

Heavy Burdens vs. the Easy Yoke of Jesus

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[0:00] Amen.

Amen. So, I guess that I should begin this morning by asking that you pay no attention to how I'm dressed.

I mean, seriously, my sermon text says to beware of those who like to walk around in long robes, and here I am decked out in long robes.

I think that the last time this passage came up in the lectionary, I'd been preaching through Hebrews, so I had a good excuse to avoid this text. But here I am this morning, in my long robes, preaching on the passage that tells you to be wary of religious leaders in long robes.

That being said, let me be honest. Let me be honest.

[2:00] It's to follow rules, rules that they require of others, but often don't follow themselves. Now, the rules might differ, but the basic message is going to be the same from these kinds of religious leaders.

If you want God to accept you, you need to follow these rules that I'm laying down. As it turns out, it always seems like there are rules that aren't actually found in the Scriptures.

Who would have guessed? That's the problem with the scribes and the Pharisees that Jesus is always calling out in the Gospels. They were always bombarding people with legalism, piling on laws that did not come from God.

See, they were coming from this place that held that the way that you were made right with God was through following the law. And if the way you're made right with God is through following the law, you really have to make sure that you are all righteous all the time.

And you do that by making up extra laws to keep you from breaking the other laws. And if you want to be really good at it, you can even make up loopholes for yourself in the laws that you've built around the law to keep from having to avoid the law.

[3:20] Or keep from having to follow the law, rather. So you have layers and layers of law that you have heaped on others, but you've found clever ways to get around it through those who are special. And that, my brothers and my sisters, is why Jesus had such harsh words for the scribes and for the Pharisees.

That is why Jesus said of them, That is why Jesus said, Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!

For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in. But you know what?

This problem is not limited to the scribes and the Pharisees of 2,000 years ago. Now, the seed of this problem can be found in every human heart.

Furthermore, I would say this is the problem with pretty much every false religion when you get down to the core. It puts heavy burdens on people that they were never meant to carry.

[4:44] But it never does anything to help. It shuts the door to the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. It says, If I'm moral, then God will accept me.

If I'm properly religious, however I define that, then God will accept me. It says, If I demonstrate that I am worthy of His attention, then God will accept me.

But it doesn't work that way. As the great preacher Charles Spurgeon once put it, perhaps a little more bluntly than I would be inclined to do, morality may keep you out of jail, but it takes the blood of Jesus Christ to keep you out of hell.

Now, at first glance, that quote might cause us to say, Whoa, that was a little harsh. But let me be clear. Now, I might be wearing a long robe, but I am not here this morning to put burdens on anyone.

Or to call people to follow rules that I made up. Not at all. The exact opposite is true. I am up here this morning to talk about where forgiveness can be found.

[5:59] I am here this morning to talk about how we can have peace and how we can have assurance, knowing that God loves us, knowing that we will glorify Him and enjoy Him forever, which is what we were created to do.

What I'm trying to say is really pretty simply. I think. The scribes that are getting criticized by Jesus in this morning's passage are guilty of putting burdens on people.

Layers and layers and layers of rules and regulations, teaching them that keeping all of that is how you become right with God. And that's adding a burden on top of the burden we already carry. Because deep down we know, don't we, that we haven't been the kind of people that we should be. That's a heavy thing to know about yourself. But the gospel, the good news, doesn't add to that burden.

The gospel calls us to repent, to turn away from carrying the burden of sin, and to give it to the one who can set us free from it.

[7:18] And His name is Jesus. He said that His yoke is easy and His burden is light. And we know that if we ask Him for mercy, what we will find is that His blood can wash away all our sins so that we are free, so that we are forgiven, so that we have eternal life.

I'm not telling you that to try to get you to do what I am unwilling to do myself.

I'm not trying to be a scribe or a Pharisee. I'm telling you that because I know that it's true because it's what happened to me.

See, the blood of Jesus does what all of the calls, even the best of calls to morality, cannot do.

Morality cannot wash away our sins.

Nothing but the blood of Jesus can do that. And that's why biblical proclamation of the gospel is not be a better person. Be more religious.

[8:25] No, biblical proclamation of the gospel says, Repent. In other words, stop running from God and go home to Him and believe the gospel. Believe that God gave His only Son to die for you.

To take away your sins and give you victory over death. I'm not saying that morality is bad. It's not. I'm certainly not saying that we shouldn't be obedient to God. Of course we should be obedient to God. We should seek to obey God with all our hearts. We should fight against sin to our last breaths.

But even our best efforts cannot wash away our sins or make us right with God. Only the blood and nothing but the blood of Jesus can do that.

When you realize that that is actually what has happened to you through faith in Jesus, it is the most liberating, the most joyous, the most wonderful thing that could ever happen in your life.

[9:37] Isn't it? You find yourself wanting to give your life over to serving Jesus. Not as a burden on top of burdens, but out of joy, out of gratitude, and out of love for the one who loved us and died for us.

And that puts things in perspective. Doesn't it? Think about all of that time we waste trying to seek the approval of people. You don't need to do that when you know that you are the beloved child of God and that He is well pleased with you because you are in Christ.

That makes all the difference in how we live. This morning, I want us to think of our Gospel reading as a kind of case study because that's really what it is in some ways.

We see a shocking difference when we look at the scribes who are getting called out by Jesus and when we look at the widow. What does Jesus say about the scribes, about these respectable religious leaders?

Let's look at our text. In His teaching, He said, Beware of the scribes who like to walk around in long robes and like greetings in the marketplaces and have the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts and devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers.

[11:09] They will receive the greater condemnation. So they're looking for human approval, aren't they? I would say that this is exactly how we act when we don't know that we are loved and forgiven and accepted by God and Jesus Christ.

Yeah, I mean, why do we seek after human approval? We've all done it, haven't we? Is there anyone here who hasn't done that? Probably not. In every human heart, there is a desire to know God as a loving Father, to know that He is well-pleased with us, to know that He accepts us.

What do you think happens when you don't know that? If we don't know that, don't we go looking for approval in all the wrong places? Especially looking for approval from other people in ways that we shouldn't.

Trying to find what only God can give. Trying to get that from other people. Now, like the scribes that Jesus is calling out, we might be very respectable.

We might be very outwardly religious. But we're seeking after the approval of people, so we seek to be important. We seek to be someone.

[12:40] We seek the best seats. We seek being greeted as someone who matters. And we might even wear long robes. But what is the end result?

Almost inevitably, we end up being hypocrites, and all of our religiosity ends up hurting people, just like the scribes who were charged with harming widows. But then, there is the widow.

Commended by Jesus. In our passage, Jesus uses her as a great example. Let's look at that portion of our text again. He sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box.

Many rich people put in large sums. And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. And he called his disciples to him and said to them, Truly I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box.

For they all contributed out of their abundance. But she, out of her poverty, has put in everything she had. All she had to live on.

[13:56] Now, this is the kind of passage that a crooked televangelist might use to convince people to send in all the money they have. That is a misreading and a misapplication of this text.

I want to be up front. I am not about to tell you to give me all of your money. But there are a couple of things I want us to think about here. The first is that as the rich folks are showing up at the treasury, putting in their money, it is probably a pretty impressive sight, wouldn't you think?

Given what Jesus just said earlier in the passage, and what we know firsthand about the dark corners of the human heart, I think that in their action, there is an element of them desiring to be seen by others, giving the large sums that they're given, don't you think?

I wouldn't be surprised if they're wanting to be seen. And wanting to be seen is wealthy and generous to be thought of that way. I also want us to think about the widow.

Compared to the wealthy, do you think that the two small copper coins she gives are going to impress anyone? Kind of reminds me of how my daughter Mia used to offer to pay for dinner when we were out with the money she had in her piggy bank.

[15:34] Oh, Daddy, we can buy this. I've got money in my piggy bank. Now, that was never enough to pay for dinner at the restaurant.

We never took her up on it, just to be clear. We weren't embezzling from Mia's piggy bank. But it did show something profoundly generous in her little heart.

The widow, if she's not giving to be seen by people, because who would be impressed by two small copper coins?

She must not be giving to be seen by people. No, she must be given from a place of heartfelt generosity and trust in God.

Because there is no requirement telling her that she has to give absolutely everything that she has. The scribes and the wealthy aren't giving everything that they have.

[16:36] So why was the widow? It seems pretty clear to me at the root that what we see behind her actions here is that she must have trusted God to take care of her.

She must have trusted that he is a loving and generous father who tenderly watches over us. The funny thing, of course, is that the widow is giving the highest proportion of what she has of anyone who is given, and she doesn't do it because she is seeking approval.

No. That kind of trust and that kind of generosity comes from a heart that knows God is good, God is loving, and God is trustworthy.

Now, I think a serious heart check is in order for all of us this morning. The question we might ask ourselves is this.

Am I approaching my life, my relationship with God, like one of these scribes, or like the widow?

[18:01] Am I being driven by seeking the approval of others? Is that what motivates me? Trying to be somebody. Trying to get God to notice me because of how awesome I am and how religious and respected I am.

Or am I living a life that is characterized, that is motivated by trusting God? Trusting not in anything that I've done, anything that I've accomplished, anything that I have, but trusting that I am an adopted child of Almighty God.

Trusting that he approves of me, not because I have done or will do anything worthy of his attention. I haven't. Not because I'm respected in the community.

Not because I am really, really religious. But because I trust in his son who bled and died for me.

Not because I am God's beloved adopted child through faith in Jesus.

Which approach characterizes our lives? So we can spend all of our lives trying to be very obviously religious, trying to be very obviously respectable, trying to be somebody in the eyes of God and in the eyes of others.

[19 : 36] In other words, we can spend our lives in bondage, carrying a heavy burden that we don't have to bear. Or, we can repent and believe the gospel.

Trusting that Jesus died for sinners like us, and that if we are in Christ, we are free. Free to serve God, who doesn't treat us like an angry taskmaster, but is to us a loving Father, whom we seek to obey, because He loves us and we love Him.

And, I want to be really clear, trying to win the approval of others will never wash away our sins.

Trying to win the approval of God through how, you know, awesome and moral and religious we think we are will never wash away our sins.

only the blood, nothing but the blood of Jesus can do that. And praise God that it does. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

[20 : 54] Amen.