

Passion Sunday

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[0 : 00] To understand our Lord's ministry, we need to have a better grasp of what the people of Israel were looking for, what they were longing for.

Israel was anticipating that time when the promised Messiah would come as a warrior. He would come to set them free from their captors, from their oppressors.

As I've mentioned in previous sermons, Israel had been enslaved throughout their history by such nations as the Egyptians, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Medes, and the Persians, and finally, the Roman Empire.

So the hope of Israel was to receive a king, a warrior king, who would finally end their oppression. This king would come as the offspring of Abraham.

And he would set up his final Davidic reign in Jerusalem where righteousness, where the law of God would then spread throughout the world.

[1 : 14] Here in our gospel text, Jesus announces that what the Jewish people had been anticipating for thousands of years has now come to be.

The king was now here. The kingdom of God was at hand. But most in Israel, especially the religious leaders, they rejected Jesus as their king and as their lord.

We heard in verses 46 and 47 here of John chapter 8, Jesus says, Why do you not believe in me? He who is of God hears God's words. Therefore, you do not hear because you are not of God. Just a few verses prior to what we heard from our lectionary here in our gospel reading.

In verses 43 and 44, we read, Jesus says, Because you are not able to listen to my word, you are of your father, the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do.

[2 : 28] What is happening here is that our Lord is revealing who he truly is. But the religious leaders do not see a warrior.

They do not see a king. They see a carpenter's son. They see a man born of Mary.

They see a group of lowly fishermen, sheep herders, and a tax collector, following around a guy who says provocative things like, My kingdom is not of this world.

They see a man who eats with sinners, those considered unclean, pagans, prostitutes, outcasts.

They see a man who defiles himself as he reaches out and as he touches the untouchables.

They see a man who prefers the company of the poor, the lowly, rather than the prestige of being with the rich. What they see is a commoner, a simple peasant, not a king, not a ruler.

[3 : 47] Therefore, they reject Jesus. And in rejecting Jesus, he warns them that they are rejecting the patriarchs like Abraham and the prophets who had gone before them.

The religious leaders accuse Jesus of being a Samaritan, or, even worse, being possessed by a demon. Therefore, they are plotting one thing, one thing, to silence him forever.

Yes, they are plotting his death. And the reason for this sinister plan is because of what he claimed and who he claimed to be.

You see, he did not claim to be a new philosopher, a powerful politician, a radical reformer, or some cultural warrior.

No, he claimed to be far more than that. Jesus claimed to be God.

[5 : 02] And the religious leaders concluded that Jesus was a blasphemer, a false teacher.

Therefore, they were going to follow the letter of the law. In Leviticus chapter 24, verse 16, we read, Whoever blasphemes the name of the Lord shall be surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall stone him.

And this is what the intent, this is what the plan from these outraged rejecters of Jesus. Jesus was not who they wanted him to be.

He was not a warrior king. He didn't come for dominion to just reign and wipe out Israel's enemies. He didn't come seeking to use the sword and making Israel great again.

And as soon as he said those words that we heard from our gospel text here in John chapter 8, verse 58, Most assuredly, I say to you before Abraham was, I am.

I am. That claim justified their actions in seeking to put him to death. You see, Jesus was claiming something far greater than being a great political ruler, or even a rival king to the Roman emperor.

[6 : 39] Jesus was claiming to be the creator and the Lord over all. He was claiming to be God.

There's one thing I want you to learn from our gospel reading this morning, and it's simply this. The outcasts, the outcasts, that is, the poor, the prostitutes, the tax collectors, the lepers, those who were physically and mentally challenged, the possessed, and all others that were abandoned by the high and the mighty, came to Jesus for one purpose and one purpose only.

To be changed. To be changed. To be changed. They came to be transformed and were willing to humble themselves before their merciful and loving God and creator.

And in encountering Jesus, they came to believe that this Jesus is the creator and God over all.

The religious leaders, on the other hand, they didn't want change. And they certainly didn't want to be changed. They were stubborn, calloused, never allowing themselves to be open to the possibility that they might actually have it wrong.

[8 : 11] And that's why Jesus was such a threat. They were not willing to change or to be converted. And that is why they hardened their hearts.

And the irony is, they became like Pharaoh. So much so, they wanted Jesus dead. You see, Jesus did not come for the healthy, wealthy, and wise.

He came for the broken. He came for the hurting. He came for those who cry out in humility, confessing their sins, and placing themselves under his mercy and his care.

He came for those willing to be taught, who were teachable, not for the self-righteous and arrogant blowhards.

Friends, it does not matter how much we know or how well we can articulate the nuances of theology. All that matters is this.

[9 : 27] Our willingness to bow at the feet of Jesus, seeking to be changed, to be converted, and to be transformed by him.

We live in a time where everyone desires to have some sort of spiritual power they can tap into. But few want to bow their knee in humility.

Few want to ask Jesus to change them or convert them. There are whole denominations in this country that have twisted and changed the words of our Lord to fit their own agendas.

Denying the deity of Christ. Sacrificing themselves on the altars of political expediency. Seeking to change the message to suit their own perverted passions and desires.

But Jesus stands calling all of us, every single one of us, to come to him. He calls us to confess the truth of who he really is, believing that he is the God, the creator over all things.

[10 : 52] And to acknowledge and bow to Jesus, confessing him as Lord, desiring to be converted daily.

And he promises to give us comfort. He promises to give us rest from our labors.

And all who come in humility and in faith, Jesus gives the right to be called children of the Most High God.

And to them, he invites all who humble themselves to share in his love for all eternity.

Amen. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.