

Pastor Tom Mortenson

Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

March 24, 2024

Palm Sunday - Loving What Jesus Loved

John 12:9-16

Prayer: *Father, we just again, we are so grateful for the ancient words that you have given to us, lord, this is a living document and we are incredibly blessed to have it. And Lord, in addition to your words, we have the presence of your Holy Spirit to guide us as we open up your book and read those words. And so I pray this morning, this Palm Sunday morning, Lord, that you would give us the ability by the power of your Holy Spirit to make those words come alive and to have permanent value. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well as we've said, this is Palm Sunday; this is the day that is really set aside to remember Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem. And those palms that were given out, they represent the palms and the cloaks that the people outside of Jerusalem laid on the ground in order to welcome a man that they believed was going to be their new king, their new liberator. And there were huge crowds in Jerusalem at that time because it was Passover and all the families were there to celebrate.

Now a large crowd had gathered outside a party that was being thrown there by a man named Simon who was also somebody who had been healed by Jesus. And the guest of honor at this party was Jesus but the actual celebration centered around Lazarus who had been raised from the dead.

It says in *John 12:9-16*: *When the large crowd of the Jews learned that Jesus was there, they came, not only on account of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. So the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well, because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus. The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!" And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written, "Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!" His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him.*

So Jesus once again has confounded the crowd and his disciples by carefully choosing to ride not on a stallion or even on a mule but

on a lowly service animal, a donkey and not even a donkey itself but the foal of a donkey. That's a baby donkey. That's a donkey that's not yet a year old. And this crowd that had gathered was intent on seeing Jesus as this military slash Messiah figure and Jesus was determined to disabuse them of that image.

So there's good reason why Jesus would choose a lowly service animal to ride in Jerusalem -- ride into Jerusalem on but there's also a subtext as to why Jesus was so confounding on so many levels to so many people. The first and the most obvious reason is that Jesus was unlike any other human who had ever been born except maybe for Adam. In fact Jesus is known as the second Adam because only Adam and Jesus came into this world perfectly. We know Adam gave up his perfection and in spite of being placed in a literal Garden of Eden, we know that Adam looked to the serpent and he sought out that one thing that God told him was forbidden. So Adam and Eve ate of that forbidden fruit and permanently gave up their perfection not only for themselves but for every subsequent son or daughter of Adam, and that of course includes you and me.

Jesus is known also as the second Adam because he, too, entered the world perfectly. Only Jesus was able to maintain that perfection. Only Jesus was able to live his entire life spotlessly and without sin. Only Jesus was able to challenge his contemporaries by saying

in *John 8:46*: *"Which one of you convicts me of sin?"*

I just want you to think about that for a second. This may well be the most audacious statement that was ever made by a human being. But it wasn't audacious, it was absolutely true. Jesus dared his contemporaries to find one single sin in his life because both he and his contemporaries knew that there wasn't any. And so his contemporaries, they fired back on the statement that proved they had no answer other than this ad hominem attack. This is what they said in *John 8:48*: *"Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?"*

Well Jesus was confounding, and he was confounding because there was no one like him in all creation. He was confounding to the crowd because he knew every single thing there was to know about the people, the places and the events that were to unfold as they led up to his crucifixion.

He was the author and the prime mover behind every single event that took place including selecting that confounding donkey to ride on. Nothing about what took place from his entry into Jerusalem until his last gasp on the cross was by accident. And if you read only John's account it makes it seem like Jesus just kind of happened on a donkey and decided to ride it; but you read the other

gospel accounts and it fills in the blanks. And there we learn Jesus had directed two of his disciples to a specific time and a specific place in order to secure that donkey, and that the details even include Jesus telling them what to say to the people they were borrowing the donkey from.

Those details are in Mark's gospel, and Jesus says this in *Mark 11:2-3*, he says: *"Go into the village in front of you, and immediately as you enter it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it. If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord has need of it and will send it back here immediately.'"*

So see nothing was left to chance, I mean, Jesus wanted to be seen riding on this donkey for two different reasons. First of all, he wanted to quash any thoughts about a military takeover; but secondly, it was to fulfill prophesy, and the prophesy was *Zechariah 9:9* which says: *Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*

So I want you to just picture Jesus and he's moving on this donkey through a crowd that started out at the house of Simon and now it's

making its way into Jerusalem. This crowd is abuzz with anticipation. But Jesus riding on a donkey looks nothing like this triumphant leader they expected to see riding into the city. The crowd wanted a stallion and instead it gets a donkey. And the sight of the donkey itself is confounding but the crowd overlooks that because in that same crowd is Lazarus, the very one who's been raised from the dead. And the crowd thinks, well, perhaps this confronting Jesus is just extraordinarily different from all the other messiahs that had come and gone, and of course that much was true.

What was confounding to that crowd as Jesus made his way into Jerusalem was actually glorious to a far greater crowd than just the locals who had lined up to see it. Because you see, in fact the entire universe, it was bent over to see the King and Creator literally mounted on a donkey entering into what he knew would be eventually his certain death. The earthly crowd was ecstatic because they felt that at long last they had their Messiah who was at last was going to throw off the shackles of Roman rule and give these oppressed people their freedom.

And again Luke's gospel describes the scene this way, it says: *And as he rode along, they spread their cloaks on the road. As he was drawing near -- already on the way down the Mount of Olives -- the*

whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, saying, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples." He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out."

You see, a far greater crowd knew the real reason for celebration. In fact all of creation knew, I mean the heavens knew, the spirit world knew, even the inanimate objects knew and Jesus acknowledged if the people had not given full expression to the fact that the King of the universe was entering into the very battle of the ages that even the rocks would have shouted. Then Jesus who's no stranger to confounding actions once again did something that astounded even his disciples. Verse 41 says: *And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it.*

So once again I want you to put yourself in that crowd, I mean, they've already been confounded by the donkey but in spite of it their enthusiasm just continues to grow to a fever pitch and they're putting down palms and cloaks and they're shouting and they're praising so much so that the Pharisees are consumed with jealous outrage. I mean this is the greatest outpouring of earthly

glory that Jesus will ever see in his public ministry and his response is to burst into tears. And the word used to describe Jesus as weeping, it's not this comfortable word that's used to describe a discreet tear shed here and there; in fact it's describing a vocal wailing that cannot be contained or constrained by manners or discretion. It's a sorrow that kind of bursts through any kind of social restraint, and it's that sorrow that's more confounding than anything because scripture goes on to describe just what that sorrow was based on.

Luke 19:41 says: And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, "Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation."

So Jesus is wailing but he's wailing over the fate that awaited Jerusalem because not only did Jesus know the exact condition of the present, he also knew the exact aspect of the near and dear and distant future. It was only 37 years later after Jesus spoken these words that Rome was surrounded -- that Rome surrounded

Jerusalem on all sides and slaughtered them. And they slaughtered them exactly as Jesus said that they would.

Jesus knew the future 37 years out but he also knew the future three days out, and he knew without a doubt that this very same crowd who was caught up in glorifying what they thought was this earthly Messiah, that that very same crowd would be caught up in punishing him for refusing to be the God that they wanted to create.

Jesus knew that soon those cries of "Praise him" would be replaced with the cries of, "Crucify him!" Soon he would hear the sound of soldiers coming to arrest him. He'd hear the sound of false testimony and feigned outrage leading up to one crucial question that he had come to answer. It's contained in *Mark 14:61*. It says: *Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" And Jesus said, "I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven."*

What's unique about Jesus' answer is that his answer would contain three different assertions of his claim to deity. I mean first he stated, "I am." That's the "I am" of the eternal God. Secondly, he prophesied his coming as the Son of Man, the exalted title given

in Daniel to the King of kings. And thirdly he described himself as *"seated at the right hand of power"* which is the position of high honor given only to the Son of God. Jesus also knew that his statement was the equivalent of a death sentence. His claim to be God himself, his claim to be the Messiah would be all they would need to start the process of crucifixion.

And again *Mark 14* says: *And the high priest tore his garments and said, "What further witnesses do we need? You have heard his blasphemy. What is your decision?" And they all condemned him as deserving death. And some began to spit on him and to cover his face and to strike him, saying to him, "Prophecy!" And the guards received him with blows.*

We all knew what took place afterwards. We know that the spitting led to slapping which led to punching and eventually being turned over to the Roman soldiers to be made sport of. We know that that led to a crown of thorns mocking his claim to be a king.

Repeatedly he would be beaten and mocked as a pseudo king. The only true king the world has ever known would be crowned with a crown of thorns and then slapped spit on and mocked.

Luke 22 says: *They also blindfolded him and kept asking him, "Prophecy! Who is it that struck you?" And they said many other*

things against him, blaspheming him.

The crown led to a scourging, the scourging left him a broken, bloodied, incredibly staggering display of unfettered brutality as if he had been guilty of the worst of crimes but the fact was he was innocent of all. The only spotless, sinless human who had ever lived would then be paraded in front of this crowd by Pilate in the hopes that somehow, someone so profoundly brutalized would stimulate some sympathy from the crowd. Pilate proved to be terribly mistaken. The sight of Jesus only intensified their desire to further brutalize, torment and then finally execute him for a crime that no one could identify.

Pilate brings him before the crowds and *Matthew 27*, says: *Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all said, "Let him be crucified!" And he said, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Let him be crucified!" So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves." And all the people answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!" Then he released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, delivered him to be crucified.*

See, Jesus had seen every last detail of what was going to unfold as he came down from the heights of Bethany toward the city of Jerusalem, but that's not all, that's not the only reason why he was weeping. And again, this is why Jesus was so confounding. You see, he was weeping for the very people who would slaughter him. He was weeping because he saw God's justice explode on Jerusalem some 37 years later when the cup of God's wrath was finally filled. And as he was entering Jerusalem he could see that cup begin to overflow. And he wasn't just weeping, he was wailing -- not for himself, but for them. And please, don't make the mistake of thinking of them, that is conquered Israel, as so isolated group historically and culturally separated from who we are. Them is us. And the people answered, *"His blood be on us and on our children!"* Folks, we are those children.

I mean, you talk about confounding, I said Jesus was altogether unlike us in so many ways and one of the ways that we seldom consider is this. It so happens that Jesus loved many of the things that we hate and he hated many of the things that we love.

Again, let me explain. Jesus was once engaged in a conversation with the Pharisees, and this is what he said in *Luke 16*. He said: *"No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise*

the other. You cannot serve God and money." The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him. And he said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God."

That's why Jesus was confounding. See, the crowd loved adulation, the crowd loved power; Jesus loved servanthood. The religious leaders, they loved to exalt themselves; Jesus loved humility. And the people that Jesus ministered to, they loved only what they could taste, touch, and see. Jesus loved what was unseen; he loved faithfulness. And what Jesus demonstrated in the tears that he shed was that while the people he served loved idolatry and brutality and wickedness, he loved forgiveness. That's altogether confounding.

And on the other side of it Jesus also hated much of what we love, and all that he hated was unfolding directly in front of him. Some of it came from the crowd and sadly enough, some of it came from his own disciples. *Proverbs 6* tells us what God truly hates. It says this: *These six things the LORD hates, Yes, seven are an abomination to Him: A proud look, A lying tongue, Hands that shed innocent blood, A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that are swift in running to evil, A false witness who speaks lies, And one*

who sows discord among brethren.

Well there right in front of Jesus it was all unfolding. There was the proud look of the religious leaders; there was a lying tongue in Peter's denial; there were hands that shed innocent blood in the Roman soldiers; there was a heart that devises wicked plans in Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin; there were feet that were swift in running to evil, that was the crowds; it was a false witness who spoke lies, that's of course the false witnesses that they brought forward; and then finally there's one who sows discourse among the brethren, and sadly to say James and John filled that bill. You see, it was only the night before that they actually tried to go behind the other disciples' backs and claim the positions of power when Jesus came into his glory. *Mark 10:41* says: *And when the ten heard it, they began to be greatly displeased with James and John.*

So just I want you to picture this. Everything that Jesus hated with every fiber of his being was about to take place right in front of him. And so in spite of the adulation and the shouts of the crowd, he burst out in tears. See, Jesus loved mercy and so in spite of the things that he hated, in spite of the things that were done to him, he wept and he wailed and he sought forgiveness for those responsible, even for those who were hammering the nails. *"Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."* Jesus was

utterly confounding because he loved what we hate and he hated what we love.

There were other prophets who knew what it means to be confounded by God. One such prophet was Elijah. After the spectacular miracles that he had done against Jezebel, he's in the desert, he's run fleeing for his life because everything has collapsed, and in the desert God presents Elijah with three spectacular miracles.

We pick up on it at 1 Kings 19. It says: *There he came to a cave and lodged in it. And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and he said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He said, "I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away." And he said -- that's God said -- "Go out and stand on the mount before the LORD." And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper.*

So there's an earthquake, there's a great wind and a great fire and yet God says very clearly, I was in none of these. What God was doing was he was introducing Elijah to a far more powerful miracle than earth, wind and fire, it was the miracle of his presence. It was the miracle that the prophet Ezekiel had been speaking about previously. We've heard it many, many times. *Ezekiel 36*, God says: *And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.*

You see, that's the kind of miracle that God through Christ was offering to a world that was largely confounded by that offer. Jesus is offering a brand new way of living that would change the very way we love and hate, a way that could break the fetters that had bound his hearers up until the very day until Jesus had arrived.

You see, Jesus saw his ministry as one that involved liberating those who had been held captive to an old way of loving and hating. This is what he said in his first public statement. He goes to a church, he goes to a synagogue, stands up in the synagogue and reads the scrolls and then he makes a public statement. He says

this in *Luke 4:18*. He says: *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed."*

Well the good news is that Jesus came to bring was good news only to those who heard that they were poor and blind and captured by their oppressors; and sad to say, those hearers were a tiny minority. The vast majority of Jesus' hearers had grown used to seeing themselves as spiritually rich and free and able to see and they were in no mood to see Jesus as anything other than a threat. And so from the start of his public ministry Jesus offered to free them of their captivity to a twisted and losing way of loving and hating; and they responded by trying to throw him off a cliff.

Jesus offered them the miracle of a transformed heart; they responded by trying to kill him. This is not a miracle that they were interested in. God himself would take up residence inside us. *1 Corinthians 6:19* says: *Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.*

What God is saying is this is this incredible miracle, he would make us the brand new temple where he would now take up residence; and when he came into that temple, he would from that very moment begin changing our very thoughts and desires so that we would begin to love what he loves and hate what he hates.

See, there's two types of miracles and there's two types of people who receive those miracles. We can call one miracles that shout, miracles of earth, wind and fire that demonstrate the extraordinary power of the one delivering the miracle. We know Elijah had that power and we saw him demonstrate it and we saw that in the end, it didn't work. And when that spectacular miracle was performed on Mount Carmel and it didn't usher in the new age of belief, Elijah was crushed to the point of wanting to die. God had to show Elijah there was a much deeper, more powerful miracle that didn't shout; in fact it whispered.

Jesus demonstrated that exact same thing over and over again. But you know, he, too, did miracles that shouted. You know, he healed the sick and by and large it just produced greater and greater crowds of sick people looking to be healed. In the first chapter of the gospel of Mark we see Jesus doing something that illustrates the importance of the whisper miracles that Jesus actually came to give. He'd been healing the sick and the crowds were growing

larger and larger as more and more desperate people were lining up to be healed.

Mark 1:33 describes it. It says: And the whole city was gathered together at the door. And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons. And he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him. And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed. And Simon and those who were with him searched for him, and they found him -- understand this is the morning huge crowds are assembling outside -- they found him and said to him, "Everyone is looking for you." And he said to them, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out."

Now does that make sense? Do you get that? This is Jesus confounding all over again. This doesn't fit in well with the narrative that we have of Jesus as the great healer. Make no mistake about it, he was a great healer, but Mark's gospel is telling us as the crowds get bigger and bigger, no doubt with many, many sick people waiting there to be healed, Jesus confounds his disciples by saying basically "let's get out of here." It says: *And he said to them, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out."*

So we ask, okay, was Jesus just being heartless here? Did he not realize that he was leaving many, many sick people still in their sickness? Or was it because Jesus understood that it's extraordinarily easy to miss the main miracle that whispers for a lesser miracle that shouts.

The fact is every single one of Jesus' hearers was broken in a way that had eternal consequences. Every single one hated what he loved and loved what he hated and only the whispered miracle could heal them. And it's the same for you and for me. Every single one of us was on our way to a Godless eternity outside the presence of God because every one of us is born broken, fallen and sinful; and Jesus alone is able to take on the penalty of your sin and my sin by laying down his perfect life as a substitute for my life of sin.

And so the miracle that Jesus is offering to virtually everyone who heard him was a soul set free from death by the payment that he would make on the cross. Jesus knew exactly what he was here for. It was to glorify his Father by rescuing hopelessly lost sinners, it was to transform hearts to shape and mold us into his image for the glory of his Father, and nothing was more important than that, not even physical sickness.

And you know, Jesus also fed the hungry, but what did it do? It

led to great crowds following him looking for a magic show and a free meal. *John 6* says: *So when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor his disciples, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum, seeking Jesus. When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal."* Then they said to him, *"What must we do, to be doing the works of God?"* Jesus answered them, *"This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."*

So they're looking for a free meal. Jesus says, "Look for food that does not perish." He says there's two kinds of food, there's food that perishes, that's the miracle that shouts; but there's also food that endures, that's the miracle that whispers. And the food that really matters is the food that endures. That's the food that Christ alone can give. It's the transformative grace of God's Holy Spirit living within you and it's far more important than any food you're going to eat. Jesus said work for that food.

The people said, well, what do we have to do? What do we do to be

doing the works of God? *Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."* Jesus made it clear, the one work that truly mattered is the work of faith. It's trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ as the one who's going to pay your ransom, redeem your life, become your Lord and transform what you love and hate into what he loves and hates. What Jesus was offering was himself, I mean, that was the miracle that whispered, but it was an offer that most people refused. They wanted the miracles that shouted.

Jesus even raised the dead. You want a miracle that shouts? He raised the dead, perhaps the most spectacular earth wind and fire miracle that shouted. It had the effect that all spectacular miracles had, I mean those whom God had chosen were drawn, softened and finally melted by the warmth of God's grace and his power, and those whom God had not chosen were threatened, repulsed and embittered by the very same miracle; their hardened hearts instead of melting turned into stone. The very sight of a rotted corpse raised from the dead was not enough of a miracle to change a hardened heart. Some saw the risen Lazarus and they said Jesus is truly God, and some saw the exact same risen corpse and said this Jesus has got to die.

John 11 says: Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary

and had seen what he did, believed in him, but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the Council and said, "What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all. Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish." He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. So from that day on they made plans to put him to death.

See, they hated, they hated the one true God and they loved their own power. If you ever need proof, any type of proof that miracles alone are not going to save anybody, this is clearly it. I mean, the miracle itself led to great crowds pushing Jesus into Jerusalem to be the new Messiah and there we find Jesus confronting the people and confounding them as well. And he did it because he loved those things that people hated and he hated those things that people loved. They loved a stallion, they loved a triumphant Messiah; he loved the donkey and a suffering servant. Jesus was

quite capable of miracles that shouted but he was far more interested in those miracles that whispered. Those were the miracles that would change how we love and how we hate, and those are the miracles that he offered to everyone.

See, if you're a child of God you are right now in the middle of a miracle, and it's the very same miracle that Ezekiel described. I mean, the moment you became a child of God, God did a heart transplant on you. The heart of stone that you once had has been removed and been replaced with a heart of flesh, and here's the crucial part, along with that new heart comes the indwelling presence of Christ.

Ezekiel 31 says: And I will put my Spirit -- capital S -- within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. That's the miracle that Christ was offering to everyone. It wasn't an earthquake, it wasn't a wind storm, it wasn't a fire. In terms of miracles, it appeared to be almost nothing at all. In fact it was the greatest of miracles. It was the ability to have my own heart transformed, to have my own desires re-shaped and reformed by God himself, to have God's Holy Spirit now living inside me, transforming me into a unique image of God's own Son. And that wasn't just a theory or some nice theological notion. In fact, I know it's not because I'm the recipient of that very

miracle; and if you love Jesus, you are as well.

You know, in my life it's been over fifty years but I still have enough of a memory to remember my own personal captivity. I remember what it was like wanting to get high every single day, nurturing grudges and delighting in getting even, being a slave to a whole host of passions that drove me and rode me just like Jesus rode that donkey. Now I'm far from perfect but I know for a fact that those things that controlled me back then, they have no power over me now. The things that I loved back then I truly hate now. That miracle may have taken fifty-some-odd years to accomplish but that's less than a nanosecond in God's timetable and that's a miracle that God promises to every single one of his children.

2 Corinthians 3:17, it says: Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

The problem is that miracle's a hard sell even today. And there's a reason why it's such a hard sell. It's a miracle of freedom available only to those who realize that they are not free. You got to understand, even the offer, even the offer of the miracle

people resent.

John 8:31 says: So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." They answered him, "We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, 'You will become free'?" They resented even the offer.

Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. I mean, can you imagine being finally freed from anger and bitterness and lust and jealousy, or from any of the host of sins that rob us of our freedom? Jesus says, "If the son sets you free, you will be free indeed."

Jesus had the capacity to heal and the ability to forgive to such an extent that he wailed in sorrow for the very people who were slaughtering him. Do you understand the power that Jesus possessed? Jesus is here to give it to whomever wants it; but the big question is: Do you want it? Would you like to have the power to forgive like Jesus forgave? Would you like to have the power to hate the things that Jesus hated and love the things that he loved?

See, if you're still held captive you're still enslaved and you don't even realize it yet, then nothing could be more threatening. The power of bitterness or lust or envy or revenge cannot only enslave you but it will blind you as well.

Let's say somebody hurt you deeply maybe last week, maybe last month, maybe fifty years ago. The world would love the power to strike back, to get even, to intimidate and to hurt back. That's how we hate. There may be somebody insulted, maybe they belittled you or made you feel like nothing. Maybe it happened way back when you were in elementary school and it haunts you even today. You wouldn't be the first and you wouldn't be by far the last to want the power to make that hurt go away. Jesus has that power. You and I frankly don't have that power to be able to forgive somebody who has deeply hurt us, to change the way we love and hate but Jesus does.

And would you like to have his power to be able to forgive somebody who deeply, deeply hurt you? We saw Jesus demonstrate it. We saw how confounding it was. In fact that's why he was even confounding to his disciples. *John 12 says: His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him.* See, they understood afterwards because God did

that same whisper miracle in their lives as well. And if you're a child of God, you're right now in the middle of that same miracle. God has removed your heart of stone and replaced it with a heart of flesh and even now God's Holy Spirit within you is changing the way you love, changing the way you hate into the same loves and the same hates that Jesus had. I mean, you may not burst into tears over the fate of your enemies like Jesus did but you will be forever changed and forever changing into the image of the very same Jesus.

And you may also notice that practicing these new loves and these new hates makes you confounding to your non believing friends. Folks, it goes with the territory. If you have not yet received the miracle that Christ is offering, you, too, can have that power to rearrange your life, your loves, and your hates because his offer still stands. In *John 5* he said: *"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life."*

And so if you'd like to receive the miracle that whispers, the miracle that would give you the power to change what you love and what you hate into the same loves and hates that Jesus had, understand Jesus is waiting for you. Speak to me, speak to one of

the elders. Love what he loved, hate what he hated. Let's pray.

Father, I thank you for the miracle that your Son offered the world. I lament the fact that the world wasn't interested. They wanted the miracles that shout. They were not interested in the miracles that whispered. The miracles that whisper were life changing and eternal. It was the miracle of changing the very way we love and the very way that we hate. And so I pray for each and every one of us here that we'd all be sensing that we are in the middle of that same miracle, that we are sensing the way we love and the way we hate are being shaped and molded into the way Jesus loved and the way Jesus hated. Give us that grace, give us that power, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.