

Rejoicing in Christ

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Date: 29 March 2026

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[0:00] Good morning, everyone. Good morning. Why don't we bow our heads and pray for God's help. Our gracious Lord, we thank you for your word.

! And this morning we ask, Lord, that as we have listened to your word read and as we listen to it being expounded, so, Father, we pray that your Holy Spirit would infect our minds.

And, Lord, we thank you that your written word always brings us to your living word, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Amen. Amen. So, Matthew's Gospel in verse 10, we read this important question.

Jesus entered Jerusalem, we're told, the whole city was stirred and asked, who is this? I suppose one of the things that you really need to learn as you navigate your way through life is how to deal with disappointment.

[1:14] I don't think there would be a soul in this church who, at some point, doesn't experience disappointment. Some of it is relatively superficial stuff.

I'm very disappointed when my football team doesn't win. Maybe there was a present you wanted for your birthday or at Christmas and it never arrived and you feel disappointed.

Sometimes that disappointment can feel really deep. Inside of you. I remember when I was a 16-year-old boy, I had played football at District and had trials with a couple of teams and finally ended up playing in a trials match for Manchester City, which, truthfully, I hate, but that's another story.

And I thought I played really well. And then I was given the news, you will never play in what we used to call the first division. And even now, as I recall that, I can feel the sense of disappointment in the pit of my stomach.

All I ever wanted to be was a professional footballer. Then there's that really hard issue of disappointment when we feel that other people have let us down.

[2:54] And it's truly disappointing, isn't it? In the Scottish version of the Daily Mail, on the 19th of March, and let me explain, I was in Scotland, there was an article in the middle of it.

There's a little section in the middle which is aimed at women. It's called female, M-A-I-L. And the heading was, Why do so many middle-aged women find their husbands repulsive?

Don't put your hands up. Apparently, this is based on some data that somebody got together.

And you can imagine what that tells you. There must be a lot of women who are quite disappointed with the way things ended up. And then, just this last week, Anthony and I were away together.

And I had no idea this person was showing up on the trip we were on. He was a man who used to be a teacher of theology and then became a very effective minister of a church.

[4:14] Had thousands of people. He's got a lovely wife. And when I met him, I used to really look up to him when I was a young clergy person.

And when I met him, I could tell he was just a little guarded with me and I didn't understand it. And I got close to saying to him, You know, have I disappointed you in some way in the past?

You know, I couldn't quite get this. Anyway, as I told him, it slowly came out that he doesn't do any ministry anymore.

He gave up many years ago. I then discovered he goes nowhere near a church and nor does his wife. And I took a little service on this trip we were on on Sunday morning.

And I noticed that he, it would be the equivalent of sitting at the back of the church with your back to me. That was his body language. And I was really disappointed.

[5:17] This is a man who was, if you like, a kind of spiritual hero in my mind. And his faith was nowhere now. I was disappointed.

One of the things that, if you've not learned it, you really do need to learn it. And that is to navigate your way through this life. You need to learn to process disappointment in a way that doesn't damage you for life.

You know, there are a lot of people who are made very bitter by disappointment. And you know, the problem with bitterness is this.

That when somebody meets you who's never met you before, they will work out you are bitter within two minutes of meeting you. Bitterness, I think, is one of the hardest things to hide.

So we come to this passage. It's Palm Sunday today. We come to this passage where Jesus entered Jerusalem.

[6:24] Clearly, it was a moment of exaltation. The crowds threw their cloaks on the ground. They cut down branches from palm trees and threw them on the ground.

This symbolized the importance, in secular terms, of somebody of high rank or royalty. And yet, just a few days later, the same crowd shouted, crucify.

And we can judge their fickleness. Of course we can. But then, we have to ask ourselves, is that fickleness something that's in me? And, sometimes I wonder if it is in me.

Just a few days later, they shouted, crucify. Why did a potential coronation become a crucifixion? That's a great question.

Dorothy L. Sayers wrote a piece for radio. Initially, it was turned into a book called, *The Man Born to be King*. And in that book, she gave quite a plausible explanation of why it was that Judas turned against Jesus.

[7:47] She said, he turned against Jesus because he was disappointed. His expectations were let down. Judas thought, with the crowd, as we shall see, Judas thought, that Jesus had come to lead a political revolution.

And he hadn't. And Jesus gave a few signs of this, didn't he? He came riding on a donkey. I mean, I can't imagine what the media would make of the trooping of the colour if all the dignitaries were sitting on donkeys.

I don't think that would work too well. Could it be that the crowd, jubilant on Palm Sunday, became a jeering mob on Good Friday?

Why? Because they felt let down. Of course, Jesus didn't go out of his way. He upset them. The next story in Matthew's Gospel is Jesus goes into the temple courts and starts smashing everything up.

Would this be the behaviour of a political revolution? Well, it may be, but I doubt it. No, this was an ugly scene that developed from a wonderful moment.

[9:12] And just by way of explanation, you will remember that at this time, Judah and Israel were occupied by the Romans.

63 BC, the Roman Emperor Pompey attacked Jerusalem and took it over and remained there. We know it was the run-up to the Passover.

Roland Deveau, in his brilliant *History of the Old Testament*, tells us that it's possible that there were two million Jews in Jerusalem in the run-up to the Passover.

And when you think about that, it's pretty likely that no more than 10% of that crowd had ever heard of Jesus. They'd be spread all over the place.

They'd have come from miles away. Maybe, very likely, the Jews in Jerusalem had heard about Jesus. Maybe some of them out in the diaspora, the surrounding areas.

[10:17] But many of them would never have heard the name. And of course, one of the things we know, or you know, if you're a student of crowd psychology, is that if one small section of a crowd starts to behave in a certain way, it catches on, it's infectious, and everybody does it.

So there were people there, very lightly, throwing their coats on the ground, chucking down palms, who didn't really understand what was happening. The kind of thought, this is political.

News travels fast in a crowd. And this promised king to fulfill the prophecy of Zechariah, chapter 9 and verse 9, comes riding on a donkey.

I mean, in a way, you have to laugh, don't you? This was the moment. This was the moment that they believed that Jesus was coming to lead a political revolution.

Make no mistake about this, this was a political demonstration. How do we know that? Save, Hosanna means save now. That was a political slogan.

[11:38] That was like people standing outside hospitals saying, what do we want? More money, when do we want it now? Save now.

Save us from the Roman oppressors. And that's not what Jesus came to do. So I want to say to you three things about this, which I hope will be helpful for you.

The first thing is, never put on others a role which is not theirs. political demo. They were putting onto Jesus the role of a political king, not a spiritual messiah.

Surely, this is an indication that the crowd's expectation was that Jesus would lead a revolution against the Romans. 150 years earlier, a Jewish man named Judas Maccabees had tried to overthrow the Seleucid empire which held power in Jerusalem at the time and failed spectacularly. People remembered that. Don't put onto others a role that is not theirs. Do you know, all through my life, I've met young adults who've been messed up because of the expectations their parents put upon them.

[13:08] They had a very clear career route for their child. Some of them would even say, God has shown us this is the career route for our child, but unfortunately God had never told the child.

Don't put onto others a role that is not theirs. It's not uncommon in marriage. that people who have a propensity to control will place on others an expectation which is unreasonable and unfair.

And of course, another example of this would be the ruling classes. We all have an idea of what they should do for us and we feel let down.

I mean, you've only got to open the pages of the printed media at the moment to see. There is huge frustration with the ruling classes. Maybe you feel that.

But then just a little closer to home. On the 16th of April, we shall welcome Simon and Amy Durrant as our new vicar and spouse.

[14:40] I often think it would be a good thing to have a short seminar in churches. Clergy are taught a lot about arriving in a new parish.

But congregations not so much. Ought we to be thinking about how we receive the person who we believe God has appointed to be our new spiritual leader.

This is about expectations. Christ's church will not be the same. It would be easy for us to keep a load of expectations upon a new vicar.

That would be unfair. And let me tell you, I know this, you know, I've been one. Not everybody likes the new vicar. I went to a parish, on the whole, it went really well, but in the early days, a man came to see me.

And he said to me, I'd like to put myself forward to be church warden. He said, I have such respect for your authority. authority. And I thought, call me cynical if you like, I thought to myself, if he accepts my authority, why is he banging on about it?

[16:08] I didn't just get on with it. This is a guy who wrote to the local paper, call me a liar and a hypocrite, because I would not agree to make him a church warden of our church.

He's trying to get a load of people to leave the church with him, and thank God failed. We want to welcome Simon. We want to give him the space to be the leader that God wants him to be in our presence.

Some of us won't like it. Here's my advice, stick with it. Give him a chance. Somebody on the radio this morning I was listening to basically said, we should give all new leaders a chance.

don't judge prematurely. It's a mistake. The second thing is, don't give up when your expectations are shattered. Historians tell us two million people were in Jerusalem for the Passover.

How about this? When Jesus ascended into heaven, we're told that there were 120 disciples left in Jerusalem.

[17:28] A lot of people obviously felt so let down they just gave up. We know this happened in the Bible. In John chapter 6 we're told there that the disciples of Jesus, some of them muttered together and said, this teaching is too hard.

Six verses later it says that a lot of the disciples turned back. Think of my friend, the spiritual hero I was telling you about earlier in this message.

Don't give up. Don't give up in your marriage if your expectations are not being met. Please don't give up with your children if your expectations are not met.

This is critical to growing up. See, I think it's an immature thing. My father used to have a phrase, you know the kind of person you play in a game or something like that and they get stropky and walk off in a strop.

My father used to call that attitude, my back, my ball, my stumps, I'm going home. That's not for us. We're the people of God.

[18:45] It's not meant to be like that. We're not meant to cause division in churches because we put expectations on a leader. Don't do it. And the disciples in John 6 say this is hard teaching.

Surely that is a question mark to the easy believism that is counterfeit religion and runs wild in our time.

being a disciple is a tough call. It's not easy believism. In Hebrews chapter 10 and verse 39, the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews, who I remind you is writing to Jewish people who've left the synagogue to become Christians and at this period were thinking of going back to the synagogue. Hebrews chapter 10 says this, right? May this be true of us friends this morning.

But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved. See, persistence is a big New Testament word.

[20:09] Don't give up when your expectations are shattered. And finally, Jesus came to save us, not from the enemy out there, but from the enemy within.

Not from the oppressive Roman government at the time of Jesus. Not from the things that are outside us that we collude with and sometimes get addicted to.

No, Jesus came to deal with the enemy inside of me. My sin, my wrongdoing, all have sinned and fall short. Of the glory of God. That's you and me, friends. And we might try and blame others, we might try and blame anybody, but at the end of the day, it tells us in Ezekiel chapter 18, when the Jews are finding an excuse for their plight in exile, and they're going around muttering together, saying, the fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.

In other words, we're not in exile because it's our fault, it's our parents. You've heard that one before. No, says God, the soul that sins will surely die.

Jesus didn't come to save us from the enemy, he came to save us from the enemy we're in. that we might become inheritors of his promises, that we might become members of the kingdom of God.

[21:43] Today, you're going to be given one of these. I'd like to think you might put it somewhere prominently in your home to remind you of the cost that Jesus paid, that your sin could be forgiven, and you could be free to be a disciple.

a cross. Why a cross? And one level, a symbol of huge failure.

That's why when Jesus was arrested, that's why when he smashed up the temple, that's why people lost confidence that this really was the person that they could put their trust in.

And you might be sitting there thinking, well, I've got plenty of reasons for not putting my trust in Jesus. Jesus came to help you with the enemy within, your wrongdoing, your sinfulness.

How does that happen? It happens on a cross. I remember that wonderful, wonderful old Lenten hymn.

[23:01] Glory be to Jesus, who in bitter pains poured for me the lifeblood from his sacred veins. Grace and life eternal in that blood I find.

Blessed be his compassion, infinitely kind. This may be for you.

a day of decision. Maybe you need to stop pressing a role on somebody close to you, which is not their role at all. Maybe you need to stop that.

Maybe you need to learn a little persistence. Don't stop when your expectations are let down. Try and ask yourself this question, what is God trying to teach me?

And finally, remember Jesus came to save the enemy within. God's mercy is overflowing says scripture.

[24:09] I am so grateful for that. St. Paul wrote that he was the chief of sinners. I think I could run him a pretty close second.

Turn your mind back to that hot and dusty day. On that Palm Sunday, what would you be shouting? What would you be thinking? where would you be? Who is this Jesus? The crowd asked. That's a great question.

And for those of you who don't know Jesus, here's my advice. Remember he loves you though you don't deserve it and make a decision to follow him.

Ask him to forgive you for the enemy within which has driven you to behaviours that you really ought to be ashamed of. Tell him from today onwards you will trust him.

[25:30] And believe me, your life will never ever be the same. Not in this life and not into eternity.

come on Jesus, save now. Not from our government or from anything outside of us, but save us from the consequences of our sin.

That one day we shall meet you face to face in heaven and live in eternity with you. In the name of that amazing God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

And the people who agreed said together. Amen.