

Matthew 11F

- Tonight we transition out of studying the first reason for Jesus' rejection and into a study of the second reason
 - The first reason as we learned was the hard, unrepentant hearts of the Jewish people
 - They would not turn away from their system of religious rituals and rules, called Pharisaic Judaism, to receive the Kingdom
 - Moreover, the Father left Israel unrepentant because it pleased Him to send Jesus to the cross
 - But there is a second reason for Jesus' rejection
 - The second reason is closely related to the first in that it also traces its origins to Pharisaic Judaism
 - But our second reason involves a different group of people in Jewish society
 - Instead of the fickle crowds, now the focus is on the Jewish authorities; the religious leaders over the people
 - Remember, the Jewish nation was formed by a religious law given to Israel by God Himself in a covenant
 - Because the laws of the nation were religious in nature, so also were the authorities over the people
 - The highest authority in the land was the High Priest, while the judges and lawyers over Israel were rabbis
 - Or as they had become known in Jesus' day, the Pharisees
- We begin our study tonight with Jesus highlighting the differences between Himself and the Pharisees

[Matt. 11:28](#) "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.

[Matt. 11:29](#) "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.

[Matt. 11:30](#) "For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

- I assume for most Christians the phrase “my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” is very familiar
 - But unless you understand exactly what Jesus is saying, His words may seem completely opposite to the truth especially in some situations
 - For example, I don’t recommend quoting this passage to a Christian friend enduring a great trial or persecution...
 - It will offer them little comfort in the moment
 - Because often obeying Christ in a fallen world means enduring trials that are hard, not light or easy
 - Which is why we must understand Jesus words in the specific sense in which He intended, which was as a contrast to Pharisaic Judaism
 - “Take my yoke” was a rabbinical figure of speech in that day referring to attending school
 - Rabbis invited new students to join their school of studies by saying “take my yoke” which meant “come learn under me”
 - But the fact rabbis compared joining a rabbinical school to shouldering the yoke of oxen reflects what life was like under Pharisaic Judaism
 - The burdens were immense and altogether unimaginable for us today
 - The life of a Pharisee was scripted by thousands of rules that addressed every aspect of daily activity
 - Pharisees prayed multiple times a day in public places, fasted several times a week, performed various washings repeatedly, memorized thousands of lines of text, etc.
 - From the moment a Pharisee woke to when he went to bed, he was bearing the burdens of that yoke
 - Even the word Pharisee reflects what it was like to live under these rules
 - Pharisee comes from an Aramaic word meaning “separated ones”
 - The effect of the Pharisaic lifestyle was to separate the man from the rest of Jewish society
 - So when a new rabbinical student heard “take up my yoke”, it reminded him of the difficult burden he was going to carry

- But then Jesus said “take my yoke”, but He quickly added that his teaching wasn’t going to be burdensome at all
 - Jesus’ yoke was light and easy to bear
 - Jesus came offering freedom from following a strenuous religious system of rule keeping
 - Because by faith in Jesus, we instantly gain credit with God for the very thing that the religious are striving to obtain: righteousness
 - Jesus accomplished everything required in God’s Law
 - So by our faith in Him, the Bible says God credits us with Jesus’ work on our behalf
 - That’s what Jesus meant when He said His burden was light and easy
 - He’s already done the work...He kept the Law for us
 - And beyond that, He also paid the Law’s price for our sin debt before God
 - He lived a perfect life under the Law in our place, and He died in our place for our sin
 - So by faith, we get credit for both...you can’t get much easier and lighter than that!
 - By contrast, the yoke of Pharisaic Judaism meant trying to keep the Law plus the thousands of additional rules the Pharisees had added to it
 - And that was an endless burden...because it matters not how well you kept the Law yesterday
 - Each day you started over with the burdens again
 - That was the burden Jews of Jesus’ day knew, and Jesus said He was prepared to free them from that burden
- Moreover, Jesus says His burden is light because He is gentle and humble in heart
 - Jesus is God, so He had genuine desire to help God’s people obey and honor the Father

- That's the heart of God...to help humanity become like Him, and the plan of salvation reflects God's love
- So when Jesus came to bring us salvation, He came in a gentle, humble fashion, as Paul explained

Phil. 2:5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,

Phil. 2:6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,

Phil. 2:7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.

Phil. 2:8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross

- Meanwhile, the Pharisees were prideful, unloving men who cared nothing for God's people
 - Far from being humble, the Pharisees took great pride in their rigorous lifestyle, wearing their burdens like a badge of honor
 - And they were certainly not gentle
 - They leveraged their many rules to accuse their opponents and extorted money from the people
 - So naturally the system they invented reflected their hard hearts
- That was the system Israel suffered under, and Jesus invited those who were weary of its burden to come learn from Him and He would give them rest
 - And Jesus' mention of rest brings us to our discussion of the second major reason Jesus was rejected by the Jewish authorities
 - And that reason is the Jewish Sabbath Day; the day of rest
 - More specifically, it was Jesus' refusal to acknowledge the myriad of Pharisaic rules associated with Sabbath observance
 - If there was a time the average Jew felt the full burden of Pharisaic Judaism, it was on the Sabbath day
 - In the Law God directed Israel cease from work on the seventh day of the week, beginning at sundown Friday

[Ex. 20:8](#) “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.

[Ex. 20:9](#) “Six days you shall labor and do all your work,

[Ex. 20:10](#) but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you.

[Ex. 20:11](#) “For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy.

- Despite the simplicity of that command, the rabbis soon made it very complicated
 - In fact, the Pharisees considered Sabbath observance God’s most important law
 - The day was so special to the rabbis that it came to personify God Himself
 - The Pharisees referred to the Sabbath day as the bride of Israel and the queen of Yahweh
 - Even today during Friday night Sabbath services in synagogues, the doors are opened for the congregation to sing a song entitled “Welcome my Beloved, let us greet Queen Sabbath”
- Why were the Pharisees so enamored with Sabbath? Because God’s prohibition against work offered Pharisees endless opportunities to craft new restrictions
 - Under Pharisaic Judaism there were more rules devoted to Sabbath observance than for any other area of Jewish life
 - The rules for Sabbath observance were Pharisaic Judaism’s crown jewel...their pièce de résistance
 - By one scholar’s count, the Pharisees recorded 1,500 rules in their Mishnah for proper Sabbath observance
 - In fact, even today the practice of Judaism is largely defined by three things: observing feasts, dietary restrictions and Sabbath rules
 - For that reason, the enforcement of these Sabbath rules was critical to the Pharisee’s power game

- Breaking any of the Pharisee's myriad of Sabbath rules could result in severe penalties, including even death
- Since the people feared the consequences of breaking the Sabbath, the Pharisees gained great control over Jewish society
- So ironically, the day God appointed for rest became the most burdensome day of a Jew's week
- But then Jesus came along and He didn't play by the Pharisees' rules, especially not when it came to their Sabbath restrictions
 - Those 1,500 rules that the Pharisees invented were not from God nor were they consistent with God's heart
 - The Sabbath was intended to be a day of refreshment, but the Pharisees had turned it into a day of fretting and worry
 - Such that even the slightest deviation from those 1,500+ rules could result in condemnation
 - So far from being refreshed, the Sabbath observance was a particular burden
- Jesus' refusal to keep the Pharisees' Sabbath rules more than anything else turned the Pharisees against Him
 - In the Gospels, most of the disputes between Jesus and the Pharisees center on Jesus violating one of the 1,500 Mishnah rules
 - Often it was Jesus healing on the Sabbath, which the Pharisees outlawed as a form of work
 - And in Chapter 12, we'll see that it was after one such healing on the Sabbath that the Pharisees decided Jesus had to die
 - From that point they plotted to kill Jesus and they turned the people against Jesus
 - Jesus knew that the Sabbath would become a major source of contention with the religious leaders
 - And Jesus even invited the conflict on several occasions by intentionally healing on a Sabbath day knowing the Pharisees would object

- And so when Jesus tells the crowds that He would give them “rest” from their burdens, He’s making a subtle reference to the Pharisees’ Sabbath rules
- In fact, notice Jesus uses the term “rest” twice in that short passage, first at the end of v.28 and again in v.29, quoting from Jer 6:16
 - In Jesus’ second use of the word in v.29 He says He is offering Israel rest for their souls
 - And if you glance ahead to Chapter 12:8 you find Jesus declaring that the Messiah is the Lord of the Sabbath
- We’ll study that passage the week after Easter, but for now let’s understand Jesus is trying to explain the true purpose of the Sabbath
 - Jesus was talking about offering Israel rest not merely from the Mishnah’s demands
 - He was talking about the true spiritual purpose of the Sabbath, which belongs to every believer who comes to Jesus in faith
- Jesus was offering Israel Himself as their true Sabbath rest, which the daily Sabbath in the Law of Moses simply pictured
 - We find a full explanation of the Sabbath in Hebrews 4
 - So before we can understand why Jesus chose to pick a fight over the Sabbath rules of the Mishnah, we need to understand how Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath

Heb. 4:1 Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it.

Heb. 4:2 For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard.

Heb. 4:3 For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said,

“AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH,
THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST,”

although His works were finished from the foundation of the world.

Heb. 4:4 For He has said somewhere concerning the seventh day: “AND GOD RESTED ON THE SEVENTH DAY FROM ALL HIS WORKS”;

Heb. 4:5 and again in this passage, “THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST.”

[Heb. 4:6](#) Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience,

[Heb. 4:7](#) He again fixes a certain day, "Today," saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before,

"TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE,
DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS."

[Heb. 4:8](#) For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that.

[Heb. 4:9](#) So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God.

[Heb. 4:10](#) For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His.

- The writer of Hebrews was concerned that some in the church in his day had "come short" of entering into His (Christ's) rest
 - So the writer draws from multiple examples out of the Old Testament to explain what entering God's rest means and what it doesn't mean
 - Because before we can understand why Jesus challenged the Pharisees' on the Sabbath, we need to understand God's purpose in giving Israel the Sabbath in the first place
 - And it starts with Heb. 4:2-3...those who believe in the good news are entering Christ's rest
 - Notice in v.2 the writer refers to those of Israel's past who had good news preached to them
 - He's talking about the Exodus generation of Israel who came out of Egypt
 - In Chapter 3, the writer reminded his readers that the generation that left Egypt ended up dying in the desert because of unbelief
 - And now here in Chapter 4 the writer goes on to say they had good news preached but failed to believe it
 - The good news preached to that generation of Israel was that God was setting them free from Pharaoh to live in the Promised Land
 - But that generation of Israel didn't believe in that promise
 - Instead, they believed the false report of the spies who claimed the land was filled with giants and terrors

- So because of their unbelief, the Lord didn't allow them to enter into the land...they all died in the desert for their unbelief
- Then in v.3 the writer establishes a principle from that biblical account...to believe in the promises of God is to enter rest
 - And to prove that principle, the writer quotes from Psalm 95 where the Lord declares that that generation's failure to believe barred them from rest
 - Now we know that God is referring to entering the land of Canaan
 - Nevertheless, the Lord euphemistically referred to entering the Promised Land as entering His rest
 - So the Lord connects three ideas through that example: belief is equal to entering His rest which is equal to entering the Promised Land
 - So what rest is God talking about? The writer then goes on to explore that idea beginning with the first time the Lord uses the term rest
 - After God finished the six days of Creation, the Bible says that the Lord ceased from His work of Creation
 - So in that sense, the Lord entered into a state of rest
 - Ever since the sixth day of Creation, the Lord has remained at rest from His creative works
 - So we could say that all Creation is in God's rest right now, in the sense that we share in God's ceasing from the work of Creation
 - But in vs.4-5 the writer notes that this can't be the "rest" God was talking about in Psalm 95
 - Because it was after God ceased from the work of Creation that He declared Israel wouldn't enter into His rest
 - Therefore, the Lord can't be referring to the Creation rest since it's ongoing for everyone
 - He must be referring to some other kind of rest that Israel has yet to experience
- So the writer concludes in v.6 that therefore, there is some other kind of rest that Israel must enter into – a rest that the earlier generation did not enter into

- Perhaps God's rest refers to inhabiting the land itself, so the earlier generations failed to enter the rest of the land for their unbelief
 - In considering that possibility, the writer then reminds his readers what David wrote in the psalms on this subject
 - In v.7 the writer quotes again from Psalm 95
 - David warns his brethren in Israel saying don't harden your hearts like that prior generation of Israel who didn't believe
 - Instead, David calls Israel to believe, saying today if you hear God's voice, respond in faith so you might enter His rest
- Now David's psalm was written hundreds of years *after* the Jews had already entered into the land under Joshua
 - Notice in v.8 the writer says if Joshua had given Israel rest by bringing them into the land, than David wouldn't have spoken of another day
 - In other words, if entering God's rest meant entering the Promised Land, then Joshua would have given Israel rest
 - But long after Joshua, David was still calling for his countrymen to enter God's rest even though they were living in the land
- So in v.9 the writer makes the unavoidable conclusion from Scripture
 - There remains a Sabbath rest for God's people...
 - Entering God's rest can't mean the rest God enjoys after completing Creation...we're still called to enter His rest
 - And it can't refer to entering the Promised Land itself, since Israel entered it under Joshua yet David was still calling Israel to enter it years later
 - And we can add to the writer's arguments that entering God's rest also can't refer to observing a weekly Sabbath day
 - Because Israel was observing a Sabbath day in David's time, yet the King was still calling for people to enter God's rest today... not just one day a week but everyday
 - So what does God mean by "enter my rest"?

- It's something that requires faith, it remains true today just as it did in ages past
- The answer is entering God's rest means trusting in the Messiah, Who is Lord of the Sabbath
- Look what the writer says in Hebrews 4:10
 - He says the one who enters into God's rest is the one who rests from his works, just as God rested from His works
 - The works the writer is talking about here are those religious works we did before we come to faith in Jesus
 - In Jesus' day those works were the rules and regulations of the Mishnah that so many Jews were faithfully keeping, hoping to please God
 - Those were the heavy burdens that the Pharisees had placed on the backs of the people which Jesus could remove for them
 - Jesus says come learn under me, and you will receive a light and easy yoke
 - Jesus will become your Sabbath rest, because Jesus will accomplish all those works for you
 - And having placed your faith in Jesus, you now gain credit for His work which means you do not need to perform any work any longer
 - That's the rest of God...knowing that you do not need to work your way to Heaven but instead you can rest in the work of Christ on your behalf
 - Had the Jews of Jesus' day accepted His offer, they could have set aside the works of the Mishnah – including all the rules of the Sabbath
 - And in fact, they would have set aside the entire law of Moses knowing that Jesus had fulfilled it on their behalf
 - That's what David was calling his countrymen to understand... that they could rest in God's promise of a Messiah if they would only believe
 - That's what the earlier generation missed...because they didn't believe in the promises of God, they didn't enter into His rest

- And speaking of that generation, we're also learning that God used their experience in the desert as a powerful picture of how faith brings us rest
 - In that Exodus story, entering the Promised Land of Canaan was connected with faith as the writer explained
 - By their failure to enter for unbelief, we learn that we cannot enter into the Promised Land without faith in Christ
 - Furthermore, the land of Canaan is called the Promised Land because in the Kingdom to come it will be the home of the Jewish people
 - So entering the Promised Land is itself a picture of entering the Kingdom
 - So when we connect all three ideas, we arrive at a fundamental truth of the Bible
 - We enter the Kingdom of God by faith, just as Israel could only enter Canaan by belief in God
 - And having salvation means entering God's rest
 - Simply put, Israel could not enter the Promised Land by keeping the Law, and we cannot enter God's rest and the Kingdom by doing works of any kind
 - We only enter by faith in Christ, and when you place your faith in Christ you enter His rest; that is you enter into a Sabbath
 - The true Sabbath of God is placing faith in Jesus, and the the day of rest God gave Moses was just a picture of the greater spiritual rest we receive in Christ
 - And to make that picture clearer still, the Lord didn't allow Moses to enter the Promised Land
 - Instead, the people of Israel were led into the Promised Land by Joshua, who took power over Israel following Moses' death
 - Moses represents the Law itself, so we can say that a person cannot enter the Promised Land by Moses – that is by law
 - Instead, we enter the Promised Land by following Joshua, and Joshua's name in Hebrew is *Yeshua*, which is the same name as Jesus
 - Jesus leads us into the Promised Land, that is into the Kingdom

- We can't enter God's rest by doing works of the law, and certainly not by following 1,500 rules in a Mishnah invented by Pharisees
- So the Lord gave Israel the Sabbath day observance to picture Jesus in this sense
 - Once every week, the nation followed in God's footsteps
 - Just as God rested for a day after creating the world in six days, so Israel would work six days and then rest one day
 - This was a lesson to Israel teaching them they must enter into God's rest by placing faith in their Messiah's work
 - If they placed faith in the Messiah, then they could enter a rest that never ends; the rest of trusting in Christ's work and of the Kingdom
 - It would be a rest for their souls not just their bodies, as Jesus said
 - And that rest would be never ending, unlike the weekly Sabbath that only lasted a day and then a new week of work began again
 - If you have placed faith in Jesus, you have rested from working your way to Heaven
 - That's the true Sabbath rest the writer was taking about, the true Sabbath Jesus was offering Israel
 - It's the true Sabbath rest of every Christian
 - Once you place your faith in Jesus, there's no need to keep a weekly Sabbath because you already have the greater Sabbath
- So if you've ever been pressured by someone to keep a Sabbath day of rest, then you now know what a yoke feels like
 - Ironically, they may have wanted you to experience refreshment, but because it was presented as a mandatory rule, it actually created a burden
 - That's how laws work...they exist to convict us when we fail, they don't make obedience easier or more joyful
 - So when someone told you that keeping a Sabbath day was a requirement to please God, you felt constrained
 - And of course, on days you couldn't rest you felt guilty

- Either way, it became a burden, a yoke on your shoulders that you were told to bear
- That was a mini-Pharisaic moment, and if that's you tonight, then please hear Jesus' words again...His yoke is easy and light
 - With Jesus every day is your Sabbath, because Jesus kept that burden and all the burdens of the Law for you
 - By faith in Him you are freed from the burden of keeping meaningless rules
 - In place of that you live every day for His glory, following His Spirit, not worrying about old laws written for past generations
 - And (frankly) you couldn't keep the Sabbath even if you tried
- Because going to Church is not keeping the Sabbath
 - Keeping the Sabbath means no work on one day every week
 - So no driving, no cooking, no emailing, no web surfing, no yard work, no working out at the gym, no hunting, no fishing, no riding bikes, no homework, no chores, no work of any kind
 - That's what keeping the Sabbath means, so who has ever actually kept the Sabbath that way in any case?
 - Once again, keeping Sabbath is a burden that Jesus has taken for us, so we may pick up His easy and light yoke
- May I humbly suggest this is a good example of why our church exists... of why it needs to exist
 - Biblical ignorance leads people to accept burdens that Christ didn't give His Church, burdens like those the Pharisees gave Israel
 - And ignorance also prevents us from obeying Him in the ways He did intend, like serving Him seven days a week
 - Understanding the Bible properly removes unnecessary burdens to make room for a life of serving Christ in joy and freedom