

# Hearing God's Word Proclaimed

## Hurry Sickness

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Luke 5: 1-11

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Once when Jesus was standing on the shore of Lake Gennesaret, the crowd was pushing in on him to better hear the Word of God. He noticed two boats tied up. The fishermen had just left them and were out scrubbing their nets. He climbed into the boat that was Simon's and asked him to push the boat out a little from the shore.

Jesus said to Simon, "Push out into deep water and let your nets out for a catch." Simon said, "Master, we've been fishing hard all night and haven't caught even a minnow. But if you say so, I'll let out the nets." It was no sooner said than done—a huge haul of fish, straining the nets past capacity. They waved to their partners in the other boat to come help them. They filled both boats, nearly swamping them with the catch. Jesus said to Simon, "From now on you'll be fishing for men and women." They pulled their boats up on the beach, left them, nets and all, and followed him.

*Will you pray with me? Holy and Gracious God, quiet our minds and open our hearts. Lord, we all seem to be in a hurry. We were in a hurry to get here, in a hurry to eat breakfast, in a hurry to squeeze in all of the endless activities on our to do lists. Are our plates too full, in fact overflowing, so that we have no time for you O God? How has this hurried pace become for us the norm? Remind us, O God, that things that matter take time. Remind us again that there is plenty of time in each day, time to love you and our neighbors and our family members, time to listen to those we care about, and time to live the lives you would have us live. Be with each and every one of us this morning, as we hear your Word and speak to us right where we are in our lives. To that end, O God, I ask that you would pour through me the gift of preaching that by some miracle of your grace my words might become your Word, your life giving Word for each one of us. These things we ask, these things we pray in the name of Jesus, the risen and reigning Christ. Amen.*

Legend has it that if you drop a frog in boiling water, the frog will jump out immediately, sensing that the boiling water will kill him. On the other hand, the same legend holds that if you put a frog in room temperature water and slowly turn up the heat the change will happen so slowly that the frog will not realize what is happening to him until it is almost too late.<sup>i</sup> I wonder: Are we so different from the frog in the experiment? The dangers which most threaten us are generally not sudden. Rather, what threatens us usually creeps up on us so slowly we don't always realize what is happening.<sup>ii</sup>

This morning I would like to offer some observations about the pace of life in the metropolitan area of New York. And I know we are all very, very busy, so I will keep this as brief as I possibly can. In the 1950's the term hurry sickness was coined by cardiologists Meyer Friedman and Ray Rosenhan who were researching personality types which had higher tendencies toward heart attacks and

hypertension. By 1959 they had refined this to the term *Type A personality*, one of the characteristics of which is "time urgency and impatience, which causes irritation and exasperation." Type A individuals are often highly achieving workaholics who multi-task, drive themselves with deadlines, and are unhappy about the smallest of delays. Thank God we don't know anyone like that! As I did some research for this sermon, it became clear that hurry sickness has become a modern phenomenon, no longer associated just with urban areas, but with Western society in general. We like to move fast, and we will buy anything that promises to help us move faster, whether it is eating at the drive thru or buying the latest, greatest, fastest computer.

A wise mentor and minister once told me, "when we become ministers in a town, we catch the local diseases, and when we leave, we are healed of them."<sup>iii</sup> His point was that you ought to know what the local diseases are before you

catch them, so that you can monitor yourself over your pastorate.

I once asked a parishioner about the pace of life in Greenwich, and he said, “we travel at Mach 3,” or in layman’s terms three times the speed of sound. Other communities describe the pace of life as frantic, like ants scurrying around, but here we travel faster than a New York minute. It seems to me that life in the express lane may come at a price, and I wonder if we fully appreciate the personal price, the daily and weekly sacrifice we pay in our marriages, in our relationships with our children, in our spiritual life. Even though a hurried life seems to be the norm in urban and suburban areas, what stress does this place on our lives and on our families? Often it feels that something’s gotta give. Do you have any idea what I am talking about?

This morning will you look with me at this phenomenon known as hurry sickness and ask the following spiritual questions: what is it, what are the signs you have it, what is the true cost of hurry sickness to our families and to our spiritual life, is there a cure for hurry sickness? The first spiritual question asks:

### **I. What is hurry sickness, and who has it?**

Hurry sickness is the belief that speeding up your daily tasks will actually buy you more time. From personal experience, it never seems to work that way. In fact, the more we speed things up in our day, the more the day simply feels like a blur.

I know that some of you will tell me that you don’t have hurry sickness. You are busy, but you do not hurry. Before you make up your mind too quickly, let me ask you a couple of diagnostic questions:

#### **Are you constantly speeding up daily tasks?**

Do you see how fast you can do dishes, get the kids bathed and to bed so you can have some time to yourself at the end of the day? Do you skip breakfast so you can catch an earlier train to work? Do you hate to wait in line at the grocery store? Do you sigh when the light turns

yellow then red before you can race through without getting caught? Do you go through the drive thru regularly and eat in your car the way God intended? Does your microwave get more use than your stove? Do you nod your head affirmatively when people speak so that they will get to the point faster? If you answered yes to any one of these questions, I am pretty sure you have at least a mild case of hurry sickness.

#### **Are you a master at multitasking?**

Multitasking is known by psychiatrists as polyphasic behavior, in other words doing more than one thing at a time (but of course that takes too long to say). Do you multitask? Do you drive and talk on the phone? Do you have at least three or more applications open on your desktop computer at all times? Do you eat or drink in the car, while listening to books on tape or catching up on the news? Do you watch television, eat dinner, and carry on a conversation with your spouse? Is your day planner the size of a small country because you have not learned to say no?

These are some of the signs of hurry sickness. Now let us turn our attention and ask: what is the cost of hurry sickness in our personal lives and in our spiritual life?

### **II. What is the true cost of hurry sickness?**

Hurry sickness sacrifices quality for speed like the student who reported, “I read *War and Peace* in just a few minutes. It’s about Russia.” When we have hurry sickness, we sacrifice depth for breadth. We never get to know anything well, or anyone, because that takes time, and we don’t take the time to make that happen.

I wonder, sometimes, if the true cost of hurry sickness doesn’t come at the expense of our families. Theologians have dubbed this “sunset fatigue.” At the end of the day, when you are finally home, are you so tired from the day’s overloaded schedule that you want to collapse? Do you have any energy and joy left in you to be with the people you love most and watch the sunset? Are you excited about giving your

toddler a bath or going over math homework with your son or talking to your teenager about the crisis she faced today or listening to your spouse about their hopes and dreams? **Oftentimes, I think we are so busy and rushed in our lives that those we love most end up getting the leftovers, because it is all we have to offer.** And isn't that ironic? We tell ourselves that the crazy lives we lead are for the benefit of our loved ones, and yet, aren't our loved ones getting gypped on a daily basis?

Here is the awful truth, if you are willing to hear it. Hurry is seductive. Hurry makes us feel important. It says to the world and to those around us, I have things to do, people to see, appointments to keep. I am important.

Danish Theologian Soren Kierkegaard said, "the press of busyness is like a charm. Its power swells, laying hold of ever younger victims so that youth are barely allowed quiet time."<sup>iv</sup>

We rush through our days at lightening speed, and we don't even notice that *like the frog in the experiment the temperature in the pot is starting to boil!*

Our families suffer from hurry sickness not only because we have little time left at the end of the day, but also because we fill our schedules with one activity after another. Its no wonder our children learn this rhythm of life—some live at a frantic pace on a daily basis. At its worst, hurry sickness causes its victims to be stressed, exhausted, and teeter between burn out and resentment. But the damage does not end there. Not only do our families suffer, when we show signs of hurry sickness, **our spiritual life also suffers because God gets pushed further and further down the priority list.**

CS Lewis says that "Pain is when God speaks to us through a megaphone." Has it come to that? Do we wait until we are brought to our knees by a diagnosis that stops us in our tracks, or the death of a loved one, or the fear of losing someone close to us who is drifting away to Alzheimer's or alcoholism or cancer or

depression? Is that what it takes for us to make time for prayer? To make time for God? Here is the bad news: you cannot microwave your spiritual life any more than you can microwave your relationship with your loved ones. Relationships take time. You cannot hurry them.

### III. What is the cure for hurry sickness?

The good news is that there is a cure for hurry sickness, and most of us can beat it if we are conscious to be on the lookout for its signs and be willing to do what it takes to gain the proper balance. You can be healed of hurry sickness by consciously slowing down your daily activities, stopping yourself when you find yourself speeding things up, taking time every day to pray, and by working solitude into your weekly schedule. The last part is perhaps the hardest. We work up to solitude with fear and trembling, wanting to bring all of the books and movies that we are wanting to see with us. But solitude is not a Blockbuster video night, it is quiet time. Henri Nouwen described solitude as the time when all of our scaffolding comes off and we sit in front of God and be honest with ourselves.

Scripture tells us that even in Jesus' day, hurry sickness was a threat. Throughout the Scriptures the gospel writers make the point that the crowds were so demanding, that Jesus and his disciples had to slip away and take time out for themselves. We usually read the story or the parable or the miracle and don't notice that detail of the story. I think the gospel writers include this fact to tell us that taking time to regain one's strength is healthy, and we should do it without guilt, the way Jesus did.

In the sixth chapter of Mark, Jesus and his disciples are so busy ministering to the crowds that the Scriptures tell us that they didn't even have time to eat. So Jesus took the disciples away for a time to eat and regroup. It is no coincidence that this story comes just before the story of the feeding of the five thousand, a story about the pressing needs of others. Jesus was a master at knowing his own limits and what he needed to live a balanced life. Before he could minister to this crowd, he had to take time out

for himself. This is one of the hardest lessons for us to learn it seems: we cannot take care of others until we take care of ourselves. Like Jesus we must learn to take care of our own needs for sleep and food and rest and not feel guilty about doing so.

When was the last time you heard this announcement? “If we begin to experience a loss in cabin pressure an oxygen mask will drop out of the ceiling? First put on your own mask and then assist those next to you including children and elderly persons.” The directions clearly state put on your own mask first. Why? If we don’t take care of ourselves, we will not be able to take care of anyone else.

I leave you with this story. Writer John Ortberg tells the story of moving to Chicago to a new pastorate. Some months into his new call, he phoned his old spiritual director to check in. He began to describe the pace of life in Chicago and how hurried his life had become. His

spiritual mentor said one thing: “Ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life.” “Okay, I got that,” he said, writing it down. “What else?” This was a long distance call, and he wanted to get as much spiritual advice as possible. “There is nothing else,” his mentor added. Ortberg says, “This is the wisest spiritual director I have ever had.”<sup>v</sup>

Hurry is the great enemy of the spiritual life. Hurry will destroy our souls, as well as our relationships with those we love most. As I prayed about this sermon, I realized how hard it is to follow Christ when the environment we live in beckons us to live life at a sprint. How can we follow Christ, if we are going faster than the one we are trying to follow? Like John Ortberg’s spiritual director, God kept saying to me: “Do whatever it takes, to eliminate hurry from your life. Until you get that one down, there is nothing else.” In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Gibbons, Whit. “*The Legend of the Boiling Frog*.” As quoted from the internet. According to Dr. Victor Hutchison, an amphibian conservation biologist at the University of Oklahoma, this legend is not entirely true. Hutchison says that a frog put in water heated at 2 degrees per minute will become increasingly active, but if it is able, it will try to escape before it dies. One can’t help but wonder who these scientists are that have tried not once but two different ways to cook a frog!

<sup>ii</sup> Ortberg, John. *The Life You Have Always Wanted*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan,) p. 84-85. I am deeply indebted in this sermon to the chapter called “The Unhurried Life.” John Ortberg says this is the basis for any spiritual life to develop. Before you can begin with prayer, you must slow down to the speed of the one you are trying to follow.

<sup>iii</sup> Rev. George C. Bland.

<sup>iv</sup> Ortberg, p. 86.

<sup>v</sup> Ortberg, p. 77.