

Let's open our Bibles this morning to Mark 15:6 as we continue with Mark, especially in this time of Jesus' crucifixion.

There's a reason that the gospels devote literally 35% of their volume to this last week of Jesus' ministry and beyond; and the reason is simple - this is why He came. And there's no better place to learn God's love (and also man's need for Him) than you do at the cross - looking at all of the different responses and actions and all.

And this morning we want to look at the high price of selling out God's love for the world's gain because, indeed, around the cross there're a lot of folks just bailing out, bailing out on God's goodness; not because they don't know Him or couldn't know Him but because they choose not to. And so this morning I'll try to fill in some of the places that Mark kind of skips over so you'll get a good feel for it in terms of flow.

Jesus had gone through three trials during the night (before the Jews) so they could come and bring charges against Him. They had mistreated Him and beaten Him terribly. They brought Him to Pilate early in the morning, at dawn. At about 6:00 a.m., Pilate would return Jesus to them to be crucified by 9:00. So early in the morning, certainly. And Pilate was a man (that we looked at for the last couple weeks) that was in trouble with the Jews. They had a lot on him, they reported him more than once to Rome, he was on thin ice. He didn't get along with them very well. It was a tough job to be ruling in Jerusalem, in Judea, if you will. They woke Pilate up with Jesus. Pilate says, "What has He done wrong?" and they said, "Look, if He wasn't a bad guy, we wouldn't have brought Him to you." Pilate said, "Well, then handle it yourself," and they made their reasons clear, "We can't kill Him; we don't have any power to do that. You do." We talked last week about how the Lord's plans to crucify His Son, spoken of a thousand years earlier in the Psalms, would have required Rome to take Him, not the Jews themselves. Pilate interviewed Jesus. He determined, very quickly, that He hadn't done anything wrong; went out and said that. That should have been the end to it. In fact, Jesus says very little beyond that, to them. They begin to add complaints, "Oh, He's subverting the nation. He's not allowing us to pay taxes. He's setting up another kingdom. He's declaring Himself to be a king." And Pilate went back and talked to

Jesus again, these guys not coming into the judgment hall because of their religious commitments - they don't want to defile themselves before this religious day. As soon as they get a guy killed, they're going to go back to worshipping. And the discussion between Jesus and Pilate - Jesus very calm; He declares to him that He's indeed a king, but not of this world; that He has come to set up the kingdom in men's hearts. And so Pilate went out again and said, "No. He's not guilty." And they said, "Well, He started these lies all the way up in Galilee," and Pilate heard "Galilee," and he said, "Oh, that's not my territory. If he started trouble there, that's Herod's domain." And Herod happened to be in town, and so he sent Jesus off to Herod. Mark doesn't cover that, but we are told that in the other gospels. And Herod, at one point in his life, was very soft-hearted towards the Messiah. John the Baptist had shared with him a lot. Eventually he had him put to death for complaining about his illicit relationship, and he was kind of hustled around by his wife and her daughter. But, in any event, he had grown hard over the last couple of years. He wasn't listening at all and wanted to see a miracle. Jesus wasn't going to accommodate that. And so Herod's soldiers again mistreated Jesus and sent him back to Pilate and said, "He's not guilty. There's nothing that He has done worthy of death." And so Pilate gets Jesus back, and again Mark doesn't tell us that meeting with Pilate. But we are told (verse 15 of this portion that we're studying today) that Pilate will eventually had Jesus over "to gratify the crowds."

And so we want to look at, this morning, what takes place next. Now between verse 5 and verse 6 (and we're going to start in verse 6 this morning) is what Luke records, and I'll read it to you. You might want to write it in the margin for yourself. But we are told in Luke 23:13, "Then Pilate, when he had called together the chief priests, the rulers, and the people, said to them, 'You have brought this Man to me, as one who misleads the people. And indeed, having examined Him in your presence, I have found no fault in this Man concerning those things of which you accuse Him; no, neither did Herod, for I sent you back to him; and indeed nothing deserving of death has been done by Him.' " And then we read, " 'I will therefore chastise Him and release Him' (for it was necessary for him to release one to them at the feast)." So Pilate thought he escaped the responsibility for Jesus and now has Him back on his doorstep, and he goes back to what he understood to begin with - Jesus hadn't done anything wrong. He's convinced of His innocence. We are told in the Bible that the Jews were certainly trying to get rid of Him because of their jealousy over His popularity. He wanted to release Him. He was afraid of the Sanhedrin. They could put pressure on him with Rome. And so nothing is working out for Pilate. He has to make a stand. I guess that's all

of us, right? We can see a little bit of Pilate in all of us. There's a cost involved to doing what's right. And so far, nothing had worked in Pilate's plan to kind of rid himself of these things, and he couldn't escape the responsibility. And so this time he goes back to the crowd and says, "Look, I told you He's innocent, and now I talked to Herod, and he says the same thing." Pilate is certainly hearing a lot of voices. As you read through the gospels, Pilate hears the voice of the mob that is crying out for a gross miscarriage of justice with political kind of pressure. His conscience is wrestling because he knows what the right thing to do is; he's just not willing to do it. There's a cost that he's not willing to pay. Jesus' words and His demeanor just blew Pilate's mind. In fact, it says that he "marveled" at Jesus' attitude. "*Thaumazo*" really means to blow your mind. He couldn't understand how someone on trial like this would be so calm. The judgment of Herod kind of supported the fact that he believed He hadn't done anything wrong. In a few minutes, his (Pilate's) wife is going to send a note, "Leave that innocent Man alone. I've had a horrible dream tonight because of Him. Don't you condemn Him. Don't you lay your hand upon Him." (You find it in Matthew 27:16). And so you can almost watch Pilate breaking down. All law and order kind of grinds to a halt, and this judge has to argue with and justify himself before the crowd, even at the end trying to wash his hands as if somehow that is going to be enough. But notice again he declares Jesus innocent - something he does nine times, nine, in the gospels. Luke tells us in verse 15 (chapter 23), " 'No, neither did Herod, for I sent you back to him; and indeed nothing deserving of death has been done by Him.' " And so that should have been it. But you read in verse 16 (Luke 23), " 'I will therefore chastise Him and release Him' " because there was an agreement during the Passover that the Romans would allow someone to go free. There would be a prisoner release, if you will, as a gesture to the Jews.

Look how wicked this compromise is, though. Right? He's going to beat an innocent Man to justify himself before the crowds. It's a very wicked compromise. There's no moral right to doing the wrong thing in the hopes of getting something right in the bigger scheme of things. I think Pilate thought, "Well, the end will justify the means. He'll get a bad beating, but He'll get released. I won't kill Him. He'll get out of here. He'll make it through. It's the best I can do under these circumstances." And I think Pilate hoped that the crowd's thirst for blood - when they saw Jesus standing there, beaten - that he would save a life and somehow move their sympathies. But, look, Roman scourging was no easy way out. I mean, history tells us that they beat prisoners in such a regular basis with these whips that had chunks of bone at the end, that 50-75% of the people beaten died in the

beating; because it didn't just put a stripe on your back, it took huge chunks of skin right off the bone. It was horrible. It was horrendous. And oftentimes people would confess - innocent people - to doing something wrong so that the beating would stop. And Jesus, we read in Isaiah 53:7, didn't have anything to confess so He was quiet, He was silent as a lamb before His shearers is dumb. He doesn't open His mouth at all. This was illegal. It was horrendous. And Pilate thought, "Well, I'll beat Him, and besides we've still got this prisoner release program to go, and maybe we can put Him out there. Certainly no one's going to not choose Him. They like Him. And now He's suffered so. They're going to vote for Him to be released immediately." It does appear (from verse 17 here) that Pilate is interrupted in his plans to beat Jesus when the people begin to cheer or to chant, "We need a prisoner. We need a prisoner to be released." And I think that kind of, in Pilate's mind, went, "That's it! I'll release Jesus. I'll get rid of Him, and I'll be off the hook. They'll certainly choose Him. They love Him."

Well here in Mark then (in chapter 15:6), we continue by reading, "Now at the feast he was accustomed to releasing one prisoner to them, whomever they requested. And there was one named Barabbas, who was chained with his fellow rebels; they had committed murder in the rebellion." (The 1st-century terrorists) "Then the multitude, crying aloud, began to ask him to do just as he had always done for them." In other words, they began to chant, and this is while Pilate is declaring, according to Mark, that he'll beat Jesus and let Him go in this tradeoff. Verse 9, "But Pilate answered them, saying, 'Do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?' For he knew that the chief priests had handed Him over because of envy." So, they had a guy who was supposed to die this morning - a notorious criminal, a terrorist, tried to overthrow the government. John said he'd been caught for robbery and for murder; deserving guy for the death penalty. And they called him Barabbas. Now, Barabbas is not a name. It's a title. Bar Abbas. It literally, in Hebrew, is "son of the father." "Son of the father." Which is an interesting picture when you think about it because here's Jesus, who's going to hang on Barabbas' cross. He's going to substitute Himself for a murderous man who needed to die, a sinner. And his title is he was the "son of the father." Isn't that interesting? You believe in Christ, you get off the cross you deserve to be on. He takes your punishment, and you become a child of God - a son of the Father, a daughter of the Father. He dies in our place, the innocent for the guilty. We walk because He didn't walk. And the very cross Jesus would die upon was prepared for the execution of this horrible, wicked man.

Now we read here in Mark that Pilate was aware of the priests' motive. He also believed that everyone in the crowd loved Jesus and had been the recipients of His kindness. I don't think this was done in the dark. I do believe Pilate thought, put to a vote, Barabbas would be a guy they wanted to hang up and string up, and they'll let Jesus go. And so he hadn't beaten Him yet, he hadn't needed to. This was even better! But Matthew tells us in chapter 27 of his gospel that, as Pilate stands up, he says to the crowd, "Who would you like me to release to you? Barabbas or Jesus, the One who is called the Christ?" And Matthew again writes he knew that the desire of the priests was envy. But as he was sitting in the judgment seat, he was interrupted, and that's where the servant of his wife came and stopped the whole procedure and had a discussion with him; his wife so moved by this dream she had that she figured she had to interrupt him no matter what he was doing at that moment exactly. "I have to get in and talk to him immediately." And the message that came from her was, "Look, I've had a horrible dream because of this Man tonight. Don't have anything to do with this just Man," this One who hasn't done anything wrong. Well, Matthew tells us that, as this meeting is going on between Pilate and the servant of his wife, the chief priests and all begin to filter through the crowd and begin to threaten the crowd and begin to convince them, "You'd better ask for Barabbas. You'd better ask for Barabbas. Don't you ask for Jesus." And, in their hatred, they seek to turn the hearts of the multitude again and turn them away from Jesus, if you will. And so that interruption there (that Matthew is the one that records) gave them time to lobby, if you will, and pressure the people. And, again, here's God's hand on things. Right? I think the people would have went, "Barabbas. Let's take him out, and let Jesus go." But the Lord wanted His Son to die. That's why He had come. And so this interruption - God's hand, for sure, upon the whole situation as He, again, guides the whole turn of events.

We are told in verse 12 here of Mark that, "Pilate answered and said them again, 'What then do you want me to do with Him who you call the King of the Jews?' So they cried out again, 'Crucify Him!' " So verse 11, "the chief priests stirred up the crowd" so they asked for Barabbas, and then Pilate says to the crowd, "What do I do with Jesus?" and they said, "You should crucify Him." Verse 14, "Then Pilate said to them, 'Why, what evil has He done?' But they cried out all the more, 'Crucify Him!' " Pilate turns to the crowd, thinking he's got this worked out, and is shocked to hear their answer because the priests (verse 11) had gone through and put out pressure. But I want you to look at the picture here - how the court is out of order. Here's the judge asking the people what to do. "Who do you want me to

kill?" "Yeah, we want Jesus strung up." "Who do you want me to release?" "Release Barabbas." "What do I do with Jesus?" "Well, you've got to kill Him." "But He hasn't done anything wrong." "Yeah, you kill Him anyway." I mean, this is called court out of order, right? But notice the question that Pilate asks because it is the most important question you can ask. "What do I do with Jesus?" For Pilate, he'd been trying to pawn off Jesus for the better part of a few hours. He's declared Him innocent again and again; he's worried about the political pressure of the Jews; he tried to dump the responsibility onto Herod; he was going to beat an innocent Man just to get the sympathy vote; he tried to use their relationship at Passover to manipulate so that he could get things the way that he wants them. But his decision about Jesus was, "I don't want to get near Him," though he knew better.

Look, the interesting thing about Jesus is if you vote nothing, you're voting against Him. If you make no decision - and there're a lot of people in the world, "Well, yeah, I'll take Him or leave Him, I'm really not a zealot, I don't lean in one direction or the other" - in so doing, you're really, if you're not coming to Jesus, you're standing against Him. Jesus said, "If you're for Me, that's great, but else you're going to be against Me" (Matthew 12:30, Luke 11:23). Right? And the reason is simple - Jesus' claims were so radical that you can't ignore Him. If He says to you, "I am the only way to heaven," and you go, "Well, I can just take it or leave it," no, you can't. Because He said He's the only way to heaven. If He said, "I'm one of the ways to heaven," you might very well go, "Oh, I'll choose another." But He makes it so difficult for you to stand on the sidelines. If you're not for Him, you're going to be against Him. If you're not confessing Him, you're denying Him. And the issue can't be avoided. And the paradox is no matter what you decide about Jesus, it isn't going to affect Him. It's going to have great impact on you. You're the one that has to face up to the decision that you make. It determines your eternal destiny. It doesn't affect Him at all. People go, "I don't think God would send me to hell." God doesn't send you to hell. You decide to go there. God wants you to go to heaven. That's why He sent His Son. All you have to do is choose Pilate, choose religious leaders, choose the crowd that can be so easily manipulated, choose Herod. But if you're going to deliberately choose to reject God's plan, then you really don't have anyone to blame but yourself.

"What am I going to do with Jesus?" Well, Pilate, why don't you do the right thing? Unfortunately, his answer put his soul in eternal jeopardy. And Pilate's plan to release Jesus without a personal cost failed, and the people began to scream, and

to scream louder. And you'll read in Luke 23:22 that Pilate says, for a third time to them, "I have found no reason for death in Him. He's innocent. But I'll tell you what. I'm going to chastise Him, I'm going to beat Him. And then I'm going to let Him go." And then he asks them what he should do with Him, and again, they yell, "Crucify Him!" and again he said, "What evil has He done?" He says it again and again. There's this big argument between Pilate and the people outside that have been stirred up by the religious leaders.

Well, nine times he declares Him innocent. The crowds continue to yell. He has no leg to stand on. And when you don't have any leg to stand on, it's usually just the volume that gets turned up. But Pilate's running out of time, and now he returns to that one plan that he had had early on and that was so horrible - he's going to beat Jesus and then let Him go. Again, Mark doesn't cover that. I'll read it to you from John's gospel. It says this in verse 1 of John 19, "So then Pilate took Jesus and scourged Him. And the soldiers twisted a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and they put on Him a purple robe. Then they said, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' And they struck Him with their hands. Pilate then went out again, and said to them, 'Behold, I am bringing Him out to you, that you may know that I find no fault in Him.' Then Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. And Pilate said to them, '*Ecce homo!* Behold the Man!' " "Look, He's bleeding like all of us. He's not a God. He's a Man, and He's innocent." And Pilate parades - in front of the crowd early that morning at the judgment hall on the Passover - the result of his own cowardice. Isaiah 52:14 says that Jesus had been so marred by the time He's through all this, you couldn't recognize Him as a man. You can just imagine how stomach-turning this all must have been from a physical standpoint - from sweating great drops of blood in the Garden, to being slapped in the face at Annas', to being beaten by Caiaphas' henchmen, to being up all night and dragged back and forth, to being beaten by Herod's men and now professionally tortured by the Romans. I'm sure that standing was an issue. And the Lord did this for us. It's beyond our imagination. But here's Pilate, still pulling strings, doing nothing. Jesus was a man's Man, I think. Courageous and silent and loving as He suffered for us. There's a Scripture that says, in Hebrews 12:2, "For the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross, despising the shame." Translation - every one of these moments, you're on His mind. He despised the shame. But for the joy set before Him, for your salvation, Jesus goes through all of this. And I think you serve yourself well to sit and watch and think about it a bit because there's nothing more moving to me than what the Lord was willing to do for you and for me. I can't

find five people that'll do that for me, and I don't think you can either. But He did. He did.

If Pilate hoped to have some sympathy when he brought Him out and said, "Behold the Man!" verse 6 of John 19 says, "Therefore, when the chief priests and officers saw Him, they cried out, saying, 'Crucify Him, crucify Him!' Pilate said to them, 'You take Him and crucify Him, for I find no fault in Him.' " "I'm not going to be a part of this." He's a part of it already. And they yelled back, verse 7, " 'We have a law, and according to our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God.' " And now Pilate freaks out. "He's what?" "He's a Son of the gods." That's what he heard. And he runs back before Jesus and drags Him back inside, and He says to Jesus, verse 8, "Where do You come from?" And Jesus says nothing. Innocent already. And Pilate says, "You'd better talk to me. I have Your life in my hands. I have the power to save You and the power to destroy You," literally, "to crucify You or to release You." And Jesus looked at him and said, "You don't have any power over Me at all unless it has been given to you from above. You have no power at all." But then He said this, "The one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin," and He refers to the Jews and to the high priests, the ones who had the Scriptures, who should have known. Pilate had no attachment to Jewish Scriptures. But they did. "So Pilate, you're responsible for what you've done. They're even more responsible for what they know." And Jesus made it really clear to Pilate, "Look, you are the one that has been given power, but now you have to answer for how you use that power." But they are empty words from a coward, a man caught in his own sin. "You're not in control, Pilate. My Father is in control." I like that because it seems to me our world is going crazy. I don't know when it's going to stop. I trust this is all leading us to welcome the Lord who's coming to get us. But when human government fails, God is still in charge. He still rules. There's a proverb - Proverbs 8:15 - that says, "By me kings reign, and rulers decree justice. By me princes rule, and nobles, all the judges of the earth." "It's by Me." In other words, "Nothing gets by Me. I'm ultimately the One that decides what is going on." And it is good to know that the Lord is in charge. So, "Pilate, you're personally responsible for what was given to you." God could say that to us. You are personally responsible for what the Lord has shown you and the decisions that you've made. But, "There's one who is even more guilty of having delivered Me up to you." The word "delivered," there in John 19:11, is the word "*paradidomi*," which means delivered, but it also means betrayed. It's the same word that is used when you read about Judas betraying Jesus into the hands of the chief priests. "*Paradidomi*." He had made a decision. And Pilate listens without debate. He

seems to at least accept the fact there's a divine rule and a human authority and all. But the crowd is waiting outside.

And so Pilate, verse 12 (of John 19), goes back to try to release Him, and the Jews say to him, "but the Jews cried out, saying, 'If you let this Man go, you are not Caesar's friend. Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar.' When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus out and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called The Pavement, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha. Now it was the Preparation Day of the Passover, and about the sixth hour" (John writing in Roman time; it was 6:00 in the morning). "And he said to the Jews, 'Behold your King!' But they cried out, 'Away with Him, away with Him! Crucify Him!' Pilate said to them, 'Shall I crucify your King?' The chief priests answered, 'We have no king but Caesar!' Then he delivered Him to them to be crucified." We read here in Mark 15:15, "So Pilate, wanting to gratify the crowd, released Barabbas to them; and he delivered Jesus, after he had scourged Him, to be crucified." Pilate makes up his mind. He sits down, he does the wrong thing. It's 6:00 in the morning. He hands Jesus over to this death squad, these wolves, with one sarcastic kind of chide, "Behold your King!" Pilate caves in; 6:00 in the morning. Mark says (in verse 25) 9:00 a.m., "third hour."

Notice verse 15. He wanted to "gratify the crowd." He wanted to keep them happy. One of the saddest, to me, verses in the Bible is when you make the wrong decision because you want to please the crowds. And I would say to you, as a Christian, never let the crowd or the world prevail over you. Stand proudly for Jesus. Resist any attempt to have you say otherwise. Don't quiet your conscience for the crowd's sake. Count the cost of being a believer. There can be a cost. But there's a much greater cost, if you watch this guy, by trying to do something else. Matthew 27:24 tells us that Pilate tries to wash his hands of the whole thing. "His blood will not be upon my hands." And they cried out, the crowd does, "His blood can be on us and on our children." So Pilate tries to absolve himself. I almost have more respect for the people. They do absolutely the wrong thing, but they're all into it. "We want Him dead." Pilate doesn't seem to be able to make a decision in any direct regard. So he hands Him over, Luke 23:25 says, to the will of the people.

Verse 16 (Mark 15), "Then the soldiers led Him away into the hall called Praetorium, and they called together the whole garrison. And they clothed Him with purple; and they twisted a crown of thorns, put it on His head, and began to

salute Him, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' Then they struck Him on the head with a reed and spat on Him; and bowing the knee, they worshipped Him. And when they had mocked Him, they took the purple off Him, put His own clothes on Him, and led Him out to crucify Him." Pilate tried to not make a decision, but he did make one; tried to avoid the consequences, but he couldn't. He chose the wrong way. He questioned Jesus. He trembled at Jesus' answers. In the end, it wasn't the word of the Lord that moved him but his own selfish ambition. He wanted popularity more than righteousness. He wanted reputation more than an honest character. He couldn't do the right thing, and, as a result, he wastes his opportunity. I mean, look at these crowds around the cross. There were the religious people like the Sanhedrin, who hated Jesus for the fact that He was popular (they were losing their popularity), and He told them what they were all about. He knew their hearts, He understood their motives, and rather than trying to be changed by Him, they wanted to wipe Him out. There was a crowd that seems to be able to be influenced just by the latest word. They loved Jesus the week before. They laid their coats out on the street. They sang, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord." That was a week ago. And now they're screaming for a murderer to be released. They just want Jesus dead. Even His bloody, beaten body had no impact on them, whatsoever; didn't affect them in the least. No sympathy. If he hoped to get some, he wasn't getting it from this crowd. There are folks like Herod who have heard God's Word, have been soft to it, and yet, when it came right down to it, hardened his heart, unmoved by what he had heard, treats Jesus as if nothing. It says he condescended to Him. "You're nobody. I'm the boss here. Did You know that?" And Jesus didn't have a word to say to him. Pilate's wife - her advice was pretty clear, "Don't have anything to do with Him at all." That's interesting. Pilate just wanted to get rid of Him at all costs.

So there're all of these reactions to the Savior. And then there're guys like the Roman soldier who we will see here in a couple of weeks say (Mark 15:39), "Indeed, this was the Son of God!" and he'll be one of the first guys to come around and have eternal life.

So there're lots of reasons to reject Jesus - all of them worldly, all of them driven by self-interest, all of them unwilling to admit sin. Or, you admit that you're a sinner, and you need a Savior, and you run to Jesus for life, and then His death means something to you. But the reason why we find so many verses kind of all crammed together is so you're brought face to face with that. Here's the One who died so that I might live. And I would say to you - if you're not a Christian this

morning, the only person keeping you from Jesus is you. He's opened the door, He's unlocked it, He's died so that the door could be opened, He's invited you to come. He sent His Spirit to personally deliver the invitation. All you have left to do is come. That's it. Nothing more. Nothing less. You'll find people willing to stand with you at about every position - hate, rejection, fickle crowds, mocking, ridding yourself of all the guilt. Or, you can stand with others that love Jesus and be forgiven. It is the message of the Bible, certainly, that God has come to save us through His Son.

Next week, we'll start with Jesus at Calvary and have lots to learn there as well.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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