

“The Wretched Choice”
Mark 15:3-15
(Preached at Trinity, June 24, 2015)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As we've seen, this passage is a continuation of the trial of Jesus.
 - A. He had already been tried by the ecclesiastical authorities. There were three stages of this religious trial –
The three stages of the ecclesiastical trial.
 - (1) The preliminary hearing before Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas
 - (2) The trial before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin
 - (3) The third stage involved the trial before this same body just after daybreak
 - B. These verses deal with Jesus being tried before the civil authorities – the Romans
The three stages of the civil trial
 - (1) The trial before Pilate
 - (2) The trial before Herod
 - (3) The return to Pilate
2. As we witness the unfolding of this trial we have before us the great issue of life. Ultimately, your entire life boils down to one primary issue. What have you done with Christ?
 - A. Pilate's words were full of meaning. More meaning than he knew.
Mark 15:12-13 NAU - "Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Him whom you call the King of the Jews?" ¹³ They shouted back, "Crucify Him!"
 - B. Your eternity rests upon this. What will you do with Him whom is called the King of the Jews?
Ultimately, your life is not a measure of all of the things you do or the things you accomplish – your education, your marriage, your occupation—all of your accomplishments – that you made a name for yourself, or of all of the things you acquire, a lifetime of possessions.
Ultimately, it all boils down to this – do you know Christ? Are you following hard after Him? Have you come to the point where you can testify, "Take everything else, but give me Christ."
- I. The first thing we see here is the great contrast between the two possible choices
 - A. On one hand you have Christ
 1. He stood before Pilate blameless – holy and righteous
Verse 14 - "Why, what evil has He done?"
Matthew 27:24 – "I am innocent of the blood of this just person:"
 2. Never has there been a sinless human being
 - B. On the other hand we have Barabbas
Barabbas was typical of all that is godless—a worldly man following after worldly things while rejecting the rule of God.

1. **Matt. 27:16** describes him as a “notable” prisoner – he was notorious
2. **Verse 7** tells us he had committed murder during an attempted insurrection – an attempt to overthrow the Roman authorities.
Mark 15:7 NAU - "The man named Barabbas had been imprisoned with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the insurrection."
3. John adds that he was also a robber
John 18:40 NAU - "So they cried out again, saying, "Not this Man, but Barabbas." Now Barabbas was a robber."
4. Barabbas was a notorious murdering thief
He was a lawless rebel – How smug he must have been as he stood before the people

II. The second thing we see is the unusual choice of the crowd

- A. Standing before them was Jesus and Barabbas
 1. One would expect the reasonable choice would be Jesus. It’s the only choice that made sense. Righteous Jesus or this murdering thief?
 - a. That was Pilate’s expectation
 - b. Only 5 days before they crowded around Jesus shouting Hosanna
 2. Instead they answered “Barabbas”
Luke 23:18 NAU - "But they cried out all together, saying, "Away with this man, and release for us Barabbas!"
- B. Here we find the condition of humanity – left to our selves we all make the wretched choice
 1. Jesus epitomizes that which is holy, righteous, and perfect. He was filled with love and mercy and truth
 - a. The lost man loves his sin. He will have nothing of Christ
There is a natural hatred, a natural hostility
John 19:15 NAU - " So they cried out, "Away with *Him*, away with *Him*, crucify Him!"
Mark 15:14 NAU - "But Pilate said to them, "Why, what evil has He done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify Him!"
 - b. The lost man closes his eyes to the truth – he suppresses the truth
Romans 1:18 NAU - "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,"
They clearly saw His innocence
They clearly saw His miracles
 2. Barabbas epitomizes that which is lawless. He was filled with hate, murder, and thievery. His rebellious spirit controlled his every action. And you can imagine his great pride as he stood before the crowd
 - a. The crowd preferred the lawlessness of Barabbas over the righteousness of Christ
John 18:40 NAU - " So they cried out again, saying, "Not this Man, but Barabbas." Now Barabbas was a robber."
 - b. The lost man naturally chooses evil over good. And he will despise you if you expose this truth.

- c. We naturally choose people like ourselves.
 - (1) The lost man chooses those who love sin
Romans 1:32 NAU - "and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them."
 - (2) The Christian loves the brethren – They love Christ

III. The lost are easily persuaded to embrace evil

Mark 15:11 NAU - "But the chief priests stirred up the crowd *to ask* him to release Barabbas for them instead."

- A. Satan easily convinces the lost man to continue in his sin
- B. Sinful men easily convince other sinful men to commit sin
 - 1. This is the nature of peer pressure
 Few would ever start smoking on their own - Or drugs, or alcohol
 - 2. And peer pressure isn't just for children
- C. This is why we must continually flee from evil
- D. This is why our church must remain as pure as possible
1 Corinthians 5:6 NAU - "Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump *of dough*?"
2 Thessalonians 3:14 NAU - " If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that person and do not associate with him, so that he will be put to shame."
1 Corinthians 5:11 NAU - "But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler-- not even to eat with such a one."

IV. Another clear teaching here is a mere external approval of Jesus is insufficient

- A. Pilate made many gestures in favor of Jesus
 - 1. He offered Barabbas in an effort to set Jesus free – (He truly expected them to choose Jesus – He would have known about the hosannas only five days before)
 - 2. He spoke in favor of Jesus
Verse 14 - "Why, what evil has He done?"
John 19:4 NAU - "Pilate came out again and said to them, "Behold, I am bringing Him out to you so that you may know that I find no guilt in Him."
John 19:12 NAU - "As a result of this Pilate made efforts to release Him, but the Jews cried out saying, "If you release this Man, you are no friend of Caesar; everyone who makes himself out *to be* a king opposes Caesar."
 - 3. Even the scourging seems to have been an effort to appease the people – to satisfy them short of crucifixion
- B. There are many people who give an outward approval of Jesus
 - 1. They may wear a cross around their neck
 - 2. They may sing songs about Jesus – the Jesus movement of the 1960's – 70's – Doobie Brothers – "Jesus is Just Alright With Me"
 - 3. They may attend church and label themselves after His name - Christian

4. They may perform acts of service for the church
 5. Like Pilate, many people make a grand open show of their religion
 6. But they **will not** risk personal hardship
- There are many religious people on the broad way that leads to destruction
- C. In the end Pilate was most concerned for his own well-being
1. Pilate was not willing to risk his own reputation, position
Mark 15:15 NAU - "Wishing to satisfy the crowd"
 - a. The proper course of action was clear – Release Jesus!
 He knew the answer to his own question in **Verse 12**
Mark 15:12 NAU - "Then what shall I do with Him whom you call the King of the Jews?"
 - b. His question should never have been asked – the proper thing was an immediate release of this innocent man
 2. Pilate feared men more than God
John 19:12-13 NAU - "As a result of this Pilate made efforts to release Him, but the Jews cried out saying, "If you release this Man, you are no friend of Caesar; everyone who makes himself out *to be* a king opposes Caesar." ¹³ Therefore when Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out"
Mark 15:15 NAU - "Wishing to satisfy the crowd"
Matthew 10:33 NAU - "But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven."
 Pilate should have acquitted him
 He should have released Him
 3. Christianity demands a denying of self and following Jesus completely
Matthew 16:24-25 NAU - "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. ²⁵ "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it."
- V. Every effort to absolve ourselves of sin will come to naught
- A. Pilate made a great open show of innocence in the death of Christ
Matthew 27:24 NAU - " When Pilate saw that he was accomplishing nothing, but rather that a riot was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this Man's blood; see *to that* yourselves."
1. Pilate had clearly seen Jesus' innocence
 2. He had the authority to release Jesus – yet he condemned Him
 3. The blood of Jesus is permanently stained on Pilates hands
- B. Human beings have remarkable way of justifying their actions
1. We find it easy to blame others
 2. We find it easy to absolve ourselves
 3. I'm often amazed how people find it so easy to disregard biblical counsel

Conclusion:

1. The crucifixion of Christ from beginning to end demonstrates the fullness of human depravity. It demonstrates the wretched choice of the human heart. We love our sin and hate righteousness.
2. We see in Pilate how impossible it will be to absolve ourselves of our guilt. Although we can appease our consciences our sins will find us out.
3. These realities make God's gracious redemption even sweeter. How merciful He has been to us. How worthy He is of our obedience and praise. May we demonstrate the reality of God's grace as we live before those still in darkness.