



CANYON HILLS

COMMUNITY CHURCH

Series: The Book of Mark

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An Unbeliever's Guide to Rejecting Jesus

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We have just declared our praise and our worship to a worthy God, and this same God now wants to speak to us. If you are new today, welcome to you! On Sunday mornings, we open our Bibles and go through books in the Bible verse by verse. We actually do expect that God will speak to us and meet us right in this place, so I'm going to ask you to get your Bibles open to the gospel of Mark, chapter 14. That's where we currently are on Sunday mornings.

As we find ourselves in these final chapters, we're walking with Jesus through the last days of his earthly life, and frankly, his mission is going from bad to worse the further into this gospel we get. In just the last 24 hours alone we have watched as Jesus has been betrayed by one of his closest 12 disciples. We saw, last Sunday, Jesus overwhelmed and distressed in the garden of Gethsemane, knowing he's about to take upon himself the guilt and condemnation of all the sin and hatred of the world's rebellion against God.

He has just been arrested in the garden. He has been deserted by all of his friends. Yet...don't make this mistake...none of this is taking Jesus by surprise. He's not a helpless victim held captive against his will. He knows exactly what's taking place and he knows why it has to be so. Already in the gospel of Mark on three different occasions we've seen Jesus warning his disciples that they are making their way to Jerusalem, where ultimately, he will be turned over to the Jewish leaders and they will condemn him to death.

I was thinking about all this this week. You know, in some ways, it is fair to say Jesus has brought all of this on himself. You go back four days earlier, before this moment in Mark 14, where Jesus entered Jerusalem. Remember the triumphant entry? He rides a donkey in a royal-like procession. He allows the people to worship him as their King and Messiah.

Right away, he gets off the donkey in Jerusalem and he cleanses the temple. He goes in and tips over all the tables. He kicks everybody out and claims the authority of God to do so, making himself equal to God.

He then teaches the parable of the tenants. You can go back to Mark, chapter 12, to refresh yourself on that, but essentially the parable was a prophecy condemning the hard-heartedness of the Jewish leaders and their eventual murder of God's promised Messiah. He was taking every opportunity to point out their wicked hypocrisy.

Needless to say, at this point in the gospel, their animosity toward Jesus has reached a boiling point. It is now at that tipping moment where the Jewish leaders are going to carry out the prophecy we see in the Old Testament as well as what Jesus just told them in this parable a day or so earlier.

With your Bibles open now to Mark, chapter 14, let's stand for the reading of his Word out of sheer regard and respect that this is the very Word of God and out of expectation that God is going to speak to all of us in this place, right where we are. Verse 53:

"And they led Jesus to the high priest. And all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes came together. And Peter had followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. And he was sitting with the guards and warming himself at the fire. Now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking testimony against Jesus to put him to death, but they found none. For many bore false witness against him, but their testimony did not agree.

And some stood up and bore false witness against him, saying, 'We heard him say, "I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands."' Yet even about this their testimony did not agree. And the high priest stood up in the midst and asked Jesus, 'Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?' But he remained silent and made no answer.

Again the high priest asked him, 'Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?' And Jesus said, 'I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.' And the high priest tore his garments and said, 'What further witnesses do we need? You have heard his blasphemy. What is your decision?' And they all condemned him as deserving death. And some began to spit on him and to cover his face and to strike him, saying to him, 'Prophecy!' And the guards received him with blows."

Father, once again, we stand in horror as we watch your very Son be beaten and mocked. God, it never gets easy. We pray right now in the name of your Son that you will remind us of what this is all about, teach us, and ultimately, God, draw us nearer to you. God, in the power of your Holy Spirit, I pray you will meet our needs in this place. I pray especially for those who are hurting today that you will even use this passage to bring comfort and hope, God. Lord, you are a good God and we acknowledge that and worship you. In Christ's name, amen.

I think the best way, church, to understand what's going on in this passage is to see it not necessarily as a trial, but as a preliminary hearing, to put it in legal context. In verse 53, we see the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was this group of 70 of the highest-ranking Jewish religious leaders. You see here in verse 53 that we have the high priest (there's only one of them), the chief

priests, elders, and scribes. They're all together and they have had it with Jesus. They desperately need to get rid of him, but they have this huge dilemma on their hands.

They already have a verdict. They've decided he's guilty. They've agreed to a sentence. They want him put to death. The problem is they need a charge. They need a charge to take to the Roman authorities because Roman law prohibited the Jews from carrying out capital punishment without a Roman trial. They knew the charge of blasphemy by itself wouldn't be enough to sentence him to death.

The bottom line we're seeing here is that they never believed in Jesus. They were never open to the possibility that Jesus was God's promised Messiah. They absolutely refused to listen to him. They refused to seek out the truth because they knew if Jesus is who he says he is, they would have no choice but to repent of their sin and to submit to him as their Lord and Savior, and they would have none of that.

We know there are people just like them all over the place everywhere today. It's the people all around us today who are okay with Jesus. Jesus is fine as long as he makes no demands on their own sovereignty. "Jesus, if you want to forgive me, great. If you want to help me, great. Jesus, if you want to love me and accept me, great. Jesus, if you want to save me from whatever, even greater. Just don't ask me to obey. Don't ask me to change my plans. Don't ask me to change my wants or my desires if you happen to disagree with me, Jesus."

What we're seeing here in this passage is eerily similar if not identical to what it has always been. We have here in this passage an old but reliable guide or map for rejecting Jesus. If a person has no genuine willingness to seek the facts about who Jesus is, then the path for the rejection of Jesus is entirely predictable and, I would even add, treacherously unforgivable. You have to...

1. *Search for a fake conspiracy.* Rejecting Jesus usually starts out in the same place for most people. It starts out with a search for a fake conspiracy theory about Jesus. People will look for a conspiracy theory they can cling to, that will comfort them in their unbelief. Just find the right one and latch onto that. Don't let go of it, and then you can just comfortably reject Jesus.

That's exactly what the Sanhedrin is trying to do here. If you look at verse 55, it says, "**Now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking testimony against Jesus to put him to death, but they found none.**" They couldn't find any charge or story that could convict him. In verse 56, it says, "**For many bore false witness [were lying] against him, but their testimony did not agree.**" They couldn't find two people to agree to tell the same lie about Jesus.

In verses 57-59, a bunch of them stood up and spoke up and they came up with what Jesus said about the temple. It says, "**And some stood up and bore false witness against him...**" Again, they lied because they're going to misinterpret what Jesus is saying here. They said, "**We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another...'**" Of course, we know Jesus is referring to himself, that he is the temple of God where the fulness of God resides, and he was speaking of his death and resurrection.

That's not what they were speaking about. They quoted Jesus exactly but they couldn't agree on why they disagreed with him. They had no idea what he meant and they couldn't find anything to convict him of wrongdoing. It says there, at the end of verse 59, "**Yet even about this their testimony did not agree.**"

For 2,000 years, people who reject Jesus find themselves in the same exact dilemma. They can't find a shred of evidence against the conduct of Jesus. Therefore, the Scripture continually proves true. In 1 Peter 2, "**He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.**" You see, the only thing left to do when you cannot discredit his conduct is to try and discredit history.

There's no shortage of these conspiracy theories regarding Jesus out there in the world. One of the sillier ones is what's known as the swoon theory. You've heard of it. This theory states that Jesus never really died on the cross. He just fainted and passed out. Therefore, there was no crucifixion. Now, in order to believe that, you have to ignore the fact that they stabbed him with a spear in his side so all the water and blood in his body would drain out.

Then, you have the stolen body theory. This is old. I even hesitated to bring it up because it's so ridiculous, but the theory says the disciples stole the body out of the tomb and hid it, and then they spread the resurrection rumor. Now, in order to believe that nonsense, you have to ignore the fact that all of the disciples died a gruesome martyr's death. I mean *gruesome*.

You would think, over the period of two or three decades of propagating this supposed conspiracy and lie, that one of them would have finally said, when they saw them bring out the saw to saw them in two, "Oh, okay, okay. We got the body. Let me show you where it is. Hold on. Put the saw away. Let's take care of this right now." At one point, one of them, you would think, would have given in, but not one single one did, because they knew he was alive.

My favorite one is by a fake biblical scholar. I don't even want to give him the dignity of giving you his name, but he claims to be a biblical scholar. He claims the story of Jesus was a sophisticated government propaganda exercise used to pacify the subjects of the Roman Empire. He actually tries to prove that Christianity was invented by the Romans as a system of mind control to enslave the poor.

Those are just a few of the ridiculous theories that are out there, but my point is if you search long enough, you could find some History channel or Discovery channel special you can latch onto in order to justify your rejection of Jesus. It's classic old-school unbelief. It's very lazy, and it's very predictable. If you're bent on rejecting Jesus, there's no shortage of fake conspiracy theories to discredit history and hope it dulls your conscience, but do you know what? That's not where rejecting Jesus ends.

2. *Ignore his perfect character.* In order to reject Jesus, you're forced to ignore the undeniable fact that there was no false word, no selfish motive, and no evil thought in Jesus, ever. If you look at verse 60, it says, "**And the high priest stood up in the midst and asked Jesus, 'Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?'**" You get the sense that this is this priest's desperate plea to try to get Jesus to condemn himself.

They've desperately tried to come up with something they can pin on him. They can't do it, so he says, "Jesus, what do you say?" You get the sense that he's so frustrated and so desperate that he's hoping in this moment, Jesus is going to say something that they can convict him of and condemn him with. In verse 61, it says, "**But he remained silent and made no answer.**" His deafening silence is evidence that he has no need to defend himself. No need.

The apostle John describes Jesus in this way. He is "**...full of grace and truth...**" Psalm 12:6 says, "**The words of the LORD are pure...**" In Deuteronomy 32:4, we read that he is "**The Rock, his work is perfect...**" In Isaiah 25:1, we read that he is perfect in faithfulness. Similar things can be said about his compassion, justice, and love.

The bottom line is there is no one like Jesus. When someone rejects Jesus, they will predictably and conveniently ignore his pure and perfect character. Anyone and everyone else is less than Jesus, so if a person is bent on rejecting Jesus, they're going to have to find some fake conspiracy to convict him with or they're going to have to completely ignore the truth that he is perfectly pure and sinless. Yet it doesn't end there either.

3. *Deny his divine claim.* To reject Jesus, you have to completely refuse to believe Jesus is God. I want you to look at verse 61. It says, "**But he remained silent and made no answer. Again the high priest asked him, 'Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?'**" That word *blessed* there, that title, is a way of saying, "Are you the Son of the Eternal One? Are you the Son of the Ancient One? Are you the Son of God?" They're trying desperately to get him to say something so they can figure out a way to take him to the Romans to kill him.

In verse 62, Jesus finally speaks up. Jesus says, "**I am...**" Now, I suppose that there was a long pause right then. This was no accident that he answered with these two words. Jesus could have answered, "Yes!" He could have said, "Yup!" He could have said, "Mm-hmm!" There are a million different ways he could have answered that question, but he answered it precisely, "**I am...**" Do you remember when Moses was afraid to go to the people of Israel as God's appointed deliverer and leader to rescue them from Egypt?

In Exodus, chapter 3, Moses says to God, "**If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?' God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.' And he said, 'Say this to the people of Israel: 'I AM has sent me to you.'"**" You know when Jesus said, "**I am...**" to the high priest, his mind blew up with Exodus, chapter 3, running through his head. He knew exactly what Jesus was saying there.

In verse 62, Jesus continues and he says, "You will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds." Again, no mistake. The guy didn't ask him about clouds or the Son of Man, but Jesus completes the truth here. As soon as Jesus said this, their minds immediately went to one of their favorite prophets of all time, Daniel, chapter 7. They know what Daniel said. Daniel said,

"I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days..." There's the Blessed One, the Eternal One. **"...and was presented before him. And to [the Son of Man] was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed."**

Look in verse 63 at this answer. The high priest stood up and just tore his robes in half. This was the straw that broke the camel's back. They knew exactly what Jesus was saying here. Jesus was claiming to be their God and their King. Ultimately, the charge they would bring to Pilate was that Jesus was claiming to be a King, their King, who would usurp the authority of the Roman king, and they were hoping that would be enough to get Pilate to condemn him.

Of course, it was. This charge was the highest of blasphemy. They finally got something out of him when he related himself to the Son of Man in Daniel 7 whose kingdom will not be destroyed. John the apostle wrote this about Jesus in the gospel.

He said, **"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."** Phillip said to Jesus, **"Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us."** Jesus said to him, **'Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.**

How can you say, "Show us the Father"? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority [initiative], but the Father who dwells [abiding] in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works [miracles] themselves." Jesus says, "When you look at me, you see God." I love the way the writer of Hebrews summed it all up. He says,

"Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.

After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs." His conduct is more excellent. His character is more excellent. His power is more excellent. His name is more excellent. His position at the right hand of the Father is more excellent.

So if you're bent on rejecting Jesus, you'll not only have to find some fake story to latch yourself onto, you'll not only have to completely ignore his perfectly pure and sinless character, you'll not only have to deny that he is God, predictably, but you'll also have to...

4. *Condemn him as dead and gone.* In order to reject Jesus wholeheartedly, it's required that Jesus become dead to you. This was their thinking in Mark 14. "Kill him, bury him, problem solved." That was their thinking. In this moment, in verse 64, the high priest says, "**You have heard his blasphemy. What is your decision?**" **And they all condemned him as deserving death.**" In that exact moment, the Jewish leaders believed they had all the power to determine the fate of Jesus.

Now, I admit that rejecting Jesus today doesn't always sound this vitriolic. I get that. Today, condemning Jesus to death is much more subtle. It sounds like this. "Jesus was a great teacher. Jesus was a wonderful leader. He was an advocate for the poor and the needy. He was affirming and accepting. He was a great revolutionary. He was an unbelievable religious prophet." All of these are nice, but what makes these so convenient is that they keep Jesus dead and in the grave.

These not-so-subtle forms of admiration really work to accomplish the same exact thing the Sanhedrin are trying to do in Mark 14: humanize Jesus, neatly bury him in the grave, and leave him there. Problem solved. You can leave him there as a great teacher. You can leave him in the grave as just an advocate for the poor. You can leave him in the grave if you just look at him as some historical revolutionary.

While these opinions of Jesus may ease the conscience, they also damn the soul. Romans, chapter 10, says, "**...if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord [God] and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.**" Look at those words. Many of you are familiar with them.

If these words are true (and we believe them to be), then the opposite of these words must also be true. If you don't confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, if you're unwilling to say he's God, and you don't believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, also confirming that he is God, then you won't be saved. You can't be justified. You can only be condemned.

If you're bent on rejecting Jesus, the path to that rejection and unbelief is very predictable. It has been happening for 2,000 years. You'll have to find a made-up story or theory to convict him. You'll have to completely ignore that he is perfectly pure and without sin. You'll have to deny that he is God. You must bury him and call him dead. Probably, most predictable of all, you will ultimately...

5. *Mock him with hateful arrogance.* Rejecting Jesus always leads to mocking Jesus. It has to. It's the most natural progression of the rejection of Jesus. Look at verse 65. "**And some began to spit on him and to cover his face and to strike him, saying to him, 'Prophecy!'**" "Tell us who just hit you!" "**And the guards received him with blows [punches].**" Mocking Jesus is the strange but necessary evil that distracts a person from their own condemnation and ultimate damnation.

Sadly, the louder one mocks Jesus, the more resistant the unbelief, the more calloused the heart becomes. Eventually, God says, "No more." God's Word teaches in Romans, chapters 1 and 2, that there's actually a time when God's grace and second chances end.

God says, "You want to reject me by rejecting my Son? You want to continue in your sin so bad? You want your own way so bad? I'll allow it. I'll allow it to take its natural course and I'll allow it do destroy you." See, that's the natural end of trying to live life as though God doesn't exist. It will always end in destruction.

In Romans, chapter 1, we read, "**For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men...**" What is that unrighteousness? "**...who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.**" They reject, ignore, deny, and mock Jesus. "**For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.**" Mostly in his Son, Jesus.

"For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly [visible], ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools..."

So God let them go ahead and do whatever shameful things their hearts desired. As a result, they did vile and degrading things with each other's bodies. Instead of believing what they knew was the truth about God, they deliberately chose to believe lies. They worshiped the things God made, but not the Creator himself, who is to be praised forever, amen.

The psalmist has, really, the perfect summary of deliberate unbelief and rejection of Jesus. The psalmist wrote it this way. "**The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.' They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds; there is none who does good.**" Solomon said it this way, maybe not quite as clear but just as powerful. "**There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.**"

It feels right to man to say, "You know what? I don't need God. If there is a God, I'll take my chances. If there is some higher power out there and his name is God and I have to stand before him when I die, I'll negotiate then. Until then, I'm going to do it my way." That's natural. It seems right to our natural, selfish, dead-in-our-sins selves. Solomon says, "You will die. Not only physically, but you will die spiritually forever, separated from God in hell." Wow!

Church, if you think about it, there are only two types of people in the whole world. Every single human being can fit into one of two categories: those who reject Jesus as God and those who accept him as God. The truth is neutrality is impossible. It's impossible to be neutral once you're faced with a claim as total, intimate, life-changing, and sin-threatening as the person of Jesus Christ.

It's impossible to say, "Well, I'm not sure. I'll just kind of sit in the middle and not really say yes or no." That is the same as saying no. He's either a lunatic with temporary and limited magical powers or he is who he says he is: God. Deny Jesus is God, ignore that Jesus is God, and either way, the Bible describes that person as a liar and the antichrist.

In 1 John, chapter 2, it says, "**Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also.**" These words are really powerful and so important that they're in our Bibles, church.

If you look at those words John is writing right here, he's saying it's virtually impossible for a person to say, "I believe in God the Father. I like the whole God idea. I believe there's a higher power out there and it might be God. It might even be the God the Christians say is in the Bible, but this whole Jesus thing... Eh, I'm not so sure. He sounds like a great guy, but not necessary."

John writes in our Bibles, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that it's virtually impossible. You cannot take one or the other. You cannot accept the Father and deny the Son because the Father is in the Son and the Son is in the Father. It is impossible to do that. You are a liar and an antichrist. Wow!

The encouraging news, though, is that the person who rejects Jesus doesn't have to end their life there. Today, I want to offer to anyone who finds themselves rejecting or resisting Jesus the gift of his forgiveness and salvation. Church, today, between 3,000 and 4,000 people are going to walk through these doors. I know somewhere in that crowd, there are people who still are holding Jesus at arm's length. They might not be cursing him, but they're mocking him in their unbelief.

Some of you may just be sitting here today. I want to give you a chance for that to change. If your heart feels exposed today, if you sense this nudge going on in your heart to give up, to surrender, that Jesus is who he says he is, if you continue in your unbelief, God's Word says eventually grace and second chances end.

If you sense the power and weight of that on your heart, I want to call you to repent today. I want to ask you to believe in the gospel, which is the good news that Jesus lived a perfectly obedient life and willingly offered himself as an acceptable sacrifice to God, paying for our sin with his own sinless blood on the cross by dying on the cross. This way, our sin is rightly and justly punished but we are mercifully saved from that punishment we so deserve.

You see, after Jesus paid the ransom price for our sin with his very own life, God raised him from the dead, giving him the power over death and making him the judge of the living and the dead. It is appointed once for man to die and then to stand before the judgment, and that's where we are going to face Jesus, alive. He is the Savior of all who turn from their sin and believe in him.

I love that beautiful promise in Revelation, where Jesus says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone opens the door, there I am. I will come in." That door is just a metaphor. It's a picture of our hearts. It's opened to Jesus only with the key of repentance and faith in him. Jesus says, "I knock at the door." He doesn't force himself in. He doesn't yank it open. He has already spilled his blood; now, he invites us to invite him in.

I realize that the majority of you sitting in this room this morning have already invited him in. You've opened the door of your heart. Yet I also believe there are some of you here today for the very purpose of doing this very thing. I'm going to ask all of us to bow our heads respectfully and close our eyes. I'm going to ask you to sit still for just a moment.

If you sincerely feel that what's going on in your heart right now is God saying, "This is it. This is my invitation to you to open your heart to my Son, Jesus," I want to give you that chance. I want to give you a chance to pray and to ask Jesus to come into your heart. I'm going to pray a prayer. It's not magical. It's not mystical. It's just an expression. It's a way for you to say, "All right. I give up." If you want Jesus to forgive you and save you, pray these words. Just simply and quietly between you and God, repeat them after me.

Dear God, I am so sorry for rejecting your Son, Jesus. Today, I confess that I'm a sinner and I open the door of my heart. I ask Jesus to forgive me, to cleanse me, and to save me from all my sins. Jesus, grant me eternal life. I believe you died for me and that you rose from the dead and are alive forever. In your name I pray, amen.

If that was the desire of your heart and you sincerely shared those words with the Lord, I want to welcome you into the family of God. God promises that those who humble themselves, open that door, and accept Jesus to be their Lord and Savior are now his children. We want to help you get started in a relationship with God to walk in your faith in a right way.

There are some people standing up here who would love to give you something to go home with today. I'm going to ask you to not be ashamed. Before you leave this room, if you said that prayer and you meant it (and I believe you did), just simply walk up to one of these people and say, "I said that prayer today." Let them give you something to go home with today to encourage you in your faith and in your walk with him. I hope you'll do that. Welcome to the family of God. Bring your Bibles next Sunday. We'll be right back at it. We'll see you then.