

4-13-25

One Good Reason

Psalm 53

Good morning. Welcome to Palm Sunday. This is the day we remember that amazing and monumental event that occurred nearly 2000 years ago when Jesus, the Messiah, rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, offering to the Jewish people his kingship and kingdom, to which they responded less than a week later... No thanks, not interested, thereby setting into motion the condemnation of an innocent man – more than that, the murder of the Son of God.

But these events did not catch God broadsided. In fact, Jesus had already prophesied that no one could or would take his life without himself laying it down voluntarily.

So, in the course of just a few days after entering Jerusalem, Jesus was crucified and put to death at the hands of the Roman government in collaboration with the Jewish religious hierarchy.

Another promising revolution gone south, turned sour, and brought to a screeching halt by the powers that be.

Better luck next time. Nothing to see here folks, move along and get back to work. The spectacle is over, the ruling authorities said.

As I began work on this message, I kept thinking to myself – and I confess, with a certain amount of glee – that this is going to be one of the easier messages I've ever had to write!

Usually, I labor and fuss over just the right words to say, the appropriate phrase to turn, or finding the perfect illustration to drive home my point, but not this message.

This is an easy one, because it speaks for itself. And not only does it speak, it challenges you and me sort of like a teenager challenging a parent when the parent says ...

go do homework, straighten up your room, or clear the dishes, and the child simply responds with an all-too familiar phrase ... "Give me one good reason."

Of course, these words literally send the parent through the roof as he or she bellows back ... "Because I told you so, that's why!"

So, for all the parents out there with younger children who have no clue as to what I'm talking about, just wait, your time's coming.

Now I understand that most of you folks are not teenagers anymore. And I'm not your parent, so I'm not going to stand up here and say ... "I told you so." But I can say with full confidence that the Bible told you so - The Word of God told you so - and continues to tell you and me even today - especially today.

And what does it tell us?

Simply this: It tells us - more than this - it spells it out and gives us the one good reason we've been searching for all along - the reason to be a follower of God - the reason to be in God's family and to be a Christian.

What I mean by this is that every day, for as long as we can remember, we've been looking for a reason to live and more specifically, a reason to live with kindness, to live with purpose and to live with a heart full of love.

In other words, we've been looking for one good reason to get on board with God's plan for the world – to invest in what He is doing right here and now in this church and in this community and even in your own family - to live intentionally for God, and have this intentionality be manifested in our actions and thoughts and deeds.

What I'm saying is that the phrase "I told you so" just isn't going to cut it anymore. There must be a deeper and more satisfying reason for us to be civil and caring and selfless and tolerant and sacrificial and honest – to be godly and righteous and loving – all these things that supposedly make life worth living.

And this reason answers all our questions, questions like ...

Why should I be good?

Why should I bother being honest on my tax forms?

Why should I bother being nice to my neighbors?

Why should I help someone in need?

Why should I be faithful to my spouse?

Why should I attempt to be a good parent?

Why should I not steal from my company?

Why should I forgive someone who has hurt me?

Why should I refrain from saying bad things to my siblings?

Why should I promote unity rather than strife?

Do you see where I'm going with this?

Give me any issue that you're dealing with right now, and I'll give you a good reason - better than that - I'll give you *the reason* for doing the right thing and turning away from evil.

But it's even more than this! It's not just about turning away from evil, it's about pursuing good – not just sitting on the side-line and saying, yep, looks good. It's about actually promoting and joining the forces of good so that goodness and righteousness flourish and become the predominate way of life for you and me, not just doing a spontaneous act of kindness that may or may not make the 10 o'clock news.

When someone asks you ...

Give me one good reason why I should read my Bible and pray.

Give me one good reason why I should fellowship with other believers.

Give me one good reason why I should stick around after church and get to know other parishioners.

Give me one good reason why I should help an elementary student with their vocabulary list.

Give me one good reason that I should be connected to a local church that dates back nearly 200 years.

Give me one good reason why I should put down my remote and visit a shut-in who is lonely and craving interaction with another human being.

And my list could go on forever.

Give me one good reason why I should stand up for truth and denounce evil.

Well, surprisingly the one good reason I'm talking about is found right here in the Psalm I just read, Psalm 53. When I went to this Psalm, I wasn't looking for the one good reason. I just read Psalm 53 because it was the next Psalm on my reading schedule – and there it was. And I'll share it with you in a moment.

But first, isn't it true that we all have our reasons for how we go about conducting ourselves in the world?

If anyone of us were asked by another, why do we do the things we do, we typically have an answer:

Well, that's the way my father taught me, or I watched my mother do this.

Oh, I'm from the south or I lived out west or I'm from the UP, and that's what we do up there.

Or I'm Baptist, or Lutheran or Methodist.

I was in the Marines, Navy, Airforce.

My dad was a doctor.

My mother was a teacher, so this is how I am.

We all have our reasons why do the things we do. Likewise, we have our reasons for not doing certain things.

But I ask you, what is your reason for coming to church this morning? Did you come here out of habit? Out of ritual? Because you were invited? Because your children begged you to come – because they wanted you to see them march around the sanctuary with a palm leaf? Whatever the reason you came this morning, I'm glad you're here.

But what's your reason for being a Christian, and for following God, and not caving to the predominate belief of today's society that says that God is nothing more than a figment of man's imagination, and if he does exist, He's just a senile grand-fatherly type figure who is powerless to have any impactful meaning on a person's life.

He cannot change the direction the world is heading in, let alone change the direction of my life. Besides, he'll just forgive all of us in the end anyway because that's what God's supposed to do. Right?

Well, I hate to burst your bubble on this Palm Sunday, but this prevailing societal thought is completely wrong. The psalmist writes in Psalm 53 that God looks down from his lofty throne in heaven, sees the thoughts, actions, and the motives of humanity, declares them to be unholy, morally bankrupt and void of any goodness and finally pronounces judgement upon us which will, in the end, reduce us to nothing more than crushed bones scattered across an open field ... unless something drastically changes.

And it's this change - this supernatural, God-ordained change - that I want to talk to you about this morning. It's this change that becomes the reason why we can have hope for our lives and our future -that we won't be judged by Almighty God and separated from Him for all eternity.

It's the reason why we can be Christians today without having to apologize - why we can be believers in a personal and supreme being without fearing or dreading the enemy's retaliation, and why when societal norms seem to be unraveling at the seams before our very eyes, we can still have hope in our future that will be filled with so

much joy and peace and satisfaction that we can't even begin to understand it.

And the reason is found right here in verse 6 of Psalm 53: *"Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion! When God restores the fortunes of his people, let Jacob rejoice and Israel be glad."*

Do you recognize what I just read?

Well, first of all we should recognize this verse as a sincere and heartfelt cry of confession from one who clearly sees his sin and his need for a Savior – the same cry that is reminiscent of the Prophet Isaiah when he saw the Lord high and lifted up in the temple and exclaimed... *"Woe to me! I am ruined for I am a man of unclean lips, and I have seen the King, the Lord almighty."*

Second, we should recognize this verse as the prayer of a person of God who's absolutely focused on and completely desirous of God's appearing and rescuing of his people that promises to bring so much wonder, gladness, and joy! *"Oh, that salvation would come out of Zion, when God restores the fortunes of his people."*

Do you feel his passion and desire?

But third, and most importantly, we must absolutely recognize this verse as fulfilled prophecy and answered prayer! How can we ever, especially during this holy season, forget what the Prophet of Zechariah prophesied in chapter 9 of his book in the Old Testament written over 2500 years ago and 500 years before Christ: *"Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey ... He will proclaim peace to the nations and even now I announce that I will restore twice as much to you."*

God, for a brief moment pulls the curtain back and allows Zechariah to behold a glorious glimpse into the future and shows him exactly how the prayer of Psalm 53 is to be answered! *“Oh, that salvation would come out of Zion, when God restores the fortunes of his people!”*

“Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion. See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation – restoring twice as much to you.”

We see the prayer, and we see it’s answer. Better than this, we witness it being carried out in the New Testament. We see its unmistakable fulfilling. This is what we read earlier in the service from Matthew 21:

As they saw Jesus riding into Jerusalem, they shouted, *“Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!”*

“Hosanna” is the well-known Hebrew expression meaning save ...

and *“Son of David”* is a popular Jewish title referring to the coming Messiah.

This is the reason you can have hope today.

This is the reason you can leave this place and know that your time here was not in vain.

This is the reason you can go home and walk across your lawn and start up a conversation with the neighbor you hardly know or the co-worker whom you barely acknowledge or the family member who has written you off because they think you’ve lost some of your marbles. You can still have hope because God answered this Psalmist’s specific personal prayer: *“Oh, that salvation would come out of Zion and restore the fortunes of God’s people.”*

Do you believe and understand that your fortunes have been so completely restored the moment you put your faith and trust in God's Son, Jesus? It's so true!

I invite you, for just a brief minute to look at the amazing gifts God bestows upon his people of faith as described in the first chapter of Ephesians. The Apostle Paul writes ...

"Praise be to God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will – to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One He loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure which he purposed in Christ."

I could go on, but I think you're starting to get the picture. Jesus Christ came from heaven, from the Father's side to earth to restore the fortunes that God had bestowed upon us but were lost the moment we partook of the forbidden fruit – when we decided that we could be our own gods - when we bought into the lie that the God who made us didn't have our best interest in mind. This was complete nonsense.

But now we have been rescued and restored and we have ***the reason*** that we can hold onto all the way to eternity. His name is Jesus. Amen.

Benediction: I Peter 5: 10 – 11

*“The God of all grace who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To Him be the power for ever and ever.
Amen.*