

## I've Got issues: Jesus Just Doesn't Fit the Mold

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Palm Sunday

Zechariah 9:9-10, Mark 8:27-33, 10:32-34; 11:1-10

Imagine you are one of the disciples. You have been following Jesus now for months. You have heard him say some extraordinary things; he speaks with power and authority! And you have witnessed his mighty deeds; he has turned water into wine, healed the sick, stilled a storm, walked on water. This fellow is amazing! You note that the crowds around Jesus have been building. He is becoming more and more popular. It looks to you and to all the world that this man is destined for greatness.

So when Jesus asks you and all the other disciples the question, *"Who do you say that I am?"* You are quick to answer with Peter, *"Why, Lord, you are the Christ... You are the Messiah – the very anointed one of God!"*

Jesus smiles and nods with approval. But then he says the strangest thing: he tells them that he is about to be rejected by elders and chief priests and scribes and will be killed... only to rise three days later.

Utterly dumbfounded, you blurt out with Peter: *"No way, Lord, this cannot be. You're the Messiah – You are God's man. You are the hope of Israel. The whole world is following you. You can't be serious!"*

With fire in his eyes, Jesus strongly rebukes you and the rest of your friends: *"Get behind me, Satan! You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."*

Feeling thoroughly chastised, you are afraid to say anything more, and you put it out of your mind, thinking maybe Jesus was just in a bad mood.

But then, sometime later, Jesus predicts his death a second time. Again, you have no idea what he means. It doesn't register. It passes right over your head. He is the Messiah, after all, and the Messiah doesn't get betrayed or murdered. Everyone knows the Messiah is the conquering King who will save Israel from all its enemies. All you and the others can think of is what life will be like when Jesus finally assembles an army, defeats the Romans and ascends to the throne of David. Which of the disciples will sit at his right and left hand? You hope that yourself will be granted a prime position in Jesus' royal court and will get to enjoy a few royal perks.

Then it happens yet again. A few days later, Jesus' predicts his death a third time. He tells you and the others that it's time to head for Jerusalem, and there the *"Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law, and they will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him... Three days later he will rise."*

You and the others are astonished as Jesus sets out on his journey, leading the way with no army at his beck and call, apparently right into the teeth of great opposition. He seems to be serious about this "being killed" stuff. Was he on a suicide mission? Again, you're just not sure what to make of it. You try

to put it out of your mind. Surely, Jesus has a plan to overthrow the Romans and fulfill the expectations of the long-suffering people of Israel.

You watch with jubilation as Jesus enters the city of Jerusalem to the adulation of the crowds. You always knew he was popular. But you are puzzled that Jesus comes into town not as a warring-king on a stallion as you would expect, but as a humble and peaceable king seated on a colt. As far as you are concerned, the great need of the hour is revolution and victory.

The crowds wave palm branches and put their coats in the road to signify their affection for their King. They shout "*hosanna*" which means, literally, "*Save us, we beg you!*" They proclaim Jesus to be the "*Son of David*." You recognize that that title is full of meaning and expectation. Just as David defeated Israel's enemies and brought the Kingdom of Israel to its height of power and influence, so now the Palm Sunday crowd expects Jesus to do the same; here is a new David who will rally all the people, and ignite a revolution that will set them free from their oppressors.

But no sooner does Jesus arrive in Jerusalem than he begins to disappoint everyone's expectations, including your own. You watch with dismay as Jesus shows no predilection for raising an army. He seems to reject violence. He chases a few moneychangers out of the temple, but he doesn't show any signs of chasing the Romans out of town. You look on with disbelief as he gets arrested, is handed over to the Romans, is mocked and spat upon, and sent out to be crucified between two thieves. What sort of Messiah is this? This is the Savior King? He just doesn't fit the mold. It's not the way it's supposed to work. Disillusionment rapidly begins to set in.

Judas was so disillusioned with Jesus' lack of action that he sold Jesus out for thirty pieces of silver. He betrays him. But he is not the only one to give up on Jesus; the crowds turn their backs on him. The disciples forsake him and flee. Peter denies him three times.

Jesus just doesn't fit the mold. He doesn't do what we expect him to do. And that is why people still reject him today.

Many people expect Jesus to be like Superman. They expect Jesus to come swooping down into their difficult circumstances and miraculously provide a quick fix. If Jesus is the Savior – if he is the Superman folks think him to be, then surely it is his job to take away all our troubles and eliminate all pain and suffering and give us a carefree life. And by golly, if he doesn't come through for us - if he doesn't do what we want him to do – if he isn't what we want him to be - then "away with him!" Why bother with him at all?

I think of Ted Turner, the media mogul – founder of CNN, and one of the richest men in the world. He may own half of the state of Montana. He has had some bad things to say about Christianity over the years. He has called Christianity "a religion for losers." Growing up, Ted was quite religious. In fact, early on he decided that he was going to be a missionary. Then his sister became ill. He was fifteen when Mary Jane, who was twelve, contracted *systemic lupus erythematosus* - a disease in which the immune system attacks the body's tissue. She was racked with pain and constantly vomiting, and her screams filled the house. Ted regularly came home and held her hand, trying to comfort her. He earnestly prayed

for her recovery; she prayed to die. After years of misery, she succumbed. Ted lost his faith. *"I was taught that God was love and God was powerful,"* he says, *"and I couldn't understand how someone so innocent should be made or allowed to suffer so."* Those are very honest human feelings, and we can understand his struggles and his doubts.

But for Turner, the problem is that Jesus didn't fit the mold. He was taught that Jesus was Superman, and as Superman, he should have fixed it. Jesus should have taken away the suffering, but he failed. Or he didn't care. In his disillusionment, he would have nothing more to do with him.

Ted Turner speaks for a lot of people, for whom Jesus doesn't match their expectations. Jesus can't be the Savior because he is weak and powerless and doesn't come through when we need him. He doesn't seem to fix anything, at least by their reckoning...

Perhaps you can relate . . .

- You are tired of being unemployed. You have been trusting the Lord to provide, but no work seems forthcoming. You wonder, *"Where are you, Lord? You are supposed to do something!"*
- You are struggling with poor health. You have been seeing doctors and taking your medication, and you and your friends have been praying for healing, but nothing seems to work. You feel as sick as ever. *"Why don't you come to my rescue, Lord? Can't you see I need a miracle?"*
- You are worrying about a loved one – a family member – who seems hopelessly addicted to drugs. You have asked the Lord again and again to intervene and to fix this person, but nothing seems to change: *"Lord, don't you care? Save us, we beg you!"*

And when he doesn't, disillusionment grows and you are tempted to lose your faith...

Palm Sunday and the events of Holy Week remind us that God's ways are different than our ways, and God's plans are different than our plans. Yes, he doesn't fit our mold. Contrary to all human expectations, Jesus does things *his* way. He chooses not to exercise power and to employ violence to free his people. He refuses to play the role of a conquering warrior king or to be a kind of "Cosmic Superman." Instead, he chooses to do the opposite thing - to take the way of suffering, the way of weakness – the way of the cross.

From our human point of view that may seem like a crazy thing to do. What's the good of that? But what seems to end in defeat, actually achieves, by God's design, an amazing victory over sin and death. At the cross, God brings something beautiful of what is evil and ugly. As the Apostle Paul puts it, it is *"foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God [1 Corinthians 1:18]."* The fact is, by doing what he did, by going to the cross, Jesus provides the ultimate fix for a world gone haywire. Jesus saves us in ways that are far deeper, far more reaching, far more meaningful than we can imagine. There at the foot of the cross we find the grace and mercy and love of God and the possibility of a new life – eternal life - with him. And because Jesus suffered so, enduring to the end, only to be raised from the dead, we can be sure that he understands and cares about what you and I go through in this life, offering us a strength and a love and hope that nothing – not even the worst

of circumstances – can undo. Who would have thought it? It probably isn't the way we would write the script.

The bottom line is that you and I must be able to trust that he knows what we need better than we do and if he is to give us his best, we must allow him to do things his way, not ours.

Beloved in Christ, know that he is the gracious true King who rules over the universe and over our lives and that he will bring about his loving purposes for us and for all creation, despite appearances that might seem to the contrary. Let us accept him as he is, not as we want him to be. He knows what he is doing. He will work all things together for good for those who love him. Trust him!