

DESPISED AND REJECTED (Mark 15:1-20) – Sunday, March 21, 2010 – Summit EFC

Series – *Way to Go: Serving & Giving Like Jesus* (Gospel of Mark), Message #21 – Pastor Doug Corlew

Let's open our Bibles everyone, to the 15th chapter of **Mark's** Gospel as we continue our walk with Jesus on the way to the cross. This is the way He must go. This is the intended destination of His journey, for –

“The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (10:45). Did you know that Jesus loved to call Himself the Son of Man? And I think one reason for this is that “Son of Man” has a ring of mortality about it. Men can die. That's why Jesus had to be one. The ransom could only be paid by the Son of Man, because the ransom was a human life given up in death.

But as **Alister McGrath** writes, *“To say that Jesus died, or just that he was executed, misses the barbarism of the way in which he died. The full sadism of human nature was brought to bear on him. It was a shameful and degrading death.”*

This week and next week we will see that very clearly in Mark's account of Jesus' sufferings. Especially in Mark, the emphasis of the crucifixion narrative actually falls not its brutality and violence, but on the shame and mockery to which Jesus is subjected.

The prophet says, *He was despised and rejected by men (Isaiah 53:3)*, and today my prayer is that each one of us will enter into this story, inserting ourselves as characters in the drama – so that we might have new eyes to see the glory of Jesus manifest in the midst of this shameful and degrading treatment.

The reason I want us to see His glory is so we would cherish Him and believe in Him, so that when you and I stand before God one day we will not be counted among those who *despised and rejected* His Son.

In **v 1-5** Jesus is arraigned before Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Palestine. He has already been tried in the kangaroo court of the Jewish Sanhedrin, under Caiaphas, the high priest. They found Him guilty of blasphemy for calling Himself the Son of God. But they had no authority to impose capital punishment. For this, they needed to prove Jesus guilty of a capital offense in the Roman court of law.

So, as soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole Council. And they bound Jesus and led him away and delivered him over to Pilate. 2 And Pilate asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” And he answered him, “You have said so.” 3 And the chief priests accused him of many things. 4 And Pilate again asked him, “Have you no answer to make? See how many charges they bring against you.” 5 But Jesus made no further answer, so that Pilate was amazed. Pilate was amazed, are you? We should be.

Because 1st, when Jesus is **ACCUSED before Pilate, He SUBMITS to the Father**. This is the second time now that Jesus has been silent before His enemies. You'll remember that when He was before the Jewish Council, and some ridiculous allegations were raised against Him –

In **14:60-61**, *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.*

Likewise, here before Pilate, in **15:5** Jesus reached a point where He simply *made no further answer*.

Before the Jewish court, Jesus was accused of threatening to destroy the temple and committing blasphemy, but those issues would be of no great concern to Pilate or the Roman government. Those were religious issues. That worked in the Jewish courtroom, but they need a different approach here.

So instead, the chief priests suggest that Jesus is a political threat to Pilate's own authority. "He claims to be King of the Jews, sir. How do you feel about that? What would your boss Herod say about that?"

So in **v 2**, *Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?"* Interesting that the wording here of this question is exactly the same as the wording of the high priest's question in **14:61** – "*Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?"* In both cases, it's more of a statement in the original language, with a question implied: "*You are the Christ?" "You are the King of the Jews?"* In other words, as Mark tells the story, even the mouths of Jesus' enemies are unintentionally confessing the truth about Him.

And so Jesus merely needs to answer Pilate, "*You have said so.*" "*You* have said so, Pilate." If Jesus would have answered, "Yes, I am King of the Jews," Pilate would have had immediate grounds for execution. But Jesus couldn't deny it and say, "No, I am not King of the Jews." So He brilliantly responds by challenging Pilate to consider his own words. It's as if Jesus is saying, "You would do well to consider the question you just asked Me."

The interrogation doesn't stop there however, because the chief priests then make up all kinds of lies, saying for example, as we learn from the other gospels, that Jesus was inciting riots or advocating non-payment of taxes – they *accused Him of many things. But Jesus made no further answer (v 5).*

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth (Isaiah 53:7).

Don't misunderstand. The silence is not an admission of guilt. And neither is this a silence of defeat. This is a silence of surrender to God's sovereignty. This is a silence of submission to His Father.

As Peter notes, *He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly (1 Peter 2:22-23).*

Jesus knew that His passion was part of the divine plan. There was no other way to accomplish the mission for which He was sent into the world. In His human nature, He would have rather avoided the cross. But since it was not possible for this cup to pass from Him, Jesus submitted to His Father:

"Not what I will, but what you will" (14:36), He said. That's why we don't find Jesus resisting arrest or arguing His case before the authorities. He came to give His life as a ransom, but what we have to realize is that the ransom price was not coerced from Jesus.

"No one takes (my life) from me," He said, "*but I lay it down of my own accord" (John 10:18).* The price was paid freely; it was not forced. He freely chose to rescue us at the cost of His own life.

So Jesus is silent as they slander Him. And the silence is deafening. Pilate was probably used to loud protests and challenges, but from this defendant, there was no self-defense offered. By the way, Peter tells us that Jesus' behavior here is not simply to be admired, but imitated:

For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps (1 Peter 2:21).

Sometimes silence is the most eloquent answer, you know. Even without words, Jesus is bearing witness, for in **v 5** Mark notes that *Pilate was amazed.* Of course, amazement is not the same thing as faith, although it may become the first step to faith.

In this case, Pilate's amazement possibly signals his intention to seek Jesus' release. Pilate sees the situation for what it is: Jesus is no rebel. He has done no harm to anyone. His enemies are just envious of Him.

So in **v 6-15**, Pilate fully intends to grant amnesty to Jesus. *6 Now at the feast he used to release for them one prisoner for whom they asked. 7 And among the rebels in prison, who had committed murder in the insurrection, there was a man called Barabbas. 8 And the crowd came up and began to ask Pilate to do as he usually did for them. 9 And he answered them, saying, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" 10 For he perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered him up. 11 But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release for them Barabbas instead. 12 And Pilate again said to them, "Then what shall I do with the man you call the King of the Jews?" 13 And they cried out again, "Crucify him." 14 And Pilate said to them, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify him." 15 So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.*

***VIDEO CLIP:** *The Passion of the Christ*, scene 15 (48:07 – 52:03)

It's hard to comprehend the wickedness of the human heart, isn't it? It was surely a sign of God's mercy that the people were given one last chance to repent of their evil designs. And it seemed like a no-brainer:

"One man can go free this morning," Pilate says. "Shall we release this notorious criminal, the murderer, the terrorist, the one who has committed treason? Or shall we release the harmless man you have brought before me this morning, the one in whom I find no fault? Your choice." And the people chose. It's hard to fathom their decision, but even here the glory of our Savior is manifest.

For as Jesus is **REJECTED by the crowd, He SUBSTITUTES for the guilty**. When my brother was here two weeks ago he informed you of my criminal record. Apparently one day I failed to return my lunch tray to the cafeteria conveyor belt. And for this offense he was blamed and he was sentenced to a full day of in-school suspension. He used the story as an example of injustice.

However, we might also use that story as an example of substitutionary atonement. I committed the sin, and he suffered in my place. Though it was not voluntary in his case, he paid the price so I could go free. And in a much greater way, was this not the experience of Barabbas here in our text?

Pilate figured he had found a way to preserve justice for the innocent man. Now if he had the guts, if he wasn't so worried about doing what was politically expedient, Pilate would have simply followed his conscience and released Jesus. He had it within his power to do the right thing, but he was indecisive and wavering. He was thinking about his own political career, so he wanted to please the crowd.

That's why he let *them* choose. And this seemed like a perfect plan. Surely the crowd would prefer to see Jesus go free than to see a violent gang leader roaming the streets. Barabbas or Jesus? It's intriguing to note that the name Barabbas literally means "son of the abba" or "son of the father." Matthew adds that his given name was "Jesus," which really heightens the drama of Pilate's question: "Which do you want, Jesus the son of abba, or Jesus the would-be Messiah" (who is of course the true son of the Father?)

Sadly, Pilate's plan misfires; sanity does *not* prevail. Even though Pilate had repeatedly lobbied on behalf of Jesus, it was no use. The crowd stubbornly and defiantly rejects Jesus.

So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barabbas (v 15). The irony is unmistakable here: Pilate, who began by seeking amnesty for Jesus, ends by seeking amnesty for himself. He thought

he was in control, but in reality, the governor is strangely governed by the people who assert their will over him and win the day. Jesus will be crucified and the guilty one will walk away.

Three crosses had been prepared that day by the Romans for three criminals. On two of the crosses thieves were to hang; the middle cross was evidently prepared for Barabbas. He had been found guilty; the penalty was his just due. Yet Barabbas never found his way to that cross; he missed it.

And if for some reason he had stayed around to watch the bloody scene that followed his release, Barabbas could have looked up to that middle cross which had truly been prepared for him, and he could have said, "Someone else is hanging in the place that was rightfully mine. I was guilty of the crime; I was condemned to die, and yet He is there instead of me."

Barabbas went away a free man, not because he was innocent, but because another took his place. And note this well: Whether or not you go to heaven is not a question of your guilt or innocence, for you and all the world stand condemned before God. It is now only a question of whether you will accept God's Substitute as payment for your sins.

Isaiah 53:5 says, *He was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities. Barabbas represents me. The cross was prepared for me!*

1 Peter 3:18 says, *Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God. He died in your place; He died the death you should have died; He died instead of you!*

The wages of sin is death, and the righteous Judge of the universe will not compromise justice. So if you refuse the Substitute which He provided, then God will exact a payment from the one who should have paid it in the first place. Either Christ's ransom payment on your behalf, or your eternal death to satisfy the justice of God. Which will it be?

Do you have eyes to see the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ in the midst of His reproach? Accused before Pilate, He submits to the Father. Rejected by the crowd, He substitutes for the guilty.

And **3rd**, in **v 16-20** though Jesus is **DESPISED by the soldiers, He SUFFERS as our King**. After His trial before the Sanhedrin, the guards beat on Jesus with their fists and spit in His face. But now He is subjected to something much more brutal. At the end of **v 15** we are told Pilate had Jesus *scourged* or *flogged* before delivering Him up to be crucified.

You know, one thing that's incredible about Mark's narration, and it's true of the entire New Testament, is that the story is told with utmost restraint and objectivity. There is no attempt to exploit the savagery of a crucifixion, either to sensationalize Jesus' death, to evoke sympathy from the reader, or to editorialize about its meaning. There is an economy of words as the facts are simply stated with no gory descriptions.

But there are plenty of details provided by secular historians of the day that make us aware of just how horrifying this procedure was. A scourging or flogging was a cruel and merciless preparation for crucifixion. The Jewish historian Josephus says the prisoner was first stripped naked and then bound to a post. He was then beaten with a leather whip that was woven with bits of bone or metal or glass.

The scourging would lacerate and strip the flesh, often exposing bones and intestines. One of its purposes was to shorten the duration of crucifixion, but scourging was so brutal that some prisoners died before the soldiers even had a chance to nail them to their crosses. Women were exempted from either suffering or

witnessing the scourging. It was a gruesome form of punishment. The victim was generally not even recognizable by the end.

The prophet says of Jesus, *His appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind (Isaiah 52:14)*. You could barely tell He was a human being. Yet Mark merely says, He was *scourged*. Rather than emphasizing the physical suffering of Jesus –

Mark's emphasis falls instead on the derision and mockery of Jesus. Before the Jewish Sanhedrin, remember it was Jesus' *divine* status as Son of God they lampooned. But now before the Romans it is His claim to *royal* status as King of the Jews that's being ridiculed:

16-20 - *And the soldiers led him away inside the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters), and they called together the whole battalion. 17 And they clothed him in a purple cloak, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on him. 18 And they began to salute him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" 19 And they were striking his head with a reed and spitting on him and kneeling down in homage to him. 20 And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. And they led him out to crucify him.*

He was despised - they insulted Him, disrespected Him, made fun of Him. Jesus was treated with scorn and ridicule. That's no way to treat a King! This is *our* King being treated with such contempt. They mocked His title King of the Jews, but the irony is not simply that He really *was* the King of the Jews, but that He is King of the Universe! He is King of all Kings.

Though he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross... God has highly exalted him... so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow... and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord... (Phil 2:8-11)

The soldiers who were sarcastically *kneeling down in homage to Him (v 19)* will one day kneel again in His presence, but on that day they will be trembling before Him, for they will recognize Jesus for who He really is. It will be too late for them to repent, but they *will* acknowledge His rule.

Fifty days after His crucifixion, on the day of Pentecost, Peter proclaimed the resurrection and ascension of Christ: *"This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses."* He is now *"exalted at the right hand of God."* So Peter goes on to quote the opening words of **Psalm 110** –

And he applies them to Jesus: *"The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool." Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.*" (**Acts 2:32-36**)

This is a sobering thought: All of who have despised and rejected Him will become His footstool. They will not escape judgment. Though He suffered as a rejected King He will come again as a reigning King.

The one wearing a crown of thorns is the one of whom the psalmist wrote, *May he have dominion from sea to sea... May desert tribes bow down before him and his enemies lick the dust!... May all kings fall down before him, all nations serve him! (Psalm 72:8-11)* And they will!

When Pilate was vacillating about what to do with Jesus, if only someone would have read him that psalm. Or maybe **Psalm 2**, which the apostles also quoted and applied to the crucifixion of Christ:

Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his anointed... He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, "As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill." I will tell of the decree: The Lord said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

Have you taken refuge in Jesus Christ, trusting Him as the Savior who suffered in your place, dying your death, and conquering the grave on your behalf? Be wise, be warned. Do not reject or despise God's King. A day of wrath is coming, and unless you "kiss the Son" you will perish in the way.

The Bible says, "*God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life*" (**John 3:16**). So there's bad news, but there's good news.

As **Tim Keller** writes: *Here's the gospel: you're more sinful than you ever dared believe; you're more loved than you ever dared hope.*"

Let's pray...