

Text: Matthew 11:28-30

Theme: Jesus Is Our Very Best Friend

Date: June 29, 2008 (Pentecost 7)

In the Name of Him whose Name is above every other name, Jesus Christ, Friend of sinners, Dear Christian Friends,

What's your definition of a friend? Some years ago an English publication offered a prize for the best definition of "a friend." Among the entries received were the following: 1) A friend is one who multiplies joys and divides sorrows; 2) A friend is one who understands my silence; 3) A friend is one who comes in when the whole world has gone out. I'm sure you can offer your own and very personal definition of a friend as you remember the friendship a special person has shown to you in the past.

One of the many definitions of what a friend is that comes to my mind is taken from the vocabulary of the North American Indians. Their word for a friend literally means, "*One who carries my sorrows on his back.*" Now, if that's what a true friend is, one who carries my sorrows on his back, then there is one friend who stands head and shoulders above all the rest. That friend, the very best friend that any human being could ever have, is in fact, Jesus Christ.

Today God's Word teaches us about the friendship which Jesus has shown to each and every one of us. We'll look to Jesus' own words, recorded in Matthew chapter 11 as we consider this theme, *Jesus is our very best friend.* Why can we say that Jesus is our very best friend? 1) He Invites the Weary to Come to Him, 2) He Offers Us a Yoke to Carry 3) He Gives Us Rest for Our Souls

1. Jesus Invites the Weary to Come to Him

First, let's look at the invitation Jesus offers us. He says, "**COME TO ME, ALL YOU WHO ARE WEARY AND BURDENED...**" Isn't that interesting. Notice, Jesus does not say, "*Come to me, you who are religious. You who keep all my commandments, Come to me you who have children who are perfectly behaved, and marriages that are out of this world. You who have your lives in perfect order, and nothing ever goes wrong. Come to me you who need no help at all.*"

No, it's come to me you who are weary and burdened. In the original language, the word translated here at "*weary*" literally means, "*you who work and toil and are worn down by it.*" The word "*burdened*" refers to what happens to a pack animal like a mule or donkey, when you overload it. It becomes burdened and weighed down. The question is, "*Is Jesus referring to you or me with those words?*"

Tell me, is there anything that has you feeling weighed down and burdened these days? Maybe you are weighed down by your job. Management is giving you more to do, with less time to do it. There's always this cloud over your head: will you still have a job tomorrow? Or will you become the next victim of downsizing and merging? Maybe that's what has you weighed down.

Or maybe you're feeling weighed down by some of the things going on in your family these days. Your kids don't seem to have the cheery attitude they once had. Your relationship with them has become rather strained of late. You want them to make good, God-pleasing decisions in their lives, but whatever you say to them seems to go in one ear and out the other. You're wondering what you've done wrong as a parent. Maybe that's what has you feeling weary today.

Or maybe you're carrying some kind of physical burden. An ailment in yourself, or in someone you love. The threat of further surgery, or medication, with no real guarantee of improvement. You're wondering why God would let something like this happen to you. You're wondering how long you'll have to deal with it. Maybe with that burden comes some financial burdens. The bills continue to pile up, while your savings continues to shrink. You're wondering how you'll make ends meet. You're worried about what the future holds for you. Maybe that's the kind of burden you are bearing.

Or finally, maybe the burden you are carrying is more of a spiritual burden. Something from your past. Something you did which now weighs heavy on your conscience. Something that now has you lying awake at night. Maybe a sin that you have fallen prey to again and again. A sin which leads you to wonder, "*Can God really forgive me for what I've done? Where do I stand in his eyes? What would happen to me if I were to die tonight?*"

My friends, these are some of the things which can weigh heavy on our hearts and minds, even today. And yet, such burdens need not keep us away from God. No, just the opposite. It is these very burdens which give us reason to be here today. It is because we sometimes feel worn down by the realities of life that we can accept Jesus' gracious invitation: "**COME TO ME, YOU WHO ARE WEARY AND BURDENED.**" Make no mistake about it. Jesus is talking to you and me. He knows what we are going through. And yet, Jesus does more than sympathize with our sorrows. Jesus offers us more than a shoulder to cry on. Jesus says more than, "I feel your pain." No, Jesus offers us more than empathy. He offers us a solution. Jesus' solution is found in a yoke. His yoke. The second proof that Jesus is our best friend is found in the fact that

2. Jesus Offers Us a Yoke to Carry

Here in our text, Jesus extends the invitation: "**TAKE MY YOKE UPON YOU.**" Now, maybe when you hear those words, you're thinking to yourself, "*A yoke!?! Why would I want a yoke to carry? I know what a yoke is. It's one of those big heavy wooden things*

they put on the necks of oxen to get them to pull an even heavier load. Why would I want one of those? I'm already carrying enough weight around. The last thing I need to do is put on a yoke."

You know something? A lot of people think in those terms when they think about religion. A lot of people think that when they come to God, when they get involved in religion, then God simply gives them burdens to carry. They mistakenly think, *"If I become a Christian, then I'll have to go to church. I'll have to give my money. I'll have to become the perfect parent, the obedient spouse. Man, I have too many other things going on. Too many other responsibilities, too many other commitments. I can't handle another burden to bear."*

You know, I guess it shouldn't surprise us that many people have that attitude about religion. Because there are a lot of religions in the world today that promote that very idea. They try to make a relationship to God nothing more than a list of rules to obey, rituals to follow, burdens to bear. In fact, Jesus says that that's what the religion of his day had become. Listen to what Jesus said to the Jewish Pharisees in Luke 11:46, *"You experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them."* Or the words of the Apostle Paul who said to the Jews of his day, *"Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear?"*

My friends, you know what the problem with that kind of religion is? It's a back breaker. If you were to take all of those rules and regulations, including God's Ten Commandments and sum them up with one law, you know what it would be? It would be the statement: *"Be perfect."* The trouble is, who can be perfect? The more you try to shoulder that responsibility, the more you make your standing with God dependent upon your living up to that standard, well, the more guilty and worthless and burdened you feel.

Fortunately, Jesus offers us a solution to those problems. For Jesus was perfect. He upheld the yoke of God's law. And now he offers that yoke to us. But as he does that, he is the one who is bearing the weight of the yoke itself. Not us! You might say that Jesus is like the man who holds the barbell over the head of the little boy. The little boy reaches up and holds the barbell and says, "Hey, that barbell is light!" Why is it light? Because the man is bearing all the weight of it. So it is with Jesus. Because Jesus has born the full weight of God's law, we can grab that yoke and say, "Yeah, that yoke is easy and that burden is light!" When Jesus says, "Take my yoke upon you," he means "believe that he has and will continue to carry the burden of God's law and the burden of your sins until the day you die."

Tell me, do you think that fact can have an effect on our every day lives? You bet it can. That fact provides the third reason that Jesus is our very best friend. Jesus is our Very Best Friend

3. Because he Give Us Rest for our Souls.

Here in our text Jesus makes us the promise, "YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS." What does that mean? Rest for your souls. Well, first it means that Jesus gives to us, the forgiveness of sins. The very mistakes and offenses which once weighed on our consciences are no longer accounted by God. Jesus paid for them in full with his holy, precious blood. You and I can sleep at night knowing that what the Psalmist said is true: *"As far as the east is from the west, so far has the Lord removed our transgressions from us"* in Christ.

Secondly, rest for our souls means the freedom and the ability to live our lives for someone other than your old sinful nature. Jesus gives us a reason to dedicate our lives to him who gave his life to us first. Jesus gives us the freedom to gather here in his house not because we have to, but because we want to, because we can't help but offer to God our thanks and praise for his love and goodness to us.

And finally, rest for your souls means the peace that comes from knowing that your life and mine is in the hands of a good and gracious God. Our Lord says in Jeremiah 29:11, *"For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."* God has a great future in store for us. He has prepared a mansion in heaven for each one of us. And until the time that he calls us home, he promises to give us the strength we need to meet the challenges we face in life. Even when we face trials and tribulations in our lives, troubles in our families, ailments in our bodies, we can still cling to the unbreakable promise of God, *"Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you."*

My friends, these days there are a lot of people who are living without a personal relationship to Jesus. People who are trying to carry all the burdens that life brings all by themselves. You don't have to be one of those people. Come to Jesus now. Bring your cares and burdens. Let him carry them as he has for so many before you. For then, in him, you will find rest for your soul.

What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear, What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer. What a friend we have in Jesus! Amen.