

JOURNEY INTO DISCOURAGEMENT

Matthew 21:1-11

INTRO: Open your Bible. Take a second, pick it up off the coffee table and open it to Matthew's gospel, chapter 21. I hope you are reading your Bible. Some of you have more time on your hands than in the past. Please take advantage of that time to read the Word of God. Don't spend your days in front of the TV dumbing down. Do something that will benefit your life. Read your Bible. If you have been reading through the Bible with us, you should be finishing up the Book of Judges today or very soon. Joshua, then the Book of Judges. If you are on track, you'll finish Judges today, and then read through the entire Book of Ruth tomorrow. It's only 4 chapters :)

We celebrate Palm Sunday today – the day that Jesus made a triumphal entrance into Jerusalem. It was indeed reason to celebrate. But the celebration would be short lived. Soon, the events that would lead Jesus to the cross would begin to unfold.

The week following the triumphal entry is the week Christians now call 'holy week'. It was the culmination of Jesus' life – the reason He came into the world as the Son of God. God in flesh. This week, for the disciples, saw a wide range of emotions.

I want you to use your imagination for a moment. Feel the press of the people as they gather along the road from Bethany to Jerusalem. Take a whiff. You can smell the dusty roads, and the donkeys and other animals coming into town. Listen closely and you can hear the excitement of a crowd of people. Look around and see the brightly colored holiday clothing of festive pilgrims gathering in Jerusalem. Can you feel the excitement in the air? And then, there's a great commotion off in the distance. You strain to see through all the waving palm branches. At first, all you can hear is a muffled roar, some indistinguishable words, then a cheer, and then a chant:

"Hosanna! Hosanna! Hosanna!" "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" (Matthew 21:9)

This was the moment Jesus' disciples had been waiting for. For three years they had been with Jesus. They had learned from Him, watched Him as He performed all manner of miracles. They were convinced He was the Messiah who was prophesied to come and lead the Israelites to victory over their oppressors. And the time was now! It was the perfect day! But a perfect day doesn't make a perfect week...

It's hard to imagine, given the celebration of Palm Sunday, that in a few short days Jesus would be betrayed, arrested, tried, abandoned, whipped, spit on, slapped, scourged, tortured, mocked, ridiculed, and ultimately nailed on a cross. And the same crowd that had cheered repeated "Hosannas", would be shouting "Crucify Him!"

Put yourself in the place of the disciples. What a roller coaster ride of emotions. A week long JOURNEY that would lead them INTO DISCOURAGEMENT.

Some of you, after the week you've had, know, at least somewhat, how the disciples felt. The experience is certainly not the same, but the emotions are just as real. And the discouragement you know right now, is as strong as you can imagine anyone going through. I want to talk to you about that today.

When we speak of discouragement, there are three things that come to mind...

1. It's universal: None of us are immune to discouragement. Everyone you have ever known has been discouraged at one time or another.

2. It's recurring: Being discouraged once does not make you immune to the disease. Sadly, you can be discouraged over and over again.

3. It's highly contagious: Discouragement spreads by even casual contact. People can become disheartened because you are discouraged. You can be bummed out because other people are are going through hard times. It's highly contagious.

Okay, so how can we pinpoint what the problem is? What is it that takes us on a JOURNEY INTO DISCOURAGEMENT? Notice...

I) UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS: **Matthew 21:1-11** *"Now when they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, 2 telling them, 'Go to the village ahead of you. Right away you will find a donkey tied there, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. 3 If anyone says anything to you, you are to say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will send them at once.' 4 This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet: 5 'Tell the people of Zion, 'Look, your king is coming to you, unassuming and seated on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.' 6 So the disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. 7 They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. 8 A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road. Others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 9 The crowds that went ahead of him and those following kept shouting, 'Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!' 10 As he entered Jerusalem the whole city was thrown into an uproar, saying, 'Who is this?' 11 And the crowds were saying, 'This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee.'"*

You can easily see from reading these verses why the expectations of the disciples were so high following the triumphal entrance into Jerusalem. But their expectations were misguided, or at least, ill timed.

Jesus hadn't come to be King at this point. On His first visit He came to be the Savior of the world. The next time He comes, He will be coming as King of King and Lord of Lords. But the disciples had missed the timing.

Unrealistic Expectations, it happens to all of us at some point. You think you're on top of the world. Things couldn't be better. Your long awaited ship has come in...then you get called into your supervisors office, and everything changes. Or a routine medical exam yields anything but routine results. Or, a virus sweeps the world that no one has ever heard of and now, you have no job, no income, and the fear of your health or the health of your children being compromised. THIS WAS NOT WHAT YOU WERE EXPECTING AT THIS PLACE IN YOUR LIFE. And you feel the weight of discouragement start to press down on you.

Job, in scripture, knew the weight of discouragement. After losing his fortune, and his family, the bible says in... **Job 3:1** *"Finally Job broke the silence and cursed the day on which he had been born."*

He cursed the day of his birth. What a sad thought. Has it ever crossed your mind, "I wish I had never been born?"

The Lord knows when we need Him most. **Psalms 34:17-18** *"When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their troubles. The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit."*

I) UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS: Matthew 21:1-11

The second thing that can lead us on a JOURNEY INTO DISCOURAGEMENT is...

II) UNCONTROLLED EMOTIONS: Matthew 26:33-35 *“Peter said to Jesus, “If they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away!” 34 Jesus said to him, “I tell you the truth, on this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.” 35 Peter said to him, “Even if I must die with you, I will never deny you.”* Mark 14:66-72 *“While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came by. 67 When she saw Peter warming himself, she looked closely at him. “You also were with that Nazarene, Jesus,” she said. 68 But he denied it. “I don’t know or understand what you’re talking about,” he said, and went out into the entryway. 69 When the servant girl saw him there, she said again to those standing around, “This fellow is one of them.” 70 Again he denied it. After a little while, those standing near said to Peter, “Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean.” 71 He began to call down curses, and he swore to them, “I don’t know this man you’re talking about.” 72 Immediately the rooster crowed the second time. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him: “Before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times.” And he broke down and wept.”*

ILLUS: In reading about the different effects of negative emotions while preparing this sermon. I came across a publication online called THE BULLETIN. In it was an article titled, “The damaging effects of uncontrolled emotions” By Pamela Knudson of the Grand Forks Herald, Published May 30, 2014. For the article she interviewed Jill Calderon, a doctoral student in counseling psychology at the University of North Dakota. In the article she quotes Calderon as saying, “Feelings are accurate and reliable. Emotions don’t lie — and they’re pretty immediate, depending on your reaction style. If something has stirred up your emotions, there’s a pretty good chance there’s a reason for it.”

When I read that, I laughed and laughed and laughed! I can only hope that Ms. Calderon was misquoted by the press. I hope that’s not the belief of modern secular psychology.

Emotions often do lie! Feelings are not reliable and accurate. I will agree that they’re pretty immediate, but that’s not usually a good thing.

Proverbs 28:26 *“Whoever trusts in his own mind is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom will be delivered.”*

Jeremiah 17:9 *“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?”*

2 Timothy 1:7 *“For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.”*

Unrealistic Expectations and Uncontrolled Emotions both lead to discouragement. Notice a third thing that can take us on a JOURNEY INTO DISCOURAGEMENT...

III) UNEXPECTED EVENTS: Matthew 26:47-50, 55-56 *“While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived. With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent by the chief priests and elders of the people. 48 (Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, “The one I kiss is the man. Arrest him!”) 49 Immediately he went up to Jesus and said, “Greetings, Rabbi,” and kissed him. 50 Jesus said to him, “Friend, do what you are here to do.” Then they came and took hold of Jesus and arrested him...55 At that moment Jesus said to the crowd, “Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me like you would an outlaw? Day after day I sat teaching in the temple courts, yet you did not arrest me. 56 But this has happened so that the scriptures of the prophets would be fulfilled.” Then all the disciples left him and fled.”*

I) UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS: Matthew 21:1-11

II) UNCONTROLLED EMOTIONS: Matthew 26:33-35

III) UNEXPECTED EVENTS: Matthew 26:47-50, 55-56 This was not how the disciples saw this thing with Jesus going down. In their minds they had created this perfect scenario where Jesus defeated the Romans, set up His Kingdom, and then placed all them in positions of great authority. But in an unexpected turn of events, the disciples in dismay ran for their lives, and all of them forsook Jesus.

I think it's safe to say that we're all living life at the present, in an unexpected place. There's no way any of us could have known we would be in this current crisis and situation 6 weeks ago. But here we are dealing with these unexpected events. And if we were all honest, most of us aren't doing that well.

Let me ask you something. Has it ever occurred to you, that nothing ever occurs to God? There's no problem you will ever face that He wasn't aware of before you knew there was a problem. No event of life will present itself that God hasn't already looked at it from every angle and has already planned your escape. God knows all things. And God knows you!

CONCLUSION: From Sunday to Friday was quite a JOURNEY for the disciples of Christ. One they didn't expect to take but took anyway. In a weeks time, they lost everything. Their hopes were dashed, their futures destroyed, their teacher was dead, and life didn't feel worth living. But we know something they didn't know on Friday. We know what Sunday is going to bring. Jesus died, but He had no intentions of staying that way! Oh next Sunday, we'll hear the rest of the story. And you don't want to miss it. BECAUSE, JUST LIKE IN OUR CURRENT SITUATION, JESUS IS GOING TO DO SOMETHING ABSOLUTELY AWESOME. He's going to change everything.

What about you today? Would you benefit from letting change everything about your life?