

When God Doesn't Work

Luke 19:28-40

March 16, 2008

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Well, this is Palm Sunday, the Sunday that we remember Jesus riding into Jerusalem and the crowds laying down their coats and palm fronds and cheering, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."

According to the Gospel of Luke, the crowd was there that day because of Jesus' miracles, they had seen his miracles, and in the Revised Standard Version, it says "his mighty works." According to the Gospel of John, the crowd was there that day because they had seen his signs, in particular they had seen Lazarus raised from the dead. Jesus gave him his life back, his old life back.

Fathers like to give their children gifts. They give their children their lives, their house, their food, their toys, and they like to give them gifts. When my children were little I'd take them to Safeway and King Soopers and buy them Hot Wheels and Polly Pockets and they'd walk down the aisle chanting, "Blessed is Daddy, who gives us Hot Wheels and Polly Pockets."

Every good and perfect gift comes from the Father of Lights in whom there is no shadow or variation due to change. The Father likes to give good gifts to his children. God is our Father.

In 1990, we went to a family camp with our church in Danville, California, and every year we would have a sharing time. And this particular year, a woman got up and she told how she and her husband were working in their back yard doing some gardening when they heard the phone ring up in the house. This is before cell phones, you know, and she ran up to the house. On her way up to the house she went by the swimming pool and she saw her toddler drowning. She dove in and saved her toddler's life and then she said to all of us there at the retreat, "I believe that God made that phone ring to save my toddler's life."

The next woman got up. She said, "The same thing happened to me, but the phone didn't ring and my child died." You could have heard a pin drop.

December 9, this past year, Matthew Murray killed two missionaries over at the YYAM base in Arvada. Then he drove to New Life Church in Colorado Springs and shot two girls there. This last week, in the Rocky Mountain News, they had this article and quoted something from the Associated Press where they talked about the letter that Murray left.

It reads like this:

Associated Press, Colorado Springs, a plaintiff letter asking Jesus: "*Why didn't you ever answer my cries?*" was found in the car of the church gunman after he killed four people and committed suicide. The unsigned, undated letter is laced with expletives but also asked Jesus *Where are you? Do you even care these days?* The letter was found in the car of Matthew Murray, 24, on December 9, after he killed two people at a missionary training school in Arvada and he killed two others at New Life Church in Colorado Springs. A police spokesman confirmed the authority of the letter.

He was disappointed. Jesus wasn't making his life work. And so he took somebody else's life. He drew blood. He was disappointed.

Have you ever been disappointed with Jesus? Have you?

Okay, this is what I want you to do. Turn. Find three or four other people near you. I want you to tell them. Now if you are embarrassed about this you don't have to. If you say, "Oh, well I've never been disappointed in Jesus." Then I'd say, "Have you ever been anxious? Ever been afraid? Ever felt ashamed?" I would guess that somewhere, then, you'd been disappointed in him. But I think most of us have. So if you would, turn, find those people and this is what I want you to do. Just share with them a time that you were disappointed in Jesus. Kind of like this "I'm disappointed in Jesus because.....and then just tell them." Don't worry, he already knows. So go ahead and do that.

[Congregation shares stories with each other in groups]

Okay, take another few seconds. What were some of the things? You were disappointed in Jesus when.....when what? You can just yell some of them out.

What happened at Lookout.

Okay that's my Mom. "What happened at Lookout," she says. Well all right, but that's a good one. I was disappointed, too. I mean sometimes we're disappointed when God doesn't make our religion work. Right? So I'm going to put it up here.

Doesn't make religion work. Can you read that, it probably doesn't matter. But it kinda helps your attention focus. Okay, religion. We would like God to make our religion work and sometimes it just doesn't seem to work.

Other things?

Doesn't fix things

Doesn't fix things. Okay, doesn't make things work, doesn't fix. Okay, what are some other things? What does he not fix?

All the pain

Okay, all the pain, killing, pain in our bodies maybe, doesn't fix our bodies. Okay what else?

Memories

Okay, feels like he doesn't fix our memories. Okay, other things?

Relationships

Relationships, Yeah. That's a big one, relationships.

Politics

You know we're into politics right now and we say, "God, when are you going to make this political thing work?" Someone said to me after preaching a sermon one time, they said "Well, what would Jesus do if he was president?" And I said, "He'd quit." Because that's exactly what he did. They chased him and made him King and he quit. I mean that's frustrating for me. It's like, you know, politics frustrates me. Politics, okay other things?

Guilt

Guilt, okay. Okay how about this one. He doesn't make *us* work. Right? He doesn't fix *us*. People. We're disappointed when he doesn't do that. Any other ideas?

No Healings

No healings...I think that would be our bodies. He doesn't...we're disappointed there. Yeah?

Timing

He takes his time. I mean that was probably a big thing with Lazarus' family, right? Lazarus was dead and Jesus just lollygags and John makes a big point out of that. Okay.

What other things? How about faith? When you want to have faith and you feel like you're just not making your faith work. Maybe that's like religion over here but you know if God wanted to, you'd think he could make us have faith. Right? Signs, wonders, miracles. I mean I think our disappointment is that he doesn't make our life work. Right? That's frustrating when he doesn't make our lives work.

Luke 19:41-44 "And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it. Saying would that you, even you [Jerusalem], have known on this day the things that would make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes [...] you did not know the time of your visitation."

They didn't see him. They saw him but they didn't see him. Luke and John say that they were cheering because they had seen the signs, they had seen the miracles, they had seen the mighty works, and yet somehow they didn't see him. They didn't know the day of their visitation. They were cheering for Jesus stuff, right? But they missed Jesus. I think we all want his stuff. Make me work Jesus, make my life work, make my business work, make my relationships work...

...and he is weeping.

I was talking to Jerry Kirk last week. Jerry Kirk is a pastor in Cincinnati. In the process of the conversation he told me a story.

He's on the President Council against pornography or something like that and in that work he was interviewed by the two-time Miss California Pageant winner. And he said, "Peter, It was amazing; I was sitting in this room and when she entered I was literally stunned." He said, "She was so beautiful I could hardly believe that she was real. And she started asking me questions and she asked, somewhere in the process, about the love of God and I began to describe Ephesians 3—that you would know the height and all that, the love of God that surpasses knowledge." And Jerry said, "While I was speaking to her, she started weeping," and I stopped

and I said “But why are you weeping?” And Peter this is what she said. She said, “I’ve always wanted to be loved and I don’t know if I am.” Jerry looked at her and he thought “You? You have wondered if people love you?” And somehow he found a way to ask her and she said, “Yeah, my father never told me that he loved me. My husband, I don’t know if he loves me or he loves my body. My friends, they all love to hang out with me but I don’t know if they love me or they love my fame.” She was weeping.

Men can be so distracted by the beauty of a woman that they miss the woman, the real beauty. And women can be so distracted by the mighty works, the strength, and the power of a man, that they miss the man. And so the man doesn’t know if he’s loved and the woman doesn’t know if she loves him, cause she’s actually never seen him. She’s like a vampire, sucking the blood out of him, not seeing him, taking his life. We do that to each other and don’t see each other.

And so bride of Christ, maybe a good question today is: “Do you see your groom?”

Well Jesus sees his bride, Jerusalem, and starts weeping. She’s chanting “Hosanna, Hosanna. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the King.” But Jesus knows something. In 5 days the crowd will be chanting something else. “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” Why? Because she’s disappointed in him. Jerusalem is disappointed in him.

I am not saying this to make you feel guilty by the way. I get disappointed in him all the time. Think about it. There’s probably never been greater disappointment in God than the week beginning with Palm Sunday 2,000 years ago. Right? They expected Jesus to make society work. Politics. I mean they expected Jesus to come in and kick out the Romans and establish his kingdom, but what does he do? He prophesied destruction of Jerusalem.

When Peter draws his sword, he says, “Put your sword away.” He tells him to even pay taxes to Caesar. They expected Jesus to make religion work. And what did he do that week? He insulted the religious leaders, chased folks out of the temple, and prophesied the destruction of the temple. I mean that was a massive building program—“You just gonna give up that building program, Jesus?”

They expected Jesus to make relationships work, right? And Jesus said, “I didn’t come to bring peace, but a sword.” He told all his disciples that they would fall away that night. At the worst possible moment, he tells them, “Eat my body and drink my blood.” Now remember he had said something like this much earlier and everybody got offended and left, and then he says it again at the worst possible moment.

They expected him to make faith work. And yet, you read it, I think that week, Passion Week, there were really no signs, no wonders, no amazing works. They expected him to make life work and there weren’t healings that week. They wanted him to make life work and he doesn’t even make his own life work. And so they take his life, they spill his blood, they suck the life out of him like old vampires.

Think of it! He goes from King of the Jews to cursed and naked and nailed to a cross. Imagine their disappointment. You know it wasn’t just Jesus that was crucified. It was all of their hopes, their dreams, their longings. All nailed to that cross.

There is no greater time of disappointment in God than in the week immediately preceding Easter. On Friday, by 3 p.m. as Jesus cries “My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me?” They are totally

disappointed. God doesn't work. And obviously, Jesus doesn't work. They could not see the great Prophet, Priest, and King that had been foretold. All they saw was body broken and blood shed, how incredibly disappointing.

Paul writes,

1 Corinthians 2:9 "As it is written what no eye has seen or the ear heard or the heart of man imagined or conceived what God has prepared for those who love him."

And we think of golden temples, and nice houses, and good children with quality teeth, right? Listen to the next line.

1 Corinthians 2:10 "These things God has revealed to us through the spirit."

Now get this:

"What no eye has seen or the ear heard or the heart of man conceived, these things God has revealed to us."

What things?

Well Paul just told us for two whole chapters: Jesus Christ and him crucified. What no eye has seen or imagined. So incredible! I mean gosh, maybe we've seen and yet somehow we haven't seen. You know, sometimes this Christian thing is just so disappointing, cause all we see is body broken and blood shed. All we hear is a word, a Logos. All we see is Jesus Christ and him crucified from the bosom of the Father, the heart of God, the Father's heart.

You know when my kids were little I'd get them anything they wanted. I could. But I didn't. Their disappointment sometimes at King Soopers or Safeway when I didn't was absolutely epic. I mean they'd like throw themselves on the floor in spasms, you know. It was like they actually believed that they were going to die just from the sheer grief. And don't get me wrong, I love my kids, I loved them even then. I would have died for them at the drop of a hat. But I would not spend 69 cents on one stinkin' hot wheel. "No siree, mister. You're gonna have to wait."

Why? Well every parent knows, right? I didn't want to spoil them. We all know that about our kids when they are little and somehow we think that we are grown up before God. But I didn't want to spoil them. And what I mean by that was I did not want to become a means to their end. I didn't want to become a means, because I was the end for them.

You see a spoiled child has learned to love his father's gifts more than his father's heart. And so a spoiled child may have all the gifts that he wants and yet that child is incapable of wanting the gift that he really needs, most desperately wants: his father's heart.

Although a spoiled child may have all the gifts this world offers, he's stuck in his own hell. And the only way to give that child what he truly wants, which is his father's heart, is to take away what he thinks he wants—his father's gifts and his own control.

And so, unless at some point a child becomes disappointed in his father, that child can never truly see his father or his heart. Unless somewhere along the line we become disappointed in God, we may never be able to see God or know his heart.

You know God's problems are kind of different than our problems. God's problem is not fixing the economy. God's problem is not making politics work. God problem is not solving poverty or healing your back or putting a stop to your smoking habit. It's not making your life work. In fact, he doesn't want your life to work.

That's what Jesus says on Palm Sunday. He says,

John 12:25 "Whoever loves his life loses it; whoever hates his life in this world keeps it."

You see God's problem isn't even getting you to believe that he exists. We act like that. Like that's some big problem for us, convincing us that he exists. All he has to do is *[sound effect]* ZAP—think elephant in the middle of the road, spray paint on the sign: "I exist you atheist." You know he could do that, right? If he's there, he could. But you see God's biggest problem is not getting you to believe he exists. It's getting you to see his heart. And trust his heart.

I told you the day that I saw my father's heart, the day I fell in love with his heart. Ironically it was a day that he could not make my life work. There were no signs, no wonders, no mighty works, just a whole lot of pain. I was in the hospital in fourth grade with knee surgery. They had taken my knee apart. It was the worse pain that I had ever felt in my life. And this is what I remember. I remember my daddy leaning over the side of the bed with tears in his eyes saying "Oh, Peter, if I could I would take your place. I would take it."

I remember thinking "My god, he means it. He means it."

And I saw his heart, you see, not when he bought me ice cream. Not when he bought me hot wheels and made my life work, but when he didn't. Not when he gave me gifts. It was when he gave me himself. When he entered my world, suffered my pain, it was then that I fell in love with him. It was then that I came to believe in him. Oh, I believed he existed all my life. But it was then that I saw his heart.

God gives gifts to teach us about himself. God withholds gifts to give us himself, to give us his heart. It's there that we fall in love with him. And you know it was also on Palm Sunday that he said this to the crowd.

"And when I am lifted up (and John tells us that he was talking about being crucified on a cross)...and he said "And when I am lifted up, I will draw all men to myself."

Did you get that? Not today, not Sunday, not when all the crowds are chanting. Not even Easter Sunday, but that day, Friday, I will draw all men unto myself.

Everybody showed up on Palm Sunday: the crowds, palms, yelling. The question is: "Where you gonna be on Friday when Jesus is stripped of all signs and wonders and power? You know, when he no longer seems to work for you. Where will you be?"

According to Jesus, all the disciples fell away that day, that Friday. That night was the beginning of the day, and that day they all fell away. Only John was even seen at the cross.

There was a Roman centurion that confessed Jesus when he saw the earthquake, the great mighty sign.

There was a thief that confessed Jesus when Jesus started talking about his kingdom, this great wonder that Jesus would do. But most all the guys were gone.

But there was this strange group of women. Remember the strange women? Mary, Mary, and Mary—the Marys. You see, I think they saw him. His heart. And they are a picture of the church. They're a picture of you.

I read the most beautiful testimony of a strange woman this week. It was in *Time Magazine*, page 6, a few weeks ago, about Ann Rice. She wrote the *Vampire Chronicles*, you know, which included *Queen of the Damned*, and *Interview with a Vampire*. I went and looked at some of her books in the bookstore: erotic dark fiction.

I'm thinking "Wow,"

But Ann Rice in *Time Magazine* talked about how her faith came back to her. She stopped writing about vampires, she said, "the blood-sucking undead." She said they were a metaphor for lost souls. And she started writing about Jesus, and they asked her in *Time Magazine* this question. "What caused your conversion back to Christianity?" She shares it wasn't some crisis. In other words she didn't need Jesus to fix something or make something work. She writes, "I wrestled with a lot of theological questions. And then one afternoon I thought, 'I love you. I want to go back to you.'"

You see, I think after writing about all those bloodsuckers, sucking the life out of everything they could find, she saw the blood giver—Jesus Christ and Him crucified from the bosom of the Father. And she didn't know if it worked. She didn't know if the cross worked. She just loved God's heart: Jesus.

The women at the cross, they didn't know if it worked. I mean they could not even comprehend how Jesus Christ and him crucified could work. They just loved God's heart.

My friend Elaine, who shared a few weeks ago, said that she didn't know how it would work. She just loved God's heart. Do you see why that kind of faith is such a gift to God?

I know Jesus told her something, and she didn't want to tell me, so I had to wrench it out of her. But this is what he told her. He said "You have no idea of how beautiful you are and how easy you are to love."

You see a woman that loves in a situation like that is pretty easy to love. It ravishes the heart of God. When Elaine shared, she said something truly profound. She wouldn't say it about herself because she's all embarrassed about it but this is what she said. She said "I figured that if there was a God, Satan was more powerful." Now God allowed her to believe that and she had reason to believe that. I mean she even shared with us once about this horrific experience she had where she cried out to God for help and she heard this word "No." It was years later that we found out that was a demon and we got rid of it and Jesus revealed that he had been helping her all along, but that's what she thought and you see God allowed it. And this is what she said a few weeks ago "I figured that if there was a god, Satan was more powerful, but even if Satan was more powerful than Jesus, I wanted Jesus. Because Jesus was good."

On Friday, at no time was there a greater disappointment in God. On Friday, on that cross, Satan appeared to be more powerful than God, yet on Friday one thing was abundantly clear:

Jesus is good.
The heart of God is good.
Goodness is the heart of God.

So if you're disappointed in God, which you all are, I think you may be in a sacred place. Another way of saying that is that I think you may be in holy place. I think you maybe in a holy week, and God is fixing to reveal his heart, His self. God takes things away in order to give you himself.

Paul writes "God subjected creation to futility in hope. And God consigned all men to disobedience that he may have mercy on all."

If that means what it seems to mean, then I think Matthew Murray who shot all those folks, he'll still see the glory of God. It may burn the hell out of him when he does, but he'll see it. His story is not over.

You know that woman in Danville? Who lost her child, who shared at the sharing time? She went on to say how in the midst of losing her child she found God's heart. And she found that he was good.

And so that first woman for whom the phone rang, she knew Palm Sunday. She cheered with the crowds and waved her palm frond. The second woman for whom the phone didn't ring, well you see, I think she had gone on to Good Friday. And she was tasting Easter. And you do understand, she'll get her son back. We get all things back. All things are yours and you are Christ's and Christ is God's. We get all things back. After we get the greatest gift of all, God's heart, Jesus Christ and him crucified.

[Communion]

[Benediction]

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