

Won't You Dance to My Tune, Lord?

Too many of us want the rest Jesus offers us without the yoke He places on us.



Tintoretto's "Christ Preaching to the Multitudes" [Public Domain, Wikiart]

•

By JULES GOMES Published on September 5, 2025

Jesus rebukes the crowds in Matthew's gospel: "To what shall I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in

the marketplaces and calling to one another, ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.’”

To what shall we compare our generation? Our generation does not think. In 1990, the educationist Jane Healy wrote *Endangered Minds: Why Our Children Don’t Think*. The most shocking discovery in her massive research is that children who watch a lot of television actually have smaller brains because they have been disrupted by “media assault and instant sensory gratification.”

Ours is a generation that lives on a diet of endless entertainment. In 1986, Neil Postman published *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. He wrote:

In courtrooms, classrooms, operating rooms, board rooms, churches, and even airplanes, Americans no longer talk to each other; they entertain each other. They do not exchange ideas; they exchange images. They do not argue with propositions; they argue with good looks, celebrities, and commercials.

Ours is a generation that lives in uninterrupted anxiety. You would have thought that 24/7 entertainment would make us the happiest generation in the history of humankind. In 1947, the poet W. H. Auden wrote a poem called “The Age of Anxiety,” describing a world in which “The lights must never go out, the music must always play . . . Lest we should see where we are, lost in a haunted wood, children afraid of the night, who have never been happy or good.”

Ours is a generation where everything is all about me. In 1979, the cultural historian Christopher Lasch wrote *The Culture of Narcissism*, suggesting that **the people of this generation have a very weak sense of self that requires constant external validation. Our egos need constant pampering to assure us that all is well with our souls.**

Don’t Make Jesus Your Cosmic Therapist

The people of this generation are laboring under a very heavy yoke indeed. Who will lighten it? Who will bear our burdens? Isn't the answer obvious? Jesus will lighten our yoke! Does He not say, "Come unto me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest?"

Is this a good solution? NO! It is the worst possible solution to our problem. Because if our dumbed-down, entertainment-obsessed, anxiety-ridden, narcissistic generation responds to Jesus's invitation, we will tell Him to dumb down His demands of us. We will want Jesus to entertain us, turn Him into our therapist, and expect Him to pamper our egos and validate our weak sense of self. We will expect Jesus to dance to our tune.

This is precisely what the crowds described in Matthew 11:16-3 are doing. Jesus compares them to immature children playing a game of weddings and funerals. As at a wedding, some children are merrily playing the flute and expecting their playmates to dance. Their playmates don't want to play along, so they suggest playing funerals. As at a funeral, some children are mournfully singing a dirge and expecting their playmates to beat their breasts. Again, their playmates don't want to play along.

Like spoiled children, the crowds are expecting John the Baptist and Jesus the Messiah to play their game, sing their song, and dance to their tune. When John and Jesus refuse to play ball, the crowds reject them. They reject John because he fasts — his brand of religion is too strict! They reject Jesus because He feasts — His brand of religion is too lax. He is a guzzler and boozier!

Isn't this precisely what many churches, preachers, and Christians do to Jesus? We dumb down His teaching and domesticate His demands. We expect Him to say what we want to hear. We expect Him to tickle our ears, amuse us, entertain us, make life comfortable, and pamper our egos.

Jesus Rejects the Elect and Elects the Rejects

The crowds are in for a shock. Jesus refuses to dance to their tune. Jesus refuses to infantilize them. He begins to “denounce the cities where most of his mighty works had been done, because they did not repent” (Matthew 11:20). Jesus isn’t meek and mild; He is rude and offensive. Like an Old Testament prophet, He calls down “woes” on Chorazin and Bethsaida. He compares them to the towns of Tyre and Sidon. He then compares Capernaum to Sodom.

Jesus is from Galilee. He spends most of his life in Galilee and performs most of His miracles there. Capernaum, Chorazin, and Bethsaida are just a short walk along the Sea of Galilee. These are Jewish cities. Jesus lived in Capernaum. He knows the people. Yet these are the very people who reject Jesus. They think they know it all and have it all. They want entertainment, not challenge. They want a therapeutic massage, not a prophetic message. **Jesus turns the tables. He rejects the elect and elects the rejects. He denounces the insiders and welcomes the outsiders.**

The outsiders are the people of Tyre and Sidon. Tyre and Sidon are Gentile cities on the Phoenician coast. The prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel had called down God’s judgment on them, dooming them to destruction (Isaiah 23:1-18, Ezekiel 26-28). Sodom was a byword for immorality. Jesus now dooms His own people to destruction but welcomes those cities to salvation.

The Greatest Invitation Ever Made

He issues the greatest invitation ever made: “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Is the invitation only to the outsiders of Tyre and Sidon? Has Jesus entirely rejected His own people? No. The invitation is for everyone. But before Jesus invites His own people, He has to challenge them to repent. Otherwise, they will come to Him on their terms, not His, and ask Him to dance to their tune. They

have been laboring under a heavy yoke, and they need to take on themselves His instead.

The Christian life is not all about “taking it easy” and enjoying rest. **When we come to Christ, He first removes our yoke and fits His upon us in its place. He lifts our burden but places His burden upon us instead.** Too many of us want the rest without the yoke; we want to lose our burden, but we don’t want to gain Christ’s. In the Old Testament, the yoke is a symbol of the Torah — of teaching and submission to authority. When Jesus says, “Take my yoke upon you,” He also says, “learn from Me.” To take on the yoke of Christ is to become His disciple, to study His teaching, and to regard Him not only as Savior but as Lord and Teacher.

For our generation, this is the most difficult step to take because we want Jesus to dance to our tune. We want Christianity to be taught to us in soundbites, we want the preacher to be a stand-up comedian, we want our pastor to pamper our egos, we want worship to be entertaining, and we want Jesus to validate what we do. And we wonder why we are not at rest even after we have surrendered to Christ. We wonder why we still labor under heavy burdens even after we have become Christians.

The people of our generation are laboring under a very heavy yoke indeed. Jesus promises to lighten our yoke. Jesus promises to bear our burdens. But it is only when we stop expecting Him to dance to our tune that we can come to Him with all our labors and heavy burdens, and He will give us rest. Only then can we sing, “It is well, it is well, with my soul!”

Dr. Jules Gomes (BA, BD, MTh, PhD) has a doctorate in biblical studies from the University of Cambridge. Currently a Vatican-accredited journalist based in Rome, he is the author of five books and several academic articles. Gomes lectured at Catholic and Protestant seminaries and universities and was canon theologian and artistic director at Liverpool Cathedral.