

BEDWELL GLOBAL MINISTRIES

Expository sermon

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HE LOVES US...HE FREES US.....HE MAKES US

Scripture Reading – Revelation 1:4-8.

Introduction

We are in the midst of the Lenten season. It is a season in which we trace the footsteps of Jesus during the last few weeks of His life. We will soon bring to remembrance the final countdown before the Crises of the Cross and the invincible resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Preceding these two events was Palm Sunday. It was a significant event which had been part of the prophetic word found in Zechariah, where the prophet wrote, "See your King comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, on the foal of donkey..." Zechariah 9:9. As Jesus rode into Jerusalem the scriptures tells us that a very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from trees and spread them on the road and the crowds went ahead of Jesus and those that followed shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" "Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord!" "Hosanna in the Highest!" When He entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked who is this? The crowd answered: "This is Jesus a prophet from Galilee." Matthew 21:8-11. And so it was that Jesus arrived in Jerusalem on His mission to bring salvation to the world. Michael Wilkins wrote that He came as a King to the Holy City, not to establish a monarchy but to bring peace between God and humanity and among the nations, through His own death. There is symbolism in the way He came. He was a King who came riding on a donkey and not a war horse to do battle. He did not come to conquer Rome and overthrow the Roman Empire. He came on a donkey as the Prince of Peace to bring deliverance, not political deliverance, not freedom from Rome, but a freedom from the domination of sin, the domain of evil and the despair of darkness. Yet even Rome in the midst of powerful rule needed this deliverance. Jesus came to bring reconciliation between a Holy God and sinful human race, the fruit of which is peace with God and the gift of eternal life. The triumphant entry into the Holy City on Palm Sunday spoke of the dawn of a new day in the history of man. This ride through Jerusalem was full of hope and promise to a people living in darkness under the rule of evil powers. His entrance into Jerusalem is referred to as triumphal entry. He was welcomed by people with enthusiastic acclaim, great joy and exuberant celebration. Did the prophetic hope burn in their hearts that this man riding on a donkey could be the King for whom they had waited for so long. But this earthly

triumph was short lived by the tragedy of His rejection on a cross. However, His entry into the Holy City in triumph had prophetic over tones. It was I believe a prelude to something far greater and more permanent. This earthly transient glory was to be translated into an eternal glory beyond the realms of human imagination. Jesus was on route to that glory by way of the Cross.

We have a description of Christ's eternal glory in the Book of the Revelation. It is a description of the triumphant Lamb of God in all of His glory where the population of heaven exalts and worships Him continually. The ride through Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday seems to be a foreshadowing of the eternal triumph of the Son of God. Is it not a glimpse of a greater triumphant procession in the eternal city? It gives birth to the promise of a living hope which was fulfilled by the His invincible powerful march out of a sealed tomb and a victorious entrance into the courts of heaven. There He is recognized as the ruler of a greater universe with an eternal glory and power. The writer to the Hebrews 1st chapter and verse 3 describes the Son of God as "the Radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being," and the K.J.V. continues, "When He by Himself purged our sins, and sat down at the right Hand of the Majesty on high."

Jesus went from the triumphant streets of Jerusalem to the Cross and on into the tomb to be raised from the dead on the third day, and ascend to sit at the right Hand of His Father in triumphant glory.

Now John catches the joy of the fulfillment of this promise in the Revelation 1:5-6. "To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins with His own blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve His God and Father –to Him be glory and power forever and ever Amen." I suggest that this is the promise of the Easter event. I submit that at the heart of these words is the message of the cross and what it has accomplished for mankind. It pulsates with hope – it reverberates with love. In this succinct way John is describing the message and efficacy of Christ's vicarious sacrifice on the Cross. Three words leap out at us which describe as describing what is vital in the message of the cross. They are pillars of truth which are redemptive.

1. SOMETHING FUNDAMENTAL. Revelation 1: 5. What is fundamental to the gospel message is the truth that Jesus loves us. It is one of the unshakable provisions of God. This love is

a. The Basis of this Provision. Revelation 1:5

Here is a Divine assurance designed to keep us strong in times of difficulty and to inspire hope in the times of darkness. "To Him who loves us..." "This is the foundation of everything."(James Stewart) This is not something revolutionary, but God's word drives us to it because it is fundamental to hope and basic to salvation. All our expectations rest upon this truth. John describes it in his prayer of praise. It is "to Him who loves us." This burning truth dispels the darkness of despair. Is not the love of Jesus for us the spring of comfort and hope? Jesus loves us is an eternal truth. It is stronger than death, mightier than the devil and vanquishes the forces of hell. His love remains constant and unchangeable.

Jesus loves us is the message of the Easter season. It is a statement made in the present tense and simply says, "Jesus Christ loves us." No matter at what point in time we live Jesus loves us. The Cross-silhouetted against the eastern sky testifies to this. This fact in itself is something on which hope can cling and upon which it is built and on which faith stands. To know that we are loved by the Son of God is a reason for hope, furthermore it is a reason to keep on hoping no matter what happens. The fleeting glory of a transient world, the passing triumph of this fragile existence will fade into oblivion, but the love of Jesus is eternal and unchanging. It is the strength in every trial, the power to overcome in all of personal pain; it is the inner driving compulsion to endure to the end.

John at this moment of writing is a prisoner on the Isle of Patmos, and Patmos was no picnic. It was the place where suffering was a way of life. It was His prison. It was there that He was suffering for his faithful witness for the Lord Jesus Christ, and yet his hope holds on to this truth. Pain burst into praise, "To Him who loves usbe Glory.

Now the significance of this love takes on new meaning when you consider who it is that loves us. The Lord Jesus Christ is the one who has poured out His redemptive love upon us. Who He is makes all the difference to a man suffering the intense persecution of the Roman Emperor. In verse five there are "three titles that describe the person of Jesus (N.I.V.) Comm. P. 70) and they are followed "by three statements about His work." John tells us that Jesus Christ is,

i. The Faithful Witness. Revelation 1:5-6. He came into the world to "bear witness to the truth." (Stott. What Jesus thinks of His church? p.15). Throughout His ministry he was a faithful witness. John Stott wrote that "He never faltered, even when He suffered." (P. 15) He is also called,

ii. The First Born from the Dead. Revelation 1:5. "As the firstborn from the dead, the resurrection of Jesus was the guarantee that His followers would also be raised. (1Corinthians 15:20.) This being true "they had nothing to fear, even from death itself." (N.I.V. Comm. P. 70 on the Book of Revelation.) The third title given to Jesus is,

iii. The Rulers of the Kings of the Earth. Revelation 1:5. When you realize that the believers were suffering under "the agents of the Mighty Caesar, this title of Jesus would confirm their hope, and establish their faith and undergird their courage. This is the characteristic way in which Jesus is portrayed in the Book of the Revelation. The Gospels focus on Jesus as a servant. They emphasize His humility and humanity as well as His suffering. They tell us that God came to us in the form of a man, and that He laid down His life for the world so that we might have salvation. This is the message of the four Gospels, but in John's Revelation the focus is on Jesus, His Deity, His Glory, His Majesty and His Sovereignty. He is the king who has defeated the forces of evil forever. He is the risen conquering Lord, described as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Tied in within these titles in verse 5-6, are the three statements about His work. "He loves us." "He has freed us from our sins." "He has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve His God and Father." He loves us is the basis of this provision. But what is,

b. The Focus of Hope. Revelation 1:5. The focus of His Love that gives us hope is you and I. Paul writing in his letter to the Galatians knew this to be true. “The Son of God.... loved ME and gave himself up for ME.” Galatians 2:20. A.W. Tozer wrote that “it is hard for man to believe that God loves him. His own conscience tells him it could not be so.” But we need to be grateful that man’s accusing conscience does not determine or limit the nature, extent or effectiveness of God’s love. God’s love is such that death could not deter it from its purpose, nor destroy its power nor blunt the cutting edge of its efficacy. Love overcame the hellish darkness of demonic power and the malignant forces of Satan’s evil. This love emerged on Easter day, strong, uncompromising, conquering, triumphant, and untarnished. It came out of devastation, death, despair and the seeming defeat of the Cross victoriously, and man’s accusing conscience can have no effect on God’s love. The love of God for us is liberating. It emancipates us from a guilty conscience. Its focus is on is on each of us and gives us hope. This love is something fundamental. It is also,

2. SOMETHING EXPERIENTIAL. Revelation 1:5.

This truth alone inspires hope. Not only does Jesus love us, He has freed us from our sins by His Blood. In these words, John outlines for us the reasons why Christians can possess hope. The first reason is obvious. It is because,

a. Provision is made for our Salvation. Revelation 1:5. “He has freed us or has loosed us from our sins by His Blood.” He is the amazing God. Here is a God who was involved in man’s predicament. He came to it. He strode boldly towards it to confront and overcome it. He was not intimidated by the power of sin. He came to free us from it. And the message is strong and clear. He has freed us from our sins. You have heard the story told by James Stewart of what Heine saw when he stood before the great statue of Venus De Milo now displayed in the Louvre in France. He gazed at the spectacular and amazing work of art. It was no doubt a work of grace and beauty. He was impressed by the statue of a goddess who for some reason had no hands. But the beauty of the statue gripped him as he looked on it at length. But suddenly it dawned on him. It was beautiful, but “Oh!” he cried, “what was it worth? For she had no hands to reach out and help poor beaten souls like me” Of what good is a god or a goddess who stands aloof, isolated and resplendent in artistic beauty yet removed from man’s problems, predicament and sinful bondage. They have no message of hope to proclaim, no power to redeem, no authority to transform the life, no might to save the sinner. Do you find those kinds of gods in the midst of humanities brokenness and despair to be redemptive? They do exist but are simply cosmetic gods. Who needs gods like that? Yet modern man worships gods of the same stripe. They maybe not be cast in iron or molded in stone or crafted in marble. But they are there dominating men’s lives. Anything that takes precedence over the genuine God is man’s god or idol. However, the powerlessness of these gods does not seem to bother them. The Biblical God is set aside because he interferes too much in man’s comfortable life-style. While man’s created gods encourage ego enhancement and fulfillment, the God of the Bible exhorts men and

women to be crucified with Christ. These earthly deities are more concerned about pleasing man than they are about redeeming him. The Biblical God is ousted because He does not indulge man's self-centered life style. He provides a way out of it. To do this He came to us as a man and by His own choice sacrificed Himself for us. The men of this world did not understand Him. They said He was a winebibber who ate with sinners. He went to tea with Zacheous the despised tax collector. He went out of His way to Samaria to redeem a fallen out cast of a woman. He refused to condemn an adulteress but gave her a second chance and told her to sin no more. The world might say what a strange God this is who walks among sinners unafraid as though it was the most natural thing to do, and then turns around and dies for them. This is not understood. It is allusive mystery. Can this man from Galilee really be the Son of God? Should He not be in the heavens on His throne and disassociating with sinners? This man Jesus is a strange kind of God. He is so because He does not fit into our minds, or fit into our molds. We do not see the world as he sees it and we do not love the world as He loves it. A God who only sits on His throne cannot reach dying souls, and certainly He cannot die on a Cross for them. He is detached and isolated from them. But Jesus Himself said, "I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." Luke 5:32 and again "I came to seek and to save that which was lost." Luke 19:10. Paul said so simply and clearly, "for you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich for our sakes became poor that you through His poverty might become rich." 2 Corinthians 8:9. He was rich yet became poor for us. What amazing grace this is! John latched on to this when he wrote "He loves us and freed us from our sins." A provision has been made for our forgiveness and cleansing. But there is also a reason for hope because we can know,

b. The Power of the Cleansing Blood of Jesus. Revelation 1:5. John says here that Jesus freed us from our sins by His Blood. This gives insight into the incalculable cost of our salvation. It speaks of the incredible price He paid for us. The significant words here are "by His Blood." This is a direct reference to the great sacrifice Jesus made on Calvary's cross on our behalf. The death of Jesus was not the hopeless noble courageous act of a deluded martyr. By His death on the Cross we are saved. His death accomplished something. There is power in the cross to release us from all sin and is that not the reason for hope? One has said that Christ died that is History! Christ died for us that is Christianity! Christ died for me that is salvation!" James Stewart describe how when St. Augustine's end was near, his strength was fast ebbing away, he begged one of his friends and disciples to paint on the wall opposite his bed the words from the thirty second Psalm, "Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven whose sins covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit." Psalm 32:1-2. And the dying man lay there, gazing at the words, fixing his soul on them as the darkness of death gathered in. "Blessed the man who is forgiven." Will there be anything else worth clinging to at the last hour? "He loves us and has freed us from our sins." Charles Wesley knew this experience when he wrote those words MY chains fell off, my heart was free. I rose went forth and

followed thee.” The words of Francis Ridley Havergal’s hymn emphasize this truth, **“Nothing to pay! Yes nothing to pay! Jesus has cleared all the debt away. Blotted it out with His bleeding hand! Free and forgiven and loved you stand.”** John makes clear that there is a reason for hope because Jesus has “freed us or loosed us from our sins.” There is power in the Blood of Christ to cleanse us from all sin. This is no abstract theory. It is not speculation or conjecture. We can know the experience and joy of freedom from our sins. This is the promise of Easter. His love gives birth to hope. Then note this love works out as,

3. SOMETHING PRACTICAL. Revelation 1:6.

There is a progression of thought in John’s words, which filter with power and it is not without significance. **“He loves us! - He has freed us! And He has made us to be a Kingdom and priests to serve our God and Father.”** The power of the Cross working in our lives not only releases us from something destructive and damning, which is sin, but He makes us for something constructive and redeeming. We are made to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God and Father. The hope within us rests on privileges about which we have spoken, but now hope is tied together with responsibilities. There are two vital truths which are implicit in these words. The first truth is summed up in the word,

a. Dignity. Revelation 1:6. Jesus makes us to be a kingdom and priests to serve God the Father. Sin is always defiling and degrading. Sin may degrade a soul but never devalue a person. Sin never exalts a person. It is righteousness that does that. It is Jesus that gives the soul dignity. John stresses the truth that Jesus has freed us from our sins. He has loosed us from that which brings shame guilt and defilement into our lives. He has broken the shackles of sins and made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God and Father. We are no longer of the kingdom of darkness and Satan for Jesus has molded us into a kingdom of His design and making. He has made us into that which has beauty and holiness. These words were based on Exodus 19:6 “you will be for me a Kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” The Apostle Peter was caught up in the same truth for in his letter he wrote, “You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God.” (I Peter 2:9). There is a clear message here, that Jesus in the power of the Cross lifts men and women to the plains of righteousness and holiness. He gives to each redeemed soul a dignity which only God can give. Samuel Rutherford wrote with a sense of wonder, “I have a King’s life in Christ.” God always brings dignity to the life. The second truth in these words is summed up in the word,

b. Responsibility. Revelation 1:6. There are two phrases that strike me in this verse. “We have been made priests....” and the purpose of this is “to serve God the Father.” “He made us priests.” Under the old Jewish law only a priest had the right of access to a Holy God. It is said that when a Jew entered the temple, he could pass through the court of the Gentiles, the court of the women the court of the Israelites – but there he must stop. Into the court of the priest he could not go; no nearer to Holy of holies could he come. In the most holy place was the Presence of God. It was protected by a strong veil. It was

shrouded in mystery and entrance in that holy place would mean death. Only the High Priest could enter through that veil but once a year. He made sacrifice for himself and for the people. The Prophet Isaiah in a vision of great days to come foretold that “you would be called priests of the Lord.” In that day all the redeemed of the Lord would be priests and everyone would have free access to God. It would be free to them because Jesus paid the price at Calvary. By shedding His precious Blood He opened the way into God’s presence. When He died on that Cross, the Gospel writer tells us that veil in the temple hiding and protecting the Most Holy Place was split in two. This visible renting of the veil in two indicated that now we can enter to the very throne of God. Every redeemed person is a priest in this sense. The writer to the Hebrews confirms this truth when he informs us that we can come with confidence into the Holy of Holies by the Blood of Jesus. Hebrews 1):19-22. We have access to God on the basis of the shed Blood of Jesus. This is called the “universal priesthood of believers.”

Moreover John also adds something here. We are made priests in order to serve God our Father. The Apostle Peter in 1 Peter 2:9 goes on to say “you are royal priesthood that you may declare the praise of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light.” This is the recurring challenge to each Child of God. “You are made priests to serve God our Father.” John makes clear that each redeemed child of God has a responsibility to serve their God. Service is included in the package of salvation. We are saved to serve. Jesus our role model made clear that He came to this world not to be served but to serve. His commitment was such that He was willing to give His life a ransom for many. What is important is not the nature of the position of service we hold, but the attitude toward service we take. God is not looking for **stars**, **He is looking for servants** - Servants who are willing to serve no matter whether they get the credit or not. True servants of God, do not serve the assignment they serve the God who gives the assignment. This being true, means that it is not so much the assignment that is important, because primarily the service we give is to God. There is a familiar scrap of verse that brings this thought to the foreground. “You know Lord how I serve you with great emotional fervor. In the limelight ...but how would I react if you point to a basin of water, and asked me to wash the calloused feet of a bent wrinkled old woman – Day after day, month after month, in a room where nobody saw and nobody knew. I wonder how I would react.

Conclusion

This is Easter time. Within it lies the promise of hope and salvation to our world. Jesus rode through the streets of the holy city and died on a Cross and rose again from the dead. **He committed Himself to the efficacious death on the cross to provide full salvation for the human race. John wrote so well “He loves us and has freed us from our sins by His Blood, and made us to be a kingdom and priest to serve His God and Father – to him be glory and power forever and ever Amen.” Let us honor and worship Him this Easter season. Let us come before Him with praise and thanksgiving and give Him all the glory due him because of His great love for us.**