

"Rest"

Matthew 11:25-30 and Luke 4:18

A Sermon by Dr. Jim Davis

First Presbyterian Church of Kingwood

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(The sermon begins with a video clip by Max Lucado)

So tell me, is that where you are this morning? Are you at rest? Or are you feeling oppressed?

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me," Jesus says, "because he has anointed me to set free those who are oppressed." And I show you that video clip this morning for two reasons.

The first is because in three weeks on Saturday, May 7th the Adult Discipleship Committee is giving us another opportunity to listen to Max Lucado. He's going to be doing a simulcast on video right here in our sanctuary talking about how you and I can learn how to "outlive our lives." And in a year where we're trying to learn how to lead a missional lives and leave behind our lives a legacy for God's kingdom, I can't think of a better teacher to show us the way to do that than Max Lucado. So I hope you'll mark your calendar this morning and plan to join me on Saturday, May 7th here in the sanctuary.

But I also had a second reason for showing you the video this morning. You see for the past three weeks of Lent you and I have been looking at the mission statement of the Messiah. And as we've done that, we've discovered week by week that each part of the statement contains an interesting assessment. It's an assessment of our lives from God's perspective. It's how we look through God's eyes. And it's not a pretty picture. For when God looks at us, as we've seen for the last three weeks, God sees people who are spiritually poor, imprisoned by regrets, and blind to the reality of God's presence. According to Luke 4, this is who we are and these are our deep needs.

Fortunately for us, as we've seen, each part of the mission statement has a second piece to it. For each part of the mission statement contains not only God's assessment of our deepest needs as fallen human beings. It also contains God's assignment for His Messiah, the One who's been anointed and sent into the world to meet our deepest needs. He's been sent the mission statement says "to proclaim good news to the poor, freedom for the prisoners, and recovery of sight for the blind." And he's been sent, as we'll discover this

morning with another assignment. But before we can talk about the fourth part of the assignment we need to talk about the fourth part of the assessment. We need to talk about why when God looks at me and at you, what He sees are people who are oppressed.

And that's where the video clip comes back into the picture. Yes, I know, I know we aren't Hebrews. And we aren't slaves to some Pharaoh. And we aren't living in Egypt in Old Testament times. But I also know this. The word oppression has a long history and out of that history emerges a meaning that you may or may not be familiar with.

Did you know, for example that the verb "to oppress" has two major meanings? I imagine you know the first. To oppress means "to crush or burden by abuse of power or authority." But did you know that the second major meaning of the verb "to oppress" is this: "to burden, spiritually or mentally, to weigh heavily."

So tell me, in the last few weeks, has anything been weighing heavily on you? Has anything been weighing heavily on your mind or your heart? Maybe it's been part of your job at work, or a test you have to take at school, or a conflict with someone you care about at home? I don't know what's been weighing on you the last few weeks. But I'm pretty sure, for many of us, something has. It's just our human condition, isn't it? There always seems to be something weighing on us. So most of the time, would you say that you're at rest? Or would you have to admit, at least according to the dictionary that you're oppressed?

But let's talk about the dictionary a little bit more. Because you see when I looked at the dictionary this week I discovered something else. I discovered that the English verb "to oppress" can be traced back to a Latin verb. And that Latin verb "oppressere" is actually a compound verb. It's made up of two parts. The first part is a preposition that means "against," and the second part is a verb that means "to press." So tell me, how often in the past few weeks have you felt some pressure in your life?

Maybe it's your boss who's pressuring you to get your work done. Maybe it's your teacher who's pressuring you to get your homework done. Maybe it's your spouse who's pressuring you to get some work done on the yard! I don't know. But I do know this. The world that we live in is a world of expectations. And everyone seems to have expectations of us. Expectations that sometimes put pressure on us.

And we feel that pressure, don't we? It's just part of being human. So tell me, have you felt someone else's expectations for you pressing on you in the past few weeks? And if you have are you at rest? Or are you oppressed?

And there's one more aspect to the meaning of this word "oppress." And we need to stop and consider it this morning, before we decide if we're at rest, or oppressed. It's hinted at in the dictionary. But it's highlighted in the Bible. For when God looks at us, the Bible says, at my life and yours, He sees the way that situations "weigh heavily" on us. But He sees more. He sees the way that other people's expectations "press against" us. But He sees more.

He also sees our sins. And He sees the future that lies ahead of us if our sins continue to open up a separation between our lives and His love. And God's heart aches for us. It literally aches for us. That's what the Bible says. So God decided to do something. He sent us a Messiah, and He made it part of the mission of the Messiah "to set the oppressed free."

And you know, in a little less than two weeks, many of us will gather right here in this sanctuary at 7:30 in the evening on Good Friday. And we'll remember how the Messiah set us free. We'll remember how he redeemed us, how he bought our freedom from death at the price of his own death.

But he wants to do more! Did you know that? He wants to do more for you than just save you from death. He wants to give you life, life with Him in heaven in the future, yes! But also life with Him in the present here on earth. He wants to give you more than the life you're used to living. He wants to give you a better kind of life, a better quality of life. He called it an abundant life. And if you're willing to take him at his word, Jesus wants to tell you this morning that the truth is He can set you free, free from oppression.

No, He can't prevent situations from weighing you down. But He can loosen the weight. He can't prevent people from pressuring you with their expectations. But he can lessen the pressure. How? Listen. Listen to the voice of Jesus speaking to you this morning.

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

"Come to me," Jesus tells you. And when He says that to you He doesn't mean just once. He means repeatedly. He means as often as you need to, because he knows it will be more than once. And His promise is that when you come to Him, He'll be there for you, every time. "Come to me," he says.

And who should come? All of us, every one of us when we're weary of carrying around a situation that's weighing heavy on us. Or when we feel burdened down with expectations that are placed on our shoulders. And you might recognize that word burdened. It's the same word that used in the Old

Testament to describe the life of the Hebrew slaves. They were burdened, the Bible says. And we are too.

But Jesus says something different. "Come to me," Jesus says to you and me this morning. "Come to me, and I will give you rest."

Let's pray ...

Lord you tell us to come to you when we feel weary, to come to you when we feel burdened down. But we confess we seldom do.

Tell us to come to you in prayer