



Mark 15 The Crucifixion

Summary: At the crucifixion of Jesus we see three men, one compromises, one stands alone, and another steps forward.

I did something stupid in high school. Says everyone, right? Well, let me tell you just one stupid thing I did. I was standing with my group of friends between classes and everyone was talking about another guy who always tried to hang out with us. They were saying they didn't like him and they wished he would pick up the hint and stop coming around. So, I figured I would be the one to do it – I'd tell *him* no one liked him and then they would all like *me* even more.

When he walked up a few minutes later I told him, in front of everyone, we didn't really like him and to stop trying to hangout with us. And when I did, he walked away. But then, instead of cheering me on, all the rest of the guys were like, "Dude, why do you have to be so mean?" Later some of them told him we didn't really mean it, and he came back and eventually became part of our group. And later, he and I actually became good friends.

But if life came with a reset button, that's one moment I would take another shot at. Because here's what I see when I look back – I *hurt* someone else in order to *help* myself. I thought I would get more acceptance and approval from the group by pushing someone else out and away. It was selfish, stupid, and shameful.

It was also very, very, human – I'm sure some of you have done something similar or had it done to you.

This morning Scripture reminds us that people have been hurting people in order to impress other people for thousands of years across cultures.

We're taking a close look at the crucifixion of Jesus and along the way we'll cluster our observations around three men – one who compromised, one who stepped forward, and in between them one man who stood alone against the world. Read with me:

Mark 15:1 Immediately, in the morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council; and they bound Jesus, led *Him* away, and delivered *Him* to Pilate.

Pilate is the Roman governor, the ultimate authority in the region. Normally he's up at his headquarters in Caesarea, the regional capital. But, every year during Passover he mobilizes his forces and moves down to Jerusalem just to keep an eye on things since it's the biggest holiday of the year, the city is flooded with pilgrims, and it's a great time for revolutionary zealots to start causing problems.

And problems are not what Rome wants. Remember, the Pax Romana, or the peace of Rome was a thing. If you were a governor and you couldn't keep the peace in your region, you'd be out of a job.

And right now, Pilate is feeling that pinch. He's already experienced two uprisings, and he caused each of them. First, he brought banners with the emperor's face on them to the Temple Mount. Why was that a big deal? Well, the second of the Ten Commandments prohibits making an image of God – no statues or paintings of Him, and the Jews expanded that to mean no images of people either. Think about it, Roman and Greek culture are famous for their sculptures, but not the Jews. So, when Pilate brought these banners with the face of the emperor to the Temple Mount of all places, it caused a great offense and started a riot.

Later, in order to build an aqueduct, Pilate took money from the Temple to pay for the project. Again, it caused a riot. Ask anyone who has been in the military, State Department, or the intelligence community, they can tell you one of the problems with being an occupying power, like Rome in Israel, or America in Iraq or Afghanistan, is that you're always doing this dance between showing enough force to stay in control without doing things that cause people to revolt.

Pilate is trying hard to walk that line. It hasn't been going well. And now he's faced with an explosive issue as the Jews bring Jesus to him.

2 Then Pilate asked Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?"

He answered and said to him, "It is as you say."

3 And the chief priests accused Him of many things, but He answered nothing. 4 Then Pilate asked Him again, saying, "Do You answer nothing? See how many things they testify against You!" 5 But Jesus still answered nothing, so that Pilate marveled.

Things don't seem right to Pilate. Supposedly this guy is the King of the Jews, but He's not causing any problems for Rome, hasn't started any rebellions, doesn't seem interested in fighting. He can tell there's something going on here, but he's not sure what. We learn more from reading the other gospels.

Luke tells us Pilate knew Jesus was from Galilee. One of the Herods still ruled that region and he was in town for the feast too. So, Pilate sent Jesus to Herod hoping he would deal with the issue, but Herod sent Him right back because he couldn't learn anything either.

Matthew tells us this is when Pilate's wife came and spoke to him. She told her husband she had a troubling dream about Jesus last night and that Pilate should have nothing to do with Him.

Things are getting more and more complicated for Pilate – the pressure on him is rising but he still doesn't have any answers – who is this man that the Jews have brought to him, and what has He really done? That's when an idea hits him:

6 Now at the feast he was accustomed to releasing one prisoner to them, whomever they requested.

Each year, Pilate bought himself some goodwill by releasing one prisoner, this was a major holiday after all – it seemed like a politically expedient way to celebrate. And this might be a way to get rid of Jesus and move on with his day. But,

7 And there was one named Barabbas, *who was* chained with his fellow rebels; they had committed murder in the rebellion. 8 Then the multitude, crying aloud, began to ask *him to do* just as he had always done for them. 9 But Pilate answered them, saying, "Do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?" 10 For he knew that the chief priests had handed Him over because of envy.

Pilate knows what's going on – he knows the chief priests are trying to manipulate things, but he hopes the public will save him by asking to have Jesus back.

11 But the chief priests stirred up the crowd, so that he should rather release Barabbas to them. 12 Pilate answered and said to them again, "What then do you want me to do *with Him* whom you call the King of the Jews?" 13 So they cried out again, "Crucify Him!" 14 Then Pilate said to them, "Why, what evil has He done?" But they cried out all the more, "Crucify Him!"

Just a few days ago crowds surrounded Jesus during the Triumphal Entry and cheered for Him. So, the question is sometimes asked, how could they turn on Him so quickly? The answer's simple, this was not the same crowd. That crowd included many people who traveled with Jesus to Jerusalem for the Passover, people who knew Him. But now, Jesus was arrested in the middle of the night, it's probably around 7AM when He stands before Pilate. Most people who have heard of Him don't know where He is or what's happening – that was the point – to keep it all low profile so it didn't cause another riot.

So now Pilate is kind of stuck, what's he going to do?

He's going to cave and compromise – let injustice fall on Jesus in order to keep the peace for Himself. Have you ever heard the expression; I'm washing my hands of this? That's exactly what Pilate does. Matthew tells us that at this point he literally brings out a bowl of water and washes his hands in front of the crowd and tells them I am innocent of this Man's blood – but you can do whatever you want with Him.

15 So Pilate, wanting to gratify the crowd, released Barabbas to them; and he delivered Jesus, after he had scourged *Him*, to be crucified.

One man compromised

Pilate sent Jesus to death, knowing this was all a conspiracy, knowing that Jesus had done nothing wrong. But he couldn't see a way out that wouldn't cause a riot and potentially cost him his job. The man with the most legitimate power in the region just caved under the pressure of public opinion. Like me telling Aaron to go away, Pilate hurt someone else in order to look good himself.

But, as Pilate compromised, Jesus stands firm, even though, point number two, the whole world is against Him.

One man stood against the world.

16 Then the soldiers led Him away into the hall called Praetorium, and they called together the whole garrison. 17 And they clothed Him with purple; and they twisted a crown of thorns, put it on His *head*, 18 and began to salute Him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" 19 Then they struck Him on the head with a reed and spat on Him; and bowing the knee, they worshiped Him. 20 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.

21 Then they compelled a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian [modern day Libya], the father of Alexander and Rufus, as he was coming out of the country and passing by, to bear His cross.

22 And they brought Him to the place Golgotha, which is translated, Place of a Skull. 23 Then they gave Him wine mingled with myrrh to drink, but He did not take *it*.

They offer something to ease the pain – the modern equivalent of giving someone morphine. But Jesus refused it – He experienced every shock and jolt and tremor of pain.

24 And when they crucified Him, they divided His garments, casting lots for them *to determine* what every man should take.

25 Now it was the third hour [around 8-9:30, three hours after sunrise], and they crucified Him. 26 And the inscription of His accusation was written above:
THE KING OF THE JEWS.

27 With Him they also crucified two robbers, one on His right and the other on His left.

Remember, robbers are not just pick pockets, petty thieves, or shoplifters, the term was used of what we would consider armed robbery. They're probably colleagues of Barabbas.

And here's what's so ironic about that. Jesus will be crucified in the middle of, and in the place of, men who used violence to take what they want. Meanwhile, He will suffer violence to get what He wants – atonement, or payment, for our sins.

28 So the Scripture was fulfilled which says, *“And He was numbered with the transgressors.”*

29 And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, *“Aha! You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, 30 save Yourself, and come down from the cross!”*

31 Likewise the chief priests also, mocking among themselves with the scribes, said, *“He saved others; Himself He cannot save. 32 Let the Christ, the King of Israel, descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe.”* Even those who were crucified with Him reviled Him.

33 Now when the sixth hour had come [around noon – sun should be in peak], there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour [around 3PM].

Throughout Scripture darkness is considered a symbol of judgment. John opens his gospel by explaining that Jesus is the light of the world. And now, as He hangs on the cross, suffering, bleeding, dying for our sins and failures, a strange darkness settles upon the land.

This was not an eclipse – Passover happens during a full moon, so the moon is in the wrong part of the sky for that. But think back to our Turn Aside study of Exodus. Passover was connected to the tenth plague, a way to escape the death of the first born through the sacrifice of a lamb. What was the ninth plague, the one right before that? Darkness.

34 And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, *“Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?”* which is translated, *“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”*

Jesus quotes here from Psalm 22 which prophesied of this very event, when God the Father would turn His back on the Son because the Son was taking on our guilt, our shame, our misconduct and misbehavior. *He became sin who knew no sin, that we might become His righteousness* (2 Cor 5:21).

The whole world turned their back on Jesus. The leaders of the Jewish nation were against Him. The crowd was against Him. Pilate was against Him. The disciples had left Him. The public was against Him. And now, even the Father had turned away.

We all have a deep sense that something is wrong with the world. We may disagree about what it is, but we see something is wrong. Something must be fixed. The crucifixion of Jesus helps us see with clarity – we are broken people who hurt people, even people as good as Jesus.

35 Some of those who stood by, when they heard *that*, said, *“Look, He is calling for Elijah!”* 36 Then someone ran and filled a sponge full of sour wine, put it on a reed, and offered it to Him to drink, saying, *“Let Him alone; let us see if Elijah will come to take Him down.”*

Some Jewish groups believed that Elijah was sent to receive the dying if they had been especially good in life.

37 And Jesus cried out with a loud voice, and breathed His last.

John tells us He cried out *Tetelestai*, 'it is finished' and then, Jesus gave up His life. It was right around 3 PM, the time of the evening sacrifice in the Temple when the Lamb of God was slain for the sin of the world. And then,

38 Then the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

The final sacrifice had been made. Every animal sacrifice in history had been looking forward to this. Every time Christians celebrate communion, we look back to this. This is what it was all about: God becoming a sacrifice, Himself, for us.

The old system of temple-based worship is meaningless now. There's no need to shed any more blood. It was one, perfect, sacrifice for all time, for all people who will be saved.

Now we are told to come boldly into the presence of God by the blood of Christ. There is no barrier between you and God if you come in through the door that Jesus made. There's no toll to pay, no offering to bring, no thing to do. You just come. Come close. Because you're offered admittance in Jesus' name.

39 So when the centurion, who stood opposite Him, saw that He cried out like this and breathed His last, he said, "Truly this Man was the Son of God!"

A Gentile soldier, a military professional and commander. A man who had seen, and shed, his share of blood, was impressed by Jesus' death.

Thousands of people ate fish and bread that Jesus multiplied, then walked away from Him. This centurion watched Jesus suffer and die and was drawn to Him. So too, the way we navigate suffering is far more compelling than the good times that come our way – sometimes we suffer so that others can see us trust Jesus more.

40 There were also women looking on from afar, among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the Less and of Joses, and Salome, 41 who also followed Him and ministered to Him when He was in Galilee, and many other women who came up with Him to Jerusalem.

These women followed Jesus. That's a term used of disciples, which is important because it helps us see that women were welcomed by Jesus and had an important place in His ministry. They're able to be here because they're less likely to be indicted than a group of men coming out to witness and support Jesus, but it still takes tremendous courage to come.

Speaking of courage – we said we would see one man compromise, another stand against the world, and now, we see one who surprisingly stepped forward.

One man stepped forward.

42 Now when evening had come, because it was the Preparation Day, that is, the day before the Sabbath, 43 Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent council member, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, coming and taking courage, went in to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.

Joseph was a member of the Sanhedrin – the combined Jewish Senate and Supreme Court. He's a man with a name, a reputation, a public position and visibility. And he leverages them all for the sake of Jesus. He knows his peers just conspired to put Jesus to death. He knows they bullied Pilate into authorizing it, and now he steps forward and identifies himself with Christ – he risks it all in front of men who were desperate to save it all.

44 Pilate marveled that He was already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him if He had been dead for some time.

Death on the cross could take days – you died from asphyxiation – basically because you can't breathe. It was typically long, slow, and painful.

45 So when he found out from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph. 46 Then he bought fine linen, took Him down, and wrapped Him in the linen. And he laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out of the rock, and rolled a stone against the door of the tomb.

The typical process was to lay the body on a slab inside the tomb and let it decompose for one year. Then you would return, collect the bones, place them in a box called an ossuary and insert that into a slot in the wall of the tomb.

47 And Mary Magdalene and Mary *the mother of Joseph* observed where He was laid.

We opened with the compromise of Pilate and now we close with the courage of Joseph – a fitting contrast because in the middle is Christ. A problem for one and a promise for the other.

There's no way for us to identify with Jesus here – what He has done is incomparable and unachievable for us. The point is not, look what Jesus did, now go and do likewise. You can't. That's why He did.

But, we can learn something as we consider Pilate and Joseph. Both were men of position and power. Both were men who could affect or even determine outcomes. One allowed what he had to be used against Jesus in order to protect himself. The other exposed himself in order to use what he had for Jesus.

So let me ask: how have you been like Pilate? How have you violated your values to keep the peace or keep your position? In what ways have you compromised so that people will

like you? What have you approved of? What have you stayed quiet about? What have you laughed at because you want to keep the crowd happy? What have you participated in?

I think we all know the ways we've blown it. We all know there have been times we weren't proud of ourselves. We weren't comfortable with what we were doing, but we did it anyway.

Why? Why do we do these things?

Because we're not sure of ourselves. We aren't fully convinced of who we really are. The pressure to conform exposes the thinness of our soul. We're more like a thin sheet of aluminum than a bar of solid steel.

So, how do we thicken our soul? How do we place our identity on a more firm foundation? How do we base it in something durable and dependable that won't sway with public opinion?

The answer is we draw our identity from Christ. This is my great hope for us as a church - that our identity is not in the degree we have earned, or the job we hold, our rank, or title, or the agency for whom we work, not from our physical appearance or strength, but that we are made in the image of God, and [accepted in the Beloved](#) (Eph 1:6). This is of absolute, essential, importance.

Friends, you need to know - whoever you look to for acceptance and meaning can also take it away. If they can give it to you, they can take it back. Rome gave Pilate his position as governor. Rome could take it away. If the crowd gives you your value and approval, they can take it away. If your relationship or position gives you your sense of identity and self-worth, where will you be if the relationship fails or the position is taken away?

On the other hand, if God gives you your identity, if you know, deep down at the level of your soul who you are and why you're here, if your value is anchored in eternity and not your resume or appearance, you have a firm, firm, foundation - and then, maybe God can use you to step up like Joseph.

Both men had positions of power - the difference was in how they used it. Maybe God wants to open doors for you and give you special opportunities *so that* you can be there for Jesus. Do you ever think about it that way? Do you ever ask yourself, how can I use the position, the resources, and the connections that God has given me for His glory and the good of others? Is there some way in which God wants me to take a step of faith and not be quiet or play safe but step up and speak up and see what God might do?

Friends, what has God given you? What does He want to do through you? Has God carried you to a particular place and given you particular access, connections, and resources, *so that* you can rise up and do something good that no one else is able, or willing to do?

Whether you work on the Hill or the Pentagon or in a classroom for Fairfax County Schools, whether you're a small business owner, contractor, or network engineer – is your job more than just a paycheck? Is it also a chance to do real good, to have real meaning, to step forward for Jesus? Not to make a scene. Not to cause a stir. But to do the right thing, the right way, at the right time, because you can. It's something to think about – it might be a special opportunity that God has given to you.

Which, ultimately, is what this entire passage is about – what we have received from God. Paul puts it this way in a letter to the church in Rome:

Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Jesus suffered injustice that we might be freed from the just punishment we deserve.

Jesus wore a crown of thorns that we might wear a crown in heaven.

Jesus was stripped of His robe that we might be clothed in His righteousness.

Jesus was cursed that we might be blessed.

Jesus died once that we might be born again.

Have you received this new life? I told you of my stupid actions in high school, we read about Pilate. You have stories of your own – you've done things that hurt people, you've done things that offend God. Time may help you forget, but it doesn't make you innocent. Have you sought forgiveness from God?

These are the kinds of things Jesus went to the cross for – for all the times that you acted more like Pilate than like Joseph – all the times you compromised and collapsed when you should have stepped up. He did all of this for us because even if we have moment or two like Joseph, we could never really do enough for God.

If you have never told God you're sorry for all your faults and failures, and never asked for forgiveness, now is a great time.

And if you have, now is a great time to tell Him thank you and to make yourself available to do whatever He wants done in the place where He has you, to be a modern day Joseph who steps up and identifies with Jesus no matter what anyone else thinks because you know and understand what Jesus has done for you.

Let's pray.



Sermon Application and Discussion Questions

Mark 15 The Crucifixion

Summary: At the crucifixion of Jesus we see three men, one compromises, one stands alone, and another steps forward.

- Do you have any regrets from high school? What have you learned from them?
- Have you ever been in a position like Pilate where you felt the pressure to do something you weren't completely comfortable with? What happened? How did you determine what to do?
- How were the following people harmed by Pilate choosing to compromise?
 - o Pilate
 - o The Sanhedrin
 - o Jesus
 - o The soldiers
 - o Pilate's wife
- Regarding Pilate, JC Ryle wrote: "High places are slippery places... Do not envy great people, they have many and peculiar temptations." What does he mean?
- Have you ever been like Jesus, the object of injustice because someone like Pilate wouldn't do the right thing? What happened? What did you learn? Did you ever see any deliverance from God?
- Movies like *The Passion of the Christ*, and some sermons, have placed a lot of attention on the gruesome details of the crucifixion. Why do you think there is such little detail included in Mark's gospel?
- Each gospel account gives a slightly different perspective on the crucifixion. Like four witnesses standing on different corners of an intersection. If two cars collide in the middle of the intersection, each witness will report it with slightly different details as seen from his perspective. What other details do you remember about Calvary, what stands out to you?
- What surprises you most about the crucifixion? Are there any elements that stand out as especially meaningful or important to you?
- Why do you think Joseph was compelled to step up for Jesus?