

Solitude and Silence Luke 3 & 4

Proposition: In this stressed out, noisy world, there are great benefits to taking time to be silent before the Lord as Jesus and all great people of faith once did.

If I were to ask the question. Has any one here felt stressed or pressured or over worked this week. The reality is 95% of you would probably put your hand up. Today is the age of the instant. The age of speed. The age of words.

The average man speaks 40,000 words a day. The average woman 60,000 words a day. All of us are bombarded with about 1500 forms of advertising a day through, TV, radio, mps, the internet and newspapers and signage. Virtually everyone feels to busy, to stressed, under too much pressure in a world that continually bombards us with noise and it seems quadrillion words, most of them meaningless.

Jesus too was pressured, met with huge demands all day long and yet he had a peace, a calm, an inner tranquillity about him that was amazing. He was accused of many things by those who were against him and yet no one ever accused him of being too busy or stressed or irritated.

Why was that?

Would you please stand with me as a read a selection of scriptures from Dr Luke's account of Jesus' life found in chapters 3 and 4.

Luke 3:1 For fifteen years Emperor Tiberius had ruled that part of the world. Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was the ruler of Galilee. Herod's brother Philip, was the ruler of the countries of Iturea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was the ruler of Abilene. 2. Annas and Caiaphas were the Jewish high priests. At that time God spoke to Zechariah's son John, who was living in the desert.3. So John went along the Jordan Valley, telling the people, "Turn back to God and be baptized! Then your sins will be forgiven."

4:1 When Jesus returned from the Jordan River, the power of the Holy Spirit was with Him, and the Spirit led him into the desert. 2. For forty days Jesus was tested by the devil, and during that time He went without eating. When it was all over He was hungry.

14. Jesus returned to Galilee with the power of the Spirit. News about him spread everywhere. 15. He taught in the Jewish meeting places, and everyone praised Him.

22. All the people started talking about Jesus and were amazed at the wonderful things he said. They kept on asking, “isn’t this Joseph’s son?”

32. His teaching amazed them because they spoke with power.

36. They were all amazed and kept saying to each other, “What kind of teaching is this? He has power to order evil spirits out of people!”

42. The next morning Jesus went out to a place where He could be alone, and crowds came looking for Him, they tried to stop Him from leaving.

I personally don't find solitude easy, I am energized by being around people. Neither do I find silence an easy discipline. It's hard for me to stop talking for any significant length of time. I feel closest to God when I am doing things for people.

And yet when I read accounts of how Jesus coped with incredible stress and we read time and time again that He used to get up early in the morning and go to some quiet place to be alone with the Father we have to pay attention. Something is being modelled here that is really, really important.

You see when people came up to Jesus and asked for a miracle or made demands on him, he already knew in advance what the Father's plan was for the day and nothing seemed to throw him off guard and stress Him out, because He had downloaded the game plan already.

Jesus did what he saw the Father doing. If we want our words and our actions to really impact people we need to be able to discern in solitude and silence firstly what God's plan is.

A.W Tozer said “If a person wants to be used by God they cannot spend all their time with people!”

Jesus knew the importance of spending time alone with God. He went into the desert time and time again and began his days usually climbing a hill very early in the morning to be alone with the Father.

When we are stressed we might say ‘hey, guys give me some space’ meaning we want to unwind and get away from people for a time. And yet when we look at the purpose of solitude in Jesus' life it wasn't to unwind but to tune in.

Interestingly, when you do spend time in solitude and silence the reality is you may not find it relaxing. Times of solitude are often times of personal struggle.

This morning I want to suggest to you four reasons why it would help us to practice solitude and silence and my prayer is simply this that our walk with Him would become deeper and our impact on the world would become greater.

FOUR REASONS FOR SOLITUDE AND SILENCE:

1. YOU WILL GET A REVELATION OF YOURSELF

Now that will not necessarily be a pleasant or a refreshing revelation. But when you step aside from the pace of life and take time to be alone before God you begin to really see who you are; both your strengths and sadly your weaknesses. You begin to identify attitudes, motives, things on the inside that you are not happy with and because you are alone you can't blame the kids or your spouse or your job, or your schedule. When you and I sit silently in solitude before God we get a picture of who we really are. And it's not always pretty. You have to be able to come with a revelation of yourself.

I suspect that is why most folk like to keep the TV on or the radio on or the MP3 playing because when you are alone and it's just you, it can get a bit uncomfortable.

Historians say that on one occasion the great Martin Luther locked himself in his room and did not speak to anyone for 50 days. He got so stressed by what he saw in himself during the experience that he picked up his ink well and threw it against the wall saying that he wanted to blot out Satan in his life. Frustration can come from solitude.

In one sense it happened to Jesus in as much as it was during the time of solitude in the desert that Satan tried so hard to destroy him.

It takes a bit of guts to turn off all the noise and sit quietly because solitude will bring about a revelation of yourself. It will also

2. IT WILL DEEPEN YOUR COMPASSION FOR OTHERS

When you and I spend time in solitude and God gives us a revelation of our inner man, the reality is we are less likely to be hard on others afterwards. When I see the stuff that God wants to deal with in me, I am much less likely to be pointing my finger at you.

There are many people here who love the book of Isaiah in the Old Testament. There is a telling change in the rhetoric in the book of Isaiah. In Isaiah chapters 1-5 we hear Isaiah saying to just about everyone, woe is you and woe is you and woe is you, you bad guys, you sinners, you messed up people.

Then in chapter six we read that Isaiah finds himself alone with God and he sees the Lord high and lifted up and he cries, “woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips and I haven’t got it together.”

For five chapters he is powerfully pointing out the faults in others as he stood among the crowds.

Then in chapter 6 he stands alone with God and he goes, woe is me, I am not doing so well myself. Now I have been alone with the Lord I realize that I haven’t got it together.

When I have been alone with God and I see my faults I am much less likely to be harsh and critical of other people. Solitude will deepen your compassion for others.

Solitude will give you a revelation of yourself and deepen your compassion for others it will also;

3. IT WILL BRING ABOUT TRANSFORMATION IN SOCIETY

For hundreds of years there were individual Christians who looked at society and the way people lived and said, what a mess, what a ship wreck, I want to see past the norm, see through the cultural errors and gain wisdom and a clear understanding of life. And so these monks would live in caves in the desert in the middle east. They would live in solitude and go without talking to anyone for ages.

Politicians and philosophers would go and meet with these monks in order to seek wisdom and to see through the clouds of culture and these influential people would gain insight into life and take those insights back into society to change society.

Now I am not advocating that we need monks today, I’m not putting my hand up but don’t we in this day and age as much as ever need people who withdraw from the noise and the bustle of western life and critique our society and critique our cultural norms.

When you learn counselling you are told that everyone views the world through their cultural glasses – no one actually sees anything objectively and clearly. The discipline of solitude I suspect could help us take off the coloured glasses and to see life and society clearly and insightfully.

Solitude will give you revelation of yourself, it will deepen your compassion for others, it can help you critique society and

4. IT PREPARE YOU FOR MINISTRY

When in our text did John the Baptist get a commissioning word from God? While he was in the desert alone.

When did Moses get a commission from God to lead the people of Israel? After he had been in the desert for 40 years?

When did Jesus begin his public ministry?

After 40 days in the desert following his baptism.

When did the apostle Paul begin his powerful ministry?
After three years alone listening to the Holy Spirit in the desert of Arabia. Could it be that in this stressful, high speed society that we have forgotten or overlooked what Christians down through the centuries knew and practiced, that the great men of faith saw as essential. That solitude, the pulling away from people, the turning off of all the noise is where you are most likely to receive instruction for what He intends for you in ministry? The Lord still chooses to speak in a still small voice that is blocked out by all our noise and activity all too often.

Friends you might be listening to me this morning and be thinking hey, Moses and those guys weren't under the same pressure that I am, I have kids and work and schedules and taxi runs and meetings and Russell realistically there is no way that I can structure into my life real times of solitude away from people and noise and everything. Sounds good but we need to get real here Russ.

Yes it's true everyone is too busy and everyone is stressed. That's normal.
But I believe that there is a way that you and I can practice solitude daily.

The way into solitude is through silence!

It's your private desert that you can do go any time you want. Just turn off all the gizmo's stop talking and be silent.
How many words do men and women speak every day. How many advertising messages are we exposed to every day?
Just turn it off. Shut it down and be silent.
I believe in the power of words in fact in *Proverbs 25:11* it says "***The right word at the right time is like precious gold set in silver.***"
A lot of what we say is just noise, but the right word at the right time is powerful. How do we discover those words and discern those right times. Solitude and silence I believe will help.
Maybe we talk too much and listen too little in reality
John the Baptist spent years in the desert then when he came out people flocked to hear what he had to say. The same was true of the Lord and of Paul.
I wonder, honestly, and I am challenging myself in this very definitely. I wonder if we spend enough time turning off the TV, the MP3, the radio etc and just saying nothing, being quiet, listening to Him for that still small voice that commissions us into ministry.
Paul encouraged us to learn to be quiet.

James said we need to listen more and speak less.

I wonder if we developed this discipline of being silent before God that when we do speak we are more likely to speak a word that is the right word in the right place at the right time that would really impact the world.

You and I know that Jesus was often referred to as the Word of God, in the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God.

Interesting to me that The Word appeared on the planet after Israel has experienced 400 years of silence from God.

The apostle John said that we saw, we heard, we touched Jesus and now as a result of that experience we want to share testimony about Him.

I wonder if some times our testimony or our teaching about Jesus, our imparting of information about Him lacks some power because we haven't first spent time with him and experienced him personally.

I wonder if we lack some power in our words and actions because we have not been in solitude with him.

Could it also be that we have not been in solitude with him because we are not willing to pay the price of silence?

I wonder if our children would listen more to us if we talked less?

I wonder if our spouses would listen more to us if we used less words?

I wonder if our witnessing and teaching of the word would become more powerful if we spent more time in silence before we witness and before we teach?

Maybe if we could follow the example of the Lord and be disciplined with solitude through silence we would deepen our relationship with Him and increase our impact upon society?

(ideal finish – 2 minutes power point slides of creation scenes for Christian symbols, no music, concluded with me just saying amen)