

Slavery, the refrigerator, and something Jesus said.

- Right now there is a **noise in your kitchen**. In fact, it's almost always there. Low. Monotone. Never rising or lowering volume—or if it does it's imperceptible. If you were to go into your kitchen and **listen in silence you might hear it...** although it's usually just ignored and drowned out. But it's there perpetually.
- It's your **refrigerator**. And like so many buzzing, droning things in our life, we mostly just tune it out. **It's below the effort required to notice it.**
- Now consider another sound with me: a **symphony**.
- A myriad of noises and sound, instruments playing their own tempo and song, but mingling into **something of beauty, importance, significance**. They don't always hit on the same notes and they **are played imperfectly at times**, but they have a cadence; rhythm; breaks between noises and volume that rises and falls and gives each measure a specialness.
- **Today I want to talk about time**. What is it? Why did God even create it?
- Have you ever asked yourself that question? **Why does time exist?** If God **exists outside of time** then why did he make it? He had to have a reason since our **God does nothing without a purpose**.
- Maybe you think it's **too deep a question** but I think one of the greatest tragedies of today's Christianity is how so few take time to ask the deep questions.
- **Deep questions lead us to deep faith.**
- I remember when we were **looking to buy a house**. Our realtor brought us from house to house and we'd wander the rooms, look at the paint on the walls and the size of the rooms; examining the backyard and the garage.
- Our realtor? He'd walk into the corner of rooms and test the angle of the floors. He'd place marbles and see if they rolled and where. He'd walk around outside and not look at the siding, but below it.
- **He was testing the foundation.**

- See, the paint and rooms and kitchen and cabinets are all nice and pretty but once the initial charm of a house wears off all that's left is the foundation. Is it strong? Is it reliable? Will it hold up in storms and shifting of ground?
- And you don't see the condition of a house by **staying in the living room**. You have to go deeper.
- Plenty of you today have been living as **Christians in the living room**—going deep isn't your 'thing'—but because you stay in the upper floors your foundation is shaky, broken perhaps. **And you don't even realize it. All you know is that's it's time to repaint the living room because it's gotten sort of old and boring.**
- That's why I want to talk about deep things...**like time and its purpose**...and why it matters.
- So why would a God who, we assume, has no use for time and its constraints in Heaven **put those constraints on us?** Well I certainly don't have every answer or reason but I can draw a few conclusions from what we know of God and what we know of time.
- With that in mind let's turn to **Exodus 1:11**
- *¹¹ So the Egyptians made the Israelites their slaves. They appointed brutal slave drivers over them, hoping to wear them down with crushing labor. They forced them to build the cities of Pithom and Rameses as supply centers for the king. ¹² But the more the Egyptians oppressed them, the more the Israelites multiplied and spread, and the more alarmed the Egyptians became. ¹³ So the Egyptians worked the people of Israel without mercy. ¹⁴ They made their lives bitter, forcing them to mix mortar and make bricks and do all the work in the fields. They were ruthless in all their demands.*
- Most of us who have spent any time in the church know this story. Joseph had long ago become the Pharaoh's right-hand man, paving the way for the Hebrews to live among the Egyptians. **But as time wore on, Joseph's deeds were forgotten and the new pharaoh was afraid of the growing numbers of Hebrew people.** His solution is to make them slaves and **break them with crushing labor.**
- Slavery. Now slavery has had many faces throughout time, some more or less humane—**closer to a lifelong job you couldn't quit**—others **brutal, wicked and evil. This type of slavery was the latter.** Day after day; hour after hour;

the Israelites labored and labored and worked. **One day flowing into the next and then into a week; a month; a year; a life.** *(sort of like going to the DMV)*

- When one day is just like the next, **the beauty, richness and joy of life are all stolen away.** It's like the **refrigerator buzz** we had been talking about to start out with. **Sure it's a noise. But it's no symphony.**
- And here's the tricky way we've become deceived by ourselves and the devil: **we think all a life needs is purpose in order to mean something; to be good and beautiful and life as God intended.**
- **But slavery has a purpose. The refrigerator buzz has a purpose. Neither is beautiful.**
(These should be two separate fires on one slide)
- There's nothing wrong with purpose and, indeed, **having a purpose and goal in life is certainly good!** But too often we allow the **good** things in life to steal the **holy**—the **best**—from us.
- God wants us to be full of **joy** and **wisdom**, but we settle for **contentment**—the art of being not unhappy—and **cynicism**—the wisdom that says to doubt everything so you won't be let down and hurt.
- God wants us to have a **deep relationship** with him, but we settle for a **religious experience** full of rules we make up and expectations we impress upon ourselves.
- And while a purpose or goal in life is good... **it is not enough. God wants us to have a life abundant, not just directed.**
- But how do we get these things? **How do we get joy, wisdom, God, a great life?** The answer is **TIME.**
- Do you want **joy**? Spend an **hour with loved ones.** I don't mean in front of the TV, I mean spend it with them. See their quirks, their personality. **Fall back in love with your husband or wife.** Enjoy your **kids' silliness** or your **parents' oddities.**
- Do you want **wisdom**? Read your bible. **And don't read it to get done—like some sort of weird celestial homework from God—read it to find truth. Absorb his words into your bones.** But take the time.

- **Time is the key.** Nobody ever says they've had a good life at 15 with any sort of meaning. It's those who have spent 60, 70, 80 years here who say "I've lived a good life; a life abundant." **It takes TIME.**
- And look at what God does after he brings the Israelites out of Egypt:
- **Exodus 20: 8-10**
- ⁸ *"Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. ⁹ You have six days each week for your ordinary work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the LORD your God. On that day no one in your household may do any work. This includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your livestock, and any foreigners living among you.*
- Now the Sabbath has always been a **strange bird** to me. I understand the need for rest and to take a break but it **seemed odd to me** that a God who wanted our lives **devoted to him day in and out** would offset that philosophy by telling us to have a day set aside for him. **It seems like it would encourage our ignoring him the other 6 days.**
- But then I made the connection between slavery, the refrigerator and something Jesus said.
- **Mark 2:27**
- *Then Jesus said to them, "The Sabbath was made to meet the needs of people, and not people to meet the requirements of the Sabbath.*
- **Why did God create the Sabbath? To give TIME back to his people.** Or to put it another way: **to wipe away the 'refrigerator buzz' that slavery had made every day and replace it with a symphony.**
- Any given day **wasn't just another day of work**, now. It was the day after or before the Sabbath. It was two or three days away. The **noise of days began to have rhythm, tempo and movement—like a symphony.**
- It was **still noise**, but **now it was beautiful and unique and ripe with meaning and significance.**
- **The purpose of time is to give us context.** It allows us to be present; present in the moment with the people who are here with us in that time. Present in the work, or play, or relaxing that we're doing.
- As an aside from a youth pastor's perspective: **Absent fathers and distant mothers are the curse of this generation...and being physically present at**

home isn't enough. If your **mind is still at your job**, or **invested in whatever is on your laptop**, or dreaming of days to come or days gone by, **you're not present.**

- **Presence is about your soul being here, not just your body.** And when you're not present for your kids, it affects them. When you're not present for your wife or husband, they sense the distance. **And to be blunt, some of you need to repent of this and start being present in your home; to your family.** TODAY! For the sake of your children and your spouse and yourself!
- And if you're too busy to do it, **then you're just too busy.** Remember: having a purpose in life is good, but not good enough. **If your purpose in life is keeping you from being present in your life, then it's doing just as much harm as it is good.**
- **The purpose of time is to allow us to be present;** with **each other;** with what **we're doing; with God!** It is a gift through which we participate in the present and daily work of God. **It's a gift that gives life significance.** And not life in broad, sweeping strokes. **Life in small, delicious, fulfilling moments.**
- And if right now you're thinking "**Wow that sounds amazing. I miss that so much.**" Then you need to figure out **when you stopped being present,** because when you're present you don't miss those things, you experience them.
- Plenty of things steal our presence from the here and now but today I want to touch on some of the ways we get distracted.

(Distraction)

- Quick! How many of you have **checked your phone** at least once during today's service? How many of you **dink around on Facebook at work?** How many of you have a **laptop with you while watching TV** or sitting with your family?
- I am the king of multi-tasking—I almost can't function by doing one thing at a time. **And in some areas of my life that's good!** There's nothing wrong with writing two or three things at once or reading multiple books. Where it can hurt me is when I **let the moments in my life where I should be present:** with my **family;** on **Wednesday** night; when **playing with my boys.**
- **And the same is true of you.** Being distracted or multi-tasking isn't bad, but some of us have **let it become the norm.** We aren't distracted or doing 3 things at once sometimes. **We always do it.**

- **We think about work** at work...and at the **dinner table**...and while **watching TV**...and when we **go to bed**...and when **we wake up**...and **in the shower**... and on **vacation!** And then we wonder why we feel like slaves and why we **can't separate one day—one hour—from another.**
- **Or maybe you're distracted by play.** You're always **on your phone** texting, chatting, watching videos, **checking Facebook** because **someone might have liked your pictures of your cat in a Santa hat in the last 2 minutes** and **YOU MISSED IT!** What if it's your turn on **Words with friends?!?** You had better **check right now**, just in case.
- In this world of **instant replay and DVR** we sometimes **take for granted the moment** we're in. We forget that life has no rewind button and once a moment is gone...**it's gone forever—which is a gift in itself.** **When bad times come, we don't have to keep re-living them.**
- **And while we're doing this** (pretend to text) **life is doing this** (hallway passing by motion).
- And just like a **magician uses distraction** to draw your eyes away from what he's really doing and make it all seem like magic, the devil and this world use **distraction to draw your eyes away from what God is doing** and before you know it, the moment **to see him at work—and join him!—has come and passed.**
(Hurry)
- Another way we get distracted is by hurry. **Hurry is the epidemic of America.** We **speed on our roads**—putting ourselves and others in danger. Remember when emails were fast and letters were slow? Now **emails are slow because we have texting.** And even **THAT is too slow!** We have to send messages like this to speed it up (*How R U 2day?*).
- Apparently typing **5 more characters** in that text is too slow. We want everything now if not sooner, and when **we don't get it we get anxious, frustrated and worried.** Hurry leads to accidents, mistakes and premature endings.
- But the worst thing hurry does is it **steals the gift of time from us.** It keeps our eyes focused on what is to come and **never on what is happening right now.** And while there's nothing wrong with looking to the future for planning and to be prepared, there's a world of **difference between looking to the future while being in the here and now and being in a hurry.**

- Hurry takes us from being present in this moment and **forces us into the future**. We miss everything happening around us because we're **trying too hard to finish it and move on to the next thing**. And we miss the **inherent gift** in every moment and every task.
- **We never stop to enjoy anything** and so the **joy is stolen from everything**. (*You don't watch movies in fast forward...why do you live life that way?*)
- We have so many things to get done, **that we never DO anything**. We simply **finish tasks**, usually while focusing more the task that comes next than the one we're currently involved in.
- **Dinner** stops being about **family time**, and instead it becomes about figuring out what **work has to be done after dinner**. Work isn't about doing our current job well, but about getting it done so we can do that other thing. **Church stops being about finding God and connecting with others**, but whether or not we had too many or too few songs, if the message was too long or if **we'll get out in time to beat the lines at Buffalo Wild Wings** (*hint: you never will*).
- And I would wager that all that hurrying doesn't actually accomplish anything besides **getting you to the next place where you can hurry**. Let's say you save an hour throughout the day by being in a hurry. **It's my guess you spend that hour simply hurrying through something else**.
- And if you save an **hour every day of your life and live to be 80**, you'll have gotten an **extra 29,000 hours of production** and work out of your time here on earth.
- And **all it will cost you is your joy, wisdom, relationships and all the good things life is supposed to be made up of**. (*Is it worth it?*)
- If life is a journey then **God created time to allow us to see and measure each step**. To be right here on this piece of ground we're standing on and be aware of it. To enjoy it and **see God's handiwork in the soil and the rocks and the trees surrounding us; to rest in His peace and enjoy each other's friendships. To LIVE!**
- And instead **we look ahead**, eager to see **what's around the next bend**, ignoring where we are. And once we reach that next bend in the road, **we want to see what comes after**. We're always in a hurry. And before we know it there aren't any more bends in the road and suddenly **we realize we've missed all the moments we rushed past**.

- Or instead of being in the here and now, **we text and tweet and play games** and do everything possible to avoid stopping and seeing where we are. **Reality is boring; we want to be distracted.**
- And as time goes on we realize **we've missed all of our moments in life.** Not because we rushed past them...but because **we were just looking at something else—anything else.**
- Or we **plod along, our focus intent on our feet** and the work involved in walking. One step. Two steps. Everything is about moving our legs just right and making sure they land exactly where they have to. **One misstep is a tragedy.**
- And at the end of that road we **realize that for all of our precise stepping—for all of our hours spent working and working and working—that all we have to show for our life is our work.** Then **entirety of our journey** became about the physical act of walking, just like the **entirety of some our lives** have become about working...or money. (*Work so you can live; don't live so you can work*).
- Luke 14
- *16 Jesus replied with this story: "A man prepared a great feast and sent out many invitations. 17When the banquet was ready, he sent his servant to tell the guests, 'Come, the banquet is ready.' 18But they all began making excuses. One said, 'I have just bought a field and must inspect it. Please excuse me.' 19 Another said, 'I have just bought five pairs of oxen, and I want to try them out. Please excuse me.' 20 Another said, 'I now have a wife, so I can't come.'*
- *21 "The servant returned and told his master what they had said. His master was furious and said, 'Go quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and invite the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.' 22 After the servant had done this, he reported, 'There is still room for more.' 23 So his master said, 'Go out into the country lanes and behind the hedges and urge anyone you find to come, so that the house will be full. 24 For none of those I first invited will get even the smallest taste of my banquet.'"*
- God is inviting you to live your life today. Take it back from work and hurry and distraction. **BE here. EXIST in this moment. LIVE this life.**
- **Make your life a symphony** to be heard and enjoyed by everyone around you, and not the **droning buzz of a fridge** to be, **at best, ignored and at worst annoying.**

- **Recapture God's precious gift of time**, and use it for its intended purpose:
 - **To let you be you. And to let you...BE.**