

When Hard Times Come
Palm Sunday Message
April 5, 2020
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Today is Palm Sunday. The day Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. The day people were shouting his praises. It was a good day. The disciples were on cloud nine. Everything was great. **Little did they know what was to come.**

Today, looking back on Easter we are able to see the whole story. We see how the death of Jesus was actually planned by God. We understand what looked like defeat at that time **was all part of the greater plan.**

But like the disciples, when we are going through hard times, it's hard to see the good in the midst of the pain and discouragement.

- **Living the story is altogether different than reading the story.**
- Someday books will be written about the 2020 pandemic – But now...

Often times, life doesn't make sense in the present. We wonder *"how can anything good come out of what I'm going through"*? **How do we make sense of this pandemic and the pain and chaos it is causing?**

Yet in the midst of every event of life we must remember and hold on to the truth that ...**God is in control and He always has a plan!!** He is the great redeemer **turning bad into good.**

Let's read the Palm Sunday story:

Matthew 21: 1-11

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away." This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: "Say to Daughter Zion, 'See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'"

The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?” The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”

Little did they know what was going to happen in a few days. Their world would be turned upside down. Their joy would turn to grief, confusion, anger, fear and great discouragement.

Little did we know several weeks ago that our world would be turned upside down. Our economy was booming. The flu season seemed mild. The winter was calm. Spring was around the corner. Kids in school. Things were looking good.

Little did we know many of the things we took for granted would be taken from us. Normal day to day living would be put on hold. Confusion and fear would be widespread.

- Hospitals would be in crisis mode, business, churches, schools and restaurants would be closed. Retirement communities would be on lock down. And whole cities and states mandated to shelter in place. What a shock to our system and world.

The disciples and the followers of Jesus were in shock. **They went into lockdown mode in the upper room.** They struggled with fear and discouragement.

What are some things from their story that will help us this morning with our story?

1. God gives us promises to hold on to for the hard times.

Jesus gave his disciples the promise of his resurrection. He told them he was going to be crucified and that he would rise from the dead in three days. **He gave them this promise to carry them through the crisis they were about to experience.**

Mark 8:31-32 He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

Mark 10:32-34 They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid. Again he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him. “We are going up to Jerusalem,” he said, “and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise.”

In Mark 9:31-32 He tells them the same thing.

Jesus couldn't have been clearer. He gave them a promise to hang on to.

The problem was they forgot the promise. They were so focused on their pain and disappointment that they forgot what Jesus had said. They were angry at the religious political system, the injustice of killing their Savior, their dream and all they had worked for was gone.

Have you been remembering God's promises these past couple of weeks? Or have you instead been focused on your personal fears, the hype of the media or maybe anger toward the government?

If that is your focus instead of the promises of God, you will end up like the disciples where unbelief settles into your heart and fear, anger, and discouragement begin to obsess your thoughts instead of peace and calm.

What are you holding on to right now? What is sustaining you?

It is so important to get into God's word. The last couple of weeks we have been very purposefully sharing many wonderful promises of God to remind you that he is in control and he will take care of you.

Let me encourage your heart on this Palm Sunday with some more promises of our God.

Isaiah 59:19 When the enemy comes in like a flood, The Spirit of the LORD will lift up a standard against him. (NKJV)

Isaiah 41:10 Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand. (NLT)

Lamentations 3:25-26 The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD. (NIV) (Be Still and Know that He is God!)

Psalms 91:14 "Because he loves me," says the LORD, "I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. (NIV)

Philippians 4:19 And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus. (NIV)

God give us these promises so we have something to hold onto that will give us hope and peace during the hard times. Keep reading the Word!

2. God wants us to be able to look beyond our pain and see the bigger picture of what He is doing.

The disciples were so overwhelmed with their situation **they lost perspective of the big picture**. God hadn't forsaken them. Jesus wasn't defeated. There was a bigger plan being played out that was hard to see at the moment. They lost their focus.

The devil thought he was getting the upper hand by killing Jesus when actually he was playing into the hand of God's greater purpose. God is in control!

I believe this virus is an attack from Satan. His MO is to kill, steal and destroy.

But the reality is God is in control in our world. Sin is not winning, the pandemic is not winning, the devil is not getting the upper hand. He has already been defeated at the cross.

Right now, in this global pandemic. Right now, in our county God is in control. He is working his purposes to a greater end. **I believe this virus is playing into God's greater purpose of preparing our hearts and the nations for revival.**

God is taking what the enemy meant for evil and he will use it to strengthen his church and advance his agenda in the earth.

God wants us to be in a spiritual perceptive mode and not just a survival mode in these days.

Isaiah 43:19 See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.

So, what do we perceive God doing in this hour? What is the bigger picture? What might be going on that is advancing the goals and values of his kingdom.

Here is what I see God doing right now from a spiritual perspective:

- God is giving us a pause from the pressure of busyness to re-think and re-adjust our values. Ask God what he want you to learn at this time!
- God is wooing us into the secret place with himself
- God is giving us valuable time to give attention to our families and marriages – His goal is to see us come out of this with renewed family values
- God is growing our faith and teaching us to trust him in a deeper way
- God is reminding us that he is our provider
- God is reminding us that church is people not buildings and programs
- He is teaching and preparing us for times of real persecution. This is not government persecution against the church. But if it were to happen in the future God is preparing us how to be the church in some new ways.
- He is making us more aware of our neighbors and not to be so isolated
- I have a sense he is doing something powerful on a global level – economically and otherwise – beyond my comprehension
- God is preparing the nations for revival
- God is shaking the nations. They recognize they are very vulnerable and not in control. Their Gods cannot save them.
- These are last day birth pains to remind us that the return of Jesus is drawing close and we need to have our house in order.
- Much more for us to learn. – I see this as a warning and opportunity.

3. It's time to pay attention to our soul.

Jesus was concerned for his disciples. Before and after his resurrection he took a lot of time to minister to them. He cared for their souls.

When anxiety, fear, weariness or depression begin to sweep over you it is time to stop and take care of your soul.

Psalm 116:7 Return to your rest, my soul, for the Lord has been good to you.

Matthew 11:29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Your soul is your inner world. The real you. Your soul connects your thoughts, your emotions, your will and integrates them into your entire being.

Your body will fade away but your soul. – **the real you, lives forever.** God breathed into the nostrils of Adam and man became a living soul.

Dallas Willard – You are a soul made by God, made for God, and made to need God. If your soul is healthy, no external circumstance can destroy your life.

How do we take care of our soul?

Dallas Willard who was a man who mastered the care of his soul said: **To take care of your soul you need to eliminate “hurry” from your life. – Willard**

John Ortberg in his book Soul Keeping says – **When we are too busy our souls begins to shrivele. The busy soul gets attached to the wrong things. -Ortberg**

In his book Ortberg tells a story from Lettie Cowan. “A traveler visiting Africa engaged a group of carriers and guides. Hoping to make her journey a swift one, she was pleased with the progress of the many miles they covered the first day. On the second day, though, all the carriers she had hired remained seated and refused to move. She was greatly frustrated and asked the leader of her hired hands why they would not continue the journey, He told her that on the first day they had travelled too far too fast, and now they were waiting for their souls to catch up to their bodies.”

Their theology may be lacking but they knew what they needed to do to restore balance to their lives better than we do.

Have you ever felt like you needed to let your soul catch up with your body? You had that deep unrest, a sense of being driven and overwhelmed with life.

Someone has called it soul-fatigue. When our soul is fatigued it affects our relationship with God and with people. We become irritable and short with others.

- It's hard to control our thoughts and impulses. We make poor decisions. It also affects our physical, emotional and mental health.

In this season God is giving us time for our souls to catch up.

This is a good time to slow down and pay attention to our inner world. Our soul. We are usually so focused on our outer world. So busy doing and going here and there. (I understand this can be an overwhelming time for moms. Give yourself time outs.)

Our soul was created by God and longs for God – spending time with God feeds our soul on a deep level.

How is your soul doing this morning? I encourage you to find that place of rest in God for your soul.

- Pay attention to you souls. God wants to heal your soul at a deep level.
- Take a long prayer walk
- Don't just fill your time with TV, Movies and Social Media
- Put on worship music and soak your soul in quietness before God

The salvation of our soul begins with surrendering our life to Jesus as our Lord and Savior. Our souls are eternal.

- **Do you know Jesus – The Prince of Peace – If you were to die**
- **During this song surrender your life, your soul to God. Ask Jesus to come into your life and save you.**
- **Then let us know – send you some info.**

I would like to close by having us sing together that well known Hymn. ***It Is Well With My Soul***. Written by Horatio Spafford in 1873 as he grieved the death of his four daughters who drowned in a shipwreck.

Even in the deepest pain and darkest of times our souls can find rest in God.

At this hour of uncertainty in our lives we can say **“it is well with our souls”** because our lives are hidden in Christ.

Song/Closing Prayer