



CANYON HILLS

COMMUNITY CHURCH

Series: The Book of Mark

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True Motives for Rejecting Jesus

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It never gets old, does it? That's the miracle of faith, just acted out right before us in baptism. It's a great reminder to all of us who have been baptized of what Jesus has done for us, so we celebrate that. In just a minute, we're going to open God's Word.

Before we do that, I'm going to ask the ushers to come now and begin receiving our offering for the day. We trust that God provides all of our needs, and so when we give we are expressing our faith in a God who does supply those needs. He takes what we give and uses it to spread the good news about Jesus even further.

As they're receiving our offering, let's go ahead and get our Bibles open to Mark, chapter 15. We're just hours away from the crucifixion of Jesus. The Jewish leaders, in the last few Sundays of passages we've been in, have bribed Judas into betraying Jesus and leading a mob of thugs into the garden to arrest Jesus and drag him before the Sanhedrin at the temple courts. They've recruited people to lie and falsely accuse Jesus. They've wrongly convicted him of blasphemy, and they've condemned him to death.

After beating Jesus up like a bunch of schoolyard bullies they tied him up and they delivered him over to the Roman governor, Pilate, so Pilate could put him to death for them. You see, that's what was required. The Jewish people had no authority to exact capital punishment. They needed Rome to approve, so they dragged Jesus over to Pilate, their acting governor from the Roman Empire.

We pick the story up today in Mark, chapter 15, at what most historians believe is some time between 5:00 a.m. and 9:00 a.m. Friday morning. The Jews needed Jesus dead before the Sabbath began that Friday night at sunset, because once the Sabbath began, by their own religious rules, they were not allowed to do anything, especially the work of executing one of their own.

So, there was a lot of risk. If they couldn't get Pilate to make this condemnation, hand down the sentence, and kill Jesus, then they would have to wait till Saturday. The risk was that the sympathizers of Jesus might find out what they were up to, revolt, and start a riot of their own.

Pilate also had something at stake here. If he didn't handle the situation prudently, he could lose control of the whole situation and his higher-ups would question his ability to keep law and order. For Pilate, his job was at stake. His lifestyle that was connected to that job was at stake. For the Jewish people, they could lose this opportunity to kill Jesus.

Everything is amped up here at full wattage, so to speak. We pick it up right in the middle of that scene, so let's stand, as we always do, for the reading of God's Word. We're in Mark, chapter 15. We're going to pick it up in verse 6.

"Now at the feast he used to release for them one prisoner for whom they asked. And among the rebels in prison, who had committed murder in the insurrection, there was a man called Barabbas. And the crowd came up and began to ask Pilate to do as he usually did for them. And he answered them, saying, 'Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?' For he perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered him up.

But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release for them Barabbas instead. And Pilate again said to them, 'Then what shall I do with the man you call the King of the Jews?' And they cried out again, 'Crucify him.' And Pilate said to them, 'Why? What evil has he done?' But they shouted all the more, 'Crucify him.' So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified."

Father in heaven, I pray that you would never allow us to forget the horrors of scenes like this in the life of your Son. I pray, God, that you would allow passages like this to remind us of how much you love us and what you were willing to do for us so that, God, we could be reconciled back to you. God, I pray that you would teach us today what this means and how to apply it to our lives, even starting today.

Father, I also pray for those in our midst who are struggling or hurting. I pray that your peace would overwhelm them today. God, give them the confidence of knowing you will walk with them through any valley that is to come. Help them, God, to rest in that knowledge. Lord, we trust you now. Have your way in our hearts through your Word. In Christ's name, amen.

I've titled this message *True Motives for Rejecting Jesus*. Here's my main idea. I think we see in this passage that *while it may be really easy to reject Jesus, it's virtually impossible to ignore him*. That's what I believe is the main idea happening right before us in this passage. Rejecting Jesus is really the easy part. Ignoring him is impossible.

In this passage, we see basically why people will choose to reject Jesus. We're also going to see that there's one life-changing question that every human being cannot avoid. It's a question we all

have to answer. All of that is tucked into this passage right here, so let's start with the first half of the main idea.

1. *Rejecting Jesus is easy.* In this passage, we see three different motivations for why people reject Jesus. What's interesting to me is that people are still rejecting Jesus with the same exact motivations or reasons as they were 2,000 years ago. It's interesting how rejecting Jesus has not gotten all that creative over the centuries. It's pretty much exactly the same.

For the first easy motivation for rejecting Jesus, we only have to look to the crowd. When we look at the crowd in the passage, we see...

A. *A thoughtless desire to fit in.* This is what's motivating them to scream, "Crucify him!" A thoughtless desire to fit in. There are four references to the crowd in these few verses alone. It just so happens that there are around 2 million Jewish people crowded into Jerusalem and the surrounding areas around Jerusalem. They've all been on a pilgrimage to get to Jerusalem. They do it once a year, and they celebrate the annual Feast of Passover.

In verses 6-8, we read that the crowd was calling for Pilate to pardon one of their Jewish prisoners. This was a politically motivated Roman tradition they would do every year during the Passover. It allowed the oppressive Roman government to extend an olive branch to the very people they were oppressing, the Jewish people, by releasing to the Jews one of their own whom the Romans had arrested and were potentially going to execute.

They would always do this right in the middle of the Feast of Passover, so what's happening here in verses 6-8 is not some random thing, but it's something the Jewish people actually looked forward to every year. It was much like a presidential pardon, only in first-century terms. When we read verses 9-12, Pilate asks them, "**Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews [instead]?"**

Well, we do know it was still very early in the morning here. More than likely, many of the people in the crowd that day didn't even know Jesus had been arrested only 12 hours earlier. In fact, there may have been some in this crowd who didn't even know Jesus. Maybe they came from so far away they might have heard about him, but they didn't know much to do with him.

So, the crowd is made up of a bunch of people who are surprised, like, "What do you mean, King of the Jews? You have Jesus back there somewhere? In verse 11, the religious leaders incite the crowd to start screaming for Barabbas to be released. We're going to get to him in a minute. Like good little blind followers that the people in the crowd were, they did as everyone else was doing.

In verse 12, we see Pilate asking them, "If I pardon Barabbas, what do you want me to do with Jesus? What do you want me to do with your King?" He was being a little sarcastic, because that's what the Jewish people were accusing Jesus of: blasphemy, claiming to be their King.

When he asked them, "**What evil has he done?**" the crowd just kept shouting more and more and screaming with even more venom, we read in verse 14. There's a whole bunch of mob-like, thoughtless emotion swirling around in this moment. It's being instigated by the Jewish religious leaders, and they're all just screaming in unison, "Kill him!"

In Matthew's gospel, he records for us that at this very moment, Pilate turned and washed his hands. It was symbolic, and he was truly washing them. He looked at them and said, "Let his blood be on your hands, not on mine." Pilate honestly didn't want to execute Jesus, but they wouldn't let him rule in Jesus' favor.

Now, when Pilate said, "Let his blood be on your hands," in Matthew's gospel, this hyped-up crowd not only accepted that curse, but they mindlessly responded by saying, "Okay! Not only on our hands, but on the hands of our children also!" In other words, they're saying, "Let it be! If we're wrong, God may kill us and our children." They had no idea what they were saying, and it didn't matter to them what the truth was about Jesus.

All that mattered to them that day was that they fit in with everyone else. They were gullible, they were naïve, and they were easily misled. Sadly, people reject Jesus for the exact same reasons still today. They just want to fit in, so they passively adopt whatever opinion of Jesus that's most socially convenient or acceptable at the time or place they find themselves being faced with Jesus.

If you're sitting with us this morning and you're still on the fence, wondering about Jesus and whether or not you're going to believe in him, I would just ask you to ask yourself what crowd is yelling at you in your life. What crowd is always tempting you to just stay where you are or to fit in with them instead of seriously considering Jesus? Is it your friends? Is it maybe family or extended family?

Is it people at work who would just die if you decided you were going to follow Christ? Are you in college or at the university where your professors are constantly applying the pressure to remain an atheist? Is it your politics that is your screaming crowd? Is it the Hollywood crowd that maybe you admire way too much? Who's your crowd that's keeping you wanting to fit in more than allowing you to believe in what you may believe to actually be true?

Jesus said, "**Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many.**" There's the crowd, right there in Jesus' words. "**For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.**" In other words, if you're looking for the majority to tell you what to believe, you're never going to find your way to heaven. In fact, just the opposite. Be sure of this. Jesus did not die on the cross so we would fit in with the crowd. He died on the cross so we would stand out from the crowd as one of his.

B. *A threatened lifestyle.* I think this second easy motivation for rejecting Jesus comes from the religious leaders and what we see going on in their hearts. Their motivation for rejecting Jesus is that their lifestyle is being threatened. They were the most opposed to Jesus, and understandably

so. Their countless rules and rituals and all of the religion they had piled onto their religion and piled onto the people as the shepherds of God's people had become so godless that there was no power left in their religion to change anybody's life, let alone change anyone's heart.

These religious leaders were simply secular minds dressed up in religious robes, and that's exactly what Jesus was confronting. That's why they hated him so much. He was threatening to their lifestyle. For them, religion had become all about making themselves look good for God, first, which was ridiculous, but even more so, making themselves look good to the people.

That's what their religion was. It was a way for them to make themselves look good. They knew if they were to follow Jesus they would have to walk away from their hypocritical religion that was fueled by greed, power, and approval ratings.

Church, today, these people are still amongst us. They just look different. They dress differently. They're the people we know who are interested in Jesus as long as he doesn't intrude on their personal pursuits or personal pleasures. You see, Scripture teaches us that following Jesus actually changes us. Our heart toward God is transformed and the result is that we find ourselves becoming more willing and more desirous to trade in some stuff.

We find ourselves wanting to trade in our sexual immorality for sexual purity. We find ourselves wanting to trade in our lying, cheating, and manipulating for integrity, truth, and considering others as more important than ourselves. We actually find ourselves desirous to walk away from greed, materialism, and the pursuit of money. We want to trade that in for being sacrificial and generous.

We find ourselves wanting to trade in being angry and instead, finding self-control. Ultimately, what we start to see changing in our hearts is we are willing to walk away from worshiping our own self-image and reputation and instead worshiping God and living for his glory.

See, Jesus said, "**If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.**" Be sure of this. Jesus didn't die on the cross so we could add him to our lives. He died on the cross so he could lovingly rule over our lives and give us a completely new life. Jesus died on the cross so we would die to sin and live for him.

C. The discomfort of opposition. For this one, we only need to look at Pilate. I think Pilate believed in Jesus. I think, based on verse 10 of this passage, Pilate was able to discern that Jesus had done nothing wrong and this was all about the envy of the Jewish religious leaders not wanting Jesus to take away any of their followers. Yet Pilate still did what was supposed to be done.

He asked for the evidence, and there wasn't any. He said, "What has he done? What evil has he done?" and they never answered the question. They just kept yelling, "Crucify him!" But the telling verse about Pilate is verse 15. If you'll look at it with me, it says, "**So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barabbas...**" When he realized that to do the right thing, to believe in Jesus, meant this crowd could turn on him at any moment...

When he realized that to believe in Jesus could mean his life would change and it wouldn't necessarily change for the better if he was going to let Jesus go, which Jesus deserved, he couldn't deal with that. The motive to want to satisfy the people who gave him what he had was too much for him to bear. All the comforts of life, the peace, and the ease he had, being in power, would all be gone, so he walked away.

Again, Pilate is like the people who believe in Jesus, but they know if they accept him as their Lord and Savior it will mean facing immediate opposition or rejection. These are the people all around us today. They don't really have a problem with Jesus. Their problem is with the people whom they feel would reject them.

That opposition and rejection comes in all kinds of forms. Sometimes it comes just from being a part of a family that has generational religious roots. "If I start walking with Jesus and I become a Christian, all those people in my life who aren't, or who follow some other religion, will disown me."

It could come from parents who won't agree with it. It could be a boyfriend or girlfriend whom we think might freak out if they think we're getting too religious. It may be people at work or at school who would persecute us or shun us or a friend or a colleague who will have a lesser opinion of us. I want us to be sure of this.

See, Jesus didn't die on the cross, you guys, so we could have peace with everyone in the world. He died on the cross so we could have peace with God. That's what matters. Jesus said, in Matthew 10, **"Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me... Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."**

I don't know about you, but I grieve over the thought of all those who go to their grave knowing Jesus must be God's Son. They go to their grave knowing Jesus must be who he said he was. All the evidence is there. In their hearts, they know this is right. They want to trust Jesus. They want to surrender to him. They know it's the right thing to do, but their fear of man made them too afraid to act on it.

So, we see that rejecting Jesus is not that hard. It's certainly not that hard if you see your lifestyle might have to change or the people around you are not going to like it. It's not that hard to just say, "Eh, I don't think it's worth it," but I think the second part of the application of this passage causes us to pause.

2. Ignoring Jesus is impossible. Again, we have to look to Pilate to see this life-altering question he asks in the passage. We've already mentioned it twice. It's the one question that has the power to determine every person's eternal destiny. Now, I admit there are a lot of big questions in life, but the question Pilate asked is actually the biggest.

Many people would disagree with me. The scientists would say, "No, Steve. The biggest question in all of life is, 'How did life begin?'" The philosopher would say, "No, that's not the biggest question of all. The biggest question is, 'What is the meaning of life?'" The astronomer would come along and say, "You're both wrong. The most important question is, 'Is there other life out there somewhere?'" The realist would come along and say, "All three of you are out of your minds. The biggest question is, 'What happens after this life?'"

All of those questions don't matter if you don't get Pilate's question right. It's in verse 12. If you look at it, he's basically pleading with the crowd. He's saying, "What shall I do with the man you call the King of the Jews? What do you want me to do with Jesus? What do I do with Jesus?" This is critical. Pilate is stuck between a rock and hard place. He doesn't want to condemn Jesus, but he doesn't want to accept him either.

He knows Jesus is innocent and he knows the crowd and the religious leaders are wrong about Jesus. Yet Pilate is attempting the impossible. He's trying to find relief from honestly answering his own question. He wants them to answer it for him so he doesn't have to take responsibility for his own actions, or so he thinks. I think there are a lot of people today who just don't want to deal with him. They're just like, "If I ignore Jesus long enough, maybe he'll go away."

Blaise Pascal, an amazing seventeenth-century apologist, says it's impossible to ignore him. Peter Kreeft, writing about Pascal's arguments, wrote something like, "Neutrality is impossible once you are faced with a claim as total, as intimate, as life-changing and as sin-threatening as Jesus." In other words, Jesus demands a response.

It's the question for the ages for every single person. What are you going to do with Jesus? Is Jesus history or is he nonsense? There's nothing in the middle. There's no safe place in neutrality. There's no safe place in between the two. There's no fence between those two. Jesus said, "Whoever is not with me is against me."

There's no middle ground. Ignoring Jesus leaves us in an eternal state of spiritual condemnation, not in a state of neutrality. No one is going to be able to stand before Jesus at the judgment seat of Christ and say, "Jesus, I wasn't totally for you, but don't forget I wasn't against you either. I just kind of stayed in the middle. I wasn't sure what to do, so I just didn't do anything." That's not an option at the judgment. Speaking about himself, Jesus said it this way in John, chapter 3.

"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil."

Jesus is speaking here, saying he didn't come to condemn us. Jesus doesn't condemn anyone. He was sent to save us. Jesus is saying here that we condemn ourselves in our rejection and unbelief of him. He says the reason is basically we don't want Jesus telling us what to do and what not to do. He's saying, "I am the Light of the World. The Light, God's Light, has shined."

He had come to show us God, to show us our sin, and to show us that we need forgiveness. He came to accomplish that for us. Yet he said people would rather stay in the darkness. They don't want anybody telling them they're wrong, they're sinners, or they have to change. That's why. People love their sin more than they love their soul.

Before I close, I want to make mention of Barabbas. He's a pretty big part of the story. Would you agree? Yet he never says a word! We have not one word of Barabbas in our Bibles. There's none of him in the narrative. I wonder... Do you wonder what Barabbas was thinking that day? That's what I was wondering this week.

When Barabbas woke up that Friday morning, he was basically on death row. He was guilty of murder. He's a robber. He's a notorious insurrectionist against Rome. Little did he know that day that his freedom was going to be purchased by the blood of an innocent man. The guilty is set free and the innocent is about to be punished.

Peter describes what's happening here in 1 Peter 3. He says, "**For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God...**" It's this great injustice that makes grace so amazing, isn't it? Do you want to know what else? Jesus never says a word in this part of the narrative. He just lets the whole thing unfold in perfect 3-D redemptive beauty. Even in this ugly, demonic condemnation of the innocent Lamb of God, Jesus is allowing this picture to unfold right before our eyes of what his death will accomplish for all who believe.

So, I wondered this week if we would see Barabbas in heaven. Don't you think he might have been startled by the whole thing? The jail cell slams open. They reach in and grab him by the shirt. The Roman guards drag him out and just throw him into the crowd and say, "You're free." He's just stunned, half-groggy, like, "What in the world is going on?"

I wonder if, when he kind of got his senses about him, he at least curiously just followed along with this crowd that just got him released. He probably got thrown out into the crowd and they all swarmed him and were cheering, congratulating him, and high-fiving him. "You're free! You're free!" They were taking credit for it and he was just still a little stunned and confused by the whole thing.

I wonder if he would have just kind of went along with the mob to Golgotha, and somewhere along the way talked to one of the disciples or any of the followers of Jesus. Wouldn't it be perfect divine irony in that the one the crowds were screaming for and demanding to be released so Jesus would be crucified... Wouldn't it be divine irony if he actually became a follower of Jesus?

I can't prove any of that, but I think other than the thief on the cross, Barabbas may be the second-happiest person in heaven, if he's there. I don't know. I think there are going to be a lot of surprises in heaven. I think we're going to see a lot of people there whom we never thought could have made it. Worse, I think we're going to notice there are a lot of people not there whom we thought were going to be.

You know, when you think of Barabbas, he really represents us, doesn't he? There was a time when we were in the same place as Barabbas. We were waking up every day, dead in our sins. We were waking up every day on death row, in a spiritual sense. We were dead toward Christ.

We had no faith, no belief, and no desire to believe every day until God graciously and miraculously opened the eyes of our heart to see and believe. Wow! We're all like Barabbas at some point in our lives. The question is...*Did we stay there or did we believe?* So, let me answer the... [audio cuts out]

...lived and died and risen from the dead. God, for those who have not yet, may today be the day of their salvation. May today, God, be the day they step over the line and say, "Okay. I surrender. God, open their hearts. Open their spiritual eyes to see what you have done for them. In Christ I pray, amen.

The people standing up here are for those of you who want to take that next step. You sense in your heart, "Okay. I can't fight this any longer. I want to believe." If that's you, they are up here to just help you take that next step of faith. They want to give you something to go home with today that will help you understand better and begin walking by faith in a loving God who sent his Son to die for you. I hope before you leave you'll come up to them and say, "That's me. What do I do now?" They will help you do that. All right?

God bless you. Have a great rest of your day. We'll look forward to next Sunday together.