

On Trial in Our Place: Rejected

¹ Then the whole assembly rose and led Him off to Pilate. ² And they began to accuse Him, saying, “We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Messiah, a king.”

³ So Pilate asked Jesus, “Are You the king of the Jews?”

“You have said so,” Jesus replied.

⁴ Then Pilate announced to the chief priests and the crowd, “I find no basis for a charge against this man.”

⁵ But they insisted, “He stirs up the people all over Judea by His teaching. He started in Galilee and has come all the way here.”

⁶ On hearing this, Pilate asked if the man was a Galilean. ⁷ When he learned that Jesus was under Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent Him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time.

⁸ When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he had been wanting to see Him. From what he had heard about Him, he hoped to see Him perform a sign of some sort. ⁹ He plied Him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer. ¹⁰ The chief priests and the teachers of the law were standing there, vehemently accusing Him. ¹¹ Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked Him. Dressing Him in an elegant robe, they sent Him back to Pilate. ¹² That day Herod and Pilate became friends – before this they had been enemies.

Everyone mentioned in Luke 23:1-12 rejected Jesus.

Start with the “whole assembly” that led Jesus off to Pilate. This “assembly” is the Sanhedrin – the Jewish council, the chief priests, and the teachers of the law, the group that put Jesus on trial in last week’s sermon. This group rejected Jesus because they feared that they would lose their way of life if Jesus continued his so-called “rebellion.” Their position, their power, and their purse were all at stake. But if you search deeper in your study of the “assembly,” what they feared most was losing their ability to do what they wanted to do. They were hypocrites. Their modus operandi was: “Control the people, and you get to do what you want.” And mind you, these are the religious leaders. But that’s exactly what they did.

Jesus exposes their hypocrisy in Matthew 23. Listen to what Jesus said of the “assembly”: **“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of bones of the dead and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness”** (Matthew 23:27-28). These are the guys that led Jesus off to Pilate.

And just how much did they fear losing their way of life? Look again at all they did to Jesus: False witnesses lined up against Jesus and false accusations were made by those false witnesses; they spit in his face, blindfolded him, struck him with their fists, and beat him; and they condemned him to death. But they had no power to put him to death. That's why they led Jesus off to Pilate. But even there, the "assembly" wouldn't let up. In front of Pilate, they accused Jesus of treason, and in front of Herod, it says in our text that they "vehemently" accused him. Again, why? Because they refused to give up the wicked lives they loved.

Then there's Pilate. Could he seem any more disinterested? He's far more motivated by apathy than he is hate. Just look at the short exchange he had with Jesus in our text: **So Pilate asked Jesus, 'Are you the king of the Jews?' 'You have said so,' Jesus replied. Then Pilate announced to the chief priests and the crowd, 'I find no basis for a charge against this man'** (Luke 23:3-4). Translation? "Uh, yeah, this guy is not a threat, and you're wasting my time bringing him to me. Leave me alone, and go about your business with this wannabe. I have more important things to do." Then notice how quickly Pilate sends Jesus to Herod when he finds out that Jesus is a Galilean.

Finally, there's Herod. You can imagine his excitement when they brought Jesus to him. Let's see what this prophet knows! Let's see what this prophet can do! But Herod's excitement quickly turned to disappointment. Jesus gave him no answer and gave him no miracles. So Herod and his soldiers had a little fun with Jesus, ridiculing and mocking him, and then sent him back to Pilate.

All three who rejected Jesus – the assembly, Pilate, and Herod – have a lot in common with those who reject Jesus today:

- Like the assembly, many people today feel threatened by Jesus. They fear that if they pay any credence to him, they're going to have to give up their way of life. And because they aren't willing to do that, they go to similar lengths that the assembly went to, but they take it out on Jesus' followers with hate, ridicule, mockery, lies, and violence.
- Others, like Pilate, couldn't care less about Jesus. To them, he is one big inconvenience, one big disruption in their lives. They have far more important things to do than give Jesus their attention.
- Then there are those like Herod. They've heard about Jesus and are intrigued by Jesus. They've heard that he can help turn lives around, so they picture some magician who will wave away their troubles. But when they realize that's not who Jesus is, they quickly become disappointed with him, even turn against him.

But what about us? How much do we have in common with the assembly, Pilate, and Herod? I think more than we care to admit.

Are we any different than the assembly when we balk and bristle at Jesus and what he has to say?

- Are we any different than the assembly when Jesus says, "**Love your enemy,**" and we refuse to do so?

- Are we any different than the assembly when Jesus teaches us to pray, **“Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us,”** but we have no intention of forgiving this person or that person who has sinned against us?
- Are we any different than the assembly when Jesus says, **“You cannot serve both God and money,”** and we mock and ridicule the pastor or the church, saying, “There they go again, talking about my money”?

Are we any different than Pilate when Jesus stands in front of us and we feel inconvenienced? This is a touchy one, so allow me to carefully illustrate what I mean: In a few weeks, we will be observing Holy Week. Holy Week is our week as Christians, everything we believe in Christ and everything we are in Christ happens on that week. It’s a really big deal! We have services on Thursday, Friday, and Sunday. Each service will center on Jesus Christ, our crucified and risen Savior. For some of you, there will be reasons you can’t attend one or the other, or maybe, any of them – you might be sick, you might be out of town, you might have to work, you might not drive at night, you might have little children and it gets too late. All of those are understandable reasons. But for some of us, if we don’t take advantage of all three, what is our reason? Is it, “Three services in a week are just too many to ask”? Is it, “Easter is the main one of the three, so I’ll just do that one”? (By the way, I humbly don’t know how you celebrate Easter without observing Good Friday.) Is your reason, “I have more important things to do” (when you really don’t)? Is it, “I don’t feel like it”? Are any of us comfortable giving Jesus those reasons while he stands in front of us?

In no way shape or form is my illustration a shameless, guilt-ridden plug. Please, please don’t take it that way. To take it that way misses the point. As God’s called servant, I am simply calling out ANY disinterest or inconvenience WE might feel toward Jesus – any disinterest or inconvenience we might feel toward worshipping Jesus, growing in our relationship with Jesus, serving Jesus. I am calling out any disinterest or inconvenience we might have because of apathy. I am calling out such rejection, because that’s what it is, and Jesus doesn’t deserve it.

Herod’s rejection is a touchy one too, because I have to ask, “How many of us have hoped and hoped, prayed and prayed, for Jesus to do some miracle in our lives, to solve some problem, to take away some trouble, and when he didn’t do it, we became disappointed, and in our anger, turned against Jesus?” What ridicule and mockery has Jesus received from us because he wasn’t the Jesus we wanted him to be?

Who are the ones who deserve to be rejected? We all know. It’s us. But for all the reasons that Jesus remained relatively silent during his suffering and death, one of the biggest reasons is this: He silently took the rejection so that, in the end, we would not be rejected.

If the holy Son of God would have responded to those who were rejecting him, in his justice and righteousness, he could have easily rejected them. Don’t forget what Jesus said to Pilate later on: **“You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above”** (John 19:11). But rather than rejecting the assembly, rejecting Pilate, and rejecting Herod, what did he do? He took it, and while being nailed to the cross, he said to his Father in heaven, **“Father, forgive them, for they do**

not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). And in essence, what was the Father’s response? **“I will forgive them, but I can only forgive them if I reject you instead of rejecting them.”** Then what happened? **“About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, ‘Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?’** (which means, **‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’**) (Matthew 27:46). Listen to that: **“Why have you forsaken me?”** There’s the cry of the REJECTED ONE, rejected for the sin of the world, so that we would not be rejected.

One of our biggest fears if not the biggest fear we have of God is rejection. You know it is. I know it is. But everything that the gospel of Jesus Christ proclaims and promises to you and me is the opposite of rejection:

- **“God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting (our) sins against (us)”** (II Corinthians 5:19).
- **“For Christ suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteousness, to bring you to God”** (I Peter 3:18).
- **“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand”** (Romans 5:1-2).

Do you hear any rejection in those divinely inspired words of Holy Scripture? You are FREE, brothers and sisters in Christ, FREE from expecting to be rejected by God for your sins, because he rejected his only Son in your place for your sins. To assure you of this, don’t forget the blessed sacraments that God has given to you. Your baptism promises you that you are a precious child of God. The Lord’s Supper assures you that you are forgiven.

Do you see how this good news of Jesus Christ changes everything for you? **“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship”** (Romans 12:1).