

Subject: When "Almost is NOT Close Enough"- Palm Sunday Reflection

Resources: [[TEACHING LINK](#)] AND [DISCIPLESHIP RESOURCES LINK]

Hey all, I hope this message encourages and challenges you,

I pray this message finds you walking closely with our Lord as we journey through this Holy Week together.

This Palm Sunday, we examined a sobering truth that echoes through the ages: Almost is NOT Close Enough. As we walked through Luke 23:13-25, we witnessed multiple individuals who came tantalizingly close to recognizing Jesus as Lord, yet turned away at the critical moment. The religious leaders, Pilate, his wife, Herod, the multitude of Jews, and even Judas—all had front-row seats to witness the Messiah, yet their pride, fear, and worldly concerns blinded them to the truth standing right before them.

The voices of this world are loud and persuasive, telling us to trust ourselves, promote ourselves, and satisfy ourselves. But God's voice calls us to something entirely different: humility, wisdom, and surrender to His authority. The tragedy of Palm Sunday is that the same crowd who praised Jesus days earlier demanded His crucifixion, choosing the criminal Barabbas over the Holy One. Their "almost" moment of recognition became their eternal loss.

**Summary:** The sermon explored how pride and spiritual blindness cause us to reject Christ even when confronted with overwhelming evidence of His divinity. Through examining the key figures present at Jesus' trial, we see how "almost believing" is the same as not believing at all, and how this remains a critical warning for us today. The implications for our spiritual life are profound: we must not construct a Jesus in our own image or maintain a faith of convenience, but instead fully surrender to Him as both Savior and Lord.

**Takeaways:**

1. Pride is the inheritance of unsaved mankind and manifests in both blatant arrogance and subtle self-reliance. It blinds us to God's truth and keeps us separated from Him, leading to spiritual death.
2. Multiple "voices of truth" surrounded those who condemned Jesus—Pilate's wife's dream, Herod's investigation, Pilate's own repeated declarations of innocence—yet worldly pressures and self-interest drowned them out. We face similar pressures today to compromise truth for convenience.
3. Jesus offers forgiveness even to those who crucified Him, saying "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do." His outstretched hand of grace remains available to anyone who will receive Him—but "almost" receiving Him is not close enough.

As we move toward Good Friday and Easter Sunday, let us examine our own hearts. Are there areas where we've constructed a Jesus who fits our preferences rather than surrendering to the Jesus revealed in Scripture? Have we allowed the voices of this world to drown out the voice of Truth? Don't let this Holy Week be your "almost" moment. If you have not yet confessed Christ as Lord, I invite you to do so today.

For those who have already given their lives to Christ, let us rejoice that our "almost" moments have been redeemed by His precious blood. We are heirs of the King, living our eternal lives now for His pleasure and glory.

In His Service,

Pastor Jim

# Almost is NOT Close Enough

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## Luke 23:13-25 Palm Sunday 2026

### I. Prologue: The World's Voices

1. The voices of the world are loud and passionate. **There is no shortage of people willing to give their expert opinions on relationships, religions, work, politics, finance, sports, or any of myriad of other topics.** Indeed, the disease of pride is so invasive as to lead us to mistakenly believe our opinions are higher than God's authority.
2. I came across an excellent summary of these voices...it goes like this<sup>1</sup>:

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The Voices of the World	God Says
Appetite says, "Be sensuous, enjoy yourself."	"Be wise, humble yourself"
Education says, "Be resourceful, expand yourself."	
Materialism says, "Be satisfied, please yourself."	
Psychology says, "Be confident, fulfill yourself."	
Humanism says, "Be capable believe in yourself."	
"Pride says, "Be superior, promote yourself."	

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There are many expressions of pride, but their source is all the same...the human heart. **There are many expressions of pride, but its consequence is the same...**separation from God, which the

<sup>1</sup> [https://ministry127.com/resources/illustrations?keys=Pride&taxonomy\\_vocabulary\\_4\\_target\\_id=All&page=1](https://ministry127.com/resources/illustrations?keys=Pride&taxonomy_vocabulary_4_target_id=All&page=1)

Bible describes as death. The currents of our pride flow with and welcome the things of the world while blinding us to the things of God.

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A. In Psalm 14:3, we read “The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’” Obadiah 1:3-4 uses powerful imagery in speaking of our natural inclination of self-deceit (AND of God’s righteous response to our spiritual blindness): “The pride of your heart has deceived you, You who dwell in the clefts of the rock, Whose habitation is high’ You who say in your heart, Who will bring me down to the ground? Though you ascend as high as the eagle, And though you set your nest among the stars, From there I will bring you down,” says the LORD.”

3. Pride is the inheritance of natural, unsaved mankind...it is because of our pride that Jesus entered Jerusalem on what we refer to as Palm Sunday that His work of redemption and restoration may be completed. In warring against God’s goodness, holiness, and His good plan for His creation, the blinding power of pride breeds deceit, disgrace, and destruction.
4. What’s more, pride is something Satan feasts upon as (1) people hate that Jesus exposes their sin and depravity (Jn 3:19-20), (2) we hate being confronted by a higher authority (Jn 15:22), (3) we love being our own gods (Jn 14:6, 15:18-19; 1 Jn 3:13), (4) the lure of Satan’s lies feed our self-addiction in our spiritual blindness, (5) truth is offensive to our self-indulgent pride (1 Cor 1:18); and (6) mankind’s ears itch for mankind’s approval (Jn 12:42-43).
5. While this blinding pride can be in-your-face-arrogance, it can also take many subtle forms. I note this because if God exists...if He is who He claims to be...we are surely to be pitied for NOT receiving His gifts of salvation and the abundant life ONLY He offers.

## II. Introduction: Jesus Came For the Throne of Our Hearts

1. In **Luke 19**, we read that a multitude of disciples were so joyful and full of praise that they spread their clothes and branches from the trees or palms down on the road as an act of welcoming worship in announcing the King had come to claim His throne. **The reality is He had, but NOT for the throne most (maybe even all or nearly all) thought...** He had come for the throne and throne room of our hearts to slay our pride.
2. You see, they wanted a Messiah to throw off the heavy yoke of bondage under Roman rule. **So much so that most, maybe all, of this great multitude stood against Him just a few hours later when He did not fit the mold they had cast for him.** It was their fickleness and their “Almost is NOT close enough” opportunity that caught my attention as we celebrate Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem some 2000 years ago. **Not unlike the Jews and Gentiles of Jesus’ day, we have sorrowfully had unqualified successes in the rinse-and-repeat-cycle-of-rescuing-defeat from the jaws of victory.**

If you have your bible, please join me as we read [Luke 23:12-17](#).

### **III. The Religious Leaders Could Have & Should Have Known Jesus was the Christ.**

1. The religious leaders efforts to overthrow the growing influence of this infidel Jesus had turned into a form of religion. **Their minds were made up...He was no Messiah...instead of searching the Scriptures for God’s truth, they had declared truth and were making the circumstances fit their version of the truth.** As their Messiah fulfilled yet more Biblical prophecy in riding into Jerusalem on the donkey (a symbol of peace), their anger and fear reached the point of no return, Jesus must be destroyed! **But there was one detail that must first be overcome...only the Romans could actually put a man to death and so they orchestrated events to get what they wanted.**
2. Of course, they were so blinded by their pride, fear, and rage, they actually were fulfilling yet another of the many prophecies their holy book spoke of...**they were personal witnesses of the Messiah,**

who along with the Romans, were being God's instruments in crucifying the Christ that was prophesied in Isaiah 53.

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#### IV. Luke 23:13-17: Coulda, Woulda, Shoulda

1. The Roman governor of Israel, if truth be told, really wanted nothing to do with internal Jewish conflicts. **But here in verses 13-17 of our passage today, he is front-and-center.** He has gathered all the protagonists to pronounce Jesus' innocence of their charges and to free Him.
2. Let's turn the clock back a few hours before we consider more in our main passage today. **Turn with me to Matthew 27:1-4:**

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When morning came, all the chief priests and elders of the people plotted against Jesus to put Him to death. <sup>2</sup> And when they had bound Him, they led Him away and delivered Him to Pontius Pilate the governor.<sup>3</sup> Then Judas, His betrayer, seeing that He had been condemned, was remorseful and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, <sup>4</sup> saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." - Matthew 27:1-4

3. Judas, evil's vessel of betrayal, is now defending the man Jesus. **Now, it would be a leap to claim that Judas was defending the hope of Jesus as there is no evidence that he confessed Jesus as Lord.** The story reads as though Judas remained convinced that Jesus was NOT Lord, but that He was also NOT worthy of death. **Some three years earlier, Judas thought Jesus was Messiah.** He had heard the living word of God and known this was He. **He had been a part of Jesus earthly ministry.** He had witnessed miracles. He had seen signs and wonders. **He knew the demons feared Jesus power and authority.**
  - A. Judas was on the mountaintop with Jesus Christ...**he had been given a front-row seat to the person-and-moment upon which all of history turns.** Instead of searching the Scriptures...instead of believing his eyes and personal witness...instead of believing the words of Christ...**Judas had adopted the prevalent Jewish**

view of their Messiah coming as a conquering King and had positioned himself close to the crown for his own gain.

- B. For his was a faith of convenience with vision only for the here and now as measured in personal worldly power, position, and riches. This is both historical fact and a great warning that we are NOT to construct a Jesus in our image as though we are gods, but to instead receive Him as Savior and Lord of our lives.

Judas ALMOST came to know Jesus as LORD.

4. A little further in Matthew (27:19), Pilate's wife, thought to be Claudia Procula, the granddaughter of Emperor Augustus warned her husband to have nothing to do with crucifying Christ for she had been warned in a dream that He was just. While there are some extra biblical texts suggesting that she may have come to confess Christ as Lord,<sup>2</sup> the bible itself leaves us with the sense that she too ALMOST came to receive Jesus as Lord.
  5. We read that Herod also found NO fault in Jesus. Yet, with his Jewish background and knowledgeable counselors, Herod could and should have known Jesus was Messiah. But that would be an inconvenient truth for his lifestyle and aspirations. Herod ALMOST came to know Jesus as Lord.
  6. What's more, in **John 18**, the Apostle John relays a conversation Jesus had with Pilate about truth to which Pilate responds to Jesus "What is truth?". Pilate knew of the religious leaders envy. He knew of Jesus miracles. Except for the Jews, he knew no other authority found fault in Christ. He knew Jesus was different in His claims, character, and the way He carried Himself.
- A. As we learn in our passage and from other Gospel accounts, "voices of reason and convenience" abounded. What's more,

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.christianity.com/wiki/holidays/how-was-pontius-pilates-wife-connected-to-christ.html>

while “voices of truth” were fewer, because all of creation testifies of God, truth was and is self-evident. While no fan of Christ, Pilate attempted to use worldly authority to overcome the spiritual blindness, bigotry, fears, and hatred they shared as Gentile and Jews along with Jews toward Jesus and His followers.

So, in all this, we can say Pilate ALMOST came to know Jesus as LORD.

V. Luke 23:18-21: The Voices of Evil

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1. While the “voices of reason” echoed in Pilate’s ears, he was NO fool. The voices of the religious leaders were corrupt. They were working diligently to crowd out the person and blessings of Jesus. In Mark 3:25, we read that “a house divided against itself cannot stand”. And so, with that in mind, we read evil is what evil does...it feeds mankind’s depraved hearts through emotions and 1/2 truths! In turn, the mob yearns for the Barabbas’ of this world, convinced that somehow he is better than Jesus’ holiness and His gift of eternal life.

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VI. Luke 23:22-23: The Mob Affect

1. One more gulp of air, one more “voice of truth”, if even from one who is himself at war with Christ, offering a way out of their chants of “crucify Him” which are little more than a whisper to be run through in the mob’s reckless abandon to destroy Good.

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VII. Luke 23:24-25: Giving In

1. On this, the third go-around, Pilate relents. He gives into the voice of evil and in so doing becomes its tool. He releases evil, while the Holy One the Father sent to rescue His own people, is crucified by them...just as He knew would happen, but He willingly came for you, me, and any that will receive Him anyway.

2. In becoming the tool of evil, Pilate chose the “ALMOST-is-NOT-Close-Enough” path to eternal death. Of itself, his choice has two great warnings and an encouragement:

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A. The first warning is that but for the grace of God, all (including you and me) will reject the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The allure of personal pride will overwhelm any NOT in Christ.

Again, referring to John 18, we see that Pilate hungered to know who was sitting right in front of him... TRUTH incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ, both fully man and fully God. But you see, in another of Pilate’s ALMOST moments, he could not grasp what Jesus was saying; for Pilate’s truth was dictated by his worldly Roman roots. When further confronted by truth in **John 19:10-16**, Pilate knew it was wrong to condemn Jesus to death, yet he bowed to worldly pressures.

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B. In these happenings we are presented with the second warning...we are to stand on truth...that is to stand on the word of God...there is one way to heaven and that is through Jesus (John 14:6).

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C. And yet, it is in the warnings that we find the encouragement. Just as Luke was encouraging in that day, you need not choose dark voices of today...you need not be part of the woulda-coulda-shoulda club. Jesus Christ’s hand is outstretched to YOU with a peace offering into His rescue story. As we close, let me first show you and then invite you...

3. Here in Luke 23, go down a few more verses to Luke 23:34. Here, being strung to the cross Jesus says: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.”. Forgive them Father. Do not pour out your wrath on them! Instead...[wait], the instead is for next week when we celebrate Christ’s resurrection on Easter Sunday.

A. For the saint, the child of God, you have given your life to Christ. Your ALMOST moment(s) have been redeemed by the

blood of Christ into confessions of faith and you are heirs of the King, even now living your eternal lives for His pleasure and glory. Well done!

- B. For those having not yet confessed Christ...if not now, when? Don't let this be your "ALMOST is NOT Close Enough" moment, but instead join me in this prayer of reconciliation with your Messiah.

## **Luke 23:13-25**

### **Almost is NOT Close Enough**

#### **I. Prologue: The World's Voices**

- Against the world, God says "Be wise, humble yourself".

Additional Scripture References: Ps 14:3; Obad 1:3-4

#### **II. Introduction: Jesus Came for the Throne of Our Hearts**

Additional Scripture References: Luke 19

#### **III. The Religious Leaders Could Have & Should Have Known Jesus was the Christ**

- Blinded by their pride, fear, and rage.

#### **IV. Luke 23:13-17: Coulda, Woulda, Shoulda**

- Real faith or one of convenience?
- Too many "almosts".

Additional Scripture References: Mt 27:14, 27:29; Jn 18

**V. Luke 23:18-21: The Voices of Evil**

Additional Scripture References: Mark 3:25

**VI. Luke 23:22-23: The Mob Affect**

**VII. Luke 23:24-25: Giving In**

- Two warning & an encouragement.

Additional Scripture References: Jn 18, 19:10-16; Lk 23:34a

**VIII. Closing: Prayer for Faithfulness**

## **5-Day Devotional**

### **Luke 23:13-25**

### **Almost is NOT Close Enough**

#### **Day 1: The Deception of Pride**

**Reading: Obadiah 1:3-4; Psalm 14:1-3**

**Devotional:** Pride whispers that we are sufficient in ourselves, that our wisdom supersedes divine truth. Like those who shouted "Crucify Him," we often construct a version of truth that serves our comfort rather than seeking God's reality. The fool doesn't necessarily deny God's existence outwardly but lives as though God's authority doesn't apply to them. Pride positions us as judges over Scripture rather than students under it.

Today, examine where you've replaced God's voice with the world's applause. Are you building your nest among the stars of self-sufficiency? Remember, God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. The first step toward true faith is acknowledging our desperate need for a Savior beyond ourselves.

#### **Day 2: Recognizing Jesus in Plain Sight**

**Reading: Isaiah 53:1-12; Luke 19:37-40**

**Devotional:** The religious leaders had Scripture memorized yet missed the Messiah standing before them. They witnessed miracles, heard wisdom beyond human capacity, and saw prophecy fulfilled—yet their preconceptions blinded them. How often do we approach God's Word seeking confirmation rather than transformation? Like Judas, we can walk closely with Jesus yet never truly surrender to Him as Lord. Proximity to truth doesn't guarantee possession of it. The crowds welcomed Jesus with palms but rejected Him with fury days later because He didn't meet their expectations.

Today, ask yourself: Am I seeking Jesus as He truly is, or am I creating a convenient Christ who serves my agenda? True faith requires releasing our blueprints and embracing His.

#### **Day 3: The Danger of "Almost"**

**Reading: Matthew 27:1-4, 19; Acts 26:24-29**

**Devotional:** Judas almost believed. Pilate's wife almost intervened. Herod almost investigated. Pilate himself almost released Jesus. History's most tragic word may be "almost." These individuals stood at eternity's doorway yet stepped back into darkness. They had evidence, opportunity, and conviction—but lacked surrender. King Agrippa told Paul, "You almost persuade me to become a Christian." Almost doesn't save. Almost doesn't transform. Almost leaves us on the wrong side of grace. Intellectual acknowledgment of Jesus differs vastly from heart surrender to Jesus. You can know

about Him without knowing Him. You can admire His teachings without accepting His lordship.

Today, examine whether your faith is genuine commitment or comfortable admiration. Don't let this be your "almost" moment. Jesus seeks wholehearted devotion, not partial interest.

#### **Day 4: Choosing Between Barabbas and Jesus**

**Reading: Luke 23:13-25; John 18:38-40**

**Devotional:** The crowd faced a choice: Jesus or Barabbas. Holiness or rebellion. Life or death. They chose the criminal over the Christ. This wasn't ignorance—it was preference. Barabbas represented what they wanted: violent revolution against Rome. Jesus offered what they needed: spiritual revolution of the heart. We face this same choice daily. Will we embrace the world's solutions—power, revenge, self-assertion—or Christ's way of sacrifice, forgiveness, and surrender? The voices demanding Jesus' crucifixion were loud, passionate, and unified. Truth often whispers while error shouts. Pilate heard truth but yielded to pressure.

Don't allow cultural currents, peer expectations, or personal comfort to drown out Christ's call. Stand firm on truth even when standing alone. The crowd's approval fades; Christ's approval endures eternally.

#### **Day 5: Forgiveness from the Cross    Reading: Luke 23:32-34; Romans 5:6-8**

**Devotional:** "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do." From the cross, Jesus didn't pronounce judgment but offered mercy. While nails pierced His hands, love pierced the darkness. This is the Gospel's stunning centerpiece: while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. The religious leaders, Pilate, the soldiers, the crowd—all participated in history's greatest injustice, yet Jesus extended forgiveness. This includes you. Whatever "almost" moments define your past, whatever rejections of truth mark your history, forgiveness remains available. Christ's outstretched arms on the cross symbolize His outstretched invitation today.

Don't remain in the "coulda, woulda, shoulda" club. Receive His gift. Confess Him as Lord. Let today be your resurrection from spiritual death to eternal life. Almost is not close enough—but surrender is everything.

## Small Group Study Guide Luke 23:13-25 Almost is NOT Close Enough

**Opening Prayer:** Pray that the Lord would open your eyes to see and understand His word as you discuss the sermon.

**Key Takeaways:** Query the group for takeaways first...you may stay with one or more of those.

1. Pride is humanity's greatest spiritual blindness – It causes us to reject God's authority and make ourselves our own gods.
2. "Almost" believing is not enough – Proximity to Jesus, knowledge about Him, or even defending Him doesn't equal saving faith.
3. The voices of the world drown out God's truth – Culture constantly offers alternatives to God's wisdom that appeal to our pride.
4. Jesus offers forgiveness even to those who crucify Him – God's grace is available to all who will receive it.

**Discussion Questions:** Did the Holy Spirit prompt any questions with you? Start with those.

1. Review the list of "Voices of the World" from the sermon: Which of these voices do you find most appealing or hardest to resist? Why?
  - a. Appetite says: "Be sensuous, enjoy yourself"
  - b. Education says: "Be resourceful, expand yourself"
  - c. Materialism says: "Be satisfied, please yourself"
  - d. Psychology says: "Be confident, fulfill yourself"
  - e. Humanism says: "Be capable, believe in yourself"
  - f. Pride says: "Be superior, promote yourself"
2. How do these worldly voices contrast with what God says: "Be wise, humble yourself"?
3. In what areas of your life are you most tempted to be your own god rather than submit to God's authority?
4. Judas had a front-row seat to Jesus' ministry but betrayed Him for personal gain.

- a. What warning does Judas' story offer about constructing a Jesus in our own image?
  - b. How can we guard against having a "faith of convenience"?
5. Pilate knew Jesus was innocent and even asked "What is truth?" while standing before Truth incarnate.
  - a. Why do you think Pilate ultimately chose political convenience over doing what was right?
  - b. When have you been tempted to compromise truth for the sake of convenience or acceptance?
6. The Religious Leaders should have recognized their Messiah but were blinded by pride and fear.
  - a. How can religious knowledge or activity become a substitute for genuine relationship with Christ?
  - b. What's the difference between knowing about Jesus and knowing Jesus personally?
7. Pilate's wife was warned in a dream but there's no clear evidence she confessed Christ as Lord.
  - a. What does her story teach us about spiritual awareness versus spiritual commitment?
8. The sermon states: "We are to stand on truth...there is one way to heaven and that is through Jesus (John 14:6)."
  - a. How does our culture respond to the exclusivity of Jesus' claim?
  - b. How can we lovingly and boldly stand on this truth in our daily lives?
9. Read Luke 23:34 – Jesus prays, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do."
  - a. What does Jesus' prayer from the cross reveal about God's heart toward those who reject Him?
  - b. How should this shape our attitude toward those who don't yet know Christ?
10. Personal Reflection: Is there an area of your life where you're living in an "almost" relationship with Jesus—holding back full surrender in some area?

**Practical Applications:** Query the group for applications first...you may explore one or more of those.

1. Pride Inventory: Spend time in prayer asking God to reveal areas of pride in your life. Journal about one specific area where you need to "humble yourself" before God. Share your commitment with an accountability partner.

2. Truth Over Convenience: Identify one situation this week where you're tempted to compromise truth for convenience or acceptance. Commit to standing on God's truth in that situation, regardless of the cost. Pray for courage and wisdom.
3. Share Your Story: Think of someone in your life who is "almost" believing or curious about Jesus. Pray for them daily this week. Look for an opportunity to share your testimony or invite them to church/small group.
4. Examine Your Jesus: Ask yourself: "Have I created a Jesus who fits my preferences, or have I surrendered to Jesus as He truly is?" Study one Gospel account (Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John) to know Jesus more accurately. Write down one characteristic of Jesus that challenges your current lifestyle.

**Closing Prayer Points:**

- Thanking God for His patience with our "almost" moments
- Asking for freedom from pride and spiritual blindness
- Praying for full surrender to Christ as Lord
- Interceding for those in the group or in our lives who are "almost" believing
- Thanking Jesus for His sacrifice and forgiveness

**Discussion Questions**  
**Luke 23:13-25**  
**Almost is NOT Close Enough**

1. In what ways do the 'voices of the world' listed in the sermon compete with God's voice in your own life, and which ones do you find most difficult to resist?
2. The sermon describes pride as 'the inheritance of natural, unsaved mankind.' How does pride manifest in subtle ways that might be harder to recognize than outright arrogance?
3. Judas witnessed miracles and heard Jesus teach firsthand, yet still betrayed Him. What does his story teach us about the difference between intellectual knowledge of Jesus and genuine surrender to Him as Lord?
4. Pilate asked Jesus 'What is truth?' but never waited for or accepted the answer standing before him. In what areas of your life might you be asking questions about God while simultaneously resisting His answers?
5. The crowd went from shouting 'Hosanna' on Palm Sunday to 'Crucify Him' days later. What circumstances or pressures might cause modern believers to similarly waver in their commitment to Christ?
6. The sermon emphasizes that 'almost' knowing Jesus is not enough for salvation. What is the fundamental difference between admiring Jesus as a good teacher and receiving Him as Lord and Savior?
7. Pilate's wife, Herod, and even Pilate himself had multiple opportunities to recognize Jesus as the Messiah. What 'voices of truth' or warnings might God be sending in your life that you have been dismissing?
8. Jesus prayed 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do' even as He was being crucified. How does Christ's response to those who condemned Him challenge the way we respond to those who wrong us?
9. The religious leaders searched Scripture to justify their predetermined conclusions rather than to discover God's truth. How can we guard against using the Bible to support our own agendas rather than submitting to what it actually teaches?
10. Reflecting on the 'almost' moments of Judas, Pilate, and others in this passage, what would you say to someone who thinks being a 'good person' or respecting Jesus is sufficient for salvation?

# **Dinner Conversation Starters**

## **Luke 23:13-25**

### **Almost is NOT Close Enough**

#### **1. Almost Versus All In**

How have you seen “almost” show up in your walk with God or in life in general—times when you were close to doing the right thing but held back? What do you think keeps people (or us) from going all in with Jesus?

#### **2. Voices We Listen To**

The sermon talked about the “voices of the world” (pride, success, pleasure, etc.). What are the loudest voices in your life right now—friends, media, school, work, culture—and how do they influence the way you think about God and yourself?

#### **3. Judas, Pilate, Herod... and Us**

Judas, Pilate, and Herod all “almost” believed Jesus, or at least knew something was different about Him, but didn’t surrender to Him as Lord. Which of their reactions do you relate to the most, and why?

#### **4. Truth and Convenience**

Pilate knew Jesus was innocent but chose what was easier and more convenient instead of what was right. Can you think of a situation when you (or someone you know) chose convenience over truth or obedience to God? What might it look like to choose truth next time?

#### **5. Pride and Blind Spots**

The sermon said pride blinds us and separates us from God. Where do you think pride most easily sneaks into our family life—decisions, arguments, priorities, schedule, money? What is one practical way we as a family could humble ourselves before God this week?

# Family Conversation Guide for Children & Early Teens

## Luke 23:13-25

### Almost is NOT Close Enough

#### AGES 5-7: SIMPLIFYING THE MESSAGE APPLICATION POINTS

1. **Choosing Jesus Even When Friends Don't**: Help kids see that following Jesus means doing what He says even when friends want to do something wrong or unkind.

##### Discussion Questions:

- (1) If your friends are laughing at someone, what could you say or do that would make Jesus happy?
- (2) How can we be kind, even if others are not?
- (3) Who do we want to follow more: friends, or Jesus?

2. **Listening to the Right Voice**: Teach that there are many “voices” (TV shows, YouTube, games, friends) telling us what to do, but God’s voice in the Bible is the one we can always trust.

##### Discussion Questions:

- (1) When you watch shows or videos, how can you tell if they are teaching you something that makes God happy or sad?
- (2) If a character says, “Do what you want!” but Jesus says, “Obey Me,” who should we listen to?
- (3) How can we remember what Jesus says when we’re watching or playing?

3. **Saying Yes to Jesus, Not Just Almost**: Help kids understand that “almost obeying” is not the same as obeying (e.g., doing chores halfway or apologizing but not meaning it).

##### Discussion Questions:

- (1) If I ask you to clean up and you only do half, is that really obeying?
- (2) What does it look like to say a full “yes” to Mom/Dad? What about to Jesus?
- (3) Can you think of one thing you can do all the way for Jesus this week?

#### AGES 8-12: BUILDING UNDERSTANDING APPLICATION POINTS

1. **Being Different in Friend Groups**: Equip kids to stand for what’s right when friends want to gossip, exclude someone, or copy bad behavior.

##### Discussion Questions:

- (1) What kind of things do kids in your group say about other people when adults aren’t around?
- (2) If your friends start making fun of someone, what are 2–3 things you could do instead of joining in?
- (3) The sermon talked about people who “almost” followed Jesus but didn’t. What does actually following Jesus look like in those moments?

2. **Evaluating Online and Media Voices:** Teach kids to question the “voices” they hear in games, YouTube, TikTok (if they see it), and shows—do they pull us toward Jesus or away from Him?

Discussion Questions:

- (1) Who are your top 2–3 favorite online or media people? What are they telling you is most important in life?
- (2) How do those messages match (or not match) what Jesus says is important?
- (3) What’s one change we could make to what we watch or follow to help us listen more to Jesus than to the world?

3. **Pride VS Humility:** Help kids recognize pride in bragging, always needing to be right, or posting/acting just to impress others.

Discussion Questions:

- (1) What does bragging look like at your school or online?
- (2) Why do you think we like people to see how “good” we are? How is that like the pride the sermon talked about?
- (3) What would it look like to show humility on the playground or online?

## **AGES 11-15: DEEPENING THE CONNECTION APPLICATION POINTS**

1. **Standing for Truth When It Costs You:** Teens often see what’s true but feel strong pressure to stay quiet. Help them connect Pilate’s “almost” to their own fear of social consequences.

Discussion Questions:

- (1) Have you ever felt like Pilate—knowing what’s right but staying silent because it was easier? What happened?
- (2) What are you most afraid of losing if you stand up for truth (friends, image, invitations, followers)?
- (3) What might it look like to be faithful to Jesus in group chats, comments, or DMs without being rude or “preachy”?

2. **Curating Your Digital Influences:** Help teens see that who they follow shapes who they become. Pride, self-promotion, and “be your own god” messages are everywhere.

Discussion Questions:

- (1) If you looked at your feed (social media, YouTube, podcasts, etc.), what “gods” do they tell you to worship—popularity, image, pleasure, being right, being powerful?
- (2) Which accounts or creators pull you closer to Jesus? Which ones subtly push you away from Him or make sin look normal?
- (3) Is there one account you’d be willing to mute/unfollow this week as a way of choosing Jesus over the world’s voice?

3. **Pride in Identity, Opinions, and Being Correct:** Teens form strong opinions about everything—faith, politics, social issues, culture. Pride shows up as “I know better than everyone (including God).”

*Discussion Questions:*

- (1) Where do you feel most tempted to say in your heart, “I know better than God”? (relationships, sexuality, money, success, forgiveness)
- (2) When you disagree with the Bible or with Christian teaching, what do you do with that tension?
- (3) How can we, as a family, make space for honest questions while still honoring God’s authority instead of creating a “Jesus in our own image”?

**Tips for Parents**

- Be patient and listen: Give your child time to think and respond.
- Relate to everyday life: Use real-life examples and stories familiar to your child to make abstract concepts more tangible.
- Encourage questions: Let your son or daughter know it’s okay to ask questions, even if things don’t make sense right away.
- Share personal insights: Tell a personal story about a time you experienced these themes, adapting as needed for age appropriateness.

# Family Conversation Guide for Gen Z

## Luke 23:13-25

### Almost is NOT Close Enough

#### 1. Listening to the Right Voice Not the Loudest

*Bible Reference:* John 10:27 – “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.”

*Application:* Jesus’ voice (through Scripture and the Holy Spirit) must outrank group pressure, trends, and popular opinions online. Gen Z lives in constant noise—friends, influencers, feeds—but disciples filter everything through: “Is this Jesus’ voice or just another voice of the world?”

*Scenario:* You’re in a group chat where everyone is dragging a classmate/peer, sending screenshots, memes, and subtweets. You feel the tension: if you stay silent or push back, you might become the next target; if you join in, you’re going against what you know Jesus would do.

*Discussion:* When your group or your feed pushes you in one direction, what specific practices (pausing, praying, checking Scripture, asking a mature believer) help you recognize and follow Jesus’ voice instead of just going along?

#### 2. Almost Christian VS Actually Following Jesus

*Bible Reference:* Luke 9:23 – “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”

*Application:* Knowing about Jesus, liking Christian content, or showing up at youth group is not the same as surrendering your life to Him. Judas, Pilate, and Herod were all “almost” there, but unwilling to deny themselves. Gen Z must decide if they’re fans of Jesus or followers who daily say “no” to self and “yes” to Him.

*Scenario:* You post Christian verses, go to church, and your bio says “John 3:16.” But in your situationships/dating, your DMs, and how you deal with people you dislike, you follow your feelings, not Jesus’ commands. You’re building an aesthetic Christian identity, but not a surrendered life.

*Discussion:* If someone could only see your private habits (search history, DMs, late-night choices), what would they conclude you actually follow: your desires or Jesus? Where is Jesus asking you to move from “almost” to “all in”?

### **3. Pride: Being Your Own God or Surrendering to God**

*Bible Reference:* Proverbs 16:18 – “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.”

*Application:* The sermon showed how pride blinds people to Jesus. Gen Z is constantly told, “Believe in yourself, define your own truth, you do you.” Biblical faith says: “Humble yourself under God’s authority; He is God, not you.” Pride in identity, opinions, and autonomy can keep you “almost” persuaded, yet spiritually lost.

*Scenario:* You read something in Scripture about sexuality, forgiveness, money, or enemies that clashes with what your favorite creators, friends, or professors say. Instead of wrestling honestly, you quietly decide, “I’ll follow Jesus where He agrees with me. Where He doesn’t, I’m in charge.”

*Discussion:* In what areas of life are you tempted to say, “I know better than God”? What would genuine humility look like there (e.g., seeking counsel, studying Scripture more deeply, praying, obeying even before you fully understand)?

### **4. Choosing Truth Over Convenience**

*Bible Reference:* James 4:17 – “So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.”

*Application:* Pilate knew Jesus was innocent but chose the easier path to protect his position. Gen Z faces constant decisions where it’s easier to stay silent, laugh along, or “not get involved.” But knowing the right thing and choosing comfort is still disobedience.

*Scenario:* At lunch or in group chats, everyone’s hyped about a plan that’s shady—cheating on an exam, cyberbullying someone, sneaking into a party, or sharing an explicit pic. You know it’s wrong, but calling it out or walking away might cost you your spot in the group.

*Discussion:* Think of a time you, like Pilate, knew the right thing to do but chose the convenient option. What would it have looked like to obey God instead—and what habits could help you choose truth over convenience next time?

**These points aim to empower Gen Z to live out their faith genuinely and courageously in various aspects of their daily lives, reflecting Biblical integrity, compassion, and steadfastness.**