

Jesus was killed by people who looked, sounded, and acted an awful lot like me.

Have you ever noticed that before? If you read any one of the gospels it very quickly becomes clear that the people who hated Jesus the most, the bad guys in the life of Jesus were people who looked, sounded, and acted like me – it was church people.

It wasn't like some weirdo cult leaders getting people to commit suicide so they could hop on the tail of a passing comet that had a problem with Jesus.

It wasn't the atheists or skeptics that tried to throw Jesus off of a cliff.

It wasn't Muslims or Zeus worshipers that plotted to kill him.

Yes, all of those people would eventually have a problem with Jesus' teaching and his disciples, but the hatred started with prayer-praying, offering-giving, Bible-reading church people. People who claimed to love the God of the Bible, who dedicated their lives to following the God of the Bible were the ones who first tried to throw him off a cliff in Nazareth (like we read about today), and those same types of people eventually succeeded in hanging him from a cross.

Jesus was killed by church people – people like me.

That is a truth that is hard to wrap my head around. It has some challenging implications... because if prayer-praying, offering-giving, Bible-reading, church-going people could do it then, could the same happen today? Is there some fundamental difference between faithful God-worshipers when Jesus walked this earth and faithful God-worshipers today that make it so we can ignore the comparisons? Or, do the similarities mean there are some uncomfortable truths about our hearts that we need to confront today?

I think that all of us here today would like to think that we are not like that crowd in Nazareth – if Jesus showed up here today and preached a sermon we assume that we wouldn't get so mad that we form a mob, walk him to the quarry and try to pitch him off the edge. We love Jesus! We'd never do that to him! Sure there are some similarities, but there has to be some important differences, right?

So, can we just dismiss this account? This section of Luke has something to say to other people who don't love Jesus, but not us, right?

The challenging part is this: I am convinced that we have more in common with that angry mob than most of us feel comfortable admitting.

To some of you it might even sound offensive for me to suggest that you have something in common with that mob. You love Jesus. You love God. You love his Bible. And some of you have life-times, decades of dedicated service you can point to as proof that you love God.

But here's my point: so did that crowd... They loved God. They loved his Bible. They had life-times, decades of dedicated service proving their love for God.

So, if I'm right, we have two big questions that we need to answer:

- 1) What exactly do we have in common? What is their root flaw or sin that led to the cliff episode and do we have that same root flaw?

- 2) What can be done about it so that we don't end up like them, abandoned by Jesus?

First question: What would cause people who claim to love God to try and kill God?

I've thought about this a lot, and I've studied the times in Jesus' life (starting here in Nazareth) where church people had a problem with him. Do you know what it boils down to?

Authority. The biggest problem people had back then was one of authority. "Who are you to tell me what to do or think or believe."

The fact is, when Jesus walked this earth, he claimed to be an authority figure. That's what Luke tells us today – [Jesus'] message had authority.

And that authority that Jesus taught with was awe-inspiring; it made people stop and listen; it created this "hear a pin drop" atmosphere that Luke describes when he first sat down to teach. His authority was good and impressive *until* his hearers disagreed with what Jesus was authoritatively teaching.

So, Jesus was impressive *until* he healed on the Sabbath. Jesus authoritatively disagreed with what the good church people of his day taught about the Sabbath. And Jesus refused to give up his authority. What he taught about the Sabbath was right. The church people were wrong.

Or, Jesus had impressive authority to heal *until* he also claimed to forgive the sins of the person he was healing. Church people didn't think Jesus should claim to do that. "You think I can't forgive sins," Jesus said. "I can. I'm right. You are wrong."

Or, Jesus' teaching was impressive *until* he makes an outrageous claim about just who does and does not belong at God's table. That's what is happening here in Luke 4 in Nazareth. Jesus makes the audacious claim that because good Jews were going to reject him, God was going to take his love and blessing to non-Jews (like in Elijah and Elisha's day). "You think that you are God's special people because you are Jewish?" Jesus says, "I say that God will take his love to non-Jews because you reject me. I'm right. You are wrong."

The core flaw that led church people to try and kill Jesus was a problem of authority. "Who are you Jesus to tell us what to do or think or believe. You are Joseph's kid. We've known you since you were little. And you think you can walk in here and claim that you are right and we are wrong? That you know more about God than we do? Who do you think you are?"

It all came down to authority and a refusal to accept Jesus' authority if it didn't line up with what they wanted – if it challenged their own authority.

So, the key question: Do we have the same flaw when it comes to Jesus? Do we have a problem if he challenges our authority?

I am thoroughly convinced that each and every one of us has that exact same flaw. How do I know?

Look at any two year old.

Two year olds are fine with parental authority – as long as parental commands don't challenge their desire for self-rule. The minute that parent tells them to do something they don't want to do... we call it the "terrible twos".

We are born with this strong inner voice that wants ultimate authority to rest right here (in my heart). I am the master of my fate. I am the captain of my soul.

That voice is big and clear and ugly in a two-year-old temper tantrum. As we grow up we get better at hiding it, but it's still there – that two year old heart that is fine admitting that "I'm not the king of the world" but still, at the end of the day, wants certain things to go our way.

When it comes to Jesus that voice doesn't just go away.

If you actually take the advice Pastor Adams and I regularly give and start to read your Bible on a daily basis, if you read *all* your Bible, not just the Hallmark passages, I guarantee you that at some point Jesus is going to say something that you disagree with, or have a hard time swallowing.

Maybe it will be what Jesus says about forgiveness – that whole bit about forgiving someone 77 times if they hurt you. That person who treats you like a jerk, not just once or twice, but they've habitually mistreated you. Jesus says, "I don't care how many times they've hurt you. You need to forgive them. No holding grudges. No trashing their name and reputation behind their back. Forgive them and love them." And then Jesus tells a story about a King and a big debt owed, and a friend with a smaller debt owed – the moral of the story: if you don't forgive the people who hurt you (no matter how much they owe you), God is going to come back and torture you.

Maybe it will be what Jesus says about hell – that there is this place where for all eternity God will subject people to the worst pain and torture you could ever imagine; where all they will do is cry and hurt and suffer and it will never end. And do you know who Jesus says will be in that hell? Most people. He says the road to hell is like this 10 lane highway full of people, and the one road away from hell, to heaven is this skinny little path with just a few footprints on it.

Maybe it will be what Jesus says about creation, or gender, or sexuality, or marriage, or money, or government, I can guarantee you that if you read the Bible there will be something where Jesus says to you, "I don't care how you feel. I don't care what you think. I'm right. You are wrong. Deal with it."

And an extra challenge to these moments (when Jesus teaches with authority and we might disagree with it) is that often that message of authority will come through a person that might be easy to dismiss. Like Jesus himself. The people of Nazareth watched Jesus grow up. And now he was claiming some special authority. It was easy to dismiss. Who does he think he is?

For you it could be your mom or dad who confront you about your dating or partying habits in college. You know your mom and dad. You know some of their flaws better than they do. Who do they think they are to tell you how to live your life?

Or, it's your pastor who confronts you about how often you bring your kids to church, or has the audacity to challenge you about how you budget your money and

time. And you know your pastor can be bumbling at times and forgetful, and not everyone likes him. Who does he think he is?

Or, it is a friend who you go out for drinks with, and he always drinks more than you do, and he's going to tell you that you should stop venting about other people every time you get together?

At some point Jesus (probably through some far from perfect person in your life) is going to challenge your authority – to say he's right. You are wrong. Deal with it. And when that happens you are going to know why church people killed Jesus. There will be this defensive voice that starts screaming in your heart. You will start looking for any weapon, any excuse to silence or dismiss that attack on your personal authority.

And we need that reminder, the reminder of the law - that it won't work out for our good if we let our natural reaction to Jesus' authority play out. We don't want Jesus to walk away from us, like he did in Nazareth. We need the reminder that it is spiritual suicide to let defensiveness win the day when Jesus challenges our authority.

We have to recognize authority outside of ourselves – even if we disagree with it. We know this is true in everyday life.

Today if I decide to just live a little bit. I get plastered drunk. I hop in the car and drive to your house, break in and steal all your stuff. On the way out I grab the whiskey from your cupboard, cruise down Rawson at 70 mph, drinking and taking selfies and one of our good Franklin PD officers pulls me over. I can't just say to him, "Look, I know that it is against your law, but you live your truth, I'll live my truth. Agree to disagree."

Do you think on Judgement Day there is going to be a self-checkout line? Is God going to let you grade our own exam? No!

You may disagree with what Jesus says, you may feel it is wrong, but that doesn't change the fact that he's in charge.

So, now that second question. Is there anything that can be done so we don't end up like the people of Nazareth?

Thankfully, the answer is yes. But it's not something we can do. It is something we need God to do for us.

Paul beautifully reminds us in that second lesson today from Romans that we are here today not because we are better people than those folks in Nazareth. It's not that we are less flawed ,or better at fighting our flaws than they were. No, our veins course with the same selfishness theirs did. We are here because of a miracle – a miracle Paul calls *grace*.

In this world full of people who reject Jesus' authority – not just Jews in Nazareth, but many of the people you interact with on a daily basis – in a world like this God's grace is taking people like us, like Paul (whose hearts are the same as those out there) and changing our reaction to Jesus.

There are some sobering similarities between our hearts and the hearts of those folks in Nazareth, but there is one key difference: Faith in a God of grace.

That grace does some miraculous things.

First of all, God in his grace forgives authority loving, toddler-temper-tantrum-throwing people like us. Jesus was walking the streets of Nazareth so that he could forgive people who had done nothing but rebel against his authority since the Garden of Eden. Jesus was going to live completely submissive to his Father's authority and then die so that you and I could be completely forgiven for all of the defensiveness that can fill our hearts when God says something we may not like.

And then that God who earned forgiveness, in grace, comes to you and me and he makes our hearts trust in his grace, trust in Jesus, trust that he is right and we are wrong.

Why has God changed my reaction to Jesus' authority through faith and not someone else, why Paul and the other disciples, but not those folks in Nazareth? I don't know! It certainly isn't because my heart is better than theirs. All I know is that by grace day after day God's word is teaching my heart to submit to Jesus' authority – not perfectly, no perfection will wait until heaven.

This is a challenging lesson. It is hard to admit and wrap our heads around just how sinful our hearts still can be.

But what a beautiful thing to know that God's grace is strong where we are weak.

Christian friends, I want you to learn from the people of Nazareth, but I also want you to know that you have been chosen by grace.

Amen.