

**Covenant High School
Chapel Service
October 25, 2019**

Grace for the Heavy-laden

Mt. 11:28-30 "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.
Let's pray.

Ana Swanson, a reporter for the Washington Post wrote an interesting article about what the Olympics teach us about human emotions. She writes, "Athletes toil and sweat for years for sometimes just a few minutes of performance on the Olympic stage, and the winners and losers of various events can't help but let their joy, anger, surprise, frustration or disappointment at their performance shine."¹

She goes on to explain a particular psychological experiment by a psychologist named David Matsumoto where Matsumoto did research on Olympic athletes competing for the Gold, Silver and Bronze Medals.

He and his team of researchers took photos of many of the competitors as they heard the results of their competitions. If they received Gold, Silver or bronze. Then, he had the "undergraduates examine and rate the facial expressions of the athletes on a 10-point scale ranging from "agony" at 1 to "ecstasy" at 10."

To some people's surprise, immediately after results were announced, silver medalists emotional reactions only scored a **4.8 out of 10** on that scale, well below the bronze medalists whose emotional reactions registered a rating of almost pure ecstasy at 7.1.

At the medal ceremony later that day, the silver medalists had fallen to a 4.3 out of 10, still below the bronze medalists at 5.7. The silver medalists had just missed out on a gold medal — while the bronze medalists were likely happy to have received a medal at all.

In other words, Gold medalists were very happy, bronze medalists were very happy and silver medalists were discouraged and angry and devastated.

Many studies have been made on this research, and the conclusion is that our happiness is often directly tied to those who are around us. In other words, we have decided that happiness is tied to being superior to others or outdoing everyone around us. If we were given the choice

¹ Ana Swanson, *Washington Post*, August 12, 2016.

to make 50,000 or 100,000 a year, most everyone would say 100,000. But what if we found out that the other half of that equation was that if we made \$50,000, all those around us would make \$25,000 and if we were making \$100,000, all those around us would make \$200,000. Given that additional information, many would choose to make \$50k and make more than others, than to have \$100,000 and make less than others.

Some of the things that discourage us the most in this world are tied to this way of thinking. We place unnecessary burdens on ourselves to outcompete everyone around us, and to be unhappy unless we are number one or the best at everything we do.

When we are children, we don't care too much about our looks, but as we get older we start to compare ourselves with others. We begin to think more about brands of clothing, types of cars, cell phones and cameras. We think about who is most popular and about who has the best grades and intellect.

Comparing ourselves to others is what is forbidden in the 10th Commandment:

Ex. 20:17 "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, **or anything that is your neighbor's.**"

The root of this commandment of envy and jealousy is that we seek to find our joy and identity in being superior to others. To outdoing other people. To having more than those around us. Sure the bronze medalist was happy, but that was directly connected to the fact that they even got a medal at all and there were many more who they were superior to who had not. If they had been in the silver medalist's position, no doubt they would have had a different reaction on their faces, because they had missed out on the gold.

There are many conflicting articles about silver medalists, but one of them has found that silver medalists actually die sooner than gold medalists. They are discouraged, they are broken and they feel like they weren't good enough.

I mention this example because I believe that it is incredibly easy to fall into the trap of envy. And the cost of that to your soul, your happiness and your relationship with God and everyone around you is that you become heavy with grief. You alienate others and torture yourself. You become perfectionistic in all that you do, and seek to find happiness through your achievements.

But this is unrealistic. This is the devil's lure to get you to heap up heavy burdens on yourself. To make you beat yourself up that you are never good enough, and then when you fail in whatever you've been striving for, or when you fall into some sort of sin, Satan whispers in your ear again, "You see, I told you! You weren't good enough." Just like that, we begin to believe Satan's lie and begin to live a life totally governed by works and achievement.

While Satan keeps pushing you into that downward spiral, and heaps more and more burdens on your back, Jesus instead extends his hand and calls you to himself.

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

He knows you are overburdened in life with everything you have to juggle. He is aware of the people who make you feel like you aren't good enough, he even knows that you yourself think you are not good enough, and he tells you to stop. To be still.

To go to him and to take that heavy burden off and to find rest in him. But we struggle to believe this don't we? Don't you struggle a little bit to believe that God wants to carry your insignificant struggles? That he wants to help?

We might not want to admit it, but we might have some doubts in the recesses of our hearts and minds.

But where do these come from? It is not from a place of knowledge, for God's word is abundantly clear that his love is eternal and his mercies are new every morning. That he sent Jesus to the cross on our behalf so that we could be saved. So clearly we aren't doubting God because of what the scriptures say. Rather, we are doubting him because we project our view of this world, of how people see us, how our parents see us, and how we see ourselves and we think God must see us that way.

We had a little foster daughter once named Emily. She was the sweetest most beautiful little girl. She looked like Dora the Explorer, but with blonde hair. We took her into our home at 2 years of age, and we had her in a crib at night and at nap time. She would stand up sometimes and look out of the crib or cry and we would go over to the crib to lay her back down and she would dive down and sort of cover her head out of fear.

We are certain that she had been physically hit. Her home life was so rough, and she had received so many injuries in her little life, that she had been removed from her mother and father's home. No doubt she had been smacked on the head, and even at age 2, she was projecting that everyone must be like that. It broke our hearts. We had only shown her love, but she feared us because of what others had done to her.

Today I want to remind you of something important.

You know that you don't measure up. You know your own weaknesses. We all know our own sins. Every last one of us is weak, and we are all embarrassed about something in our lives. We are ashamed of something in us, or where we come from or where we currently live. Those feelings of shame and guilt are heavy. They break our backs and they influence us in terrible ways.

And just like Emily, we have misconceived notions. Emily thought we were coming to hit her because that was her experience in the world up until that point. We, on the other hand, think God is going to judge us and be ashamed of us because of our sins. We hold our heads down in shame and strive harder and try to be better.

But Jesus isn't like that. Jesus doesn't come to add to your burdens and your heavy hearts. He comes to free you from your brokenness. He comes to restore you. He comes to heal you and to give you rest. He wants you to hold your head up high, not because you are better than other people, but because you are his. He doesn't want you to carry the weight of the world on your shoulders, he just wants you to live for him as his son or daughter...he doesn't need you to be perfect.

Jesus wants you to leave the yoke of sin and this world and of our shame, guilt at his feet, and take up his yoke. His love. His perspective. He wants us to learn from him. He is forgiving, he is gentle and lowly in heart.

He does not sit with a gavel in his clenched hands, but rather with open nail-ridden hands, calling you to rest. Calling you to trust him and listen to his teaching. He loves you with all of your struggles and weaknesses and shame. He hears your confession of sin and he forgives you when you cry out to him. He cares about all your struggles – the small ones and the big ones.

"Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

He wants to renew your soul with strength and joy and happiness. To give you rest and peace in him.

So let us approach the throne of God. The throne of grace and ask him to renew our souls with the joy of his salvation. To put on us his yoke, and his teaching rather than the teaching of this world. So that we might rejoice in his love and delight in him all the days of our lives.

Let's pray.