

**Text:** Matthew 21:1-11

**Title:** Disappointment

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If you have ever been disappointed, then Palm Sunday is your day. If you have had your expectations unmet time and time and again, Palm Sunday is a day for you. I think you'll see what I mean, but first we need a little history. From about 60 years before Christ's birth until about 60 years after his birth (60 BC to 60 AD), Israel existed as an occupied country. Before 60 BC, it had a brief spell of freedom, and in 60 AD, the nation of Israel was completely demolished, only to be reconstituted in the 1940's.

During those 120 years of occupation, the scruples of the Jewish people and the ham-fistedness of the Roman occupiers was a volatile combination. For instance, Jewish refusal to swear oaths and prohibition against images were some of the many occasions for the Roman authorities and Jewish people to clash; and clash they did.

Those 120 years were marked by protests, civil unrest, and opposition—some violent, some peaceful. What they experienced is probably not unlike what the Middle East is experiencing now: uprising, followed by military response, followed by a brief period of peace, followed by another uprising.

One interesting piece of history: There was a protest movement called the *Sicarii*, which is Latin for *dagger*. The Sicarii would hunt down opposition, both Roman and Jewish, and then dispatch of them with their namesake. There is some speculation that Judas Iscariot was member of Sicarii, as his last name comes from that group. While only speculation, knowing a little about the ruthlessness of Judas Iscariot, it is certainly an interesting possibility.

Let me tell you about three protests that occurred during this time period. (Most of what we know about this time period comes from a Jewish Historian named Josephus. The following three examples are from his work, *The Jewish War*.)

One protest was led by an unnamed and unarmed Samaritan. He led a group of people up Mt. Gerazim and from there promised to reveal the Holy Vessels that were used by Moses. Now, Moses was a great liberator from Jewish history. Pontius Pilate understood the implications: This prophet, like Moses, was going to lead the people to liberation, so Pontius Pilate crushed the movement before it began.

A couple of decades later, a prophet named Theudas led a popular protest promising to part the waters of the River Jordan, another reference to liberation, as Moses had led the Israelites through the Red Sea to freedom. This also was an unarmed movement, and it was met with a swift and thorough military response from Rome.

Another: An unnamed prophet had a large gathering in the wilderness. He promised to shout at the walls and cause the walls of Jerusalem to crumble. Still another image from the glory days of Israel and a page out of their collective history.

The one common national hope throughout these 120 years was for the Jews' liberation and freedom—to be able to exercise their religion and way of life without fear of reprisal. And time and time again, one charismatic leader after another performed—or at least promised to perform—some symbolic act that heralded liberation, and each time, that charismatic leader was crushed and that resistance scattered.

The hopes of a nation would rise, and fall, and then rise again, only to fall again. Disappointment.

Let me tell you about one more charismatic leader. He had a large and peaceful following. He was a wandering preacher, and some even claimed he worked miracles. And as he prepared to enter into Jerusalem, the capitol city of Israel, he, like these others, took a page from Israel's history: He commandeered a donkey, a clear reference to an Old Testament prophet who had promised that the King would come riding on a donkey. So, with high hopes of liberation, men, women, and children lined the roads and welcomed him as a coming King.

But in response to this leader—Jesus—as with every other leader who had come or would follow, the tanks rolled in, and that was the end of that. Another disappointment.

Can you imagine the disappointment? Time and time again. Hopes rise only to be dashed again. Is it too much to call it the *torture* of repeated disappointment?

Have you ever experienced the torture of repeated disappointment? A few months before graduation from seminary, we began the torturous process of interviewing for my first job. We went everywhere: Midland, Texas; Ligonier, Pennsylvania; Virginia Beach; Detroit, Michigan...And with each place we visited, we allowed our hopes to rise. We allowed ourselves to imagine what it would be like to live here and to work at this church with these people; and each time, our high hopes were met with disappointment. And I'll bet each one of us has our own story of repeated disappointment. It doesn't have to be apocalyptic, like a call from the doctor or a job interview. It could be something small: waiting for a phone call, and each time that phone rings you think, "Maybe this is it!" only to find it is not. Just like those people of Israel who lined the roads with shouts of "Hosanna!" must have felt.

So what do we do with disappointment? What do you when the disappointment comes like waves? What do we tell ourselves when, for the fifteenth time in as many days, our hopes don't materialize? What possible comfort do we have? What possible good could

come from disappointment? Let's focus on those two questions: What possible comfort and what possible good could come from disappointment?

Well, Jesus Christ encountered disappointment. Public opinion turned very quickly on Jesus. He was a disappointment to the many who lined the road with shouts of "Hosanna!" The night he was betrayed, he took his closest friends, just three, and he went to a place called the Mount of Olives, right outside the city walls. He asked them to watch with him while he prayed. That's what you want when you are going through an ordeal; that's what you want in the ER; that's what you want in the funeral home; you just want someone to stay by your side and watch.

Verse 40, chapter 26: "He came back to them and he found them sleeping. And he said, 'You could not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you do not enter temptation.'"

Again, a second time, he withdrew to pray and, again, he came back, and, again, he found them sleeping. And so, one last time, Jesus withdrew to pray, and, one last time, he returned to his disciples, only to find them asleep."

Why? Why do each of the gospels give us this detail that, while he prayed, his friends slept? Why do the gospels tell us this detail that he returned not once, not twice, but three times to see if anyone was with him?

Because the gospels give us insight into how he must have felt. And he must have felt a little bit like I felt during that interview process. He must have felt a little bit like each of us has felt as our hopes have been raised only for them to be dashed. Maybe he thought, "This time, maybe this time, they will be awake." But they weren't.

I'll bet he felt disappointed.

And there is some comfort. It may only be small comfort, but it is real comfort that we do not believe that God resides in celestial ease, a Buddha with a gentle smile across his lips, or some distant deity who is unaffected by the ups downs of life. Instead, we believe that God is intimately aware of our disappointment. That Jesus Christ was a man of sorrows and he is able to sympathize with us. Disappointments of life will always leave us with a question. But you are not alone in your questions. Jesus Christ encountered disappointment, too. And that is some comfort.

Let's turn to our second question: What possible good could come out of disappointment?

Well again, let's look to Jesus: From His disappointment in the garden, the disappointments Jesus faced mounted like waves.

Staying in chapter 26, verse 47: His friend betrays him. A few verses later, he is falsely accused by his own people. A few verses later, in verse 69, his closest friend, Peter, for his own safety, denies that he even knows Jesus. Next chapter, 27: Jesus experiences the disappointment of injustice. If there was a bright spot to Roman Civilization, it was in their legal system, but not in this case. A few verses later, he has the disappointment of being passed over in favor of a known criminal, Barabbas. Have you ever had the experience of being snubbed in favor of someone less qualified? Someone else got a job that should have gone to you? Jesus knows that disappointment. He had the disappointment of asking for something to quench his thirst and received sour wine instead. And finally, the most crushing disappointment of all: Forgotten by God and forsaken on a cross.

- Betrayed by a friend
- Falsely accused by his people
- Abandoned by his closest friend
- Wronged by the courts of law
- Snubbed in favor of a criminal
- Tormented by sour wine
- Finally forsaken by God

Have you ever known disappointment? There is no disappointment like his disappointment. And through the absolute onslaught of disappointment, Jesus Christ gave us the most remarkable display of enduring love the world has ever seen:

As his friends fell away, he pressed on. As he was wrongly accused, he did not defend himself. As he was snubbed in favor of Barabbas, he did not protest. Abandoned on the cross, he endured till the end.

Enduring love is the greatest force the world has ever seen. Jesus Christ displayed earth-shattering, history-changing, gates-of-hell-breaking, enduring love in the face of crushing disappointment. And the cross that hangs behind me is the exclamation point on the question of disappointment: Enduring love will always triumph over repeated disappointment.

In the midst of your disappointment, whatever it may be, you have an opportunity to offer those disappointments in faith to a God who knows about disappointment and who will continue you on in the face of disappointment with his enduring love. Your repeated disappointments are opportunities for you to walk in the way of Christ, to pick up your cross and meet repeated disappointments with enduring love.

A few years ago, a meteorologist coined the term *the butterfly effect*. He was using a computer to predict a weather pattern, and he rounded some number up, introducing a small, small change. But that small, small change led to a completely different output.

Looking at the results, he concluded that if this miniscule level of change could produce such a drastic result, a butterfly flapping its wings in China could produce a tornado in Texas. *The butterfly effect.*

You will face disappointment, and when you do, you have a chance to introduce a small change that could lead to a completely different outcome. You can introduce the small change of enduring love in the face of disappointment. And if you do, like the effect of a butterfly flapping its wings, someone you may never know, somewhere you have never heard of, sometime in the distant future, may have strength to live, to love, and to hope. There is no greater force in the world than enduring love. And the cross proves it beyond a shadow of a doubt.