

The Third Option Nobody Talks About

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[0:00] All right, good morning once again. My name is Anthony Parrott, and I'm one of the co-lead pastors here. And this sermon was written in a couple hours yesterday.

So you will give me all of the grace in the world, correct? Yes, thank you. But it's Palm Sunday. We're not breaking tons of new ground here. So if you want to follow along with the notes, you can do so at table.center.

You can follow along the notes there and fill in the blanks. We have our kids in the room with us this morning, so we're going to try to keep them entertained. We'll do our best. So Palm Sunday, we're doing a couple things simultaneously.

We are finishing up our Jeremiah series, so we're going to talk a little bit about Jeremiah. And we are launching into Holy Week or Passion Week, this last week of Lent, where we recognize Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, the institution of the Last Supper, Good Friday, what my son accidentally called Fun Friday. Not so fun for Jesus.

And then, you know, Holy Saturday and Easter, Resurrection Sunday. So we are going to get right into it. If you have a Bible, you can join along if you want in Jeremiah chapter 42.

[1:21] And I'm just going to sort of keep this short for us. Today, we're going to talk about three ways to respond to empire. And option one that we see in Jeremiah towards the sort of chronological end of Jeremiah's life is the option of the retreat.

Running away is the option that you have. When you are faced with the bad guys, when you are faced with violence, when you are faced with empire, you have the option of running away.

So in Jeremiah 42, at this point, Jerusalem has fallen. Exiles have been taken to Babylon. And there is a frightful remnant, a group of people left behind.

And they come to Jeremiah, and they say the right thing. They say, Jeremiah, pray for us. Whatever God says, we will do it. God's answer, fascinatingly, takes 10 days.

Even for the prophet Jeremiah, he has to wait 10 days to get an answer from God. And when it comes, God's answer to Jeremiah is to stay. To the remnant, stay.

[2:37] Stay in the land. Don't be afraid. God says, I will build you up, not pull you down. I will plant you and not pluck you up. Whatever you do, don't run to Egypt.

Because what the folks who are left behind want to do is they want to run away and retreat. Run away! Run away to Egypt.

Matt's going to have a lot of fun with this, I can tell. They want to run away to Egypt because they think they're going to be safe there. Now, is it safe? Eh. But it's known.

Egypt is a known quantity. And sometimes the chains that are familiar feel safer than the freedom that's unfamiliar. Are you with me? Are you with me? So Jeremiah 42.10, don't go.

I will build you up. I will not put you down. And the people hear Jeremiah's word. They go to Jeremiah. They say, pray for us. What does God say? And Jeremiah says, stay. Don't go. And they reject it.

[3:35] They call Jeremiah a liar. They go to Egypt anyway. And they drag Jeremiah with them. And they didn't disobey because God was unclear. They disobeyed because it was scary to do what God said.

When the answer required trust, stay put, face the unknown, they chose the familiar cage instead of the unknown freedom. For the kids in the room, have you ever asked your mom and dad for permission to do something?

Yes? Yes? Have your parents ever told you no? Okay? If they've never told you no, there's a parenting seminar afterwards. No. All right. And have you ever done it anyway?

I see that hand. I see that hand. And that's what's happening here. Now, the consequences are a lot bigger than losing screen time. So, the option that you have when you are facing empire, when you're facing dominion, when you're facing living under violence and oppression and you're scared is to run away and retreat.

To run back to what you know, even if what you know is a cage. But, there's another option. And it's the one that probably, most of us, many of us, think of first.

[4:50] And that's to attack. To fight back. When the retreat doesn't work, the obvious alternative is to fight back. So, you want to gather up your army.

You want to gather and get your sword. Wave it in the air. Get on your horse. Yell death. And run towards the enemy. And there's actually a story in Jewish history where that's exactly what happened.

It's the reason that we have palm branches today and what they mean. So, about 165 years before Jesus, three, four, five generations before the life of Jesus, there was a Jewish family named the Maccabeans.

Let me hear you all say the Maccabees. The Maccabees. And the Maccabees, that was a nickname. And anybody know what the Maccabees meant? What that nickname means? The hammer.

That's right. There was a guy named Judas. Judas. He saw enemies come into his land. And so, he picked up a hammer and he started swinging on it nails. But at people. Do not try this at home. All right? So, Judas Maccabeus and his family, the Maccabees, lead this military revolt against the empire, occupying Israel at that time, the Greeks.

[6:07] And they actually won. They actually managed to keep their land for a while. So, the Maccabees, they take over the land from the Greeks and they march into Jerusalem.

And as Judas Maccabeus marches into Jerusalem, do you know what they're waving? Palm branches. So, in our Catholic Bibles, you can read about this in 1st through 4th Maccabees, about this whole era, and about the Maccabees coming into Jerusalem and then being celebrated by waving palm branches in the air, waving them as victory banners.

The Maccabees go into Jerusalem. They clean the temple by force. And they become national heroes. And this is what Hanukkah celebrates. So, when you hear palm branches in the Bible, that's what it meant to a 1st century Jewish person.

Palm branches meant military victory. It meant liberation by force. It meant charging to the enemy. So, when the crowd on Palm Sunday waves palm branches and marches towards the temple, they know what story they're reenacting.

It's 185 years ago. It's the story of the Maccabees coming into Jerusalem. And they're expecting a warrior liberator who will drive out the Romans the same way the Maccabees drove out the Greeks.

[7:22] But that's not what they get. The Maccabees won. They were heroes of their tradition. And their way still wasn't God's final answer.

Fighting fire with fire sometimes works until it doesn't. Violence wins battles. And it loses the very thing that you're fighting for.

So, we've got two options on the table so far. You can run away and retreat. You can run away and retreat. You can... Thank you.

You can run away and retreat. You can counterattack. To be clear, I love this scene.

I love Lord of the Rings. I listen to this song on the drive here and on the drive home and on the drive here. Okay? I get the feeling. But that's not what Jesus does.

[8:24] What does Jesus do? He comes into the city riding not a war horse, but what? A donkey. Jesus shows us a different way.

A third way. The same palm branches. It's the same city. A little bit later, Jesus is going to clear out the temple. But everything about what Jesus does is different.

And that difference is the whole point. Now, when Jerusalem was filling up for Passover, typically what would happen is that you would have... Let's see, from your perspective, the West.

[18:15] Not the one in the palace, not the one with the army, but the one on the donkey. And when they were told to stop, they refused. When the authorities got angry, Jesus quoted the psalm about children's praise, and the parade kept going.

It's not triumphalism. It's survival testimony. The psalmist in Psalm 118 says, Out of my distress, I called on the Lord. The Lord answered me and set me in a broad place.

I was pushed hard so that I was falling, but the Lord helped me. I shall not die, but I shall live and recount the deeds of God. The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

The psalmist has been surrounded, pushed to the edge, and has come out the other side saying, God showed up. The rejected thing became the foundation. Joining the parade does not mean that we have it all figured out.

The crowd on Palm Sunday didn't know what the week would bring. They didn't know about the arrest and the trial and the cross. They joined the parade before they knew the ending. And that's what trust looks like.

[19:18] Not certainty, but movement. We've been living in the book of Jeremiah for a few weeks now. In exile and in uncertainty. I'm being tickled with palm leaves.

What? Nothing better. Even the rocks will cry out tonight. It's fine.

It's fine. All right, let's bring this plane to a landing. We have been living in the book of Jeremiah for a few weeks now. In exile and in uncertainty. In the long middle of a story that does not resolve neatly.

And the truth is, we are all still living there. Living in the in-between. Between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. Between the ascension and the hope for return. Between the world as it is and the world that God promises.

And Saturday, Holy Saturday is the hardest day. Friday has its grief and Sunday has its joy. But Saturday is just not knowing. It's sitting in the ambiguity.

[20:18] It's wondering if the parade was worth it. The crowd on Palm Sunday joined a parade on what they thought was the beginning of liberation. And by Friday they watched Jesus die.

By Saturday they have nothing but silence and uncertainty and locked doors for fear. And yet, even if they didn't know, Sunday was coming.

They didn't know it, but Sunday was coming. We live in the Saturday and the invitation is not to run away to Egypt. It's not to pick up a sword.

but it is to keep marching in the parade. To choose joy as an act of defiance. To trust that the donkey beats the war horse even when the evidence is thin.

To refuse to let the empire tell us who we are or what is possible. Are you with me? The best image that I can come up with is any pride parade.

[21:15] Any time a people show up as fully and authentically themselves celebrating in the street refusing to hide even when the world has told them to hide.

Not because the future is certain but because hiding is no longer an option. As Samwise says in Lord of the Rings, there is some good in this world, Mr. Frodo, and it's worth fighting for and that fight is not with a sword or a rock.

It is with hope and it is with joy. And so our invitation this morning is to join the parade. Amen.