



THE EASTER EXPERIENCE

“Why the People Rejected Jesus”

Matthew 27:22-23

March 13, 2011 P.M. Service

1. Jesus Claimed to Be God

- ✓ His Complete Fulfillment of Prophecies
- ✓ His Uncompromised Character
- ✓ His Miraculous Power
- ✓ His Avoidable Death
- ✓ His Verifiable Resurrection
- ✓ His Faithful Followers

2. Jesus Didn't Fit What They Wanted

- ✓ His Kingdom Was Spiritual, Not Political
- ✓ He Didn't Keep Their Religious Traditions
- ✓ He Associated With the Wrong People
- ✓ He Was a Threat to the Authority of the Religious Leaders

3. Jesus Demands Life Change

Our Response:

1. Tonight, do you realize who Jesus is and what He did for you on the cross? Have you given Him your heart and your life? It's as simple as ABC. **Admit** to God you are a sinner, **Ask** for His forgiveness, **Believe** Jesus is God's Son, **Confess** Him as Savior & **Commit** Your Life to Him as Lord. (the Boss of your life)
2. Have you asked Christ into you heart, but never made it public? Have you been baptized? If not, you can make that decision today and be obedient and follow through and become a part of the Bethsalem Family.
3. Do you need a church home – without one a Christian is an orphan. Don't just attend – step over the line today and join this family! We need you and you need us.
4. As we step back and look at who Jesus was and His claim to be God – we are amazed and realize that He was exactly who He claimed to be and did exactly what He said He would do! Aren't you glad? Where would we be without Him. May we thank Him this week by the way we live.
5. If we are not careful, Jesus won't fit into what our expectations of Him are – we don't get what we want; our prayers aren't answered like we would like; He doesn't fit into the box that we want Him to fit in. May we be reminded this week that we don't ask Him to fit into what we want, but ask Him to mold us into His image – to be more like Him
6. Are you and I surrendered to life change? Are we truly willing to respond to Christ's message of change in our daily life? May it be true in our lives!

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Rejection hurts. We certainly have all experienced that truth. Sitting by yourself in the lunchroom. Hoping not to be the last one chosen for the team at recess. Waiting on someone to invite you to the dance. Skipped over for a promotion at work. Not being invited out with some friends. Rejection really does hurt. Actually that’s a scientific fact. According to a Reuters’ article, that “kicked-in-the-gut” feeling that comes with rejection generates some physical symptoms.

The Old Testament prophet Isaiah predicted that the Messiah would be rejected by men. As Jesus was crucified He was dismissed by the soldiers and He was rejected by the people. In [Matthew 27](#) Jesus was brought before Pilate. After considering the accusations and talking to Jesus, Pilate couldn’t find anything to bring against Him. In verses [22–23](#) he asks the people the most important question that anyone will ever answer. “[What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?](#)” Pilate asked. They all answered, “Crucify him!” “[Why? What crime has he committed?](#)” asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, “Crucify him!”

Instead of answering this question for himself, Pilate did what many people do. He looked to the crowd to answer it for him. What did the majority of people think of Jesus? That’s how he would decide what to do with Jesus. Majority opinion may be a popular way to determine truth, but it certainly isn’t reliable. The majority once believed slavery was acceptable. The majority in Germany once supported Hitler. He asks the people what they want to do with Jesus and the people painfully reject Him. What is it that caused the people to reject Jesus?

You’ll notice that they really don’t give Pilate a reason. They just shout, “Crucify him!” So we’re left wondering why? Why was Jesus so rejected? As we answer that question, we discover that things haven’t really changed. Many people reject Jesus because:

1. Jesus Claimed to Be God

This claim infuriated the religious leaders. In [Matthew 26:59–61](#) it states:

The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death. But they did not find any, though many false witnesses came forward. Finally two came forward and declared, “This fellow said, ‘I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days.’” When Jesus had said this He of course was referring to destroying the temple of His own body, not the physical temple in Jerusalem. And in another three days His figurative language would become crystal clear. But such a statement, while raising a few eyebrows, certainly wasn’t cause for an arrest—let alone for death. Look at Matthew 26:62–66 Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, “Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?” But Jesus remained silent. The high priest said to him, “I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.” “Yes, it is as you say,” Jesus replied. “But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.” Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, “He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?” “He is worthy of death,” they answered. This is crucial to your understanding of Christianity. Christ’s claim that He was God was a bold statement. The high priest was correct in saying He was blaspheming *if* He wasn’t the Messiah. So in deciding what you will do with Jesus, you have to deal with His Divinity.

ILLUS: C. S. Lewis accurately describes our options in dealing with this question. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon; or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about him being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.

There were many places Jesus claimed to be Divine. In John 5:17 Jesus heals a lame man on the Sabbath and the Jews were quite upset with Him. Jesus said to them, “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working.” John 8:58 says: “I tell you the truth,” Jesus answered, “before Abraham was born, I am!”

In John 14:9 and 11: Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, “Show us the Father”? . . . Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves.”

In Matthew 16 Jesus is in a region called Caesarea Philippi and He asks a question to the disciples. In verse 13 He says, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” They share some of the different things that people have said. Then Jesus looks at them and asks, “Who do you say I am?” (v. 15).

Simon Peter answers without doubt or hesitation, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (v. 16). It’s difficult to understand this truth that God became flesh. Somehow Jesus was one hundred percent human and one hundred percent divine. Colossians 2:9 says, *For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.* So where do you stand on this? Is Jesus the Son of God? It’s the most important question you’ll ever answer. Though we only have time to touch on a few evidences for His Divinity, consider the following:

✓ **His Complete Fulfillment of Prophecies**

In Luke 24:44 Jesus said, “Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.”

The fulfillment of the prophecies identify Jesus as the Son of God. These fulfilled prophecies are as convincing as fingerprints or DNA. Prophecies like a virgin birth in Bethlehem, being crucified with robbers, before crucifixion had even been thought of, being buried in the tomb of a rich man; these prophecies reveal the divinity of Jesus.

But what if the fulfillments were staged?

Like the prophecy that states the Messiah will ride triumphantly into Jerusalem on a donkey? How hard is that? Couldn’t He have engineered His own crucifixion to fulfill prophecy? It’s true that a few of His prophecies could have been fulfilled intentionally, but not many. For example, the prophecy that says the Messiah will be born in Bethlehem. Or the one that says He will be betrayed for thirty pieces of silver.

Or the prophecy that says He will be of the line of David. Or the prediction men would gamble for His clothes after His death. And how could He have faked the prophecy that the Messiah will perform miracles when He was constantly surrounded by people who were trying to disprove Him?

But what if the fulfillments were coincidence?

ILLUS: Peter Stoner, a science professor, worked with six hundred students to calculate the mathematical probability of a number of Old Testament prophecies being fulfilled in one person. He concluded that the chances of Jesus fulfilling forty-eight of the prophecies: **One in ten to the 157th power.** Lee Strobel wanted to understand that number and so he called a scientist and asked, “How small is an atom?” The scientist said, “*An atom is so small that it takes a million of them lined up to equal the width of a human hair.*” Then Strobel asked, “Has anybody calculated the approximate number of atoms in the entire known universe?” And amazingly the answer was, “Yes.” Based on those numbers, Strobel concludes that the odds of Jesus fulfilling forty-eight prophecies would be the same as trying to find one specific, predetermined atom among a trillion, trillion, trillion, trillion, billion atoms spread out over our universe. So, these prophecies are like a fingerprint that only could match the Messiah—Jesus fulfilled them all.

✓ **His Uncompromised Character**

Usually, when you get to know someone you become more aware of their shortcomings. But the opposite was true of Jesus Christ. In fact, nobody was closer to him than Peter and John; listen to what they said: John said, “*In Him is no sin.*” Peter said, “*He committed no sin and no deceit was found in His mouth.*” So His character validates Him as the Son of God and gives credibility to His claim. He was the sinless Son of God!

✓ **His Miraculous Power**

Jesus said in John 10, “*Don’t you even believe me unless I do miracles of God?*” in other words, anyone can claim to be the Son of God but I have done miracles supernaturally to show you. And the miracles He worked weren’t done in secret. He did them in broad daylight. He did them in front of skeptics and cynics. As a matter of fact you can look in books of ancient history of the people who opposed Jesus Christ in ancient Jewish writing; they admit that Jesus did the miraculous. So His ability to do the miraculous further validates His claims of Divinity. John 10:25 says: “*The miracles I do in my Father’s name speak for me.*” John the Baptist wondered if He was the Messiah and Jesus answers Him clearly that He fulfilled the prophecy and also spoke of His miraculous power – Matthew

11:5 quoting Isaiah 35 “the blind receive sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up.”

✓ **His Avoidable Death**

Jesus speaks of His life in John 10:18. He said, “No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.” Remember what Jesus was on trial for. He was on trial for blasphemy. He could have avoided His death by simply saying He wasn’t the Son of God. He could have stopped the nails if He would have simply denied His identity as the God.

✓ **His Verifiable Resurrection**

In Acts 2:32 Peter said, “God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact.” He appeared to more than five hundred people. Remember what Thomas said when the other followers tried to convince him that Jesus had risen from the dead. He said, “*Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and . . . put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.*” He demanded proof. When he got it, he cried out “*My Lord and my God.*” Thomas understood that any man that walks out of his own grave is anything he says he is.

✓ **His Faithful Followers**

When Jesus died, nearly all the disciples abandoned Him. They were confused and terrified—they were afraid to die. All seemed lost. But after the resurrection, everything changed. They boldly and courageously told of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Not only that, reliable history tells us that the closest followers of Jesus were fully convinced of His Divinity. They not only taught it, but they died for it.

Matthew was killed by a sword in Ethiopia.

Mark died in Alexandria, Egypt, after being dragged by horses through the streets until he was dead.

Luke was hanged in Greece.

Peter was crucified upside down.

Thomas was stabbed with a spear in India during a missionary trip.

Jude, the brother of Jesus, was killed with arrows when he refused to deny his faith in Christ.

The people who knew him the best were fully convinced. Could it have been that they co-conspired to fabricate a myth about the resurrection of Jesus, and made an oath to each other: “Guys, let’s keep the gag going even if it kills us”? I don’t think so. See, there are a lot of people who

have died for the lies they believed were true. But no one dies for what they know is untrue. The disciples didn't just believe, they knew. They knew whether or not Jesus was the real deal and they were so convinced that nearly all of them died for it.

2. Jesus Didn't Fit What They Wanted

The Jewish people had been looking and longing for the Messiah. And they began to look for someone who could save them from their immediate circumstances. They were looking for a Savior who was going to bring peace and overthrow the Roman government. Many of the people rejected Jesus because He didn't fit their Messiah mold.

✓ His kingdom was spiritual, not political.

They wanted Him to bring a power that would conquer their enemies. Jesus said to Pilate in [John 18:36](#), “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my Kingdom is from another place.”

✓ He didn't keep their religious traditions.

He allowed the disciples to eat grain without washing their hands. He healed on the Sabbath. He was determined to show people that a relationship with God was not about legalistically following a list of rules.

✓ He associated with the wrong people.

He willingly accepted those whom society had rejected. In Christ's economy of things the misfits were just as high in the pecking order as the elite. He said the first shall be last and the last shall be first. He invested time with social misfits, the immoral, the uneducated, and the dishonest.

✓ He was a threat to the authority of the religious leaders.

On two separate occasions He cleansed the temple courts, driving animals and dishonest moneychangers out of God's house. It was a huge, profitable business, and yet with His authority He brought it to a screeching halt. The religious leaders would try to trap Jesus with some question they thought impossible to answer. And He would turn the tables on them and they would walk away feeling foolish and humiliated.

Jesus routinely called them out not just for their actions but for the condition of their hearts. In [Matthew 15:8](#) Jesus put it this way:

“These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.”

3. Jesus Demands Life Change

While Jesus freely offers grace and forgiveness, He also requires complete surrender to Him. In [John 8](#) Jesus was teaching a crowd early in the morning. We don't know what subject He was addressing. But His teaching was soon interrupted by a group of religious leaders. They brought a woman to Him who they said was "caught in the act of adultery." Caught in the act. There was no question of guilt. They tried to corner Jesus by asking, "What should we do to this woman?" If Jesus said to let her go He would be undermining the Law of Moses. If He said to stone her, then all His talk of forgiveness and grace would be just that, a lot of talk. Jesus answered the leaders by saying, "If any of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." One by one the leaders drop their stones and walk away. With eyes full of love Jesus says to this woman, "Neither do I condemn you." And the story ends with these words from Jesus: "Go now and leave your life of sin." Grace is given and change is expected. I've found that most people are all for Jesus as long as following Him doesn't require a change in their lifestyle. The people loved Jesus as long as He was making the lame to walk and the blind to see. But the crowds had a way of thinning out when Jesus would say things like, "If anyone would come after Me, he must take up his cross and follow Me." Jesus was constantly raising the bar when it came to our moral lives. He didn't water down the message in hopes that people would accept Him. He didn't just speak the comfortable truth. He spoke the whole truth. As a result many people rejected Him because too much change was necessary. I have found that people who reject Jesus often hide behind a variety of spiritual smokescreens. They may say things like— "*The Bible is full of contradictions.*" "*The church is full of hypocrites.*" They may even say, "*I don't believe Jesus is really God's Son.*" As those challenges are addressed they continue to find new ones. Eventually it becomes clear: they aren't rejecting Jesus because of some intellectual objection or theological hang-up. The reason they are rejecting Jesus is because they don't want to make the changes that come when Jesus is truly the Lord of your life. Rejection hurts. We've all experienced the truth of that. Garrison Keillor said he remembers the pain of rejection as a kid when two teams were choosing sides for baseball. He recalls the pain of being the skinny kid with glasses who was never chosen first or with much

enthusiasm. The cross is the ultimate symbol of being chosen. God hasn't rejected you. In fact, through Jesus He accepts you and welcomes you. And Scripture tells us that we love God because He first loved us. So how will you answer the ultimate question that Pilate asks? What will you do with Jesus?