

Come

Series: From Stressed to Rest

Matthew 11:28-30

September 9, 2018

Good morning again. Good to see that everyone is here. And let me remind you as your pastor the promise of the rainbow and that the Lord will not destroy the earth with rain ever again. According to the National Weather Service, the Dayton area got 2.7 inches of rain yesterday (a new record), and more today.

There once was a woman who took her husband to the doctor's office. After the examination, the doctor said, "Your husband is suffering from a very serious infection."

The husband, who was hard of hearing said, "What did he say?"

His wife said, "He says you're sick".

The doctor went on. "But there is hope. You need to reduce his stress. Each morning, give him a healthy breakfast. Be pleasant, nice, and kind. For lunch and dinner, make him his favorite meal. Don't discuss your problems with him, it will only make his stress worse. Don't yell at him or argue with him. And most importantly... just cater to your husband's every whim."

The husband asked, "What did he say?"

His wife said, "You're going to die."

Today, we are beginning a new message series called "From Stressed to Rest." Let me say this as we begin. Periodically, I will sit down and plan out my sermons anywhere from 3-6 months out. Or I might have an inspiration from something I hear or see and put it on the schedule. So, a few months ago, I thought we might spend a few weeks and focus on stress. I mean, according to the American Institute of Stress (I'll bet that's a fun place to work), 43% of Americans suffer from stress-related health problems. But all I really had written down was an idea; no title, no Scripture.

Last week, as we were finishing our series on prayer, I looked at what was ahead, and I saw we were going to talk about stress. And you know what, I started stressing, because I really didn't have anything yet. I started thinking about it. I had been pondering doing something I have never yet done before: repeat a series in the same church. We've done 70 series since I've been here, and around a dozen of them have been series I've done in previous churches that were rewritten for here, but never have I repeated a series in the same church. I thought I might repeat the series we did several years ago on the 23rd Psalm. It was so good, and it too focused on stress. I still think I might do that someday and dig back into the 23rd Psalm, but I didn't really feel right in doing that now for this time. I was really at a loss even on Wednesday morning when I needed to work on the bulletin. I spent most of the morning trying to come up with an idea – any idea – for a four-week series. But I just kept coming back to dealing with stress. Then I was reminded of a wonderful Scripture from Jesus, and it was settled. We are supposed to talk about stress for the next few weeks, so I invite you to turn to page 5 in your bulletin as we begin this series "From Stressed to Rest."

In Matthew 11, Jesus has been teaching the people, and in particular, about who John the Baptist, at this time was in prison, really was. Then we have these words that are uniquely written in Matthew alone. I want us to read together from Matthew 11:28-30; it's printed in your bulletin:

Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light."¹

What a great passage. Jesus spoke to people who were desperately trying to find God and desperately trying to be good, who were finding the tasks impossible and who were driven to weariness and to despair.

He says, "Come to me, all of you who are weary." His invitation is to those who are exhausted with the search for the truth. The Greeks had said, "It is very difficult to find God, and, when you have found him, it is impossible to tell anyone else about him." One of Job's friends demanded of Job: "Can you find out the deep things of God?"². For the orthodox Jew, religion was a thing of burdens. Jesus said of the Scribes and Pharisees: "They bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders"³. To the Jew, religion was a thing of endless rules. A person lived their life in a forest of regulations which dictated every action of his life. They must listen forever to a voice which said, "Thou shalt not."

So, it was into this environment that Jesus said, "Come." Why? Because in our lives, we will have to deal with stress and trouble, and it has been my experience that something happens when we feel the stress levels rise. Write this down:

It is easy for the temporal to seem bigger than the eternal.

When we stress, the temporal becomes huge and the eternal seems to shrink in our minds. Appointments on the calendar seem bigger than all of eternity. Standing in line is bigger than waiting upon the Lord. The immediate and the urgent seem bigger than the peace of God that passes all understanding. When we are stressed out, be it deadlines or troubles or too many things to do, those little, temporal things seem bigger than the God of the universe and His power.

Into that, Jesus says, "Come." Today, we are going to focus on verse 28 and Come. Jesus says that there are 4 things when we come:

First, pursue.

Jesus says, "Come to me..." We must pursue the right thing, not the tyranny of things. Come to God.

So often, it is we who go astray. Isaiah 53:6 says,

*All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God's paths to follow our own.*⁴

The lost, astray sheep are not looking for the shepherd. We too, when we feel overloaded and start to stress, go astray. We forget the promises of God, His power, His omnipotence. We forget that there is nothing too big for God. We go astray.

But thanks be to God the Good Shepherd is looking for the lost sheep. God sought out Adam and Eve after they had sinned; Adam and Eve on the other hand hid from God.⁵

¹ Matthew 11:28-30 (NLT2)

² Job 11:7

³ Matthew 23:4

⁴ Isaiah 53:6 (NLT2)

⁵ See Genesis 3:8,9

So instead of the call of stress to chaos and distress, here the call is from God, "Come to me."

Second, the problem.

Jesus said:

Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens...⁶

A lecturer was talking to his students on stress management. He raised a glass of water and asked them, "How heavy do you think this glass of water is?"

The students' answers ranged from 20g to 500g.

The lecturer said, "It does not matter on the absolute weight. It depends on how long you hold it. If I hold it for a minute, it is OK. If I hold it for an hour, I will have an ache in my right arm. If I hold it for a day, you will have to call an ambulance. It is the exact same weight, but the longer I hold it, the heavier it becomes."

That's the problem when stress starts piling up on us. Something that usually is so light and trouble free becomes overwhelming. You've had that. You are stressed out, and the simplest of things become hard: putting the key into the door, tying your shoe.

I have a pastor friend of mine. They had just finished building a brand new church and on the first Sunday, during worship, he passed out. He has on the chancel and just passed out. Everything he had been carrying just overwhelmed him, and on the day when everything was finished and they could celebrate, he just lost it.

That's what Jesus meant when He said, "all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens." You and I were never meant to lug those things around, whether it is too many things on the list or people pulling you from all sides or even sin, especially sin. Sin enslaves and makes us labor rigorously; sin is also a burden that is too heavy to carry.

Third, if we come to Jesus, we receive a product.

And the product is rest.

Jesus said:

"Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest."⁷

When we come, we receive rest; rest from the toil and burden of sin.

MYRA'S COME TO JESUS MOMENT

When we come, we focus on the person.

Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and who will give you rest? Christ is the One Who saves, who vanquishes the stress with the breath from His mouth, who gives when we come.

This week, in the devotions from Oswald Chambers, "My Utmost for His Highest", Chambers was commenting on John 7:38 that says, "He who believes in Me...out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."

Chambers wrote:

"A river is victoriously persistent, overcoming all barriers. For a while it goes steadily on its course, but then comes to an obstacle. And for a while it is blocked, yet it soon makes a pathway around the obstacle. Or a river will drop out of sight for miles, only later to emerge again even broader and greater than ever. Do you see God using the lives of others, but an obstacle has come into your life and you do not seem to be of

⁶ Matthew 11:28 (NLT2)

⁷ Matthew 11:28 (NLT2)

any use to God? Then keep paying attention to the Source, and God will either take you around the obstacle or remove it. The river of the Spirit of God overcomes all obstacles. Never focus your eyes on the obstacle or the difficulty. The obstacle will be a matter of total indifference to the river that will flow steadily through you if you will simply remember to stay focused on the Source. Never allow anything to come between you and Jesus Christ— not emotion nor experience— nothing must keep you from the one great sovereign Source.”⁸

The believer who is focused on the Source never sees the obstacle. When we let stress take over, we are focusing on the obstacle and not the source.

When we were in the Holy Land, we would pass by Bedouins. The Bedouin shepherd lives in shabby box tents that dot the hillsides throughout Israel. When compared to our lives saturated with modern conveniences, it seems as though they live a very difficult life, one that is thousands of years old. However, an interesting fact is that their average life span is more than 100 years.

While the diets are made up of natural foods which contain no preservatives, that is not the secret to their longevity. The secret lies in their relatively stress-free lives. Stress makes us sick, drives us crazy, and kills us some three decades before the majority of these shepherds.

The Bedouins rise from their tents slightly before sunrise and go about the work of their days. As the sun begins to set, they gather as families in their tents for dinner. Then they will sit around sharing stories and singing. Each evening involves three to four hours of family time.

Their work is very physical and tiring, but their lives are relatively free from the noise of life. They routinely go to bed at the same time every night and enjoy deep restful and renewing sleep. As the Bedouins lie down, all is quiet as they stare up at the clear star filled sky. Their minds are able to focus on the majesty of God and that is the last thought on their minds as they fall asleep.⁹

What is it that you are focusing on when you try to go to sleep? Is it all the work you have to do tomorrow, or maybe the things you left undone today? Is it the people you are afraid of or the people you have let down? Is it the molehills we have made into mountains or the little situations that we have turned into crisis's?

Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest."¹⁰

My friends, there is relief from stress, but you've got to come.

⁸ From My Utmost for His Highest Updated Edition, 09/06/18

⁹ From a sermon by Scott Chambers, Chill Out and Breathe, 2/2/2011

¹⁰ Matthew 11:28 (NLT2)