

The Custom Fit

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In England they call it a “bespoke suit.” In this country we call it a “custom made suit.” In either case it refers to a suit of clothes—jacket, trousers, perhaps a vest—made to measure using handwork techniques that go back hundreds of years. Sure, there have been innovations: fabrics made by machine, steam ironing and pressing, and so on. But the important thing is, the finished product is made to your measurements from the get-go and carefully fitted and constructed all the way along the line. A bespoke suit typically looks great, responds well to maintenance and repair, and lasts a long time. And it feels good while you’re wearing it. It’s a real confidence booster.

That’s just the sort of thing Jesus had in mind when he said “my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” In those days people carried things in containers suspended from shoulder yokes (they still do, but not so much around here, or I wouldn’t have to explain it). And yokes were used to hitch oxen to plows and wagons (again, you still see that, but not so much around here). In both cases the yokes were made of wood to fit around the shoulder girdle of a person or a beast of burden. Each yoke had to be custom fitted to the person or the animal it was intended for. Otherwise the burden of doing the work was increased. Discomfort, fatigue

and injury could result from badly made and fitted yokes. A well-designed, well-made and well-fitted yoke definitely made the load easier to manage.

It would appear that Jesus was trained as a carpenter. The word we translate as carpenter could also mean someone who cut or carved other kinds of material, such as stone, but traditionally we think of Jesus as a worker in wood. If so, he might well have made and fitted yokes to oxen or people. In any case he certainly knew something about how such pieces of equipment were made and used. Because when he says “my yoke is easy and my burden is light” his point is the custom fit.

What Jesus means is that he is like someone making a custom-fitted device to help you carry the burden of life. Each person is unique, so each person’s approach to coping with life must also be unique. I’m not talking just about moral, emotional and spiritual burdens; any burden is God’s concern. Jesus’ message is this: God is not squashing us into a set of one-size-fits-all requirements. If you accept what I’m saying about God’s kingdom (says Jesus) you will find God meets you where you are and that his gift of love calls forth a response from you that will result in a solution that fits you to a tee.

And so it is. It turns out to be a lifelong project, not a one-shot fitting. Few are the suits that don’t have to be altered,

adjusted or at least cleaned and pressed during their lifetime! Conversion to faith in Jesus Christ is a matter of numerous, maybe even continuous, alterations. And that is so the fit will be just right. God's righteousness wants to settle on us not as an oppressive weight but as a lifting joy. We are called to wear God's glory briskly and brightly in the world. Through prayer, study, and Godly conversation the fit is adjustable within the generous bounds of God's justice and mercy. With such help in carrying our load of hopes, responsibilities, illnesses, losses, opportunities and wonders—all the stuff of existence—we walk lightly and rise to eternal life.