

Rejected by his own

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[0 : 00] I'm going to read the Bible, so take out your devices or your Bibles and turn to Matthew chapter 13 verse 53.

If you haven't had a chance to see the visual summary by the Bible Project that we posted on Facebook this week, I encourage you to watch it. It's really great to get an overview of the first half of Matthew and the big themes there.

And now we've come to the middle of Matthew and Jesus has been teaching about the kingdom of God and he's been teaching in parables and also in miracles. So reading from verse 53.

And when Jesus had finished these parables, he went away from there. And coming to his hometown, he taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished and said, where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works?

Is this not the carpenter's son? Is his mother not called Mary? And are his brothers not James and Joseph and Simon and Judas?

[1 : 11] And are not all his sisters with us? When then, where then did this man get all these things? And they took offence at him. But Jesus said to them, a prophet is not without honour except in his hometown and in his own household.

And he did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief. At that time, Herod the Tetrarch heard about the fame of Jesus and he said to his servants, this is John the Baptist.

He's been raised from the dead. That's why these miraculous powers are at work with him. For Herod had seized John and bound him and put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife.

Because John had been saying to him, it's not lawful for you to have her. And though he wanted to put him to death, he feared the people because they held him to be a prophet.

But when Herod's birthday came, the daughter of Herodias danced before the company and pleased Herod. So he promised with an oath to give her whatever she might ask.

[2 : 24] Prompted by her mother, she said, give me the head of John the Baptist here on a platter. And the king was sorry, but because of his oaths and his guests, he commanded it to be given.

He sent and had John beheaded in the prison, and his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, and she brought it to her mother. And the disciples came and took the body and buried it, and they went and told Jesus.

Well, good morning, everyone. Yeah, a few years ago at Youth Group, we played a game that made me realise that I was officially old. Some of you may not think so, but the youth certainly think so.

I've handed over the old title to Matt Hand now, who's the youth claim. He's definitely in his late 30s. Anyway, we played this game where we had to identify these memes. I can't even describe a meme, because it's pictures and it's got a caption to it.

I was useless. I was absolutely useless. And I knew in that moment that I no longer fitted in, if I ever did, into cool, young society. I didn't fit in.

[3 : 44] I can live with that. But then there's been another moment where I've realised that I don't think I fit into society at all.

Well, not just cool, young society, but society generally. I read or listened to this book recently, and I know some of you have been reading it as well.

And I'm going to just read a few paragraphs from it and see if you have the sickening feeling that I experienced listening to this book. Because up until a couple of weeks ago, reading this book, I thought, as long as I live, I'm a respectable person in society, I live a respectable Christian life, okay, maybe people will find me weird, a bit odd.

Maybe they'll find me a bit rude if I bring up Jesus and God in conversation every so often. But overall, I'll fit in. Maybe a bit odd. Maybe a bit rude.

But then reading this book, *A Strange New World* by Carl Truman, our society thinks very differently to Christian belief.

[4 : 56] Now, it's talking, I think the transgender debate going on in sport. So think about that. That's in the media at the moment. So although it talks here about sexuality, please hear this quote saying the problem is a lot deeper than that.

So please, please understand that. So let me quote. So to tolerate somebody is by definition to disapprove of them, albeit in a rather passive way.

But it is also not to recognise them. It is not to affirm their identities as they wish to be affirmed. At best, it is to keep them in place as second class members of society.

This in turn explains why such things as cake baking has become so contentious. A Christian baker who refuses to bake a cake for a gay marriage celebration is doing so because her conscience would regard such an act as supporting a relationship that she regards as fundamentally immoral.

The gay couple, however, regard her refusal as a denial of their fundamental and constitutionally protected identities. Equality requires equal recognition of a kind that tolerance just doesn't provide.

[6 : 17] If we are, above all, what we think and what we feel and what we desire, then anything that interferes, that obstructs these thoughts and feelings and desires, it inhibits us as people.

It prevents us from being ourselves who we are convinced we are. A person who objects to homosexuality, he may think he is objecting to a set of sexual desires or sexual practices, but the gay man sees these desires as a part of who he is.

It is his very essence. So the old chestnut of love the sinner, but hate the sin simply does not work in a world where the sin is the identity of the sinner and the two can't be separated.

To hate the sin is to hate the sinner. But Christians who fail to note this are going to find themselves very confused by the incomprehension and indeed the easy offence taken by the world around them.

End quote. That was the moment I realised all my words of going, I believe you're made in the image of God. I just don't agree with what you're doing.

[7 : 30] That just, it won't be enough. They won't hear me loving if I say that. It will be deeply offensive to not affirm a person's identity.

So putting, in one sense this is nothing new, is it? It's a new cultural expression, but there's nothing new in a sense because when we say Jesus is Lord, that moves the centre of reality from ourselves.

So that's always been threatening. We've just got a new expression of it today. We can't be safe and accepted in this society.

So we're entering a new section of Matthew. The bulk of Matthew is made up of these five sections.

So you get this block of story or narrative and then it concludes with a block of teaching. So we're entering the narrative section again. And Matthew wants us to see something.

[8 : 38] I think there's lots of themes going on in this section, but I think he wants us to focus primarily on the goal of Jesus' mission. And I think these two stories that we're going to look at today are starting to prepare us for understanding why Jesus came.

We've got the two stories. Even those who knew him best took deep offence in him. He was rejected by his own.

And John's death is a foretaste of him dying at the hands of his own people. So I think these two stories are meant to kind of shock us and prepare us for understanding the goal of why Jesus came, to be rejected by his own.

So let's get into the first story. He comes to his hometown, Nazareth. Think Dungok. Like pretty small. That's probably offensive to speaking of offence, but if you come from Dungok, it's just...

Think Townworth. There you go. I can offend myself. This community grew up, a small community, and they didn't move around like we do today.

[9 : 53] Nowhere near to the same extent. They grew up with this young, prepubescent and then adolescent and then young adult Jesus up until he's 30 years old.

And now the famous son comes home. Now they could have celebrated him. Like sports stars, when they play in their hometown, the town rallies around them.

They celebrate them. So if Jesus was just claiming to be another rabbi, even if he was claiming to be the top rabbi, I reckon they would have celebrated him.

He would have put Nazareth on the map. At first they are astonished by what they see and what they hear, verse 44. Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works from?

They are astonished by... They're seeing, struggling to comprehend. What's the source? Who is the authority empowering this guy? And it's a very good question.

[10 : 58] It's not a wrong question to ask. It should have led them to faith, asking that question. They ask five rhetorical questions, all presuming the answer is yes.

Is not this the carpenter's son? Yes. Is not his mother called Mary? Yep. His brothers James and Joseph, Simon, Judas, his sisters with us? Where does this man get his authority from?

Some people today will use the excuse, we can't even know if Jesus really existed. These people back then, they lived with him. They lived with his brothers and sisters. They knew personally his mum and dad.

But Jesus sat in that very synagogue listening to the teaching. They didn't throw up that excuse. Others today, they use the excuse that Jesus adopted teaching from other people, other religions.

These people, they knew Jesus had no education. He was a carpenter's son. He did not have formal training like the Apostle Paul under Gamaliel. He did not have any education.

[12 : 12] They knew. He had no education. He was from a poor family, not royal family. His parents were ordinary. His brothers were ordinary. His sisters were ordinary.

And yet, this incredible teaching and these powerful works, where did they come from?

Now, what's their choice? I think it's the same choice for us today. Believe that he is unique and that he is sent by God as he claims or throw up some excuse. Find something about him to object to.

I can't see why familiarity with Jesus leads to their unbelief. I don't think it's the knowing him that leads to unbelief.

They know more than anyone else how ordinary his upbringing was. They know that. They were in a great place to realise if he's got this authority, it must have come from outside of him, somewhere from above.

[13 : 14] And I reckon their first-hand knowledge of him and his family would be a great starting point for trust in him. So I don't see how knowing him leads to unbelief.

This rejection must have been, from a humour point of view, just incredibly painful for Jesus. I heard this week of Christians who had to flee the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Imagine your own family reporting you to the Taliban because they found a Christian app on your phone. They would rather you imprisoned, maybe die, than keep owning you as part of the family, putting you outside, knowing that you might be hunted down.

That is pretty deep rejection. This must have been really painful. He knows firsthand this rejection.

And Jesus, he exposes why they are slow to trust him. So we've got that response. A prophet is not without honour except in his hometown and in his own household.

[14 : 39] We've got this same phrase in John's Gospel in Chapter 4, and I think it's interesting there that the context there is about the Samaritans. The Samaritans rally to Jesus, and yet the Jews don't.

And here in Matthew's Gospel, in this section that we're coming into, even the disciples are pretty slow to believe. Like, they confess Jesus to be Messiah. Next minute Jesus says, I'm going to die.

Peter goes, no way. They're slow to believe. There's one person who understands Jesus properly in this section, and it's a foreign Canaanite woman.

That is the highlight of this section in Matthew. So why did Jesus say this to them? A prophet is not without honour except in his hometown, his own household.

At first, I've always thought it's to console himself. It's kind of like, it's okay, Jesus. You're rejected here. Incredibly painful.

[15 : 41] But don't worry. Others will accept you. But that just, like, another thought. You think about that, that can't be right. An insecure person has to justify themselves saying to other people, he's not consoling himself.

So why did he say it to them? It must be for their sake. I think he's answering their question. Where did I get my wisdom and mighty works from? Can't you see I'm sent by God?

The obvious answer is I'm a prophet. Not just any prophet. A prophet like Moses, who was promised to come. I think the cause of their offence was they've always known him as this ordinary guy, but now his authority is demanding that they come under his authority.

They've got to treat him completely differently, submitting to his authority. I think that's where the offence is. It's not because he's familiar to them, but he's now saying, you need to come under my authority.

He had come to give them eternal life, but only, we've got in verse 58, he did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief. He had come to give them eternal life, and only a few people accepted him.

[17 : 03] So him not being able to do many mighty works, I'm going to quote Carson here just to explain that. The could not is related to Jesus' mission.

Just as Jesus could not turn stones into bread when he was being tempted in the wilderness, that would be violating his mission. So he could not do miracles indiscriminately without turning his mission into a sideshow.

The lack of faith of the people was doubtless a source of profound grief and frustration for Jesus, rather than something that stripped him of power. So I think what's going on, if Jesus had just done miracles without people depending on him, coming to him in faith, that would be suggesting that you can have life outside of coming to Jesus, and that would not be a loving thing to do, because it's just not true.

Another thought is, maybe he didn't do the miracles so he didn't add guilt to their unbelief. It would have made them more guilty. So, I can't think of a more devastating story of rejection than his own people, his own family.

Now, James comes to believe after the resurrection, but his own family at this point, his own community, don't believe. Isn't it the people closest who can hurt us the most?

[18 : 33] They saw God with their eyes, they heard him with their ears, with Jesus in front of them. His power, his word, his character. They got a foretaste of him, but they didn't embrace him.

I think Matthew is preparing us for what Jesus came to do, to be rejected by his own people. God came to his own, and his own didn't receive him. I find it super encouraging that Jesus actually went to Nazareth.

He would have known the rejection that was awaiting him. He would have entered it willingly, as painful as it was. And why did he do it? To give them eternal life.

He entered that town knowing he would be rejected, but he did it out of compassion. Then we're shown this next story, this gruesome end to John the Baptist.

King Herod offers his opinion about who Jesus is. John risen from the dead, which just seems to be this superstitious belief. And then verse 3, we're kind of like, the camera fades, the tone of the scene changes.

[20 : 00] We're going back in time a few months. I'm wondering why verses 3 to 12, why do we have this long description of John's death?

It seems to be taking the spotlight off of Jesus for a time. It seems to wreck the flow. It could have been summed up in one sentence.

But we've already seen in Matthew's Gospel how closely John and Jesus are tied. John was the forerunner of Jesus, pronouncing that the kingdom of heaven is at hand. You need to repent.

And then Jesus himself comes under his baptism, identifying with sinful Israel, taking on their sin. So these guys are linked. Their ministry is linked.

Jesus has already said in Matthew's Gospel that John is the Elijah that was promised to come before the great day of the Lord. And it's interesting because here we've got someone who's very similar in character to King Ahab and Jezebel.

[21 : 03] You've got a weak leader and you've got this ruthless wife. Both wicked. I'm not sure what the implication of that is, but it's interesting that they had similar experiences.

So John is at the end of this long line of prophets who have died at the hands of God's people. He's at the end of a long line.

But it's not the end of the line. He is the bridge into Jesus' ministry. He is the forerunner of the suffering of Christ. And then Christ tells his disciples, follow me, take up your cross.

There's this long line of suffering prophets and then it prepares us for Christ's own suffering, his own mission to come and suffer and die.

So getting into the story a bit, Herod was a tetrarch. So there was four kings in that region. That's what that means. So Rome split up the power. Now, Galilee and Perea was his jurisdiction.

[22 : 13] So John and Jeze's ministry was under Herod's jurisdiction. And apparently his court was known for just being wild and lawless, like not trying to follow God's law.

And then he does something just incredibly politically and morally, religiously scandalous. He takes his own brother, who is still living, as his wife.

So divorce, not just the divorce, but taking that wife. And that wife came from the neighbouring, she was the daughter of the neighbouring official.

I should probably read my notes. The king of the Nebuchadnezzar. It eventually led to war, but the Romans came and saved Herod's...

Saved Herod. So John was crying out like the prophets of old. The prophets were above the kings in terms of authority.

[23 : 18] And then Herod puts him in prison because of it. He wants to continue his lawless living. Let's not be confused here.

Verse 5 tells us plainly what Herod wanted to do with John. He wanted to put John to death. But he feared the people because they held him to be a prophet. And then in a drunken, probably drunken, birthday party in front of his important guests, Herodias' daughter, probably 12 to 14 years old, danced and pleased Herod in the crowd.

And pretending to be some great monarch, he publicly promises up to half the kingdom. He shouldn't have given the oath and he shouldn't have followed through on the oath even more.

But he feared those important people in front of him. He feared the crowd because the crowd held John to be a prophet. But in that moment, he feared his guests even more.

He didn't want to come across as some weak ruler, not coming through with his oath. I think we've watched too many movies.

[24 : 31] And this whole idea of beheading is not gruesome enough, I thought. But as John serves coffee this morning, just imagine my head next to those coffees.

Someone's not liking what I'm saying. And so they cut off my head and put it on a silver platter. It's a gruesome picture.

This is the greatest prophet, Jesus has said. And Herod has just cut off the mouthpiece of God's head.

Like Jesus, there's no legal trial here. There is no justice. And like John, Jesus' execution comes from a leader who gives in to the crowds.

I think we're just being painted here that John is a forerunner for Jesus' suffering so that we can understand his suffering when we see it. I think the most disturbing detail in this story is what isn't said.

[25 : 42] God could have struck down Herod like he does in Acts. He could have struck him down before he had the chance to do this and save his prophet.

He could have opened the prison cell doors like he does in Acts. But he doesn't. What is Jesus doing? We're not told. I think what we're not told is some of the most disturbing part of this.

This was no mere accident on God's watch. It must have grieved God's heart and yet it was God's will for John to die like this.

It prepares us for that greater injustice, that greater will of God, that he sent his son to experience this same kind of fate. It was God's will, God's plan for his son to be rejected by his own people, even at the point of death.

Why would God do that? Well, with Herod, we get an insight into his motives for why he did it.

[26 : 52] And I think that helps us examine our motives and how we can be reluctant to put our trust in Jesus. We're told he feared the crowd, he feared the people, and he wanted to avoid being ashamed before his guests.

Herod believed that people could give him the respect and the admiration and the love and acceptance he craved. And I think the great irony is that as lawless as Herod was, the Pharisees who were obsessed with keeping the law had more in common with Herod than they did with the prophets.

We get later in the Gospel, in chapter 22, they're attacking Jesus and they're questioning where his authority has come from. And listen to what happens.

Jesus goes, or answered this question first. The baptism of John, where did it come from? From heaven or from man? And they discussed it among themselves, saying, If we say from heaven, he will say to us, Then why didn't you believe in him?

But if we say from man, we are afraid of the crowd. For they all hold that John was a prophet. So they answered Jesus, We don't know. For as much as they think they're obeying the law of God, really they're acting in fear of people.

[28 : 15] Wanting the praise of people. Like we heard in the Sermon on the Mount, they practice their religion for the audience of others. Whether someone is lawless or trying to be law-keeping, if they're doing that for the praise of people, they're not serving God.

And it's actually that seeking that praise from people is a huge barrier to putting our trust in Jesus. It's a huge barrier to living a faithful life, wanting to please God the Father.

Jesus points this out pointedly in John chapter 5. He says, How can you believe when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes only from God?

We might think that this is a problem for timid people, being people pleasers, but this was a problem for Peter.

He was a bold person. And what do we see him doing at the end of the Gospel? Before a servant girl, he's denying Christ. He's saying an oath. He's calling curses down on himself.

[29 : 27] I do not know Jesus. This is Peter, the one who speaks before he thinks. This is all of our problem. Whether we're people pleasers or really bold and rash, we can all be seeking the praise of others.

So can I pause and let us reflect on where in your life you are seeking the acceptance of people? And remember, I'm asking this because it can be a huge barrier to us putting our trust in Jesus.

I think we should look for where we feel compelled to act in a certain way. Look at areas of our life where we don't even ask the question whether it pleases God or not, because it's going well for us.

We don't even ask the question. We don't care. I think we should look for areas in our life where we feel trapped by the opinion of a person, as if somehow that person is making us respond in a certain way.

I think all those things are indicators that we actually think those people can give us the praise and glory we seek. So to use a book titled by Edward Welch, When People Are Big, God Is Small, which makes it a massive barrier to trust in Christ and a massive barrier of living for Christ and stepping out in risk.

[31 : 02] I'm going to share a few things that Welch says in his book to help us understand just a little bit more how this works. He says this, We fear people because they can expose and humiliate us.

They can reject and ridicule or despise us. They can hunt, attack or threaten us. And then he says this. I think this is the key. People are our idol of choice.

So when we think idolatry, we often think money. He's claiming people are our idol of choice. We worship them as ones who have God-like exposing gazes.

We worship them as having God-like ability to fill us with esteem and love and admiration and acceptance and respect. Other psychological desires.

And the whole strategy backfires. We never expect that using people to meet our desires leaves us enslaved to them. In the biblical sense, what we fear shows our allegiance.

[32 : 04] It shows where we put our trust. It shows who is big in our lives. So how do we fix this?

What's the remedy for this? How do we make Jesus big and put people's opinions in their proper place? I think it's by looking for our safety and acceptance, not in other people, not even in our own people, whether that's family or our own community.

Not looking for our safety and acceptance in people, but looking for it in the one who is rejected by the whole world. It seems counterintuitive.

The one who is rejected, that is the one we will find. Our acceptance. If you knew everything about me, you would probably find reasons to avoid me.

You'd find reasons to cut me off. I wouldn't blame you. But that's not the case with Jesus. His character, his truthfulness, the gracious words out of his mouth, the fact that he puts his life on the line, he knowingly moves towards our rejection so that he can give us life.

[33 : 28] Everyone should accept this man. He deserves full acceptance. I think we read this story of being rejected at Nazareth and like, okay, other people who reject Jesus.

How are they rejecting this man? He's God in the flesh. We need to look for our acceptance in him.

And I think key to it is owning our rejection of him. Owning the fact that we can be hesitant to trust him. Owning and confessing the fact that we can fail to see him as big as he is.

Owning the fact that we seek praise from others instead. But then we need to see his great compassion. He doesn't cut us off for that like other people would.

He moves towards us. He moves towards our rejection of him. Willingly being cut off, not only by his own people, but as we learn later on, even cut off by God the Father.

[34 : 36] He moves towards our rejection. And he gets cut off so that we might come to share the acceptance he has by God the Father. Fully filled with total love, total acceptance, total safety, that he enjoys for eternity.

If we see Jesus like that, then we see him as big as he is. And people will be put in their place. Then we can follow him as he calls us to take up our cross and willingly risk rejection by our own people so that they might know the acceptance that we have found in God and Christ.

We'll only do that if we see Jesus as big. We'll only do it if we feel how fully and permanently we are safe in him.

We'll only do it if we don't actually see it as shameful to be rejected by people. That's actually sharing in our Messiah's suffering.

It's not shameful if we're seeking their eternal good. So I don't think I belong in this society that rejects God.

[35 : 59] And I don't think we're meant to. The Bible is very clear on it, isn't it? There is no safe haven on earth if you're a follower of Christ. With everyone backing their own opinion rather than submitting to Jesus' wisdom, with everyone seeking affirmation from people rather than from God, you cannot live a godly life in Christ Jesus and expect to be safe and belong.

But in Jesus' rejection, we have full acceptance. In him, we have full safety. And that's when we can have the resources to risk our lives for the sake of others and follow him.

We need to find in him, in his rejection, full acceptance by God. So let's see God as big and people as needing to see God and Jesus as big.

Will you pray with me? Let's pray. Father, I pray that your words would sink deep into our hearts, that you would help us to celebrate just how loving you are, that you have moved towards us, that you sent your son knowing that he would be rejected by the entire world, ourselves included.

But you did it. You did it. Because you are that kind of God who loves out of your freedom to love. Help us to see just how incredible you are that you have loved us in this way.

[37 : 48] And I pray, Lord, that you would help us to be satisfied in the safety that we have in Jesus, that we are fully accepted by you, our Father in heaven.

Please help us to know we belong to you so that we might risk our lives for the sake of others who need to come and see you for who you are.

In Jesus' name I pray. Amen. Amen. Amen.