

CIC 3/29/26 - Palm Sunday, PJS, Is Jesus our King?

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Pull Quote: The crowd abandoned Jesus because he wasn't the Messiah they wanted. Do we abandon Jesus because he's not the Messiah we want?

Message Summary: The crowds welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem as their Messianic King, and followed his ministry closely in the following days, but their followership faltered when he was arrested and sentenced to death. Not just during his last week in Jerusalem, but throughout his ministry, Jesus' kingship was misunderstood. Observing the fickle loyalty of the crowd, let us be those that endeavor to follow the real king Jesus, not just the king we want.

Discussion Questions:

1. High, Low, Buffalo?
2. What stood out in this week's message?
3. What do you think indicated to the crowds that Jesus was King?
4. Is there a way that his kingship could be misinterpreted by them?
5. In what ways do we imagine Jesus as a different king than the one he is?
6. What Barrabases do we or our culture choose instead?
7. How can we follow the real King Jesus better?
8. Pray for each other.

Message

Today is Palm Sunday, and it's one of the days that Christians celebrate over and over again year after year. It's the start of Holy Week, when we anticipate the Last Supper on Good Friday, the crucifixion of Jesus on Good Friday and his resurrection on Easter Sunday. As far as I know, we don't have any Palm branches here, but I remember as a kid, sometimes the church I grew up in would give out palms. But I guess full palm branches are kind of hard to find or just expensive, it is New England in March so there aren't exactly many palm trees swaying outside. I say that because usually it wasn't a whole branch, it was just a single narrow palm

frond, that was like this long and this wide, and it would usually droop when you held it up. That being said it was a fun reminder of what day it was as a kid.

Here is one of the passages in Scripture that we oftentimes look to on this day.

Mark 11:1-3, 7-10

11 As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, **2** saying to them, “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. **3** If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ say, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.’”... **7** When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. **8** Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. **9** Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, “Hosanna!” “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” **10** “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!” “Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

This is the scene that makes Palm Sunday, Palm Sunday, when Jesus enters Jerusalem on a donkey, and many people spread out their cloaks and spread branches to cover the road as he approaches, which is where the Palm part comes from. To give some context, this is the start of the week of Passover, the biggest Jewish festival, when the Israelites celebrate God rescuing them from Egypt, and people from all over Judea and the Jewish diaspora came to Jerusalem to celebrate it. Jerusalem is the historic capital of Israel, the site of the temple, the place where sacrifices to God are made and where the Ark of the Covenant resided, where the Israelites believed God’s spirit met Earth. And so not only has Jesus gained a reputation because of his ministry, his teaching and miracles the past few years, but the timing and the setting are very charged. All that to say, the crowd’s actions here are not casual, they are intentional. They have an idea of what and who they are witnessing.

Let's look at the words and actions here. To spread your cloak or branches on the road is like saying the ground is not worthy of the feet who walk on it. And Jesus isn't even walking, he's riding the donkey, so the ground apparently isn't even worthy of the donkey's hooves. Hosanna is a Hebrew expression meaning save, to come in the name of the Lord is to arrive with God's authority, to say blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David is clear language supporting the restoration of the Kingdom of David, Israel's high point of power and moral clarity. Clearly, kingship was very much on the mind of the crowd.

So these actions and this language accompanying Jesus' entry is Kingdom language, it's Messianic language. To the people waiting for Jesus' entry, this is a hopeful moment, a moment of anticipation for what is to come. That perhaps Jesus is the Messiah, the savior king the Jewish people have been anticipating for some time.

Throughout Jesus' time in Jerusalem the next few days, there were crowds present.

They were present when Jesus overturned the tables at the temple

Mark 11:15-18

15 On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, **16** and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. **17** And as he taught them, he said, "Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'"

18 The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching.

The whole crowd was amazed at his teaching. The crowds were present when Jesus gave the parable of the rebellious tenants in the vineyard.

Mark 12: 9-12

9 “What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others. **10** Haven’t you read this passage of Scripture: “The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; **11** the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes’?” **12** Then the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders looked for a way to arrest him because they knew he had spoken the parable against them. But they were afraid of the crowd; so they left him and went away.

But they were afraid of the CROWD

The crowd was also present when Jesus talked about the Messiah being a distinct personality

Mark 12:35-37

35 While Jesus was teaching in the temple courts, he asked, “Why do the teachers of the law say that the Messiah is the son of David? **36** David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit, declared: “The Lord said to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.” **37** David himself calls him ‘Lord.’ How then can he be his son?” The large crowd listened to him with delight.

Who listened to him with delight? The large CROWD. Their anticipation is building. The crowds were excited enough to give him a King’s welcome, and what Jesus is saying seems to only be increasing his followership.

But this momentum does not last.

Mark 15:1-15

1 Very early in the morning, the chief priests, with the elders, the teachers of the law and the whole Sanhedrin, made their plans. So they bound Jesus, led him away and handed him over to Pilate. **2** “Are you the king of the Jews?” asked Pilate. “You have said so,” Jesus replied. **3** The chief

priests accused him of many things. **4** So again Pilate asked him, “Aren’t you going to answer? See how many things they are accusing you of.” **5** But Jesus still made no reply, and Pilate was amazed.

6 Now it was the custom at the festival to release a prisoner whom the people requested. **7** A man called Barabbas was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising. **8** The crowd came up and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did. **9** “Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?” asked Pilate, **10** knowing it was out of self-interest that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him. **11** But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead.

12 “What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?” Pilate asked them. **13** “Crucify him!” they shouted. **14** “Why? What crime has he committed?” asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, “Crucify him!” **15** Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

The crowd present in this scene was likely composed of some of the same people in the crowd that welcomed Jesus with enthusiasm as Messiah when he came to Jerusalem, some of the same people present in the temple when Jesus was overturning the tables of the money changers, that were delighted when Jesus debated the religious elites. How do you know it’s probably the same people? Well Jerusalem at this point is less than half a square mile large, it’s a very dense urbanized half of a square mile, but it’s still small, and it’s packed with extra people due to Passover, so it’s the kind of place where news would travel very fast. So when something big is happening, everyone knows. And Jesus has been there for a few days, so people have likely been following him and his disciples around. From the start of Jesus’ time in Jerusalem until now, the crowds have been for him, they’ve liked Jesus, but in this scene, they aren’t. They shout crucify him, and choose to free Barabbas instead. So in less than a days time they turned against him. How?

Well, to see how that happened, it's helpful to look at a history of Jesus and crowds. While the crowds in Jerusalem were all around him during Passover, Jesus was typically more crowd averse for much of his ministry.

Mark 1:29-34

29 As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. **30** Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they immediately told Jesus about her. **31** So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.

32 That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. **33** The whole town gathered at the door, **34** and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.

Mark 1:40-45

40 A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, "If you are willing, you can make me clean." **41** Jesus was indignant. He reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" **42** Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed. **43** Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: **44** "See that you don't tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them." **45** Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere.

Mark 5:38-43

38 When they came to the home of the synagogue leader, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. **39** He went in and said to them, "Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep." **40** But they laughed at him. After he put them all out, he took the child's father and mother and the disciples who were with him, and went in

where the child was. **41** He took her by the hand and said to her, "*Talitha koum!*" (which means "Little girl, I say to you, get up!"). **42** Immediately the girl stood up and began to walk around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished. **43** He gave strict orders not to let anyone know about this, and told them to give her something to eat.

Repeatedly when Jesus performed miraculous healings or cast out demonic, oppressive spirits, he told the witnesses both human and spiritual, to be quiet about what happened, or to keep it a secret. Which might seem puzzling. If something amazing, miraculous, life restoring happened, why would you be quiet about that? Wouldn't you want people to know? But Jesus keeps on avoiding crowds and trying to stop them from forming.

Some of his conversations with the disciples reveal why

Mark 8:27-30

27 Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?" **28** They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets."

29 "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Messiah." **30** Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

Why does Jesus not want to be known for who he actually is? The Messiah, the savior King of Israel?

Here's a few more scriptures that help us understand.

Mark 9:33-35

33 They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?" **34** But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest. **35**

Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, “Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.”

Mark 10:35 -37

35 Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. “Teacher,” they said, “we want you to do for us whatever we ask.”

36 “What do you want me to do for you?” he asked. **37** They replied, “Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.”

Mark 10:41 -45

41 When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. **42** Jesus called them together and said, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. **43** Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, **44** and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. **45** For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

The disciples keep imagining how Jesus is going to favor them individually.

The Disciples have an image of Jesus in their head that doesn't line up with what the real Jesus is actually saying.

When people think of Jesus as Messiah, as King, they imagine him as someone who crushes enemies, who rewards followers with wealth, power, titles. In other words, they imagine Jesus the way they typically imagine a king. Which makes sense, because the Israelites have been living with this prophecy of a savior king since the time of Isaiah, the exile, and the prophets, hundreds of years earlier. Isaiah's book was written approximately 7 centuries before Jesus' life and ministry. That's like going

back from now to the 1300's, so it's a long time to be imagining someone you haven't seen yet. And during those 7 centuries, the Israelites were oppressed and conquered multiple times, by foreign pagan empires, including the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Greeks, and now Rome, their current occupier. So when the Israelites hear the word Messiah, it's a term that has been in their imagination for a long time, and their historical, political context has shaped it into their own ideal pop culture image of what an Israelite savior king would be to them.

And that wasn't just true of the crowds, those closest to Jesus imagined him much the same way. Because he's the Messiah, and that's a term that they, their families, their culture have already defined for a very long time now. They don't understand that Jesus came to serve, not to be served, and he wants those that follow him to do the same. This is why Jesus avoided the crowds for a long time until he knew his time was near, because he knew people would see the signs of who he was and misunderstand. They would see Jesus as the Messiah they imagined, not the Messiah he really was and is.

And so, when you get to the events of the week of Passover in Jerusalem, it makes sense why the crowds did what they did. It makes sense why they welcomed him like a king when he entered the city, it makes sense why they were interested in what he had to say when he flipped tables in the temple. Why they were intrigued when he debated with the religious elites and taught in the temple. They liked it when Jesus was doing things they expected the Messiah to do.

But then it also makes sense why the crowd turned on Jesus to the point that they would ask for Barabbas to be released instead, and would shout crucify at Jesus. Jesus was willingly arrested, he did not fight the priests or Pilate when he was being accused, tried, and sentenced. Jesus didn't fight back for the same reason he allowed the crowds in Jerusalem to glorify him in the first place, because he knew he needed to die in order to

pay sin's debt and rise again in victory over death. But the crowd wanted to see their ideal image of Messiah, the one who was going to fight, and win, to defeat their enemies and reward them, and the Messiah of their imagination would never be willing to be arrested, accused, charged, in other words defeated, like Jesus was.

Barabbas, unlike Jesus, had rebelled against Rome, he was a murderer. He was a fighter, a man of action. He wasn't someone willing to suffer or be defeated. In the face of the crowd wondering how could Jesus really be the real deal we want with all of this happening, Barabbas seemed like an appealing alternative for the time being, he might have been cheap, but he was accessible. I don't know if anyone in the crowd actually imagined Barabbas was the Messiah, but at least he was a man they could appreciate and support, at least Barabbas did what the crowd wanted, Barabbas was a fighter. Jesus looked like a loser by comparison. So the crowd abandoned him.

The crowd abandoned Jesus because he wasn't the Messiah they wanted.

Do we abandon Jesus because he's not the Messiah we want?

Maybe we imagine Jesus the way his followers did, we want Jesus to reward us individually in this life. We want Jesus to get us a job, we want Him to give us a promotion. And when we're confronted by the reality that Jesus does not promise us material gain or status, but invites us to serve and suffer alongside Him, we want out. We want to spend our time and money rewarding ourselves, making ourselves happy. We'll follow self-help guru's and podcasters instead. We'll follow Christians preaching Prosperity Gospel, that God actually wants us to be rich, because that sounds better. Listen, if you don't like what Jesus has to say, the reality is the internet is full of people willing to tell you exactly what you want to hear so they can make money.

Perhaps we abandon Jesus more subtly, by putting all of ourselves into our jobs, school, hobbies, our relationships, our families. Because that's how we know we can get ahead or feel accomplished, successful, secure. Those things aren't necessarily bad, but they can become false idols that we allow to become like God in our lives when we aren't careful. So instead of working alongside the Messiah that changes lives and is changing the world, who has given us a means to have eternity with our creator, we settle for material happiness and personal success for this life, instead. Jesus says I'm inviting you to serve and suffer alongside me, we say peace out.

Maybe we see Jesus the way the crowds did, as the King that wasn't just going to teach cool things but was going to fight their enemies and win. And let's be honest, when we talk about Kingship, that's a political term. And there's a lot of politicians out there that like to depict themselves as a fighter. They're fighting against the elites, they're fighting for the people, they're fighting for your rights, they're fighting for America, they're fighting for you. They don't always explain what that means exactly, but they're fighting. And both sides here in America do that.

Nobody in politics likes a loser, nobody likes a politician that asks them to make hard choices or address what's wrong with them. When fighting is what people are asking for, the fruits of the spirit that scripture talks about: love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, start looking like weaknesses. The model of Jesus to willingly suffer becomes laughable.

Maybe for you, you abandon Jesus by allowing your worldview, your opinions, your heart to gravitate more towards a modern day Barabbas than to him.

So we need to ask ourselves, who are we loyal to in our hearts? Is it the real King Jesus that was willing to be crucified, who invites us to serve and

suffer alongside him, or is it the idealized King Jesus of our dreams that does everything we want him to for our personal success, or do our loyalties lie with a modern day Barabbas, who fights the way you want them to.

Is Jesus really our king?

That's the question I want us to sit with

Pray for the congregation, that we would be those that want to follow the real King Jesus, not the Messiah we want, not a Barrabas. Not just in the Palm Sunday moments when there's anticipation and excitement, and Jesus is popular, but the trials where it might not seem like Jesus is meeting our hopes in the moment, when he challenges our perceptions of him and we're faced with the choice to follow a crucified king on a cross, whom nobody else might be following. Will we still follow King Jesus then?