

**CHOOSING THE UNEASY WAY
PALM SUNDAY APRIL 5, 2009.
HARRINGAY UNITED CHURCH-BAPTIST**

Introduction:

The context:

On most occasions like this (Palm Sunday) and in most of our churches, the triumphant entry is the expectation on the theme today and to a greater extent I have complied with this tradition. But God wants us to hear something new, hence the inspiration for this passage.

This episode happened just after they came from Caesarea Philippi where Jesus asked his disciples who people and they think he is. In this place the Holy Spirit came upon Peter and declared Jesus as the Christ, son of the living God. Jesus then enjoined them not to say a word about it to anyone. This probably made Peter to be the right spokesman for the disciples.

After Christ's identity has been revealed as the messiah, he now openly started to tell them what is about to happen to him.

It is normal for people to wish they die peacefully in their bed, sleep and never to wake but it is not always achieved. Some people are privileged to know when they will die or how but not the exact time and spot. For Christ to predict the exact way, manner, by whom and where is divine in nature.

It takes the grace of God to know the gruesomeness of one's death and have the courage to choose that route.

God's way, not an easy way but the perfect way.

From the fall of man which separated him from God, the latter has a plan to bring the former back to himself and that is through a perfect sacrifice of His sinless son Jesus Christ. That is the reason he was born and died. He came with a purpose to reconcile man back to his creator and bring salvation to people through his death and resurrection.

I believe that there are few lessons that God wants us to learn from this passage:

1. **The purpose for coming to the world** – to die for our sins and reconcile us back to the Father. Without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins and anyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. God demands that our sins be atoned for hence he taught Adam to sacrifice when He killed an animal to atone for their sins and cover them with the skin instead of the leaves they initially used. He came, focused on his call and purpose even though he was distracted several times by Satan and the authorities, he did not lose focus. Tell your neighbour to stay focused to his calling and purpose. Distractions will come from people around you and from Satan, look unto Jesus who is able to help you stay focused. Many people have lost their focus because they yield to distraction. The distraction is always attractive; it appears to have some truth in it, sounds very sensible and always an easier option. You must be aware that Satan will always suggest a short cut, an easy and compromising way. It is not Godly no matter how sensible or reasonable it sounds. For the mere fact that it sounds sensible or reasonable means it not Godly. One must have thought that Peter is a true friend who love Jesus and wished nothing bad happened to him. And that is the reason why he took Jesus aside to talk him out of this bizarre thought. But Jesus knew that the Father's route is not an easy one. He knew it will be hard and he knew that the end will be glorious. He fought Satan back by rebuking him to get behind. I remember a friend whom God called out of his secular job he loved doing to ministry. Whilst many people affirmed his ministry and are in support of it, some queried his call and ministry. They asked him, did God really call you to be a pastor? He told me it was a painful experience and it almost made him doubt God and himself. That is people for you. Hold on to your calling and purpose and if you stay focused on Him who calls you then you will make it as Jesus made it. You will fulfil your purpose and destiny. Friends, I want to tell you something important about Peter here. It is easy to slip from spiritual height to spiritual slum or depression. Look at Peter who was the hero a while ago when he

declared Jesus as the Christ and son of the living God and Jesus commended him of his availability to be used of the Holy Spirit. He now gets the bash for being used of Satan from the same person that commended him.

We must always be aware of our dependence on God for every minute of our lives so that we will constantly be in tune with and guided by God. Do not slip from your height, stay focused.

2. **The road will not be easy** – Jesus knew he was going to be beaten, tortured and treated very harshly and it will be very painful. He knew he was going to be killed. The question ‘supposes he did not raise me up’ did not cross his mind, he obeyed like Isaac obeyed when he queried Abraham, here is wood and matches, where is the lamb? The messiah must suffer, brutally beaten and gruesomely killed. Isaiah 53 clearly spelt out about 700 years before Christ was born. All of us want an easy life, easy work, work little and get plenty. In fact some culture prays that they will work little and rewarded big. What a prayer, is that Godly?

I once remember the New Year message of one of the social critic of Nigeria which he titled ‘may your road be rough’. This generated a lot of arguments and criticisms. While many saw it as a curse, only few saw it as a reality and a way to prepare them for success. But I want to tell you that is a right approach to life.

Suppose I say or pray ‘May you suffer to acquire perseverance which will produce character and hope?’ It appears no one wants to say amen to my prayer and that is an indirect expression of Romans 5:3. You see how easy and itch free we want life to be and if that is the way we think, we are not thinking the way God does. God’s way is not easy but it is perfect.

We will be persecuted, tortured and some of may be killed as well but we will share his glory. Don’t despair, don’t cut corners and compromise. Confess Jesus here and he will confess you before his Father and deny him and he will deny you as well.

Folks Jesus warned us of hardship of life in John 16:33, why do we expect less? If we do, it means we are seeking short cuts and it is not God’s way.

3. **There will be misplaced expectation:** People who should be looking forward to the messiah have missed him and in the name of God would soon torture and kill the Messiah. This is very disappointing but Godly. The High Priests and religious leaders who knew that the Messiah is coming, will be born in Bethlehem and should welcome Jesus were the ones that opposed him. They antagonised him and killed him because they have a contrary picture of the one who should be the Messiah.

They were expecting a military marshal with charisma and power who will fight the Romans and uproot them from their land. But instead, Jesus came to preach love for enemies, turning the other cheek to your assailant and other things not expected by the authorities. Surely he could not have been the Messiah.

Another misplaced expectation is that instead of Him to become victorious against the Romans, he will be victorious over Satan and death by his resurrection on the third day, what a misery?

God’s way is not our way so he declares in Isaiah 55:8-11 "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."

So when things appear to be contrary to your expectation, when people you expect to support your course are against you and things are going upside down, could it be that God’s will is prevailing? He will accomplish His purpose in your life His word is powerful and cannot be revoked and his promises are yes and amen. Just hold on to Him, obey him and He will accomplish his purpose for you, like he did for Jesus and for many saints who have been before and are around you now.

4. **That the outcome will by far glorious than the cost:** Jesus’ choice for the hard route is a rewarding one. Hebrews 12:2 "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith,

who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

This is a case of the Silver/gold smith telling the gold that the more you endure the heat the better you become. What is the temperature we are talking about here, 100 degree centigrade? No. We are talking about 1000 degrees or more.

This reminds me of the email Bisi sent me the other day about a group of women doing Bible study and they came to Malachi 3:3 “ He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the Lord will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness.” Curious to know what this means, they sent a group to the silver smith to study how he does his work. They could not believe the intensity and the temperature of the heat and they asked the smith, how would you know when your gold is purified? He replied, when I begin to my image in it. So when God begins to see his image in us we are being purified.

There is no crown without a cross so they say. Jesus saw the outcome he endured the shame, torture and death on a cross with its stigma. He did not consider what people will say or how they will feel. He would face the cross because of two reasons.

1. His commitment to total obedience to His father. He just wants to please his father because he has faith in Him and without faith it is impossible to please God.
2. He must have weighed the outcome of his obedience- his resurrection and glorification against the cost and choose the hard way because the outcome is far precious than the cost.

Conclusion:

Make your choice:

Friends, Christianity is not for the weak, it is not for the compromiser or the infidel, and neither is for the proud or the arrogant. Rather, it is for those who are committed to their cause, those who will obey God without giving excuse, those who will not be ashamed to be called Christians and will stand up for the consequences of what that will bring. It is for the fearless and dogged.

To deny self does not mean to deny things. It means to give yourself wholly to Christ and share in His shame and death. Paul described this in Romans 12:1-2, Philipians 3:7-10 and Galatians 2:20.

Take up your cross, which means whatever will cause you to identify with Christ, what people will say, the shame you are likely to face and the unpleasant names you will be called, the troubles you will face and bring them to Jesus who leads ahead of you, focus on Him and the outcome will be glorious

But suffering always leads to glory. If you suffer with him you will share in his glory as well.

As Jesus presented two choices to his disciples, so I present you two choices as well. Take your choice.

	For God	For Self
1	Deny yourself	live for yourself
2	Take up your cross	ignore the cross
3	Follow Christ	follow the world
4	Lose your life for his sake	save your life for your own sake
5	Forsake the world	gain the world
6	Keep your soul	lose your soul
7	Share His reward and glory	lose His reward and glory

God’s way is not an easy way but a rewarding one. There is no short course but full length, no friendliness with the world but enmity but the end will be better than the start.

I do not know where you are but where ever you are help is on the on the way. You only need to turn your back to the world and people and turn to Christ and identify with Him. If you would, then you are worthy to be called Christians and to be named after Him because you are like Jesus. But if you are not yet there, there is a hope for you. Today is a good day to start afresh and just call on his name who is the very present help in time of trouble and need and He will come to your aid.

As we look to Easter, choose God’s way even though it is difficult but you will share Christ glory.