

April 11, 2017



feeding...gathering...carrying...leading. (Isiah 40:11)

Dear Church Family,

"Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest." These are shouts of praise from the multitudes at the beginning of Jesus entry into Jerusalem celebrated on Palm Sunday. But this joyful celebration ends on a note of tragedy. *And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it.* (Luke 19:41). He grieves that Jerusalem fails to recognize the time of their visitation and receive the things that make for peace. The consequences of their failure to know or recognize the day of his visitation are severe. And it begs the question, why did they fail to recognize the day of their visitation?

In his last two messages, Stuart focused on our going and His coming. There is the reality that our current lives are not our homes and we will all die and have eternal life. And there is the reality that Jesus will come again and we will appear before His righteous judgment. In both messages, the application was the effect on our lives if we were more aware and mindful of these realities that are often obscured by the world around us. Continuing in that same vein, there is also the reality that Jesus has come into our lives on this side of eternity. And this reality is also obscured for us much of the time. (*hidden from your eyes* Luke 19:42) Like the Jews who *did not recognize the time of [their] visitation* we can struggle to be aware of Jesus' presence and purpose in our daily lives. We tried to glean ways that his happens to us by looking at why it happened to the Jews of Jesus' day.

They had the wrong expectations of what He would bring, thinking He would deliver Israel from the power of the Roman Empire. They expected His visitation to have more impact on their temporal lives than it did. Jesus did have a huge impact for some, primarily through his healing and deliverance ministry. But He did not change the political or economic order and thereby eliminate political and economic oppression from the Roman Empire.

Don't we also struggle with expectations? We look to the presence of Jesus in our lives to impact our circumstances. And while this happens and we praise God for that, it also at times does not happen according to our expectations. And when we experience this, we lose sight of the truth that He is still present. Because He is not present in the way that we expect, we can have a hard time worshipping Him for who He is. He is hidden from our eyes. We need to cultivate a faith (defined in Hebrews 11:1 *the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen*) that is able to recognize His presence and His worthiness when our expectations are not being met. Our lives, and especially our worship, need to be based on this faith and not on our present circumstances.

It is clear that there was an issue of authority between Jesus and the religious leaders that contributed to their inability to recognize Jesus for who He was. They specifically ask Him where His authority was coming from (Luke 20:1-8). In his response, Jesus exposes the motives behind these religious leaders in their own decision with regard to His authority. They are mainly concerned with protecting their positions of status and respect. That is why they will not answer the question about John the Baptist. They fear what the crowd will think more than they fear God.

Jesus then tells a devastating parable about wicked tenants in terms of what it communicates about the religious leaders (Luke 20:9-19). And even they understand this parable and that they are the tenants. What is most damning in this parable is that the tenants recognize the son and kill him with the motivation of gaining ownership of the vineyard. This is not a case of being unable to recognize the son, this is a case of murderous rebellion. It is difficult to discern how to understand the application to the religious leaders. Do they really know who Jesus is and think that by killing Him they will somehow gain what is His? I think this is more from God's perspective than their own awareness of what they are doing. Elsewhere in Luke they are portrayed as blind (although there are reasons for their blindness). But their failure to recognize Jesus is fed

by their own reluctance to acknowledge His authority over them, because it would mean giving up their own positions of authority and submitting to Him. So, in a sense, they are killing Jesus in order to retain possession of something that belongs to God, which is their lives and His rightful place of authority in their lives.

We also may be reluctant to submit to Christ's authority, preferring to live our lives the way we think is best for us. And though we may not be aware of it, we are in rebellion against His rule. If there is an area of our lives that we are not submitting to Christ's authority, that will prevent us from recognizing His presence in our lives. We may in fact be suppressing that awareness because of what it would mean in terms of obedience. We also looked at Jesus cleansing the Temple, which is the first thing that He does when He arrives in Jerusalem (Luke 19:45-46). This is a scene of judgment. Jesus enters the temple, observes what is going on, and finds it objectionable. So objectionable that He casts the sellers out. But what is so objectionable? Jesus declares, *"It is written, My house shall be a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of robbers."* Jeremiah 7 refers to a den of robbers and gives key insight in what Jesus means by this phrase. A den of robbers is their hideout, where they retreat to in order to avoid being brought to justice for their crimes. It is not the place where they are doing the robbing. It was their place of sanctuary and safety from justice. In Jeremiah 7, God says that this is how His people are treating the Temple. They believe that worship in the Temple will save them from judgment for their sins. As a result, there is no repentance. They feel a freedom to sin without any consequences from God. In making this statement. Jesus is saying that the same thing is happening in that day.

The sacrificial system was intended to emphasize God's holiness and the seriousness of sin. It was supposed to bear the fruit of increased devotion to God in the form of living holy lives unto Him. But the way that it was being practiced was having the opposite effect. It was meant to provide a freedom from sin that spurred people onto a greater pursuit of holiness, but it had become a freedom from holiness that gave license to sin without punishment. So a religious practice, instituted by God in order to bring His people closer to Him had become a practice that was actually separating His people from Him.

Spiritual truths and practices can operate in this same way in our lives. The way that much of the church in our country understands and practices grace is an example. There is a celebration of acceptance and affirmation that is focused on building up self-esteem rather than honoring God. There is much talk of God's grace and love and very little talk of His holiness and righteousness. There is much talk of fulfilled and flourishing lives and little to no talk of sin and repentance. This all appeals to our culture and will grow a church, but does it bring people closer to God? I fear that these churches are more of a hindrance than a help when it comes to people recognizing the presence and purposes of Jesus in their lives.

There is also the opposite side of that coin, the pursuit of righteousness that is more about self-righteousness than pleasing God. Anything that promotes self-righteousness in us is a barrier to our drawing closer to God. The only way for us to draw closer to God is through Christ. Jesus said in John 14:6, *"No one comes to the Father except through me."*

Prior to the story of Palm Sunday is the story of the healing of blind man. This is significant because the people in Jerusalem need to be healed of the blindness that causes them to fail to recognize Jesus for who He is. We too need to be healed so that we are able to recognize Jesus's presence in our lives, to be strengthened and comforted by that awareness, and to be filled with praise and worship when we have that sight.

Lord, please help us to recognize
what is hidden from our eyes. (verse inspired by Devin ☺)
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