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Sermon Preached At The
South Norfolk Baptist Church
1101 Chesapeake Avenue
Chesapeake, Va. #23324
By Frank Hughes, Jr., Pastor
February 25, 1973
(Broadcast WXRI-FM, 7:30 P. M.)

"FRUITFUL TENSION"

John 9:4
John 12:27
Matt. 9:36

INTRODUCTION:

One may question, can tension ever be fruitful? Tonight, however, I wish to picture a man in a disturbed state. I wish to talk about a man who had tension and acted and re-acted to that tension. Of course, we all know the other side of tension is confidence or faith.

But I think it is good for us to think about tension. The main spring of a watch must have tension if it is to work properly. Now, if the main spring loses its tension -- the watch becomes junk.

But I hope we can discover something in the routine of living that we might dedicate little time to the matter of worry and use even our tensions for the purpose of happiness.

We would say the magic word in the world tonight is relax. People want to know how never to be tired - how they can relax - and how they can get rid of the pressures of their day.

Sometime ago it was reported that a Chaplain at San Quentin Prison conducted a poll among the inmates. The Chaplain wanted to know what the prisoners wanted him to preach about. He submitted a large number of titles and asked for their vote. The sermon title that won with a large plurality was "Fling Wide The Gates" -- That title spoke to the prisoners of their interest and concern.

Now people are under all sorts of pressures and tensions today. One magazine carried a news article from Paris that the necklines would be lower, skirts would be somewhat longer and fuller, and three new perfumes were being put on the market reported to kill at 20 yards. Now that was big news! And people get all tense even about such matters.

This nation of ours has been under tension for many years now due to a war. However, it seems that with the return of prisoners some of that tension is disappearing. Indeed, it is profoundly impressive. To listen to some of the prisoners of war as they make statements.

Army Capt. Mark Smith said, "This is the biggest day of my life -- home-coming." He spent his time preaching in prison and making brooms. His wife said, "I think he is closer to God."

Navy Lt. Al Varez, the first pilot shot down, had been there 8 1/2 years said, "God bless the President, God bless you Mr. & Mrs. America - you did not forget us."

Col. Reisner, "Let me tell you something, folks, to us this is truly the land of milk and honey. The land of the free and the home of the brave."

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Now these war heroes, as they express how they were honored to serve and help their country in a difficult time and in difficult circumstances have brought a certain amount of release to the tensions that had been mounting in this country over the years. There are tensions of the nation, tensions in industry, tensions in labor, tensions that individuals have to cope with.

The Ladies Home Journal carried this story a few years ago of a child who never developed mentally. It was written by the famous Pearl S. Buck. And it was about her own mentally retarded child.

When the child was born, the mother said to the Chinese nurse, "Doesn't she look very wise for her age?" She was then less than an hour old. "She does in deed," the nurse declared, "and she is beautiful too. There is a special purpose for this child."

She did not know then that before long they would discover the truth about this tragic little life. Her body grew but her mind did not. It remained on about a 3-year-old level.

Mrs. Buck recounted the months spent in going from one clinic to another to discover what was wrong and to secure aid. Finally, they came to Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn., where every test was given. In reply to her question, "Is it hopeless?" - the Doctor was too kind to tell her the truth, and responded, "I think I would not give up trying."

But a worker at the hospital gave the mother some sound advice. He said, "you will wear out your life and beggar your family unless you face the truth; she will never be normal." "Do you hear me - I know I have seen these children. She will never be able to speak properly or read a word. Find a place where she can be happy and leave her there. And live your own life. I tell you the truth for your own sake."

But the mother was not able to give up. She took the child back to China with her. Some little American children were giving a party. One of them remarked, "My Mama says I can't have your poor little girl to my party the next time." She realized then that she must find another world for her little daughter, which she did. By then the child was 9.

This heartbreaking story was published to give encouragement and guidance to other parents, who might be facing similar situations. I've used it here, in this message to remind myself, and to remind others, that if God is like Christ said he was - he must be concerned over the tensions which we have in this life. He must be even grieved over his children who somewhere along the line never develop spiritually.

Let us look tonight at the tensions of Jesus. Let us see how he dealt with the situations in his life. I will take three specific incidents which I feel will help each person who may be in some disturbed state or who may have some tension that ought to become fruitful instead of tragic. I will discuss them in this order. First, in John 9:4 - The Pressure Of A Deadline. Second, John 12:27, - The Pressure of Inward Strain. Third, Matt. 9:36 - The Pressure Of Deep Up-setting Sympathy.

I. THE PRESSURE OF A DEADLINE - John 9:4

Jesus said "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day, the night cometh when no man can work."

In speaking of the incident where he had healed this blind man, blind from his birth, Jesus said, "I must quickly carry out the task assigned to me."

And of course, Jesus was saying this to his disciples. He is saying it to you tonight. You have some deadlines to meet. You know what I am talking about when I mention a deadline. Of course, newspaper people know about this because they have a deadline to meet. They have an hour and a specific moment when everything must be ready to be printed. They cannot wait 30 minutes, an hour, or five more hours. It must be met.

Students know about deadlines; in their work they have a certain date when a term paper is due - when they are to turn in their assignment for that semester's work. And thus the deadline must be met.

Insurance men are conscious of this in that they have deadlines set up when an individual can be insured at a certain rate, at a certain period in his life. When that birthdate passes that deadline goes on and another deadline must be set up.

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Jesus dealt with the pressure of a deadline. And my, the pressures that he had. You have pressures to get the children off to school. To get this done. To get the taxes paid, to buy the groceries, to fix the meals, to provide the clothing, to get the car repaired, or get a new sticker on. You know that is a deadline too, when the proper month comes around - it has to be met. So all of these, we are bound up in them day by day. And it is a part of life.

Now in this experience, we are in complete identification with Jesus. We know how we are anxious. However, if our tension is to be fruitful, we must identify with Jesus in carrying out his will. His grace is sufficient for every perplexity, for every position of difficulty, for every circumstance, and for

the great pressures of deadlines. In the things that we are so responsible for that seem so difficult, and the strain upon us, we must count upon his resources, because Jesus says we must work while it is yet day. We must get this done. We must turn this pressure of the deadline into a glorious thing of bringing light and vision to those that are blind - even blind from birth.

II. THE PRESSURE OF INWARD STRAIN - John 12:27

Now Jesus said in John 12:27 - "Now, is my soul troubled - and what shall I say, Father, save me from this hour. But for this cause came I into this hour." Therefore, we see here the strain, the pressure of strain upon Jesus. Even to the point that he stated that his soul was troubled. He had discussed with them that except the corn of wheat fall into the ground and die - it abideth alone. But if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. That is, his hour had come - that the son of man should be glorified. And of course, he was going to give up his life, and Jesus here gives us an example of how to deal with this pressure.

There was a story, out of a fellowship in India where various nurses were trying to interest a woman; but she had never become concerned about the way of Christianity. They were simply talking, she thought, and turned in unconcern. Until one day, she noticed a nurse - nursing a sick baby. She said nothing for awhile. Then one day, she said to her, "Why do you do it. Why do you work for this sick baby night and day. What makes you do it?" The nurse replied, "It is nothing in me. It is the love of my Lord Jesus." It is he who gives me love for this baby.

"I've heard talk about him," said the woman, "but I thought it was only talk. Now I have seen him and I know it is not mere talk." She listened, and accepted Christ in truth. She knew that it would cost - and she returned home. Two months after she had returned home, a strong woman, she was dead. That death for her meant, the end of what she had known must come - sharp persecution for the sake of her new found Lord. Not peace but a sword. And this is the thing that Jesus was feeling the strain about - because he had embraced the cross and he was going to be crucified. And this woman had witnessed this in the nurse and she embraced the cross of Christ and was put to death for it.

This is a point of Jesus and his real humanity. This is a Gethsemane experience. And this is the situation where he gets near to the cross.

Over a hundred years ago, in the South of England, like most gypsies there was a little band of unreliable people. One day in the Spring of 1860, another baby was born, a boy, and they named him Rodney. The parents were poor and uneducated, and made their living going up and down the land, making and selling baskets and other similar things. Tragedy struck the family, when Rodney was very young. Dreaded small pox caused the death of his mother - leaving the father to provide for the several small children. And the father was not a good man - he cursed and drank, and very likely abused the children. Then one day, God came into that father's heart and he was a different man. Soon thereafter, Rodney became a Christian. And life in the gypsy tent was so much happier.

Without an education, with poverty stalking him on every side, the doors of happiness and success seemed locked to Rodney Smith. Known later to the world as Gypsy Smith - but God can unlock these pressures and these doors because he has the key to unlock for you just as he did this gypsy lad - places of service and usefulness. Studying his Bible with his dictionary at his side, giving himself to prayer, he determined at the early age of 17 to be a preacher. He recognized his handicaps, but others saw in him great possibilities, and offered him every encouragement possible.

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William Booth, who was just starting the Salvation Army, helped the lad. Gypsy Smith became a great evangelist, preached in all parts of Britain and America. Thousands of people were changed by his simple message. And many praised him even until this day. They have gratitude. The thing about it is this -- he achieved even in spite of the pressures and strains of life that were upon him. God literally opened up a way and he went through Gethsemane on to glorify the Father. Now this is what Jesus would teach us. He met his deadlines and then he met the strain -- that pressure when his very soul was troubled.

III. THE PRESSURE OF DEEP UPSETTING SYMPATHY - Matt. 9:36

The Bible says of Jesus, "but when he saw the multitude, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd." He recognized that the harvest was upon them. The laborers were few.

And if you get the fruitfulness of attention at this point, it will greatly help you see the tension. He had pity for the crowd. Their problems were great. And really Jesus was saying, "they don't know where to go for help - they do not understand that help is available for them." And here was a sympathy on the part of Jesus. It had something to do with this world in which they lived - and he knew that he had a message that would help them in the great eternity beyond.

This is half the trouble with the people of the world today - we refuse to face the bitter fact that there are those who need, have burdens, and have sin, but they do not recognize that they must pay a price. They refuse to face up - they want things at a bargain sale. Everybody wants to be successful, but they do not want to pay the price for it. It is hard work, self-denial, it is sacrifice.

In this illustration of the pressure of Jesus, the religious condition of the people is described. They were bewildered by those who should have taught them. They were hindered from entering into the kingdom of Heaven. They were laden with the burdens which the Pharisees laid upon them. The masses were in a state of dejection - Jesus was moved with compassion and sympathy at this point.

It was a deep upsetting sympathy. How seldom do we feel that we are pushed down by such pressure. But this sort of pressure of an upsetting sympathy is fruitful because Jesus went on to the cross and provided relief and release even for those who rejected it.

In another place in the Bible it says and when "he came near to the city, he beheld it and wept over it".

Heb. 5:7 - "Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong cryings and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared." As you know, Jesus was weeping over the city that was doomed. And in a second scripture, he was weeping over a lost world that rejected him, and still rejects him.

It is so easy to criticize a lost person. It doesn't take a great deal to stand off to one side and look at this mad upside-down world in which we are living - and tell what is wrong with it. Everybody and anybody can do that. We have all done that. But I want to say to you, it is hard to love and to show this sympathy - it is hard to agonize and have a deep vital concern for people who reject our Saviour.

This world is so unmoved and so unconcerned.

I read the story of a visit by the Swiss theologian Carl Barth who had a penetrating mind. He attended Union Seminary, Richmond. One of the smart young professors asked him this question. "You have written many books on Christian theology. I'd like to ask you, can you give in one sentence the chief message of Christianity. Dr. Barth replied, "Yes, I have written many books on theology. I can give you Christianity's message in one sentence. This sentence is from an old song my mother used to sing to me in Switzerland when I was a child...."Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so."

Now, if anyone else had used that - it might not have been able to be passed off. But here was a man, a superior thinker, with this simple divine truth. And I think this is our Gospel. This is the compassionate, sympathetic Christ. That Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so. He loves you, he loves through you, others.

Henry Ward Beecher once said, "people may excite within themselves a glow of compassion. Not by toasting their feet, at the fire and saying, Lord, teach me more compassion. But by going, and seeking an object that requires compassion."

Now let me in summary say to you that if you are going to make your tensions fruitful you must learn how to deal with these pressures - the pressures of deadline, the pressure of strain that reaches your very soul, and the pressure of an

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Now let me in summary say to you that if you are going to make your tensions fruitful you must learn how to deal with these pressures - the pressures of deadline, the pressure of strain that reaches your very soul, and the pressure of an unsatisfied sympathy. This will help you to be fruitful.

C. M. Clow has said, "the symbol of a Christian Church is not a burning bush. Nor a dove, nor an open book, nor a halo around a submissive head, nor a crown of splendor -- it is a cross." This is the secret of our power.

Hudson Taylor, founder of the China Inland Mission - said, "we know how the Lord Jesus became fruitful. Not by just bearing his cross merely, but by dying on it." Do we know much fellowship with him in this? There are no two Christ's - an easy going one for easy-going Christians, and a suffering toiling one for exceptional Christians or believers. There is only one Christ. Are you willing to abide in him and let your tensions bear fruit. Death is still the gateway to life. Life from the dead will be multiplied.

Charles Simeon, the great Cambridge preacher, was poured out again and again into the mould of the cross. And as you listen, to his own story. Here is a part of it. "I strolled forth one day, buffeted and afflicted, with my little Testament in my hand. I prayed earnestly that upon opening the book I might find some text which should sustain me. The first text that caught my eye was this. "They found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. Him, they compelled to bear the cross."

"You know Simon, is the same name as Simeon. What a word of instruction was here. What a blessed hint for my encouragement. To have the cross layed upon me that I might bear it after Jesus - what a privilege. It was enough. Now I could leap and sing for joy as one whom Jesus was honoring with a participation in his sufferings. And when I read that I said, 'Lord, lay it on me. Lay it on me.' I will gladly bear the cross for thy sake, and henceforth bind persecution as a wreath of glory around my brow."

F. J. Huegel, in his book, "The Cross of Christ" - told the story of J. G. Fleming, who tells of the days of the boxer uprisings in China - boxers captured a mission school. Locked all gates but one. Placed a cross before it, and sent in word that any one that trampled on that cross would go free. But that anyone that stepped around it would be killed. The first seven, we are told, trampled on the cross, and they were allowed to go free. The eighth, a girl, knelt before the cross, and was shot. All the rest in a line of 100 students followed her example.

In order to avoid pain, humiliation, disgrace and death - we can trample on our cross and go forth to a false freedom, or we can kneel in worshipful acceptance and carry it to our Calvary, in submission. We can find the freedom in Christ that sets us free from tension. Even causes unspeakable joy that the tensions we bear will bear fruit and be fruitful. For the glory of God.

And, as the poet expressed it --

All through life I see a cross,
Where the sons of God yield up their breath;
There is no gain except by loss;
No life, except by death;

There is no vision but by faith;
No glory but by bearing shame;
No justice but by taking blame;
And that Eternal Passion saith --
Be emptied of glory and might and name.

I trust that you will embrace your cross. Tomorrow, you will do the same thing. The next day, you will do the same thing. And be linked with Jesus, in making tensions fruitful.