

Victory of the Lamb – April 8, 2018 – Pastor Bill Limmer

Acts II – John 20:24-31 – Transformation: From Stressed to Blessed

Know what this is? It is not just a basketball. For me, it is a stress ball. We all have stress, even little children. Money or no money, there is stress. How is your stress level? On a scale of 1-10, one being low stress and 10 being high stress, what would you rate your stress level right now? Share your number with someone sitting by you. Stress at its core is a threat. Real or perceived. Stress causes your blood pressure to go up, your heart rate to accelerate and adrenalin to be released. This is good if a truck is coming at you as you are walking across the cross walk at 4th and State trying to get to the Bradley Center. It gives you the boost of speed and energy you need to get out of the way. The problem is many right here today are living under chronic stress. In chronic stress your body never shuts down. There is always something to do and you feel responsible to do it. The adrenalin faucet is wide open. Some of us are adrenalin junkies. Chronic stress is dangerous to your health. Chronic stress cause things like depression, anxiety, fight or flight mode, chronic illness, insomnia, back pain, muscle pain, and I found out this week even auto immune diseases.

This morning as we continue our Acts II series, we are going to look at Jesus' original disciples lives and our lives see how we can be transformed from stressed to blessed. There are a lot of things that can cause stress in our lives. One of the things that causes stress in our life is loss. For some of you, you experienced that stress this morning. You lost your car keys. You went nuts looking for them. You checked the usual places purses, coat pockets, counter tops, the couch, the night stand. The longer the search went on the faster you walked around the house, going back and forth like a springer spaniel on a pheasant hunt. And some of you are here today, because you resorted to your second set of keys, or your spouses set of keys because you still haven't found yours. And that's one level of stress right but that is nothing compared to if you have lost your phone. Things just became real intense when we can't find our phone. We start calling out orders for someone in the family to call us. And then everybody must be really quiet because we might have left our phone on silent. There are all kinds of loses that we face in life that can cause stress, aren't there? For the disciples this is how it went: Matthew 27: **As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus.** ⁵⁸ **Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body, and Pilate ordered that it be given to him.** ⁵⁹ **Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth,** ⁶⁰ **and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away.** With Jesus' death, they lost their reputation, their job and their friend and they thought their purpose. These all very significant losses and all cause stress to soar to a very high degree. Some of you know all about the stress of these losses. For some, you are dealing with more than one of them right now. Friends here is the take away from this portion, Look to God to meet all of your needs, instead of your spouse, your friends, employer because all those things you can lose. God will always be around. The living and resurrected Lord Jesus said, **I am with you always.** Matthew 28:20 The resurrected Jesus provides for all of our needs. Because Jesus is alive, Jesus enables us to be transformed from stressed to blessed.

Another thing that causes stress in our life is worry. This is what that looked like for the original disciples. John 20:26 **A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked,** The doors were locked because they were worried that the Jews or the

Romans might show up and they might get arrested or worse. Do you lock the doors at your house? Dumb question today, but not all that long ago we didn't lock the doors to our homes or our cars. What causes you to worry? Today we have so much more to worry about than 20 years ago. How much information does FB have on you? How much info does FB have on you that was ripped off? We use our credit card at the restaurant, the store online, and was information put at risk. Identity theft, the black market. And it goes on and on. We worry about looking good in front of other people and I don't necessarily mean visually but that too, right? We worry because of the pressure to succeed. And in the middle of all of this worry we are told, **Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.** 1 Peter 5:7 When I was a little kid, sometimes I could see shadows in my room. Freaked me out, every time. But here is one thing I learned and for you to know, if there is a shadow there is also light. Jesus is the light of the world. Jesus is not only with us all the time, in fact, he recovered your Satan stolen identity on the cross and clears up your credit score by grace through faith, as in your baptism. Because Jesus lives we can be transformed from stressed to blessed.

A third thing that causes stress in our life is fear. Same was true for the disciples: John 20:19 **On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders**" When our children were little, Jacky did a whole lot of single parenting because I had a fear of not meeting others expectations. But on one of those evenings I was home, we decided we would watch a Disney movie for a special family treat. We watched Beauty and the Beast. We had popcorn and soda and juice. Alyssa was like two years old, and she just wouldn't sit still. I'm thinking, come on man, you are stressing me out. Sit still, and enjoy the movie. Well come to find out years later, the reason she wasn't sitting still . . .she was afraid of the beast. Instead of being a great family time, she was fearful. What are your fears? Most of the things we fear aren't real at all; just figments of our imagination. Fear distorts our perceptions, making us lose our sense of reality and focus on "what-ifs." Financial institutions will get even the wealthiest of us to fear what if I don't have enough money, what if I don't parent well (cross reference the whole movie story), what if my kid asks for me something and I can't provide it, what if I don't get into the college I want, what if I fail the test, what if I miss the shot, what if I get turned down for the loan, what if my family gets in a car wreck, what if I don't say the right thing in the job interview, what if I burn supper, what if they don't have internet, what if I get asked a question and I don't know the answer I will look like a fool, what if I or someone I love gets alzheimers, cancer or . . . Fear. Do you know the most common command in all of Scripture is "Do not be afraid." It is used 365 times, one for each day. Here is one such occurrence: Joshua 1:9 **Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.**" So here is the transformational truth: You and I don't know what the future holds but we do know who holds the future! We can be transformed from stressed to blessed!

Another cause of stress in our life is hurry. Acts 1:6 **"Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"** If we are honest, we all hate to wait. In fact, most often we say something like, "I can't believe this is taking so long." The increasing pace of life leaves little or no time to rest. That's because most of us consider waiting to be wasting. Computers were supposed to make our life easier, but now we end up following the yellow brick road of bait clicks and then we really have to play catch up. Think back, Americans used to eat at what was known as the supper table, now our cars are the supper table. As we hurry off from one practice to the next or one game to the next we eat in our cars. Some of our cars are fully stocked. Just check between the seats. The seats are always good for a fries, candy, or an apple slice loaded up with enough preservatives to last 10 years without losing color, half

bottle of water. Have you ever been late for a job interview? Yeah me neither, I was just checking. You know all about hurry then don't you. Driving fast, hitting the breaks hard. You know, you really start to turn the corners fast don't you. Acts 1:7 **He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you;** Relying on God we moved from stressed to blessed. Psalm 46:10 **Be still and know that I am God.** Waiting is not wasting time with God. It is what we need. Even when you can't see what He is doing, God is always orchestrating the events of Heaven and earth to accomplish His purposes for your life. Trust in His unfailing love — love that moved Him to send a Savior from heaven to restore and rescue you. God's plans for your life will not be thwarted. Wait patiently, knowing that waiting is never wasted when you are waiting on God. Because Jesus is alive we can be transformed from stressed to blessed.

A common denominator of all these stress causers is control. Stress says we have to keep it altogether, and so we have a totally unrealistic expectation of life that we have to be in control. Whenever we lose something we get a tweet that says, you are not in control. Whenever we worry, the FB post says you are not in control. When are afraid of things the story on Instagram is we are out of control. When we are in hurry, the snap says we are not in control. Friends, I am not God. And you are not God. God is God, and he is in control. You and I think control should look a certain way but clearly God has a different view point. Good Friday and Easter announce you and I aren't in control and that is good. We would have tried to stop Good Friday just as Peter did. And we wouldn't have been able to raise Jesus up from the dead like God did. God is on your side and that is way more than enough. God already sees the future clearly and so there is not a single "what if" coming from him. Romans 8:32 gives us this comfort in the meantime **He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?** 2 Corinthians 4:18 gives us this direction, **So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.**

Stress says this is going to end horribly. Jesus says, "I'm making everything new. Stress fills our mind with doubt. Jesus brings peace. Satan points at us because of our sin and covers us with the guilt and shame and assures us that we are going to be punished. Jesus was punished for us, makes us clean and sets us free. Satan points out everything we are not so the cross and empty tomb point to all of who Jesus is. Act II of the Easter story is because Jesus is alive we can move from stressed to blessed!