**Palm Sunday 2020 – Tim**

Pre service music – How great thou art

Opening Prayer: Father God thank you that we’re able to meet together to look at your word. I pray that you’ll keep the technology working so that we can have this time together focusing on you not on how it happens. I pray that we’ll be able to for a bit of time focus purely on you and what you want us to learn. Amen.

Notices – see slide.

This morning I am going to make no apology for having chosen upbeat songs for you to sing along with at home. Please keep your mics muted though as slight time lags will make it sound pretty ropey! Now am I deluded or sticking my head in the sand – I certainly hope not. I appreciate the situation that we’re facing together, it is a bleak challenge, and know that we’ll need a miracle to keep us all safe – but I’ve got a God who does miracles so I’m going to praise Him through this storm for the good things that He’s done for us already and is going to do in the future, whilst praying for that miracle.

Song - Open the eyes of my heart Lord

Today is Palm Sunday – to help explain what it is all about we’re going to watch a video based on the version of Palm Sunday based on the version found in Luke 19:28-44. All of the gospels have a slightly different viewpoint on it, so is worth having a look through all of them.

So Palm Sunday is where Jesus was recognised by some of the people about for who He was. They’d been watching Him perform all of His miracles and some recognised that He was their King, the one that they’d been looking for and were praising Him for this. Now they didn’t fully understand it all, they’d perhaps missed the significance of Him riding on a donkey, they’d perhaps not appreciated the all knowing nature that He possessed to know that there would be an unridden donkey in the next village that they’d be able to get for Him, they’d maybe missed the fact that He was going to suffer for them to truly rescue them, not from the Romans, but from their sins.

Maybe we don’t understand it all. Well I know we don’t understand it all from our discussions the other week about the first part of Ephesians. But we do recognised Jesus as our Messiah, our Saviour, our Redeemer, our Lord. And you know what, we need to be praising Him for the stuff that we do understand, as well as the mysteries that we’re yet to grasp. We need to be praising God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit for the power that they’ve already demonstrated through history and individually in our lives. That’s why this morning I was us to be praising God like on that first Palm Sunday for what He has done for us.

We’ll spend a moment in quiet, reflecting on things that we should be praising God for, then I’ll pray for us before we sing our next song.

Father, Jesus, Holy Spirit. Thank you that you’ve created each of us in your image, and thank you that because of other’s that you’ve made in your likeness and the gift of you revealing a bit of you through them, we’ve come to accept you as our Lord, Saviour and part of your global adopted Church family. Thank you for keeping us safe so far and keep us praising you every day of our lives and then when we get to see you in your full glory. Amen.

Song – Rescuer

I am going to read Psalm 34 from verse 1-14, but I would suggest that you read the whole of the Psalm because there’s a lot to gain from it, but don’t want to take on too much in one morning.

We’ve been looking at Ephesians 1 in Bible Study the last couple of weeks and this week looked at the prayer Paul wrote where he mixed up the requests and the praise of what God has done for them. And I can see some similarities here, with a bit of license as the psalmist is talking to a congregation rather than praying, but the psalms were sung as worship so it is still about communicating with God. The psalmist in Psalm 34, and it is accredited to David, mixes up praising God for what He has done to rescue them, with commands and persuasion to look to God, to taste and see that He is good, and other parts like it. This to me at least has some overlap with the themes in Ephesians 1:15-23 where Paul is praising God for what He has done, but also praying that the readers will get to know God better through the gift of the spirit of wisdom and revelation and that they’ll see God’s power more clearly.

In the Psalm, verse 2 had some words in that jumped out to me as being a recurring theme from something that Steve has been sharing with us, from 2 Chronicles 7:14 which says this

 if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

At this time where we’re facing the corona virus, we who are called by Jesus name, need to humble ourselves and pray to God. We need to accept that as a country, as a world, we’ve not been following His plans and His will, and you know what, I’d argue more importantly, individually none of us are perfect, so we also need to be praying for us and acknowledging our own sins, turning to him and seeking God’s forgiveness. We need to look at the planks we’ve got before looking at the rest of the world’s splinters. When we’ve humbled ourselves, God will then listen to our pleas, and show us His greatness. That’s when like the psalmist we’ll be praising God for what He has done to save our souls and the other miracles that He’s going to do for us.

In verse 3 the Psalmist exalts us to be encouraging others to praise God with us. We still need to be praising God and evangelising to others. How we do that right now I don’t know, but people were mentioning at the prayer meeting that opportunities have come up. Maybe it could be through sharing some of the church Facebook posts or things on the website with people you know? Maybe through a phonecall where the right opportunity opens up, not forced by us by where God has opened the metaphorical door, to share something of God.

Verse 4 shows us that the psalmist was reminding himself and those hearing what God had done for him so that he could take a stand on the foundation of what God has already done for them. And we can do that ourselves. We need to recall the times that God has helped us already, and trust that He’ll do it again. The fear that we can feel at times can be where we’ve forgotten what God has already done to help us and forgetting that God already has it in hand – that doesn’t mean it won’t be a bumpy ride, but He’s there in that storm with us.

Verse 5, 8 and 9 I’m going to talk about together – we’re told by the psalmist to Look to God and shine. Now I like that idea – we’re to be reflecting God to others, which links back to verse 3 where we need to be evangelising. But it is also about how we can be God’s hands and feet at the present time, we can make that difference in other people’s lives if we stay tuned in to God.

We need to taste and see, we need to trust God and then we’ll see Him work in our lives and those around us, and when we revere Him, recognise Him for what he’s done and worship Him – we’ll have everything that we need. I think the virus has certainly made people stop and reflect on who the key workers are, and what we really need in our lives. Shortly we’ll pray and we’ll say the Lord’s prayer together which has the line ‘give us this day our daily bread’ – God doesn’t promise to give us everything that we want, but He will provide what it is that we need from Him. Now sometimes what we need will be that arm around us, and at other times it might well be a poke up the backside. But either way – from God it’ll be what we need.

The final part of the passage that I want to highlight is the commands in verses 13 and 14. We’re told that if we want a good life we need to take care of the things that we say and to walk away from the evil things of the world and to seek peace. It is so easy at the minute to fill our heads with negative news stories and whilst it is important that we know some of this, it is dominating the news coverage of even things like the BBC, where all 10 of the most read articles are corona related. There’s then various rumours going round on the internet about various so called cures or causes – the latest one was about the new mobile phone network causing it which someone then went and burnt down a phone mast. We need to make sure that we’re yes keeping up to date with things, but we also need to have the wisdom to fill our heads with the right things, and balancing it up with talking to God about it and praying and reading His Bible. We also need to make sure that we’re sticking to what the actual truth is about the causes and the best ways of protecting ourselves as otherwise panic will be spread, like one of the local paper’s headline the other day that petrol stations were shutting. When you actually read the article that wasn’t actually the case at all, rather just that a few rural stations might need to. Obviously some people wouldn’t have read the article, just the headline and then gone out and panic bought petrol. We need to at the minute make sure that we’re focussing on the truth and the hope that we have in God, that certain hope.

I hope that this look at part of Psalm 38 has been helpful and if you have any comments or questions, please put them on the website or email me afterwards and I’ll try to respond to them. But now I want to take some time to pray.

I’ll pray for us that we’ll acknowledge our own shortcomings and that we’ll also pray for our country and world. I’ll pray for a miracle that we’ll all be kept safe during the virus. We’ll also praise God for the things that He has done for us. If there’s anything in particular that you want us to pray for please jot it in a comment and I’ll try to include it if I see it in time.

Prayer

Own shortcomings and for how as a world we’ve not followed God’s will – forgiveness and guidance and mercy.

Miracle of keeping us all safe.

Praise God for what He has done for us already.

Anything else.

Lord’s prayer.

Song – Lighthouse

Closing prayer + the grace.