

Lake Cities Community Church
November 1, 2009
Pastor Craig Schill
Series: On Your Mark

“Crucify Him! Crucify Him!”
Mark 15:1-15

Many years ago when Tammy and I were dating, we drove from Phoenix, Arizona to Flagstaff in July to escape the heat of the desert for some cool mountain air. The directions for this excursion are not difficult. You drive 2½ hours north on your way there, and the same south on your way back. We had a nice day together but on our way back I began to wonder why there were not more road signs indicating the number of miles to Phoenix. I didn't think much of it until I began to see signs indicating that we were approaching the California border. At the one small freeway interchange in Flagstaff, instead of taking I-17 south, I somehow missed the signs and got on I-40 going west. We were about 100 miles west of where we were supposed to be.

That was the first of many clues to Tammy that I am not good with directions. The signs were there -- I just either didn't see them or misinterpreted them. And that happens sometimes in life, doesn't it? We miss or ignore the road signs that God gives us on how to live our lives. God wants to teach us through the Bible. He wants to show us His son, Jesus; but we miss the signs and wind up in places we should not be.

Well we are going to see this morning a bunch of people who are really, really lost. The signs were there for them along the way. But they, like we do sometimes, either missed or ignored them.

Turn with me to Mark, chapter 15, verses 1-15. The story this morning is familiar to us – Jesus is brought by the Chief Priests before Pontius Pilate. In studying this text, I want

us to do three things. First I'd like to briefly review the passage. Then I want us to consider in greater detail the two major characters in the story: Pontius Pilate and the crowd.

Review - Overview

In review the passage, we are going to start with verse 15 and work backward, and as we do pay careful attention to the complex relationships and cause and effect in the story. The story ends in v15 with Jesus being "scourged," as a preliminary step toward his crucifixion. Jesus would have been bent over so that his back was stretched out taut; then two Roman soldiers, one on either side would whip his back with short-handled whips that had multiple leather straps on which were embedded pieces of metal and bone. Often a third soldier would be yelling "Harder, Harder" as the whips came down. The straps were designed to shred the skin, fat and muscles down to the bones. The scourging of the Romans was often fatal to the prisoner. The loss of blood and bodily damage was severe.

And so we ask: "**Why is Jesus being whipped in such a way?**" Last week we learned that the rejection of Jesus was going to be physical, but this is much more intense than spitting and mocking. Well, Jesus is being whipped because Pilate approved it. OK.

Why did Pilate approve it? Verse 15, "to satisfy the crowd."

What do you mean, "satisfy the crowd?" The text tells us that they were on the edge of a great riot. They were shouting loudly, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" (13-14). Pilate had to do something drastic to avoid a riot. All right, **what caused the crowd to shout in such a way?** The answer is that Pilate asked the crowd the question, "Then what shall I do with Jesus?" (12). That is odd. **Why would Pilate consult a mob** on the sentencing of a prisoner? It was because Pilate gave the crowd a choice to either release Jesus or a

murderer named Barabbas (9). This was both the crowd's request and Pilate's desire – as he saw it as a clever way to release Jesus, as Pilate had found him innocent of all charges. Choosing between a violent criminal and a beloved teacher was not a hard decision; but the crowd surprised him by choosing Barabbas, and with some frustration, Pilate asked the question, "What should I do, then, with the Jesus?"

So the interesting question is: **Why would the crowd choose Barabbas over Jesus?** That really doesn't make sense, does it? The answer is in verse 11, the chief priests had "stirred up the crowd" to release him and kill Jesus. They had been spreading lies and inciting the crowd.

Ok. "**Why, then, would the respectable Chief Priests stoop to manipulate a crowd of people against Jesus?**" It was because they wanted him dead. Every since chapter three, they have been attempting to kill Jesus. To arrest Jesus was one thing, but the Sanhedrin Council – did not have the authority to kill Jesus – they needed the Roman Government to endorse that. And they knew that just as Judas was the key to getting Jesus arrested; so the crowd was the key to having Jesus killed.

One more question, **Why did the Chief Priests, Scribes and Elders, Pharisees, Sadducees and Herodians want Jesus dead?** Verse 10 – Pilate sees clearly through their deception – it was because of envy. They were jealous of his popularity with the crowd. They were jealous of his power to heal. They were jealous of his authority in teaching and his intelligence in debating. They envied Jesus in every possible way. And envy is a horrible sin. Because if you can't have what you want, you want to destroy what you can't have.

Pilate and the crowd of people and the chief priests and the other religious leaders are very, very lost. They are far from where they should be. They are saying things and

doing things are should not be said or done.

Pontius Pilate

But we need to go deeper still by looking more closely at Pilate and the Crowd. Pilate was a prefect – like a governor of Palestine. He had full civil, military and criminal jurisdiction over the area of Palestine. He was an important man. The Chief Priests handed Jesus to him as they needed the Roman Government to declare the death sentence. In order to do this, they change the charge against Jesus. They had declared Jesus guilty of blasphemy, but Pilate would not care about their religious squabbles; so they present Jesus as a rebel – who is claiming to be king. A rival king had a better chance at being taken seriously, so they bind him and present him as a dangerous criminal.

Pilate, however, is a smart man, and he sees through their deception immediately. He knows the real issue is envy, and he find Jesus innocent. Luke's gospel emphasizes this fact with Pilate declaring three times that Jesus is without guilt. Not only that, but Matthew's account tells us that Pilate's wife has a dream and tells her husband not to harm Jesus because He is a righteous man. And therefore, as a man charged with carrying out justice, Pilate, according to John's gospel, makes every attempt to release Jesus, including the Jesus / Barabbas trade.

But, the problem is that Pilate was not only charged with carrying out justice, but also keeping the peace. And the whole reason he was in Jerusalem was to make sure there were no riots from the people. Pilate had already had riots occur under his watch – and if there was one thing that Rome valued beyond all else was *Pax Romana*, the peace of Rome.

Sometimes Pilate is presented as a weak man – with no courage or backbone. I disagree. A weak man would never have made it into such a high position. He was a seasoned soldier and politician, and was very intelligent. And so when weighing justice on the one hand, and national security on the other hand, Pilate decided that one Jewish man's life was a small price to pay for avoiding a riot and thus jeopardizing his own position. The good for the many outweigh the good of the one, he reasoned; and he condemned Jesus to death, and I wonder if perhaps you or I might have done the same thing. Pilate was not a weak man, but he was wrong and foolish. As a politician he opted by political expediency.

He saw the signs – “This is a good man! This is an innocent man! Do not harm this man!” Pilate stood amazed in the presence of Christ. But he ignored the signs and got himself very, very lost. The exhortation to us is to not ignore the truth that God brings into our lives. God's truth sometimes will complicate our lives and lead us down a challenging path. Men – when your wife reveals a truth to you – don't ignore it! Embrace God's truth and follow it no matter where it leads.

Crowd is against him.

Now let's consider again the crowd. We begin to see why it was so important for the Chief Priests to get the crowd on their side. It was the key issue to influencing Pilate. But the question I have been thinking about for weeks is “Why?” Why does the crowd turn against Jesus? Since Jesus arrived in Jerusalem in chapter 11, the crowd has been protecting Jesus and adoring Jesus. Why are they now against Jesus? Do you remember in chapter 11?

Mark 11:9 Those who went in front and those who followed were shouting: "Hosanna! BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD; And again: Mark 11:18 The chief priests and the scribes... *began seeking how to destroy Him; for they were afraid of Him, for the whole crowd was astonished at His teaching.* And chapter 12: Mark 12:12 And they were seeking to seize Him, and *yet they feared the people...* And again, Mark 12:37 And the large crowd enjoyed listening to Him. And chapter 14: Mark 14:1 The chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to seize Him by stealth and kill Him; Mark 14:2 for they were saying, "Not during the festival, otherwise there might be a riot of the people."

The crowd loved Jesus, and was inclined toward Jesus. The worry was that they would riot to protect him, not to kill him. So what happened? The text doesn't tell us directly, but I think that we can guess

Think about how a public figure can go quickly from fame to failure? There are usually one or two elements are in play. First, if a public figure is **discredited in some way**. Any credibility Jesus had with the crowd is now gone. First of all – his close friends has deserted him – if they are not going to stay by him, the more distant crowd is certainly not. Jesus has been condemned by the Jewish government. And even though the crowd may not care for the prideful Chief Priests – they have to be law and order. Loyalty has its limits and the crowd is no longer on his side. It makes me think of Richard Nixon, who before Watergate was one of our most popular presidents. But as the evidence came forward that he was involved in criminal activities – he lost his popularity quickly. He was discredited.

But there is something more going on here – the crowd is now actually angry with Jesus. Have you ever been promised something by someone – really led to believe that they

were going to help you or take care of something – but they failed you? They lied or manipulated you for their own benefit? That is the way the crowd feels about Jesus. They really thought with his popularity and his miracles he was going to bring in the real, earthly, David-like kingdom of God. That is why they picked Barabbas – who (though a murderer) had at least fought to free Israel from the Romans. And now as Jesus submits quietly under the Roman oppressors, they feel deceived and angry.

Jesus and his whole operation was seen by the crowd as the first century equivalent to Enron. They felt like shareholders with worthless stock options; deceived and disappointed.

Of course they weren't! They just missed the signs. Jesus never promised a physical military victory – *they put that on him*. They missed and misread the signs. They saw some good – they saw him as being from God. They were attracted to his powerful teaching and miracles. But they didn't grasp the true nature of why he had come. They missed the signs and wound up very, very lost. We can make the same mistake, especially when what God tells us doesn't make sense. In those times we want to believe what we want. Be careful not to misinterpret God's messages to you – just because they don't make sense or take you to an uncomfortable place.

Conclusion / Application

In old Texas an early Dallas judge was in session. The bailiff came to him and said, "Judge, there is a woman in your court with a gun in her purse." The judge would have none of that. He banged his gavel and said, "I understand there is a woman here with a pistol in her purse - you have a choice - come up to the bench or spend a night in jail." Six women

came forward. The Bible says, "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." We all have broken the law – everyone who ever lived. Except Jesus. But he suffered and died on our behalf. In a sense it was all of our sin that cried out, like the crowd against Jesus.

In 1972 William E. Barrett wrote a fascinating book called "The Shape of Illusion." The plot of the book was the discovery of a Renaissance Painting of Jesus and Pontius Pilate – but there was a strange twist. A young artist is invited to view the painting:

"The Christ had been scourged and exhibited to the people. Pilate had washed his hands, and the Romans soldiers were taking Jesus through the courtyard where they would presently load on his shoulders the cross upon which he was to die. First, however, they must reckon with the mob. Men, women, and children, wealthy and poor, blocked the way, howling their hatred at the dazed man who stood within the circle of Roman soldiery. They were shouting, spitting, and hurling stones, those people, and the Romans were endeavoring to force them back.

Jesus Christ, in a white robe stained with blood, stood with his legs well apart, standing upright with obvious effort. He had been heavily punished and the marks of his punishment were on him. He was looking into the faces before him and it was difficult to read his expression. He seemed dazed, but his eyes were alive. They did not mirror fear, not hatred, resentment or surprise; they were, perhaps, merely asking a question.

I drew a deep breath, reminding myself that this was merely a painting...
"Magnificent!" I said. "An amazing painting. Who did it?" "No, No. The artist doesn't matter. He was a nobody. You never heard of him." Look again. You are not observing the details. Look at the people.

They were people whipped to a fury of hatred and denunciation. There was movement in them and tension. They shouted and spat and brandished fists, swore no doubt, and reached for bits of jagged stones where the pavement had cracked under the hoofs of horses. I studied the mob now, fewer people actually than there appeared to be.

Immediately I saw myself. I was in the third row of those who were being hurtled back by a Roman soldier. I had taken one step away from the pressing front lines to bend over in search for a missile to throw. My fingers were closing around a jagged piece of stone that was not quite so large as the hand which sought it. It was no mere resemblance; it was a portrait. It was myself as I was.”

This book challenges us to consider that as we look at the story of Pilate and the crowd, we all could see ourselves yelling “Crucify Him. Crucify Him!”

And the lesson for us now as we seek to follow Jesus fully, is not to ignore God’s truth when it is dropped in our lap. Don’t be like Pilate. And don’t misinterpret God’s truth and try to make it something it is not – just because it doesn’t make sense to you, like the crowd. If we do – we will wind up 100 miles west of God’s will. Rather, when you see God’s truth, and understand who Jesus is – follow Him. There you and I will find joy and peace and fulfillment in this life and the next. Amen.