

Sermon, February 21, 2021

Psalm 22:23-31 & Romans 7:22-23

“Transformed: Change My Life by Changing My Mind”

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Have you ever met someone and had let's say a premature impression of them that proved to be entirely false? We may look at someone, they just seem pleasant, and we think *I'm going to like this person* with nothing to base it on. And we may do the opposite. There is just something about this person that sets me off. We aren't going to get along. Or so we think.

The reality is, we are often poor judges of character. The people we think we will like we don't get along with, and the people we think we won't like we end up having an great affinity for.

I remember one minister in our conference whom I looked up to and continue to do so. I had heard him preach, and he was very austere. Very learned in many topics. Almost professorial. Not the pastor who goes into his office on a Saturday in a t-shirt and shorts.

But I ended up sitting across from him at a meal at annual conference once and found out looks can be deceiving. He was one of the most personable, engaging people you would want to meet. Very funny.

When he had a new interest, and he always had a new interest, when he told you about it, his eyes would light up like he had found the greatest thing in the world.

At the meal, he looked over at me. I think because I was the only one who didn't know this and what's the use of having an interest if you can't share it, he said hey, have you seen my new ultralight. The small one-person planes? And he reached into his pocket and showed me a photograph of the plane. This was before smart phones, and we didn't carry around pictures of everything.

My first thought was here is someone who is so excited about this ultra-light he took a picture just so he could come to Annual Conference and share it. Not in a braggadocios' manner at all. Just because he thought it was really cool.

And it was. We talked a lot about flying that day, and later when we got to work together. Not that I have an interest in learning how to fly. But he was so enthusiastic about it, it made it interesting to me. He told me later one of his great regrets was when, because of some health issues, he could no longer fly the ultralight and had to sell it.

Over the years, we talked about the planes he liked or wanted to fly, and I asked him about helicopters. Did you ever want to take lessons to fly a helicopter? His answer was no. He said "I decided against it because a very experienced helicopter pilot once described a helicopter as a machine of thousands of parts all trying to come apart at once". I've known people who have flown helicopters for the military, and I can't say that's all that inaccurate. A machine of thousands of pieces all trying to come apart at once.

I wonder how many of us can relate to that? Don't you feel that way sometimes? Maybe a lot, maybe all the time? Sometimes we feel like a helicopter, and our lives are made up of a thousand pieces and they are all trying to fly apart all at once. Work, family, health, bills, hobbies, everything in your life, and I mean literally everything is vying for your attention, and it's all important. But it feels as if they are all pulling you in different directions all at once, and it feels like some days you are just going to fly apart. For some of us, it can get so bad that we find our goal isn't solving our problems. It's just maintenance. Solve my problems? It's all I can do to maintain until I can go to bed. And if I can go to bed and my life hasn't flown apart in a thousand different directions, I call that a good day. And then we go to sleep knowing tomorrow we start all over again.

Have you ever desired a different way to live? Not a different life, but a way to live your life where you didn't feel like a helicopter and all of the pieces of your life pulling you apart? If so, I am glad you are here today as we continue our series of *Transformed*. This has been our theme for the last couple of weeks, and it's become our overall church theme. From small groups to Sunday morning, we are looking at the ways God can transform our lives. Because we firmly believe that's what Jesus came to do. He has come to

transform your life. And one of the things you will see in this series is that Jesus didn't come to transform just one area of your life, but all of them. There is not one part of your life Jesus can't transform. Even the stuff that stresses you out.

Because that's what we are talking about, isn't it? When we feel as if there are a thousand hands pulling at us, it causes stress. A plane feels structural stress when that happens. We can experience structural stress spiritually. And you will if you live every day with all of this stuff pulling at you, it's going to cause stress on your spirit. And it will develop cracks, and you will experience structural failure spiritually. We talked about sin on Ash Wednesday. Very often, one of the reasons we fall into sin despite our best efforts is because of stress, it causes structural damage to our spirits. Think about the times you have fallen back into sin or a behavior because it's your go to way of dealing with stress.

So how can God help transform us mentally to deal with this feeling we are being pulled in a million directions and might come apart at any moment. One of the key things we need to know is that stress is a part of everyone's life. Being under stress and feeling as if the world is pulling you in a million directions is not a direct correlation on your Christian walk. It is a false and dangerous pretense to believe that being a Christian means you won't have stress in your life. Or that experiencing stress means you are in any way being unfaithful. Everybody experiences stress. Paul talks about stress, being pulled in one direction by his desire to live a life of holiness and the sinful part of him that pulls him in another direction.

Secondly, doctors will tell you that having a proper diet and getting sleep are an important part of dealing with stress. Why would you think it any different mentally or spiritually? What you feed your mind on, what you take in spiritually will determine your spiritual health and the ability to deal with stress. Often the times when I am feeling the most stressed are the times when I am feeding on junk food spiritually or in a place where I am spiritually malnourished. If you feed your spirit on all the negatives of life, you will be spiritually malnourished and unequipped to deal with stress. The Bible over and over reminds us to fill our spirits with good and holy things. Prayer, Bible study, worship, will help feed you and enable you to deal with stress.

Develop a Biblical rhythm to life. God tells us to take a Sabbath, to stop and reorder ourselves. If you aren't taking time to rest, to get away from your stressors, you will be overrun by them. And run so spiritually dry you find yourselves engaging in destructive behaviors. Do you have a healthy rhythm to life, do you take a Sabbath, do you have time with God every day?

Take care whom you surround yourself with. None of us are invulnerable to negativity. If you surround yourself with people who are negative, who live lives out of their stress, you will be infected with that. Surround yourself with people who will pray for you. Do you have people like that? Who build up your self-esteem and help you see yourself and your problems through God's eyes? We all need them.

Place a high value on the peace God gives us. Learn to surrender your moments of stress, when everything is pulling you apart, over to God. Surrender them to Him. This is what David does over and over in the Psalms. *God, I am overwhelmed so I give it all to you because I can't handle it.* And David would experience both peace and would see God dealing with his problems over and over. He will do the same for you.

You don't have to live like that helicopter. God can make a difference. Will you let Him? Amen.