

1. Week 39: Jesus as the Crucified Messiah

2. Recap & Preparing for CG:

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

Resources for Week:

- Read Scripture Video: The Messiah (themed video) and Luke 1-9

3. Focus of our 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.

4. Weekly ground rule / goal / value:

Goal: Our goal this week is to practice engaging in conversation at a slow enough pace to allow for regular silent pauses that can help create an atmosphere of prayerful stillness and reflection. Try not to rush into every silent space filling it with conversation but rather embrace each moment of silence as an opportunity for quiet contemplation.

5. Connection and Unity Exercise (Mutual Invitation, 15 minutes):

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.

6. Opening Prayer:

Take a few minutes to practice the Unity Prayer, expressing whatever heartfelt longings that you heard others express during the unity exercise.

Close by praying the Lord's prayer aloud together:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.

7. Intro to Discussion:

Last week, we read the Gospel writers' depictions of Jesus' royal entry into Jerusalem. On the surface, it appeared like Jesus was being hailed as a kind of new would-be king. Our study 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 rumor. 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.

8. Questions for Large Group Discussion (75 minutes):

Read Luke 22:39-23:46 (Note: This long chunk of text covers a huge swath of narrative ground. Read it very slowly allowing yourselves to follow along with the story. Pay particular attention to how Jesus' identity unfolds.)

Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. On reaching the place, he said to them, "Pray that you will not fall into temptation." He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.

When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow. "Why are you sleeping?" he asked them. "Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation."

While he was still speaking a crowd came up, and the man who was called Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him, but Jesus asked him, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?"

When Jesus' followers saw what was going to happen, they said, "Lord, should we strike with our swords?" And one of them struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear.

But Jesus answered, "No more of this!" And he touched the man's ear and healed him.

Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple guard, and the elders, who had come for him, "Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come with swords and clubs? Every day I was with you in the temple courts, and you did not lay a hand on me. But this is your hour—when darkness reigns."

Then seizing him, they led him away and took him into the house of the high priest. Peter followed at a distance. And when some there had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat down with them. A servant girl saw him seated there in the firelight. She looked closely at him and said, "This man was with him."

But he denied it. "Woman, I don't know him," he said.

A little later someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them."

"Man, I am not!" Peter replied.

About an hour later another asserted, "Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean."

Peter replied, "Man, I don't know what you're talking about!" Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times." And he went outside and wept bitterly.

The men who were guarding Jesus began mocking and beating him. They blindfolded him and demanded, "Prophecy! Who hit you?" And they said many other insulting things to him.

At daybreak the council of the elders of the people, both the chief priests and the teachers of the law, met together, and Jesus was led before them. "If you are the Messiah," they said, "tell us."

Jesus answered, "If I tell you, you will not believe me, and if I asked you, you would not answer. But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God."

They all asked, "Are you then the Son of God?"

He replied, "You say that I am."

Then they said, "Why do we need any more testimony? We have heard it from his own lips."

Then the whole assembly rose and led him off to Pilate. And they began to accuse him, saying, "We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Messiah, a king."

So Pilate asked Jesus, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

"You have said so," Jesus replied.

Then Pilate announced to the chief priests and the crowd, "I find no basis for a charge against this man."

But they insisted, "He stirs up the people all over Judea by his teaching. He started in Galilee and has come all the way here."

On hearing this, Pilate asked if the man was a Galilean. When he learned that Jesus was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time.

When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he had been wanting to see him. From what he had heard about him, he hoped to see him perform a sign of some sort. He plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer. The chief priests and the teachers of the law were standing

there, vehemently accusing him. Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him. Dressing him in an elegant robe, they sent him back to Pilate. That day Herod and Pilate became friends—before this they had been enemies.

Pilate called together the chief priests, the rulers and the people, and said to them, “You brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him. Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us; as you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death. Therefore, I will punish him and then release him.”

But the whole crowd shouted, “Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us!” (Barabbas had been thrown into prison for an insurrection in the city, and for murder.)

Wanting to release Jesus, Pilate appealed to them again. But they kept shouting, “Crucify him! Crucify him!”

For the third time he spoke to them: “Why? What crime has this man committed? I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore I will have him punished and then release him.”

But with loud shouts they insistently demanded that he be crucified, and their shouts prevailed. So Pilate decided to grant their demand. He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, the one they asked for, and surrendered Jesus to their will.

As the soldiers led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. Jesus turned and said to them, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. For the time will come when you will say, ‘Blessed are the childless women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!’ Then

“‘they will say to the mountains, “Fall on us!”

and to the hills, “Cover us!””

For if people do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?”

Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left.

Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is God’s Messiah, the Chosen One.”

The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar and said, “If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.”

There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: “Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!”

But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.”

Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Jesus called out with a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” When he had said this, he breathed his last.

The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, “Surely this was a righteous man.” When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away. But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.”

Questions for Interacting with Scripture:

These questions are to help us slow down to taste and notice Scripture, savor 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 organizes 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 Examining Ourselves

These questions are to help us look at ourselves, be aware and honest about who we are in 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?

9. Questions for Small Group Discussion:

There will be no small group discussion this week.

10. Closing (5 minutes):

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.