

# Palm Sunday - The Greatest Failure of All?

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[ 0 : 00 ] I wonder if anyone has ever said something that you disagree with, but you've nodded along anyway, out of a sense of obligation.

And I wonder if this has ever happened to you in church. Thanks for nodding along. I wonder if this has ever happened in the context of hearing about God's faithfulness.

And on the outside, we nod along because we feel like we're expected to be fully confident that God is faithful. But maybe on the inside, we actually are not quite so sure and we actually doubt that quite a bit.

We doubt who Jesus is. So on Palm Sunday, we remember Jesus entering Jerusalem and we think of the crowds full of excitement and anticipation.

And they've heard stories of Jesus. They've heard stories of healings and miracles and there have been prophecies. And they expect that Jesus has come to save them from the Roman rule.

[ 1 : 08 ] So they're full of excitement. And at the end of the week, Jesus is dead on a cross. It probably felt like a huge failure after all that anticipation.

And when I heard the title of today's talk, the greatest failure of all, question mark, I was like, what failure? Because on this side of the cross, we don't see a failure.

We know that things didn't go as they expected because Jesus died. But then Jesus rose again, defeating sin and death. That's not a failure. We know that even though there might have been disappointment, God had a bigger plan.

And yet so often, maybe we find ourselves resonating with these people. Maybe we have expectations of God and we feel that they haven't been met.

And we're left questioning and doubting who God is. When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, who is this?

[ 2 : 18 ] Who is this? This is essentially the key question that we spend our lives trying to work out and wrestling with. And this is a question asked throughout Jesus' life.

So in Luke 7, who is this who even forgives sins? In John 5, who is this fellow who told you to pick up your mat and walk? In Mark 4, who is this?

Even the wind and waves obey him. Jesus' entire life begs the question, who is this? And yet when we go to different people, we get very different responses.

Some say a king, a prophet, a saviour, others a liar, a threat even. And we see this in the response of the crowds.

The crowds welcoming him in, praising him. And then at the end of the week, Jesus faces crowds chanting for him to be put to death. So when we look to different places, we get different responses.

[ 3 : 22 ] So three things we cannot rely on to answer this question, who Jesus is. Number one, we cannot rely on people to inform us who Jesus is.

Now, don't get me wrong, it is important to speak to different people and get different perspectives. But if we rely on people, then we'll get very mixed messages.

We only need to look on social media or even mention Jesus' name to know that there is controversy over who he is. And when navigating faith, this comes with challenges, because where do we go?

Even within the church, there have been tensions, disagreements, failures that have left people disappointed. And I feel so grateful that my experience of church has always been a place where everyone is welcomed and treated with genuine love, welcomed as they are.

And yet we hear stories where people have experienced rejection at church and they've left with this idea that this is who Jesus is and they've walked away from faith.

[ 4 : 31 ] So we can't always rely on people to tell us who Jesus is because different people have different influences and will be left with mixed messages.

Number two, we cannot rely on our understanding of circumstances to tell us who Jesus is. So, so often our circumstances influence our perception of who God is.

We might feel like God isn't present or feel like God isn't with us. But as we know from the cross, the way we feel based on circumstances isn't always a reliable indicator because we don't have the full picture.

So about a year ago, I went with my brother to see one of my absolute favourite musicians, Jacob Collier. And I was so excited.

So we were queuing outside for hours. And when we finally got in, my legs were aching. I felt so tired. But the thought of seeing Jacob Collier live kept me going.

[ 5 : 41 ] So we were waiting inside. Still kept waiting. Finally, it looked like it was about to start and we had such high expectations.

And someone comes on stage with a megaphone. The show's cancelled. There's been a power cut and everyone needs to evacuate the building. So we're all full of disappointment and leaving.

Some people are literally sobbing. And all hope is lost. People are going home. But me and my brother, we wait a bit, sort of wallowing in our dismay.

When, all of a sudden, a cue board is set up right next to us. Jacob Collier comes out and we get a live performance literally a metre away from him.

And genuinely one of the best moments of my life. And much like the cross, we don't always see the full picture.

[ 6 : 46 ] Things didn't go the way I expected. I felt disappointed. But thank goodness I didn't leave because something much better was about to happen. When Jesus was on the cross, people said, If he comes down off the cross now, we will believe him.

Maybe sometimes we approach God in this way. If you were God, then you would do this.

Circumstances are telling me that you are not who you say you are.

And we have expectations of the way things should be if God really is God. But we can't always put our faith in circumstances because we don't see the bigger picture.

The reality is, it's not this easy. Which leads to point number three. We cannot let our disappointment inform us who Jesus is.

In this world, we do face some circumstances which seem truly hopeless. Where it does not look like things are going to get better.

[ 7 : 54 ] It's almost impossible to see how any good can come from it. And in the face of this, it's natural to ask the question, God, where are you? God, why are you allowing this?

These questions are real. But God didn't ever promise that we wouldn't have suffering. He actually told us, in this world, we will have difficulties.

Our experience of pain, us witnessing pain, is not God-breaking promises. And it's important to acknowledge the reality of our disappointment.

But also, this does not change what God has promised, which is that he will always be with us. So, if we can't rely on people, can't rely on circumstances, can't rely on our feelings, then where do we go?

How do we know who God is? We look to the cross. The cross tells us who Jesus is. When we look to the cross, we see a God who does not watch from a distance, but a God who chose to meet us in our suffering.

[ 9 : 08 ] When we look to the cross, we see that Jesus understands suffering, because he experienced it himself. When we look to the cross, we see a God of grace, that chose to pay the price for our sins, so that they would not separate us from him, so that he could be with us through it all.

It is true that when we look to the world, we see rejection, we see injustice, we see inequality, we see grief, we see a lack of forgiveness.

But when we look to Jesus' life, we see that Jesus did not reject, but God welcomed in the outsiders. Jesus welcomed in the sinners. He stood up for those who were abused by power and looked down on.

He cared about justice. He experienced grief and loss and pain, and he didn't turn away when that was suffering. He got involved. This is who Jesus is.

And if we think that Jesus is someone who excludes, condemns, neglects, or fails, then maybe we're not seeing him through the lens of the cross. We cannot place our faith in what we see, but rather in who he is.

[10:22] And who he is never changes. The Bible tells us Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. And if our faith is based on what we experience and how well things are going, it might look a bit like, things are going well.

Great, I trust you, God. But as soon as something goes wrong, which it usually does, we're so quick to walk away, and the risk is that it becomes like a contract. God, if you do this, then I'll follow you. But part of faith is that we don't see what's coming. We choose to follow Jesus because of who he is, even when things may not be going as well as we hope.

So, how do we respond to the reality of disappointment? I don't know if you've ever come across the ostrich effect, but I laughed when I saw this because I relate so much.

But ostriches often bury their heads in the sand, and it's often used as a metaphor for when we're faced with a problem, and we don't know where to go, we just bury our head in the sand and pretend it's not there.

[11:45] And I so do this. But I wonder if we do this with faith as well, when we look to circumstances, we feel overwhelmed.

We feel overwhelmed with the opinions of others, expectations, what we should think, overwhelmed with doubts and questions and emotions, and we feel like the only option is to just bury our head in the sand, pretend the struggle isn't there.

But we don't have to do this. We don't have to fake it. God never tells us that to follow him, we have to suppress all doubts.

The Bible tells us, cast all your cares on him because he cares for you. Cast all your cares on him because he cares for you.

Not filtered. We can cast everything on him, every doubt. It doesn't have to be the cares that aren't too heavy or the cares that we don't mind telling our friends or the cares that won't offend God.

[12:50] All the cares. We can be unfiltered about this. We can say, God, I feel disappointed in you. I feel let down by you. God, I feel angry with you. God, I actually want to walk away from you right now.

And we can be brutally honest with God. And the thing is, having faith is all about relationship. We know this from the cross. Jesus came to earth because he wanted to have relationship with us. And to have relationship, this requires honesty. This means we have to be vulnerable with God. We have to tell him how we feel. And the wonderful thing is, his goodness and his faithfulness is not dependent on our perception of it.

We don't need to bury our head in the sand because faith is not about suppressing doubts. It's not about pretending the darkness doesn't exist.

Faith is about making a choice in the light of who Jesus has shown himself to be. We don't need to accept the brokenness of this world.

[14:01] But ultimately, faith is about saying, God, I don't understand the darkness, but I know that your name is light. Feeling disappointed is a reality.

But let's remember who Jesus is. Let's look to the cross. God, thank you.

Thank you. That you promised to never leave us. And we just acknowledge the reality that sometimes it doesn't always feel like that. Thank you that we can come exactly as we are.

We don't need to hide anything. That's not what you ask for. You just want us to let you in. And we just bring to mind now.

We just come before you completely honest. Thank you that you do not reject us. But you actually welcome us.

[15:06] You can take it. Thank you that no matter what it feels like, no matter what we see, who you are is a God of comfort, a God of love, a God who understands suffering, a God who is with us.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.