

“Thrilling Him by Saving Them”

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Texts: John 12:9-28

According to my calculations, I have preached thirty -four Palm Sunday sermons to date (17% of all such sermons preached in the two hundred year history of this church). The danger is, I suppose that the topic might get tired, ho-hum humdrum . . . but It doesn't! It doesn't because today we celebrate God's obsession for the "lost." His passion to have back those who belong to Him—not a something, or a what but children who have been abducted from Him, His home, His care, His family. Of course, there's rejoicing in heaven when a single lost person turns back to God! And, yes, there's joy amounts us here on earth when someone repents, undergoes new birth, adoption, comes home through the rescue mission of the Father!

When we come to the triumphal entry of Jesus which is the featured event of Palm Sunday, excitement fills the air. The crowd is exhilarated, everyone appears thrilled to be there. However, the reasons for that excitement are enormously varied—all over the map. Many were confused as to what was transpiring before their eyes, and that feeling was contagious. But no one was more thrilled than Jesus. We are explicitly told that **for the joy set before Him He endured the cross—Hebrews 12:2 reads: Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.**, The verse is rich with meaning for us. First, it exhorts us to make Jesus, **the author and perfecter of our faith** our focus. Jesus, the Christ, the Lord of all, the Creator of the universe, from heaven to earth come down—seated on a donkey, on top of some few garments, Jesus, the King of kings whose ultimate destination is set before us here as well (**sat down at the right hand of the throne of God—having returned full cycle to heaven from whence He came.** Seated there as the critical mass of the divine order—all that power and glory in one holy man, uniquely Jesus. **For the joy set before Him, Jesus endured the cross.** Yes, beloved, and by **enduring the cross**, He despised its shame, **scorned its shame.**

Reviewing all this brings to mind an astounding conclusion—God is not lonely please-able, He is thrill-able. God is thrilled by the redemptive work of Jesus, bringing many sons to glory:

10 For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, **in bringing many sons to glory**, to perfect the [a]author of their salvation through sufferings. **11** For both He who sanctifies and those who are [b]sanctified are **all from one Father**; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, **12** saying,

**“I will proclaim Your name to My brethren,
In the midst of the congregation I will sing Your praise.”**
13 And again,

**“I will put My trust in Him.”
And again,**

“Behold, I and the children whom God has given Me.”

14 Therefore, since the children share in [c]flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.¹

In brief, God is thrilled that Jesus had undertaken the work of rescuing His abducted, the children of the Father! This thrilling adventure, finding, recovering, rescuing and restoring the children *lost to the Father- **this is the greatest story ever told!*** When Alfie is asked what it’s all about, the answer is: it’s all about the love of the Father for His children, for whom He created all that exists, and for whom, when tragedy struck and evil invaded and with its darkness, sin and defiance defiled His children bringing death and trouble—spiritual hardships and afflictions—God the Father dispatched the Son to remedy the situation, and to strongly save from condemnation, from everlasting shame.

The shame of sin has been cancelled on the cross—eradicated by the life and power in the blood of God’s slain, but living Son. And that of course is our forgiveness.

By dealing with sin in this way, according to the divine plan(!), Jesus cancels the enmity between man and God; He brought an end to the hostility that must pertain between a holy God and sinful man. And not just hostility, but all the unpleasantness that sin suggests. I am sure we are all familiar with that unpleasantness: sin, judgment, wrath and perdition. There is a huge pressure brought on preachers to eliminate any mention of sin and its consequences. Some go so far as the Pope, and extend “comfort” by denying the reality of hell—this against the clear teaching of Scripture that hell is a place of just punishment prepared by God to punish the fallen angels *and to vindicate His justice and righteousness*. Human occupation of hell was not the original purpose for hell and that development came about as a consequence of the fall of man. It simply isn’t a winsome gospel of preach about hell, or about being saved from hell. Denying that hell is an actual place, or represents spiritual reality, is hardly comfort. It is also a refutation of the repeated warnings in Scripture, from trustworthy sources, as its reality—hell? Whatever it is, *in its fullness*, they say, you should avoid going there at all costs. Replacing warning with winsomeness is unfriendly to say the least. And if saving us from hell is a reason for Jesus’ sacrificial death; we should be loath to simply ignore the whole business.

¹Footnotes

- a. **Hebrews 2:10 Or *leader***
- b. **Hebrews 2:11 Or *being sanctified***
- c. **Hebrews 2:14 Lit *blood and flesh***

It is significant that Jesus is the only one on the ground who knows what is going on—and this is not for want of prophetic warnings. Many things foretold were actually coming true; but they were not unfolding in anticipated ways. And it was not for want of explanation from Jesus either. Because Jesus predicted and explain His death and resurrection many times. The sublimity of the process was quite simply beyond human comprehension therefore we have spent the intervening centuries between the cross and our present unpacking. And that process has been far from straightforward; there have many diversions and false starts.

What is most astonishing is that the redemptive work begun in the Old Testament and brought to a decisive point in the New Testament through Jesus ' work is, according to the plan of God to be moved forward by the power of the risen Christ alive in us. *His work is transformed into our work!*

Christ has left it to us to continue setting the captives free—finding, rescuing and relocating the “lost,” abducted children of God. Redemption is the creation of God’s family in its entirety until all who are called by God have been gathered home. Then there is completion. A family reunion which transcends all time, history, culture and of all who have every lived regardless of history, or personal longevity (be it long, m or short). The image of God in which we were created, after being conceived in the mind of God is a forever thing.

By faith (believing on Him), a piece of eternity is activated in us. We actually begin to walk in the power of the indwelling and risen Christ. We are partakers with Him of Resurrection Life and it is because of that power, that life, *that implanted eternity?* Enables us to choose to dwell on heavenly, or eternal things—the things that do matter forever, as contrasted with things temporal and transient, things that are passing away! Our primary purpose, the meaning of our existence, totally exciting and totally thrilling, as it turns out, actually thrills our God. Let’s resolve to move beyond serving Him, and pleasing Him, and after attains to the holiness He has in mind for us, move on to thrilling our God!

Amen