

Take

Series: From Stressed to Rest

Matthew 11:28-30

September 16, 2018

Welcome again to Germantown United Methodist Church. I'm so glad we're here together today.

Last week, we began a series dealing with stress called, "From Stressed to Rest." We're talking about what Jesus had to say about stress, so I invited you to turn to page 6 in your bulletin.

It is easy for us to live stress filled lives. Those of you who have children know the stress of worrying about them as they grow up. Issues like if they will grow up healthy, or will they face bullying, or will they do well in school, fill your mind and spirit with stress and worry.

I would guess some of you were stressed during the first half of last night's Ohio State game. We can get so identified with our sports teams that we feel real physical affects when they are struggling.

During his first year as head coach of the UCLA Bruins football team, alumni and fans made coach Pepper Rodgers's life miserable as his Bruins got off to a horrible season start. Rodgers said of that year, "Nobody in Southern California would hang out with me. My dog was my only true friend. I told my wife that every man needs at least two good friends. She bought me another dog."

During our series "From Stressed to Rest", we will look at what Jesus of Nazareth had to say about stress. So, look with me at page 6 as we study this truly incredible passage of Scripture from the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 11, verses 28-30. Let's read it together:

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

Last week, we studied the concept of "Come." Today, we will focus on Take.

He said, "Take my yoke upon you." What a strange phrase. Yokes aren't used much in the modern world. It is a wooden harness used to guide oxen or other draft animals while plowing fields. The yoke still exists in developing countries, but by and large, it has been replaced by tractors.

So, what a strange paradox then that a person already weary and overloaded must take a new weight upon them in order to be eased and find rest! What in the world could Jesus mean?

I believe in life, we have many things that weigh us down, and more times than not, they are things that we can easily let go of, but we tend to hold on to them with dear life, weighing ourselves down so much that moving forward is non-existent and almost unachievable in our minds.

A pastor friend of mine has a son who attends the University of Cincinnati and is in their ROTC program. Yesterday, Samuel completed the United States Air Force Half

¹ Matthew 11:28-30 (NLT2)

Marathon... with a 30-pound pack on his back. He purposefully put a yoke on himself to run a 13.1-mile marathon.

Today, I want to share with you a few things in life that weigh us down, and we carry the heaviness of them with us from day to day. These are our yokes that we are carrying; ones that we have placed upon our necks and on our backs. Let me share 3 things that are part of the yoke we carry and that weighs us down.

First, Un-Forgiveness.

In life, we are faced with a multitude of occurrences that weigh us down in this area. We get upset with someone and have a difficult time in truly forgiving them because they wronged us. We love the weight of un-forgiveness and carry it throughout our lives because when our pride is hurt, we will gladly pack un-forgiveness into our bags and tell ourselves that we will never forgive so and so for as long as we live. We even pretend that the weight of it isn't heavy to us and we go on about our happy little lives carrying Un-forgiveness each and every day. We think by holding onto certain things that it will make us feel better about how we have been treated, but nothing is further from the truth.

Jesus said in Mark 11:25

And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.²

As a Christian, we are to be forgiving of others when we are wronged. How do we expect to be forgiven ourselves of the sin within our lives if we can't forgive others?

Carrying extra weight on your back with sooner or later get the best of you. We are only hurting ourselves, others, and our relationship with God when we do not simply let go of the un-forgiveness in our hearts.

Another yoke we carry is Un-confessed Sins.

Un-confessed sin in our lives is like a small pebble in our shoe or a small splinter in our finger. Neither one is big enough to stop us, but they sure slow us down. Have you ever tried to keep walking or running with a small pebble in your shoe? You can do it, but it hurts and it steals our concentration on what is important.

Un-confessed sins in our life do the same thing. They may not keep us from going to heaven, but they sure make getting there much more difficult. Un-confessed sin is a robber of joy, of peace, of victory. It keeps us in shame and defeat. It adds weight on our backs that is unnecessary.

By un-confessed sin, I do not mean sins that at the end of the day you cannot remember you committed and cannot pray for forgiveness. My goodness, it would require me carrying around a notebook each day if this is what God meant by un-confessed sin.

No, un-confessed sin is sin that we are very much aware of and hold onto, not willing to let it go. We find ourselves not only hiding it from others, but we may even be justifying it.

A third yoke we carry is Un-spoken Prayers.

I wonder what great things God has in store for us if we would but ask. We read in Scripture that we have not because we ask not.³

² Mark 11:25 (NIV)

³ See James 4:2

We struggle with finances, our children, our grandchildren are a mess, our boss is un-fair, our Nation has troubles, family members are sick, disaster is all around us and what is it that we do? We pack it in our yoke and carry the weight around with us.

I don't know why we keep unspoken prayers. I only know that in Philippians 4:6 we read,

Do not be anxious [can I substitute "stress"?] about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.⁴

What prayer do you need to offer to God today to lighten your load? When we hold unspoken prayers in, we allow them to build up and clutter our lives up with negativity. And negativity will only slow us down as it keeps our hearts in a heavy state. We begin to feel unloved, unimportant, we begin to feel all alone in this world with no one on our side that is there for us to guide us and lift us up.

Jesus said, "Take my yoke upon you." He wants us to drop the yoke we put on ourselves, like Samuel did for the Air Force Half Marathon, and put on a different yoke: His yoke. So, that brings up the question, "What is the yoke of Christ?"

Let me suggest 3 things that are part of Christ's yoke and that will relieve stress.

First, Sabbath.

In the creation story of Genesis 2, it says,

On the seventh day God had finished his work of creation, so he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because it was the day when he rested from all his work of creation.⁵

We live in an action-oriented world! There always seems to be something to do and no time to rest. Yet God demonstrated that rest is appropriate and right. If God Himself rested from His work, we should not be surprised that we also need rest. Jesus demonstrated this principle when He and his disciples left in a boat to get away from the crowds.⁶ Our times of rest refresh us for times of good labor and service.

So "God blessed the seventh day." That means He set it apart for holy use. The Ten Commandments emphasize this distinction by commanding the observance of the Sabbath.

"Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. You have six days each week for your ordinary work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the LORD your God. On that day no one in your household may do any work... For in six days the LORD made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and everything in them; but on the seventh day he rested. That is why the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and set it apart as holy.⁷

This is hard for me. The joke always is that pastors only work 1 day a week for a couple hours and that's it. Of course, we know it's a joke. It can be really difficult for me to find sabbath, rest, and folks, Sunday is not sabbath for me. It's hard to find time to rest. A couple of weeks ago, I had one day off in 18 days. Starting tonight, I have something every night for the next 10 days straight. Yet I know that in order to faithful to the calling God has for me, I need rest, sabbath.

⁴ Philippians 4:6 (NIV)

⁵ Genesis 2:2-3 (NLT2)

⁶ See Mark 6:31-32

⁷ Exodus 20:8-11 (NLT2)

Jesus' yoke means honoring sabbath in our lives, and folks, I hate to say this, but football probably wasn't part of God's idea for keeping the Sabbath holy. One day a week, we are to focus on the Lord and our relationship with Him, not just an hour or 2. But when we keep the Sabbath, our load becomes lighter and less stressful because we have taken up Christ's yoke.

A second element of the yoke of Christ is Obedience. Obedience. Now, sometimes, our reaction to that word is like that of a 2-year-old throwing a temper tantrum because we are told to do something and we don't want to. Likewise, when I talk about the yoke of Christ being obedience, we can sometimes view Christ as the driver of the oxen under the yoke, and we're the oxen. That's a terribly distorted view of obedience.

The Latin root of the word "obedience" means "listen." So, to obey is to listen. That's what the dogs were doing in the booth at yesterday's Community Day. A properly trained dog finds joy in obeying its master.

That's what it means to obey God. When we obey the Lord, His teaching and guidance, then there will be less anxiety, less pain, and definitely less stress in our lives.

Proverbs 3:5-6 says:

*Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take.*⁸

Obedience shows our relationship with God. Put another way, obedience to God is true freedom.

May I suggest that the final part of Christ's yoke is Hope.

In the ancient world of the Greeks and the Romans, hope was not a throbbing passion. The chorus of Sophocles lamented: "The highest remains, never to be brought to life." Seneca felt that hope was "an uncertain good."

Most of the world sees no possibility of hope, whether it be economically, socially or spiritually. But not the believer.

The Psalmist wrote:

*I am counting on the LORD; yes, I am counting on him. I have put my hope in his word.*⁹

The Apostle Peter said:

*Through Christ you have come to trust in God. And you have placed your faith and hope in God because he raised Christ from the dead and gave him great glory.*¹⁰

The Christian's hope is grounded in the work of Christ. No other religion in all of the world can offer the "hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised."¹¹

Are you overwhelmed with stress? Maybe you are carrying your own yoke. It's heavy, it hurts, it's burdensome. Don't you think it's time to throw off that yoke at take on Christ's yoke? For when we keep Sabbath, when we obey, and when we hope, life becomes lighter.

⁸ Proverbs 3:5-6 (NLT2)

⁹ Psalm 130:5 (NLT2)

¹⁰ 1 Peter 1:21 (NLT2)

¹¹ See Titus 1:2