

Sunday, 25 July 2021

Welcome

Hey church fam.

Hopefully, God willing this won't go on much longer but who knows. So we're planning online services and vlogs for the next 4 weeks at least. Rachel has also put Sunday school packs together for the families and will be sending them around. If you haven't gotten yours yet, please speak to Rachel.

I've been reflecting on this lockdown and comparing it to last year's lockdown. I've noticed that this lockdown has been particularly hard for some people. I have a cousin who is going through the HSC this year and he's pretty resilient but this lockdown has taken quite a toll on him. It must be hard to cope with life feeling like it's on hold right now. There's a lot of angst I hear when I talk to some people. Can I ask for a favour? Could you call someone this week and check up on them? Call them up and ask them if they are okay? Sometimes the best thing that we can do is to listen to someone.

I also want to say that I know that you look to me as your spiritual leader, but as I read the Scriptures, I'm reminded that ultimately Jesus is our leader and the head of the church. And when I look at what church looks like in the Scriptures, it's really every member contributing to the church with their individual gifts for the good of one another. It's not just up to Rachel and me, or the elders, or Margaret, or June, or Valerie, but it's every single one of you. And it's as simple as loving one another. Church isn't about being a spectator like you might at a sporting event, you get involved. So that's what I want to encourage you this morning with.

Book Recommendation

I wanted to recommend a book today, it's only a very small book. It's called *Christ and Calamity*, by Harold L. Senkbeil. It's a great book because it encourages us to look to Jesus in whatever calamity we face. And I wanted to read a quote from it,

The secret to maintaining an even keel in storm-tossed situations and to finding persistent hope in the midst of your suffering: seeing your affliction as your personal link to Jesus. Because he is "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Isaiah 53:3), you can be sure you are not alone in your suffering. Jesus is there with you. Because he bore your misery ahead of you and experienced it in a human body just like yours, your pain is sanctified in his. Emotional or physical distress can be endured not because you have sufficient grit and determination to push through it on your own, but because he is alongside you. (page 37-38)

Maybe you find yourself in storm-tossed situations. Maybe you find yourself in a difficult moment right now, and there doesn't seem to be an end in sight. Remember that Jesus knows. He understands completely what you are going through. Just as the writer to the Hebrews says,

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Hebrews 4:14-15 (ESV)

The writer argues that Jesus who is able to understand our weaknesses because he himself became a human being, he was tempted like we are, but didn't sin. It means that he understands exactly what you and I go through. He understands and knows all our weaknesses. He understands what it means to be human. Whatever it is you are going through, Jesus understands. Isn't that a comfort? I love what the writer then says next,

Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Hebrews 4:16 (ESV)

Let us draw near.

Mark 11:11-25 (ESV)

I'm going to ask Rachel to read to us from the Scriptures.

Mark 11:11 And he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple. And when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

Mark 11:12 On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry. 13 And seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see if he could find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. 14 And he said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard it.

Mark 11:15 And they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. 16 And he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. 17 And he was teaching them and saying to them, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers." 18 And the chief priests and the scribes heard it and were seeking a way to destroy him, for they feared him, because all the crowd was astonished at his teaching. 19 And when evening came they went out of the city.

Mark 11:20 As they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots. 21 And Peter remembered and said to him, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered." 22 And Jesus answered them, "Have faith in God. 23 Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. 24 Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. 25 And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses."

Devotional

Let me pray before we look at this passage,

Heavenly Father,

We ask that you would continue to speak to us in your word this morning. As we continue our series in Mark, we pray that you would reveal more about your son Jesus Christ, and the good news. We know that there is infinite depth to Jesus Christ and his gospel, so we ask that you would reveal new truths, deepen our love for him and his beauty and that you would remind us of old truths.

In Jesus name, Amen

Introduction

As we continue our series in Mark, I wanted to ask, what is the first that you do each day? When you get up? When I get up, I have to be honest, the first that I look at is my phone. I check to see if there are any messages or phone calls. When I had a smart phone, I would often check my emails as well. Now that I don't have smart phone, I now check Rachel's smartphone. I can imagine Rachel rolling her eyes at me. But you know, even with lockdown, I find that I can be really busy with a lot of activity. I reckon, I pick up my phone maybe 10 times an hour. And so that's about 120 times each day. It's a little crazy.

What do you do when you first get up? I ask that because it shows us where our priorities are. I know that many of you have a lot on your plate. People to see, places to go, things to do. And it's only going to get busier once lockdown finishes. This passage that we're looking at shows us what Jesus' priority is. And it's really his relationship with God.

Today, I want to talk about three things. The importance of our relationship with Jesus. The importance of faith and prayer. And finally, why we can have a relationship with Jesus.

The Importance of Our Relationship with Jesus

Let's look first at the importance of our relationship with Jesus. Because Jesus here in this passage has just entered into Jerusalem on a colt. He is the true king in the line of King David. He comes humbly on a donkey to show that he is the true ruler of Israel. But it's interesting because where is the first place that Jesus goes to when he enters into Jerusalem? He goes to the temple.

The temple in the Old Testament was a place where God would meet with the people of Israel. It was the place where the high priest would enter the Holy of Holies, in the presence of the LORD to ask for forgiveness, to give thanks, and praise God for the people of Israel. It's really where the LORD would meet with his people. It signified that the importance of Israel's relationship was with the LORD.

Recently, Rachel and I have been moving things around the house. And I hate to admit it but do you know what is the centre piece of our house, downstairs? It's the television now. Rachel and I have really been getting into this television show on Channel 9. Can you guess what it is? It's Beauty and the Geek. It's a television show where beauties are paired up with geeks and they have to work together through the the season to win the ultimate prize. I think Rachel and I really like watching it because it reflects our relationship. Me being the beauty and Rachel being the geek. Just kidding. You know it's the other way around. But the television is prominent in our house. It's where we spend a lot of time. It's often where we centre our lives especially during this lockdown (sadly).

And in the same way, the temple that Jesus is at, was the place where the Israelites would spend time with the LORD. It's the centre of their relationship with God where they would gather to worship the LORD. It is the centre of their national identity. So maybe you can see why Jesus is really upset when he goes into the temple. We're told that when he goes in the next day, that he "began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. And he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple." (Mark 11:16-17 ESV) This shows us that the temple was really important to Jesus as well. Jesus is concerned because the money changers and those selling things are in the temple. They're not supposed to be in the temple! Yes, sacrifices could be sold for people making their way to Jerusalem but they're not supposed to be sold inside the temple. The problem that Jesus is pointing out is the fact that the temple has become a place

of trade. It's no longer a place of relationship. It's no longer a place of prayer. It's no longer a place of worship. That's Jesus' problem with what the temple has become. The temple should be a place of prayer for the nations (Isaiah 56:7, Jeremiah 7:11).

I wonder whether we are more concerned about busyness, business and activity. Here is a warning for us, that busyness, noise can distract us from what really is important. Let me ask, are we concerned about the things that Jesus is concerned about? Are we concerned about our relationship with God? Do we see its importance?

Pete Scazzero says this about this passage,

Jesus' intense anger and overturning of the tables in the temple courts ought to make us gasp. He knows that if we don't get to God, invaluable treasures will be lost or obscured. We lose the space where we experience God's unfailing love and amazing forgiveness. We lose an eternal perspective on what is important and what is not. We lose compassion. We gain the world but lose our souls.

I know I keep harping on this at Caringbah but how is your relationship with Jesus? Because if we don't make it a priority, I can guarantee that activity, and busyness will be the order of the day and you will miss out on a wonderful relationship with Jesus. You will lose space to experience God's unfailing love and amazing forgiveness.

During our sabbatical earlier this year, Rachel encouraged me to spend time in the word each morning before starting. And it's something that's stuck with me. Now, I have to be honest, I don't spend as much time in the Word as I did on that Sabbatical. What I've tried to do now is to spend time with Jesus on a more regular occurrence. This is what I might do, after breakfast, I spend 10 minutes in the word. After lunch, I might spend time in silence, and say the Lord's prayer. And then after dinner I might read something from a devotion. Regular time that is shorter in time might be more helpful.

That's the first point, the importance of our relationship with Jesus.

The Importance of Faith and Prayer

Let's talk about the second point, because Jesus highlights the importance of faith and prayer. In our relationship with God, faith and prayer is really important. It's like

any kind of relationship we need trust. And Jesus highlights that trust, faith is just as important in our relationship with God.

Let me show you, what does Jesus says in verse 22 and 23?

And Jesus answered them, "Have faith in God. Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours." Mark 11:22-24 (ESV)

Faith is so so important. Can you think of a friendship, a relationship where trust is lost? It's actually really difficult to have a relationship isn't it? It takes time to build. I wonder whether we see faith as important in our relationship with God. If you're listening, and you don't trust God, why is that?

Here's a test to see whether you trust God. Do you pray? Because Jesus makes a link between faith and prayer. Jesus is saying that prayer is an outworking, a sign that you have trust in God. If you trust in God, you're going to pray. That's what Jesus is saying here. That you trust God through prayer. Can I encourage you, trust and pray. Trust by praying.

Now, you might hear Jesus' words here and you balk at what he says, if he believes it comes to pass, it will be done for him. You hear what he says and you say, "surely he's not going to give me anything I ask for!?" But that's not what Jesus is saying. We can trust that God will answer our prayers. Maybe not in the way that we want them answered, but they will be answered. It's like those of us who are parents, our children may ask us for something but we know in our wisdom that what they have asked for is not good for them. Infinite amount of money will not be good for our children. And in the same way, our Father in Heaven knows what is best for us. He hears our prayers and in his infinite wisdom, infinite love and sovereignty answers our prayers perfectly for our good and his glory.

Let me ask again, do you show your faith in God through your prayers? I'm not talking about routine prayers, but I'm talking about bold, heart felt prayers to God where you honestly pour out your emotions and your heart to him.

So our relationship with God involves faith and prayer. But I want to take a moment and talk about forgiveness in our relationship with God. Because we see Jesus talk

about forgiveness in verse 25 and I want to suggest to you that our relationship with other people affects our relationship with God. See what Jesus says,

And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. Mark 11:25 (ESV)

Jesus says that we need to learn to forgive others if we want to grow in our relationship with the LORD. When the pharisee asks Jesus what is the greatest commandment, do you notice that Jesus effectively talks about two things? Love the LORD with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and love your neighbour as yourself. They're like two sides of the same coin. And I think that Jesus is saying that a lack of forgiveness of others reflects our relationship with the LORD. If you're holding onto bitterness against other people, you have to learn to forgive. I'm not saying you need to reconcile to become friends again or trust that person again, but you need to learn forgiveness just as the LORD has forgiven you. Please don't hear me say that you need to reconcile with someone. There's a difference between forgiveness and reconciliation. Forgiveness is a choice that we make to take on the cost of other people wrong doing. Reconciliation takes both parties. I know that is hard but we need to choose forgiveness.

Why we can have a relationship with Jesus

The importance of our relationship with Jesus. The importance of faith and prayer. Let's talk about why we can have a relationship with Jesus. Don Carson, a NT scholar, talks about how our society is more concerned about whether we accept God rather than whether God accepts us. I want to say he is right. When we read through Scripture, it's more important that God accepts us.

We don't think about that very often, it's really a privilege that we have a true, living and personal relationship with God. And it's all been accomplished through Jesus. Where Jesus curses the fig tree in this passage, Jesus is actually showing us there is a better way than the temple of God, it's actually through his own body. As he died on the cross, we're told that the temple curtain was torn in two. It's a sign of how the old way of approaching God through the temple was dead and it's now through Jesus. The great high priest that we can have a relationship with God.

Are we thankful for the relationship we have? That we have the Holy Spirit in our hearts so we no longer need to worship God in a place, but we can worship in spirit and in truth (John 4). That is the power of the cross we have. Just as the song by Stuart Townsend says,

Now the ground beneath

Quakes as its Maker bows His head.

Curtain torn in two,

Dead are raised to life;

'Finished!' the victory cry.

Oh, to see my name

Written in the wounds,

For through Your suffering I am free.

Death is crushed to death,

Life is mine to live,

Won through Your selfless love.

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, thank you that through Jesus' death and resurrection, we have a relationship with you. Help us to slow down so that we can receive your love more fully. In Jesus name, Amen.

Church Family Prayer

I thought I would get Lucas, Daniel and Caroline's son to pray the church family prayer.

Dear God,

Thank you that you love us and that you sent Jesus to save us. We pray for our church family. Please give comfort to those who are feeling sad. Help them to remember that You are always with them. Please take care of those who are feeling sick. Help them to get better quickly. We pray for those who are worried about the coronavirus. Help them to trust you and know that You are in control. Please keep us all safe and healthy and help the virus go away soon. Help us to give thanks each day and help us to spend time with You by reading the Bible and praying.

In Jesus name we pray,

Amen

Closing

Thanks Lucas! It's so encouraging to have him pray. We want more people to be involved so if you would also like to write your own prayer or read out a prayer that we've written please let us know.

Okay, let me give you the benediction.

And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen. 1 Peter 5:10-11 (ESV)

You can click in the description box below for some hymns I've chosen. That's all for this week. Please keep safe and see you soon. Bye!

Here's some hymns for today,

The Power of the Cross: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hZIKmNlqpVQ>

Jesus Loves Me (Kid's Song): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=owx3ao42kwl>

Turn Your Eyes: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F2tKVqZZiI4>

Tell Out My Soul: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qf3mgRUZkAk>