

GATEWAY CHURCH NORTHUMBERLAND

13.4.14

Do not be afraid – Joss Bray

Today is Palm Sunday and the King has come! Here is John's account -

JN 12:12 The next day the great crowd that had come for the Feast heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. ¹³ They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, "Hosanna!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Blessed is the King of Israel!" JN 12:14 Jesus found a young donkey and sat upon it, as it is written, JN 12:15 "Do not be afraid, O Daughter of Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt."

The quote is a paraphrase from Zechariah – written 500 years earlier

ZEC 9:9 Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

What an amazing picture – everyone seemed to be for Jesus, he was fulfilling the prophecy from so long ago. But even the disciples did not understand what was going on at that point. It was so long since it had been written –

JN 12:16 At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him....

So we can assume the people of Israel “the daughter of Zion” didn’t really understand either. But they had heard about all the amazing things that Jesus did – the healings, miracles and teaching. They got caught up in the moment. But as we know later, this was a shallow response that would not last when they started to shout “crucify him”.

However, for the moment, for the crowd, anything was possible. Their new king had come – and because of this, they didn’t need to be afraid any more. He would make things right and protect them and bring a new kingdom.

So we just read this –

JN 12:15 "Do not be afraid, O Daughter of Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt."

How does that apply to us today in our lives?

For me and I am sure for most of us, it is easy to fear – to be afraid. We can fear things or people. All of us will have our favourite fears and worries. And often our past experiences have shaped our current anxieties.

We can have a fear of people -

We can fear people because we have been badly treated in the past – or it may even be happening now. We might have been condemned, abused, controlled, rejected, used, misled or lied to. Sometimes by people we have been close to. Sometimes there has been physical violence, sometimes emotional abuse.

Sometimes there are things that only we ourselves know in our hearts. All these things and many others can make us fearful about other people and what they may do to us.

We can have a fear of things -

Sometimes it is about “what if” types of things that may happen. What if I lose my job, get burgled, get mugged, the house burns down, I don’t pass these exams – even down to what if I can’t get a parking space and whether there is a spider in the sink. We can all think of the particular areas in which we have problems.

Sometimes, anxiety is free floating – we don’t even know why we are anxious and fearful – there is no obvious cause. This is sometimes worse than a specific fear and can be with us for a long time.

Fears are disabling –

These fears can stop us from moving on, from doing new things, from being at peace and from living life to the full in the way that Jesus wants us to. They can actually make us physically ill as well as mentally ill. They can harm relationships and make us withdraw from people.

It is different for all of us – and we must understand that there is nothing to be ashamed of in admitting our fears. There is certainly no room for condemnation or looking down on each other – remember – who are we to judge?

What does the bible say about fear?

Quite a lot actually. Clearly, people had the same problems all through the centuries and millennia. God wants to say something to us and he says it all the way through the bible. We will look at a few passages starting with the Old Testament -

ISA 35:3 Strengthen the feeble hands,
steady the knees that give way;
ISA 35:4 say to those with fearful hearts,
"Be strong, do not fear;

ISA 41:10 So do not fear, for I am with you;
do not be dismayed, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you and help you;
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

ISA 41:13 For I am the LORD, your God,
who takes hold of your right hand
and says to you, Do not fear;
I will help you.

ISA 51:7 ...Do not fear the reproach of men
or be terrified by their insults.

PS 139:23 Search me, O God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.

PS 23:4 Even though I walk
through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil,

for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.

PS 27:1 The LORD is my light and my salvation--
whom shall I fear?
The LORD is the stronghold of my life--
of whom shall I be afraid?

So Isaiah and Psalms in particular, are full of God's appreciation that we fear things and people – and also his reassurance that he is with us – and because of this, we do not need to fear.

In the New Testament, Jesus is also very aware of our problems in this area -

MT 10:28 Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul..

LK 12:32 "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.

JN 14: 27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives.
Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

Jesus knew his flock – us – his sheep. He highlights that worry is fear about the future and we don't need it:

LK 12:22 Then Jesus said to his disciples: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. ²³ Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. ²⁴ Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! ²⁵ Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? ²⁶ Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest? LK 12:27 "Consider how the lilies grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ²⁸ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith! ²⁹ And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. ³⁰ For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. ³¹ But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

The New Testament writers were also under no illusions about people's real life problems.

1PE 3:13 Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened." ¹⁵ But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord.

PHP 4:6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

What is the answer then?

There are several points which are really important.

- Trouble will come and we may suffer – we may walk through the valley of the shadow of death. There may be persecution and difficulties
- God is with us – he will never leave us or forsake us – he went to the cross for us
- We are very valuable to God – as valuable as his own Son.
- He knows what is on our minds and does not condemn us for our weaknesses
- He tells us not to worry or to be afraid or to fear evil – fear and worry does not achieve anything positive – so why do it?
- We should seek his kingdom first – look to God to provide our needs and heal our wounds. Look to him for our security and future.
- Pray – ask with an attitude of thanks and confidence
- He will provide everything we need – and more than we can imagine in eternity.
- That includes the promise that God will give us the peace that guards our hearts and minds.

We can be set free from fear and anxiety. We have to make a conscious decision to “set apart Christ as Lord”. It is much more than self help. It is kingdom help.

Say this as a declaration – “I will not fear anyone or anything, past present or future. I will not let fear or anxiety rule my life. I want the King to rule and his kingdom to come”.

The King has come – humble and riding on a donkey, but mighty and powerful to heal and restore – right now. That has got to be good news!