

“Places of the Passion: The Mount of Olives”

Matthew 26: 30-35

30 Then they sang a hymn and went out to the Mount of Olives. 31 On the way, Jesus told them, “Tonight all of you will desert me. For the Scriptures say, ‘God will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’ 32 But after I have been raised from the dead, I will go ahead of you to Galilee and meet you there.” 33 Peter declared, “Even if everyone else deserts you, I will never desert you.” 34 Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth Peter—this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny three times that you even know me.”

35 “NO!” Peter insisted. “Even if I have to die with you, I will never deny you!” And all the other disciples vowed the same.

2 Chronicles 20: 1,2, 14-22

1 After this, the armies of the Moabites, Ammonites, and some of the Meunites declared war on Jehoshaphat. 2 Messengers came and told Jehoshaphat, “A vast army from Edom is marching against you from beyond the Dead Sea. They are already at Hazazon-tamar.” (This was another name for En-gedi.)

14 The Spirit of the Lord came upon one of the men standing there. His name was Jahaziel son of Zechariah, son of Benaiah, son of Jeiel, son of Mattaniah, a Levite who was a descendant of Asaph (the one who wrote many of the Psalms).

15 He said, “Listen, all you people of Judah and Jerusalem! Listen, King Jehoshaphat! This is what the Lord says: Do not be afraid! Don’t be discouraged by this mighty army, for the battle is not yours, but God’s. 16 Tomorrow, march out against them. You will find them coming up through the ascent of Ziz at the end of the valley that opens into the wilderness of Jeruel. 17 But you will not even need to fight. Take your positions; then stand still and watch the Lord’s victory. He is with you, O people of Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid or discouraged. Go out against them tomorrow, for the Lord is with you!”

18 Then King Jehoshaphat bowed low with his face to the ground. And all the people of Judah and Jerusalem did the same, worshiping the Lord. 19 Then the Levites from the clans of Kohath and Korah stood to praise the Lord, the God of Israel, with a very loud shout. 20 Early the next morning the army of Judah went out into the wilderness of Tekoa. On the way Jehoshaphat stopped and said, “Listen to me, all you people of Judah and Jerusalem! Believe in the Lord your God, and you will be able to stand firm. Believe in His prophets, and you will succeed.”

21 After consulting the people, the king appointed singers to walk ahead of the army, singing to the Lord and praising Him for His holy splendor. This is what they sang: “Give thanks to the Lord; His faithful love endures forever!” 22 At the

very moment they began to sing and give praise, the Lord caused the armies of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir to start fighting among themselves.

In 1962, a nuclear disaster was as close as the press of a red button—one single red button! A Russian submarine was patrolling along the Florida coast and the captain began preparing to nuke three American cities! Had it not been for the calm of a clear-thinking Russian officer, WW III might have begun in 1962. The officer's name? Vasili Arkhipov.

Back in the day, Soviet subs were designed for cold water, not the warm water off the Florida coast. Temperatures reached 120 degrees Fahrenheit inside the Russian sub. As it patrolled near the Florida coast, the men were exhausted and on edge. Finally, the captain lost his cool. He issued the order to launch three nuclear missiles—T-minus three minutes and counting!

Just then, Vasili Arkhipov asked the captain to reconsider. The captain listened. His anger cooled. The Soviet sub went back home! Authorities kept this incredible brush with WW III secret for decades. It wasn't until 2002 that the public learned of Vasili Arkhipov's heroic stand. Why does this matter? After all, we won't ever spend three weeks in a sweltering Russian submarine. We may spend a semester carrying a heavy class load. We may fight the headwinds of a financial downturn. We may spend night after night at the bedside of a sick child or a dying parent. We may fight to keep our family together or our business from going under. And we will be tempted to press the red button and launch—not nuclear warheads—but angry outbursts, rash accusations, a hateful retaliation of ugly words. Sometimes, we just want to let them have it—and deal with the consequences later.

What do we do when the temperature is up, our defenses are down, and we want to go nuclear? How can we keep our finger from pressing the red button? How can we keep our heads when everyone else is losing theirs? Walk to the Mt. of Olives. What? That's what I said, walk to the Mt. of Olives.

We're in a sermon series called Places of the Passion. Today we walk with Jesus to the Mt. of Olives. At the Mt. of Olives, Jesus teaches us to sing. Sing? Yes, sing! Singing is a whole lot better than sobbing, sighing, feeling sorry for myself, or pushing the red button! Sing because of God's power. Matthew chapter 26 and verse 30 reads: "Singing a hymn they went out to the Mt. of Olives." Imagine that! Everything and everyone is about to go nuclear and Jesus sings Psalms 113–118—the Egyptian Hallel. Hallel means "praise!" These psalms praise God for his power that delivered Israel from Egyptian slavery. [NOTE 1]

Here are some verses that Jesus and his disciples sang. Psalm 113:7, "He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap." Psalm 115:3,

“Our God is in the heavens; he does everything he pleases.” Psalm 116:8, “The Lord has delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling.” Psalm 118:22–24, “The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. The Lord has done this and it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.” When your world looks like the darkness of the Mt. of Olives—sing because of God’s power!

Christ is about to be betrayed by a kiss. Then, in staccato-like fashion, there will be deniers and slappers and beaters and spitters and whippers and mockers. And there will be nailers. So what does Jesus do? Jesus sings! Jesus sings because of God’s power. Psalm 118:17—one of the psalms in the Egyptian Hallel—“I shall live and recount the deeds of the Lord!” [NOTE 2]

Instructive are the events in 2 Chronicles 20. In this chapter, Jehoshaphat gains a great victory over the Ammonites, Edomites and Moabites. How does he do it? 2 Chronicles 20:21 tells us, “Jehoshaphat appointed men to sing to the Lord and to praise him for the splendor of his holiness as they went out at the head of the army, singing: ‘Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, his steadfast love endures forever!’” Sing because of God’s power—God’s power brings victory!

Here Psalm 149:6 comes up huge: “The praises of God are in their mouths like a double-edged sword in their hands.” When the praises of God are in our mouths, they—like double-edged swords—silence our sobbing, sighing and feeling sorry for ourselves. When biblical truth is set to music, it becomes memorable, teachable and transformational! When the heat is on and the stress is up, sing—sing hymns and songs. Sing because of God’s power!

Sing because of God’s promise. “Then Jesus said to them, ‘You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered. But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.’” (Matthew 26:31–32) Immanent disaster is right around the corner—but there is also Galilee! Galilee! Galilee is where Christ begins his ministry. Galilee is where Christ continues his ministry! When will that be? After his resurrection! Matthew 28:10 states, “Then Jesus said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.’” [NOTE 3]

When everything looks dark and bleak and you’re tempted to go nuclear—sing because of God’s promise! Why do that? Because the end is not the end. I’ll say that again. The end, is not the end. With Jesus Christ, the end is never the end! There is death but there is also resurrection! There is Golgotha but there is also Galilee! When I was in college I heard Tony Campolo preach a sermon originally written and preached by S.M. Lockridge titled, “It’s only Friday; but Sunday’s coming.” To make a long story short, it stuck. Here’s part of it ... Remember, It’s Friday; but Sunday’s coming. It’s Friday. Jesus is arrested in the garden, the disciples are hiding and Peter’s denying.... But Sunday’s Coming. It’s Friday...

Jesus is beaten, mocked and spit upon, those Roman Soldiers are flogging our Lord Jesus. But Sunday's coming. It's Friday ... See Jesus walking to Calvary, the blood dripping from His body. See those Roman soldiers driving the nails into the feet and hands of my Lord. Hear Jesus cry, "Father forgive them... But Sunday's Comin'. It's Friday ... Jesus is hanging on the cross, bloody and dying, Jesus gives up His spirit and hangs dead on a cross. But, it's only Friday; Sunday's coming. It's Friday... Mary's crying her eyes out 'cause her Jesus is dead. But it's only Friday; Sunday's coming. It's Friday ... Pilate's strutting around washing his hands 'cause he thinks he's got all the power and victory. But it's only Friday; Sunday's coming! It's Friday ... People are saying "as things have been so they shall always be—you can't change anything in this world." But it's only Friday; Sunday's coming. It's Friday... the temple veil ripped from top to bottom—the earth shook—the rocks split and tombs opened. The centurion spoke seriously in fear, "Truly, He is the Son of God!" But it's only Friday; Sunday's coming. It's Sunday—"the angel, like dazzling lightning rolled the stone away exclaiming, "He is not here! He is risen!" It's Sunday. Easter is reality, Easter is why we are here, Easter makes all the difference. It may feel like Friday, but as long as you claim Jesus as Lord, Sunday's always comin'! That's why we sing. We have a reason to sing. Jesus is alive!

That VISA bill... it's not the end. That diagnosis is not the end. That impossible situation ... it's not the end. That depression stalking and mocking you, is not the end. Christ always brings a new beginning—always! Sing! Sing because of God's promise! Galilee! Sing because of God's pardon. "Peter answered him, 'Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away.'" (Matthew 26:33) Peter will not only fall away, he will deny Jesus three times. And the third time Peter will do it with a curse!

On Easter morning, an angel tells the women, "Go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he said." (Mark 16:7) Peter! Peter, who denied the Master three times! Peter, who caved in under pressure! Peter, the rock who broke into pieces—right when Jesus needed him most. Peter! "Go, tell his disciples and Peter!" **[NOTE 4]** Sing because of God's pardon for Peter. Sing because of God's pardon for parents. Sing because of God's pardon for partners and peers and even pastors. Sing because of God's pardon for all people! We cannot out-sin the grace of God! We cannot out-sin the grace of God! God's grace? "Signed when our Redeemer died. Sealed when he was glorified!"

Growing up, a son's job was to mow his family's lawn. His family's lawnmowers, though, weren't very fancy—they were just a step above garage-sale junk. One day, he couldn't start the mower. He kept pulling the chord and sweating! Pulling the chord and sweating! His father appeared and said, "You're

not using all your strength, all your resources.” “What?” The son blurted out exasperated. “You’re not using all your strength.” The son doesn’t get it, “What do you mean?”

His dad said, “You haven’t asked me to help you.” Did I tell you that this father played football in high school and in college? That this father had bulging biceps? That this father was stronger than an ox? Give your stress and your anxiety to your heavenly Father. Ask him to help. You don’t have to pull and sweat alone! That’s what Jesus teaches at the Mt. of Olives. And that’s why we sing!

When things go south in the waiting room, the living room, the boardroom, the classroom, the conference room or the emergency room, don’t go nuclear! Don’t sing your old song—woe is me! Poor me! What about me? Look at messy, miserable me! When I was young and living at home my parents watched Hee Haw almost every time it was on. It was basically a country variety show, kind of like the Carol Burnett show but with more music and especially country music. Every show, the cast, or at least 4 of them would gather, usually sitting on hay bales, wearing jean coveralls and tattered hats, with the bloodhound relaxing in the foreground amidst some moonshine jugs and tell sad stories. Then they would sing this song: “Gloom, despair, and agony on me. Deep dark depression, excessive misery. If it weren’t for bad luck, I’d have no luck at all. Gloom, despair, and agony on me! They basically made fun of people being all about doom and gloom. When life gives you lemons remember it may feel like Friday but for Christ-followers ... Sunday’s comin’. Don’t give in to the gloomies. You have a Lord and Savior that promised that He would never leave you or forsake you! When you are tempted to give in to sadness, depression or the temptation to push the red button, “Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things!” Let’s pray ... Amen.

Sermon Notes for “Places of the Passion: The Mount of Olives”
based on Matthew 26: 30-35 & 2 Chronicles 20: 1,2, 14-22
given at Doster Community Church March 12, 2023

- I. What do we do when the pressure, stress, and anxiety come? What do we do when we are tempted to push the red button? ...We do what Jesus did, we sing! “Jesus and the disciples sang a hymn and went to the Mount of Olives”. (Matthew 26:30)
- II. They sing because of the power of God. They celebrate God’s faithfulness and goodness and claim Him as their rock and refuge. They choose to rejoice. Judah’s King Jehoshaphat is a good example.

- III. When everything looks dark and bleak and you're tempted to go nuclear, Sing because of God's promises! Why? Because the end is not the end. Golgotha becomes Galilee. Sunday's coming!
- IV. Sing because of God's pardon! You can't out-sin God's grace, mercy, and forgiveness. God promises us He will never leave us.
- V. What are you going to do about it? Pick out a song now that you will sing the next time you are down or tempted to go nuclear! Come up with a plan now! What is your "I will _____" statement for this week?