

Jason Porterfield

FOREWORD BY SCOT MCKNIGHT

FIGHT LIKE JESUS



HOW JESUS WAGED PEACE
throughout HOLY WEEK

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“In a world where violence is spiraling out of control, this book is an urgent call to rediscover Jesus, the Prince of Peace. Only as peacemakers can Christians truly be the salt and light that God intended. Dive deep into this compelling story of a week in the life of Christ and you will be changed, for good.”

—**CRAIG GREENFIELD**, founder of Alongsiders International and author of *Subversive Jesus*

“From Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday, what does Holy Week have to do with peacemaking? I’d never thought about that before reading *Fight Like Jesus*, but now I’m convinced the two are bound together as Jesus wages peace each day and teaches his followers to do the same. Read this book for new insight on Holy Week and on Jesus as peacemaker. Read this book to be inspired and equipped for practical peacemaking today.”

—**APRIL YAMASAKI**, pastor and author of *Four Gifts and Sacred Pauses*

“A friend who lived through the Troubles in Northern Ireland told me that the anger he sees in the American Christian community rivals the animosity that existed in Northern Ireland in the 1980s. *Fight Like Jesus* is a timely call for peacemaking in a period of escalating violence. In a season of rising homicides, mass shootings, gun violence, vigilante attacks, and deep-seated hatred, we need now, more than ever, this call for Christians to embrace our heritage as forgers of peace in a world of division. *Fight Like Jesus* will equip us all for the difficult work of peacemaking and reconciliation that lays before us.”

—**SCOTT BESSENECKER**, national director of global engagement and justice for InterVarsity Christian Fellowship

“For those who think ‘peace’ might be mild or meek, flimsy or weak, author Jason Porterfield unpacks Jesus’ embrace of a radical peace. Built on a faithful biblical exposition, this book inspires and equips today’s courageous peacemakers to fight like Jesus. Will you put down your hammer and join him?”

—**MARGOT STARBUCK**, author of *Small Things with Great Love*

“In *Fight Like Jesus*, author Jason Porterfield takes the reader through the final week of Jesus’ life and provides a powerful vision of peacemaking by situating it within his personal call to build a more just world. This relatable calling gives the book deep wisdom and thick theology in a world where many are searching for substantive discipleship. Through practical lessons for the everyday peacemaker, this book is equal parts commentary, guide, and communal resource suitable for congregations and classrooms alike. *Fight Like Jesus* will refresh one’s understanding of both peacemaking and conventional readings of Holy Week.”

—**ROSE LEE-NORMAN**, formation pastor at Sanctuary Covenant Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and adjunct professor of reconciliation studies at Bethel University

“Rather than requiring political manipulation or military conquest, the decisive peace that Jesus waged required self-sacrifice. In *Fight Like Jesus*, author Jason Porterfield takes us on an undomesticated, and therefore more realistic, journey through Holy Week that equips us to walk the way of the cross in ways that make for peace. I commend this book with hope!”

—**JER SWIGART**, cofounding director of the Global Immersion Project and coauthor of *Mending the Divides*

“Written as a compelling narrative of Jesus’ final week of life and ministry, this book weaves historical context and accessible commentary in building a tangible set of practices for those who want to take peacemaking seriously. Many describe Jesus as a peacemaker, but few do the thoughtful work of unpacking what that meant and how it informs the vocation of the church. This is a great book for any church that desires to take a deep dive into the implications and invitation of Holy Week as an embodied extension of the peace that Jesus waged two thousand years ago.”

—**JON HUCKINS**, cofounder of the Global Immersion Project and coauthor of *Mending the Divides*



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Harrisonburg, Virginia

The Key to Holy Week

A strange thing happened at the start of Holy Week. No one saw it coming, and ever since, few have noticed it. Yet it holds the key to understanding Jesus' final days.

At the time, Jesus was making his way to Jerusalem for the start of Passover. As he neared the holy city, a large crowd gathered around him, and when he passed by, they hailed his arrival by singing psalms, chanting "Hosanna!," and waving palm branches.

That's when the strange thing happened.

Amid all the excitement, nobody seemed to notice that one person was not celebrating. He was not rejoicing. He was not smiling. He was not having a good time. In fact, he was crying. The gospel of Luke tells us that while the crowd shouted cheers, Jesus shed tears (19:41).

Something important was going on here, for rarely do we find Jesus overwhelmed with such grief. In fact, the Scriptures speak of him weeping only one other time. In that instance,

Jesus cried alongside those mourning Lazarus's death. There wasn't a dry eye among them. But this time, on the outskirts of Jerusalem, at the start of Holy Week, only Jesus wept. What prompted this strangely dissonant scene? Why was Jesus crying?

Thankfully, we don't need to speculate about the cause of Jesus' sorrow. Luke records that as tears streamed down his face, Jesus cried aloud for all to hear, "If only you knew on this of all days the things that make for peace" (19:42, author's translation).

Like the weeping of a preacher at the pulpit, Jesus' sobs should have been impossible to ignore. And like a bridegroom's wailing at the altar, Jesus' lament should have abruptly ended the party. Neither proved true. For some inexplicable reason, the celebration continued unabated. Somehow, as improbable as it may seem, the crowd failed to notice Jesus' tears or to consider the reason for his lament.

I fear we have done the same.

Each year, our congregations commemorate the start of Holy Week by reenacting the crowd's actions. We sing upbeat hymns, shout "Hosanna," and wave palm branches with gusto. We've turned the day into a joyous occasion and filled it with festive traditions. Yet we never pause to reflect solemnly on Jesus' lament. And not once are we troubled by the fact that our emotions match the crowd's glee instead of our Savior's grief. It seems that like the crowd before us, we too have overlooked Jesus' tears and ignored his lament.

This is a tragedy, for when it comes to understanding the events of Holy Week, Jesus' lament is of the utmost importance. At the very least, it provides us with two crucial insights. First, because of this lament, we now know what Jesus was thinking about as he entered into his final days. And second,

the passion with which this lament was spoken reveals the depth of Jesus' concern.

Taken together, these two insights teach us that at the start of Holy Week, more than anything else, Jesus longed for his admirers to know how he makes peace. Clearly, this was no trivial matter to Jesus. In fact, if his tear-filled eyes are any indication, making peace was his most fervent desire for the week.

What if Jesus' lament is more than just an intriguing glimpse into his innermost thoughts and desires? What if it was placed at the start of Holy Week as a marker so that it might guide us down the correct interpretive path? What if Jesus spoke these words on the first day in order to introduce his primary objective for the week?

This book makes a bold claim: Jesus' lament is the interpretive key to Holy Week. His lament suggests that the events of Holy Week are best understood when viewed through the lens of peacemaking. And it encourages us to see the central struggle of Holy Week as a struggle for peace.

Said another way, with this lament, the great drama of Holy Week began. And upon Jesus' speaking these words, the week's events were set in motion. For with this lament, Jesus launched a campaign for peace that would consume his final days. Each day, he would contend for our peace. And each day, he would correct the misguided methods we use to make peace.

THE MISSING PEACE

Admittedly, this is not how most people talk about Holy Week. You won't hear many sermons that speak of Jesus working for peace during his final days. And you'd be hard-pressed to find a single book on Holy Week that reflects on the significance of Jesus' lament. Few even mention it.

For years, I did the same. I saw no connection between peacemaking and Holy Week, so I simply glossed over Jesus' lament. Ironically, I now consider his lament to be of the utmost importance for the very reasons I once ignored it.

I used to brush past Jesus' lament, in part, because it felt like a random remark. His words about peace seemed to bear no relation to the unfolding events of Holy Week. After all, it was a very violent week. Priests championed death, crowds demanded capital punishment, disciples picked up swords, politicians ordered executions, soldiers delighted in torture, and—most startling of all—even Jesus grabbed a whip. Everyone seemed to thirst for blood.

I realize now, though, that we need Jesus' lament precisely because the week was so violent. Without it, our understanding of Holy Week is prone to err. Apart from it, the whirlwind of violence can easily turn us around in our thinking, dizzying our senses until we stumble out of Holy Week convinced that God is violent and that the cross somehow satisfied God's bloodlust.

My other reason for previously glossing over Jesus' lament was that I thought I already knew what it was alluding to. Sure, Jesus' original listeners were ignorant of "the things that make for peace" (Luke 19:42 NRSV). But I had the benefit of hindsight. I knew how Holy Week ended. And thus I assumed to know how Jesus made peace. In fact, the answer seemed downright obvious. It's the cross. The old, rugged cross. That's how Jesus made peace.

I still believe this answer is true. It's beautifully true, wonderfully true, foundationally true. But as I've come to see, it's not the whole truth. In other words, the cross was not the only way in which Jesus made peace. We need Jesus' lament, in part, because it warns against reducing Jesus' peacemaking

efforts to just one solitary act. By speaking of “things”—in the plural—“that make for peace,” Jesus revealed that his peace-making operation would be multifaceted in nature.

Without this lament, it’s easy to overlook that Jesus was crucified on Friday precisely because of how he sought to make peace on the previous days of Holy Week. And if we fail to recognize this, then despite all our familiarity with the events of Holy Week, and despite clinging to the cross of Christ for our salvation, we may one day be horrified to discover that we’ve actually embraced a different approach to peacemaking. One that justifies killing enemies. One whose methods include nailing criminals to crosses.

IF ONLY YOU KNEW

Jesus’ lament does more than just guide our interpretation of Holy Week. It also speaks a much-needed prophetic critique over today’s church. For you see, I believe Jesus is still pleading for us to learn how peace is made. Tears are still streaming down his face. And he is still crying out, “If only you knew the things that make for peace. If only you knew how I make peace. If only you’d embrace my approach to peacemaking.”

We desperately need to recover the radical vision of peace-making that Jesus embodied throughout Holy Week. And we urgently need to be trained in his way of making peace. The good news is, if you want to learn how Jesus makes peace, there is no better place to look than Holy Week. It’s true that throughout his years of public ministry, Jesus had much to say about how to make peace. But Holy Week is special, for it was the main stage on which Jesus enacted all of his previous peace teaching. Throughout the events of that most sacred week, formerly abstract principles (like “Be merciful”) found

concrete expression, and lofty ethical ideals (such as “Love your enemies”) became grounded in actual events.

That is why this book is both a commentary and a how-to manual. The remaining chapters walk day by day through Holy Week, starting with Palm Sunday and ending on Easter Sunday. As a commentary, each chapter shows how Jesus contended for peace on that particular day. And as a how-to manual, each chapter contains lessons—gleaned from the day’s events—on how to be faithful and effective practitioners of Jesus’ approach to peacemaking.

DEFINING PEACE

Before we begin, however, we need to identify what Jesus meant when he spoke of peace. Given the various ways we use the word, it’s important that we not enter into Holy Week having projected our own definition upon Jesus. If we can gain a preliminary understanding of what Jesus meant by the word, then ultimately the events of Holy Week will further inform and refine our initial definition.

Raised by devout Jewish parents, Jesus developed his understanding of peace from the Hebrew Scriptures (generally equivalent to our Old Testament). There, a beautiful vision of shalom—which is the Hebrew word for peace—takes shape. Unlike how we often speak of peace, shalom denotes more than just the absence of violence. It indicates harmony, health, and wholeness in all aspects of life. Shalom exists when all our relationships are flourishing: our relationship with God, with each other, with creation, and even with ourselves. It is the state in which everything is as it ought to be, as God intends for it to be.

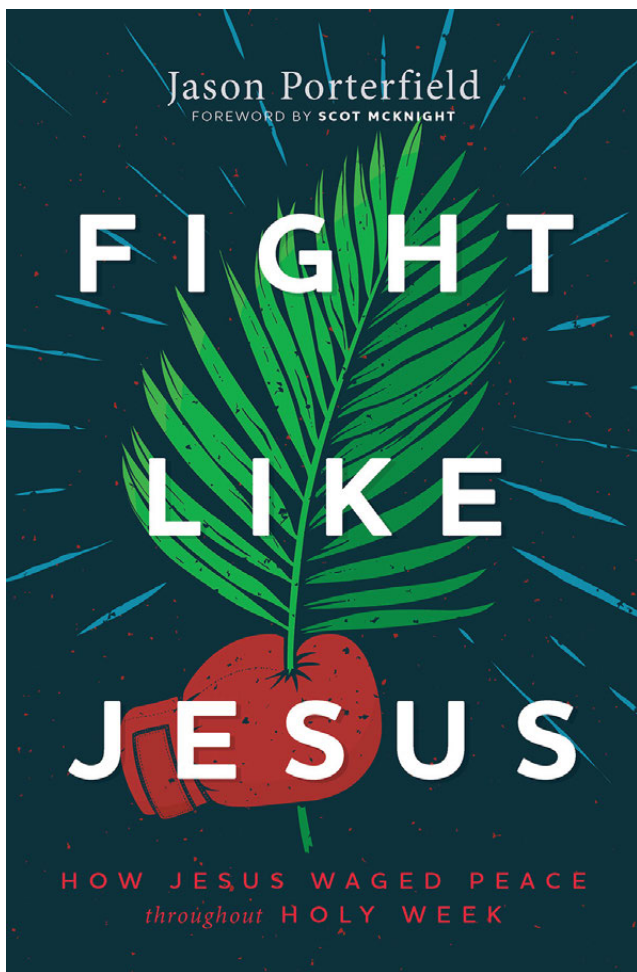
This vision of peace is profoundly comprehensive in scope. It leaves no aspect of life untouched. And it can never coexist

with injustice. This is the kind of peace that Jesus labored to bring about during Holy Week. And this is the kind of peace that he calls his followers to also actively advance.

A SACRED JOURNEY

Equipped with this definition of peace and with Jesus' lament as our interpretive guide, we're now ready to venture into the sacred terrain of Holy Week. My prayer is that by the time we reach the other side, you'll be able to say, "Now I know the things that make for peace. And now I wholeheartedly embrace Jesus' approach to peacemaking."

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