

Sunday, 22 August 2021

Welcome

Good morning church! Another week in lockdown. And as you would have heard on Friday, the lockdowns have been extended until at least the end of September now!

There's three announcements this week.

Rachel's VLOG

If you haven't already done so, check out Rachel's vlog and what we get up to. A day in the life of Rachel and Justin. Julie thinks that my favourite drink is coffee. I think with this lockdown, it's becoming my favourite drink again! Also, have you done the exercise? If not, read James 1 and share with someone what stood out to you.

Committee of Management

A message from the Committee of Management. Thank you church family for your faithful weekly giving to our Lord through direct debit or otherwise, including over this current time when our income is less. For those who normally either give to the Lord with the church envelopes or in cash, you may wish to deposit or transfer your offering directly into the church bank account yourself, or you are welcome to contact Sid Wishart (0439 644566) or John Rolland (0408 006473) and they would be happy to assist you in confidence by calling at your door. Our bank details are below:

- Caringbah Presbyterian Church
- BSB 062-136
- Account Number 0090-0330

Prayer times

A message from John Rolland. How about sharing in your own home on zoom (phone or video) with others at one of our prayer times at 7.30 – 8.00am on Wednesdays and Saturday mornings – you would be very welcome – contact John for the zoom link.

A Challenge

So as you know, each week I've been laying down a challenge for each one of us. I'm trying to help us grow in our love and enjoyment of God, and our love for one another. These challenges are one way of helping us grow.

This week's challenge is the challenge that Rachel laid down in her vlog. Read James 1, and share with someone what stood out to you!

Prayer

With that in mind, I'm going to read from Psalm 13. I shared about this a few weeks ago, and I encouraged you with the acronym CAT. Cry out. Ask him. And trust God. It's something that we all need to learn to do, especially when we find ourselves in difficult circumstances.

Psa. 13:0 To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David.

Psa. 13:1 How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?

How long will you hide your face from me?

2 How long must I take counsel in my soul

and have sorrow in my heart all the day?

How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

Psa. 13:3 Consider and answer me, O LORD my God;

light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death,

4 lest my enemy say, "I have prevailed over him,"

lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken.

Psa. 13:5 But I have trusted in your steadfast love;

my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.

6 I will sing to the LORD,

because he has dealt bountifully with me.

Loving Heavenly Father, thank you that we can worship you wherever we are. We don't need to gather at a temple, for you desire people who worship you not in a place but you desire people who worship you in spirit and in truth. So thank you that even though we are at home, we can still worship you, because your spirit dwells in us, and we have your word to encourage us. We pray this morning, we would be strengthened. We ask that we would remember that we can trust in your steadfast love, we can rejoice in your salvation, we can give praise to you. In Jesus name, Amen.

Confession

I was reading through 1 Timothy 3, and you might know it as the Scripture that talks about the requirements of elders and deacons. But I came across a confession that Paul declares. I don't mean confession like confessing sins, but a confession where you declare something that is true. Paul declares the truth of Jesus Christ, becoming a man. And it appears that this confession was used by the early church, as a way to remember what Christ accomplished. I thought it would be great for us as church today to say it out loud together.

Beyond all question, the mystery from which true godliness springs is great:

He was manifested in the flesh,

vindicated by the Spirit,

*seen by angels,
proclaimed among the nations,
believed on in the world,
taken up in glory.*

1 Timothy 3:16 (ESV)

Scripture Reading

I'm going to ask Rachel to read to us from Mark 13 (ESV).

Mark 13:1 As Jesus was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!"

Mark 13:2 "Do you see all these great buildings?" replied Jesus. "Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."

Mark 13:3 As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him privately, 4 "Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?"

Mark 13:5 Jesus said to them: "Watch out that no one deceives you. 6 Many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and will deceive many. 7 When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. 8 Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains.

Mark 13:9 "You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. 10 And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. 11 Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry before-

hand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.

Mark 13:12 “Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. 13 Everyone will hate you because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.

Mark 13:14 “When you see ‘the abomination that causes desolation’ standing where it does not belong—let the reader understand—then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. 15 Let no one on the housetop go down or enter the house to take anything out. 16 Let no one in the field go back to get their cloak. 17 How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! 18 Pray that this will not take place in winter, 19 because those will be days of distress unequalled from the beginning, when God created the world, until now—and never to be equaled again.

Mark 13:20 “If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, whom he has chosen, he has shortened them. 21 At that time if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Messiah!’ or, ‘Look, there he is!’ do not believe it. 22 For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. 23 So be on your guard; I have told you everything ahead of time.

Mark 13:24 “But in those days, following that distress,

“ ‘the sun will be darkened,

and the moon will not give its light;

25 the stars will fall from the sky,

and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.’

Mark 13:26 “At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. 27 And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.

Mark 13:28 “Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. 29 Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door. 30 Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. 31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

Mark 13:32 “But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 33 Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. 34 It’s like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.

Mark 13:35 “Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. 36 If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. 37 What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’ ”

Devotional

Before we look at this passage, let’s pray.

Father, this passage is perhaps one of the hardest to understand in all of the gospel of Mark. We pray that you would help us to understand it, and to respond to it with humility. Please help us to see that Christ reigns. In Jesus name, Amen.

Finding Ourselves in the Midst of Chaos

Well in one of the episodes of The Simpsons, Bart’s told that he’s about to repeat the fourth grade because he has failed too many exams! He has one last hope, one

final exam before they make a decision to repeat fourth grade so he tries to study. If he fails, he repeats. But every time he studies, he gets distracted! Until finally, the night before the exam, he prays. He prays to God and asks, please God, send anything! Send a blizzard, a snow storm just so that I have one extra day to study. Lisa, his sister, overhears him and says, "Prayer the last refuge of a scoundrel" Bart is absolutely desperate. He needs a miracle, maybe he's wondering, "Does God care?"

Sometimes, for us, it feels like that too! Does God care? Maybe, right now, that's a question you're asking, does God care about me in the midst of the pandemic? Or maybe you're asking a related question, "Where can I find hope in a world full of chaos?" That's the flip question really. Does God care? Where can I find hope? Two sides of the same coin. In a world where we feel like life can be so out of control, it's what we struggle with.

Today, Rachel read out to us Mark 13. We come across a scene where Jesus is with his disciples, Peter, James, John and Andrew and they're marvelling at the temple. It's majestic. And yet, Jesus tells them something really surprising, the temple will be destroyed, every stone will be thrown down. It will be chaos, there will be death. It will be uncomfortable for those who have to go through such a difficult moment. You can imagine how the disciples would have felt. Shocked. Gobsmailed. How could this happen? Utter disbelief. Does God care? Where can we find hope?

Perhaps, that's what we feel right now. Maybe it's what we have felt in the last 18 months. Does God care? How can I find hope? What do we do when we find ourselves in the midst of chaos? This passage is an encouragement to us. And it helps us because it reminds us of one truth and one response. One truth and one response. The one truth: Jesus is still in charge. The one thing to do: stand firm.

Jesus is Still in Charge

Let's talk about the first point. That Jesus is still in charge.

So here in this passage, Jesus is speaking to his close disciples, Peter, James, John and Andrew, and they ask him when the temple will be destroyed. In Jerusalem, the temple was the centre of Jewish life. It's where priests would sacrifice lambs, it was where people would come to worship God. And here the disciples ask Jesus for signs to know that the temple is about to be destroyed. "When will the temple be destroyed?"

Recently, I've been ordering a lot of things online. It's just easier. Do you know how I know that my package is about to arrive? Because Mary, our dog, starts barking. She starts barking because the doorbell gets rung. Or she manages to hear their footsteps. The sign that I have a package is that Mary starts barking.

Jesus tells his disciples that they can tell that the temple will be destroyed when they see signs of chaos. There will be false prophets, false messiahs (v6), there's going to be wars (v7-8), earthquakes and famines (v8). These are signs to look out for. Because when you see these things, that's when the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem is going to happen.

In fact, Jesus gives one big hint that the temple is going to be destroyed. Have a look at verse 14,

But when you see the abomination of desolation standing where he ought not to be (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.
Mark 13:14 (ESV)

This actually happened. In 70A.D. the Roman Empire laid siege to the city of Jerusalem. Emperor Vespasian had ordered the Roman army to attack the Jews. The Jews were revolting against the Roman Empire so the temple is completely destroyed!

How would you react if your whole world came crumbling down? Maybe, you might feel desperate, you might feel like things are futile. I'm sure that those who witnessed the temple being destroyed would have felt that. Perhaps that's what the disciples listening to Jesus would have felt. For us, this last year, may have caused us to feel desperate, to feel that things are futile. I'm sure we would feel absolutely helpless. We would feel like God doesn't care, that God is not in control, that God is distant. We might find ourselves looking for a way out right?

But Jesus gives his people comfort. But I want to draw your attention to some key verses here in the chapter that should be comfort to us. These key verses remind us that Jesus is still in charge. Have a look with me, Jesus is speaking and he says this,

But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And then he will send out the angels and gather his

elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven. Mark 13:24-27 (ESV)

There's actually debate around what this passage means. Some people believe that Jesus is talking about his second coming. Jesus coming from heaven to earth in glory at the end of time. Other people suggest that Jesus is talking about his ascension to heaven. That the Son of Man goes to the Ancient of Days and is given dominion and power. Personally, I think that it's talking about Jesus' ascension to heaven after his death and resurrection. Not about his second coming. I think that because in this passage, he tells them that once the temple has been destroyed it will happen and it will happen in this generation (v29-31). But there's still debate around this.

But what is clear from this passage is that Jesus is painting a picture of him being in charge. Despite the chaos, Jesus is greater. That's the kind of image we're meant to see. Jesus is greater than the destruction, the chaos, the tribulation. Because Jesus is actually referring to an Old Testament passage. Daniel 7, where Daniel the prophet has a vision of one like the Son of Man, who is given dominion, glory and a kingdom by God. Whose dominion is an everlasting kingdom, a kingdom that will not be destroyed. It's a picture of a ruler that would be stronger, greater, mightier than any king. It's interesting because Daniel has this vision, in the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon. The king of Babylon was the strongest king at that time and God gives Daniel a vision of someone who will be stronger, greater, than the strongest king reigning at the time. Jesus is telling his disciples that no matter how out of control life appears, he is in charge.

I have this memory when I was in primary school. My family and I were overseas on a holiday, and I remember being at a resort swimming in the pool. All of a sudden, I black out, I have no memory of what happened next. All I remember was waking up besides the pool and there was a lifesaver over me. Apparently, I had nearly drowned and I don't even remember the situation. I didn't realise it at the time, but lifesavers were actually watching over the whole pool. They were in charge. And I'm thankful that they looked out for me.

Jesus's point here is that no matter what chaos we may find ourselves in. Even if it feels like God is out of control, that is a lie. The truth we need to hold onto brothers and sisters is the fact that Jesus is still in charge. Sometimes, it's easy for us to look at our world and to start fearing. It's easy for us to find ourselves being plagued by anxiety, When will we get out of lockdown? "When will this world go back to nor-

mal? Will it? I love Paul's words in Romans 8, when he talks about all the difficulties we may find ourselves in, he says this,

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." Romans 8:35-36 (ESV)

Go through that list and ask yourself have you found yourself in any of those situations? Have you found yourself in trouble, distress, persecution, suffering, famine, nakedness, danger? It can feel like God has forgotten us in the tough times. But what does Paul then say?

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:37-39 (ESV)

Nothing will separate us because Jesus is still on the throne. Jesus still reigns. Jesus is still in charge. Here's a challenge, every time we think to ourselves that God is not with us, we should memorise these words from Romans 8. Learn them off by heart, write these precious words on our hearts. Because then we can answer these two questions, Does God care? Where can I find hope? Yes, God cares. And my hope can be found in Jesus. That's what we need to hold onto this morning. In fact, that's what we need to hold onto everyday. We need to hold onto the truth that Jesus is in charge.

Stand Firm

But we need to talk about what we need to do in response. And the answer to that is stand firm. Stand firm because Jesus is in charge. I want to do is draw your attention to the commands that Jesus gives to his disciples. Have a look with me,

*But **be on your guard**. For they will deliver you over to councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them.* Mark 13:9 (ESV)

And,

*And you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the **one who endures** to the end will be saved.* Mark 13:13 (ESV)

And,

*But **be on guard**; I have told you all things beforehand.* Mark 13:23 (ESV)

And,

***"Be on guard, keep awake.** For you do not know when the time will come."* Mark 13:33 (ESV)

And,

*Therefore **stay awake**—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning—lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: **Stay awake.*** Mark 13:35–37 (ESV)

You can tell it's important to Jesus what he's saying because he's repeated it several times. Be on your guard, stay awake. Endure. Watch out.

I'd like to summarise it as stand firm. The disciples are told that they are going to suffer. Some of them will be beaten, some of them will have to explain the reason for their faith, in fact some of them will be killed! And the command that Jesus gives them is to stand firm. Hold on even when they go through chaos, even when they go through suffering and difficult times. Even when life doesn't make sense. They are to stand firm.

That's encouraging for us this morning. Jesus words to you and me is that even when we find our worlds falling apart, we are to stand firm. To endure the suffering. I'm reminded of what Rachel shared this week. Reading James 1. I love what James says,

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. James 1:2–4 (ESV)

Jesus and James are saying something very similar. Endure, stand firm in the midst of difficult times because you know that it is making you grow in Jesus. It's kind of like the story of the three stonemasons who are working. A passerby asks the first

what he's doing and he replies that he's moving stones for a living. He asks the second what he's doing and he replies that he's doing the best job at cutting stones. The passerby asks the third what he's doing and he replies that he says, "I'm building a church."

It's a matter of perspective, isn't it? Standing firm might not make sense until we see it from God's perspective. Little by little, we're being changed, being made perfect, complete, lacking in nothing.

Are you standing firm? Are you enduring knowing that God has a purpose even in your pain? Are you being patient as you wait for Jesus to return at his second coming. That's what he's encouraging us to do in verses 32-37. Encouraging us to wait patiently until the master returns. Are you standing firm by being faithful with what he has asked you to do? Are you standing firm by telling others about the love of Jesus when the opportunities arise? Are you standing firm, trusting in Jesus, even when life doesn't make sense?

Stand firm, because Jesus is still in charge.

Let's pray.

Church Family Prayer

Okay, so I'm getting June Eggleton to pray today. June, could you please come down and lead the church family prayer for us please? Just kidding, I wanted to see how you'd react. Let's pray,

Loving Heavenly Father, we come as your children to bow before you in quietness, reverence, and humble obedience. And in that spirit, we take to heart and pray for ourselves the prayer which your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane: "Not my will, but yours be done."

We rest our souls in you. We cease striving after plans of our own making. We sacrifice all self-interest, pride and ungodly ambition before you. We repudiate all worldly gain, privilege and prestige. We refuse to be driven, controlled, or mastered by them.

We yield to you in glad and willing surrender. We acknowledge that your will is best, your way is good, and your paths are right. We affirm that our vision is clearest, our faith is strongest, and our life most rewarding when your will, not ours, is done.

It is humbling to realise that there is no good in us except what you have worked in us according to your good pleasure and will. It is humbling to think that we are like clay, of no use or value by ourselves, until we are shaped and moulded by the will of you, our Master. And yet with grateful thanks we acknowledge it to be true.

And we welcome your continued working. We submit to your discipline. We follow your leading. We heed your correction. And we defer to your greater wisdom.

Show us what sins hide you from us. Help us to humble ourselves for past evils. Grant us your grace to walk before you with greater care, consistency, and conviction.

Keep us meek and humble before you. By faith may we rest in your grace and so find your will. And knowing your will, may we continually evidence your love.

So, gracious Father, enable us never to run ahead of you, or lag behind you, but always keep step with you. May we ever await your will, ever pray for it to be done, always accepting of it, even when it crosses our own, and ever striving to be fully obedient to it, in Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Closing

That's the end of our service. I wanted to give you the Aaronic blessing,

The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.
Numbers 6:24-26 (ESV)

And if you want some hymns, please click on the description box below. If you have a hymn or song that you want to recommend, send it through and I'll include it in a future service! Okay, that's the end, bye for now!

I Surrender All: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JaHYX2eu9uo>

Little by Little: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SPN2B07ZLi8>

It is Well: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zY5o9mP22V0>

From Whom All Blessings Flow: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tP3CsHfU7dc>