

The Spirit of Power, Love & Self-Control
Part 3: “If Only You Had Known...”
(Luke 19:41-44 with 2 Chronicles 7:14 & 1 Peter 2:9-12)

Opening Prayer

Savior Help Me

(lightly amended from Robert Grant, to tune “Kristy” – bc)

By Your birth and by Your tears;
by Your human griefs and fears;
by Your conflict in the hour
of the subtle tempter’s power;
Savior, look with pitying eye.
Savior, help me, or I die

By the tenderness that wept
o’er the grave where Lazarus slept;
by the bitter tears that flowed
over Salem’s lost abode;
Savior, look with pitying eye;
Savior help me, or I die.

By Your lonely hour of prayer;
by the fearful turmoil there;
by Your cross and dying cries;
by Your one great sacrifice;
Savior, look with pitying eye;
Savior help me, or I die.

By Your triumph o’er the grave;
by Your power the lost to save;
by Your high majestic throne;
by the kingdom all Your own;
Savior, look with pitying eye;
Savior help me, or I die.

Intro

Introduction:

*“After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.
As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives,
he sent two of his disciples, saying to them,
“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.
If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' tell him, 'The Lord needs it.' "
Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them.
As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?"
They replied, "The Lord needs it."
They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it.
As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road.
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:
"Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!"
"Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"
Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus,
"Teacher, rebuke your disciples!"
"I tell you," he replied, "if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out."
As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city,
he wept over it 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.
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.
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 19:28–44)

This passage is a prime example of what John wrote about when he said:

"The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it."
 (John 1:5)

There is a very real sense in which the whole story of the human race could be told in terms of God coming to humankind, visiting us in every conceivable way, with one approach after another, and in the stupor of our own waywardness, we just don't get it.

We like to sing songs like "How Deep the Father's Love for Us" but have we ever even considered what that really means? Take this scene for example:

Here Jesus is coming to Jerusalem, Zion itself, the fabled 'City of Peace'

- surrounded by a cheering crowd of admirers
- many had witnessed His healings
- some had seen Him raise Lazarus from the dead
- they had heard Him teach
- some had been with Him since the beginning of His earthly ministry
- it is a truly cosmic event - even the stones sensed it

But

- no one understood the emotional meaning of it all
- Jesus wept over the city-Everyone else is cheering, Jesus is crying

What is His lament?

- If only you knew...
- This day...
- What would bring peace
- But now it is hidden from your eyes
- You did not recognize the time of God's coming to you

If Only You Knew

Many - most of the people in the crowd claimed to be God's Covenant people. Each had his or her notion of what kind of event represented God working among them. (Of course, most would say they believe that God is at work in everything, but in actuality, only certain kinds of events drew their attention to the idea that God was at work.)

Remember when John the Baptizer was in prison. That did not fit his idea of what God would be doing. Perhaps Jesus was not doing what John thought Messiah was going to do, so he sent his followers to ask Jesus, "are You the one?" Do you remember Jesus' answer?

*"Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see:
The blind receive sight,
the lame walk,
those who have leprosy are cured,
the deaf hear,
the dead are raised,
and the good news is preached to the poor.
Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me.'"*
(Matthew 11:4-6)

Jesus had a long track record of doing things that obviously indicated God was at work, yet Israel still kept asking for a sign. Why? Because Jesus did things God's way, not theirs. They were blind to anything they found unexpected.

So when He comes to Jerusalem, knowing that they were cheering Him now, but within a week they would be crying out for His crucifixion - and He says, "If only you knew..."

This Day

God was at work. He was doing exactly what He had been saying for centuries that He would do. Messiah was here and He came having fulfilled prophecy after prophecy, but they did not see it. It was a truly cosmic moment - so much so that if at least some people didn't see and offer recognition, even the stones would testify to it.

But even His disciples did not see it.

What would lead to Peace

Here Jesus stands over Jerusalem, the "city of peace" yet it was a hotbed of turmoil:

- Religious controversies...
- Heresies...
- Fake Messiahs...
- False and corrupt religious leaders...
- Political unrest...
- International intrigues...
- Social injustices...
- Brutalities from all sides...
- Inequities...

Jerusalem was arguably the one place on earth that where peace was most conspicuously absent, yet its inhabitants did not recognize the Prince of Peace when He came riding into town the way their prophecies said he would. Because ...

Now the truth is hidden from your eyes

The One who in fact was and is THE WAY, THE TRUTH, THE LIFE stood right before them, in plain sight, having been heralded to all, yet remaining hidden.

What kept them from seeing?

- Fear
- false teachings
- love of money & things
- love of power
- ignorance of God's Word
- well meaning, but mistaken traditions
- terminal small-mindedness --
- the failure to recognize the very thing they said they were looking for.
- they fell away on account of Jesus - He wasn't what they expected.

All leading to the same tragic outcome...

You did not recognize the time of God's coming to you

The word used here is the word used when an overseer visits a worksite to assure things were going right.

God was visiting them - this time in person

They did not recognize it for what it was.

They missed Messiah... They missed out on peace...
They missed out on salvation

So, what does this mean to us?

Could it be, that this whole covid 19 phenomenon is a visitation from the Lord?

We say that God is in control - and take comfort from that.

We say that He is at work in this world - and find purpose in that.

We pray "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven"

Yet many will consider me either overly superstitious or arrogantly judgmental to even raise the possibility that this might be discipline from the Lord.

Count on it, the more people who hear this, the more criticism I will get for even suggesting the possibility that someone has done wrong or that God judges - indeed, even among Christians, our society prefers to criticize those who expose wrongdoing more than it criticizes wrongdoers

But really now, think of it...

-it's a cold virus (Covid 19 - the 19th example of this kind of virus)

-extremely contagious

-potentially deadly to be sure

-it has caused incredible fear

-even before it really hit our shores, it brought our economy to its knees

-just the threat of what some people think it could do has crippled our society

-it has literally shut the church doors of even the most orthodox and devout congregations

-if someone told you last New Years day that in less than 3 months our economy would be brought to a stand still and you would be afraid to even go to church because of a cold virus, would you have believed it?

Doesn't it seem like something bigger than normal life is at work here? Doesn't it make sense to raise the question:

Is God saying something to us through all this?

I suggest that anyone who observes how God has acted throughout the Scriptures and over the centuries would know, there is good reason to think this may well be a stroke of God's discipline.

If indeed, America trusts in God, we ought to at least listen to His Word:

*“My son, do not despise the LORD’s discipline
and do not resent his rebuke,
because the LORD disciplines those he loves,
as a father the son he delights in.”*
(Proverbs 3:11–12)

What greater example of despising the Lord's discipline could there be than to suggest He would never do it?

By God's own Word, if we say He would never discipline or judge, then are we not saying He does not loves us?

If you ask the question, 'Why would God discipline us?' my answer would be to challenge you with this:

Can you watch ten hours of primetime television without seeing multiple examples of each and everyone of the Ten Commandments being violated, not just by the ‘villains’, but also by the ‘heroes’?

Could you watch even five hours of news without reports indicating the brazen violation of each and every one of the Ten Commandments?

For decades now evangelists have been calling America to repentance.

The following is from a letter by Billy Graham posted in 2012 on the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association website:

"Some years ago, my wife, Ruth, was reading the draft of a book I was writing. When she finished a section describing the terrible downward spiral of our nation's moral standards and the idolatry of worshiping false gods such as technology and sex, she startled me by exclaiming, "If God doesn't punish America, He'll have to apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah."

She was probably thinking of a passage in Ezekiel where God tells why He brought those cities to ruin. "Now this was the sin of ... Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy. They were haughty and did detestable things before me. Therefore I did away with them as you have seen" (Ezekiel 16:49–50, NIV).

I wonder what Ruth would think of America if she were alive today.

Let me suggest to you that 2 Chronicles 7:14 is exactly the passage we should become experts in today:

*"I have heard your prayer
and have chosen this place for myself as a temple for sacrifices.
"When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain,
or command locusts to devour the land
or send a plague among my people,
if my people, who are called by my name,
will humble themselves and pray and seek my face
and turn from their wicked ways,
then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin
and will heal their land."
(2 Chronicles 7:12–14)*

You see, I believe Jesus' lament over Jerusalem could be made every bit as accurately over the United States today:

“If only you knew” – so we need to humble ourselves, pray and seek God’s face

“This day” – we need to examine -- as individuals, as churches, as denominations, as a society, and as a nation – standing face to God, in His eyes, how do we appear? Is Covid 19 a visitation from Him? Are we reaping what we’ve sown? Does this present us with opportunities for love that we could never have had otherwise? How can we best become instruments of His peace?

“What would lead to peace” – can we realistically ask God to give us peace when so much of what we have become and what we do present a direct insult to our Creator and Savior? What can we do to help bring about peace, wholeness...

“but now it is hidden from your eyes” – Our best strategy for removing our spiritual blinds spots is this: to be sincere in our humility, sincere in our prayers, and honest in seeking God’s face – then to turn from our ways to His ways.

Humility... prayer... seeking God... Repentance

This is where peace will be found.

Repent – a change of mind that changes our direction

The repentant mind...

- changes how it thinks
- changes how it acts
- changes what it longs for
- changes what it prays for

Lord willing, we will have much more to say about repentance and its happy connection with Resurrection, but for now, I close with this:

We are called to be priests of a New Covenant
A renewed people
A holy nation

We are not at the mercy of a virus. We are not at the mercy of our government.
We are not at the mercy of our fears or discontents.
We are by God’s mercy -- witnesses – ministers – ambassadors of His mercy and grace. We are stewards of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood,

*a holy nation, a people belonging to God,
that you may declare the praises of him who called you
out of darkness into his wonderful light.
Once you were not a people,
but now you are the people of God;
once you had not received mercy,
but now you have received mercy.
Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world,
to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.
Live such good lives among the pagans that,
though they accuse you of doing wrong,
they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.”
(1 Peter 2:9–12)*

In the meantime, remember God’s promise: If His people, who are called by His name will humble themselves, pray, seek His face and turn from wicked ways

HE WILL HEAL OUR LAND!!!