

LOOK TO THE SYMPATHETIC JESUS

15 Very early in the morning the chief priests, together with the elders and scribes and the whole Sanhedrin, reached a decision. They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate. ²Pilate asked him, Are you the King of the Jews? He answered him, You[are correct in] saying so. ³The chief priests accused him of many things. ⁴Pilate again asked him, Do you make no reply? Look at all the things of which they are accusing you. ⁵But Jesus made no further reply; this caused Pilate to wonder. ⁶At the feast [Pilate] used to release for them one prisoner whom they requested of him. ⁷Now there was one named Barabbas, imprisoned with those men who had led an insurrection, and who in the insurrection had committed murder. ⁸The crowd went up and began to ask [Pilate to do] as was his custom to do for them. ⁹Pilate asked, Would you have me to release for you the King of the Jews? ¹⁰[He asked this] because he knew that it was out of envy that the chief priests had handed [Jesus] over to him. ¹¹But the chief priests incited the crowd to ask him to release Barabbas for them instead. ¹²Then Pilate asked them again, What then shall I do with him whom you call the King of the Jews? ¹³And they cried out again, Crucify him. ¹⁴Pilate said to them, Why, what crime has he committed? But they cried out vehemently, Crucify him.

¹⁵So Pilate, wishing to pacify the crowd, released Barabbas for them; and, after he had scourged him, handed Jesus over to be crucified. ¹⁶Then the soldiers led him away into the courtyard, (that is, the Praetorium) and called together the whole company of soldiers. ¹⁷They clothed him with a purple [robe], and weaving together a crown of thorns, they put it on him. ¹⁸Then they began to salute him, Hail, King of the Jews! ¹⁹They repeatedly struck his head with a rod, and spit upon him, and bowing their knees [before him], they worshiped him. ²⁰After they had mocked him, they took off the purple [robe] and put his own garments back on him. Then they led him out to crucify him. ²¹Now a certain man from Cyrene [named] Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country; [the soldiers] forced him to come with them, in order to carry [Jesus'] cross. ²²They brought him to the place called Golgotha, (which, being interpreted, means, The place of a skull). ²³They offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he refused to take it. ²⁴So they crucified him. Dividing his garments among themselves, they cast lots to determine what each one would take. ²⁵Now it was the third hour [of the day] when they crucified him. ²⁶The written notice of the charge against him read, THE KING OF THE JEWS. ²⁷Along with him they crucified two robbers; one on his right, and one on his left. ²⁸So the scripture was fulfilled, which says, And he was numbered with transgressors. ²⁹Those who passed by hurled insults at him, wagging their heads, and saying, Ha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, ³⁰save yourself, and come down from the cross. ³¹In the same way, the chief priests along with the scribes were also mocking him among themselves, saying, He saved others; [but] he cannot save himself. ³²Let the Christ, the King of Israel, now come down from the cross, so that we may see and believe. Even those who were crucified with him insulted him.

³³When the sixth hour [of the day] arrived, darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour. ³⁴At the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? (which, being interpreted, means, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?) ³⁵Some of those who were standing there, when they heard it, said,

Listen, he is calling for Elijah. ³⁶One man ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a rod, and offered it to [Jesus] to drink, saying, Leave him alone; let us see whether Elijah comes to take him down. ³⁷Then Jesus let out a loud cry and yielded up his spirit. ³⁸And the veil of the temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom. ³⁹When the centurion who was standing in front of [Jesus] saw how he had yielded up his spirit, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God. ⁴⁰There were also women watching from a distance; among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and Joses, and Salome. ⁴¹When he had been in Galilee, they had followed him and ministered to him. And many other women who had come up to Jerusalem with him were also present. (Mk. 15:1-41)

Introduction

Norma Sanders paced the floor—all alone, late at night. Earlier that evening her husband had sat across the kitchen table from her, his eyes averted. Finally, he said he must leave; he had some thinking to do. Norma knew there was something desperately wrong, but she could only wonder about the extent of the problem.

The next morning Norma asked her husband why he had gone out the night before, and what was the problem. He explained that he had “fallen in love” with a younger woman, and that he was leaving. Norma’s world crumbled. They had survived so many crises together: financial difficulties, family problems, major surgeries, how could he leave her now?

During the next few weeks when Norma witnessed other couples together it only reinforced the fact that she was alone. Norma was acutely aware that she was alone, rejected. She felt her entire life was over, that she had arrived at the end of the road.

We, too, may find that there are certain times in our lives when we experience rejection, when we feel that nobody understands and nobody cares—times when we feel isolated and all alone. This present passage of the Gospel of Mark reveals to us just such a time in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because our Lord Jesus Himself has experienced the absolute depths of rejection and isolation for our sake, we may look to Him with confidence that He understands and cares. In our times of rejection and isolation, we may look with confidence to the sympathetic Jesus.

I. If You Are Rejected by the Political Establishment, Look to the Sympathetic Jesus (Mk. 15:1-5)

Very early in the morning the Jewish leaders convened a special session of the Sanhedrin for the purpose of officially passing sentence against Jesus. (vs. 1) Having officially passed sentence against Him, they now bound Jesus and brought Him before the Roman governor. Before Pilate the Jewish leaders accused the Lord Jesus of many things, all in an effort to persuade the Roman governor to pronounce the death penalty (vs. 3.)

Perhaps you, too, have been the victim of “politics” at one time or another in your life. Maybe you did not get the job, even though you were the most qualified, because someone else had “connections” with the company’s officials. Maybe you did not get the promotion, although you were deserving, because of your Christian life and witness.

If you find yourself rejected by the political establishment, you can look to the sympathetic Jesus and be confident that He understands and cares; for He, too, was rejected by the political and religious establishment.

II. If You Are Rejected by the Very People of God, Look to the Sympathetic Jesus (Mk. 15:6-15)

Mark reports the custom that the Roman government had initiated with regard to the Jews: as a goodwill gesture, one prisoner was released at the time of the Passover (vs. 6.) Now, addressing the crowd that had gathered before him, Pilate asks, *“Would you have me release for you the King of the Jews?”* (vs. 9.) Pilate recognized that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered Jesus to him (vs. 10.) So he now seeks to take the matter directly to the people, being confident that they will choose to have Jesus released for them.

But the Jewish leaders had incited the crowd, persuading them to request the release of a revolutionary criminal named Barabbas (vs. 11.) Barabbas was a notorious prisoner (Matt. 27:16,) the equivalent of a modern day terrorist. Caught off guard by this unexpected turn of events, Pilate now asks the multitude, *“What then shall I do with him whom you call the King of the Jews?”* At this point in the proceedings Pilate dismissed Jesus as an idealist who posed no threat to Rome; an innocent man who was being victimized by the Jewish hierarchy who envied His popularity. In his effort to release Jesus, Pilate sees no harm in reminding the people that they have hailed Jesus as their king: *“What then shall I do with him whom you call the King of the Jews?”*

But back comes the response of the multitude incited by the chief priests, *“Crucify him!”* (vs. 13.) Pilate tries to reason with them, but to no avail, for by this time the crowd was on the verge of turning into a raging mob and the situation was rapidly getting out of the control of the Roman authorities (vs. 14.) Pilate, desiring to appease the multitude, acquiesces to their will: he releases Barabbas, and sentences Jesus to crucifixion.

Perhaps you have found yourself rejected by the very people of God at one time or another in your life. Maybe you experienced some form of prejudice within the church, which ought not to be: *“There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus”* (Gal. 3:28.) Maybe you experienced rejection because of your lack of social status, which ought not to occur within the church of Christ, as the Apostle James reminds us:

My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, do not practice favoritism. ²Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. ³If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, Here is a good seat for you, but say to the poor man, You stand there or Sit on the floor by my feet, ⁴have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? ... ⁸If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, Love your neighbor as yourself, you are doing right. ⁹But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. (Jas. 2:1-4,8-9)

Maybe you experienced rejection because of some past sin of which you have repented but that is still held against you, which should not happen within the church of Christ. Referring to the repentant brother, the Apostle Paul counsels the Corinthian church, *“you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow”* (2 Cor. 2:7.)

If you find yourself rejected by the very people of God, you can look to the sympathetic Jesus and be confident that He understands and cares; for He, too, was rejected by the very people of God.

III. If You Are Rejected by the World, Look to the Sympathetic Jesus (Mk. 15:16-32)

The Roman soldiers mocked the Lord Jesus, then beat Him, and finally led Him away to crucify Him (vs.16-20.) As Jesus hung upon the cross in the agony of an awful death, the soldiers callously sat at the foot of His cross and divided up among themselves whatever valuables He might have possessed (vs. 24.)

All those who passed by that way made it their business to pause long enough to hurl their own insults at our Lord as He hung upon the cross, displaying their contempt for Him (vs. 29-30.) Even the two criminals hanging on either side of Him, reproached Him, denouncing Him and insulting Him (vs. 32.) But note that as the one witnessed Jesus' conduct as the afternoon wore on and the hour of death approached, he had a change of heart and cried out to Jesus for salvation:

One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him, Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us! ⁴⁰But the other criminal rebuked him. Do you not fear God, he said, since you are under the same sentence? ⁴¹We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong. ⁴²Then he said, Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. ⁴³Jesus answered him, I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise. (Lk. 23:39-43)

At one time or another you, too, as a Christian will find yourself rejected by the world that is hostile to Christ and to the God of the Bible. Maybe your Christian beliefs have been ridiculed with contempt by a teacher at school before an

assembled class. Maybe you have been taken advantage of because you are a Christian, perhaps being assigned the worst jobs at work. Maybe you have been accosted by a self-centered, disappointed, misconceived neighbor who is angry with God for failing to do as he desired and who now vents his anger against you because you bear the name of Christ.

When you find yourself rejected by the world, you can look to the sympathetic Jesus and be confident that He understands and cares; for He, too, was rejected by the world.

IV. If You Feel that You Have Been Rejected by God, Look to the Sympathetic Jesus (Mk. 15:33-41)

The physical darkness that engulfed the land from the sixth hour (approximately noon) until the ninth hour (3 p.m. in the afternoon) testifies to the awful spiritual darkness our Lord Jesus Christ experienced in His soul during those hours. At the ninth hour Jesus cried out those awful words recorded in Mark 15:34, *“Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? (which, being interpreted, means, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?)”* This was the terrible experience of separation from God, the experience of hell itself; consider, also, Isaiah 53:4-6,

... we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. ⁵But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him ... Jehovah has laid on him the iniquity of us all. (Isa. 53:4-6)

Note that Jesus’ cry was unintelligible and misunderstood by the crowd (vs. 35)—all the more emphasizing the complete isolation experienced by the Lord Jesus. In that awful hour He was abandoned by God and no one could understand the horror He was undergoing.

Perhaps you, too, even as a Christian, have had times in your life when you have felt isolated from God. Maybe you have experienced an awful moment of darkness in your soul. The Christian who has the highest experiences of God’s glory seems also to be exposed to moments of deepest darkness; consider the testimony of the Apostle Paul: *“To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a stake in my flesh, a messenger from Satan, to torment me”* (2 Cor. 12:7.) Maybe you experienced a sense of isolation and felt rejected by God after having committed an especially defiant act of sin; although you expressed sorrow and repentance, you still felt separated from God. Such was David’s experience after his grievous sins against the LORD: *“I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. ⁴Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight”* (Psl. 51:3-4a.)

If you experience a time in your life when you feel that you have been rejected by God, you can look to the sympathetic Jesus and be confident that He understands and cares. He was rejected by God for our sake that we might be reconciled unto the LORD forever:

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. ¹⁴... he himself is our peace ... ¹⁸... through him we ... have access to the Father by one Spirit. (Eph. 2:13-14,18)

I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8:38-39)

Conclusion

Sometimes you may feel that nobody understands and nobody cares—you may feel like Norma Sanders, all alone. But Norma discovered that she was not alone: she found the LORD upholding her, providing for her, and graciously ministering His own presence to her. Norma testifies:

I thought I had arrived at the end of the road. In reality, it was not the end but a turn that brought me to a deeper commitment to God and His leading. There were times when I allowed bitterness to control my thoughts, actions and words. But God's Holy Spirit didn't permit me to dwell on these negative emotions. Most of my days have been bathed with joy and a deep inner peace. I was on my own, yet I was never alone, for God's presence surrounded me. His Spirit was in me and around me. (POWER, 2/11/90)

Christian, at those times in our lives when we experience rejection and the sense of being all alone, we may look with confidence to Jesus, knowing that He understands and cares. We may look with confidence to the sympathetic Jesus, because He Himself has experienced the absolute depths of rejection for our sake:

Cast all your care upon him because he cares for you ... ¹⁰... after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will personally restore you, support you, strengthen you, and establish you. ¹¹To him belongs the dominion forever. Amen. (1 Pet. 5:7,10-11)