

Sermon preached by Rev. Phillip Jensen at the Healing Service at St. Andrew's Cathedral,
Sydney on Wednesday 19th October 2005.
Reading: Matthew 11:25 -30, 23:1-12 Topic: "Carrying a Great Weight"

Good evening friends, tonight as we look at these two passages in Matthew's gospel, two passages where we hear Jesus speak, I want to address especially those of us who are **carrying a great weight**. I do not know what that weight is. It can be the burden sickness, pain unforgiven sin. It can be the burden of living outside the will of God. It can be the burden of suffering the consequences of our fallen world; the ruined health, the ruined relationships, the mind that is overloaded with worries and concerns. Life is not easy, sometimes it is very, very hard. Sometimes it feels like we are walking through treacle and at every turn added weights are placed on our shoulders.

Did you notice in the two passages we read tonight there was the same word **Heavy**, heavy burdens and heavy laden. In fact the Greek word is the same word for burden *so practice and observe whatever they tell you- but not what they do. For they preach but do not practice* laden. In Matthew 23 Jesus speaks of heavy burdens *They tie up heavy burdens hard to bear and lay them on peoples' shoulders*. Jesus knew how the religious leaders of Israel were adding to peoples' burdens, he knew how we are so often burdened in life and he uses the same word, burden in Matthew 11, though, there it is translated laden. *V28 Come unto me all who labour and are heavy laden*. He knew that life can be a real labour, tiring, wearying, exhausting, as one burden after another is laid upon us and as we try to go on in sickness and guilt in broken hostile relationships, in unloving environments. For some people life seems a breeze, but for many of us it is a long uphill struggle and even if at some stage it all seemed easy it now is hard and difficult. We get depressed and sad, finding it hard to get out of bed, let alone be able to get done all the things that we want and need to do. Jesus knew that there were people who laboured long and hard in life and were tired and burdened by the struggle. He knew that the burdens sometimes felt too heavy to bear.

But the two passages are very different for they contain a contrast between the leaders in Israel who were laying burdens on people and Jesus who came to bear our burdens for us. Notice in chapter 23 how the scribes and the Pharisees were *Laying it on us. They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders*. They have authority that is to be respected, for they do this from Moses seat they are telling us the law, the law of God and claiming to do it in the name of Moses for some of the burdens of life do come from our disobedience to the law of God. But these leaders (i) **preach without practice** (what they preach) so in v3 we read *"so practice and observe whatever they tell you – but not what they do. For they preach but do not practice."* They do not keep the law of Moses but they lay it heavily on the shoulders of the weary sensitive souls who are struggling in life already, while all the while indeed rather than being like Moses who was noted for his meekness and humility they (ii) **love prominence** "By our sense of superiority we are able to put you down. By putting you down we are able to build up our own sense of superiority." So instead of bearing other's burdens they enjoyed burdening others. They did their deeds to be seen and admired by others. They loved the show of religious significance and importance. They loved best seats and titles; they loved dominating as Father or Teacher.

One of the things you will notice in our healing ministry here at St Andrew's is that in the prayer time, when people come up to pray with you, it is the lay leadership of the congregation that prays with you, not the ordained leaders for it is God who hears prayers and heals. It is not by our power but by the mercy of our powerful God who hears the prayers of his humble people. Notice v11-12 *"The greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled and whoever humbles himself will be exalted."* And these proud teachers and leaders were **not willing** to lift a finger to help the needy and burdened people, rather they took the pride of place in the community but left the communing suffering under their oppression see this condemnation of them in the end of v4 *"They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on peoples' shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger."* When you are down and struggling, the last thing you need is more advice that is going to burden you yet further. What you need is somebody to come beside you and take some of the load for you to lift the burden to share the suffering.

And here is the great contrast with Jesus for unlike the scribes and Pharisees of his day or the moralists of our day Jesus' role was **Bearing it for us**. He came into the world to save us, to rescue, heal and protect us. He did not come into the world to condemn the world but that the world may be saved through him. So turn your attention to Matt.11 and notice three things: where his authority came from, what he is asking us to do, what he is promising us. Firstly then his authority it is not from Moses seat but from **God's heaven** for his Father is Lord of heaven and earth in v25 the scribes loved being called Father but there is only one Father, the one who is in heaven and he is Lord of both heaven and earth. Now Jesus thanks his Father in heaven because all authority in heaven and earth is given to God's son v27 "*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 chooses to reveal him.*" Jesus as the Son of God the Father has been given all the authority of his Father to rule the world. Already Jesus can see what happens by his death and resurrection *All Authority in heaven and earth has been given to me* he says. But notice how different is the one who is truly in command and control. He is not seeking his own prominence, he is not proud and exalting himself but he is **gentle and lowly in heart**. This is what we need, a ruler who is more concerned for the people he rules than he is for himself. A ruler and king who is genuinely humble, kind and gentle and that is Jesus. V29 *Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart.* This is the king we want. This is the man that we want in charge and in control. This is the man who will lay down his life for us. This is the man who does not grow in prestige by our failures but will be concerned to help us in our struggles.

So secondly there is this wonderful **invitation**. It is repeated three times in slightly different words. It is the invitation to come to him, to take his yoke, to learn from him. They are all the same invitation for we come to him as our master, putting his yoke upon us. We come to him as our teacher, learning from him but notice that we are to come to **him** not to **another**. For nobody else has all things handed over to him by his Father, nobody else has all authority in heaven and earth. It is Jesus that we have to deal with. It is Jesus that we have to come to with whatever struggle and burden we have, with whatever we are heavy laden with. We are to come to him. But as we come, we are not to come to him in order to tell him how to heal us. We do not come to him to tell him what he must do for us. We do not come to him as our servant. We come to him as our master. We must place his yoke upon our shoulders. We must accept him, the lord and master of the universe as our lord and master. And this means that we must learn from him. We do not come to our master to teach him. We do not come to our master in order to ignore him. We come to learn from him, to learn how to live, how to love, how to deal with our burdens, how to forgive and be forgiven.

Thirdly notice the **promise**. It is a wonderful promise, well really three wonderful promises. (i) rest oh what a wonderful word for the weary is that word "rest". When we have been troubled; when the anxiety of mind and pain of body keeps us awake at night; when the ongoing week in week out pressure of living, suffering of unresolved tensions in our family keeps burdening our hearts and minds, what a wonderful word is that word "rest". When our souls are troubled by guilty conscience, seared by memories of things we would rather forget; when the hurts of harsh words, abuse and of body and mind keep overwhelming our emotions, what a wonderful word is that word "rest". Jesus offers us rest, rest for our souls. *Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your soul.* It is well with my soul. The second promise (ii) His yoke is easy. Our master is not harsh but gentle and lowly in heart and so his yoke is not harsh and difficult so he will not harm or hurt us as we come under his lordship. In fact he will give to us the easing of burdens making our life more pleasant and pleasurable because the third promise is that his burden is (iii) **light** He does not add heavy burdens to our troubled lives. The exact reverse, he lifts our burdens and cares for our troubles. What he calls upon us to do is to trust him, to live by his word in loving forgiveness, in faithful service of others. Being selfish always looks like the best thing for us, but we all know that being unselfish is the way to live and have friends. Love is not something you take but something you give having to pray is not a heavy burden to bear but an enormous privilege that lifts our burdens. Having to fellowship with Christ's people is not a painful drudgery but an enormous encouragement and a useful remedy for selfish introspection. The burdens of Christ, the lessons he teaches us enrich our lives and do not burden us. Giving our money to others is not a financially crippling pain for it is more blessed to give than to receive. In command after command of Jesus there is life and pleasure.

What about you are you carrying a Great Weight? I do not know what it is. It can be in body, mind, emotions, relationships, guilt. You don't have to carry it alone. You do not have to have people adding more burden to you. You can come to Jesus, the Lord of Heaven and Earth, the one who died to bear our sins, the one who has risen to rule the world. He is gentle and lowly in heart. He has promised rest for your soul. His yoke is easy and his burden is light. Come tonight.

Dear God,

I know that I am not worthy to be accepted by you.

I don't deserve your gift of eternal life.

I am guilty of rebelling against you and ignoring you.

I need forgiveness.

Thank you for sending your son to die for me

That I may be forgiven,

Thank you that he rose from the dead

To give me new life.

Please forgive me and change me,

That I may live with Jesus as my ruler. Amen