

YOBL

Year of Biblical Literacy

Week 39: Jesus as the Crucified Messiah

Daily Reading for Week

- John 16-18, Psalm 110
- John 19-21, Psalm 111
- Luke 1, Psalm 112
- Luke 2-3, Psalm 113
- Luke 4-5, Psalm 114
- Luke 6-7, Psalm 115
- Luke 8-9, Psalm 116
- **Read Scripture Videos: The Messiah (themed video), Luke 1-9**

Focus of time together

To carefully read Luke's account of Jesus' arrest and crucifixion and then to meditate on the scandalous relationship between Jesus' death and His royal, messianic, and divine identity.

Connecting Exercise

Sit in silence for 3 minutes.

Then invite one another to share in one word what surfaced in you during this silence. Feel free to elaborate beyond that one word, but take whatever time necessary to search for the word that best describes what you experienced. Practice a slow, reflective pace of conversation by not rushing others or allowing yourselves to feel rushed. When invited to speak, embrace the silence as your opportunity to turn your internal world into words. Take whatever time you need

Opening Prayer

Intro to Discussion

On the surface, it appeared like Jesus was being hailed as a kind of new would-be king. Our study last week led us to see that the referenced Old Testament passages further revealed

Jesus not just as another new leader but as the long-awaited Jewish Messiah figure,

who was expected to be anointed by God to take up the throne of David and begin a military revolution against the invading forces of Rome. This week, we'll fast-forward just a couple days in the story, where Jesus has been betrayed, arrested, indicted, mocked, tortured, and executed. How in the world do we make sense of this story? How did Jesus' followers come to understand this brutal and embarrassing turn of events?

To help us get our bearings, let's discuss this idea of a Messiah figure or Jewish king a bit further:

Most Christians are at least somewhat familiar with the idea that Jesus was "the Messiah" (Hebrew) or "the Christ" (Greek). However, we often fail to understand what exactly it meant for this to be true. When we say Israel was awaiting the coming of a Messiah, we mean they were waiting for a king. Messiah/Christos is a term for a King of Israel who would be a kind of new David figure who would take up the throne and liberate Israel from her enemies by leading a mighty military victory. What Israel was most deeply hoping for at the time of Jesus was a kind of new Moses or King David figure to rise up and lead them on a new exodus out of their current exile. Once rescued and redeemed to freedom by this Messiah figure, Israel would be able to rebuild the temple and inaugurate worship once again in a renewed Jerusalem. This, they believed, was what God had promised through the prophets to do.

But when Jesus was born, Israel already had a king... sort of. And the temple had already been rebuilt... sort of again. Herod has been appointed as a kind of puppet King by the Roman Empire, ruling over the Jews as their king. And Herod, hoping to win the trust of the people (based on their messianic expectations) helped to rebuild the temple. But historical records of this "Second-temple Period" reveal that neither Herod's kingship nor his temple were accepted as the real deal. Herod was considered a sick farce and the temple a sad excuse for the "crown jewel of Jerusalem." In other words, the Jews had an impostor king but were still waiting for a messiah, the true king, to arrive.

We should know, however, that Jesus of Nazareth was neither the first nor the last to esteem Himself or be touted by others as Israel's messiah. Several men both before and after Jesus were identified as the long-expected messiah. They inaugurated their would-be reign by leading sizeable rebel movements that would subvert the official Jewish "kingship" and eventually fight in a violent coup against the Roman overlords in Jerusalem. Time and again, both the ruling Roman army and the local Jewish aristocracy faced the threat of these Jewish uprisings and became more and more brutal in their efforts to squash such revolts. By the time of Jesus then, the idea of any man being deemed Israel's true king was perceived as a violent threat both to Roman and Jewish rule, to the likes of Herod and Caesar alike. These messianic hopes also carried very particular connotations in the eyes of ordinary Jews who widely assumed that whenever the true king did arrive, he would prove it through a successful military coup. In other words, everyone on the scene understood the Messiah as a fierce political threat to, and indeed a full-on violent replacement of, the powers that be.

It is interesting then, for many reasons, that the title that Jesus used least was that of the royal, Davidic Messiah. In fact, Jesus never actually uses the title in reference to Himself. Furthermore, when His healings or actions caused people to call him Messiah, Jesus typically urged them to silence and not to spread the rumour. Christopher Wright suggests that “the most probable reason [for this reticence] is that the term messiah had become so loaded with the hopes of a national, political and even violent Jewish restoration that it could not carry the understanding of messiahship that Jesus had derived from a deeper reading of his Scriptures. If he had stood up and claimed to be the Messiah it would have been “heard” by his contemporaries with a load of associations that were not part of Jesus’ concept of his mission...The trouble was that what they expected of a messiah and what Jesus intended in being the Messiah did not match” (Knowing Jesus Through the Old Testament).

So, does Jesus’ apparent reticence to be publicly called the Messiah mean that He did not think himself to be Israel’s King? Were the crowds wrong to put down palm branches before Him and celebrate Him as such? If so, why did Jesus go out of His way to ride in on a donkey? And how do we reconcile the way Jesus spoke about Himself, with the Gospel writers’ (especially Matthew’s) insistence on referring to Him as the Messiah? Was Jesus the Messiah? Or was He not the Messiah? This week, we’ll take a careful look at how the amazing story of Jesus’ death reveals, paradoxically, that yes, He is the Messiah — but not the kind of messiah Israel was anticipating.

Whole Group Discussion (75 minutes)

Read Luke 22:39-23:46

Questions for Basic Understanding

These questions are to help us interpret and understand the text as it was intended to be interpreted and understood.

1. Question
2. Question

Questions for Interacting with Scripture

These questions are to help us slow down, to taste and notice Scripture, savour its richness and meditate on its complexity of meaning.

Before responding, spend 3-5 minutes in silence to sit with this text.

1. What part of this story moved you, struck you, or surprised you the most?
2. Consider the questions posed to Jesus by those engaging him in this story. Notice how Luke’s inclusion of all these identity questions in the Gospel’s climax works to form a sort of existential suspense about Jesus, begging the question, who is He? Take a few minutes to sit with the questions below and then take turns responding to either of the questions below.

- When Jesus' followers saw what was going to happen, they said, "Lord, should we strike with our swords?"
 - They all asked, "Are you then the Son of God?"
 - So Pilate asked Jesus, "Are you the king of the Jews?"
 - One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Messiah?"
3. Which of these questions resonate most with you as your own questions for Jesus?
 4. Which question do you see answered most clearly in Jesus' trial and death?

Questions for Listening to Scripture

These questions are to help us be affected by Scripture in the way it was intended to affect us.

Consider this quote from Rowan Williams' *Christ on Trial*:

"Jesus before the High Priest has no leverage in the world. He is denuded of whatever power he might have had. Stripped and bound before the court, he has no stake in how the world organises itself... It is at this moment and this moment only that he speaks plainly about who he is... God's "I am" can only be heard for what it is when it has no trace of human power left to it; when it appears as something utterly different from human authority, even human liberty; when it is spoken by a captive under sentence of death."

In other words, Jesus' massively authoritative identity isn't fully revealed until He is stripped of all His power. What does this reveal to us about Jesus' divinity and Kingship?

Questions for Self Examination

These questions are to help us look at ourselves, be aware of who we are in the light of our interaction with Scripture and consider any appropriate action.

1. If you're honest, what Jesus would you have truly wanted? Would you have wanted the powerless, failing Jesus or the triumphant, conquering Jesus?

Luke goes out of his way earlier in his Gospel to prepare us readers to be ready to wrestle with the fact that Jesus' Messianic Kingship reaches its climax at the point of Jesus' nonviolent martyrdom. In Luke 9:22-26, He records both Jesus' prediction of His death and His explanation of the implications for those who would be His disciples:

And he said, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

Then he said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very

self? Whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.

2. What is one way that Jesus' Kingship of self-denial can reshape the way you relate to the world?
3. In what ways might God be calling you to take up your own cross (i.e. choose martyrdom) today and to give up your fight to preserve your present existence?

Closing Prayer

Take another few minutes of silence to let the Holy Spirit clarify for you which part of this week's reading, discussion, and reflection is most important for you to sit with right now. Then take turns talking to God in whatever way you need to in order to be able to move forward in obedience to God's leading.