

March 25, 2026 – Hebrews 2:1-12 & Mark 8:31-9:1

*“The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected.”* Rejected. That's the word that Jesus uses in our Gospel lesson today. And it's a strong word. You don't reject someone accidentally. Rejection implies that what you've said has been heard and considered carefully and found wholly unacceptable.

Jesus will be rejected. He will be rejected by the elders. Rejected by the chief priests. Rejected by the scribes. Those three groups are, in many ways, the very people who should recognize Him. The very people entrusted with the Scriptures that testify about Him.

They will hear Him. They will consider His words carefully. And they will cast Him aside. They will condemn Him. They will kill Him. They must kill him. That's what Jesus says. He must suffer. He must be rejected. He must be killed.

He's talking about his crucifixion, of course. But in some ways that rejection has already begun. Right here, in fact, Peter takes Him aside and rebukes Him. Peter, who just confessed Him as the Christ. Who has walked with Him, listened to Him, and seen His power.

Peter accepts that Jesus is the Christ, but then he rejects what Jesus has to say. He rejects the very mission for which He has come. And Jesus makes very clear that this is an impossible position to take. *“Get behind me, Satan,”* He tells Peter. To reject the suffering Christ is to reject the Christ altogether.

This isn't the first time Jesus will deal with rejection. It won't be the last. This is a repeating theme in His ministry, from the very beginning. Over and over again, Jesus is rejected. Rejected not because He's evil, but because He's good. He's not cast out because He harms people. He's cast out because He reveals the truth about them. You see it again and again throughout the Gospel of Mark.

Early on in His ministry, He heals a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath. A good work. A merciful work. A divine work. And what's the response? The Pharisees go out and immediately hold counsel with the Herodians against Him, contemplating how to destroy Him. They want to destroy Him... for healing someone.

The same thing happens when Jesus casts out demons. How do the scribes respond to this amazing act of God? They say, *“He is possessed by Beelzebul.”* They take the work of God and call it the work of Satan. Their hearts are so hardened against the truth, they convince themselves that Satan could actually cast out Satan.

When Jesus is caught in a storm with His disciples, they come to Him for help. *“Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?”* But then when He gives them that help, how do they respond? Mark says they are terrified of him. *“Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him,”* they ask each other.

Last week, we heard about the man possessed by a legion of demons, freed from their control when Jesus sent the demons into a herd of pigs, which then promptly drowned themselves in the sea. What we didn't hear was what happened immediately after that. How the herdsmen who owned those pigs begged Jesus to leave because they cared more about protecting their livelihood than seeing the saving work of God in their midst.

And then the people of Jesus' hometown, among His own people, those who knew Him growing up, take offense at Him. *“Is this not the carpenter?”* they ask. And they reject Him.

The pattern is clear. The crowds follow Him when He feeds them, when He heals them, when He amazes them. But when His teaching becomes hard, when He speaks of suffering, of the cross, of losing one's life, the enthusiasm fades. The numbers thin. The excitement turns to confusion, then to resistance, then rejection.

Even His own disciples struggle. They argue about who is the greatest. They misunderstand His teaching. They resist His path. Again and again, He speaks of His coming suffering, and again and again, they fail to grasp it.

Why? Because holiness confronts sin. Because goodness exposes evil. Because the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness does not overcome it, but it certainly fights against it.

This is the nature of sinful humanity. It was the nature of Galilee and Judea at the time of Jesus. And it's the nature of Boonville, MO today. It was the nature of Jesus' disciples then. And it's the nature of Jesus' disciples now.

Hebrews warns us at the beginning of our lesson, *“We must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.”* That's our sinful nature in a nutshell. We don't drift towards Christ. Even as Christians, we don't drift towards him. Our sinful inclination, without the working of God's Word in our lives, is always to drift away. To reject the one who has come to save us.

And like all those people who rejected Jesus in the Bible, we don't drift away from Christ because He's evil. We drift away from Him because He tells us the truth. Because He calls us to repentance. Because He says, *“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”*

And we would much rather keep our lives. Our control. Our comfort. Our sin. And so we push back. We drift away. And, if we're not careful, we drift straight into a life that doesn't have any place within it for God's Word anymore.

Maybe the two stories of rejection in the Gospels that are the hardest to hear are the ones that were the closest to Christ. Judas, one of the twelve. Chosen, like all the other disciples. Sent out. Given authority. He walks with Jesus, hears His teaching, sees His miracles.

And yet, in the end, he betrays Him. And for a really pathetic reason. He betrays him for silver. For money. For the very treasure that Jesus warned time and time again was not worth chasing after.

And then there's Peter. Peter, who confessed Him as the Christ. Peter, who promised, *“Even though they all fall away, I will not.”* Peter, who swore loyalty unto death. And yet, when the moment comes, when the danger is real, Peter denies Him. Not once. Not twice. But three times. *“I do not know this man of whom you speak.”*

Jesus is rejected by enemies. Rejected by the crowds. Rejected by His own disciples. Jesus is rejected by everyone. He is abandoned. Betrayed. Denied. Mocked. Beaten. Crucified.

Why? Hebrews tells us, *“It was fitting that he... should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.”* *“He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source.”*

He descends into rejection so that He may lift us up into holiness. He is cast out so that we may be brought in. He is treated as unclean so that we may be made clean. He is denied so that we may be confessed. He is rejected by men so that we may be accepted by God.

*“He is not ashamed to call them brothers.”* He is not ashamed to call us brothers. Us, in all of our sin. Our weakness. Our denial. Our betrayal. Our drifting. Our rejection. If anyone had reason to be ashamed, it would be Jesus being ashamed of us.

And yet, He's not. He takes on flesh and blood. He calls us His own. He joins Himself to us so completely that our shame becomes His, and His righteousness becomes ours. He stands in the place of the rejected so that the rejected might be restored. This is the great and blessed exchange of the Gospel.

And this is why He says so clearly in Mark. *“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”* To follow Him is to follow the rejected Christ. And it's not a path of glory in the eyes of the world. It's not a path of ease or comfort or constant affirmation. It's the same path that Jesus walked to Calvary for us.

Because the world hasn't changed. The same holiness that provoked rejection then still provokes it now. The same truth that exposed sin then still exposes it now. The same Christ who was cast out then is still unwelcome wherever His Word is preached. And so, to follow Him is to share, in some measure, in that rejection.

But thankfully, though His rejection leads to death, it also leads to resurrection. And so will yours. *“Whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.”* That is His promise to you.

And so, Hebrews is absolutely right. Pay close attention to what you have heard. Deny yourself and take up your cross and follow him as closely as you can. For He is the founder of your salvation. And though it may be through suffering, He is making you perfect and bringing you to glory. Amen.