

THE MAN FOR OTHERS.

READING: Luke 19 v 41-44.

Next week we celebrate Palm Sunday, or Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. The story is often told at the beginning of "Holy Week" and the lead-up to Easter as the culmination of the whole of Jesus' life and ministry: His acclamation by the crowds and His cleansing of the Temple which is sometimes seen as the final event that pushed the Jewish authorities into plotting His demise. However, I'm not sure that I have ever heard a preacher look into this particular little incident on the way into Jerusalem?

Despite the "coronation" feel to the event in the excitement of the crowds, Jesus was not swept away by the popular enthusiasm. He well knew why He was going into Jerusalem, and what awaited Him there. He had been trying to prepare his disciples for months in advance, by warning of His impending death, ever since the time they had recognised Who He really was (see Luke 9 v 18-22 if you need reminded of the details). In one sense, Jesus "stage-managed" His death: with steely determination he had set out for Jerusalem, knowing the outcome. From childhood He would have witnessed executions – if not the actual act of crucifixion he would have passed Roman gibbets with corpses left hanging on them in various stages of decay. He could have chosen a different course: He could have simply gone away into hiding, or staged the sort of coup d'état that the Jews were expecting their Messiah to bring off. Alternatively, he could have withdrawn into Himself, into self-pity, fear, and depression.

This is what amazes me about this wee incident. Jesus ignores the expectation of the crowd, forgets thoughts about Himself ... and stops to weep over the city of Jerusalem, the pride of every Jew, and "the joy of the whole earth". He knew that by rejecting Him, they were sealing their own fate; their present course of attitude and action could only lead to ultimate destruction by the all-conquering Romans. They had rejected the one source of salvation that was open to them. A similar statement of regret is found in:

MATTHEW 23 v 37-39.

Much of the Christian church seems to have fallen between two stools: those who believe that God delights to bring judgement, and those who see Him as a benign Father-Christmas type figure, who may threaten children with a naughty list, but in the end everyone is treated equally and safely gets their presents on Christmas morning. Both are travesties of the truth. Our Lord Jesus displays Who our God is like: a God who hates bringing judgement, but nevertheless will have to do so if His offer of mercy is rejected. If you want to follow this through, turn to Ezekiel 18 and carefully study verses 23, & 31-32 in the context of the whole chapter. Even under the Old Covenant God wants to have mercy, but His people refuse to allow Him to do so. We have a God who desires "all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth" (1Tim.2v4) and does not wish "anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2Pet.3v9), as I have often reminded you before.

The example of Jesus, in the passage we are looking at today, challenges us: where is our focus, and what are our priorities? Are we prepared to look beyond our own circumstances and weep over the sins of others? How much do we really care about them being saved? In Romans 9 v 3 Paul says that he would be prepared to trade in his own salvation if only his own race, the Jews, might be saved. We live in a world where people are hopelessly lost, "without hope and without God" as Paul puts it in Eph 2v12. When did you last really pray for someone else's salvation? If our Lord Jesus could forget about Himself and weep over the lost at the beginning of the most traumatic week of His earthly life, should not His followers share the same attitude (Phil.2 v 5)?

Can we pause for a moment, and reflectively listen to: “Filled with compassion” (Noel Richards, 1994)

Tap/click link for song - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rxx0EN6Bqdc>

Baptists are not a credal people: we do not have a doctrinal statement, but we do have a simple 3-part “Declaration of Principle”, the last of which states:

“That it is the duty of every disciple to bear witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to take part in the evangelisation of the world.”

We cannot meaningfully pray for the whole world. Neither can we pray for every mission or missionary that solicits our prayers, but I can suggest a simple starting point: that each one of us chooses ONE person who is not yet a believer, and either ONE missionary or one nation and pray for them regularly? That is not beyond any of us, would get us going, and begin to make a real difference in the world. Perhaps we could even pause now, and ask God to put someone or a place on our hearts right now, and begin to pray for then?

Finally, for this morning, can we sing “Make Way” (Graham Kendrick, 1986) ... but with a difference? Graham’s Make Way music was not written to be sung in church: it was written for proclamation in the open air for the Marches for Jesus back in the 80’s. We’re summoning people to believe and follow Jesus. So let us sing it with the person in mind that we have been praying for. In singing it to them, we are actually prophesying, by declaring what God is saying to them!

Tap/click link for song - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tK6XuYhL7JI>