

Not What I Will, But What You Will

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. Mark 11, 1-10, and again chapter 14, 32-42, as it is written here. As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, 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 written. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, Why are you doing this? Say, The Lord needs it, and we'll send it back here shortly.

They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied to a doorway, and as they untied it, some people standing there asked, What are you doing, untying the colt?

[1 : 13] They said, As Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go. When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields.

They went to a place called Gethsemane.

And Jesus said to his disciples, Sit here while I pray. He took Peter and James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled.

My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow at the point of death, he said to them. Stay here and keep watch. Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that, if it's possible, the hour might pass from him.

Abba Father, he said, Everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will. Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping.

[2 : 29] Simon, he said to Peter, Are you asleep? Couldn't you keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.

Once more he went away and prayed the same thing. When he came back, he again found them sleeping because their eyes were heavy. They did not know what to say to him.

Returning the third time, he said to them, Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough. The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. Rise.

Let us go. Here comes my betrayers. This is the Gospel of the Lord. Who is Jesus? What did Jesus say and what did he do?

And what does that mean for us? These are the questions that we've been seeking to answer as we've been exploring the Gospel of Mark since Christmas. And every year around Christmas and Easter, you'll find a new article or a new book comes out with a startling thesis based on groundbreaking research revealing entirely new insights about Jesus Christ.

[3 : 44] An archaeologist digs up a new stone. An archivist redates a manuscript. A seminar comes up with a new analysis. And they say, Now we've discovered the secret of who Jesus really was.

He was a Gnostic mystic. He was a cynic philosopher. He was a proto-liberation reformer. An apocalyptic prophet. A peasant revolutionary.

In fact, one recent bestseller argues that Jesus was actually a zealot. Another argues that he was in fact married, divorced, and then remarried.

And I know some of you are wondering, he was married to Mary Magdalene. They had three kids, one daughter, two sons. According to this book. So, what are we to make of all of this?

These new views suggest that Jesus never did and never said what the four Gospels claim he did and said. And what they do is they try to get behind the so-called prejudices and perspectives of the

biblical Gospels in the hopes that they'll find a rather different Jesus there.

[4 : 55] These scholars and popularizers tell us, for example, that the Gospel of Mark is theological fiction. It can't be trusted to give us reliable information about Jesus, but can only really tell us about Mark's own theology about Jesus.

And I want to just say as we begin today that these questions that are being raised and these conclusions that are being asserted in this quest for the historical Jesus are emphatically not new. In fact, these new discoveries and theories that come out every year that claim to pose significant challenges to the historic Christian faith, if you study it, they turn out to be variations on very well-worn themes, recycled questions and recycled ideas that you can trace back over the last 250 years of New Testament scholarship.

So, of course, it's a very good thing for us to challenge popular visions of Jesus that are tamed and domesticated versions of the real thing.

That's something the church should always be interested in doing. And certainly, we should know that if we discover for ourselves a Jesus with whom we can cope, that that's certainly not the real Jesus.

Because the real Jesus is someone we cannot cope with. But what I want to encourage you with as we begin Holy Week is that it's not really possible, nor is it desirable for us to go back behind the four Gospels, but that what we have in these texts is reliable historical evidence and documentation about the historic Jesus.

[6 : 35] And if you study these Gospels, you'll find a Jesus there that absolutely explodes whatever categories you bring to him.

And I want to, some of you, I know, whenever I recommend a book, there's like two of you that actually go and get it and read it. So, two world-class scholars here, Tom Wright and Richard Baucom.

Tom Wright wrote the original Jesus, the life and vision of a revolutionary. This is a series he did for the BBC back in the day. And this is Jesus, a very short introduction with this Oxford University Prez series of very short introductions.

And I commend these two scholars to you if you are looking for some extra reading this week. But Palm Sunday is this doorway through which we enter into Holy Week.

And 2.4 billion Christians in every culture around the world this week are going to read and remember and prayerfully meditate upon the final days of Jesus leading up to his climactic crucifixion and his resounding resurrection.

[7 : 42] And so, if you're exploring Christianity today, there's no better time to get a front row seat than Holy Week. And if you're a Christian, I want to remind you that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John had devoted a total of 30 chapters to Jesus' final days and final moments leading up to his death on the cross.

So, I can imagine that even those of us who are very, very familiar with the events of Holy Week have something here in these 30 chapters, not to mention the rest of the New Testament, that we've not yet integrated into our faith and into our life.

And so, I want to encourage you to take up and read and to engage in these events this week. And I pray that as you do, you'll be surprised by God the Father and that you will experience his son and you'll come to encounter the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit as you do so.

But I want to dive in now to Mark chapter 11 and Mark chapter 14. And what I want to say today is that our king rides on a donkey, surrenders to the Father, and calls us to pray.

Our king rides on a donkey, surrenders to the Father, and calls us to pray. So, let's start with our king riding on a donkey. Oftentimes, we assume that Jesus kind of stumbled into Jerusalem that final week and he realized some people really liked him and he said, oh, shucks, okay, I guess you can make me king.

[9 : 20] But Jesus is far more deliberate and reflective and strategic than that. He gives great thought and great energy to what he's going to do and say to bring his story to a climax and to bring his public vocation to a proper conclusion.

And so, what we find here in this so-called triumphal entry is what we would consider premeditated symbolic action. Jesus is making decisive, calculated arrangements for how he's going to enter into the capital city during the great feast of Passover.

And so, in verses 2 to 3, we find his detailed directions to his advance team. And he says, this is how I want you to set up this staged campaign. And Jesus basically is recreating an enthronement scene.

In the ancient Near East, a king would go out to battle. They'd defeat their enemies. They'd return in victory and they'd be welcomed back into the city. And Jesus is saying, that's what we're going to do.

For about a mile, for about 30 minutes, we're going to have a red carpet event, a ticker tape parade, and there's going to be a welcome of the king, a royal reception. And how did the disciples in the crowd respond to Jesus' plan?

[10:34] Well, it says in verse 8, that many people spread their cloaks on the road while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. So, you can imagine a person visiting our city, and there's a crowd of people there taking off their very nice and expensive jackets and laying them down in the dirt to be walked on by people and animals.

And what would we conclude? Well, we would conclude this must be a very important person. This must be a person who's worthy of great attention and respect and honor. We'd also think that this is going to be a great day for the dry cleaning business as well.

And we read in verse 9, it says, Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, Hosanna, which means save us. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David.

Hosanna in the highest. This is a Passover hymn. They sang it every year. It's Psalm 118, part of the Psalms of Ascent, the Hallel Psalms. And these are Jews.

These are people who read Moses and the prophets and the Psalms. And they're people who are looking for a king in the line of David who will save them and put their nation and put the whole world right.

[11:44] And so they're singing this victory chant about Israel's hope that God would send a king to defeat their foes and establish his kingdom of peace in its fullest measure.

And you've got to remember, these are people that have come down to Jerusalem from Galilee. They're pilgrims that have been with Jesus. And if you go back and you skim the first chapters of Mark's gospel, we've seen there that Jesus is exercising incredible authority and power to deliver people from demons.

He's got authority over evil. He's got authority and power over illness where he's healing people of their afflictions. He demonstrates authority and power over nature as he's calming the storm and feeding the 5,000.

He's demonstrated his authority and his power over death and raising people back to life. And most outrageous of all, Jesus has demonstrated his authority and his power over sin and forgiving people of their failures to love God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength.

These are people that have been with Jesus. They've experienced Jesus. They've seen Jesus. And all that he can do. And so no wonder they're shouting, basically, long live the king.

[13:02] Not long live a king, but long live the king. God's only chosen king. And when Jesus hears this, he doesn't blush. And he doesn't say, oh, no, no, no, that's just too much.

You're going too far. No. Jesus receives their praise and embraces their hopes and affirms their desires and implicitly says, yes, I am the one who comes in the name of the Lord.

Yes, I am bringing the kingdom. And yes, I do intend to be your king. And so the question of Palm Sunday is, will we bow our knee to this king?

And will we confess that he and he alone is Lord? Not just Lord of our lives or Lord of this church, but Lord of the whole world. Jesus rides into our lives like he rode into Jerusalem saying, I am an absolute monarch.

I am a supreme sovereign. And therefore, on the basis of who I am, I want total surrender. And I want exclusive allegiance and I want glad obedience.

[14:13] Jesus does not want to be our chaplain. Jesus does not want to be our consultant. He doesn't want to be your therapist or your guru.

Jesus doesn't want to be even your teacher or your role model. Jesus comes in the name of the Lord and he wants to be your king. And here I think Jesus is throwing down the gauntlet and pressing his identity on the people.

And basically saying, I refuse to be merely admired. And I really, really don't just want to be shoehorned into a little portion of your day or an hour or two on the weekend.

No, I am either of greatest importance or of no importance whatsoever. But the one thing I cannot be is of marginal importance.

So who is Jesus to you? Many of us, this thought of living under a king feels threatening because we live in this culture of self-expressive individualism where the last thing you want to do is give up your control over your life.

[15:25] The last thing we want to do is submit our will and our desires to the will and desire of another person. And of course, history shows us that kings and queens have abused their authority and used their power in oppressive ways and have shown themselves to not be worthy of our trust.

But Jesus, I want to convince you today that Jesus is different. Notice the chosen means of Jesus' transportation into the city is not a war horse, but it's the cult of a donkey.

And of course, this is Jesus' opportunity to make history, right? This is his moment to be put up there with Alexander the Great and Caesar Augustus.

To be considered among all those great warrior kings like Attila the Hun and Charlemagne and William the Conqueror and Genghis Khan and Napoleon. Why does Jesus choose a donkey in this moment?

Well, Jesus' choice of this little baby donkey, rather than the mighty steed of a triumphant king, is his making a statement about the kind of king he's come to be.

[16:39] That I'm the king who's come to ride Eeyore. I'm the king who's come to ride a beast that's worthy of a little child or even a hobbit.

And it's extraordinary that one who has such authority and power, the power over sin and death, power over evil and illness, power over nature, that he would come and ride such a humble creature.

But Jesus comes and he rides in humble and meek and gentle on a donkey saying, I am the king, I'm the sovereign, I'm the monarch that you can trust.

And my power is the power of my lowliness. My power is the power of giving up my power. Jesus, our donkey king, has not come with brute force to seize, coerce, demolish, pillage, enslave, and oppress.

But rather, he's come to serve you as a gentle and lowly, vulnerable and defenseless prince of peace. And he's come not to threaten you into surrender, but to say, I'm here to willingly surrender myself and my life for you.

[17:58] I'm not going to oppress you. I'm going to liberate you and humanize you. I'm not going to disempower you. I'm going to empower you with a love like you've never known before.

And so the question for us on Palm Sunday is, are we willing to open the gates of our city, the gates of our life, and let him ride in as king? And are we willing to say in our heart to him, Hosanna, save us, save me.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. So our king rides on a donkey, but he not only rides on a donkey, he surrenders to the Father.

Our king surrenders to the Father. And at this point, I want to fast forward a bit into Holy Week, to the night before Jesus' cross. Where Jesus has just spent the evening with his disciples in the upper room in Jerusalem.

And he washes his feet and their feet. And he says, I want you to love one another. And this is how the world's going to know that you're my disciples, if you love one another.

[19:06] And he institutes his Holy Supper. He promises the spirit of truth will come to them. He prays for himself and he prays for his apostles. He prays for his future church.

And now it's late at night. And they leave the upper room and they go out and walk the streets of Jerusalem. And they go down into the Kidron Valley. And they climb up the Mount of Olives. And they turn aside into this olive grove called Gethsemane. And that brings us to Mark chapter 14, verse 32. It says, They went to a place called Gethsemane.

And Jesus said to his disciples, Sit here while I pray. And I want to give you a bit of a preview of coming attractions this week. So that you have something to meditate on between now and these events that we're going to commemorate on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday.

And what is Jesus' state of mind and state of heart as he enters into Gethsemane? Well, it says in verse 33, He took Peter, James, and John along with him.

[20 : 07] And he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death, he said to them. Stay here and keep watch.

This is amazing the way that Jesus lays bare his soul and his struggles and his agony and the fear that he has about what's coming.

And it says that word troubled means that he's overwhelmed and overcome with horror. And why is that? What is it that's horrifying Jesus?

Well, verse 35 says, Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible, the hour might pass from him. Abba, Father, he said, everything is possible for you.

Take this cup from me, yet not what I will, but what you will. This is telling us that Jesus is facing something beyond the normal fear of physical torment and physical execution.

[21 : 06] Because the Hebrew scriptures tell us that this cup that Jesus talks about is a metaphor for the wrath of God on human evil. This cup is the image of divine justice being poured out on human injustice.

When Jesus would read his Bible, he would come to Ezekiel 23 that says, This is what the sovereign Lord says. You will drink a cup large and deep, the cup of ruin and desolation.

You will drink it and drain it dry. Jesus, when he read Isaiah 51, he read these words that God speaks of, The cup that made you stagger and the goblet of my wrath.

So when Jesus turns to the Father in Gethsemane, all he can see is this cup of wrath, this cup of ruin and desolation, this cup of God forsakenness.

And Jesus, as he begins to get a whiff, just a foretaste of the hell that's coming for him on his cross, the spiritual, cosmic, infinite disintegration and separation that lies before him, he's staggering under the weight of this cup in this hour.

[22 : 23] And some of us hear this and we say, You know, I don't like this idea of the wrath of God. I want a God of love. But we know that when we look around the world and we see people or whole groups of people destroying themselves or destroying other people, and we see human beings trampling on the dignity of others and on justice itself, and if we don't get angry about that and we don't feel a sense of opposition to that injustice, it's because we're callous and we don't care and we're indifferent.

And God is anything but callous and not caring and indifferent about his creation. God's goodness and his love for his creation is so great. And the cumulative extent of evil over time and in the world today is so vast that his wrath is an expression of his justice and of his willingness to do something to put this broken world right.

And so if we want to have a God of love, we must have a God of wrath. There's no such thing as a God of love without wrath. And Jesus tells us that because he names this God whom he's praying to, Abba, Father.

Abba, Father. And his appeal to the Father is based on these twin assumptions that on the one hand, all things are possible for you.

And yet on the other hand, you also have a will that should be accepted and not altered. All things are possible for you.

[24 : 09] And yet your will is to be accepted and not altered. And this is how Jesus taught us to pray. It's the pattern that he taught us to pray in the Lord's Prayer. We affirm God's power and his ability.

We say, Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. That's how we begin in prayer. We say nothing is beyond you. Nothing's too difficult for you. Nothing's impossible for you.

That's a great place to begin in our prayers. But then the very next thing Jesus taught us to pray is a resolve to submit ourselves to the Father's sovereign agenda.

Your kingdom come and your will be done. Not my kingdom and not my will, but yours be done. And you see, that's what Jesus is doing right here.

Jesus says, My immediate and my loudest desire is to be spared from this hour and to be spared from this cup. But my ultimate and my deepest desire is to spare your people, Father.

[25 : 11] And so, Father, not what I immediately want, because ultimately I want what you want, and that is the salvation of your people.

Friends, do you hear Jesus' love for you in this prayer? Can you imagine Jesus thinking about you as he's praying this prayer about the cup that really belongs to you and to me?

The thrill for us is that on Good Friday, when Jesus drank that cup of divine judgment, the cup did indeed at that moment go away from us.

And it's precisely because this cup was not taken away from Jesus that it has been taken away from us. Jesus drank that poison cup, that poison cup of our sin and our cursedness so that you and I never even have to taste it, never even have to get a whiff of it.

So thank God, right? Thank God that he surrendered his will to the will of the Father. Amen? Amen? So our king rides a donkey and he surrenders to the Father.

[26 : 31] But the last thing I want to say is that he also calls us to pray. Our king not only rides his donkey and surrenders to the Father, but he calls his church, he calls his disciples to pray.

Gethsemane is the crowning prayer of the gospel for a reason. Because it shows us that Jesus' obedience on the cross is a struggled and learned and prayed for obedience.

Hebrews chapter five helps us with this. It says, in Hebrews 5, seven, during the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death.

And he was heard because of his reverent submission. Son, though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered. Now, now I don't pretend to know half of what that means.

But what I think it does mean, at least a little bit that I understand, is that Jesus prayed himself to courage. And Jesus prayed himself to faithfulness.

[27 : 39] And Jesus prayed himself to sacrificial love and to becoming and giving his life as a ransom for the many. And what this means for us is that this reverent submission of Jesus, this learned obedience of Jesus, that's how we're to pray.

That's how we're to be living our lives in prayer. But if you look at verse 37, it says, Then Jesus returned to his disciples and he found them sleeping.

Simon, he said to Peter, Are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.

Three times, Jesus finds his disciples sleeping when they ought to be praying. Right? Three times, he finds them to be physically close to him and yet spiritually quite distant from him.

These disciples, they're like you and me. They talk a big game. Right? They pledge themselves to undying devotion. In fact, just before this in Mark 14, Peter said, Jesus, Lord, even if all fall away, I will not fall away.

[28 : 54] And even if I have to die with you, I will never, ever disown you. But might we argue that Peter's three denials in the courtyard when Jesus is on trial might in some way be linked to his three naps in the garden while Jesus is praying.

In Mark chapter 9, verse 29, we looked a few weeks ago at Jesus' statement when he says, this kind can come out only by prayer.

What he's telling us is that there are things in the Christian life and there are things in the life and mission of the church that if you attempt to do them, if we attempt to do them without an extraordinary effort of prayer, we're going to fail miserably.

And in the same way here, what we learn is that the only way Jesus could surmount serious temptation and the only way his disciples could have surmounted serious temptation is through this kind of submissive prayer.

And so as we close, I just want to give you a little bit of guidance on how to pray during Holy Week and hopefully beyond Holy Week into our lives in the season ahead.

[30 : 12] And I just want to point out four features that might change the way we pray. First of all, it says that Jesus fell to the ground. And I have to ask myself, how often do I put myself down on my knees in prayer?

How often do I put my face down on the ground as a sign that I'm in fact very poor in spirit and that I'm in a humble state that I'm more desperate than I even realize that without God I'm helpless and I'm hopeless?

Jesus fell to the ground and if he fell to the ground, maybe I should fall down on the ground. And secondly, Jesus prays, Abba, Father.

And I have to ask myself, do I pray with that kind of intimacy and affection and respect for God? I ought to. Romans 8, 15 says, the spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship and by him we cry, Abba, Father.

Galatians 4, 6 says that God sent the spirit of his son into our hearts, the spirit who calls out Abba, Father. Father. The sign of our freedom as precious daughters and treasured sons of God is whether or not we call him Abba, Father.

[31 : 42] Do I pray with the confidence of a child? Do I pray with the kind of humble boldness of Jesus? Abba, Father.

He fell to the ground, he prayed Abba, Father. Third, it says in verse 39 that once more he went away and he prayed the same thing. Jesus praying the same thing three times over shows me that I need to persevere a little more in prayer.

I need to be persistent in prayer. I need to not try and pray one time and say, well, I'm gonna give up because I don't think God's listening or I'm not sure that God cares or I'm not sure that God's able to do what I'm asking him to do.

No. Jesus, he went away and he prayed the same thing again and again and again. How much more do we need to keep going in prayer?

And the fourth thing is Jesus said, not what I will but what you will. We often assume that prayer is about getting God to do what we want him to do but in fact prayer is pretty much the exact opposite.

[32 : 56] Prayer is meant to put us in this place where the Holy Spirit can shape us according to the will of God and where we can find by the power of the Holy Spirit the faith and the courage to let go.

To let go of our immediate and our loudest desires so that we can embrace the ultimate and better way of our Heavenly Father. When Jesus went to prayer he went to prayer with a will that was good a will that was pure a will that was undefiled and even he had to relinquish control of his circumstances and submit his desires to Abba Father.

And so when we bring our wills stained as they are corrupted as they are twisted and flawed as they are to the Father we do so knowing that he has something way different and way better in mind than we could have ever come up with.

And so we go to his good and pleasing and perfect will and we say ah that's going to be so much better than if you do my will. And so the question today for us on Palm Sunday is will we pray?

Doesn't matter if you prayed yesterday doesn't matter what you did this past week this past month this past year the question is this week this month this year will we pray?

[34 : 25] And will we go to that place that Jesus takes his disciples to where we can find faith and find courage to let go of what we want so that ultimately we can pray as Jesus himself prays when he's hanging on the cross what does he say?

He says Father into your hands I commit my spirit he didn't just he wasn't just enabled to pray that by magic all of a sudden by accident he prayed himself to that moment so that when it really mattered when Jesus was dying on the cross for us and for our sins he said Father into your hands I commit my spirit oh that we would have the grace to pray like Jesus in the name of the Father Son and Holy Spirit Amen Amen Amen