

Palm Sunday, April 10, 2022

An Inconvenient Week

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✠ When things are not as they seem

- *Have you ever had a time in your life when you realized that things are not what they seem? That the parts of your life that you thought were solid, you thought you could count on, all of a sudden turned out to be fallible?*
- *A basic human desire we share is to know that things in life are the way they should be. We want things to go according to plan... to be able to look around at our circumstances and say.. "I can rest, because I finally have things in their place" In fact, we want this so much that many times we become blind to the reality that things AREN'T as they should be... that things ARE NOT as they seem. EXAMPLE...*
- *Tired parent to child "have you cleaned your room and done everything I asked?..."*
- *You hear that funny noise in your car... and turn up the radio... everything's good!*
- *Avoid doctor and dentist, because as long as I don't go, I'll be health! Right?*
- *BUT reality has a way of asserting itself. At some point, our blinders are stripped away and we start to see things for what they truly are.*
- *SOMETIMES this can be an unveiling of incredible beauty. A liberating truth we didn't know, a beauty we had up to some point failed to see, a love we never realized.*
- *But often this can be a process of great struggle. The pain and brokenness of a marriage comes to the surface. The hidden insecurities of a child boil over. A leader fails us. Our health falters. In any case, the sense of security and control we so desire is GONE.*
- *And in circumstances such as these- when we finally realize that life is beyond us- that we may begin to LOOK FOR GOD. God- where are you, and what are you doing!*
- *AND here's the thing! IF we have ears to hear and eyes to see, we may discover that God is RIGHT HERE... right in our midst- but who he is and what he is doing is NOT what we expected.*
- *THIS IS WHAT HAPPENED FOR EVERYONE SURROUNDING JESUS during the last week of his life.*
- *Today we are looking at Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem.*
  - *Scholarly consensus is that it is year AD 33 (actually, very little consensus, except 30-33)*
  - *In John we are told that SIX days prior to the Passover Jesus went to the home of Lazarus, Martha, and Mary, and that the NEXT day was Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem.*
  - *So, if you take the traditional dating of the DAY OF PASSOVER, AND Jesus' crucifixion being on Friday, April 3<sup>rd</sup>, (some consensus), that would put the Passover meal on Thursday (day of preparation, Passover officially began that night), then back up FIVE days, this puts Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on SUNDAY, March 28<sup>th</sup>, AD 33.*
- *In ANY case, beginning on this day which we now call Palm Sunday- for everyone in Jerusalem, it would prove to be a very..*

✠ Palm Sunday, and a very inconvenient week

- **Jesus enters Jerusalem with great fanfare, but the cross is just days away. For everyone involved, things are not as they seem....**

**Matthew 21:6-11** *The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. They brought the donkey and the colt, placed their cloaks on them, and Jesus sat on them. 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!" 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."*

- **Then in just a matter of days, everything changed.**
- **As you know, after Jesus shared the passover meal with his disciples, they walked to the nearby Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus prayed. Suddenly, Judas appears with a group of armed men sent by the High Priests, and when Jesus is arrested, Mark tells us...**

**Mark 14:50** *Then everyone deserted him and fled.*

- **If we consider the perspective and attitudes of the people in this story, the week would end very differently from how it began.**
- **Look at what happened from 4 different perspectives...**

#### ✠ The perspective of the powerful

- Pharisees... religious leaders. Of everyone involved in this drama, they had the most to protect... Their circumstances were the way they liked them. SO, looking at Jesus and all he was saying and doing...

#### They entered the week facing a threat.

- Pick story up right after Jesus had raised Lazarus

**John 11:45-48, 53** *Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. "What are we accomplishing?" they asked. "Here is this man performing many miraculous signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, **and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.**" ... So from that day on they plotted to take his life.*

- **Jesus was a threat to their status-quo. And so they fought him. And by the following Friday, they thought they had won.**

#### They ended the week in self-confidence and pride

**Matthew 27:39-43** *Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, "You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!" In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! He's the King of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'"*

- **Now... it is easy to judge these people. But we need to ask ourselves- are there times when we would have been one of them. Times when Jesus's call to "follow me" are very inconvenient to us, because we would rather stay with and our status quo. And so, we fight him. We do everything we can to subvert his voice in our life, to protect ourselves from being exposed, or from losing the control we think we have.**

- *At times, are we the ones seeking to silence Jesus in our own hearts?*

✠ The perspective of the crowd. They entered the week expecting a miracle

**Luke 19:36-37** *As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road. When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen:*

- *These were the spectators. They knew about Jesus, and they had been following him, listening to him, but from a distance. They were amazed by him, and yet the text reveals that they did not understand what was really going on.*
- *They were following Jesus interested in what he could do for them. How he could help their circumstances. They perhaps believed that Jesus WAS the son of God, but at the center of their belief was THEIR PLAN, what they wanted Jesus to do according to their needs.*
- *For these people, it turned out to be a very inconvenient week. Jesus started to say some uncomfortable things. He started to do some things that upset the established order. As He started to clearly lay out what was really going on, the resistance to him started to become apparent. Hanging around Jesus went from being uncomfortable to downright dangerous.*
- *It started to become clear that Jesus DID NOT intend to do all the things they wanted him to do, that he had a plan very different from what they wanted... and so the attitude of the people changed...*

They ended the week in resentment and anger.

- *They fell away, and then at the cross they watched in disappointment, perhaps even joining in with the crowd who cried for his death.*
- *NOW... it's easy to judge these people, to call them fickle, marvel at how self-centered they had to have been.*
- *BUT, we must ask ourselves, are there times when WE would have been part of this crowd. Following Jesus, wanting to learn more about him, but our faith still being centered on ourselves, on OUR plans, OUR KINGDOM. And then, when God doesn't do what we want him to do, we become disappointed, even angry, and we turn away and look for something else that will help us according to our own plan...*

✠ The perspective of the disciples. They entered the week expecting victory

- *In Luke 19 we see the story of Jesus in Jericho, including the famous story of Zacchaeus, the tax collector. This story ends with Jesus saying:*

**Luke 19:9-10** “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

- *Then, right after this Jesus goes on to teach one of his most challenging parables- The Parable of the Ten Minas, or, of the Faithful and unfaithful servants. It's a cautionary parable, and Jesus is being very purposeful, because he knew the crowd- including his disciples, didn't understand what he was doing.*
- *As they all approached Jerusalem, Luke tells us..*

**Luke 19:11** *...the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once.*

- ***In their minds... Jesus was finally going to do what they thought he had arrived to do! Not only was he going to be victorious over the Romans, they were going to be victorious with him... Example.. In Matthews version...***

**Matthew 20:20-22** *Then the mother of Zebedee's sons (James and John) came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him. "What is it you want?" he asked. She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom." "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said to them. "Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?" "We can," they answered.*

- ***They did not have a clue what was coming, and for the disciples MOST OF ALL, it would be a VERY inconvenient week. Just as Jesus alluded in his answer, they would start to see that truly following Jesus would take them into situations where their own wisdom and strength would fail.***
- ***Following him meant they would have to TRUST HIM COMPLETELY. Following him would mean seeing others reject him, and this meant they might be rejected as well...***

**They ended the week in fear and brokenness**

- Remember Peter! After his denial of Christ, he hears the rooster crow and Matthew tells us... **Matthew 26:74-75** ***he went outside and wept bitterly.***

- ***FINALLY, in great contrast to everyone else, we see...***

**† The perspective of Jesus *He alone understood what has happening.***

**He entered the week with obedience and heartbreak**

**Luke 19:41-44** *As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace — but now it is hidden from your eyes. (why did Jesus weep? Love!) The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you."*

- ***For Jesus, the week went exactly as he knew it would. He saw people turn and walk away. His closest followers still didn't understand, and his circumstances went from bad to worse. AND YET...***

**He ended the week in love and trust**

**Luke 22:39...** *Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. On reaching the place, he said to them, "Pray that you will not fall into temptation." He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."*

**† That week in Jerusalem... where was I?**

- ***Was I fighting him because he threatened my perceived control over my own life?***
- ***Did I turn away in disappointment or anger because he didn't do what I wanted him to do?***
- ***Did I follow him almost to the end, and then succumb to fear?***
- ***There are times in life when we may find ourselves identifying with all of these.***

- **AND YET, we have an option these people didn't have. Because, you see, WE WEREN'T there on that original Palm Sunday. We have the gift of looking at these events on the OTHER SIDE OF THE CROSS, and as such, we KNOW something these people DIDN'T know.**
- **Of course, what we NOW KNOW is the rest of the Gospel, the rest of the New Testament, the incredible picture of God's Grace and Truth that humanity NEVER EXPECTED GOD TO DO.**
- **And of all the scripture that speaks to what we NOW KNOW, one of the most stirring is what Paul captures in the first two chapters of Colossians.**

#### ✠ What we now know

- **Turn with me to Colossians, chapter 2... we are going to look at this scripture backwards, starting with the astounding statement we seen in verses 12-14....**

**Colossians 2:13b-14** **WE NOW KNOW** He **GOD** forgave us all our sins, <sup>14</sup> having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.

- **I can't read that verse without remembering the third verse of 'it is well with my soul'... MY SIN, oh the bliss, of this glorious thought! My sin, not in part, but the whole- was nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more! Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, oh my soul!**
- **The miracle of complete and total forgiveness and freedom before God... THIS IS POSSIBLE because of what we see in the beginning of verse 13...**

**13a** *When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ.*

- **We weren't just separated from God because of our sin, but because we were spiritually DEAD! And IN CHRIST we aren't just forgiven, we have been MADE ALIVE!**
- **We are people who- by NO deservedness of our own- have been brought from DEATH to LIFE. AND BECAUSE THIS IS TRUE, IN CHRIST, we are COMPLETE. WHOLE.**

**9-10a** *For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and in Christ you have been brought to fullness.*

- **ACKNOWLEDGE... so often our experience of life- the way we sincerely feel- flies in the face of this. Moments of true completeness and fullness can seem rare, like glimpses of a distant and greater reality. AND IN OUR CURRENT REALITY we so often feel incomplete, struggling for something more... and there are times life just leaves us feeling empty.**
- **SCRIPTURE RECOGNIZES THIS- Go read the psalms- and throughout the NT we see LOTS of teaching that unpacks Paul's statement that IN CHRIST we are complete. BUT WHEN IT COMES DOWN TO IT, THIS IS A MATTER OF FAITH.**
- **Think... What is the primary purpose of FAITH? A big part of Christian culture sees faith as the TOOL we use move God to do what we ask him to do. I have a need, and if I just believe enough, long enough, God will meet that need on my terms, according to my understanding.**
- **With good intentions we say things like "just have faith, things will eventually work out, thing's will be okay..." And then when things don't resolve the way we hoped, when a**

situation just stays **HARD**, for **YEARS**- which it often **DOES**- it can leave us feeling, well, empty.

- **IN CONTRAST**, even in the midst of life's many needs and struggles, **THE GREAT GIFT OF FAITH IS THE POWER TO BELIEVE** that what God has said about us is **TRUE**, and to **LIVE IN THE GOOD** of that truth!
- As Paul says in Romans six, **BY FAITH to RECKON YOURSELVES ALIVE IN CHRIST**, you are **COMPLETE**. **IN CHRIST**, you have been brought to fullness! You no longer need another person, some thing, a certain social setting or status, a certain outcome, or to buy into the never ending offers of this world that claim they can finally give you what you most are seeking... because **YOUR IDENTITY, YOUR WHOLENESS**, is rooted in who **GOD** says you are. (More on that next week)
- **BECAUSE WE HAVE BEEN MADE COMPLETE**, this gives us a new foundation for **HOW WE LIVE**.

**6-7** So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord (**by faith, by His Grace- NOT by the pressure of my own performance**), continue to live your lives in him, <sup>7</sup> rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

- **And church**, we are able to know God's strength, to experience the powerful gift of a life filled with gratitude, because we have a new **SOURCE** of life itself, and this is what Paul proclaims in...

**Colossians 1:25-27** the word of God in its fullness—<sup>26</sup> the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord's people. <sup>27</sup> To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

- **THIS** is what we now **KNOW** to be true, and it changes everything. But not everyone knows this. Even as believers today, it is easy for us to forget this.
- We need to be reminded. **AND SO**, I want to close by directing our focus toward what would happen on **GOOD FRIDAY**.

#### ✠ Looking toward Good Friday

- At the end of the week, God's plan was fully revealed, and it was not what anyone expected.
- Without any resistance, and with a countenance of pure love, Jesus surrendered to the cross. In the crowd that day, there were:
  - Those threatened by Christ. There are times when this is us.
  - Those disappointed, disillusioned, even angry at Christ. This too, at times, can be us...
  - The outsiders, the unclean, the people whom the law and religious systems and declared were 'less than' and undeserving... At times it can be tempting to be the ones seeking to pass judgment on others...
  - Those consumed by confusion and fear
- **ON THE CROSS**, there was Jesus. And to the threatened, the prideful, the angry, the disillusioned, the broken, the outcasts, and the frightened- **TO YOU AND I-** Jesus surrendered to the cross and proclaimed **I LOVE YOU**

- *Next Sunday is Easter. Friends, the Resurrection stands as God's great proclamation of victory and freedom from sin, darkness, fear, hatred, bitterness, despair, violence, selfishness and pride.*
- *BECAUSE OF THE RESURRECTION and everything it means, Jesus Christ truly is the hope of mankind.*
- *But Easter Sunday is only possible because of what happened on Friday. And so, I invite you, I urge you if you possibly can, to come and join us Friday evening at 7:00- when as a family we together will consider why Jesus went to the cross, we will remember- through communion and other ways- what Jesus did on that cross... and together we will prepare our hearts for the miracle of Easter Sunday.*