

SERMON FOR JULY 9, 2023

TEXT: MATTHEW 11:25-30

THEME: YOU DON'T HAVE TO GO IT ALONE

25 At that time Jesus declared, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; **26** yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. **27** All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. **28** Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. **29** Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. **30** For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

In the name of Jesus:

There is a wonderful legend concerning the quiet years of Jesus, the years prior to his visible ministry. The legend claims that Jesus the carpenter was one of the master yoke-makers in the Nazareth area. People came from miles around for a yoke, hand carved and crafted by Jesus son of Joseph. When customers arrived with their team of oxen, Jesus would spend considerable time measuring the team, their height, the width, the space between them, and the size of their shoulders. Within a week, the team would be brought back and he would carefully place the newly made yoke over the shoulders, watching for rough places, smoothing out the edges and fitting them perfectly to this particular team of oxen.

Jesus knows all about yokes. A pastor and church leader named Justin

Martyr lived about a hundred years after Jesus. He wrote that Jesus and His earthly father, Joseph, were carpenters and plied their trade by making yokes for oxen. Justin Martyr even said that some of the yokes that Joseph and Jesus made were still in use into the second century, because the workmanship of Joseph and Jesus were of such fine quality that they were built to last.

Today Jesus invites you to take His yoke upon you. The yoke Jesus invites us to take, the yoke that brings rest to weary souls, is one that is made exactly to your heart and life. The yoke He invites you to wear fits you well for it is designed for two to carry, for Jesus is your partner carrying your yoke, He has come to bear your burdens.

In a literal sense a yoke is a bar of wood, so constructed to allow two animals, usually oxen, to share the weight of the load, making the work easier on the animals that are to carry the weight. The principle of a yoke is that it makes things easier to carry. The bar called the yoke spreads out or evenly distributes the weight that is to be carried or pulled. Jesus invites you to take on His yoke, to be so bound to Him that you will allow Him to lead you in your life, so too allow Him to pull the weight of giving you a clean conscience before God the Father. He has done this through the forgiveness of your sins. He invites you to take upon His yoke and learn more of Him, dedicating your life

to Him, allowing Him to lead, guide, and help you in your time of need for He loves you. We need to learn the lesson Jesus teaches in this lesson of the yoke.

I remember an old story about a little boy who was out helping dad with the yard work. Dad asked him to pick up the rocks in a certain area of the yard. Dad looked over and saw him struggling to pull up a huge rock buried in the dirt. The little boy struggled and struggled while Dad watched. Finally, the boy gave up and said, "I can't do it." Dad asked, "Did you use all of your strength?" The little boy looked hurt and said, "Yes, sir. I used every ounce of strength I have." The father smiled and said, "No you didn't. You didn't ask me to help." The father walked over and then the two of them pulled that big rock out of the dirt.

True freedom comes from being yoked with, being connected to Christ. There are things in life that weigh you down, especially knowing that not one of us has measured up to God's commands. There are public sins that we commit, sins that are known to others, such as in the way we speak or react to people who have wronged us. But there are also secret sins, which truly reveal how sinful we really are, the sins of the heart, the hatred, the jealousy, the lust, which, if these secret sins were revealed, we would be deeply ashamed. No one can see these sins, only God, and you know in your heart that. As much as you try to change your thoughts or behavior, you still sin, you

still fall short of what God demands and expects.

Your life is compounded not just with your sinfulness, but also with the daily challenges and burdens of life. You have heard life explained or described as a rat race. It is as if you feel like a hamster spinning the wheel in the cage, going full throttle in life trying to meet the challenges of life, but you keep spinning the wheel, not seeing any progress, and in the end, you are physically, emotionally, and spiritually exhausted. You are at the end of your rope and you feel as if you are going it alone, that you are swimming upstream, going against the current with no hope in sight.

God's Good News for you today is that He has sent His Son, Jesus, to be your ever-present Help in the times of your trouble. In good times and in bad, Jesus is there with you, for Jesus Christ is your yoke, for He has taken upon Himself your sin to be your Savior. He has bound Himself to you in His birth, taking on the same flesh that you have, with all of its burdens. Jesus has so bound Himself to you and that He came down from heaven to become flesh and blood, just as you are flesh and blood. He was born as you were born, He lived just as you live today. He was called to obey authority, submit Himself to the guidance and discipline of His mother and father, Jesus went to school, to worship and Sunday School, He even as we have seen the words of Justin

Martyr, held a job. Jesus knew the daily challenges of life, of meeting expectations, of paying bills, of making ends meet. Jesus lived as you live; yet Jesus lived His life perfectly for you, loving God first and foremost, so as to bind Him to you in love.

But Jesus also bound Himself to you in His death. Jesus died a very real death, dying a death that you deserved on the cross of Calvary. The Scriptures proclaim that cursed is anyone who hangs on a tree. Jesus was cursed when He died on Calvary's cross. The perfect One died a perfect death for you so that by His life and death He would be so connected to you so that you would belong to Him.

You have been eternally connected to Jesus in your Baptism. There the One who rose from the grave called you from the death of your sins into an eternal life with God. In your Baptism God has drowned your sins and placed you in His Son Jesus Christ. You don't belong to yourself, you don't belong to the world, you don't belong to your problems, and you belong to Jesus! You are yoked, eternally connected to Jesus in Baptism, so that nothing will ever be able to separate you from His love.

Even though you have numerous burdens that cause anxiety and weigh you down, Jesus has connected you to Himself, so that He now bears your

burdens. He is in control of your life, of the things that worry you and depress you. Jesus is there carrying your problems, so you don't need to feel as if you are going at it alone. You aren't, because Jesus is with you and invites you to cast your cares upon Him for He cares for you. That is Jesus' gracious invitation for you today, for He says: **"28** Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. **29** Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. **30** For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Jesus reminds you that His yoke is easy to bear. Why? For He has known you from the moment you were conceived in your mother's womb. Jesus has fitted the yoke He has for you and especially has designed it so that it fits you well, so wear it well. Learn what Jesus means when He says this. He is not out to punish you; God isn't out to get you. No, instead God poured out His wrath upon His Son, Jesus, for YOU! Jesus has borne your grief and carried your sorrows to His cross. All of your sins, and all of your burdens and anxieties have been nailed and crucified to Jesus' cross. And seeing that Jesus has risen from the grave, He by the power of His resurrection now gives you a new life to live, a life, which trusts in Christ to lead and guide you throughout your life.

Jesus invites you to come to Him. He invites you to take and receive

what God alone gives you, namely, forgiveness, life, His power, His peace, and eternal security and salvation. Come and take, and learn of Jesus. Each week God invites you to come to Him in worship, to freely receive what He gives in Christ. Come and learn of Jesus not just on Sunday but learn of Jesus everyday, opening yourself to the blessings of His Word. God speaks and gives great blessings to all who hear His Word. It is true what the Psalmist says: “Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the Law of the Lord” (Ps. 119:1), and “this is my comfort in my affliction that your promise gives me life.” (Ps. 119: 50). Let God’s Word be “a lamp to your feet and a Light to your path, “ because the Lord gives life to His people by His Word.

On special days such as Christmas or on a birthday we like to say: “Come and open your presents!” While this seems like a command to do something, it isn’t a burden; rather, it is a joy when people receive the gifts that are intended for them to have! It is never a burden, rather, it is a joy to receive and open gifts from the giver. Dear friend, God loves you with an everlasting love. He has sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, to bear your sin and be your Savior. Jesus invites you to cast your cares on Him, for Jesus really does care for you. Jesus longs to give to you the peace that surpasses all understanding.

He invites you to trust in Him that He will work all things out for you according to His plan.

You don't need to go at it alone. So come, take, learn of Jesus. Let Him pull the load of your sin, the weight of your guilt, the burdens and anxieties you have. He loves you. And when you trust in Christ, and give Him your burdens, then you will find the rest, help and peace you are looking for, only in Jesus.

Amen