

LOVE WITHOUT LIMIT

All the way to Calvary

History has only one main event. Mankind's timeline is dotted with important moments: The first spark from the first flint; the rolling of the first wheel; the treating of the first wound. Who dares minimise these events? But who dares compare them with the cross? History has only one main event, scripture has only one main event – others matter, but only one is essential.

The story of Jericho might stir you, but falling walls can't redeem you. Moses will give you direction in the wilderness, but no solution for your sin. David's defeat of Goliath may reduce you to timidity. But the cross prepares you for eternity.

Scripture only has one main event. Even in the life of Jesus there is only one main event. For if there is no cross of Christ, then there is no truth to Christ. And when it comes to your life the same is true. To remove the cross, is to remove the hinge pin from the door of hope – the door of your hope.

For if there is no cross, then there is no sacrifice for sin; if there is no sacrifice for sin, how will you face a sinless God? Will you cleanse your own sin? And if there is no cross of Christ, there is no resurrection of Christ. And if there is no resurrection, how will you live again? Will you push back your own grave?

*Forgiveness of sin, deliverance from death; these are the claims of the cross. Let there be no mistake, the cross is not **an** event in history, it is **the** event in history.¹*

Have you ever wondered what would have happened if God had quit? Some of the most powerful words in all of human history are these words: 'In the beginning God created...' (Genesis 1 v 1). These words are simply stunning. These words changed everything. The power of these words still echoes across the universe today. These words still challenge the human race today. These words still challenge to the core, our understanding of what it means to exist, to be alive and to understand who we are.

¹ Quote by Max Lucado

In the beginning God created... God created a magnificent world. God created a beautiful world. God created a stunningly intricate world. God created a world that, even in its fallenness, we are still discovering today.

God created a world that was an extraordinarily generous gift. God created a world that brimmed with, and exhibited, remarkable creativity. God created a world that reflected his goodness, his generosity, his creativity, his joy. God created a world with pizzazz – a world that is, because it reflects who God is. God created a world that gives and give and gives... in beauty, in detail, in its intricacy, in its variety, in its creativity. And then, to top it all off, God created men and women – the fullest revelation of himself in all of his creation. And to men and women, God gave the world he created. It was a world that was so good, so very good. And maybe, God looked at the world that he'd created and said something like this: "Whoa! This is so good – its great!"

What if, when Adam and Eve took and ate the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, God quit? What if God had said in response that his world was now so wrecked that he'd have nothing more to do with it? What if God had not only banished Adam and Eve from the garden of Eden but banished his whole creative plan? What if he'd quit?

What if God had decided he wasn't going to save even Noah when a great flood filled earth? What if he thought things were so very bad, it wasn't worth saving anyone, no matter how good they might be? What if he'd quit?

What if, after rescuing his people from Egypt through the dramatic events of the plagues and the extraordinary escape through the Red Sea, and hearing after only three days of freedom, their moaning and wishing they were back in Egypt, God had said: 'It's not worth it!'

What if, after showing them the Promised Land and hearing them say they'd never be able to take it because the people were too big and strong, he'd given up on them? What if, after hearing his people's cry that they wanted a king so they could be like every other nation, God had said: "I'm done with this!"

But, God never gave up.

He sent prophets, people like Hosea to speak on his behalf. And with Hosea, he got creative, very creative. "Hosea," he said. "I want you to go and marry Gomer the prostitute to show the people the way they have been with me."

“And, Hosea, when Gomer goes off with other men, I want you to take her back – because that’s my story with your people. Oh, and Hosea, go and tell the people that if they go on the way they are, they’ll have to face the consequences of their actions and the way they have chosen to live...and the consequence will be exile. They will find themselves defeated by the people they turned to for help. They will find the gods they chose to worship cannot deliver on their promises.”

What if in 722BC, during the time Hosea was speaking God’s word to Israel, when Israel was taken in captivity by Assyria, God had said: “That’s it! I’m done! I warned you and warned you and warned you, but you wouldn’t listen. Now I’m done! That’s it! It’s over!”

But God never gave up.

Have you ever wondered what would have happened if Jesus had given in to one of the temptations of Satan? What if Jesus had said: “You know what, I am really, really hungry and those stones could become bread for me. If I’m going to do what I came for, I need to eat. Maybe I should turn these stones to bread.” What if he had said: “Yes, if I jump off this cliff – God would send his angels to protect me, and it would be fun, wouldn’t it?” What if he’d said: “I could do with a bit of wealth while I’m here on Earth and I’ll need the best money can buy.”

What if Jesus had simply given up?

What if Jesus, when he heard that John the Baptist’s head had been cut off, thought to himself: “This is getting dangerous now, I’m going into hiding.” What if, after watching the crowds that had followed him, walk away because his teaching was too hard and being left with only 12 disciples, Jesus thought – I may as well give up because this is never going to work.

What if Jesus looked at the 12 disciples, who one moment saw him feed 5,000 men, plus women and children with five loaves and two fish, and the next moment don’t recognise him as he walked to them on the water, and thought – I might as well give up! This will never work, they’ll never get it! We’ve got no chance with this in their hands! What if he just walked off into the sunset?

But Jesus never gave up.

²⁸ After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. ²⁹ As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called

the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, ³⁰ “Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. ³¹ If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ say, ‘The Lord needs it.’”

³² Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. ³³ As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?”

³⁴ They replied, “The Lord needs it.”

³⁵ They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. ³⁶ As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road.

³⁷ When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen:

³⁸ “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

³⁹ Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples!”

⁴⁰ “I tell you,” he replied, “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.”

⁴¹ As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it ⁴² and said, “If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. ⁴³ The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. ⁴⁴ They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God’s coming to you. (Luke 19 v 28-44)

You know friends, the truth of this story, the one with God and Jesus in, is going somewhere. God, it seems to me, had many, many opportunities to give up on the people he had created. Time and time and time and time again, the people he created gave God cause to say: “That’s it, I’m done!”.

But God never gives up.

And when everything else has failed to win his people back, God, who could have given up right there, invites Jesus to walk into the mess. And Jesus, living close up to the fickleness of those his Father created and loved, could, many times, have looked around and thought, maybe it really isn't worth it. But this story is bigger and better than that! This is the story of God who never quits, of God who never walks away from those he created and loves.

This is the story of the God who has you in his heart, who holds you in his affections. This is the story of the God who would do anything to win you back and have you close. And this is the story of the God who did exactly that and when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, when the crowds welcomed him and threw down their cloaks in front of him.

The story was reaching its climax. Jesus was saying something very simple but very profound, as he rode that day on a donkey.

He says: "You can welcome me today and hail me as your king, because, in truth, that is who I am. And in a few days, you can change your cry from 'welcome' to 'crucify'. You can welcome me today, and hate me tomorrow. You can stand against the authorities today and bend with them tomorrow. You can open your hearts to me today, and then turn your back on me tomorrow. But, whatever you do, and however you do it, I will never give up on you. And I will go to the cross because that's how much I love you and that's how much my Father loves you. We will never, never give up on you!"

The climax of the story of love is the greatest demonstration of love in human history. It is not an event in history. The cross is The Event in history.

It simply tells you this: God never gives up on anyone and God will never give up on you.

The truth about you and me is that like the people we read about in the Bible, we have given God many opportunities to give up on us if he wanted to. But God's story is the story of the God who simply never gives up on us.

Maybe today you need to hear that deep, deep truth and hear it about yourself. It is wonderfully true for the people sitting either side of you. But it is also wonderfully true for you. Today, in these moments, God is saying to you: "I will never give up on you!"

There is nothing more that God would love today, than for you to hear him speak those words to you. So, how about it friends? Are you going to let yourself hear God speaking those words to you?

On that first Palm Sunday, as Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, the people laid cloaks on the dusty road before him. Passover was a time of promise and celebration, a time of remembering God's sovereign presence, of freedom and of the kingdom of God coming in a new way. It was a time of celebration and anticipation and the people welcomed Jesus by laying down their cloaks.

But here's the thing: laying down cloaks is something you don't do. You don't lay down your cloak on a dusty, dry, stony Middle Eastern road. You don't do it for a friend – however close. You don't do it for family – even a senior member of the family. The only time you lay down your cloak is for royalty. Jesus, the king, the person at the centre of the story, rides in on a donkey to tell the people he'll never give up on them. And the people welcome him by laying down their cloaks.

Maybe the question for us this morning becomes something like this: What will we lay down to welcome the King? When you hear his words to you this morning, when you hear him tell you he will never give up on you, what will you lay down to welcome him?

Friends, my best guess is there are many cloaks present here this morning, many cloaks that need to be laid down so that we can welcome the king. Maybe the question becomes: "What's your cloak?" What is it that stops you fully welcoming the king today? Perhaps our pride. Perhaps it's that we believe God has given up on us. Perhaps it's the hurt we carry from the challenges of life. Perhaps its anger, at God or others, or ourselves. Perhaps its resentment, buried deep in your heart that leads to an attitude of bitterness about someone or something.

Perhaps its disappointment – life has not gone as you'd hoped and planned. Perhaps its fear, or ambition, or the illness you suffer from or the illness a loved one suffers from.

The road with the cloaks on leads all the way to Calvary, where God says in the deepest, most profound way: "I will never give up on you!"

The way of the cross is the way of freedom, release, renewal, healing, forgiveness, peace, wholeness.

So, what will you do?

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