and John get Jesus into his bedroll and close the flap of his tent.}

Joanna Is he all right?

Judas Just a little punchy from exhaustion.

Susanna *[firmly]* I don't like seeing him this way!

John *[in wonder]* I hate seeing *myself* that way.

Joanna You? Like that? Never!

John Sometimes. In my heart. I don't show it. I don't dare.

Susanna *[scornfully]* And you're right to keep it hidden! A grown man should have more self control.

Judas Maybe. But maybe a Messiah also needs that inner fire. That fire that can sometimes burst forth unexpectedly. My former master was like that. Sometimes, I thought of him more as a force of nature than a man. An earthquake that could level a city in a night.

Joanna *[incredulously]* So you're okay with this?

Judas For now. There's a time and place for everything. At some point, we'll need the man we saw tonight. But hopefully, we won't see him in the town tomorrow.

Scene 3

Jesus , Joanna , John , Judas , Susanna

{Yet later that night, a little before dawn, in the women's tent.}

Joanna *[anxiously]* Are you awake?

Susanna *[sleepily]* Barely. The first light always wakes me, but don't worry, I can go right back to sleep.

Joanna I think something's wrong.

Susanna What is it?

Joanna Listen! Can you hear that?

Susanna Ummm...someone's up and about already.

Joanna Someone's been walking around out there for over an hour now. Not doing anything; just pacing back and forth. I think it might be the rabbi.

Susanna *[groaning]* Not again.

Joanna Will you come with me to check on him?

Susanna Ugh. All right. I guess I'm not going to get back to sleep either way.

{They exit their tent and find Jesus kneeling on the ground in a clearing.}

Joanna I think he's praying!

Susanna Good! That's exactly what he needs to calm himself down. We should have thought of it last night.

Jesus *[praying calmly]* I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do.

{He stops, and after a long silence, the women speak.}

Joanna Rabbi?

Susanna Rabbi, are you done praying?

{Jesus rises and looks at the women.}

Jesus *[a little dizzily, as if he's still a little dazed by exhaustion]* What are you doing up so early? We have a big day ahead of us, you know.

Joanna We were worried about you.

Jesus Really? Why?

Susanna You were so angry at the town in the middle of the night. Remember?

Jesus Shouldn't that have made you worry about the town rather than about me?

Joanna Well, you were pretty worn out. We were worried about your health.

Jesus *[becoming a little more animated or agitated]* My health! "Physician, heal thyself!" That's what they'll say.

Susanna Huh? Who are "they"?

Jesus "They will look upon him whom they pierced!"

Susanna Rabbi, what are you talking about?

Joanna *[whispering to Susanna]* I think you'd better to get the others.

{Susanna exits.}

Jesus *[beginning to really ramble]* Others he saved. He could not save himself!

Joanna *[trying to make small talk]* We don't have a doctor in the group, do we? Maybe we should try to recruit one. We've been lucky so far that no one's gotten seriously ill.

Jesus *[getting more worked up]* Don't worry about sicknesses of the body. Worry about sicknesses of the soul! For what goes into the mouth goes into the stomach and then out into the latrine. But what comes *out* of the mouth: that's what truly defiles! Evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander!

Joanna *[trying to change the subject]* Rabbi, what were you praying about just now? What are the things the Father hid from the wise but showed to children?

Jesus *[solemnly]* All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

{Joanna waits for more explanation, but Jesus says nothing more.}

Joanna *[uncertainly]* Uh huh. Well, maybe you should try to get a little more sleep before everyone gets up.

Jesus *[becoming more agitated]* Can't! Have to...have to see the town again! Yes!

{He begins to walk toward the view of the town where he was yelling before.}

Joanna Rabbi, no! That won't do any good! What you need is sleep!

Jesus Sleep! That knits the raveled sleeve of care.

{The others arrive on the scene.}

Joanna *[to the others]* Help!

Susanna Oh no! He going to scream at the town again!

John Rabbi, why don't you go back to bed? You'll feel better with a little more sleep.

Judas Let him go! Let him do what he has to do!

Joanna *[to Judas]* He's going to be wreck for the town! He's got to get some sleep!

Judas *[breezily]* Hey, if you think you can grab hold of the earthquake and stop it shaking, be my guest!

{Jesus stops at the edge of the promontory and pauses for a long time. Then he calls out to the town in a strong, compassionate voice that breaks at times with grief.}

Jesus *[slowly and with great feeling]*
Come to me!
All who are worn out by grief
And weighed down by care,
And I will give you rest.
Take my yoke upon you
And learn from me!
For my yoke is easy,
And my burden is light!
For I am gentle and humble in heart,
And you will find rest for you souls!

{A long silence.}

Susanna Wow.

John Heart of my heart.

Joanna Praise to the earthquake!

Judas I think we're ready for the town now.

You can read my thoughts about this play and respond with your own at
www.WineskinProject.net/blog/yoke

Copyright © 2014 by Freeman Ng and the Wineskin Project

Freeman Ng is a writer, poet, and Google software engineer living in Oakland, California. He's also the author of:

- *Joan* - a novelization of the life of Joan of Arc
- *Who Am I?* - a personalizable picture book
- **Haiku Diem** - a daily haiku feed that's been going since July, 2010

www.AuthorFreeman.com