TITLE: HANDLING HOLIDAY STRESS—

TEXT: Luke 10:38-42; Is. 9:6-7; Jn.14:27; 2nd Cor. 3:17; Jn. 16:33; Col. 3:1-3; Is. 26:3

INTRODUCTION: Anyone else here this morning ever suffered from Holiday stress?

We live in a nation that often provides a very stressful environment…

A couple interesting statistics I found…

Percentage of medical office visits made for stress-related symptoms in America: 60-90%

Number of aspirin taken by Americans each year: 33,000,000,000.

There is nothing worse than a stress headache or migraine.

The month of December is the most stress filled month of the year for most Americans.

I once read that the month of December has a higher number of suicides than any other month of the year.

Particularly right around Christmas.

Police officers will tell you that domestic disputes increase dramatically during this time of year.

Why? Most attribute it to holiday stress.

Whether it be the stress of all the busyness of this time of year, financial stress--the stress of spending more money then you have to spend, the stress of keeping up with the Jones’s, the stress of maybe just being alone during what is most often thought of as a time to spend with family and friends….

For whatever the reason this can be a very stressful time of year for many people….

Example: My years in Grocery business---from 2 weeks before Thanksgiving until the first week of January was the busiest time of the year in grocery retail and filled with stress---especially right around Christmas….Often by Christmas Eve I would find myself burnt out by all the commercialism of the Holidays and servicing very demanding customers… The Last thing I wanted to do when I finally gathered with family after working a 12 hour day on December 24th was sing Joy to The World!

I could identify with the Grinch that stole Christmas or Ebenezer Scrooge…(Just ask Pam)

Many of you wives here today can identify with the stress of hosting that family Thanksgiving or Christmas dinner..

(And many of you husbands can identify with the stress of your wife being stressed)

The fact is this can be a very stressful time of year and I believe the most important question isn’t how to remove the stress of the Holidays but how to handle the stress of the holidays..

Do you realize that as a Christian that God has called us to live a stress free life? Not to live in a world without stress but to handle the stress of this world.

We have a classic example of how two people handled a stressful situation differently in Scripture…One actually handled the stress of a situation and the other let the stress of the situation handle them…

It’s A story we are all familiar with, the story of two sisters who had a dinner party……..

Here is the set up….

A man by the name of Lazarus and his two sisters, Martha and Mary lived in the small village of Bethany.

They were friends of a man that was becoming very popular among the people. This man’s name was Jesus of Nazareth…

Jesus and His disciples where going through Bethany one day so they stop by their friends house for a visit..

Sister Martha is the one who invites them all over for dinner….

**Luke 10:38 (NIV) As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him.**

39 She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said.

**40 But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"**

Be honest, how many of you ladies can identify with Martha here?

The house is filled with guest who just dropped by and the stress of the situation has gotten the better of her.

In contemporary language I think we could paraphrase Martha’s reaction like this….

What a day for people to just drop in!

The house is a mess! The laundry is piled up, the bathroom needs cleaned, the beds need made, the floor needs swept, not to mention I haven’t put anything out for dinner!

Martha is overwhelmed by the circumstances! All these things to do! And then the straw that breaks the proverbial camel’s back! She looks into the living room and there is her sister Mary just sitting at the feet of Jesus hanging on His every word.

The stress gets to her, she comes unglued! She rushes into the room, probably interrupts Jesus as He is talking, and says:

**"Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"**

Jesus response to Martha:

**41 "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things,**

**42 but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."**

Here we see an important truth with regards to the stress of this world….

**Jesus said, Martha, Mary has chosen what is better.**

Here we have two sisters in the presence of the Lord, each makes a choice, one chooses to sit at the feet of Jesus and the other chooses to clean the house.

One places the most importance on physical preparations while the other places the most importance on Spiritual preparations.

So Jesus says:

**41 "Martha, Martha, "you are worried and upset about many things,**

**42 but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."**

Was cleaning the house to make it look good for her guest a bad thing to do? NO! Not at all!

It just wasn’t the most important thing to be doing at the time…

Mary chose what was most important….To sit at the feet of Jesus.

The point is, it was a choice that each woman made…

Martha chose to allow the stress of this world to handle her—Mary chose to handle the stress of this world, and she did that by sitting at the feet of Jesus.

So does that mean that we should never clean our houses? No, It just means that we should put things in their proper perspective and place of priority…

And taking time to sit at the feet of Jesus and be spiritually fed by Him should always be the first choice that we make. We all need to give Jesus top priority in our lives. Then He will better equip us to do the other often-necessary things that need to be done more efficiently.

There was a quote in one of my daily devotional the other day that said:

*“When Christ is absent, what should be the best of times becomes the worst of times”.*

Boy, does this ring true in America this time of year..

*“When Christ is absent, what should be the best of times becomes the worst of times”.*

Folks, the Christmas season should be the best of times!

It represents the birth of a Savior!

**Isai 9:6 (NIV) For to us a child is born,**

**to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.**

**7 Of the increase of his government and peace**

**there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.**

To many people this time of year, the Christmas season, becomes the worst of times.

The reason that it does is because many have allowed Christ to become absent in their Christmas.

And what is needed is not to go clean the house or buy more presents or do whatever it is we do to keep up with the Jones’s, but what is needed is to truly put Christ back into Christmas, to just take some time to sit at Jesus feet and commune with Him.

Jesus is the ultimate stress reducer in this life….

John 14:27 (NIV) Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

Illustration:

There are two ways of handling pressure. One is illustrated by a bathysphere, the miniature submarine used to explore the ocean in places so deep that the water pressure would crush a conventional submarine like an aluminum can. Bathyspheres compensate for the pressure, the stress of the deep, with plate steel several inches thick, which keeps the water out but also makes them heavy and hard to maneuver. Inside they're very cramped.

When these craft descend to the ocean floor, however, they find they're not alone. When their lights are turned on and you look through the tiny, thick plate glass windows, what do you see? Fish! These fish cope with the same extreme pressure of the ocean depths but in an entirely different way.

They don't build thick skins yet they remain supple and free. They compensate for the outside pressure through equal and opposite pressure inside themselves.

As Christians, we don't have to become hard and thick skinned to survive the pressures and stresses of this world—we just need to appropriate God's power within us to equalize the pressure that we encounter in our world.

How do we do that?

We do that by sitting at the feet of Jesus, by spending quality time with Him in His Word and in prayer.

We do that by adsorbing His Word in our lives and equalizing the pressure within us.

We do it by living our lives, not by our own might or power, but by the power and might of His Spirit that lives within us as we yield our wills to the will of His Spirit..

Martha, like many of us, had succumbed to the pressures, the stresses of this life.

She wasn’t controlling the circumstances, the circumstances were controlling her..

Jesus tells her…

**41 "Martha, Martha, "you are worried and upset about many things,**

**42 but only one thing is needed, is necessary and Mary has chosen that!---** to sit at My feet and receive from Me!

I will make a challenge to us all this morning…..

The next time we start to feel stressed by the outside pressure of this world, just stop and take a little time to sit at the feet of Jesus.

Read the Word or pray or sing a familiar hymn or chorus or just start reciting to God all the things that we are thankful for and see what happens……

The stress will start to fade away!

Why? How? Because we will start to equalize the pressure!

We fill ourselves with Jesus within and it takes away the pressure without..

Folks this is a truth, a promise of Scripture!

John 14:27 (NIV) Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

2Cor 3:17 (NIV) Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

One of the things that the Spirit of the Lord frees us from is the stress, the pressure of this world.

Just look at the life of Jesus….

Just before Jesus went to the cross and He is trying to prepare His disciples for what is going to happen, He tells them that even though they will all desert Him that He will not be alone because the Father will always be with Him. That even in the midst of great trial and tribulation He would not be alone..

John 16:33 (NIV) "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

Here we see two important truths, two undeniable facts of this life…

#1. In this world you will have trouble!

As long as we live in this world we will have trouble! There will always be trials and tribulation as long as we live in this fallen world in these bodies of clay.

The more that we live “in the world”, live according to the worlds standards, desiring what the world has to offer, the more stress, the more trial and tribulation, the more trouble we will find.

But Jesus says:

#2. In Me (in Christ) you will have peace!

That phrase Jesus uses here is a very specific one.

It is the same phrase that the apostle Paul often uses in admonishing us as Christians on how we are to life our lives as Christians.

In Christ, “en Kristos”

**Roma 8:1 (NIV) Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,**

**1Cor 15:22 (NIV) For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.**

**2Cor 1:20 (NIV) For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ.**

**2Cor 5:17 (NIV) Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!**

**Ephe 2:13 (NIV) But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.**

This phrase, in Christ, en Kristos, literally means to be enveloped in Christ! Being saturated in Christ!

Being so full of Jesus that Jesus drips off of you!

Example: Brother Loren used an illustration one time to illustrate this has always stuck with me: Have you ever left a dishrag in the sink all night having forgot to drain the water? Maybe you had Spaghetti and had let the dishes soak for a while and then forgot about them. What happens when you go over to the sink in the morning? The dish rag is a real mess! It is slimy and saturated with grease and spaghetti sauce! You don’t even want to touch it!

What has happened?

It has adsorbed its environment!

This is what Scripture means when it talks about our being “In Christ”!

If we envelope ourselves in the environment of Jesus by spending time with Him in His Word and communicating with Him in prayer we are placing ourselves “In Christ” and we will become saturated with Him! Full of Him! So full of Him that He will start to drip off of us!

In the Apostle Paul’s writing he uses this very specific term, ‘In Christ”, some 89 times in admonishing us as Christians on how we are to live our lives!

We will all live our lives in one of two ways:

We will live them “in the world”

Or we will live them “in Christ”!

And all the promises of Scripture; salvation, justification, sanctification, transformation, glorification, are for those who choose to live their lives “IN CHRIST”..

**For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ.**

In fact, how can we even claim to be a Christian if we haven’t chosen to live our life “in Christ”! Taking time to sit at His feet! Placing ourselves in obedience and subjection to Him!

For if we are not living “in Him” then the only other option is living “outside of Him!

So, how do we go about living our day to day lives “in Christ”?

Colo 3:1 (NIV) Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.

**2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.**

**3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.**

Did you catch that?

Once we come to Christ for the forgiveness of our sin and accept Him as the Lord and savior of our life,

Once we have been raised with Christ, we are to set our hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God!

We are to set our minds on things above, not on earthly things!

When we set our hearts and minds on things above where Christ is seated at the right Hand of God, when we set our hearts and minds on the things that Jesus’ heart and mind is set upon, the things that are important to Him, things that have eternal importance and significance, it will equalize the pressures that we feel from living in this often stress filled world.

So, if we start to feel stressed by the Holiday then we need to take time to sit at the feet of Jesus and put Jesus back in the Holiday!

If we start to feel stressed by our job then we need to sit at the feet of Jesus and allow Jesus into our workplace!

If we start to feel stressed in our relationships then we need to sit at the feet of Jesus and allow Jesus into our relationships!

Whatever the stress of our world may be we need to take time and sit at the feet of Jesus and allow Him to minister His presence and peace in our lives!

We need to be setting our hearts and our minds, not on the things of this world that have but temporal value and significance, but on the things of God that have eternal value and significance!

We set our hearts and minds on those things the same way that Mary did, by taking time to just sit at the feet of Jesus.

Are you handling the stress of this world, whatever it may be, or is the stress of this world handling you?

If you find that you are being handled by the often stressful situations of this world then are you taking time to sit at the feet of Jesus and allowing Him to minister His presence and peace in your life?

**Isai 26:3 (NIV) You will keep in perfect peace**

**him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.**

Have you trusted, are you trusting in the Lord to be your peace, not just this Holiday season but everyday in every way?