

Some Say Jeremiah 3-16-08

Luke 19:28-44; Matthew 16:14

While we were following the footsteps of Jesus in Israel, one of the ladies in our group asked me, "Why did some say Jesus was Jeremiah?" I can't remember exactly where we were when she asked, but it must have been after Caesarea Philippi. It was on the way to that area that Jesus asked the disciples, "Who do people say I am." (Matthew 16:13)

I had thought about their answer of Elijah and "that prophet", but I don't think I'd ever thought deeply about the response of some that said He is Jeremiah. Sometimes, to find the deeper answers, we just need to ask the right questions. Why did they think Jesus was like Jeremiah?

The text I have chosen for this Palm Sunday is the Triumphal Entry story from the Gospel of Luke. Luke is the one Gospel writer that records a strange and seemingly out of place occurrence. Read the text, Luke 19:28-44.

We know from the Gospel of John that it was five days before Passover when the Triumphal Entry took place. (John 12:1,12) There are several very significant events that took place on that day. One we find in historical records. The Roman ruler would enter that day from the western side of the city. All those who compromised with Rome, and saw the influence of Rome as something to be desired both for personal gain and advancement, went out to be a welcoming crowd for the king of the Jews, or at this particular time, Pilate the procurator of Judea. He would ride in with all the pomp and splendor that his position afforded him.

On the opposite side of Jerusalem, the eastern side, came a lowly rabbi, Yeshua, riding on a donkey. Those who favored deliverance from Roman occupation were not on the western side of the city. They were looking for the Messiah of Israel, a deliverer who would oust Rome and restore Israel to the glory they experienced under the Davidic reign. Upon hearing of the miraculous signs of Jesus, especially the raising of dead Lazarus, these people on this side of the city began to praise Jesus as the deliverer. They were quoting a Messianic Psalm that they sang during the Feast of Succoth. ²⁵ O LORD, save us; O LORD, grant us success. ²⁶ Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD. From the house of the LORD we bless you. (Psalm 118 NIV) The psalm goes on to say that with palm boughs in hand they join the festal throng all the way up to the altar.

So we see a very political motivation in the hearts of those who were praising Jesus and asking Him to save them. They were not asking for Him to save them from their sins, but from Roman taxation. They were not asking for a restoration of their relationship with God, but for the temporal deliverance from the oppression of an occupier. But Jesus was on a lowly donkey, not a war stallion.

Commented [notes1]: Matthew 16:13 (NIV) 13 When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"

Commented [notes2]: John 12:1 (NIV) 1 Six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. John 12:12 (NIV) 12 The next day the great crowd that had come for the Feast heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem.

His message was one of love, not violent resistance. He would reassure Pilate with the clear truth that so many seem to willingly overlook. ³⁶ *Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place."* John 18:36 (NIV)

The other significance of the fifth day before Passover was that this was the day that each Jewish family chose a lamb for the Passover sacrifice. ³ *Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household.* Exodus 12:3 (NIV)

⁶ *Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the people of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight.* Exodus 12:6 (NIV)

Jesus was not offering a political alternative. He was offering Himself and a kingdom that is not of this world. He was offering to be a king that reigns over hearts of men and transforms them in the process. He came to make the greedy generous and the angry loving. What an upheaval in the way the Jews of that day saw the coming of Messiah! It is even a difficult concept for many today. Many would rather see a change in government than a change in our own hearts.

Riding in on that donkey was a declaration that he was the passive Lamb of God and yet king over all. The meek will inherit the earth, not the freedom fighters or the occupiers! (Matthew 5:5) Contrary to Jesus' words, liberation theology has turned Jesus into promoter of earthly kingdoms. That misses the greatness of the kingdom in the hearts of men. That heavenly kingdom is infinitely greater than any earthly power for it is eternal. The kingdoms of men come and go. One day they will all go, and the meek shall inherit the earth.

The disciples seemed to be caught up in the idea that Messiah's main purpose was to restore the glory of Israel to the days of David. (Acts 1:6) They kept arguing about who would sit nearest Jesus when He came into His kingdom. (Mark 10:36-37) Jesus has a kingdom for sure, but right now it is one of the heart, within man. The one that sits closest is the one who is the most submitted to the heart of Jesus, and that usually means a death to self in service to others. As Jesus said, "The greatest among you will be your servant." (Mark 10:45)

This is what the disciples were waiting for, acceptance of the masses in Jerusalem, but for all the wrong reasons. Political allegiance to the one giving promises only lasts as long as itching ears hear what they like. Jesus' message is not a popular message in any age. It is politically popular to hear promises of a better tomorrow, not die to yourself to serve others. (Mark 8:34) Annihilate your enemies is much more popular than love your enemies. (Matthew 5:44) People wonder how the crowd could turn from shouts of praise to shouts to crucify so quickly. One reason is that last week was full of public speaking by Jesus. Once they heard the message they realized He was not the lamb they wanted. They wanted a murdering thug that would deliver some kind of temporal vengeance. (Mark 15:7) That was their choice, Barabbas.

Commented [notes3]: Matthew 5:5 (NIV)
5 Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Commented [notes4]: Acts 1:6 (NIV)
6 So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

Commented [notes5]: Mark 10:36-37 (NIV)
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."

Commented [notes6]: Mark 10:45 (NIV)
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."

Commented [notes7]: Mark 8:34 (NIV)
34 Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

Commented [notes8]: Matthew 5:44 (NIV)
44 But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

Commented [notes9]: Mark 15:7 (NIV)
7 A man called Barabbas was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising.

The disciples must have been riding high during that so called Triumphal Entry. They thought their hour had finally come. Surely the kingdom they had in mind was about to be established. But then Luke records that as Jesus saw the city, He broke down and wept. Can you visualize it? Crowds gathered around the man on the donkey, talking about His miracles, shouting Hosanna, waving the palms, and He began to cry.

Some say Jeremiah. The Scripture only records two times when Jesus wept. (John 11:35) Both seem very unusual to me. One was before the resurrection of Lazarus. Why would Jesus weep when He was about to call him back to life? And then this time when the crowds are cheering Him? Surely there must have been many more times, for they compared Jesus to the weeping prophet, Jeremiah. That is part of the answer to the question, "Why did some people think He was Jeremiah?" He wept. He had a broken heart for others.

When He was with Martha and Mary He felt their sorrow and wept with those who wept. (Romans 12:15) Amazing isn't it? God, our Creator, who is high and lifted up, infinite in knowledge, unlimited in power, is so personal that He shares the depths of human pain and loss.

Some people get angry with God when things take a painful turn and prayers aren't answered in the way we would like. They would miss the only way to get through the difficulty that is inevitable in this life, to walk through it with the only One who truly feels the depths of our pain. No matter how great the loss, there is One that understands and will actually share the fullness of your pain. Don't blame Him for the effects of sin upon the world. Run to Him for help to get through. (Matthew 11:28-30)

When Jesus looked upon the city of Jerusalem, He looked past the cheering crowds and saw the future. Roman armies would lay siege to the city. They would torture and crucify those that were caught. The few survivors that held out to the end were so weak from starvation that they could not resist. They were crucified or enslaved. He could see it, and He wept for the pain that sin would inflict on the city He loved. If only they had chosen a spiritual kingdom over a physical one!

The passage says that the destruction would come upon them because they didn't realize the time of God's coming to them. There He was, God in the flesh, offering Himself as their lamb for the forgiveness of sin. What if... What if they had received Him as their gentle King, the King that changes the heart not the conditions? What if they asked for grace to love Romans and forgiveness for their bitterness? The Jewish revolt would never have taken place. The destruction and awful consequences, the thousands that were crucified along the roads would never have happened. But they could not see. Their eyes were blinded by the immediate circumstances and hopes were all set on better conditions here and now. It reminds me of the polls that point to a large percentage of voters who say their number one issue is the economy.

Commented [notes10]: John 11:35 (NIV)
35 Jesus wept.

Commented [notes11]: Romans 12:15 (NIV)
15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.

Commented [notes12]: Matthew 11:28-30 (NIV)
28 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.
29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.
30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

I'll be the first to admit it is easy for me to say we should be satisfied with a spiritual kingdom, but I don't say it lightly. I don't suffer under occupation. I haven't lost loved ones to the bullet of a tyrant. I haven't had children tortured by an evil regime. Jesus' powerful example was that truth and love will eventually conquer all. Who would have thought the Christian hating idolatrous empire of Rome would be conquered by the words of a peasant carpenter? I'm afraid we've lost our real power to bring transformation to our communities because we try so hard to fix the here and now instead of focusing on being like Jesus. (John 20:21).

Commented [notes13]: John 20:21 (NIV)
21 Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."

The Roman Empire was changed because Christian couples raised discarded baby girls. It was changed because Christians stayed behind and tended to the sick during plagues. It was changed because those early believers faced lions rather than deny their faith, not because they were political activists. People were changed because Christians wept with those who wept, just like their example, Jesus.

There is another way in which Jesus was like Jeremiah. In declaring that Rome would crush the city, He was preaching the unpopular message of doom. That was Jeremiah's call. Jeremiah was told that the people would not hear His message, but he had to preach it nevertheless. Jesus' declaration of the destruction of Jerusalem was probably a major factor in the crowd moving from praise to demands for His death. (Matthew 24:2) It was not politically correct for Him to preach doom. It was about as unpopular a message as one could preach, but it was the truth. No wonder some said Jeremiah.

Commented [notes14]: Matthew 24:2 (NIV)
2 "Do you see all these things?" he asked. "I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."

Jesus didn't come in the spirit of Jeremiah. The reason there is a similarity is that the Spirit of God came upon Jeremiah. He is the same Spirit that descended upon Jesus when He began His ministry. (Matthew 3:16) He is the same Spirit that wells up in you when you have compassion on those who are grieving. Who will enter into the pain of others because God loves them and shares their pain?

Commented [notes15]: Matthew 3:16 (NIV)
16 As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him.

Who will voice the unpopular truth that the answer is not in the kingdoms of men, but in the kingdom of God within you? (Luke 17:21) Will you ignore the praise of men and the desire to be honored or even accepted and speak truth at every opportunity God gives you?

Commented [notes16]: Luke 17:21 (NIV)
21 nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you."

Listen to the words Jeremiah spoke to the people of Judea. ¹⁷ *But if you do not listen, I will weep in secret because of your pride; my eyes will weep bitterly, overflowing with tears, because the LORD's flock will be taken captive.* Jeremiah 13:17 (NIV) That is the Spirit of God upon him speaking the unpopular truth.

Hear the words of Ezra in a psalm he penned. ¹³⁶ *Streams of tears flow from my eyes, for your law is not obeyed.* Psalms 119:136 (NIV) The Spirit of God was upon these men as it was in Jesus. They shared the pain in God's heart of the impending consequences of their people's pride and disobedience.

When we think of Palm Sunday, I think we think of celebration and joy. We even call it The Triumphal Entry. That is not what it was to Jesus. As we have studied the life of the patriarch Joseph, we have seen that he looked beyond the present circumstances and saw the truth of God. He believed what God had spoken to him and so his actions were based upon the unchanging Word of God instead of his temporal conditions. In that magnificent display of faith, he was representing the One who would come.

Jesus looked beyond the praise of man and saw their future suffering. Even when He was suffering He was thinking of the pain of others. He told the women who were trying to comfort Him, "Weep not for me, but for yourselves and your children." Luke 23:28

As we approach this Passion Week, I bring you an unpopular message. Will you allow the Spirit of God to help you to weep with those that weep? Will you believe that those who mourn are blessed and will be comforted? (Matthew 5:4) There is so much pain all around us. Many do not know that there is an unseen One who weeps with them. They need you to represent Him so that they can know Him.

Commented [notes17]: Matthew 5:4 (NIV)
4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

I'd also challenge you to ask yourself where your hope is placed. If it is in the next President, Democrat or Republican, your aim is set in the wrong direction. Our hope is not in temporary improvements, but in the One who can change the heart of man for all eternity. The next time politics comes up in a conversation, why not use it as an opportunity to point others to the real solution, Jesus? Our only hope is in recognizing when God has visited us. In other words, responding to the Holy Spirit as He works in our life. Will you allow the same Holy Spirit that caused Jeremiah and Jesus to weep, cause you to weep as well? Will you set your hope on the work of God within you instead of the temporal conditions in which you live?

I guess what I am asking is will you be less like the fickle crowd, excited about what they might get from Jesus, and instead be more like Jesus, who was concerned for others and what they would suffer? Will you allow the Spirit of God to make you less like the world and more like our Savior?