

**Reeks:** 'n god wat god is  
**Titel:** *When Power Fails*  
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**Datum:** 17 April 2011

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Good morning, friends! It's good to be with you. It's a very big Sunday today: you know, I know, it's Palm Sunday, and I guess this is the most important week in the life of those who follow Christ as Lord and Saviour. If you read, for example, the Gospel of Mark – I think there are 16 chapters – eight chapters of the 16 are devoted to the last week of Jesus' life, so it's a very important week, and that is why so much energy gets put into this week by ourselves here at Mosaïque [?], and you're warmly invited just to really make this week a deep journey in your own life.

The journey starts with Palm Sunday, the first Sunday of the Passover week, and I'm going to read... when you came into the auditorium you had a, you were given a brochure, and just on the inside of that brochure you have a leaflet, and you may like to follow with me the reading. I'm going to read Mark's account of the events of that first Palm Sunday, and I... as I read it, just pay special attention to Jesus' initiatives, to Jesus' deliberate intention through those events – okay? I'll read from verse one.

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of His disciples – Jesus sent two of His disciples, saying, Go, go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it you will find a colt tied there which no one has ever ridden. Untie it, and bring it here. If anyone asks you why you are doing this, say the Lord needs it, and will send it back here shortly.

They went, they found the colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, some people standing there asked, what are you doing, untying the colt? They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go. When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw the cloaks over it, He sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches that they had cut in the fields; and those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD! Blessed is the Kingdom, the coming Kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!

Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple courts. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, He went out to Bethany with the Twelve.

So we thank God so much for that Scripture reading that comes to us from the Gospel of Mark.

I don't know if you remember that delightful story of the father who early in the morning got up to make some pancakes for his two boys? And as he was making pancakes, the two boys began to fight about who would get the first pancake. Now, the father came to Mosaïque, worshipped here every Sunday morning at the second service, the real service; and came and worshipped here, and so he wanted to use this opportunity to teach his two boys about Jesus. And so he said to them, you know, boys, if Jesus was here with us today, He would say to his brother, you have the first pancake. So the two boys listened to this, and then the oldest one says to the youngest, hey, boet, you can be Jesus today.

Let's be honest: it's easy to talk about Jesus, to worship Jesus, to send emails about Jesus to other people, to respect Jesus, to admire Him – it's quite easy; it's very difficult to follow Him; to follow Him. You can be Jesus today; you can be Jesus today – huh? I often say that there are many people who have been born again, but who have not learnt to live again, and I think this causes confusion for people who look at us, because we talk a lot about Jesus Christ, and yet sometimes our lives do not reflect a deep discipleship to Him.

There was once a philosopher some years ago, an atheist philosopher, Nietzsche, and he once said these words – he was speaking to Christians; he once said these words, and they're very sharp words - he said, you know, I will believe one day in your Saviour when you look more saved; I will believe in your Saviour one day, when you look more saved.

Now, it's against this backdrop on this first Sunday of the Passover week, on this Palm Sunday, that I want today to extend to you if I may, and I extend it to myself as well, an invitation, a simple invitation: it's an invitation to explore, to explore and to embrace again the way of Jesus Christ for our lives. That is going to be my invitation today, for us again just to explore, a little bit, what does it mean to follow Him, so that we can embrace His way into our own lives today. And it's when - you see, this is the good news – it's when we begin to follow Him that God becomes a living reality in our lives; it's when we begin to follow Him that the Kingdom of God becomes a reality for us.

It was a few years ago, I think about two or three years ago now, that I learnt something about Palm Sunday that I didn't know, and I want to share that learning with you today because it's been a very profound learning for me. I discovered through the work of historical scholars who knew the time of Jesus very well, that on that first Palm Sunday - I didn't know this – on that first Palm Sunday that first day of the Passover week there were in fact in two processions that entered Jerusalem. I didn't know that, did you? On the one hand – let me unpack this bit – on the one hand, there was the procession of Pontius Pilate; I want to give you – now, don't fall asleep - I want to give you a quick history lesson. It's going to take about three or four minutes, and I'll be as quick as I can, but we need to get the backdrop.

We know that the ancient world at that time was mostly ruled by the Roman Empire. At the head of the Roman Empire, the head dude, he had a title, and his title was Caesar; and so we have a number of Caesars; the Caesar who was in charge at the time of Jesus was a guy by the name of Caesar Tiberius. Now, Caesar couldn't be everywhere in the Roman Empire, so what he did was, he would appoint governors who would rule on his behalf over certain parts of the Empire. And we know today that the person who ruled over Judea and Samaria was a guy by the name of Pontius Pilate; he was the Roman governor.

Now, we also know - a little bit more history, stay with me – we also know that on that first Sunday of the Passover week, that first Palm Sunday, Jewish people, Jewish pilgrims would come from all over the Empire, and they would descend upon Jerusalem. Just yesterday I was learning that the population of Jerusalem during that week swelled from 40,000 people to just over 200,000 people – huh? That's like Scottburgh during the Christmas holidays on the South Coast. Well, that's what I would say in Benoni here, that's what Plettenberg Bay is like down during December – it just grows and swells – huh?

And Jewish people would come together, and as they came together they would look back to the exodus, and they would look back to the days when they were in oppression and God acted, and God liberated them and took them out of Egypt and He led them through the sea of impossibility and He took them into the Promised Land, and they would celebrate that this was their God – Liberator, Deliverer, Saviour. And they would cry out again, God, will You deliver us again now from the Romans? What You did centuries ago, will You do it again in our history?

And so you can imagine it was like a week of nationalistic fervour and passion, and obviously the Romans would get a little bit edgy. And what would happen, and this is what the historians teach us, is that Pontius Pilate, who had a villa on the coast of Caesarea Philippi - most rulers had nice villas on the coast – had a lovely villa, and he would form a procession and he would come down and he would enter Jerusalem, and it would be a massive procession of power. He would ride at the head on most... usually on a stallion; he would be followed by heavily armed guards on horses. And then there would be the foot soldiers, and there would be the standards and the banners, and it was a show of military power and strength.

And as they entered Jerusalem it was a way of saying to the Jewish people: you had better watch out – look who's in power here. And it's very interesting to trace the journey; I've got a map here for you: the procession came down from the coast, that's where Pontius Pilate lived – it came down... and now we've got a map that's a little bit closer to Jerusalem... it came right down, and then this procession would enter Jerusalem from the west; that was the one procession. I didn't know that.

And then there was another procession - and now we begin to see the contrast: on that same day, the first day of Passover week: Jesus also decides to enter Jerusalem. He forms a counter-procession; He's doing it deliberately, intentionally; He's doing it with brilliance. He doesn't come on a stallion – He could have; He doesn't even come on His feet – he could have done that as well. He makes sure that He comes on the humblest animal there is: He comes on a donkey, and He steps into the prophecy of Zechariah centuries before when the prophet prophesied that when the Messiah came He would come riding - riding on a donkey.

Now, what is significant, that when you read Mark's Gospel, and you follow the travelogue, Jesus – look at this – He comes down from the north of Galilee, and if you follow Him through the Gospels he comes right down to Bethany, through Bethphage – here is the closer map – and He enters Jerusalem from the east. So you have two processions.

Now, you've got to get the feeling of this. On the one hand, there is the procession of Pilate, and it's a show of strength and power in human terms of arrogance, of dominance; and then you have the procession of Jesus, in profound humility, with radical courage, with vulnerable love, and those are power... look at this photograph: those are powerful images, aren't they? They contrast, they contrast with each other so powerfully: on the one hand, the love of power, on the other hand, the power of love.

In South Africa this week we've had – have you noticed this? - we've had lots of marches, processions; have you noticed that, and how different they've been? Julius Malema walking through the streets of Johannesburg, dark-suited bodyguards heavily, heavily armed, hundreds of followers thronging around him. Down in Grahamstown, we've had a march, One in Nine march of rape survivors, women who walked in silent protest against the rape culture of this country; hundreds of women, and men who identified with them – contrasts...

This week I've been wrestling with what Palm Sunday means for us today. Yes, there were two processions years ago, but what does it mean today? Huh? And I just want to share with you, if I may, and I've got a few more minutes, just a few thoughts that have been going around in my head and heart, and as I share with you I just pray that somehow God will just speak a word into your hearts today. You know, when I look at those two marches, those two processions, one from the west, one from the east, Pilate and Jesus - the one thing that Jesus does - doesn't He do this for you? - He radically, he radically redefines for us what God's power looks like. God is a God of power, but God's power is very different to the power of Pilate; it's very different to dominance and arrogance and violence; it's very different. It's a power – did you notice this? – that somehow gets revealed in vulnerability, in weakness?

Look again at Jesus as He enters, as He enters Jerusalem – did He come on a stallion, AK-47s blazing? No, He comes as a lonely defenceless prophet, riding a donkey. What a picture of weakness, what a picture of power! You see Him hanging on the cross, choking in His own blood, crying out, My God, why have you forsaken me? What a picture of weakness! What a picture of power!

God's power gets revealed in weakness, in vulnerability, in fragility; don't ever be scared of your vulnerability, of your weakness, because that's where God's power works. If there were, if there are any recovering alcoholics here, and I'm sure that there are many, and I were to invite them on to the stage here, and I were to say to them, tell us your story – when did you first experience God's power, do you know what they would say? I experienced God's power when I experienced my powerlessness over alcohol, when I knew I couldn't do anything about it, and I acknowledged my weakness – at that moment I experienced God's power.

Yes, we celebrate our strength; we must celebrate our strength, but it's in our vulnerability that God meets us. It's where we're weak, it's where we limp, and we all limp – hey? Sometimes people say to me, Trevor, Christianity is a crutch! Well, it is, because every human being limps; we've all got an Achilles heel. There's a place in our life where human power fails us, and it's in that place that God's power meets us. If I were to share with you my story now – relax, I'm not going to, relax - but if I were to share it with you, I would just speak of my vulnerability and how again over the years God has met me where I have been at my weakest. God's address is the bottom of the rope; God's address is the bottom of the rope: it's where we struggle most deeply. Don't be scared of that. I don't have to pretend to have it all together; I don't have to try to be arrogant, I don't have to try and show that it's in my weakness God's power gets revealed.

What did Paul say? What did he say? When I am weak, then I am... strong. Two of you know your Bibles, hey? But go back to that story. You know, you look at that story, you look at those images - there are two ways to live: there's the way of Pilate, there's the way of Jesus: what way do you go? The way of Pilate, the way of domination, the way of showing who's boss, the way of arrogance? There is the way of Jesus, a profound humility, a radical courage, and a vulnerable love. What's your way? How do you live?

It touches every part of our life: how do you drive a car? Pilate's way? Jesus' way? Hey? How do I relate to those closest to me? How do I relate to Debbie? Pilate's way – you'll do what I say; Jesus' way – how do we find our way through this together? How do we parent kids? Pilate's way? Jesus' way? How do we... and many of you are leaders, many of you, maybe all of you... how do you lead? Pilate's way? Jesus' way? How do you resolve conflict? Pilate's way? Jesus' way?

And yes, to some degree the way of Jesus doesn't make sense, but it is His way. And it's when we follow His way that we are surprised again and again by God's power. I think God today is looking for people – how do I put this? – who are strong weaklings, who are wise fools, are wounded healers – why? Because we follow the Lamb of God who's got the roar of the Lion of Judah! The Lamb who's the Lion, together – together; and if I want to hear the roar of God the Lion in my life, I go the way of Jesus the Lamb. Which way do you go? Which way are you following?

Can I say one more thing? - I've got a few more moments – one more thing. I think we will only – does this make sense? – we will only, we will only go the way of Jesus if we know deep down, if we know deep down that we are God's beloved. Jesus was able to do what He did, He was able to go to Jerusalem on a donkey because He knew

who He was. He just knew – He didn't have a weak ego, He didn't have an inflated ego, He had a strong ego; He knew that He was God's beloved Son. He had the dignity and the affirmation in His guts: this is who I am. And when we know who we are, we don't have to pretend. Often it is the most insecure person who has to show how strong they are, but when I know who I am, when I know that I am God's beloved, when I know that not with my head but when I know that as a living reality in my heart, when I know the love of Christ in my heart, it gives to me the courage that I need to go the way of Christ.

It has been – let me be honest with you - it has been a deep privilege for a boy from Benoni to be able to serve you on Sundays with God's Word; a deep, deep privilege for the last year and a half. I've come to know some of you; I've had email contact, I've had conversations; I've come to respect the immense resourcefulness of this congregation. It must be one of the most resourceful in talent and ability and capacity in the whole of Johannesburg, and I respect it profoundly.

Underneath that I have sensed a deep longing, and I think I sensed it because the longing is in me as well. And it's a longing to know, not with my head, but with my heart, the reality of Christ's love; the reality of God's love, because when we know who we are, then we are free to follow the way of Christ. And I'm praying that this holy week – and I'm going to invite you: put yourself into the events of this holy week, so that maybe the spirit of the living God will come and give to you and to me a fresh sense that we are God's beloved in our guts, not our head, our guts, our heart – not as a theory, as an experience. And then we'll find ourselves free to go the way of Christ.

So that's Palm Sunday: two processions: a procession from the west, and a procession from the east; the way of Pilate, the way of Jesus; a deep reminder that God will meet us in our vulnerability. We don't ever have to be scared of our vulnerability because when I admit and acknowledge my vulnerability, it's there that God meets me with power. These two images of two ways to live, a way of dominance and superiority and arrogance; a way of profound humility, of radical courage and of vulnerable love: Jesus/Pilate, Pilate/Jesus. I pray that today in a fresh way we will embrace the way of Jesus, and as we follow Him it will lead us to a cross always, but it will lead us into the resurrection life that God wants to give every one of us before we die: the resurrection life of God Himself. Let's pray; I want to pray for you.

Oh God, we speak about deep things today; will You speak a living word into our hearts this morning? Will you come and meet us where we struggle most deeply? That place in our life where we get defeated again and again and again, that place where human power fails, will You come and meet us there with Your grace and Your healing and Your possibility of a new beginning? And, Lord, as we keep these images before us of the way of Pilate and the way of Jesus, Lord, we want to follow Jesus. We want to follow Him because somehow deep down we know He is the Way, the Truth, the Life; but we need, Lord, to know that You love us, and we battle with that; we kind of know it with our heads, but in our hearts there's more fear than Your love, more anxiety than Your love, more panic than Your love, more arrogance than Your love; and we ask that into our hearts Your love will come today in a fresh way. This is our prayer, and we offer it to You, Lord, with all the love and with all the longing of our hearts in the name of Jesus, and we say together, as God's people, Amen; Amen.

Friends, it's a lekker duvet day. Have a great one, and may the joy of Christ be with you! God bless you, friends! Take care.

