

Christ the Lord Episcopal Church Pinole, CA

The First Sunday of Advent: November 28, 2021

“What is the Messiah?”

Rev. Dr. Lois Williams

Good morning, everyone, I see we have all survived another Thanksgiving (sometimes referred to as “Family feud”). Today is the first Sunday of Advent and soon we will light our first Advent Candle. Traditionally, the first candle represents hope. So, with that as our background theme, I am going to explore the true, real history about Jesus, and why the struggle with his own Hebrew people happened. Why Jesus’ own people could not see the “hope” standing in front of them, and why we begin the anticipation of Jesus’ coming as our Messiah. This is our Old Testament look at truth.

Please understand with all your heart and compassion, this is not a judgment on our Jewish brothers and sisters, this is a look at history and how it affects our spirituality, wherever your faith calls you. So, as we look deeper into Jewish history, we remember that today is the first day of Hanukkah.

Christopher Garrison in his exploration called, “The Judaism of Jesus; The Messiah’s Redemption of the Jews”, shows us why the Old Testament scriptures have actually clashed within the culture that created them. Please note, this type of social and spiritual versus religion clash occurs even today; and yes, even among Christians. When what is set as dogma prevents one from seeing God’s truth standing right in front of them, even if the original dogma contained the truth to begin with, there is a substantial clash that can leave one spiritually stuck.

In Garrison's book, Rabbi Simmons explains some of the details one needs to know about being a Messiah. Rabbi Simmons tells us that Messiah means "anointed one" and this is a ritual performed by a prophet on a completely human man, one without any supernatural abilities. But upon the anointing, that man becomes king. It could be said that King David and King Solomon are closely ranked in this Messiah-like attempt. But we will see why even these two anointed ones fail to meet the criteria held by their own tradition, let alone Jesus' call to be the Messiah.

For Rabbi Simmons, every king in the Hebrew Bible has been anointed, or basically had a calling to be a Messiah. He goes on to explain the appointed job of the Messiah is to:

1. Build a Third Temple,
2. Gather all the Jews back to Israel,
3. Usher in a time of world peace where there is no suffering, oppression or disease, and
lastly,
4. Spread the Universal knowledge of God so that it unites humanity into one.

Rabbi Simmons also states that failure to accomplish any one of these items proves that the person, whoever he is, is not the Messiah promised of God. Oh yeah, and they must be a direct decent from the line of David.

So, I don't know if you are with me on this but when you are talking about a human man with some oil and prayers on his head ushering in world peace with no suffering, oppression or disease, I don't see that happening anytime soon. But I will hold hope. What I do more clearly understand from my little excursion into study with my Jewish brothers and sisters, is why Jesus was the way he was. Why he so often stated that the kingdom is near, but answered Pilot that his kingdom was not of this world.

Understanding this need to build a third temple explains the reason Jesus tells us not one stone will be standing. The building itself is not of importance to God, but rather your heart which holds your spirit. In reference to gathering all the Jews, Jesus did not make a distinction between Jew or Gentile in the eyes of God, therefore all are, in a way, already gathered.

If we followed Jesus' ways (which obviously we try hard to do, but often miss the mark) then there would be world peace, and Jesus would show us his ability to heal disease. And addressing the last of Rabbi's list, the universal knowledge of God that unites humanity, was just the very thing Jesus said to the disciples. Known as the Great Commission, this is the command to spread the Gospel to all the ends of the earth.

And as we already admitted, no human on this earth could actually accomplish the expectations of Rabbi Simmons. This is not because the Messiah could not, but in truth (just maybe) because we could not. Remember last week's quote, "Christianity has not failed, it has never been tried."

We could not cooperate together to build a temple and again not destroy it with another war. We could not unite together and allow our Jewish brothers and sisters the peace and protection they deserve as human beings in the past. Through noncompliance or unwillingness, we continue to struggle all too much with disease. And lastly, the promise and goodness of God is often lost in our lives due to the stress and pressures of our earthly needs and desires, which admittedly is often stirred by advertisers and the media.

Again, Jesus did not fail as a Messiah, it was us. Jesus did not fail as a Messiah because He understands us, He became incarnate, and He died. He experienced our worst fears and brought to the world amazing teachings, blessings, and the promise of life

everlasting. And today, in our weary world, with night coming earlier and earlier, we need to look for the light. We need to have hope.

We look for inspiration, we look for a reason to get up in the morning, a reason more than just needing to get to work, or finish chores. Jesus is that inspiration, he is that reason, because we have a chance each day to find a little space to connect with God, maybe light a candle. And that connection with God is so much easier when you let a little bit of light in each day, take a breath and allow hope to stir.

Jesus the true Messiah showed us how to save ourselves, and he gave us the promise that even if we fall down, He will be there with us. When we succeed, He will be there with us. And when our life is over, Jesus provides the true Messianic promise of that place of perfect peace - with no sickness or disease - reuniting with loved ones in unity. This the true Messianic promise that no one human man can promise.

Welcome to Advent, to the first candle of hope. May you ponder on the expectation of love and light incarnate coming to fruition, not as some old traditional story of the past, but in your life right now, today. May you feel the stir of hope in your heart. And while we watch and wait, lets do our part to usher in the time of peace and unity. Amen