

## INTRODUCTION

What an exceptional year this has been. It is one for the history books, for sure. We are living right in the middle of history. Future generations of Americans will study the pandemic that began in 2020.

Throughout America, churches have stepped up to encourage us with hope. I am amazed by the creativity of some churches who put messages on their signs that made people in their community smile. Here are some of my favorites:

- (1) Catch a Jesus virus, and let it be contagious.
- (2) Jesus can wash away sin, but you've still got to wash your hands.
- (3) Can we uninstall 2020 and install it again? This one has a virus.
- (4) Jesus cleans the heart; we disinfect the pew.
- (5) Prophecy class cancelled due to unforeseen circumstances.
- (6) Faith not cancelled; Hope not closed; Love not quarantined.
- (7) And finally, in front of America's first Baptist Church in Providence, Rhode Island: Had not planned on giving up quite this much for Lent.

We have been walking verse by verse through the Gospel of John for the past twenty-six months. We've arrived at the morning of the day when Jesus will be crucified. Last week we examined the crown of thorns. In today's passage, Pontius Pilate tries his best to release Jesus—and he has the authority to do so. But we're going to see that he gives in to the pressure of the mob and hands Jesus over to be crucified.

Let's read about it in John 19:5-16: Then Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Here is the man!" When the chief priests and the temple servants saw him, they shouted, "Crucify! Crucify!" Pilate responded, "Take him and crucify him yourselves, since I find no grounds for charging him."

"We have a law," the Jews replied to him, "and according to that law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God."

When Pilate heard this statement, he was more afraid than ever. He went back into the headquarters and asked Jesus, "Where are you from?" But Jesus did not give him an answer. So Pilate said to him, "Do you refuse to speak to me? Don't you know that I have the authority to release you and the authority to crucify you?"

"You would have no authority over me at all," Jesus answered him, "if it hadn't been given you from above. This is why the one who handed me over to you has the greater sin." From that moment Pilate kept trying to release him. But the Jews shouted, "If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend. Anyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar!" When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus outside. He sat down on the judge's seat in a place called the Stone Pavement (but in Aramaic, *Gabbatha*). It was the preparation day for the Passover, and it was about noon. Then he told the Jews, "Here is

your king!” They shouted, “Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!” Pilate said to them, “Should I crucify your king?” “We have no king but Caesar!” the chief priests answered. Then he handed him over to be crucified.

Let’s talk about the time of day this took place. The time of this gathering was the “sixth hour.” Casual readers of the Bible scratch their heads when they read “noon” here, because Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell us Jesus was nailed to the cross at 9:00 a.m. and stayed there for six hours. There is a simple answer. John is using the Roman means of time, which began at midnight, so the sixth hour would be 6:00 a.m. Matthew, Mark, and Luke are using Jewish time, which was figured differently.

This is a mob scene in the early morning of the Preparation Day of Passover—the day our Passover Lamb, Jesus, would die for us. The city of Jerusalem was packed with thousands of pilgrims who had come for the annual spring celebration. This is the same mob who, on the Sunday before, had lined the road down the Mount of Olives into the city of Jerusalem. When Jesus rode the donkey into town, they shouted, “Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.”

The same mob who shouted “Hail him” is the same mob now who is crying out “Nail him.” The same fickle crowd who yelled, “Crown him” on Sunday are now screaming, “Crucify him!” Let’s learn about mobs.

### **1. To a mob, wrong can seem right.**

This mob was stirred up by the Jewish religious leaders to call for the crucifixion of an innocent man. It was like a 1<sup>st</sup> Century lynch mob. Individually, they would have acted differently, but a mob is blinded to what is wrong or right.

There have been many scientific studies conducted on mob violence. French psychologist and sociologist, Gustave Le Bon, was one of the first to publish a study about crowd behavior. He wrote: “Isolated, he may be a cultivated individual; in a crowd, he is a barbarian. Whoever be the individuals that compose it, however like or unlike their character, or their intelligence, the fact that they have been transformed into a crowd puts them in possession of a sort of collective mind which makes them feel, think, and act in a manner quite different from that in which each individual of them would feel, think, and act were he in a state of isolation.” (*The Crowd: A Study of Popular Mind*)

There are plenty of examples of mob behavior in the Bible. Take for instance what happened in Exodus 32. Moses had been up on Mt. Sinai for a long time, so a rumor started among the Israelites that he was dead. They came to Aaron and said, “We need a god that we can see like the gods in Egypt.” So with Aaron’s guidance they melted down their gold jewelry and made a golden calf and started to worship it. This was idolatry—but panic had gripped the crowd and to them this was the right thing to do.

Over the past three months, we have seen dozens of examples of mob behavior. There is a big difference between peaceful protesting and mob behavior. Last Sunday evening, there was a rumor circulated on social media that an African American man had been killed by Chicago police (which was false). Hundreds of looters headed into the heart of the Magic Mile and looted and plundered those upscale stores.

The Bible warns about the danger of substituting wrong for right. The Lord said, "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness, who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter." (Isaiah 5:20)

The opposite of mob behavior is civility, sometimes called common courtesy. This is a value that seem to be missing in our society today. The fact that we obey laws is what makes us a civilization. Every time you obey that traffic signal you are participating in the civil order of our culture.

The Oxford Dictionary defines civility as: "Behavior or speech appropriate to civil interactions; politeness, courtesy, consideration...the minimum degree of courtesy required in a social situation; absence of rudeness."

The Bible definition of civility is found in the words of Jesus in what we call the Golden Rule. When I was an elementary student, my school passed out wooden rulers and printed on each one was the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

The Danger of Mob Mentality is that wrong can seem right .

## **2. God gives us the power to choose.**

Jesus had an interesting final conversation with Pilate. Pilate was pounding Jesus with questions, and Jesus was silent. Pilate said, "Why do you refuse to answer me, don't you know that I have the authority to set you free or to execute you?"

Now, before we consider Jesus' reply, let's try to picture the scene. This was after the flogging, torture, and the crown of thorns. Jesus looked nothing like a king. But He stared at Pilate with a gaze that would freeze his blood. Out of cracked and bloodied lips Jesus looked up and said, "You have no authority other than what was given you from above."

He was saying, God is the one who gives you any authority you think you have. God gives you the power to choose.

Pilate could have made the choice to release Jesus: he had that God-given authority. He was the law of the land. Of course, even if Pilate had released Jesus, we need to realize that Jesus still would have been crucified. He was the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world. But history would view Pilate differently if he had released Jesus. We must realize that God gives us the power to choose. We aren't some pre-programed software from Heaven, and when an angel taps the screen of a heavenly iPad we all fall on our knees and worship God. The word "choose"

is found over 200 times in the Bible. And with every choice we make there are consequences. Good choices lead to good consequences and bad choices produce bad consequences.

When the Children of Israel were being led by Moses to the Promised Land, they came to a place called Kadesh Barnea. They sent 12 spies into the land and ten of them came back and said, "The people there are giants—we can't occupy the land." But two of the spies, Joshua and Caleb said, "Yeah, they're big, but our God is bigger, let's go take the land."

In Numbers 14 we read that the mob mentality took over. The people rebelled and picked up stones to kill Moses and Aaron. About that time God showed up. He said, "Moses, I'm going to kill all these people and make a great nation from your family." Moses prayed and said, "God please spare them for my sake." And God responded to that intercessory prayer of Moses and didn't kill the people.

Then God told Moses, "Tell the people to take another lap around Mt. Sinai—and another—and another." For forty years they wandered in the wilderness until that faithless generation was dead. At the end of Deuteronomy, the next generation was poised to enter the Promised Land, and Moses gave them a challenge to make the right choice this time. In Deuteronomy 30:19-20, he said, "I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, love the Lord your God, obey him, and remain faithful to him."

They made the right choice and this Israel 2.0 trusted God and chose life. They entered the land of milk and honey. Every day we face many choices and God tells us to choose life. You will be faced with many life choices, but the greatest choice you'll ever make is to follow Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior.

### **3. When you resist the mob, you'll be attacked.**

Pilate came out and for the third time, tried to release Jesus. That's when the mob turned on him. They yelled that if he released Jesus that he was no friend of Caesar's. That got his attention. He was appointed to Israel by Caesar; he was the big boss. As I mentioned last week, Israel was the worst posting in the Roman Empire. Pilate wanted to keep his boss happy, because he wanted out of this place. So with this threat hanging over his head, he released Jesus to the soldiers to be crucified.

We must understand that when we stand for truth among the mob, we must be ready to endure personal attack. I've read that there's an old adage among trial lawyers that says, "If you have the facts, hammer the facts. If you have the law, hammer the law. If you have neither the facts or the law, hammer the opposing counsel."

Pilate had a backbone of Jell-O. He caved to the crowd. It takes amazing moral fortitude to stand up against the mob. And the larger the mob, the more courage it takes.

One of the most dangerous mobs in history was the Nazi regime under Adolf Hitler. He brainwashed an entire nation to commit unthinkable violence against the Jews and neighboring nations.

There's a famous picture from a Nazi rally in 1936. A huge crowd of people are seen giving the "Heil Hitler salute." But there in the crowd is one man who crossed his arms and refused to salute. He was later identified as a shipbuilder from Hamburg named August Landmesser.

Historian Declan Gainley said this about Landmesser's defiance: "His act of defiance was not targeted simply at the Nazis and their Führer; it was also a powerful rebuke of the hundreds around him, the people who raised their right arms, the people who went along with the crowd. It takes courage not to go along with a crowd, especially when that crowd is screaming at you that you must."

Here's the full story. Landmesser had fallen in love and married a Jewish woman, which was illegal at the time, so the Nazis didn't recognize the marriage. In defiance, he refused to salute Hitler. But he paid the price. He was arrested and sent to prison, then he was sent to the front-lines as a prison soldier and was killed in action in 1944. In 1951, the German government recognized his marriage retroactively.

August stood up to the mob, and he paid the price. We are currently involved in a great moral conflict in America. It involves precious issues including the sanctity of human life; the definition of marriage, and religious freedom. We need to understand that if we stand up for truth, we will be attacked. But we must also understand that we have a God who has promised to fight our battles for us.

A couple of months ago, I talked about the battle of King Jehoshaphat against three foreign armies. The take-away truth from that message was when the people prayed, "We don't know what to do. But our eyes are on you." That same attitude will sustain us during times like these. "Lord, we don't know what to do. But our eyes are on you."

But there's another take-away truth from that battle. They were outnumbered, but here's what God told them in 2 Chronicles 20:15: "This is what the Lord says: 'Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast number, for the battle is not yours, but God's.'"

Brothers and sisters, if we try to fight this battle in our own strength, we will become weary, discouraged, and frustrated. But if we trust God and surrender to Him, He will fight our battles and we can rest in the victory that He has already won. So how do we know when we're trusting God to fight the battle for us? When we do what King Jehoshaphat did. He didn't send his soldiers out first; instead he sent out singers to sing, "Praise the Lord, for His mercy endures forever!"

When we stand for truth, we will be attacked. We are outnumbered for sure. But as when we march forth with praise on our lips, God will fight the battle for us. Finally,

#### **4. Like Pilate, we must choose between Jesus or the mob.**

The mob screamed, "We have no king but Caesar!" What a profession of faithlessness. They backed the wrong King. After they threatened Pilate with treason, he fell apart like a cheap suit and caved in to the mob. He handed Jesus over to be crucified. But he did everything he could to escape the blame. We read in Matthew 27:24, "When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that a riot was starting instead, he took some water, washed his hands in front of the crowd, and said, 'I am innocent of this man's blood. See to it yourselves!'"

With that act of symbolically washing his hands, Pilate thought he would be vindicated. He thought that he would never be associated with the death of Jesus. But let me show you what is tragically ironic. The one man who wanted to be absolved of any guilt is the name that has been spoken millions of times connecting him to the death of Jesus. I'm referring to the Apostle's Creed. This creed has been recited millions of times, and is being recited today in Catholic, Lutheran, Methodist, and many other churches.

By the way, we don't recite the Apostle's Creed because of the bedrock beliefs of Baptists is that we have no creed except the Bible. The first few lines of the Apostle's creed says: "I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried." Beside the name Jesus, only two other names appear in the Apostle's creed, Mary and Pontius Pilate. I can only imagine that as Pilate dried his hands that morning, he thought, "Whew, at least I'll never be connected to the death of this man." And he had no clue that for sixteen centuries his name would be repeated millions of times in hundreds of thousands of church services!

We live in a time when the mob mentality is filling our streets. We are in the same sandals as Pilate. On one side there is the mob trying to convince us to join them. On the other side, Jesus stands with His nail-pierced hands out. He says, "Come to me all of you who labor and are heaven laden, and I will give you REST for your souls."

So what will you choose today? The Master or the mob? Christ or the crowd?

So here's my call to action. Would you be willing to pray this take-away prayer? God, give me the courage to stand and speak the truth in love even when it isn't popular. The Bible says in Ephesians 4:14-15: "Then we will no longer be little children, tossed by the waves and blown around by every wind of teaching, by human cunning with cleverness in the techniques of deceit. But speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into him who is the head—Christ."

Truth without love is brutality. Love without truth is hypocrisy. But when combine radical truth with radical love the result opens the door for God's mercy.

## CONCLUSION

Martin Niemöller was a Lutheran Pastor in Germany during the Nazi regime. Like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, he spoke out against Hitler and was arrested and put in a concentration camp. Bonhoeffer was executed a few days before the war, and Niemöller barely escaped execution. After the war, he expressed his regret for not doing more for the Jews. I hope that one of his quotes will give you courage to stand up against the mob mentality. "First they came for the Jews and I did nothing because I am not a Jew. Then they came for the Socialists and I did nothing because I am not a socialist. Then they came for the Catholics and I did nothing because I am not a Catholic. Finally, they came for me, but by then there was no one left to help me."

So first, if you haven't made the choice to follow Jesus, I encourage you to choose life today. Receive Jesus as your Lord and Savior. If you are a Believer, may God give us all the courage to stand up for truth and righteousness in this time of mob mentality.

## OUTLINE

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"Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness, who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter." *Isaiah 5:20*

### 2. God gives us the power to choose.

"I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, love the Lord your God, obey him, and remain faithful to him." *Deuteronomy 30:19-20*

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"This is what the Lord says: 'Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast number, for the battle is not yours, but God's.'" *2 Chronicles 20:15*

### 4. Like Pilate, we must choose between Jesus or the mob.

"When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that a riot was starting instead, he took some water, washed his hands in front of the crowd, and said, 'I am innocent of this man's blood. See to it yourselves!'" *Matthew 27:24*

## TAKE-AWAY PRAYER

God, give me the courage to stand and speak the truth in love even when it isn't popular.



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For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes



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