
Certainty in the Silence

Palm Sunday 2020

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Today is Palm Sunday

Today is Palm Sunday — the day that Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, and all the people laid down cloaks and palm branches before Him. It's the first time Jesus received the worship of His people. It marks the first day of Holy Week — the week leading up to Jesus' Crucifixion and Resurrection.

This particular event fulfilled prophecy written in Zechariah 9, and the exact day this would happen was prophesied in Daniel 9. The Jewish people that worshiped Jesus this day 2,000 years ago thought they knew what God was up to — they thought they understood what Jesus was coming to do in Jerusalem. They expected God to FINALLY deliver the Jewish people from their Roman oppressors and to bring a political revolution and victory.

But Jesus came to accomplish something much bigger, much grander than a political victory in the first century world. He came to change the spiritual landscape of the entire universe throughout the course of human history.

And this leads to our scripture for today — while we may not understand exactly what God is doing, or why God is doing it — we have an incredible assurance that whatever God is up to — it is leading to something that is far bigger and far greater than we can possibly fathom.

Romans 8:28-35, 37

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose. ²⁹ For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. ³⁰ Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who *can be* against us? ³² He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? ³³ Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? *It is* God who justifies. ³⁴ Who *is* he who condemns? *It is* Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *Shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

³⁷ Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Today, I've got bad news... and I've got good news. In order for the good news to be good, the bad news has to be bad.

**AN INESCAPABLE REALITY
AN ABSOLUTE CERTAINTY
OUR CONFIDENT ASSURANCE**

AN INESCAPABLE REALITY

What compelled the Apostle Paul to write Romans 8? Paul asks, "What shall we say to these things?" What things is he talking about? "Who condemns us? What is going to separate us?"

Earlier in Romans 8, vs. 18-23, Paul writes about the suffering of this present age, that all of creation is groaning for redemption, we're eagerly waiting for our redemption of our bodies.

Paul is going to war with what uncertainty and suffering tempts us to believe — that you might be separated, you might be condemned, that there is something coming against you — something trying to destroy you. Like what? Paul lists it:

- *“Tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, sword, death, life, principalities and powers, height, depth, things present, things to come in the future...”* there is an endless barrage of attacks coming down on the people of God.
- And because of that reality, there is an endless temptation to believe that maybe God isn't really in control after all — that maybe He's not as involved as we thought He was — that maybe He's not good — or doesn't have my best interest at heart, or is unable to change things for my good.

Application — Especially now. We are living in a time where it's easy to look out at the world and say, *“God... what in the world are you doing right now? What is happening? Are you even paying attention? Are you watching? Are you listening? Do you see your world? Do you see what's happening?”*

Not just Corona Virus, but the swarms of locusts in the E. Africa and India, the wildfires in Australia, even the tornado in Nashville...

**It's so easy to see all of these things and begin to question...
God what in the world are you doing right now?
Intervene! Do something!**

*The inescapable reality that Paul is addressing here is that throughout human history... **suffering has been a part of the human story** — and this is an inescapable reality of the world that we live in.*

There's the bad news —
but Paul tells us in the midst of this —
we have an absolute certainty that we can cling to!

AN ABSOLUTE CERTAINTY

Romans 8:38

For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

That word *persuaded* it's not loosely held belief.... Paul is saying, *I have zero doubt in my heart and mind... I'm absolutely certain that there isn't anything in all of creation that will separate us from God's love.*

There may be times in your life when something you've done makes you have a crushing realization that you're actually not as good of a person that you think you are, that there is some sin that God still needs to work out of your life... and it's in those moments that it's so easy to feel like... “Look at what a mess I am! God couldn't possibly love me!”

But then there are those moments when you see the brokenness outside of you... happening around you — and in those moments, we're tempted to say, “Look at what a mess my life is! God has abandoned me, there's no way a loving God exists in the middle of this!”

Paul says, “*Oh yes there can be, and there is, and you can be absolutely certain, no matter how bad the brokenness is on the inside, and no matter how bad the brokenness is on the outside, that God is with you and for you, and there is nothing internal or external that can separate you from Him!*”

Romans 8:28

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose

- *What that is saying is, that if you love God, and you’ve been called into His Kingdom through Jesus Christ, not some things, not most things, but every single thing that happens in and around your life, somehow, God is working that together for your good and His glory.*

Joseph — In the life of Joseph, in Genesis 37, Joseph’s brothers betray him, throw him into a pit in a place called Dothan; they stage his death; and he’s going to be sold into slavery.

Question — *Now, what do you think he’s doing in that pit?*

- “He’s is praying like he’s never prayed before! “Oh God, please get me out of this! Please don’t let me be sold into slavery! Please save me!”

Answer — **What does he get? Silence. Deafening silence.**

He is sold into slavery, and lives years of isolation, imprisonment, suffering, and silence from God.

Application — *Now, if we’re in Joseph’s shoes, in the middle of that kind of suffering, and that level of silence from God — there’s no present assurance of God’s love, there’s no intervention, there’s no rescue, God is allowing evil intentions run their course, and we’re being punished for it — all hope is lost, we’re all alone — **every single one of us would think that we’ve been abandoned by God.***

But, if you know the story of Joseph’s entire life... you know that if God hadn’t allowed Joseph to be sold into slavery, if He hadn’t allowed years, and years of agonizing isolation and hardship to come down into his life, if he hadn’t lived through all those years of misery — hundreds of thousands of people would have died of famine — including his own family.

Do you realize what God tells us here?

**God is telling us, Church,
“My Specialty is turning tragedy into victory!
I am moving in ways you can’t understand
and orchestrating details behind the scenes
that you can’t possibly fathom...**

**“Even in your darkest days, don’t let my apparent silence fool you into thinking
that I don’t care,**

or that I’m not at work.

**One day, you’ll see what I was doing all this time,
but that day is not today.**

So, trust me.

Just because I’m silent, doesn’t mean I’m slumbering.”

Application — *See, Church, what hardship reveals in us modern western Christians is that we want spiritual progress without pain, we want the miraculous without the mess, we want revival without resistance, and we want revelation without desperation... **but these things we most want from God only come by walking through the things we most want to avoid.***

Throughout the scriptures, God is telling us, “Yes, there are times when I’ll send the fire from heaven, I will part the waters, I will intervene in miraculous ways... **but don’t ever think that just because I don’t send the miracle you want, when you want it, that a miracle’s not coming.**”

Paul says, “I’m absolutely certain that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God...”

Why? Because God takes ALL THINGS, He works all things together for good for those who love God and are called according to His purpose. *That is an **absolute certainty**, which leads us to our **everlasting hope**...*

OUR CONFIDENT ASSURANCE

What I’ve been observing over that last several weeks is that in the absence of concrete answers to this pandemic, there’s been an increase around the world in openness to prayer — to the *idea* of God. When the world loses the illusion of control, we begin to turn toward a God who is in control.

But a general belief in God, or in prayer is not enough. We need far more assurance than that. It’s not enough to just say, “I don’t have to worry about it. God is in control.” That won’t change you.

There are people who say, “Yes, I believe God loves me, nothing can separate me from God, I believe that...” but their life hasn’t changed. They’re just as worried, just as anxious, just as fearful as they’ve always been.

Question — *Why? Because their belief is abstract. It’s conceptual. It’s not concrete. It’s not real.*

On **Palm Sunday**, the path Jesus would have taken from the Mt. of Olives into Jerusalem 2,000 years ago, is often referred to as the Triumphal Entry. This journey into Jerusalem was the first time that Jesus received and accepted worship as Israel’s King and Messiah. The people were celebrating Him, laying down palms to symbolize the victory they thought he was bringing as a political deliverer, the miracle they thought he’d come to perform to save them from their Roman oppressors. We know, that in just a few days’ time, their praises would turn into unrelenting demands for His death, because He wasn’t the type of Messiah they wanted.

In the **Garden of Gethsemane** — as Jesus was praying to His Father in heaven — as He was asking, like Joseph, to be pulled out of the pit, for some other way — do you know the answer He received? **Silence.**

The word *Gethsemane* means pressing place — and it was here that all of the forces of hell came down on Jesus, crushing Him. All the forces in the universe were pressing down on Jesus, and He could have stopped all of it — with a word. He could have stopped the rejection, the coming mockery, torture, abuse, His own death — He could have stopped the rejection of his Father. He could have stopped every ounce of it...

All He had to do — was give up on you.

And He refused.

Romans 5:8

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Hebrews 12:2

...who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross

- What is the one thing Jesus didn't have before His suffering that He gained as a result of it?
- You. You are the joy set before him.

This isn't some ethereal concept.

This is concrete.

This is specific.

This is flesh and blood.

It's human history...

and it's for you!

Question — *How do you know nothing can separate you from the love of God? How can you be confident about it, secure in it? The key phrase is, nothing can separate you from God... "in Christ Jesus."*

Because when you look upon Him... you see that **He doesn't love you based on certain conditions...** it's not based on your behavior... it's not conditional...

And in fact, it's not even unconditional... **His love is counter-conditional.**

God loves you in spite of all of the reasons you give Him not to.

And if He died for you then —

if He wouldn't let you be separated then —

if He wouldn't abandon you then —

what in the world could cause Him to abandon you now?

Romans 8: 35, 38-39

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *Shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁸ For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

**Jesus Christ is our concrete, flesh and blood,
Confident Assurance that God is with us,
that He'll never forsake us,
and that even in the silence,
He's working all things together for our good.**

Discussion Questions

1. What does uncertainty and suffering tempt YOU to believe?
2. What is the Absolute Certainty in Romans 8:38?
3. Share a time when you were able to see the truth of Romans 8:28, in retrospect.
4. Have there been times in your life that you thought that God did not care because He was silent? How did you get through that time?
5. If Jesus did not abandon us, when He could have by choosing not to die for our sins on the cross — what could cause Him to abandon us now?

NOTES