

**"If you do good and suffer for it . . .
this is a gracious thing in the sight of God!"**

1 Peter 2:20

Sermon for 14 April 2019

Texts: Acts 3:6-4:4, 13; 1 Peter 2:12-25; Psalm 2

In the weeks following the first Easter, and the days following Pentecost, things were really hopping in Jerusalem. We could start in any number of places, but let's start with the divinely orchestrated jail break reported in Acts 5:18-20:

18 They (the high priest and the Sadducees) **laid hands on the apostles and put them in a public jail. 19 But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the gates of the prison, and taking them out he said, 20 "Go, stand and speak to the people in the temple the whole message of this Life."** or, **"Go, stand and continue to speak to the people in the temple, all the words of this Life."**

That last word "Life" is heavily freighted. It could mean "this new life, this eternal life, this salvation life" (cm John 6:68) And what comes into view here is a guilty, frightened leadership attempting to do damage control for their part in Easter.

The officers went to fetch the imprisoned apostles, found them gone:
5:23 **`We found the prison securely locked and the guards standing at the door, but when we opened them we found no one inside. 24. Now when the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these words, they were greatly perplexed, wondering what this would come to.** There's the fear. And now we come to the guilt: 28. **We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us.** They were afraid that what they had done would actually be attributed to them and laid at their feet!

But Peter does not back down (5:29-33):

29 We must obey God rather than man. 30 The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. 31 God exalted him at this right hand as Leader/Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and for forgiveness of sins. 32 And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.

v. 33 **When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them.**
That is to say, they wished to do a cover-up the old fashioned way!

Well, today is Palm Sunday. Palm Sunday is a royal ascension day! The King of Israel comes, seated on a donkey, greeted with palms, songs and shouts of acclamation. And that is exactly what transpired. At least on one track, that is what happened—out in public, amongst the people. But there was a counter movement gathering momentum at the same time—a Resistance! Yes, even back on Jesus' coronation day, there were powerful interests, secular and religious leaders, who had determined to reject their king. They would do whatever they could to prevent him from

ever assuming his rightful place as God's anointed King of Israel. So they sent out spies, they met and conspired together and held a mock trial, convicted him of fabricated charges and persuaded the Romans to crucify their king, to commit regicide on their behalf. And the problem with Peter was complicated: 1. he knew exactly what they had done, 2. he understood why they did what they did; and 3. by his application of Psalm 2 to their present circumstances, he was exposing them not for who they thought they were, but for who they actually were in the eyes of God and for the role that they unwittingly, to some degree, in the salvation history of mankind!

What he knew, dear friends, is what you need to know. Remember, Peter's terse summary:

*God raised Jesus from the dead, who God-hating rebels has put to death—by crucifixion. Jesus, our true King, vindicated by the resurrection, was exalted by God to his rightful place, his throne in heaven, as Prince (a royal Son) and Savior! God did all this **to give repentance and forgiveness of sins** to his erstwhile enemies, the rebels who betrayed, hated and walked unfaithfully towards their God. (repeat)*

This declaration is just as inflammatory to day as it was in the early days of Peter's ministry in the early church. It still enrages God haters and it still provokes them to want proclaimers of the gospel dead!

The whole scenario of Easter is presented in Psalm 2. Therefore we can declare that this prophetic psalm was fulfilled in the events of Easter. We must do so boldly. Here's the psalm:

The Reign of the Lord's Anointed

- 1 Why do the nations rage
and the peoples plot in vain?**
- 2 The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers take counsel together,
against the Lord and against his Anointed, saying,**
- 3 "Let us burst their bonds apart
and cast away their cords from us."**
- 4 He who sits in the heavens laughs;
the Lord holds them in derision.**
- 5 Then he will speak to them in his wrath,
and terrify them in his fury, saying,**
- 6 "As for me, I have set my King
on Zion, my holy hill."**
- 7 I will tell of the decree:
The Lord said to me, "You are my Son;
today I have begotten you.**
- 8 Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage,
and the ends of the earth your possession.**
- 9 You shall break them with a rod of iron
and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."**

10 Now therefore, O kings, be wise;
be warned, O rulers of the earth.
11 Serve the Lord with fear,
and rejoice with trembling.
12 Kiss the Son,
lest he be angry, and you perish in the way,
for his wrath is quickly kindled.
Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

We start with a seething mass of angry plotters—the nations, the kings of the earth and the rulers (read, Herod Agrippa, Pontus Pilate, Caaiaphas, the Sanhedrin, the Jewish Council, the romans, the elders of Israel) and among them, many screaming, “No, no, not this king . . . we have no king” but Caesar which means, because they hated Caesar, they held no allegiance to anyone except themselves. ***They are out and out rebels . . . traitors and lawless ones.*** Peter allows that they have slid into this out of carelessness, ignorance and spiritual drift. That can only be claimed for some of them for others amongst them are downright villains. Murderers, thieves and liars like, as Jesus notes, their spiritual father, Satan himself.

They take counsel together against God and Christ—**Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us. No laws for us, no morality, no standards, no spiritual restraints at all!** They favor radical autonomy and spiritual independence—but seldom state it plainly and baldly as all thst. They will have their way and ain’t nobody going to tell them what to do. Can you hear the rankling pride and arrogance of the ungodly? No wonder they were easily persuaded, or bought, to chant **“Away with Him . . . Crucify Him.**

God seeing the futility and folly of their ways holds them in open derision—he **laughs them to scorn.** (v.4) Then, it is written, he will follow up derision with **wrath . . . and fury.** Seriously. However, he is not distracted in the least—while he deals with the scoffers and God-haters handily enough **he proceeds with his agenda: As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.** Jesus is king now and forever! And God states, **I will tell of the decree . . . “You are my Son” Today,** that is, in the day that God decreed **You are my Son—it is established, I have begotten you.** Jesus is king because God says that it is so. **Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.** (v.8)

It is such a done deal that there is nothing the kings, or rulers can do .except gnash their teeth and rage and fume. Nothing. Against God they cannot succeed. They are totally impotent to have their own way! Their defiant little tizzy-fit will fizzle out and die with their defiance. **Every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord!** (Phil 2:10-11). So, bow now, it is better now than later. **Be wise . . . be warned . . . Kiss the Son,** kiss the Lord Jesus. Receive him with respectful trembling joy! Lest he become incensed and bring complete and final judgment on you as swiftly as a bolt of lightning. **Blessed are all who take refuge in him.**

I know my treatment has been brief and the ascent has been steep; but, my friends, this is what Easter is all about. The Jews in Jerusalem, right after Pentecost, would have recognized this psalm of David. It was historically applied to King David, probably

in his coronation exercises. But since the Babylonian exile, when the dynasty of King David ceased, the psalm had taken on a messianic tone and a prophetic purpose. But, buried as it was in the liturgical practice of their ceremonial religion, were they paying attention to the fulfillment of this prophecy in the life and person of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ—or Anointed One? Well, no, they were not. Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned *is clearly a call to repentance*. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling *is equally clearly a call to submission*—to repent of rebellion, to submit to God’s King, King Jesus! Kiss the Son signifies the reconciliation brought about by Christ’s atonement (his dying freely, out of love, for all our sins). And, more than that, we hear urgency—reconcile as soon as you can! Why urgency? Because the door of grace may be open now, but it will not be open forever *and when it is over, it’s over*.

So attend to the word of the Lord in Acts 3:1-4:4:

3:1 Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour.[3 P.M.] 2 And a man lame from birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple that is called the Beautiful Gate to ask alms of those entering the temple. 3 Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked to receive alms. 4 And Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said, “Look at us.” 5 And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. 6 But Peter said, “I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!” 7 And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. 8 And leaping up, he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. 9 And all the people saw him walking and praising God, 10 and recognized him as the one who sat at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, asking for alms. And they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

Peter Speaks in Solomon's Portico

11 While he clung to Peter and John, all the people, utterly astounded, ran together to them in the portico called Solomon's. 12 And when Peter saw it he addressed the people: “Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk? 13 The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant [*or, child*] Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. 14 But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, 15 and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. 16 And his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus [*him*] has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.

17 “And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. 18 But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. 19 Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, 20 that times of refreshing may

come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, 21 whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago. 22 Moses said, ‘The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. 23 And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.’ 24 And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days. 25 You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.’ 26 God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness.”

Those listening to Peter were so privileged. They were first in line among the people of God to receive the gospel. They heard that resurrection is vindication and that in turn is exaltation or glorification. And so we are privileged, too—we know what Easter is about. Let us share what we know.

Peter and John Accosted by the Council

4:1 **And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, 2 greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. 3 And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. 4 But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand. . .**

It does not take much thinking to grasp why the Sanhedrin were annoyed. The matter goes beyond the doctrine of resurrection. Peter is indicting indicts them! 13 **The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant [or, child] Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. 14 But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, 15 and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead.** First, Peter says that God, their God, glorified the very one they scorned, rejected and handed over for brutal execution *in order to **save the nation***, to preserve their place of power, prestige and influence—getting rid of Jesus was political and expedient. They betrayed one of their own, even to overriding his determination of **no guilt**—so at the very least they murdered and innocent man! And they knew it, they participated in it, they conspired and rebelled against the Lord’s Anointed. *Whether chanting as cued, or rioting and causing disturbances, whether threatening the peace with their uproar—to satisfy their masters, or earn their pay.* It is little wonder that they felt the need to repudiate all that Peter was testifying to, or witnessing to. He was condemning them for complicity in condemning Christ Jesus! So there they were, between a rock and a hard place:

“What shall we do with these men?” For not only are they indicting us, but that a notable sign has been performed through them is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. But in order that it spread

no further among the people, let us warn them not to speak or teach anyone in this name. (Acts 4:16-17)

4:13 Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.

Thirty years later, from Rome and during the reign of Nero, Peter wrote a letter to the persecuted church in Asia, instructing believers then and now how to behave, or live in such a way that others may, observing us, also conclude that we have been with the Master. Here that passage is, 1 Peter 2:12-25:

12 Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

Submission to Authority

13 Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, 14 or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. 15 For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. 16 Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. 17 Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor. (four brusque imperatives!) 18 Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. 19 For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. 20 For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. 21 For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. 22 He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. 23 When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. 24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. 25 For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

The word “gracious” here demands some treatment because we are not using gracious to mean, polite, civil and considerate. No, it is more in line with **Hail, Mary, full of grace**. Gabriel did not mean polite, civil or considerate—still less did he mean, skillful and smooth on the dance floor—as in nice moves. Gabriel meant **full of the grace of God**. He had that divine property in mind that we allude to when we say, saved by grace through faith in Christ alone? It is “sheer, unmerited favor” which carries forward the redeeming mercy of God. Grace is what we communicate to others when we **endure sorrows while suffering unjustly**. That is a sublime thing. That is what Christ manifested in enduring his unjust trial and cruel treatment at the hands of wicked and evil men—the trial of which Peter witnessed first hand, and then lived to tell others

about. Jesus suffered for our salvation's sake. And you, when you embrace Christ, embrace suffering, too.

Are you suffering some injustice this hour? Turn into a testimony, demonstrate by how you suffer persecution that you are the genuine article—a Christian. Here's a transparency to aspire to: may those who see you, observe through you our awesome, sinless king! Embrace your cross for the cause that it advances—always seek to remind others of what he has done for us.

If when you do good, and suffer for doing good *enduringly* (with courage, perseverance and divinely supplied strength) without reviling, that is cursing, or blaming; if you do not take matters into your own hands (even if you could do so), and you do not avenge yourself but trust God to judge you and our enemies *justly*, regardless of how harsh, unfair, or undeserved it may appear now, you are following Christ's example! You will not go without your reward in the coming kingdom. You will be righteous.

Amen