

## Why Jesus failed

Mark 11:1-11, Philippians 2:5-11

March 16, 2008

Let me tell you why Jesus failed ...

Jesus failed because when the moment of opportunity arrived -- a moment for which the Jews had been waiting for generations -- he blinked.

He had come to Jerusalem, the political and religious capital of the Jewish people and the city from which Rome exercised its control over all aspects of the lives of the Jewish people. It took courage, great courage, for him to come! He knew the religious authorities in Jerusalem were plotting against him and even making threats against his life. And he must have known that Rome would not long tolerate anything or anyone that threatened to disturb the status quo. If he proved a problem to the peace, for whatever reason, surely they would have to deal with him, too.

But he came anyway, bravely, defiantly, by his presence alone making a bold challenge to the high and mighty! But when he got the kind of reception he could have never anticipated, when the people flocked to him and sang his praises, when they declared him their king, he did nothing! He said nothing!

He had them in the palm of his hand. At that moment, with the slightest encouragement from him, they would have done anything for him. They would have followed him anywhere, even to the halls of the Roman procurator! He had the means at hand -- the means in his hand! -- to strike a mighty blow against the Roman oppressors and the Jewish collaborators. All the elements of a powerful, history-making, destiny-changing people movement were there at his disposal ... and he did nothing!

He missed the opportunity of a lifetime, the last opportunity of his lifetime, not because he lacked courage, but because he lacked vision. He just didn't see what needed to be done and he just didn't see who could help him do it.

He had always been a political failure. Just look at the people he chose as his lieutenants: a tax collector, a leftist radical, a bunch of fishermen! Where are the people with the connections, the people with the money and the power, the people to whom other people are ready to listen? Those are just the people Jesus did his best to turn away! He told the rich to give away their money and the strong to lay aside their power. What kind of movement can you build on the backs of the poor and the powerless? With that kind of strategy, he was destined to fail!

He did not understand what it takes to win. He was politically naive and spiritually misinformed. He did not see, or he refused to acknowledge, the clear calling of God's people in every age, that is to wield the sword to rid the earth of evil and of evil people! Isn't that what God called Moses and Joshua to do? And was not David, the man after God's own heart, first and foremost a great warrior? Were not each and every one of the heroes whose praises are sung generation after generation by priest and prophet and people men of action?

This is the spiritual reality: there are good people in this world and there are bad people in this world. God judges and destroys those who are bad. Just read the stories! And God's people serve God best when they take up God's banner and boldly confront the princes of this world, always striking at the cancer of unbelief wherever it shows itself!

That's why Jesus failed. He gave much too much room, much too much time, to doubters and sinners. His spiritual vision lacked clarity ... and teeth! He was too soft, too forgiving, too patient, too generous, too hopeful about the capacity of bad people to change their ways. And when the chance came to mobilize the good people, to harness their energy and make of them a mighty and righteous army to carry out the will of God, he couldn't do it or wouldn't do it. He failed.

Jesus failed because he didn't seize the day, because he surrounded himself with the wrong people, because he didn't have what it takes to do what needed to be done. But mostly Jesus failed because he chose to fail!

He suffered -- and died -- at the hands of his enemies, at the hands of the enemies of God's people, because he chose to do so. You cannot say he didn't! He knew the fate that awaited him in Jerusalem, but he came anyway. And when he was taken into custody and was interrogated and was tortured by the Jewish and Roman authorities, he said nothing and did nothing to defend himself.

When the people needed him most to stand up for them -- when the people needed him most to stand up for himself! -- he failed them! He chose to give up all he had instead. He chose to suffer instead. He chose to die instead.

Instead of defying the oppressor, he died with the oppressed. Instead of confronting the abuser, he suffered with the abused. Instead of toppling the evil empire, he made himself weak and let it have its way with him. Jesus failed!

And if you follow his way, if you identify with the weak, if you befriend the poor, if you refuse to take up arms against evil, but choose instead love the unlovable and give yourself away to the ungrateful ... then you will surely fail, too!