

Palm Sunday 6th April 2020 The Gospel Church Marchwood Podcast.

As we gather as a virtual church again this Sunday, if you are like me you are really missing the normal social interactions and the goings in and out. I realise how blessed I am to be living with four generations of my family under one roof. But we all still feel a bit trapped.

Today is Palm Sunday, which especially reminds us of big crowds, noise and bustle, as we again read the story of Jesus's great procession into Jerusalem. As Jesus sat on a donkey, accompanied by his disciples and what seemed to be every person in city, as they squeezed through the narrow city gates and streets, singing Hosannas and paving the route with palm branches. Of course under today's Corona restrictions such an event would not be allowed and the thought of being with people is very appealing for us today.

In the midst of all the excitement of that day, with hindsight, we already know what is to come for Jesus during the next harrowing week, which we often call Holy Week. We know Jesus had set his course and there was no turning back. During this week we remember his teaching to the crowds, his tussles with the city authorities, his private supper of remembrance with his stunned disciples who couldn't quite understand what was going on, his mock trials, and eventually his torture and execution on Good Friday. But Jesus would not waiver from the task he had accepted.

The many events of Holy Week and so much of Jesus's teaching during this week are recorded in the four gospels. Palm Sunday is such a land mark occasion written on to the disciples' memories and inspired by God to be recorded in all four gospels as well. (Matt 21v1-11, Mark 11v1-10, Luke 19v29-38 and John 12v12-15).

However we also know that after the darkness of Holy week, the following Sunday was to eclipse Palm Sunday as Jesus is resurrected and he conquers death and sin, and brings new life and forgiveness to the world on that first Easter day. May be it would be a good use of our time this week to relive these events if we read through the gospel accounts again.

I just want to leave you with a few thoughts from Psalm 118 which we read earlier in the podcast.

The psalm is appropriate for this Palm Sunday as it is a song of thanksgiving and praise used by the Jewish nation as they made their way up to the temple for special times of celebration and also as they celebrated Passover together. Some of the words of praise in the psalm echo into the narrative of the gospel accounts of Palm Sunday.

This is such an encouraging psalm which has many nuggets of truth worth considering, but I just want to focus on some. I will leave you to dig out others. It is full of reasons to be thankful.

The Lord is good and he loves us. V1. *Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, his love endures for ever.* In difficult times we need to remind ourselves God in his character and his actions can be nothing but good, and he continually loves us. His love is not just for the present moment, but will endure throughout all eternity and is dependable – it does not change in spite of how we treat him.

The Lord is with us. V5&6. *In my anguish I cried to the Lord and he answered by setting me free. The Lord is with me, I will not be afraid... he is my helper... it is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust men.* All of us are puzzled and anxious about the present situation, but we need to remember we are not on our own, and we don't have to be afraid, because we have a God we can

speak to, even in our most anguished times, who hears and answers us, setting us free from situations where we feel trapped. When we come to Jesus and put our trust in him we are set free from our sin and guilt, and we can live life to the full as God intended.

The Lord strengthens us and puts a song in our hearts v14 -15. *The Lord is my strength and my song, he has become my salvation. Shouts of joy and victory resound in the tents of the righteous.* When God is with us we have his strength to help us overcome the burdens and challenges of each day, but more than just having the strength to limp through life day by day, we can know the joy and victory of living in a new relationship with him. That should make our tents and homes resound with his praise and worship. Of course we can only be considered righteous because of Jesus. It's not because of how good we are, because we could never be good enough. We can only meet God's standard and be accepted and be included under this heading of righteous when we come to God in repentance, and ask for his forgiveness for our sins, trusting in Jesus's sacrifice on the cross and receiving the reflected righteousness Jesus offers to us. Just like the words of one of the songs we often sing together, "Your majesty, I can but bow, I lay my all before you now. In royal robes I don't deserve I live to serve your majesty". (*King of Kings, Majesty* by Jarod Cooper).

The Lord is our foundation. V22 *The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone, the Lord has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes.* On Palm Sunday Jesus seems popular and is welcomed by the people as their King, by the end of Holy week, he has been rejected and the songs of praises to Jesus have been replaced by cries of "crucify him". The picture of a builder constructing a house is one we are all familiar with, especially the idea that to build a secure home we need to lay sufficient foundations to support the weight of the building, in this verse we are reminded that God has taken what man had rejected, that is Jesus, and made him the capstone or foundation which we need to build our lives upon. Especially in difficult times his foundation remains secure, we must ensure we don't reject him and try to build in our own strength and wisdom.

Each day is given by the Lord V24. *This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.* We need to remember each day is a gift from God. Recently we have been sharply reminded of this fact: that life is fragile. We need to treasure each day wisely, and carefully and use it for God's glory. Whatever the situation or our circumstances we need to be encouraged to rejoice and be glad each day. Remembering all the marvellous things God has done for us, and the gifts he has given to us should make us grateful and rejoicing people.

So how should we respond? We need to confirm and declare our trust in him alone, as the Psalm concludes with these following words, let us join in this Palm Sunday celebration... (v25-29)

O Lord save us: O Lord grant us success. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. From the house of the Lord we bless you. The Lord is God and he has made his light shine upon us, With boughs in hand, join in festal procession up to the altar.

You are my God, and I will give you thanks; You are my God and I will exalt you. Give thanks to the Lord for he is good. His love endures for ever. Amen.