

“BUSY or Not?”

Psalm 46, Jeremiah 13:1-11

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Many of us can probably relate to the story of the woman in the skit in one way or another. We just seem to live such busy lives. Twenty-five to thirty years ago, just before the technology revolution really took off, it was estimated that by the time we got to the 21st century, because of all the advances in technology, we would have a lot more discretionary time on our hands. Time to relax, time to focus on those things that are most important in our lives, less time at work. Many even predicted that the average work week would be cut short, perhaps closer to 30 hours instead of 40. We were fooled! Actually we have a lot less time than we had before the technology revolution. The average work week has increased dramatically. If not the hours than at least the expectations. The number of things that we can give our time and attention to has multiplied exponentially. So much so we can't even keep up. If you or your children are involved in sports or school activities the expectations from each of those has increased dramatically as well.

A couple of weeks ago I was introduced to a man who was the former Athletic Director at Bellefontaine High School. It was the week of Aug. 1, just as some of the golf teams were beginning their practice for the upcoming season. Keeping in mind that many of the sports have been participating throughout the summer in so called “voluntary” practices. How “voluntary” they really are, I'm not so sure. The former athletic director said, “I can remember when you didn't start practice until two weeks before the season began.

But it isn't just sports, its everything. The American Dream is that if something is good, than more of it is always better. I don't know if you have noticed, but for many, the so called American Dream has become a nightmare. People are working a lot more hours, spending more money than they have. Our nation's debt crisis is really just a mirror of many individual debt crisis'. Most married couples today need to both work just trying to keep up. And almost all of us, especially those of us age 60 and less, are caught up in the rat race we call life.

In one of the passages from the Gospel of Matthew that we looked a couple of months ago, it tells us that Jesus said:

“Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 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. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Matthew 11:28-30 (NIV)

How many really feel they are living out that passage?

I appreciated Alex's message last week, *“Never meant to Walk on Water.”* Jesus could walk on water, but we were never meant to walk on water, at least by ourselves. But often we live like we can, or we live like we have no limits. We put unrealistic demands upon ourselves and upon others.

Ivy Thoman recently told me about a sermon she heard on the radio by David Jeremiah, from *Turning Point Ministries*. In the message he talked about all our busyness. More often than not we dismiss our busyness as just a necessary part of living today in the 21st century, without realizing what it is doing to us. David Jeremiah had a wonderful acronym for the word B.U.S.Y. - Being Under Satan's Yoke. Being BUSY distracts us from focusing on the right things. Even being BUSY with lots of "good things," keeps us from the "best things." One of Satan's best tricks is just keeping us distracted from what really matters.

Being BUSY with all kinds of things prevents us from taking the time to really listen to God and see how He might be working in our lives today. The Book of Jeremiah is all about God's people who became distracted. They became busy with lots of other things and they lost their focus upon God. They just didn't have time to listen. Over and over again the prophet chides (scolds) God's people in Israel for their failure to listen.

One of the Bible verses on the front of your bulletin this morning:

"While you were doing all these things, declares the LORD, I spoke to you again and again, but you did not listen; I called you but you did not answer."
Jeremiah 7:13 (NIV)

And a few chapters later the prophet shares this story:

This is what the Lord said to me: "Go and buy a linen belt and put it around your waist, but do not let it touch water." So I bought a belt, as the Lord directed, and put it around my waist.

Then the word of the LORD came to me a second time: "Take the belt you bought and are wearing around your waist, and go now to Perath and hide it there in a crevice in the rocks." So I went and hid it at Perath, as the LORD told me.

Many days later the LORD said to me, "Go now to Perath and get the belt I told you to hide there." So I went to Perath and dug up the belt and took it from the place where I had hidden it, but now it was ruined and completely useless.

Then the word of the LORD came to me:: "This is what the LORD says: 'In the same way I will ruin the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem. These wicked people who refuse to listen to my words, who follow the stubbornness of their hearts and go after other gods to serve and worship them, will be like this belt - completely useless! For as a belt is bound around a man's waist, so I bound the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah to me,' declares the LORD, 'to be my people for my renown and praise and honor. But they have not listened.'

Jeremiah 13:1-11 (NIV)

Why does God bind people to himself? "I bind my people to me," declares the LORD, to be my people for my renown and praise and honor!"

Because of their refusal to “listen” to God, their distraction to so many worldly things, the Israelites had already been captured by the Assyrians. Jeremiah was speaking to those from Judah and Jerusalem, warning them that the same thing was soon going to happen to them. They just wouldn’t take the time to listen. Israel and Judah weren’t captured by the Assyrians and Babylonians because those empires were much stronger than they, though they were. They were captured, sent into exile, because they refused to “listen” to God and God was casting judgment upon them.

The word “listen” is a very interesting word. We tend to think of it as a very passive word. The theme of our retreat, “Be Still and Listen.” But listening carefully takes effort. Often it means getting rid of many of the distractions, some temporarily, some for good. But also implied in the word listen is the idea of doing something about what we hear. Listening correctly implies obedience to the one we are hearing from. How many parents here have kids who just won’t listen?

I think of my own experience growing up. I heard what my father was saying, but many times I didn’t follow through. If you were to ask him if I was listening, he would say, “no way.” Often that’s the same way with our relationship with God. Not “listening” to God has some very serious consequences. It did for His people back in the days of Jeremiah and it does today, whether we want to acknowledge it or not.

This summer we have taken some time to try and listen to God. Some have questioned, “why all the time in our visioning on Sunday mornings during the Sunday school time?” I don’t think we can overestimate the importance of taking the time to listen for and to God. How is God speaking to us today? What is He calling us to do? Who is He calling us to become?

How does being BUSY apply to our own lives, our own relationship with God, our church life? Well, in many ways, our lives as Christians, our church life, has become a mirror of our society. Bigger and more is better. We try and offer more. We try and do more and more things. We add new things, new programs, new ministries, but very rarely do we take any away. We can’t do everything, be everything to everybody. We need to focus on what is most important. What is God calling us to do with the gifts that He has given us? If I am hearing God correctly, I think He is calling us to simplify. Whether it be our Constitution or all our committees and programs. Sometimes you need to cut out some things, even some good things, to focus on the best things. How do all the things we are doing fit with our vision?

As Christians, we are also presented with a dilemma, today, in the 21st century, like any no other time in history. Is it that we really don’t have time for church things and ministry or is it that we just have so many other things. A lot of things that don’t have any long lasting - eternal consequences. I don’t think God really cares how much time we spend on sports. Or he might, but I think it’s the exact opposite of how we look at it. Or how much time we spend on the computer, or watching T.V., or movies, or even work. Yes, I think he wants us to support ourselves and to help others. But how much do we really need to have? How big a house, how nice a car? Especially when millions and millions of people don’t even have enough food to eat.

As Christians how do we justify \$21 million dollars over ten years, just for salary, for a college football coach when there is so much need in the world.

And we even need to be careful with lots of church things. We can become very BUSY with church things and still Be Under Satan's Yoke. Most important is our relationship with God, everything else we do must flow from that.

We find ourselves in some difficult times. An economy that continues to struggle, some have lost jobs, others in danger of losing jobs, illnesses, fear of the unknown.

Many nations, including our own, are in an uproar. Kingdoms fall. It is very easy to have the same feelings of our psalmist this morning - "though the earth give way, and the mountains fall down, though the waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging."

But:

*God is our refuge and strength,
an ever present help in trouble . . .*

*There is a river where streams make glad the city of God,
the holy place where the most high dwells.*

*God is within her, she will not fall;
God will help her at break of day.*

*The LORD Almighty is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.*

Come and see the works of the LORD,

*Be still and know that I am God:
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth.*

*The LORD Almighty is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.*

What does Psalm 46 and Jeremiah 13 have in common? Good question! God tells us through the prophet Jeremiah "I bind my people to myself for my renown and praise and honor!" Through the psalmist he says, "Be still, and know that I am God, I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in all the earth!" God will be exalted with us or without us. The big question for us is, "will we Be Under Satan's Yoke with all our busyness and distractions or will we be yoked with Jesus when He is?"