

Matthew 11:28-30

Date: Sunday, 2 January 2022

Scripture: Matthew 11:28-30, Psalm 46

Sermon: Slowing Down

Preacher: Justin Ang

Passages

Matthew 11:28-30 (ESV)

Matt. 11:28 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Psalm 46 (ESV)

Psa. 46:0 To the choirmaster. Of the Sons of Korah. According to Alamo. A Song.

Psa. 46:1 God is our refuge and strength,

a very present help in trouble.

2 Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way,

though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea,

3 though its waters roar and foam,

though the mountains tremble at its swelling. Selah

Psa. 46:4 There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,

the holy habitation of the Most High.

5 *God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved;*

God will help her when morning dawns.

6 *The nations rage, the kingdoms totter;*

he utters his voice, the earth melts.

7 *The LORD of hosts is with us;*

the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah

Psa. 46:8 Come, behold the works of the LORD,

how he has brought desolations on the earth.

9 *He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;*

he breaks the bow and shatters the spear;

he burns the chariots with fire.

10 *"Be still, and know that I am God.*

I will be exalted among the nations,

I will be exalted in the earth!"

11 *The LORD of hosts is with us;*

the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah

Transcript

Introduction

Well, it's 2022 and you know what happens at the beginning of the year? You do New Years resolutions. Interesting, I read a statistic that most people give up on their New Years resolutions by the end of February. Maybe because we have goals

which are too high, or maybe because our willpower and discipline runs out by that time.

Maybe you're thinking that you should put some Christian New Years resolutions in there as well? And I would commend you for that. Last week, I shared that I think the greatest danger for our church is that we know so much, but we don't put it into practice. We can be like the Pharisees, the Scribes in Jerusalem when the three wise men come in. We know the Scriptures so well, and yet, we don't make our way to Bethlehem to see where the King of the Jews is to be born. We do nothing with the information. That's the greatest risk we have in this church. Filling our minds with head knowledge but it not reaching our hearts.

And I've been thinking about it, and I believe that there's a reason why that's the case. There is a big barrier that each one of us faces, it's a challenge for each one of us and it's this. We are simply too busy. I love the book by Roald Dahl, Charlie and the Chocolate Factory. I wasn't a big reader growing up, but that and the Secret Garden were two of my favourite books. And in Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, you know the story, of how Willy Wonka is known for making the most delicious chocolate treats. And he gives out 5 golden tickets to tour his chocolate factory. Charlie, who comes from a poor family, manages to get the last ticket, and so goes with his grandpa on the tour. And on the tour, it's frantic, and Willy Wonka says this, "Too much time and so little to do! Scratch that, it's the other way around. Too much to do and so little time."

That's so true! When you ask someone how they are these days, what do they say? Busy. Tired. Exhausted. Hands up if that's you? I know, personally, that many of you tell me that. And you know what? It's something that many of us are proud of. We fill our schedules to the brim.

But I want to talk about it. Three points.

The problem with hurry.

The solution to hurry.

One spiritual practice.

The Problem with Hurry

Maybe you're thinking, what's the problem with hurry? It means that I get more stuff done. If you look at the culture around us, our culture does not embrace slow! We are addicted to hurry. I'll give a few examples.

What does it mean when you refer to someone as slow? It's not positive at all!

When you're at the post office, or the grocery store, which lane do you pick? Obviously the one with less people in it.

When you watch advertisements on television for the latest gadget, they're often talking about how much faster the processor is, or how much faster it is compared to the old model.

A recent interview with the CEO of Netflix was rather revealing. The CEO said that he wasn't worried about other streaming platforms like Disney+. Do you know the greatest threat to Netflix? Sleep. He said that sleep was getting in the way of people watching Netflix. Apparently the average amount of television that we watch is 4 hours a day.

When we're bored, we're on Netflix. Or on our phones. Nicholas Carr says that the internet superhighway has changed the way that we think. We can't focus on one thing deeply anymore.

Apparently our attention span has dropped. Can you guess what it's dropped to? Eight seconds. Do you know what has a greater attention span? A goldfish. Nine seconds. Spare a thought for public speakers like pastors!

Everything is getting faster. Fast food. When I worked at McDonald's, the maximum amount of time that someone could be in the drive through was something like 4 minutes.

Oh, do you know the most disobeyed law in America? It's speeding. We are speeding more and more. We don't like how people die but we are addicted to speeding.

Maybe you're thinking, what's the problem? I get more done. Well. I want to suggest to you that hurry and love do not mix. In fact, a famous Christian, Dallas Willard once said, "Hurry is the greatest enemy of spiritual life in our day."

Let me read that out again and let that sink in. "Hurry is the greatest enemy of spiritual life in our day."

Corrie Ten Boom said that "if the Devil can't make you sin, then he'll make you busy."

Blaise Pascal said, "All men's miseries derive from not being able to sit in a quiet room alone." Meaning that we live in noise, in busyness, in hurry. We cover up on our pain, our loneliness, with frenetic activity.

As you know, C.S. Lewis wrote the Screwtape letters, he writes from the perspective of a senior demon called Screwtape who helps his nephew in distracting humans. "We will make the whole universe a noise in the end....The melodies and silences of Heaven will be shouted down in the end."

Jesus himself says that we can be really busy, we can be like Martha. Busy running around the house doing all these things for the Lord, but being in a hurry means that we forget the one thing. The one good portion that Mary had. At another time he said, that not everyone who says Lord, Lord will enter the kingdom but only those who do the will of the Father. Listen to what Jesus says, "On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' (Matthew 7:22 ESV). Do you hear how busy they sound?

You might be busy. You might even be in a hurry doing "great things" for God. You're involved with church ministry, left right and center. I know some of you are like that. But he may say on that last day, I never knew you, depart from me.

You see, God is never in a hurry. God is love. Is love ever done in a hurry? Absolutely not. Can you imagine? Maybe you're pouring your heart out to a loved one, and they're looking at their watch. Some of you, just want to get straight to the point, that's because you're in a hurry.

Maybe you don't think you're in a hurry. Let me give you some diagnostic tools. You know, like the check engine light on your car. Let me give you some questions.

1. Are you irritable? Do you dismiss other people's perspective off the cuff?

2. Do you suffer from workaholicism? Like you just can't stop. You're like a shark that will die if it stops moving? I know I tell some of you to take a day off, and you haven't taken a day off, well, I have news, you're a workaholic.
3. Do you have less than 6 hours of sleep? I was tempted to suggest 8. Do you know that before the invention of the clock, people would sleep when the sun went down, and wake when the sun came up? People would sleep 11 hours a day.
4. Do you display escapist behaviour? Like you drink too much coffee, you overeat, over drink, you watch too much Netflix, too much internet, television?

The Solution to Hurry

So let's talk about the solution to hurry. I'll tell you what you don't need. You don't need more time. You don't need more money.

As human beings, we have limits. That's what it means to be finite. What happens if you choose to go without food? You can starve to death after a couple of months. We need food! What happens if you went without water? After a few days, you'd die for dehydration. We need water. Sleep.

Even if you had more time, you could never do everything you'd ever wanted. That's what we saw the writer of Ecclesiastes come to the conclusion. You'd never be satisfied. You don't need more time.

What you need is to take on Jesus' yoke. I want to show you,

Matt. 11:28 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Matthew 11:28-30 (ESV)

I want to look at this. Because the more I reflect on this passage, the more it troubles me. What do you think it means to take on Jesus' yoke? Maybe you already know what a yoke is. The yoke is something that was used in farming. It was like a wooden beam that would go across the shoulder of an ox. So you'd have two ox,

with a yoke across their shoulders so that they would carry the load. The older ox would teach the younger one as they shouldered it together.

One thing that we have to remember is that Jesus was a Jewish rabbi. A teacher. And the thing you need to know what rabbis, and teachers is that all have a yoke. A yoke like an ox. Jesus had something you needed to learn from him. Jesus as the older ox, has something to teach us. The teacher teaching us his students, his apprentices something.

A way of life, so to speak.

You often hear me talk about Jesus being king, being saviour. But I realise that I also have to talk about Jesus being our teacher. And we are his apprentices.

Recently, I've been researching woodworking. I'm not sure why, I think I want to do something that is physical as a hobby. So I've been researching both Western and Japanese woodworking. Because they're actually very different. For example, in Western woodworking, the plane which you use to make sure wooden surfaces are flat operate with the pushing motion. Planes are also made of metal. Whereas in Japanese woodworking, planes operate with a pulling motion. Planes are made of wood.

But the best way to learn is actually watch a master woodworker. In Japanese woodworking, as an apprentice you watch the master woodworker for up to five years. In the first year, you don't even get to pick up the tools. You just watch. But the point is that woodworking isn't done with just knowledge. It's done by imitating. Living it with someone who is more experienced.

That's why Jesus had disciples. He had twelve apprentices. Who lived with him for 3 years. They saw what he did, how he lived around the clock. We don't need more time in our hurried life. What we need is to imitate Jesus.

Eugene Peterson, the author of the Message, puts it like this,

Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.

We need to imitate Jesus. Become his apprentices.

Yes, Jesus was busy but he was never hurried. He never hurried from one moment to the next. When the ruler asked Jesus to heal his daughter, he gets interrupted by the woman who had been bleeding for twelve years (Luke 8). He never told her to go away, he spent time with her even though the ruler's daughter would die before he'd get there. Doesn't hurry.

He doesn't hurry when he finds out that Lazarus is sick. In fact, he stayed where he was for an extra 2 days (John 11).

When people are asking him to heal and cast out demons, he prioritise his prayer life early in morning and late at night (Mark 1, Mark 6).

There is never a place in the Scripture where Jesus hurried.

This year, I want to encourage each one of us to be an apprentice of Jesus. Learn his ways. I know that a lot of us love to grow in our knowledge of the bible. We like to hear what's going on historical, geographically, linguistically. That's all good. But knowledge by itself puffs up.

We can walk away with more knowledge, but this year, I want us to apprentice with Jesus each and every single day. "What would Jesus do... in my situation?" So we're going to learn one spiritual practice.

One Spiritual Practice

In order to combat hurry, I want to encourage you with one spiritual practice that Jesus did. It's something that we can all start this week.

Let me show you. It's in Matthew 4, right after John baptises Jesus in the Jordan.

Matt. 4:1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.

Matthew 4:1-2 (ESV)

Don't worry, I'm not going to suggest fasting. But I wanted to point out that Jesus after he's been baptised heads to the wilderness. Another way to translate it is desert, or lonely place, or quiet place. A place by himself.

Why would Jesus go to the wilderness and make himself hungry for 40 days in order to battle the devil? The wilderness looks like a place of weakness. But it's actually a place of strength. It's only after 40 days of prayer and fasting in a quiet place that he had the power to battle the devil and walk away unscathed (John Mark Comer).

And it's not just a once off. Jesus goes to the wilderness on multiple occasions during his ministry (Matthew 14:13, Mark 1:35, Mark 6:31, Luke 1:80, Luke 5:16).

Just like Jesus, we too need to go into the wilderness. We need to get away from the noise of the world and spend time with God like Jesus did.

Let's get practical.

Firstly, find a lonely place. We need to have time alone. We need solitude with God. That means we need alone time with God. By ourselves. With no-one else. Henri Nouwen, a Catholic theologian, says "Without solitude it is virtually impossible to live a spiritual life. ...We do not take the spiritual life seriously if we do not set aside some time to be with God and listen to him." Sometimes, I use the storeroom in the manse upstairs. It's really quiet. Rachel and the pets can't find me. Where I'm by myself. We need to find a place where we can be alone with God.

Secondly, get rid of the noise. There's a lot of noise in the world. Turn off the Television. Turn off the phone. These things, phones, can be really dangerous. They're really noisy. Back in the day, we only used to have landlines, and answering machines. Now, with these phones, they're the internet in the pocket. Messages, WhatsApp, signal, Facebook, instagram, twitter. They're attention sapping devices. There's been studies done on them, apparently even if you have the phone off, and the phone face down on the table, they sap your attention. But they're not conducive for your relationship with Jesus. We need to have silence from the external world.

Thirdly, start small. Five minutes. I wouldn't overdo it. But consistency is key. You want to be able to do five minutes each day.

I pray that this spiritual practice will be a blessing to you.

Let me pray.