

## PREPARING FOR A MIRACLE (PALM SUNDAY)

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*So before celebrating a baptism, the deacon approached the young father and solemnly said, "Baptism is a serious step. Are you sure you're prepared for it?"*

*"I think so," the man replied. He said, "My wife has prepared several appetizers, and we've got a caterer coming who will bring lots of cookies and cake."*

*And the deacon said, "No, no! I don't mean that! I mean, are you prepared spiritually?"*

*And the man said, "Oh, sure. I got a large keg of beer and a case of whiskey."*

[Laughs] You don't get that? Are you prepared spiritually? [Congregants laughs] Okay; I was prepared that joke would bomb, so I came prepared with a second joke for you. [Congregants laugh]

*So this Baptist guy moves into this all-Catholic neighborhood. And on the first day of Lent, he's cooking up a steak. And the smell of steak while everybody else has got to eat fish is excruciating. Second week, again, he's cooking Friday night -- second Friday of Lent -- and it's excruciating.*

*And the guys are saying, "Oh, we've got to do something about this." So all the Catholic guys went over to the Baptist guy's house, took a priest and said, "Hey, you've got to convert to Catholicism."*

*He says, "Well, what do I need to do?" They said, "Nothing. The priest will take care of it."*

*He sprinkled a little water on his head and he said, "Born a Baptist; raised a Baptist; now a Catholic." He said, "Now you're Catholic."*

*He said, "That's it? Now I'm Catholic?"*

*"Yeah, and you've got to follow all the Catholic rules."*

*The next Friday, he's cooking steak again! And they can't believe it. And so they all go over to the house and say, "What are you doing? You converted to Catholicism."*

*He said, "Yeah, but in the same way, I did a little conversion of my own."*

*They said, "What do you mean?"*

*He sprinkled a little water on the steak and he says, "Born a cow; raised a cow; now a fish."*

[Congregants laugh] Okay. It kind of made up for it! Okay ....

How many people are watching NCAA basketball? Anybody watching March Madness? So in honor, we will have a quote from legendary coach Bobby Knight. And he said, *"It is not the will to win that matters. Everybody has that."* He said, *"It is the will to prepare."* That is the important thing. Everybody wants to win. Everybody wants to succeed. Everybody wants to achieve. Everybody wants to do great things. But not everybody is willing to prepare and to do the not-so-glamorous, tedious, behind-the-scenes work that is necessary and needed to win and succeed. Things like practicing and rehearsing and reading and studying and training and planning and working on the details may not be so much fun, but it is that preparation itself that is key to success and great achievement.

Ralph Marsden said, *"Great opportunities are everywhere, and the people who benefit the most from them are those who are best prepared."*

You know, one of the many things that Jesus taught us by his example was the power of preparation and the importance of preparing ourselves. Jesus always prepared himself before he spoke; before he

taught; before miracles; before the challenges. He prepared himself before and afterwards, every single day, with consistent regular prayer. And he also prepared himself even more to go out and do his ministry by withdrawing for 40 days and 40 nights of fasting; of prayer; of quietly cleansing and releasing; and opening himself to give his full and deep concentration to God to prepare him for his ministry and his great work, which culminated in the incredible miracle of his resurrection.

Today is Palm Sunday, the day that we honor Jesus' triumphant entrance into Jerusalem, highlighted by people waving palms and singing, "*Hosanna to the Son of David; blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest heaven.*"

Jesus prepared himself for Palm Sunday by sending his disciples ahead to get a colt and donkey for him to enter into Jerusalem. Palm Sunday, itself, is a preparation for everything that happened during Holy Week: you know, the trial; the betrayal; the crucifixion; and the resurrection, and what we celebrate today as Easter. Palm Sunday prepared the way for that all to happen that culminated in the great miracle.

I want you to think for a second of what is something that you want in your life; something you'd really like to have? And my question for you is: Are you prepared for it? You know, whatever the thing it is that you desire, are you really prepared for it? Have you been doing the inner and the outer work to prepare to accept and receive and have that thing in your life?

You know, everybody wants to win the lottery, but studies show that many people who win it aren't prepared to handle and manage it. You know, if this very second, I could stop my fingers and give you everything you wanted in your life, are you really prepared for it? To accept it, to have it, to fully experience it and utilize it wisely?

You know, preparation, I believe, absolutely is the key to success, to breakthroughs, to transformations, and miracles in every area of our lives. In sports; in music; in relationship with our goals and dreams; and our finances; as well as our spiritual growth and evolution.

Today, we're going to look at four lessons inspired by Jesus on Palm Sunday to prepare ourselves for great things.

And the first one is we've got to prepare ourselves with **PRAYER**. And we've got to take time to prepare ourselves with prayer. You know, Jesus prepared himself, as I said, withdrawing for 40 days of prayer and fasting. And the reason for that is so he could open himself to be an even greater channel of light and goodness for God. To literally empty himself fully so he could be a great channel of light to bring forth something great, which was the ministry that he did.

The other great examples, like with Moses: 40 days of prayer and fasting. And he came forth and received the Ten Commandments. Elijah: 40 days of prayer and fasting, and he met with God. There are many examples how 40 days of fasting and prayer prepared that individual to bring forth and open a space for something greater.

Interestingly, the number 40, symbolically in the Bible, means two significant things. The first one: it represents a period of discipline and devotion to God. And the second thing is that it represents new life and transformation. So it is a period of devotion to God; discipline to God; and opening away for new life and transformation.

You know, and the thing about these periods of prayer, of the fasting -- they were special over and above periods of dedication and devotion and discipline.

How many people have ever been on a prayer or a meditation retreat? Anybody ever been to one of those? It is a special over and above time where we focus our minds and our attention on deepening our

connection with God. Emptying ourselves as best as we can to open ourselves to be a greater vessel and vehicle to God. And whether it's a three-day, a five-day, a 10-day, a 30-day ... there are wonderful activities out there that can allow us to have a greater period of concentrated devotion and dedication to God.

I've mentioned several times, like five years ago, I went on a 10-day silent retreat. It's one of the best experiences of my life. A focused, dedicated time. Interesting! There was no talking. There was no reading. There was no writing. There were no electronics. You didn't get your wallet. You got nothing! Because it was only supposed to be you in the silence with your experience with God for 10 days. Everybody ate in the same room, but you could not look at anybody. All you did was that you did everything in silence and quiet.

And it brought more good than I expected. First, just slowing down from the crazy of life was so calming and peaceful. Being able to be present to nature and just seeing all that was going on. Being able to taste my food in a way that I hadn't in a long, long time in the way that we rush.

The second thing I gained from it was that when you're ... Anybody ever meditate for five minutes and your mind wandered for four-and-a-half? Anybody have that experience? Well, imagine if you meditated for 11 hours, how much your mind would wander! One of the things meditating that long does is: it shows you where your mind tends to go to. It shows you the patterns and the hurts and the areas that are wounded that need healing and attention.

And they predict that, if you do the meditation, around day six or seven your "stuff" will start coming up. And it's a good thing, because it's stuff that we've buried that is now -- that we're opening ourselves -- are starting to come up. And it feels a little unstabilizing.

So they do allow you for five minutes to talk to one of the counselors. So I went to the guy. And I knew they said this is going to happen, and it was happening! And I said, "*You know, my stuff's really coming up.*" And the guy said, "*Great! Keep up the good work. Have a nice day.*" [Congregation laughs] I didn't even get one minute of my five minutes!

But anyway, he was right. I kept doing the work, and insights, and breakthroughs, and new life and transformation. happened. There is something that happens when we give our undivided attention to God with a committed, over-and-above time with a level of discipline to go a little bit deeper. And, you know, it could be self-realization, fellowship or Franciscan renewal center. It can be all kinds of places. They have great, great, great programs.

But even if you didn't have that time, I encourage all of us to create some special time to focus and concentrate on deepening our relationship with God. One of them you could do is get up one hour earlier for one week and do some extra meditation, and maybe some journaling or some spiritual study.

I've got a friend; he and his partner meditate. I mean, they fast and don't speak for one day a week. Can you imagine doing that on an ongoing basis? I've got other people who are prayer partners and they meditate together once a week, creating accountability and support for one another. There are all kinds of different ways for us; take a meditation class; do something to create some over-and-above dedicated time to focus on God; to set our devotion and discipline on God. And I guarantee you, it'll bring new life and transformation.

So the first thing to get ready to do something great is to prepare yourself with prayer.

The second one is to have the **COURAGE TO OWN WHAT IS YOURS TO DO.** How many people have something in your life that you really don't want to do? Anybody have ... Anybody? How many people have something in your life that is good for you, but then you still don't want to do it? [Congregants

laugh] You know, have you ever wanted something, but you got something else? Anybody ever have that experience? You know, you really wanted something, but you got something you didn't want at all. And to the point, you're just like, *"I didn't want this! This isn't what I want!"*

It kind of reminds me like the little boy who was praying. He said, *"Dear God, thank you for the new baby sister. But what I really wanted was a puppy."* [Congregants laugh] And so, sometimes we want a great marriage, but we end up getting a divorce. Sometimes we want to be successful in our business, and we end up having a bankruptcy. Sometimes we want an easy, smooth life, and it seems like one problem after the other. We want great health and vitality, and we get some sort of health issue and challenge.

We have many areas in our lives where things happen that we don't want to happen. Things happen that are uncomfortable or challenging or difficult or painful for us: things that we want to run away from.

You know in the book of John, Chapter 12, Jesus shares about how he felt about going into Jerusalem. And he said, *"Now my soul is troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour?' No; for this purpose I have come to this hour."*

And what he is saying is, like, *"I'm scared facing this; this is hard. You know, this isn't what I want. Should I run it away? Should I push it away? Should I pray it away?"* And then he comes to the conclusion: *"No! This is tough, but this is a part of my purpose. This is why God called me here. You know, this is a part of my spiritual journey. This is a part of my contribution to all humanity."* Jesus prepared himself to do this great thing by having the courage to face and own the thing that was his to do, no matter how difficult it was.

You know, the fact is we all have something in our lives that we don't want to face. We all have something that's difficult and challenging. But it is that very thing that we are called to, to help bring about our own healing; that is a part of our own spiritual path; that is a part of our contribution to the world ... something that will bless the people in and around our lives.

Joseph Campbell said, *"The cave you fear to enter holds the treasure that you seek."* The things that scare us; the things that are painful; the things that are challenging in our lives are there. But I bet if we go a little deeper, we realize, *"This is the thing I'm supposed to do. That I meant to face this. I am meant to walk through this. That this is a part of my purpose."*

And the reason we know that it is for us is because it's in our lives. It wouldn't be in our lives -- it wouldn't be for us -- if it wasn't in our lives. Even though Jesus was warned not to go back into Jerusalem, he could have hid. He could have done all kinds of things to avoid it. But he knew this was not something he was supposed to avoid. It was something he was supposed to face, and something he was supposed to walk through.

Every single one of us has our own Jerusalem -- our own cave -- that we don't want to go into. But deep down, we know we need to have the courage to face it, to own it, and to walk through it. Because it will bless us, teach us, lift us, and take us to a place of greater possibilities and greater things.

The third thing to do to prepare ourselves for something great is to **TRUST**. In the Book of Proverbs, it says, *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart; and lean not to your own understanding, but in all ways acknowledge God, and He will make straight your paths."*

And it is saying to trust in all areas of your life. Trust that God has a plan and purpose for your life. Trust that all things are working together for your highest good. Trust Paul's words when he said, *"I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me."* Trust that the same power that brought you to it will get you through it. Can you trust at that level?

I had a friend who once said that, "Trust is a must or your game is a bust." Trust is a vital and important thing in our lives. When Jesus said, "Father, if you can, take this cup from me ... but not my will, Thy will" ... that is an expression of deep trust: to trust God; to trust God's plan; to trust God's purpose; and to trust that we've got what it takes to come through that.

Letting go, to me, is an act of incredible trust. All forms of letting go are an act of great trust to know that -- if I let it go -- I'll be okay. In fact, if I let it go, I'll be better. That there will be greater things that will come in its place.

Jesus trusted that the same crowd that was cheering him on and loving him up and praising him would be the same crowd that would be condemning him and hating him and saying, "Crucify him." He trusted that that process -- as difficult and painful that it was. He had to walk through that valley, but he knew that he would rise. He knew there would be a resurrection. He knew there would be a miracle.

You know, trust is a vital thing, particularly when life isn't going well. You know, when things don't look like the way we want them to look.

When you think about it, one of the ultimate examples of somebody with great trust is a caterpillar. When you think about that: a caterpillar has to die to its old self; like, become a liquid version of itself. And there's a period where it's no longer itself, but it's also not what it's supposed to be. And it has to walk through that process to be born into being a butterfly and something great.

We all have to get to that place where we are willing to die to the old self, to the old version of ourselves. You know, to die to some old pattern or mindset or belief so that we can die to it to be born to some greater perspective; some greater mindset; some greater level of awareness. To open our lives to greater things.

Remember when Jesus cursed the fig tree that wasn't bearing fruit? I always want to say, "Jesus, why so cranky? Do you need a Snickers?" [Congregants laughs] Why would you curse a tree? But you know what he was doing? He was cursing it because it didn't bear fruit. And what he is saying to all of us is: let go of the things in your life that don't bear fruit. To look at your life and say, "This is no longer serving me. This is not healthy for me. This is not good for me. This is not positive for me. This is not for my highest good." And are you willing to let that go? Even if it's a friendship. You know, even if it's your diet or bad health habits.

What is it that you need to let go? And are you willing to trust that, by letting it go, it will open a space for greater possibilities and greater good?

Karlfried Graf Durckheim said this in his book, *The Way of Transformation*: "The way to transformation is to willingly open ourselves. It is not to play it safe. It is not to be closed off, but to be open ... But to open ourselves fully to the situations of life. Only the person that is willing to risk themselves and expose themselves to life -- only they can have that which is indestructible rise within them."

Preparing ourselves for something great requires trust: to trust God; trust that you have it in you; trust that you can let go of the things that are no longer serving you; and trust that you can die to the old so you could be born to the new.

And the final thing to prepare ourselves for great things is our **CONSCIOUSNESS**. You know, when Jesus entered, it said, "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord." In the Bible, your name represents your nature. So to say, "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord" means: blessed is the one who comes in the nature of God. In the nature of peace; in the nature of love; in the nature of all that is good.

Interesting thing: Jesus entered Jerusalem from the east on a donkey; humbly with his head held high. You know, walking in grace; you know, spiritually centered and grounded. And on the other side -- on the west -- Pilate, you know, entered from the west with his army. You know, strong with weapons and armor and with aggressive showing of the power.

And I find it's interesting. We need to ask ourselves: How do we enter our Jerusalem? How do we enter our lives? With calmness and humility or aggressively and forcefully? And how would we want to enter the situations of our lives? What kind of consciousness do we want to enter in with our relationship? With our work? With areas of conflict? Or going after our goals and dreams? What is the ideal consciousness?

The book of Zachariah says, *"Not by might, not by power, but by my Spirit," says the Lord.* To be more grounded. To be more centered, with more humility, with more grace. So what is the way we want to enter? And I'll tell you: I believe that, whatever we do -- whatever the consciousness and the spirit of whatever we do is -- the consciousness thing is more important than whatever it is that we do. But our consciousness will impact the thing that is done.

When I was in seminary, there was a fund for the ministerial students' class trip. Like, we would go to some area. We were from Missouri; we were going to go to Florida and visit like 10 or 15 churches in a week. And it was cool. Well, the fund was really low. And it didn't do that well for the last period of years. And we were trying to figure out: Who do we put in that position to be the chairperson? Well, there was a guy there and he was so prosperous; he oozed it. And he just had a prosperity consciousness. And we said, *"Ron! Let's put Ron there!"*

And all we did was: we did a service every week. There was an offering, like there had been for years. But somehow with this guy's consciousness, money poured in like you wouldn't believe. And we had the trip of our life going on! But the thing about it is: his consciousness ... it looks like he did nothing different, but something different happened. Because his prosperity consciousness affected everything he touched. Every intention and goal and prayer he had was at a high level. And it makes a difference.

How many people know who Steph Curry is? Steph Curry; basketball fans? He is a very devout person. Do you know on his shoes it says, *"I can do all things."* It's got Scripture written right on his shoe; and it was a part of his deal. He wouldn't make that deal [without the Scripture]. He was with Nike for awhile; left Nike for Under Armour.

And here's what he says. He says, *"Obviously there's a lot of hoopla and fanfare that follows you wherever you go. But I know where my talent comes from. I know why I play the game, and it is not to score 30 points a night. It is to use the stage I'm on. I have been put there for a specific purpose: to be a witness and to share my testimony as I go through it."* See, basketball might be the thing he does, but the consciousness in which he does it is about living his purpose: being a witness and knowing that he can do all things through God. And it ain't about basketball.

See, Jesus entered in a certain consciousness. And Steph Curry does that in a certain consciousness. Ron Neff was dealing with money, and it was about consciousness. And it's about all of us elevating our consciousness.

Amelia Earhart said, *"The most difficult thing is the decision to act."* And I would add to that and say: The most difficult thing is determining the consciousness in which to act.

Can you imagine if you could raise your consciousness in your relationship? In your work? In your self-care? In your health? What a difference it would make in all the things that you do? Particularly the great results that you would get as a result of that consciousness?

You know, Douglas Abrams had an interview with the Dalai Lama and Bishop Desmond Tutu. And he noticed that each of them were able to welcome new experiences with wonder and surprise and great possibility ... even the challenging ones. And there was an underlying feeling of joy!

And in their interview, the Dalai Lama said that he wakes up every day and says these words: *"I am fortunate to be alive. I have a precious human life. I am not going to waste it."*

[Repeats] I am fortunate to be alive. I have a precious human life. I am not going to waste it. There's another example of: It doesn't matter what you do; he comes from that consciousness that he is fortunate, and he will not waste it.

You know, entering any situation, we all need to think: What is the consciousness I am going to enter in? Will it be a godly consciousness? You know, will it be a spiritual consciousness? A prosperous consciousness? Because consciousness rules.

On a Palm Sunday, a five-year-old boy was too sick to go to church because his throat was sore. And when everybody got back -- the family returned -- they were carrying these palm branches. And the little boy asked, *"What were they for?"*

And the father said, *"People held him over Jesus' head as he walked by."*

And he said, *"Wouldn't you know it? The one day I miss church, Jesus shows up."* [Congregants laugh]

Okay. Okay. Palm Sunday is not just a celebration of a date -- a historic date that happened a long time ago. I would say it is a reminder and a message for how we're living today. It is a powerful and wonderful teaching that we can learn about preparing ourselves, about preparing the way. And the way to do that is with prayer, courage, trust and consciousness. You know, being prepared opens the doors to great achievements, to great transformation, and even miracles.

God bless you all!

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