

Sunday, 19 September 2021

Announcements

Hey church fam! We're getting closer to the end of lockdown. Hope you're doing okay at the moment. I want to acknowledge that it is hard, I'm finding this lockdown hard. But the other thing I want to acknowledge that we have a God who is looking after each one of us. Let's keep trusting in him. And let's keep reminding each other that our God is a strong God.

Challenge

As a challenge this week, I thought that we could try to find our rest in Jesus.
Matthew 11,

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Matthew 11:28-30 (ESV)

There's a book I have recently been reading, it's called, Gentle and Lowly, by Dane Ortlund. I find it's a great book because it's a reminder of how caring, and how loving our Lord Jesus is to each one of us. He's not a master that is demanding. But he's a master who is gentle towards you and me. Jesus was willing to draw near even with our sin because he loves you and me. In the book, Dane writes, "Go to Jesus. All that means is, open yourself up to him. Let him love you." Sometimes we are prone to forget that Jesus loves us. It's not because Jesus loves us less, it's because we have forgotten the truth of Jesus' perfect love. This week, I think it's worth us remembering Jesus' perfect love for us. Perfect love casts out our fear. I thought, every time you look at the mirror, tell yourself that Jesus loves you. And when you see another person, tell them that Jesus loves them.

With that in mind, let me pray

Heavenly Father, thank you for your son Jesus Christ. Thank you that Jesus is gentle and lowly. He cares for us, you have a perfect love for us. In this time of lockdown, in any time really, it can be easy to forget your presence. It is easy to forget your perfect love for us. So today, remind us of your perfect love, a perfect love that drives out fear and help us to look to Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. Please help us to cling to the truth of the gospel, to give thanks for all the blessings we have received from you hand and to continue to trust you until you call us home. In Jesus name, Amen.

Scripture

We're going to read Mark 15:1-32,

Mark 15:1 And as soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. And they bound Jesus and led him away and delivered him over to Pilate. 2 And Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" And he answered him, "You have said so." 3 And the chief priests accused him of many things. 4 And Pilate again asked him, "Have you no answer to make? See how many charges they bring against you." 5 But Jesus made no further answer, so that Pilate was amazed.

Mark 15:6 Now at the feast he used to release for them one prisoner for whom they asked. 7 And among the rebels in prison, who had committed murder in the insurrection, there was a man called Barabbas. 8 And the crowd came up and began to ask Pilate to do as he usually did for them. 9 And he answered them, saying, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" 10 For he perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered him up. 11 But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release for them Barabbas instead. 12 And Pilate again said to them, "Then what shall I do with the man you call the King of the Jews?" 13 And they cried out again, "Crucify him." 14 And Pilate said to them, "Why, What evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify him." 15 So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.

Mark 15:16 And the soldiers led him away inside the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters), and they called together the whole battalion. 17 And they clothed him in a purple cloak, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on him. 18 And they began to salute him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" 19 And they were striking his head with a reed and spitting on him and kneeling down in homage to him. 20 And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. And they led him out to crucify him.

Mark 15:21 And they compelled a passerby, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross. 22 And they brought him to the place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull). 23 And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. 24 And they crucified him and divided his garments among them, casting lots for them, to decide what each should take. 25 And it was the third hour when they crucified him. 26 And the inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." 27 And with him they crucified two robbers, one on his right and one on his left. 29 And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, 30 save yourself, and come down from the cross!" 31 So also the chief priests with the scribes mocked him to one another, saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. 32 Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also reviled him.

Mark 15:1-32 (ESV)

Devotional

Have you ever had great expectations for something but were disappointed? Where your expectations didn't match reality. Where you were disappointed because something didn't turn out how you thought it would? I have. Many times. And I'm sure you can think of a time.

Well, we're coming to the end of our time in the gospel of Mark, and we come to Jesus' crucifixion. And imagine for a moment that you were there watching this whole thing go down. Imagine that you were a disciple of his, following him. He said that he was the son of man, the kingdom of God has come. You'd been travelling with him for three years. You've lived with him, he's taught you, he's been your

teacher. And you've come to the realisation that he is the son of man, the son of God. That here is the true king sent from God, to set his people free. He is going to free your people from your enemy.

You have great expectations. And then suddenly, your king, your saviour, the one who you think is supposed to set you free from your enemy is betrayed. He is given over to the enemy, and he is killed at the hands of the enemy. You've betrayed him. You had great expectations. And now, you are absolutely devastated seeing your king, the one who would free your people, on a cross.

That's what it was for his disciples, their worlds are completely turned upside down. Their expectations were completely destroyed as they see Jesus betrayed, as Jesus is crucified. What would it do for your understanding of God? Maybe you might ask yourself, is God really in control? Is God really sovereign? How can he be powerful when he let such an evil thing to occur? It just doesn't make sense. Perhaps we think about these types of questions as Christians, when we are disappointed or our expectations don't match reality.

I want to encourage you this morning to see one really important truth. One simple truth that we need to remember, a truth that we see in this passage. And that is this: **God uses the weak to show his strength.** Let me repeat that, Our Father in Heaven often uses the weak to show his strength and power in our lives.

I want to show you from the passage that those who were around Jesus truly didn't understand who he was. They thought that he was weak, but God uses the weak to show his strength. Have a look at how the people around Jesus perceive him. Pilate asks him whether he is the king of the Jews, yet Jesus merely replies "You have said so." And look at how the Jews respond to him, they want him to be crucified. They would rather have a criminal released than having Jesus released. And have a look at the Roman soldiers,

And the soldiers led him away inside the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters), and they called together the whole battalion. And they clothed him in a purple cloak, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on him. And they began to salute him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" And they were striking his head with a reed and spitting on him and kneeling down in homage to him. And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. And they led him out to crucify him. Mark 15:16-20 (ESV)

They salute him as if he's the King of the Jews, but we know that they are merely mocking Jesus. We're told repeatedly by Mark that the crowd mocks Jesus. Repeatedly we're told that Jesus is mocked. Why? Because they don't understand that God uses weakness to show his strength. Have a look!

And the inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." And with him they crucified two robbers, one on his right and one on his left. And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!" So also the chief priests with the scribes mocked him to one another, saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. Mark 15:26-31 (ESV)

The chief priests and the scribes don't understand the irony. They think it's about saving himself, but really it's the opposite. It's about saving others. Saving his enemies. They don't understand the things of God. I wonder, whether we are the same. That we don't understand that God uses weakness, to show strength.

Maybe when you look at your circumstances, when you look at where God has placed you, you ask, How can God bring breakthrough? How is there any hope for me in a situation like this? Have you ever found yourself in a situation like that? Where you felt like God couldn't change it?

When we look at Jesus being crucified in this passage. It may *look like* a moment of weakness. But here's the thing, it's a moment of strength. Even when the crowd, the Romans, all mock Jesus and declare him to be the king of the Jews. They actually don't realise that he is actually the king of the Jews. In fact, not only is he the king of the Jews, he's king over the entire creation. I love how God does that. He uses the weak to show his strength. He used something like the Cross, a symbol of weakness and death, to show his ultimate strength, over sin, and Satan and death.

I wonder, whether we are in a situation of weakness, where we need God's strength. I tell you it's the best place to be. It's like the life of Paul, we're told in 2 Corinthians 12 that he had a thorn sent by the devil. A thorn that troubled Paul, we're not told exactly what the thorn is, some people suggest that maybe he couldn't see well, some people think that it was a difficult relationship. But the truth is we're not told exactly what the thorn is. But we're told that Paul asked the LORD to remove the thorn. In fact, Paul asks the LORD to remove it not once, not twice, but three times. And the LORD refuses.

Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 2 Corinthians 12:8-9 (ESV)

Can you imagine boasting in weaknesses? Recently, and to Rachel's delight, she's noticed that whenever I squat and get up, my right knee clicks. It clicks, but it doesn't hurt. But every time she hears my knee, she cracks up. She's laughing her head off, and then proceeds to remind me that I'm old. Now, I'm sure that some of us have more serious weaknesses, things that remind us that we're human, but can you imagine if you and I were to be proud, to boast, to glory in weaknesses? That's what Paul does, he revels in his weaknesses.

For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong. 2 Corinthians 12:10 (ESV)

Can we be like Paul, can we be like Christ, in being content with weaknesses, hardships, calamities? Knowing that it's through our weakness that Lord's power is made perfect in weakness. That in our weakness, when God's power works, people don't look at you and me, but rather look to God because they realise it's God's power? Maybe when we find ourselves weak, we need to remember that's okay, it's then we are strong because the LORD is our strength. The Lord is our refuge.

I want to share with you an example of God using the weak to show his strength. I recently read of a Christian doctor who went to Cambodia as a missionary. This was in the 1980s. And if you know anything about Cambodia back then, it was a very dangerous time. The communist party, the Khmer Rouge, ruled between 1975 to 1979. They were considered to be as vile, dangerous and hardened sinners that the world has ever known. In fact, they were as bad as the Nazi SS. They would imprison, interrogate, and kill anyone who opposed them. This included Christians. And yet in 1980, a Christian doctor went to minister to the Khmer Rouge. Except, by the doctor's own accounts, he had a major weakness, he had bouts of deep depression that meant that he couldn't share the gospel effectively. Apparently, all he could do when he was there was tell people of their sins, he couldn't share the gospel! But with him ministering, was a retired missionary minister who only went because he knew Cambodian, there was also a brand new convert from the Khmer Rouge, and another Khmer Rouge patient who was sick with one of the most fatal form of malaria. And yet through these four weak vessels, revival occurred. Many

Khmer Rouge people came to know Christ. Revival in the most unlikely of places, with the most unlikely of people. Let me ask, could these four individuals boast in the number of converts that they had? No. They couldn't. It is God who uses the weak to show his strength.

Let's boast in our weakness, and see God work in his strength,

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we often find ourselves in situations of weakness. Where there appears no hope. But you are a God who delights to use those who are weak, for your glory. Through weakness, you show yourself as strong. We ask that you would help us to find comfort in that truth. When we are weak, we are strong because of you. When we look to your son Jesus Christ, as he hung on the cross, that was the ultimate sign of weakness, and yet strength.

Heavenly Father, we yearn to meet with one another face to face. Please help that to happen soon. For us who are struggling with lockdown, give us a peace that transcends all understanding and help us to find our rest in you. We pray for those who have lost loved ones recently, we ask that you give those the comfort that they need. We ask that you would strengthen each one of us that we may grow in our knowledge of your son, to love him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. And to love others as ourselves. Please help us to put other people's interests first just as Jesus did as he came to this world, taking on human flesh, becoming a man, and serving us through his life, death and resurrection.

Heavenly Father, thank you so much for your steadfast love, thank you so much for your grace. Help us to practice contentment, help us to give you thanks for all that you've given us. And help us LORD, to look to you, our Father, our shepherd, our king, our guide. In Jesus name, Amen.

Closing

Well that's the end of our service. We're one week closer to seeing each other. Please look after yourselves, be safe and see you soon. Let me give you the benediction,

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor? Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen. Romans 11:33-36 (ESV)

That's the end of our service. See you soon!

God is Our Strength and Refuge: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bA0zJnW1R-r8>

Your Will Be Done: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8nLXXephYRI>

Yet Not I But Christ Through Me: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_HMLYoeB6I