

## Unload the Burden

**Grace and peace to you from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ...**

I've heard it said that, *"Sometimes you don't feel the weight of what you've been carrying until you feel the weight of its release."* ...

Another person once said, *"It's the things that we quietly carry within ourselves that are the heaviest burdens."* ....

And for a happy Sunday and a happy life I've heard it said, *"May your burdens be few and your coffee strong"* ...

I read a story a few years ago about a teacher in India who used an unusual method of teaching to her students about carrying burdens and why letting them go can lead to greater peace within...

And the way she did it was by giving to each student a plastic bag (and asking each student to take one potato that she had in a big bucket for every person they disliked, every fear and worry they were holding onto, and for every concern they had for the future)... and on each potato they were to write what it was that burdened them...

As you can imagine some students had a few potatoes and others had many... she then instructed the students to carry all of their potatoes in their plastic bag everywhere they went for a certain number of days... but the rule of the game was – they had to keep the bag of potatoes with them at all times (even as they laid down to sleep, went to the bathroom, had dinner with friends, etc.)... they had to hold onto that bag...

Well, as the days passed, the children began to complain about the odor that was being let out by the smelly rotting potatoes... and as you can imagine – those with more potatoes in their bags (complained even more)...

Finally, when the time had come - the students were relieved when they were given permission to throw away their slimy and rotten smelling potatoes... and then the teacher used it as an opportunity to share the following wisdom...

She said: *"This is exactly what happens when you willingly carry burdens... the weight and the stench of those things go with you wherever you go (and they are sure to weigh you down) – and if you had trouble carrying them for only a few weeks – imagine what your life would look like if you were willing to hold onto your burdens for a lifetime... this is why we teach you – let them go (so that you too can go in peace)"* ...

You know, this weekend is a very important celebration for our nation (because on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July we celebrate our freedom) but without getting into a big discussion about whether or not we're really indeed 'free' anymore as a nation (I'm more interested in you and your inner peace)... and so let me ask you a question – what potatoes did you bring with you in your bag this morning?... in other words, what burdens are weighing you down and keeping you from being free to have peace?... what worries plague your mind?... and what is it that's stealing away your joy?...

Well, let me begin by mentioning that there are honorable burdens that we carry – raising a family, doing a good job, or caring for someone in need...

In fact, we've all heard about the story of the man who stumbled upon a little boy who was carrying an even smaller boy on his back (who was lame and unable to walk on his own)... the man went up to the young boy and said, "That must be a very heavy burden for you to carry"... to which the boy replied, "That's not a burden – that's my brother"... and of course, when we carry a burden with love it's a much lighter load to carry...

But what about the unnecessary burdens that we carry with us (that prevent us from being free to have peace)?... the pain caused by broken relationships – the regret from our past – the mistakes we've made and rehash over and over in our minds (none of which we can change now but only learn from) – the fears of tomorrow (most of which never come true) – or even all the worries of today (all related to the troubles we see on the news or related to the pandemic)?... aren't they weighing you down?...

If so, listen to the words of Jesus this morning... he tells us in our Gospel lesson (in Matthew 11:28), "*Come to me, all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest... 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... for my yoke is easy and my burden is light*"...

Now many scholars believe that Jesus was primarily speaking to those who were burdened with a religion that was full of rules... and as you know, there are 613 laws that were given to the Jewish people (which in some ways, can be understood to be the most beautiful gift that God could have given His people)... but what made them burdensome to the people was the interpretation of the rabbis (which made the law strict and oppressive)...

In fact, one only has to look to Lakewood to see how burdensome the law can be – dictating everything from what you eat, to how you dress, to how you speak, and

ultimately – to how you think... this is why even Jesus challenged the rabbis in his own day (in relationship to all of the burdens imposed upon the people observing the Sabbath, for instance)... because when we're weighed down with guilt, and with feelings of inadequacy, or even with a sense of obligation to prove our faithfulness to God (life becomes filled with burdens rather than joy and with love)... and it is certainly less likely to change the heart...

But this is also why Jesus invites us to come to him in prayer (to lay down our burdens – whatever they may be) so that we can be free from the things that drag us down (and live our lives with joy and with peace) as the Children of God... the way that God intended us to live... and the way that He wants us to live today – even with all of the troubles that surround us...

This is why it tells us in 1 Peter 5:7, “*Cast all your cares on him, because he cares about you*”...

or when we're facing troubles – it's why we hear David remind us how he kept a *still mind* in the midst of difficulty - when he says in Psalm 55:22, “*Cast all of your burdens on the LORD, and he will sustain you; He will never allow the righteous to be shaken*”...

and why David also celebrates the name of the Lord when he writes these words in Psalm 68:19, “*Blessed be the Lord! Day after day he bears our burdens; because God is our salvation*”... in other words, God is the one who can restore, lift up the broken hearted, and bring peace to those who not only carry heavy burdens (but are willing to give them to the Lord in prayer)... or as they say, “Let go – and let God”...

and so again, I wonder – what burdens are you carrying with you this morning?... and what's preventing you from giving them to the Lord in prayer?... and once you give it to God (the Bible tells us that whatever comes our way – He will be with us to the end of the ages)... if you would but trust that God loves you (and will not let any harm come to you)...

Let me close with a simple story that made me smile this week (and perhaps might remind you of why we can give our burdens to the Lord)... it's a story about a Sunday school teacher who was trying to teach his students (the same message that I am this morning) – that we can always bring our burdens to the Lord...

And so the teacher says to the children – Jesus tells those of us with worries, “*Come to me, all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give*

*you rest... 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... for my yoke is easy and my burden is light”...*

The teacher continued, “*Does anyone know what a yoke is?*”...

A little girl said, “*Something they put on the necks of animals.*”

Then the teacher inquired, “*And what is the meaning of God's yoke for us?*”

All were silent for a moment, when the hand of the little girl went up and said, “*God putting his arms around our necks.*”

And what could be more comforting than *that*...

Let close by telling you that I know that we all carry burdens with us from time to time (and right now – it’s quite easy to do with so much uncertainty – and so much unrest in the world) but let me remind you that if you’re willing to come to the Lord in prayer this morning – and give to Him all that weighs you down (trusting that He will provide for you the way out) you, too, will feel our Lord’s embrace protect you from all harm...

Jesus says, “*Come to me, all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest* “ and that invitation was meant for you...

May all of your burdens be lifted... may the Spirit of God fill you with renewed joy, and may you always know the peace of our Lord’s embrace...

In Jesus’ name we pray...

**Amen!**

