



# CANYON HILLS

## COMMUNITY CHURCH

Series: The Book of Mark

August 12, 2018

### **Putting Jesus in His Place** Pastor Dustin Slezak

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If you had a chance to join us last Wednesday at the Summer Concert Series, it was a great time, wasn't it? Great food... Those brisket sandwiches were right on. Plenty of activities to do with the kids, inflatables... Most importantly, we had some amazing worship, joined by our friends down at North Point Community Church, down in Atlanta, Georgia. It was just an awesome time. If you weren't able to make it, mark your calendars for this Wednesday. Be there. Bring the family. Everything starts at 6:00.

If you've been with us any length of time here at the church, you know we've been working our way through the book of Mark, verse by verse, chapter by chapter. We've covered a lot of ground. If you've noticed, over the last couple of weeks, things have kind of taken a dramatic turn in our story, haven't they?

We've seen Jesus arrested. We've seen the disciples flee, even Peter. Peter denies Jesus three times. There's this mock court that Jesus gets pulled before. False witnesses come, and he's been beaten and whipped. Then, we came to last week, the darkest situation, the darkest environment that has ever existed on this planet, when mankind turned their back on their Savior and killed the Son of Man. He came to seek and save us, and he was put to death.

You know, if the book of Mark ended last week, if the story was done with the death of Jesus, there would be no hope. We might as well just pack it up, call it a day, and go on home, right? But we know better. We know the story is not yet over. We know Sunday is coming and the resurrection will be here, but that has not yet happened.

In our story today, we're going to see that in the midst of this dark, seemingly hopeless moment, there is going to be a little flicker of light. There is going to be a faithful servant of the Lord who's going to stand up, show, and demonstrate to us that it is possible, even in life's difficult moments and dark times, that the faithful can still flourish. When the battle seems lost and the faithful ones have fled, we can still put Christ in his rightful place.

This morning, I'd like to invite you to open up to the book of Mark, chapter 15, verses 42-47. We're going to stand together right now for the reading of God's Word. As we stand, we read,

**"And when evening had come, since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God, took courage and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.**

**Pilate was surprised to hear that he should have already died. And summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he was already dead. And when he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the corpse to Joseph. And Joseph bought a linen shroud, and taking him down, wrapped him in the linen shroud and laid him in a tomb that had been cut out of the rock. And he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where he was laid."**

Father, we come before you this morning and we realize we are on earth and you are in heaven, and that you are great, awesome, and holy. This morning, as we look at your Word and we begin to discover how to remain faithful when life is difficult, we pray for your wisdom. We pray for your patience. We pray your Word would be clearly presented. Give us insight and understanding, Lord. We love you. In your Son's name, amen.

As I have been kind of chewing on this passage all week and reading it over and over, every time I came to verse 43, I was absolutely shocked to discover who Joseph, the hero of the story, is. Did you catch that in verse 43? Joseph of Arimathea was **"...a respected member of the council..."** That should ring a bell.

The council also goes by another name. It's referred to as the *Sanhedrin*. As you know, as we've been going verse by verse through the book of Mark, every step of the way, this council has been hounding Jesus. They've been trying to get him to stumble and trip up. They have been scheming behind the scenes to get Jesus to fall.

In fact, as we just read a couple of weeks ago in Mark 14, it says this in verse 55: **"Now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking testimony against Jesus to put him to death..."** These are the ones who brought the false accusations to Jesus and ultimately led to his crucifixion. These are not good people. These are the enemies of the cross, the enemies of God.

Yet here we read that Joseph was a card-carrying member of the Sanhedrin. I'm not a rocket scientist, but that would make me think Joseph is a bad guy. What is he doing here? Yet as we look at other places in Scripture... In fact, this account of the burial of Jesus is mentioned in all four Gospels. The gospel of Matthew and the gospel of John tell us some other good information.

First, it reveals that Joseph was a disciple of Jesus. In fact, in Luke, chapter 23, verses 50-51, it says, speaking of Joseph, **"He was a member of the council, a good and righteous man, who had not consented to their decision and action..."** I love how God works. Even in the most chaotic, crazy situation that has ever existed on this human planet here...

God the Son is being killed. God the Father is in heaven, and guess what! He's not freaking out. He has everything under control. He's not in heaven, wringing his hands, saying, "Oh my goodness. I did not see this coming. What shall I do?" He knew. See, God had pre-positioned a covert operative inside the Sanhedrin. He had put one of his faithful servants inside there. He put him behind enemy lines for such a time as this.

See, the call upon Joseph's life was that he was called to minister to the people who hated Jesus the most. Wow! I think some of us in this room, maybe, get that. Some of you in this room, maybe, feel like you're in a position right now where you're around people, living with people, and surrounded by those who are enemies of Jesus. Maybe you're a public-school teacher. Maybe you hold some position in the government. Maybe you live with someone who's an unbeliever and just hates anything to do with church, the Bible, and Christ.

There are many of us in this room who kind of get this. Joseph is going to demonstrate and show us today that even in difficult circumstances, even when the environment is toxic to the things of Christ, it is still possible for us to remain faithful and to elevate and lift up the name of Jesus Christ. He's going to demonstrate this by showing us three things.

1. *Putting Jesus in his proper place requires urgency.* Let's look at verse 42 again. Verse 42 says, "**And when evening had come, since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath...**" If you're unfamiliar with the concept of what the Sabbath is, this is the day of rest that God instituted at creation. On the seventh day, he rested from his works.

He had asked the people of Israel to rest from their work one day a week as well. There was to be no work, no clocking in, or doing any sort of manual labor at all. This was kind of a big deal. Exodus 31:14 says, "**You shall keep the Sabbath, because it is holy for you. Everyone who profanes it shall be put to death. Whoever does any work on it, that soul shall be cut off from among his people.**" This is kind of a big deal here.

This means there was to be no work at all, including the type of work it would take to, say, take a body down from a cross. See, Jesus died around 3:00 in the afternoon. The Sabbath was set to start when the sun went down that same day. There were literally hours to act. The reason they had to act was because if they didn't get it down, Jesus' body would have remained on that cross and left to open and public shame.

See, as we learned last week, crucifixion was horrific. In every single way, it was horrific. What made crucifixion horrible was not just that it killed a person, but it was meant to humiliate the criminal in both life and in death. Roman law, for example, dictated that people sentenced to death for capital offenses, such as Jesus was, forfeited their property and were to be forbidden burial.

In fact, it was common for people to be left hanging on that cross for days, maybe even weeks after their crucifixion. They could be torn apart by the elements and consumed by wild animals.

It was to be a warning sign to everyone else that, "This man has lost all honor." That was what the Romans had intended to do with the body of Jesus, to leave it up there to be torn apart.

Yet we also know that Jesus was Jewish, and the Jewish law had something to say about this as well. Deuteronomy 21:22-23 says, "**And if a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God.**" To leave the body of Jesus on that tree overnight would have brought about a curse upon him.

So, what is mankind to do? All the faithful ones have fled. All the heavy-hitter disciples, the faithful... We don't even know where they are. Yet there is one man who got pre-positioned. It was his time to shine. He knew burying Christ was absolutely urgent. If he didn't act, Christ would have been dishonored.

Now, it would have been very easy for him to do absolutely nothing. Surely, someone else would step up. He was busy. It was the day before the Sabbath. He had stuff going on. He had to prepare three meals, because you couldn't cook on the Sabbath. He had three meals to prepare.

He had gotten up early that morning and put the ribs on the barbecue. He was trying to get a nice eight-hour smoke on those things. The guy was working hard. His family was coming over, filling up the kiddie pool. I mean, life was busy. Surely, someone else would step up to do the right thing.

You know, I've been a follower of Christ now for 27 years. The majority of times in my life where I have missed the opportunities to honor Jesus... Unfortunately, there have been many. I've found that in those moments, I was living in the wrong spiritual time zone. See, let me explain this. There are three time zones we tend to live in in our walks with Christ, I think.

The first time zone is called *the past*. When a Christian begins to live in their past, when all their stories of obedience to Jesus are told in the past tense, it's, "I used to honor Christ. Do you remember that one time I went on that missions trip? One time, about 10 years ago, I shared my faith, and it was awesome. I used to read my Bible. I used to be in a small group. I used to..."

All their stories of obedience are, "I used to..." There's nothing that's going on today. They're hanging on to, "Yeah, I was baptized when I was 12 years old, but I haven't walked with Jesus for 20 years. But you know what? I'm still a follower of Jesus."

You know, there are some questions that need to be asked. If we live in the wrong time zone as Christians, if we live in the past, it can bring about a false assurance of our faith, and that's dangerous. It's the wrong time zone.

The second time zone is *the future*. This is when we walk around and we're like, "You know what? Right now, I kind of like life the way it is. I'm kind of all about me right now. One day, I'll get serious about Jesus. One day, I'll start attending church. One day, I'll start tithing. One day, I'll join a Life Group, but for right now, I'm going to settle things down. I'm going to get a good

job. I'm going to get married. I'm going to have kids. When life works for me, at that moment I will get serious about my walk with Jesus Christ."

If you're living in that time zone, that's a really, really bad decision, because you don't know the measure of your days. You don't know when your life is going to end. For all you know, you're going to drive home today, pull out onto I-405, and get hit by a Mack truck. The next thing you know, you're going to be standing before Jesus. Then, all those times you said "one day" aren't going to matter at all. It's the wrong time zone.

The right time zone is *now*. This is the time zone that Joseph was living in. Even though he had all the excuses, and even though it was inconvenient in the moment to step up and try to honor Jesus, the time was now. He knew this was urgent. He knew this couldn't be pushed off or put on someone else.

Honoring Christ is always the most important, most urgent item on a believer's agenda. Nothing else comes close to it. When the reputation of Jesus Christ is on the line in the workplace, in your community, or in your home, everything else is second place to lifting high and putting Jesus in the place he deserves. We cannot delay obedience. Putting Jesus in his proper place requires urgency.

2. *Putting Jesus in his proper place requires courage.* Let's continue reading. Verse 43: "**Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God, took courage and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.**" He took courage. That phrase in the Greek could also mean to dare. In fact, in other places throughout the Gospels, that's the way it's translated. It could literally be translated, "Joseph dared himself to go and ask Pilate for the body of Jesus.

Have you ever been dared to do something before? Maybe when you were younger, a little unwise, a little foolish? You know, I've been dared to do many things in my life. I've always found that a dare typically isn't to do something that's smart, right? It's to do something that's dumb. When was the last time you were double-dog dared to look both ways before crossing the street? You rebel! No, that's dumb. No one would ever do that. To dare someone to do something is to do something idiotic, something illogical.

I remember when I was younger, I was in high school. My family took a little trip up to Wisconsin and there were a bunch of teenage guys up there with us. We were having a great time. It was winter and they had a pond out back. You take a bunch of teenage guys who are bored, and you have a half-frozen pond in the back yard, and no parents around... What dare do you think is about to take place? We're egging each other on. Who's going to go out and stand in the middle of that pond and jump?

Well, the most foolish among us (not me) decided to take up that dare, so he goes out there. He's strutting his stuff, thinking he's the coolest thing since sliced bread. He stands out there in the middle of the pond. We're all like, "Yeah, man!" Guess what he does. He jumps and disappears. He goes under the ice.

Do you know what the faithful friends did, those of us who were watching? We freaked out and ran! We ran for the hills! Now, he was okay. The water was only about chest-deep. He only had mild hypothermia. It was okay. He was okay. Now, if I remember the story correctly, it did not go okay for us once our parents found out about this. Not well. It was stupid. It was idiotic. It made no sense. Why would you go out on a half-frozen pond and jump? Hence the nature of a dare. Do you get it?

Well, Joseph is about to do something that is seemingly illogical. He is putting himself at extreme risk. He is daring himself to do something radical to honor Jesus Christ. You had better believe it; he had a lot to be afraid of.

First, he could be afraid of the Jews. Remember, he was a member of the Sanhedrin. Even though he was kind of undercover, he had a front-row seat to their scheming. He knew exactly what they were capable of. He had been there in the late-night chats when they were talking about trying to trip up Jesus and recruiting people to come and to give false testimony against him. He had ears to hear all those things. He knew that not only was his reputation (or even his life) on the line, but his family was as well. There was a lot to be afraid of.

Yet the Jews really weren't his biggest issue. It was the Romans, because, again, remind me, who was he going to go talk to? Pilate. Remember Pilate? Good guy or bad guy? Bad guy! He had just condemned Jesus to death! This was the guy who had all the power and authority. This was the one who just allowed Jesus to be crucified, who gave the order to kill him.

So, here you have some no-name Jew who's about to go walk in and talk to "the man." I don't think that's going to go very well for him. Joseph must have been freaking out. His life was on the line. His family's life was on the line here.

This week, as I've been thinking about this, I was just trying to put myself in Joseph's place. What was he feeling? What were those emotions, going to go talk to this man with great authority? Now, it might not be surprising, but I don't tend to hang out with people in high positions. I don't know a lot of people who are powerful and big heavy hitters.

Yet there was this one time, many years ago. I was a youth pastor in Chicago. One day, I got an invitation in the mail. It was to go to this leadership forum. I'd never been to a leadership forum before. That was kind of cool, so I went and got my best suit, which happened to be my only suit, which was two sizes too big. I threw that on, and on the right date, I went to this leadership forum.

When I pulled up at the event, I began to realize, "I ain't in Kansas anymore, Toto. There's something going on right now." I pulled up and there were guys, very serious men, walking around with suits and sunglasses. There were multiple levels of security I had to get to. Then, when I finally got through all that chaos, they let me into this room where there were about 30, maybe 40 other individuals.

When the door opened up, my breath was taken away, because you and I would know about half the people in the room. National heavy hitters were standing in that room. Here am I. I go walking in, totally out of my element. I go find a table in the corner and I sit down all by myself.

As I was observing the room, I noticed something. There was a nervous energy. There was some anxiety in the room. People were talking and yukking it up and all that, but you could tell everyone was on edge. People were on edge because we were there to meet "the man." We were there to meet the guy who held all the power. Even these heavy hitters felt the weight of that moment. We were there to meet the president of the United States. Kind of cool, right?

We were there. They lined us up. I was at the very back of the line, of course. They led us into this room. There were all these secret service agents again, standing there, arms in their jacket, holding who-knows-what. I was walking in with my hands visible. "See my hands? I'm not making any sudden moves!"

When I walked in and I saw President Bush standing there, I tell you, I just lost it. There's a photo of us, and you can see he's not even looking at the camera. He was so done by this point. When I saw him, though, man, my heart started racing. If you had asked me my name in that moment, I don't think I could have answered you. I don't remember what he said. I don't remember what I said. I just remember shaking the guy's hand, taking a quick photo, and then I was ushered off.

If it was that intense having just a meet-and-greet with this guy, imagine what Joseph must have been feeling. This was not a friendly meeting. He wasn't there for a photo op. He was going in there to ask something extremely difficult. Could you imagine Joseph's heart beating, and every step, just praying, "God, give me the words. Protect my family. God, if you're not with me right now, I am literally dead"?

This was not an easy thing. So much was at stake. Yet here's the key. Joseph didn't let fear hold him back. He had courage. In the same way, loved ones, we cannot let fear hold us back. Doing the right things to honor Jesus always requires courage. It always involves risk.

What are the things in your life right now that God is asking you to do? You know what you need to do, though it scares you to death to think about actually doing it. Maybe it's forgiving somebody. Maybe you've been deeply wounded in your past and there's someone you haven't forgiven yet, and you're afraid if you do forgive them, they might open up some old wounds.

Maybe you've sinned and no one knows about it yet. You have to come clean and you're worried, fearful about the hurt it's going to cause people you love. Maybe you have someone in your Life Group who has made some really poor choices. You care for them and you've been in relationship with them for a long time, but you know you have to have a hard conversation with them and you're fearful of how they're going to respond.

Maybe in the workplace you've been asked to do something that compromises your faith and your integrity, but you know if you say no there's a great potential that you're going to be passed over for promotion down the road. None of these daily choices we face are easy.

I love 2 Timothy 1:7. It says, **"...God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control."** See, as followers of Christ, yeah, we can be scared, but that fear doesn't have to stop us from acting, especially when it comes to honoring the Lord. He has given us a spirit of courageousness, not of fear. He has given us power, love, and self-control. So, whatever it is God has called you to do that honors him, it needs to be done now and with courage.

Now, of course, as we see here in the story as we keep reading, Joseph might have been afraid, but he went forward. Look at verses 44-45. What happens? **"Pilate was surprised to hear that [Jesus] should have already died. And summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he was already dead. And when he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the corpse to Joseph."**

Imagine that! Joseph stepped out with courageous faith and God actually shows up. God actually takes care of him and protects him. That's the type of faith we need to have when we act with courage.

3. *Putting Jesus in his proper place is costly.* Verse 46: **"And Joseph bought a linen shroud, and taking him down, wrapped him in the linen shroud and laid him in a tomb that had been cut out of the rock. And he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb."** See, there's something we don't know yet about Joseph that's important to this story.

In fact, Matthew, chapter 27, verse 57, tells us, speaking again of Joseph, **"When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who also was a disciple of Jesus."** This is what we don't know. Joseph is loaded. The guy has money. He has wealth. He needs to have money and wealth, because we also learn in the book of Matthew that this isn't some random tomb they found and commandeered for this purpose.

The tomb Jesus was laid in was Joseph's own tomb. In fact, we have a photo of what the tomb might have looked like. You know, they didn't have jackhammers and TNT back then. To make a tomb like this was costly and very time-consuming. This was no easy task. Tombs, back in the day, were for those who were rich and could afford them.

It wasn't also a personal tomb. This wasn't just for Joseph. This tomb was meant for his family. It was a family tomb. He would be laid to rest there. His wife, his kids, his grandkids, and his children's children's children would all be put to rest in this place. This tomb represented family legacy.

He spent a lot of money and a lot of time to secure this legacy for his family. In an instant, when the honor and reputation of Jesus was on the line, he gives it up. He sacrificed, not just his future, but part of his family's future for the point of honoring Christ. Here it is. He didn't hold too tightly to what he had.



See, it's so difficult to honor Jesus with a closed fist. When we grip so tightly to the things God has given us, when we fail to release our children, our marriage, our retirement, our family, our friends, our car, our home, or whatever it is... What do you have that Christ has not first given to you? When you don't release that to the Lord, you're not going to be able to honor Jesus. It's impossible.

Holding everything we have with an open hand before him, saying, "God, yeah, I worked hard for this. Yes, you've given me so much. This stuff kind of brings about some peace in my life, but you know what? With shaking hands, I offer it to you. Do with it what you will." With open hands is how we honor Jesus. Do you want to put Jesus in his rightful place? You have to have an open hand.

See, it was no accident that Joseph just happened to be rich and he just happened to buy this tomb at this specific time. You see, God had allowed Joseph to acquire wealth and to do these things. Joseph thought buying this tomb was for his family legacy, but the purpose of that tomb from day one had always been to house the body of the Son of God.

Joseph didn't know that, but that was its original intent from day number one. What God has given to you has a greater purpose than what you're currently doing with it. Would you allow God to use your retirement, your home, your family, and the things he has given to you that you think are meant for *a*, and God is like, "Yeah, no. I didn't give them to you just for *a*. There are *b*, *c*, and *d* over here as well"?

When we don't let go and we don't release the things God has given us, we don't realize there's a cost to honoring Christ. We sacrifice a lot of God's blessing. We sacrifice what God can do with those things. We're taking the bottom shelf. God is like, "I have top-shelf stuff for you. I have a plan. I could build you and use you in my kingdom."

"No, God. I just want what I have. I don't want to release it." That's not how Joseph played it. Joseph was a man who knew that in order to put Jesus in his proper place, there was a cost associated. Honoring Jesus will always cost us something. Isn't that the whole point of what has been going on in this story? Isn't that what brought Jesus to this dark, cold tomb in the first place?

Jesus held his very life with open hands. Not once did Jesus ever grip on and say, "This is my life. You can't do anything with me, God." His entire ministry, his entire life, and his entire purpose was held with an open hand. That's why he came and died, was buried, and rose again three days later.

The gospel exists. There's hope for you and for me to be in glory with him, because he held his life with an open hand. He realized there was cost and he was willing to pay it on our behalf. He expects us to be able to do the same. It's for him, those we live, and those who call themselves followers of Jesus. Following Christ is always costly.

As I've had a chance to talk with many of you over this last year, I know there are some difficult decisions we're facing. I know some of you are really, really struggling right now and you don't know what to do. Some of you guys do know what to do, but you just lack the motivation right now to do it because it's hard.

No one is doubting it's hard, but we need to follow the example of Joseph. When life got hard, when things were dark, and when seemingly the world was chaotic and there was no hope, he held fast. He acted with urgency. He acted with courage, and he was willing to pay the price, all with the point of honoring Jesus. Here it is. He dared himself to honor Christ with his life.

As you go about this week, that's my prayer for you, that you would dare yourself. Do something radical for Jesus Christ, knowing he has paid it all for you. Let's put Christ in his proper place. Let's pray.

Father, we love you and we thank you for this morning. Thank you for your Son, Jesus, who held his own life with an open hand. Because of that, we can gather, celebrate, and worship. The reason we have family, resources, and time on this planet is because of what Jesus has done. God, help us to do what it takes to honor you. Following you is not easy, but it is always worth it. Thank you for loving us. Help us to honor you this week. In your Son's name, amen.

Before you go this morning, I want to let you know that if you don't know who Jesus Christ is, if this story of the gospel of what Jesus has done is kind new news to you, I would highly encourage you to not leave. There are people up front right now who would love to talk to you and kind of tell you a little bit more about who Jesus Christ is.

Likewise, if you have a difficult decision to make, you're scared, and you just want someone to support you and pray with you, we're also up front for you as well. Thank you for your time this morning. Have a great day! God bless.