Luke 13:10-17 March 25, 2018

Palm Sunday!

*The Forgiveness of Jesus, Part 6*

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 The fields were parched and brown from lack of rain, and the crops lay wilting from thirst. People were anxious and irritable as they searched the sky for any sign of relief. Days turned into arid weeks. No rain came. The ministers of the local churches called for an hour of prayer in the town square the following Saturday. They requested that everyone bring an object of faith for inspiration. At high noon on the appointed Saturday the townspeople turned out en masse, filling the square with anxious faces and hopeful hearts. The ministers were touched to see the variety of objects clutched in prayerful hands – holy books, crosses, rosaries. When the hour ended, as if on command, a soft rain began to fall. Cheers swept the crowd as they held their treasured objects high in gratitude and praise. From the middle of the crowd one faith symbol seemed to overshadow all the others: A small child had brought an umbrella.

 Why was it that on that first Palm Sunday that, from all we read, the disciples were waving palm branches right along with the throngs of people shouting, “Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Hosanna! Save us, Jesus!” Why do we not read that at least one of the twelve disciples was following Jesus, watching and weeping? Jesus had told them numerous times that when he went to Jerusalem he would be handed over to the officials, beaten, and killed. How was it that they could ignore what he said and instead go along with the crowd?

**How could they ignore what he said and instead go along with the crowd?**

 *Let us pray: Heavenly Father, we thank you for opening up the way of communication between us through the broken body and shed blood of your Son, the Savior of the world, Jesus Christ. May our hearts be fully yours as we turn to your Word now, in Jesus’ name, Amen.*

 Our text today from our Lenten study is from the gospel of Luke 13:10-17. However, for worship this morning I’m going to read all the way to the end of chapter 13. *“****10****One Sabbath day as Jesus was teaching in a synagogue,****11****he saw a woman who had been crippled by an evil spirit. She had been bent double for eighteen years and was unable to stand up straight.****12****When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, “Dear woman, you are healed of your sickness!”****13****Then he touched her, and instantly she could stand straight. How she praised God!* ***14****But the leader in charge of the synagogue was indignant that Jesus had healed her on the Sabbath day. “There are six days of the week for working,” he said to the crowd. “Come on those days to be healed, not on the Sabbath.”* ***15****But the Lord replied, “You hypocrites! Each of you works on the Sabbath day! Don’t you untie your ox or your donkey from its stall on the Sabbath and lead it out for water?****16****This dear woman, a daughter of Abraham, has been held in bondage by Satan for eighteen years. Isn’t it right that she be released, even on the Sabbath?”* ***17****This shamed his enemies, but all the people rejoiced at the wonderful things he did.*

***18****Then Jesus said, “What is the Kingdom of God like? How can I illustrate it?****19****It is like a tiny mustard seed that a man planted in a garden; it grows and becomes a tree, and the birds make nests in its branches.”* ***20****He also asked, “What else is the Kingdom of God like?****21****It is like the yeast a woman used in making bread. Even though she put only a little yeast in three measures of flour, it permeated every part of the dough.”*

***22****Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he went, always pressing on toward Jerusalem.****23****Someone asked him, “Lord, will only a few be saved?” He replied,****24****“Work hard to enter the narrow door to God’s Kingdom, for many will try to enter but will fail.****25****When the master of the house has locked the door, it will be too late. You will stand outside knocking and pleading, ‘Lord, open the door for us!’ But he will reply, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from.’****26****Then you will say, ‘But we ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.’****27****And he will reply, ‘I tell you, I don’t know you or where you come from. Get away from me, all you who do evil.’* ***28****“There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, for you will see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the prophets in the Kingdom of God, but you will be thrown out.****29****And people will come from all over the world—from east and west, north and south—to take their places in the Kingdom of God.****30****And note this: Some who seem least important now will be the greatest then, and some who are the greatest now will be least important then.[*[*a*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+13&version=NLT#fen-NLT-25517a)*]”*

***31****At that time some Pharisees said to him, “Get away from here if you want to live! Herod Antipas wants to kill you!”* ***32****Jesus replied, “Go tell that fox that I will keep on casting out demons and healing people today and tomorrow; and the third day I will accomplish my purpose.****33****Yes, today, tomorrow, and the next day I must proceed on my way. For it wouldn’t do for a prophet of God to be killed except in Jerusalem!* ***34****“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones God’s messengers! How often I have wanted to gather your children together as a hen protects her chicks beneath her wings, but you wouldn’t let me.****35****And now, look, your house is abandoned. And you will never see me again until you say, ‘Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord!’”*

 After 18 years the woman who had been bent over was healed of her affliction! How did this happen? First, the woman went where Jesus was. That was her action, her decision. She went to the place where Jesus was. What happened next was God’s action. Jesus saw her, he called her to come closer, he spoke words of healing to her, and finally he touched her and released her from 18 years of affliction. He saw, he called, he spoke, he touched, he released. Our word of the week, as we begin Holy Week, is RELEASED.

 The synagogue leader was so upset by what Jesus did, and rightly so according to his interpretation of the Law. The Sabbath was a day to rest from all your labors. It was a day to focus on the Lord’s gracious provision for his people. There’s nothing wrong with that – unless you lose sight of the people – unless you lose sight of God’s grace – unless you lose sight of the truth that God is God and we are not. As Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes 11:5, *“As you do not know the path of the wind, or how the body is formed in a mother’s womb, so you cannot understand the work of God, the Maker of all things.”*

 We can so easily get to the point where we box God in and say that He will do this, or He will not do that, based on our own limited understanding, when the truth is we cannot fathom the ways and the mysteries of God. In Job 11:7,8 we read, *“Can you fathom the mysteries of God? Can you probe the limits of the Almighty? They are higher than the heavens above – what can you do? They are deeper than the depths below – what can you know?”*

 Jesus came and broke through so many glass ceilings, so many cultural barriers, he broke apart so many preconceived notions as to what God would or would not do. God himself came to earth in Jesus Christ! He came, he called people to himself, he spoke to them in words they could understand, he touched them, and he released them, life after life after life after life! He released people from thinking that it was their rigid adherence to the Law that saved them. He released them from thinking that people with perhaps more responsibility in the church like a priest or minister or a teacher or a musician would be first in line when the gates of the Kingdom were opened. No! Jesus came, and he called all people to himself saying that the first will be last and the last will be first! He called out to the blind, the lame, the demonized, the tax collectors, the fishermen, the educated, the uneducated, the gay, the straight, the widowed, the divorced, the Muslim, the Jew, Gentile, slave, free, women, men, old, young – he calls them all! He calls us all! He calls us all to come away from the crowd, from the influence of others, to put ourselves in a position where he can speak to us and touch us and release us from our past – and then he calls us to follow him. To put down our palm branches and follow him all the way to the cross.

 But it’s important you watch your step. Anytime you walk behind a donkey for a length of time, you better watch your step, if you know what I mean. I say that to make you chuckle a bit, but also to give you a mental picture. The road to the cross is full of landmines. Satan doesn’t want us to get to the cross where we will die to self and find new life in Christ. He will throw all sorts of things in your path. Not to mention, the pathway itself is lined with people, many of them with good intentions, shouting out words that could fill your head with thoughts that are contrary to your mission. “Save us, Jesus! Overthrow the Romans and become our king!” The crowd was well-intentioned, but they missed the bigger, life-changing, world-changing, World-Changer who was right in front of them. Their view was too narrow. They wanted a conquering king to save them from the Romans, not a suffering servant King to save them from their sin.

Jesus came to release us from anything and everything that would hold us back from ministering his love and grace to all people. That release comes at the cross, folks. It comes at the cross. He died to set the captives free! He came to release us from hard-heartedness, from unforgiveness, from religious legalism, from apathy, from perfectionism, from idolatry, from spiritual blindness, and from shame and guilt.

Our Lenten study is called *The Forgiveness of Jesus*. On the back of the workbook is written, *“We all carry guilt and shame – it drags us down and keeps us from enjoying life to the fullest. Jesus came to forgive us, allowing us to move from guilt and shame to freedom and forgiveness. As we examine the people he met and set free, you will be transformed by your encounter with the God who loves you so much that he runs to you.”*

What a great promise the publisher makes. “As we do this study, we will be transformed.” I liked this study, I appreciated the teaching – especially the visuals that were provided in the land of Israel. But a study, folks, is not going to transform us. We can’t get to the end of the 6th lesson and say, “Ta da! I finished the study, therefore I am transformed!” That’s sort of like the synagogue leader’s very narrow view of the Sabbath. “Do this. Don’t do that. You will be on the faithful list.” That’s sort of like saying that just because we come to church, or small groups, or serve on a board or a committee or the tech team, or go on a mission trip, or give so much away to missionaries on Easter Sunday, or read our Bibles every single day, or pray in a certain way in a certain place, that we have been transformed and will be welcomed into Heaven one day. Hallelujah! Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord!

Of all days, on Palm Sunday, the day the crowds and, by all appearances, even the disciples got it all wrong, let’s remember, let’s acknowledge, let’s celebrate, let’s speak out the truth that JESUS alone transforms us. JESUS ALONE transforms us. JESUS ALONE TRANSFORMS US! And that happens friends when we follow him all the way to the cross.

Don’t ignore what he said and just go along with the crowd. You know what to do. Repent of your sins. Receive God’s forgiveness. Allow God to refocus you on areas where you might be spiritually blind. Reach out to others with the truth and love of Jesus. When you fail, remember that he is eager to restore the relationship and re-send you out into the harvest. Keep your eyes on the cross – for there – we have been released from all the stuff, all the voices, all the shame, all the guilt, all the chains that have bound us up for weeks, months, and yes, even years.

Biblical commentator Matthew Henry wrote this, “Come, and see the victories of the cross. Christ’s wounds are thy healings, His agonies thy repose, His conflicts thy conquests, His groans thy songs, His pains thine ease, His shame thy glory, His death thy life, His sufferings thy salvation.” Let us pray: *Almighty God, have mercy on us. Have mercy on us, for we know that we are sinners completely undeserving of your forgiveness, your mercy, and your love. So many times we have gone along with the crowd and done what they were doing instead of following you on the paths of righteousness. So many times. We know that we have allowed our sinful thoughts to determine our attitude, our behavior, and our hope. We know that we have failed to live lives pleasing to you. Have mercy on us. Hear us as we confess. (Silence). You gave everything, Jesus, so that we could live free. Your life in exchange for ours. Oh, fill us anew with thankfulness, with hearts bursting with love and gratitude, with joy that cannot be stolen, and with determined courage to live according to your will. As we come to your Table today, we pray that the bread we break and the cup we pour may be for us a true communion of the broken body and the shed blood of our Savior Jesus Christ. May we truly enter in and see and savor the love that changes everything. Hear us now as we pray the prayer you gave us. Our Father …. Amen.* Let us stand and sing:

Behold the Lamb who bears our sins away, slain for us - and we remember
The promise made that all who come in faith find forgiveness at the cross.
So we share in this bread of life, and we drink of His sacrifice
As a sign of our bonds of peace around the table of the King.

The body of our Savior Jesus Christ, torn for you - eat and remember
The wounds that heal, the death that brings us life paid the price to make us one.
So we share in this bread of life, and we drink of His sacrifice
As a sign of our bonds of love around the table of the King.

The blood that cleanses every stain of sin, shed for you - drink and remember
He drained death’s cup that all may enter in to receive the life of God.
So we share in this bread of life, and we drink of His sacrifice
As a sign of our bonds of grace around the table of the King.

And so with thankfulness and faith we rise to respond, - and to remember
Our call to follow in the steps of Christ as His body here on earth.
As we share in his suffering, we proclaim Christ will come again!

And we’ll join in the feast of heaven around the table of the King.

(Getty Music)