SINCERE FAITH
1 JOHN 3:1-3 MATTHEW 23:1-12

In our reading in Matthew, Jesus warns the crowd and his disciples about the hypocrisy and attitude of the Pharisees. Pharisees, one of two sects –Pharisees and Sadducees—that make up Jewish leadership. They commit to strict observance of the Law of Moses and oral traditions surrounding it. Jesus opposes them not because they care about God's law but because they use adherence to it as a crushing burden and tool for self-righteousness. Their hypocrisy and false piety cause them to miss the intention and spirit of the law:

> "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former." Matthew 23:23

Jesus addresses the Pharisees' critical oversight, saying to his followers, "So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach" (Matthew 23:3). The Pharisees have created elaborate systems of rules that reach far beyond the dictates of Scripture. Examples include that you cannot spit on the Sabbath, nor can you swat a fly on the Sabbath, and you must use a specified methodology for proper hand-washing before eating. These burdensome dictates Jesus addresses in Mark 7:7: "They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules." Jesus calls out legalism and hypocrisy while calling his followers to a sincere lifestyle of faith and fellowship. His concern is for the heart of the hearers (Matthew 23:4, see below).

The Word of God is a gift. It is not a yoke of slavery. The Bible repeatedly teaches that God is the source of relief and strength: ""Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30). Look at the invitation in this verse. Christ

invites the weary and the burdened to come to Him. "Come . . . Take my yoke. Learn. Rest. My burden

is light," He says. The Pharisees teach identity in prestige and rule-keeping. Jesus' message is always identity in relationship with Him.

Sometimes, I believe, we are guilty of tying up our own heavy burdens—guilty of setting our eyes on the burden and not on Christ. Let me ask you this morning, to what are you yoked: Burdens of sin, guilt resulting from aspects of our past, financial stress, grief, spiritual weariness, challenges in relationships, emotional wounds? You are not carrying anything that God cannot handle. Dave Ortland writes, "You don't need to unburden or collect yourself and *then* come to Jesus. Your very burden is what qualifies you to come." Jesus says it in Matthew 11:28: "Come *ALL*"! The God we serve is not passive when His children suffer. He invites us to bring to Him our burdens. Having denied His Lord and having experienced His love and Saving Grace, the Apostle Peter tells us with assurance: "Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7). Peter would know! Further, Christ breaks the chains, the heavy yoke, of our sin: "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery" (Galatians 5:1). Christ offers freedom from any yoke that is not His. Isaiah 40:31 describes His freedom this way:

> but those who hope in the Lord
> will renew their strength.
> They will soar on wings like eagles;
> they will run and not grow weary,
> they will walk and not be faint.

We find rest in Him and gain new strength. The Father of mercies and the God of all hope invites you to come. To be yoked to Christ is to learn from

Him, to find rest in Him. His power is made perfect in our weakness. Paul testifies, “But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me” (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Family, His Grace is sufficient. Living out a sincere faith begins with a sincere understanding of our own reality. You and I need a Savior! Good works won’t do it. Mohammed, Buddha, Confucius, the Universe, Karma, good energy—none of that will save. Only Jesus saves. And not Jesus plus anything, only the Living Christ can save.

For all who bear burdens today, I offer some practical applications of this truth:

1. Cast your burdens upon Him. Prayer and surrender are the means by which God lifts burdens
2. See His rest. Accept His “easy yoke” and find peace in His guidance.
3. Trust His presence. Psalm 16:11: “You make known to me the path of life; You will fill me with joy in Your presence, with eternal pleasures at Your right hand.”
4. Lean on community: “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way, you will fulfill the law of Christ” Galatians 6:2. Carrying each other’s burdens reflects Christ’s love. Trust Him, surrender to Him, and rely upon Him: “‘He Himself bore our sins’ in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness. ‘By His wounds you have been healed’” (1 Peter 2:24). He is certainly capable of carrying our burdens, and He does because He cares for us.
5. Remember that the joy of the Lord is your strength 0 Nehemiah said, “Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength” (Nehemiah 8:10).

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Carrying your burden of guilt and shame is of some form of penance to be paid. It is unnecessary bondage. Our relationship with the Lord, Christian, is meant to be enjoyed. He is rich in mercy. He delights in mercy. While we are often busy running from God, wrestling with burdens or bound by sin, Christ invites us to come, to learn, to rest. Family, no matter where you are, you need Jesus. And no matter who you are, He will receive you. Come to Him in humility and repentance, honest about the burden you carry, and He will help you carry it and give you peace.

PASSAGES IN SUPPORT OF THIS SERMON:

1 John 3:1-3

3 See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. 2 Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. 3 All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

Matthew 23:1-12

A Warning Against Hypocrisy

23 Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: 2 “The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. 3 So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. 4 They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.

5 “Everything they do is done for people to see: They make their phylacteries[a] wide and the tassels on their garments long; 6 they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; 7 they love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to be called ‘Rabbi’ by others.

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8 “But you are not to be called ‘Rabbi,’ for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers. 9 And do not call anyone on earth ‘father,’ for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. 10 Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one Instructor, the Messiah. 11 The greatest among you will be your servant. 12 For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

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