

EASTER SERMON

NOTES

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Do not gloat over me my enemies! For though I fall I will rise again. Though I sit in darkness the LORD will be my light. Micah 7 verse 8

...destroy this temple and in 3 days I will raise it up. John 2 verse 19

INTRODUCTION

At Easter, our thoughts turn to changing seasons and new life. The verse we read today is a small part of an important message to God's people. It's a message declaring painful changes that are about to descend on the people of Israel and Judah. It's the kind of message that nobody wants to hear.

It's hard to see the upside of a message that goes something like this: "I am going to punish the people who are about to hurt you". Gee. So it's not all bad news then?

And yet this message of coming challenges follows a format that we see repeatedly throughout the scripture and nowhere more so than in the Easter story. Stories of promised tragedy and spectacular turnarounds are par for the Christian course. The good news is that God has already won and He has already made a way for us to spend eternity with Him through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

1. In God's economy, outcomes are determined before the contest. Before any pain or suffering is endured, comfort and reward is guaranteed. In Micah chapter 1 God gives stern warnings about the future of the nations who are about to raze Jerusalem to the ground. But such a warning does not change the fact that hard times are heading Israel's way.

Just as the LORD spoke through Micah to warn Israel and Judah of the pending exile, so Christ was fully aware of the path that lay ahead of him. As per John 2, he knew exactly what was going to happen to him. He knew but never tried to change course. He endured the cross because of the joy that was set before him.

Together with our sponsors, Compassion serves children living in some of the toughest circumstances imaginable. Yet the surroundings into which a child is born does not make them any less precious in the eyes of God. Neither does it mean that their future is determined by their economic conditions nor that they are abandoned by God. Psalm 23 is vivid reminder that even if you find yourself walking through the darkest valley, He is with you. You may always wish for Him to lead you by still waters, but when the heat is on, He is right there by your side.

Michaelangelo, one of the world's most renowned artists, is reported to have said of his iconic sculpture that 'David' was in the stone, clamouring to be freed. And so inside every child we serve is a masterpiece waiting to make a mark on the world. Together we are chiselling away the stone of poverty and injustice so the world will see the glory and beauty of God in each precious child.

2. The Lord never leaves us without hope and even in the middle of a message that is upsetting to read, he speaks words of hope for the future. In Micah chapter 5 the birthplace of Christ is prophesied. The destruction of Jerusalem is a powerful metaphor of the death and resurrection of Christ. Just as God's people would be returned to Jerusalem, so Christ would come back from the grave.

Never forget that when something appears to be laid to waste today, do not assume this will always be the case. It may feel today that you stand in the rubble and remains of your hopes and dreams but never forget that you have not arrived at the end of the story.

Exile was not the end of Israel's story. The grave was not the end of Christ's story and defeat is not the end of yours.

3. Whether we are referring to the destruction of Jerusalem or the death of Christ, what does this narrative teach us about how to live? Micah Chapters 6 verse 8 tells us, "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you. To act justly and love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

Micah's message was not just preparing God's people for exile. It was teaching them how to live in good times and in tough times. In Ephesians chapter 2 verse 1 to 10, Paul tells us that though we were dead in transgressions and sin, God has raised us up with Christ to do good works.

The ministry of Compassion is a response to the numerous exhortations of scripture to attend to the needs of those less fortunate than ourselves. On this Easter Sunday, to share in Christ's resurrection life is to act on the good works he has prepared in advance for us to do.

There are many ways we can draw closer to God but there can be no denying that serving the poor is an important part of our devotion to Christ.

Speaking at the Presidential prayer breakfast in 2006, the rock singer Bono said,

"God is in the slums, in the cardboard boxes where the poor play house. God is in the silence of a mother who has infected her child with a virus that will end both their lives. God is in the cries heard under the rubble of war. God is in the debris of wasted opportunity and lives, and God is with us when we are with them."

REFLECTIONS ON HOW WE MIGHT RESPOND

Maybe today's message is a word to help you to stand strong in the Lord despite testing circumstances? Do not let your circumstances 'gloat' over you for though you fall, you will rise again. Though you may feel as though you are sat in darkness, the LORD will be your light.

It could be that these thoughts are encouragement to you to offer hope to someone in your life who is suffering at this time. Perhaps sponsoring a child with Compassion is a way for all of us to put our faith into action and help children who are currently suffering in extreme poverty.

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