

Title: Just Jesus!!

I am not sure how many of you have seen all of the Marvel cinematic universe movies starting with *Technically the Incredible Hulk* with Edward Norton and ending with *Avengers Endgame*. If you weren't aware that is a total of 23 movies over the course of 11 years. It is literally like a TV series in movie form. It is incredible. You get to see these characters develop and the story leading you to this crazy battle. Don't worry, if you haven't seen it I won't give any spoilers.

Everything from the "Incredible Hulk" in 2008 to "Avengers Endgame" 2019, had to have been so thought out and precise. The creators had to know where they wanted to take the story and bring the audience along over the course of an 11-year journey. What does this have to do with Mark 15?

Much like the Marvel cinematic universe, but on a much larger scale, God had been taking his people on a journey of over 2000 years all to point to this moment in Mark 15.

You see God created all things and made man in his image. However, man turned their back on God. As soon as that happened, sin came into the world and separated us from God. God's people were now distant from Him. We were unclean, deserving of death and needed to be rescued. God knew what would need to happen. An ultimate sacrifice to satisfy and complete the law. Something that would allow Him to rescue His people forever. That Plan was Jesus.

The Gospel of Mark focuses on the person of Jesus. We have seen throughout this series how captivating Jesus is for how he loves, challenges and engages with those around him. How he is willing to save each of us. That His pursuit is out of love. He is obedient to the point of being betrayed and willingly brought before those who hate him. Mark 15 leads us to the point in time all creation has been waiting for. This is the part that the whole Bible has been leading up to, so as Dr. Strange said in *Avengers Infinity War*: we're in the endgame now.

God has an endgame to relate to us though we are unclean and deserving of death - Jesus willingly and lovingly sacrifices himself. Through some characters Mark shows us how everything that happens is the fulfillment of God's plan. The Setting: Jewish Passover. Everyone is here. It is the biggest Jewish event of the year. The characters: Religious leaders (they hate Jesus), Pilate (local governor), Barabbas (violent criminal), Jesus (Son of God), Centurion (assigned Roman soldier in front of Jesus).

Last week Daniel showed us how Jesus willingly went with the guards to go before the religious leaders, who did not understand who Jesus is. They know the law, practice it, live it out and know scripture inside and out but they cannot save themselves. They will never be clean before God. Their lack of understanding is why they brought Jesus to Pilate and is demonstrated in verse 31 where they mock Jesus for saving others but is unable to save himself. The religious leaders hated Jesus for telling them that they were wrong, because of this hate, their "endgame" was to have Jesus killed. They couldn't accept the fact that they needed Jesus to save them. How could they? After all they followed all the rules and laws and were righteous in their own eyes. Jesus willingly sacrificed himself to save everyone because we cannot do it ourselves. There was a time when I thought I was right and thought I knew how to live a "good life". Even as a Christian I thought it was OK to drink and party, and still say I believed in God; However, I never actually wanted him to rescue or transform me. How wrong I was because I wasn't willing to sacrifice my worldly pleasures. Aren't we all like the religious leaders who thought they could save themselves but ended up hating Jesus, the servant King, because He wants to save us from ourselves. What are you unwilling to give up in order to let Jesus save you?

In order to get rid of this man they hated, for wanting to save them, the religious leaders take Jesus to Pilate who has the authority to do what is unlawful for the them.

Pilate is the roman governor of that area and has judicial authority over Jesus' fate. Jesus willingly put himself in Pilates hands by voluntarily going with the guards earlier. Pilate begins to question Jesus and asks "Are you the king of the Jews?" Jesus responds wisely by saying You have said so. Then while all the accusation are flying at Jesus He remains silent and amazes Pilate in verse 3. Silence serves the speaker. To be silent is not lying it is a choice to not reveal. By not offering a defense it amazes Pilate and also shows Jesus putting Himself in Pilates hands. Guilty men confess to avoid more punishment and innocent people usually defend themselves to prove their innocence. Jesus does neither and willingly allows Pilate to choose his fate. It says in verse 10 Pilate even perceives that Jesus was arrested out of envy. Pilate sees an innocent man before him. However innocent Jesus was, Pilate caves to the pressure of the religious leaders and the crowd to have Him executed. Pilate couldn't accept the truth of who Jesus is because of the social cost. He sees Jesus as good and right but still doesn't choose Him. Have you ever caved to not sharing Jesus or talk about Him because of those around you? If you aren't willing to give up what others think about you, can you truly follow Christ? When I decided to give up my worldly pleasures of drinking and partying, I lost all my friends. They all Made accusations that I was only taking advantage of them and many other things. I Finally decided it isn't worth it and to follow Christ. My way wasn't working. I was so miserable and saw how futile it was and finally willing to give it up no matter what it cost. Pilate was not there yet. He wasn't willing to let Jesus go because of the cost.

Pilates "endgame" to be done with this whole situation was to put Jesus into the hands of the people, which is customary for this time of year, the passover, as we see in verse 6.

We see the choice in verse 7 between Barabbas, a known revolutionary and murderer during an uprising, and Jesus, whom is perceived as innocent yet still hated. The religious leaders wanted their endgame to be completed so they stir up the crowd. The guilty person deserving of death for his crimes is set free. There was nothing he had to do but walk away. This is the picture we get of who Jesus is when we believe in Him. He takes our place and the punishment that each of us deserve. We are all Barrabbas! We are guilty and ready to be sentenced to death until Jesus intervenes and takes our place. I do wonder what did happen to Barabbas after this. Did it change him at all knowing someone died for him to be set free? We do not know his response to what Jesus did. You have a chance to respond. You are guilty and deserve death but Jesus wants to rescue you! Are you willing to let Him? The result of Jesus' obedience to go through this sham of a trial allows Barabbas — YOU — to be set free. Jesus set me free from a life that once was comfort of drink and parties but now He is my comfort. He is the one who set me free and it makes me want to live for Him even more.

Jesus' loving, willingness and obedience leads him to be beaten and flogged. I mean brutally, painfully beaten, and all while being innocent. This is one of the biggest injustices that has ever happened and yet Jesus did it for you! He was mocked with the title and crown and robes that were deserving. Verse 20 says that WHEN they had mocked Him they tore off the purple robes, put his clothes back on and took him to be crucified. Jesus is the King but a king who suffered. He suffered as a criminal to bear the punishment of sin. This is why He was beaten so YOU could be set free. This is God's endgame plan from the beginning. To bear the punishment we can't so that we can be with Him. The punishment, beatings and whippings, made Him too weak and exhausted to carry His own cross as was normally required. He still needed to be crucified. His punishment wasn't over. Verse 21 "A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross." Could you imagine being Simon? Probably not how he thought his day would go.

This allows God's plan to keep moving forward. After all in order for this plan to work Jesus had to die! In verse 23 Jesus refuses wine mixed with myrrh, a sedative, to demonstrate His willingness to undergo maximum suffering. Although Jesus is innocent, He is given a criminals death. Verse 27 says "They crucified two rebels with Him." On the cross His charge was "King of the Jews". Marks wants us to know He died like any other criminal on the cross.

In this moment we see the three groups that have been mentioned before. The followers who are hopeful, the crowds who are expecting, the opposition is antagonizing all in the hope of one last miracle. If He is the Son of God then surely God wouldn't want Him to die? God would want to save Him. How selfish they are in thinking it is about them and the internal focus. It has always been about everyone else. God loves us so much He is willing to have His son die for our sake and to be the fulfillment of God's plan. The transformation of Christ in our life comes when we realize that our life is not ours but a gift from God which He paid for. Most people know the saying you only live once, well have you ever thought that you will only die once too? We won't live for ever, if we are going to die, why not trust in Jesus who has already died for you, me everyone.

Jesus had now been on the cross for about 3 hours now, darkness has fallen. Jesus cries out "*Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?*" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?") Jesus is quoting Psalm 22:1. In this moment Jesus is taking on the sin of all mankind. He is the one being separated from God so that we can become close to Him. This is the endgame and has always been. This is what has been planned for over 2000 years. This is why Jesus came, not to save himself but to save everyone else. Nothing was going to stop Him from accomplishing it. Jesus lovingly, willingly sacrifices His relationship with God so that we can have the relationship we were meant to have from the beginning.

In this moment darkness thinks it has won by having the Son of God killed. It thinks they have overcome the light of the world. How often does it seem that we are defeated? Darkness, hopelessness, and loneliness, seem like the only way to live. Well that is why Jesus died. So that we will always have light, hope, and relationship in Jesus. I drank and partied to fill a void in my life. I could never fill the void with anything. God had to be the one to replace my emptiness with His fullness. Let Him fill you up. Do not let darkness think it was one because it hasn't.

At the same time that Jesus breathed His last, the curtain in the temple was torn. This curtain had represented our separation from God. This is what God has been trying to restore. Our relationship with Him. The first person to realize the separation from God was no more was the centurion. Our final character.

He has been front row center to God's endgame to rescue all mankind. Verse 39 "When the centurion, who stood there, saw how He died, he said "Truly this man was the Son of God." In this moment as an outsider, as a guard on duty for this crucifixion, an unworthy nobody, who helped crucify Jesus, recognized that Jesus had died for HIM!! He gets it. There wasn't anyone evangelizing to him or preaching at him. There was no alter call at this moment. He saw the brutality of what Jesus went through, played a role in even, and saw the Son of God. He saw Jesus willingly, lovingly, taking the punishment of death we all deserve so that we could be back in the presence of our creator once again.

You see, it doesn't matter how good or bad you are, how much fame, fortune, knowledge and degrees you have, you cannot save yourself. It is impossible. There is no void in our life that we can fill ourselves, believe I have tried! I know first Hand how Jesus death is enough! Let it be enough for you! He did it for us, to save us. Let Him save you as He did me. Don't be pressured by what others say around you. Once all my friends were stripped away and I found

a local church God gave new friends to walk me through a true relationship with Him. I was finally able to Enjoy the access God has given through Jesus! You can too!

We have seen how the religious leaders had knowledge, power, prestige yet do not want to be saved and want to save themselves. We have seen how Pilate lets an innocent man be sent to death row because he caved to the pressures around him, we have seen how Barabbas has been set free because Jesus willingly went with the crowds who first captured Him. We saw how the centurion, the most unlikely of people, was the first one to see Jesus for who He is.

This is EXACTLY what God had set out to do, for His son to die for each of us.. Now that he has done it, it is up to each of us to respond. Wether for the first time or to remind ourselves of how to live for Him. How to choose Him each and every day to lay down how we think should be and seek him and His ways. This may have been the Endgame to rescue all mankind but this is not the end. Death is not the end. On that cliffhanger, lets pray.