

“THE SILENCE OF JESUS; THE CRY OF THE CROWD.”

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Scripture Text: Mark 15:1-15

Introduction.

“What then shall I do with this one called Jesus?” That’s the question, that’s the question that divides history, the question that divides nations, and divides rulers and divides families. That’s the question that determines destinies. What then shall you and I do with this one called Jesus?

Mark 15:1-5

We know what the Jewish leaders intended to do with Jesus. Mark’s opening words remind us that the Sanhedrin had been meeting in the night against their own rules for a fair trial. Now at daybreak they hold a quick mockery of a trial making a mockery of justice.

And the mockery isn’t over. They bound Jesus like a common criminal, maybe for extra effect, and delivered Him over to the Roman’s since they had no power to put anyone to death.

Their charge against Jesus was a charge of blasphemy. But that charge created a problem. No Roman official would recognize a charge of blasphemy. That was nothing to them, they couldn’t care one wit whether someone spoke against their temple or their God.

The Jews changed the charge into a charge of treason, saying that this Jesus claimed to be the King of the Jews. That was a different matter, that was sedition, that could be the beginnings of a coup, an insurrection and Rome would quickly deal with something like that.

Pontus Pilate.

Pilate was the fifth governor over the Roman province of Judea. He ruled from 26-36 AD, making his tenure the longest of all the Roman governors who ruled there.

He began the trial with the simple question, “Are you king of the Jews?” Jesus answered, “You have said so.” It was neither a direct affirmation nor a denial. It was suggestive, the kind of answer that was supposed to make you think about your question.

The truth was the answer was yes and no. Pilate’s words were correct but his meaning was wrong. Jesus is King, but His kingdom isn’t of this world.

Sensing that Pilate wasn’t impressed by the evidence, the chief priests piled a whole bunch of other charges on Jesus. Luke includes what some of them were.

Luke 23:2 “We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king.”

The charges against Jesus were utterly false, just as the charges what are brought against Christians now are often untrue or twisted. Though blameless, they will be blamed.

Friends, slanders and lies and false things are some of Satan’s favorite weapons. There is no end to the negative things that can be said against God’s elect. Don’t believe every negative thing you hear about the followers of Jesus.

But Jesus was silent before the charges.

If someone made a bunch of false accusations about you would you be able to remain silent? If someone was spreading lies and made up reports about you could you hold your tongue? Or would you start out defensive and then go on the offensive and giving some charges back?

That would be human nature, right? Maybe that’s why Pilate was astonished at Jesus’ silence. He had been in leadership among the Jews long enough to know how they operated. He knew the leaders were an envious, jealous, protective bunch. He knew what he was hearing was trumped up.

No wonder Pilate was amazed Jesus gave no defense, no rebuttal. Why was He silent? Several reasons come to mind.

First, this was to fulfill the prophecy:

Isaiah 53:7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.

Second, Jesus was done teaching and preaching. Now was the time for the judgment of man. Now was the time for them to decide what they were going to do with this man called Jesus. It’s noteworthy that people were amazed at Jesus’ teaching and amazed at His silence.

Third, we see the meekness and lowliness of Jesus as He patiently and quietly submits to the will of God under the hand of those in authority.

Fourth, Jesus didn’t defend Himself so that He could defend us. Jesus was silent then so He could be our spokesman now. Now He is our advocate before the Father, the one who ever-lives to speak and pray and make intercession on our behalf.

The Son of God stood trial in a human court before a human judge against false charges and submitted to their verdict, so that we who are the sons of men would not have to stand before the Judge of the universe in fear and face the ultimate death penalty. And all of this for us and for our salvation.

Mark 15:6-15

Barabbas

This custom of releasing a prisoner must have been one of Pilate's personal deals, there's no mention of it in any ancient literature.

Who was this Barabbas?

He was a notorious sinner, a rebel, a thief, a terrorist, an insurrectionist, and above all a murderer. He wasn't just a bully or a thug, he was a political prisoner, his crimes were crimes against the state, against Caesar. There was no innocence in him at all, he was guilty as charged. He deserved not only to be in prison, but to be crucified for what he did.

Pilate made a political mistake here. He thought he could expose the chief priests by suggesting the release of not just any guilty man, but the worst possible person, someone they wouldn't want released. Maybe this would get Jesus off the hook. Surely the crowds would want their miracle-worker back. But Pilate misjudged the murderous intent of the high priests.

His second mistake was to ask what he was supposed to do with Jesus. Pilate had completely lost control of the situation. Instead of the leader leading, the mob was leading. Instead of him upholding justice, he let injustice prevail. Instead of doing what was right, he wished only to satisfy the crowd.

Try to imagine for a moment what was going on in *Barabbas*' head. Those of you who heard the first person monologue I did two years ago on Good Friday may recall the turmoil and confusion this day created for Barabbas.

He was in a prison cell somewhere beneath Pilate's palace. Perhaps he can hear the rumbling of a crowd, sudden there was a cry from the crowd, "Barabbas, Barabbas, we want Barabbas!"

What's that about, what's going on up there? Who is stirring this up? And then a moment or two later he hears the cry of the crowd again, "Crucify him, crucify him!" Imagine how that would mess with your mind. First, they yell his name and then they yell, crucify him.

Then imagine the mental and emotional whiplash when some Roman guard told him he was released and free to go and it's all because of some unimportant itinerate preacher named Jesus.

How crazy is this? How insane? How against all nature? A guilty man goes free and an innocent man is condemned to die.

"Barabbas, really? You want to kill Jesus and release Barabbas? Why, what did Barabbas ever do for you? He has robbed you, plundered you, even killed one of your own."

To reject Jesus and release Barabbas was a staggering display of hardheartedness. We need to take pause to consider how far people will go to kill Jesus, to get rid of Jesus, to get Him out of their sight and out of their conscience.

John MacArthur says, “This is to show you the depth of the animosity, the depth of depravity, the darkness of the human heart, the ugliness of wretched sin and rejection of the truth, and to show you the terrible, damning evil of false religion. It’s a stunning thing.”

What are you going to do with this man called Jesus? Seeking to satisfy the crowds Pilate washed his hands of Jesus and handed him over to be crucified. Seeking to satisfy the crowds. What a terrible judgment, what a horrible epitaph for his tomb.

Brothers and sisters, I beg you don’t decide what you are going to do with Jesus based on the crowds or based on trying to please the crowds. Don’t stand before God on judgment day saying you were just trying to go along or get along.

Application and conclusion.

First, Mark was preparing his readers for when they would be dragged before the Romans and persecuted. Remember how Jesus suffered and what He endured.

Brothers and sisters, we are in a nation in a moral free fall. Judges all across our nation are rapidly opening the doors to sin. Sexual immorality of all kinds won’t just be condoned, it will be approved. A mockery will be made of God’s gift of marriage. Drugs will flow freely. Euthanasia will be encouraged for all who are inconvenient.

When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do? (Psalm 11:3).

One thing they can do is not be intimidated or fearful. They have absolute confidence and assurance that whatever is meant for evil, God has sovereign power and authority over and can and will turn it for His glory and the glory of the gospel and the good of His own people.

Psalm 37:5-7 Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act.

6 He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday.

7 Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him;
fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way,
over the man who carries out evil devices!

When we look at our world it sounds very much like the world of Jesus in the first century. There is evil on all sides, wicked men devising and carrying out wicked plans, political power plays at every level, religious conflicts. It’s pretty clear that we really are not in control of all that is happening around us.

What we need to hear and to know is that someone is in control and that that someone is good and powerful and has a perfect plan.

We can take from this text assurance that the most evil plans ever devised on earth are countered and used by God whose superior plan always prevails. And His plan has been from before the beginning of the world.

If this is what God can do with hell's very worst plans, then there is nothing in our lives that God cannot and in fact will not turn into good and great blessing for those who love Him and are called by Him. This is our assurance.

Second, consider the Grand Exchange, the Holy Substitution.

Three times Pilate defended Jesus. Even this evil man knew He was innocent, that He had done no evil, nothing to deserve death. He knew they were motivated by envy.

In three ways we are told that Barabbas was guilty. He was a rebel in prison, he committed murder, he participated in the insurrection, the uprising against Roman authority.

In the entire telling of the passion story, one thing is very clear, Jesus was innocent. A convicted felon, a murderer and leader of a revolt was set free, while an innocent man was crucified.

This is the whole gospel told in one simple exchange. A great sinner is delivered from death, and a sinless one is bound over to death.

Isn't this exactly what has happen with you and me? While we were yet sinners God loved us and sent His Son, the just to die for the unjust, the godly for the ungodly, the righteous for the unrighteous.

How great is Jesus' love for us? He allowed Himself to be considered worse than a criminal, to be counted more guilty than an insurrectionist, anarchist, and murderer. Worse than the worst sinner.

Such are our sins, and when we consider our sins we should consider them to be like Barabbas'. We, who deserve to be in the company of Barabbas in hell, will instead sit with angels in glory.

This is the grand exchange that takes place every time a sinner surrenders in faith to Jesus Christ.

II Corinthians 5:21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

This is cause for worship, this is cause for humble, grateful feasting as His Table.

Amazing love, how can it be that you my king would die for me? What will you do with this man who is called Jesus?