

“What Shall I Do With Jesus?”

Mark 15: 6 - 15

Fairview Evangelical Presbyterian Church

March 27, 2016

I know what you are thinking: “Pastor Mark, is not this an odd choice for a sermon text at sunrise on Easter morning?”

I have chosen this text because of the question Pilate asks, of the crowd, of himself, and of us. It is a good one: “What Shall I Do with Jesus?” There is no denying that in life some questions are more important than others. Indeed, knowing which questions are important is a key facet of maturity and wisdom.

Some questions are more important than others. “Whom will I marry?” And, related to that, “Who will be the mother/father of my children?” or, “What will be my occupation?” “What faith will I confess?” “What will be the moral framework by which I will seek to live my life?” Such questions as these are more important than: “What will we eat for Easter lunch today?” Or, “Should I read this book or go to that movie?” Or, “What clothes should I wear to work tomorrow?”

Knowing which questions are important in life is a key facet of wisdom and maturity. As we grow we learn to discern which things are of great value, which things are of lesser value, and which are merely matters of preference. These are truths we seek to teach our children: happiness is different from joy; sharing is a greater good than possessing; commitment, even at personal cost or discomfort, carries the reward of character and stature; or satisfaction is not the same as pleasure. On the other side, certain forms of emotional or mental illness are characterized by an inability to make these distinctions. Emotionally unstable folk may be dependent upon things that are in fact of little consequence; they may have an inability to distinguish the enduring from the transitory and temporary. They major in minors.

I want to argue that just as there are people who are emotionally ill, who cannot discern between the important from the irrelevant in the matters of life, so too, there is a spiritual illness in the world: one in which some people cannot discern the key issues in the matter of the spiritual life. Questions are key. If you want the right answer, you must ask the right question. If you do not ask the right questions, you may never have the right answers.

This is where, surprisingly, Pontius Pilate can be our guide. Pilate asked the right question: “What shall I do with Jesus?” (Mark 15:12) In identifying the right question, he was half way there. But identifying the right question is only half of the equation. Next you have to answer it correctly.

Consider the various answers people might give to the question, “What shall I do with Jesus?”

Some People Admire Jesus: 11:1-11

⁹ And those who went before and those who followed were shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

This is the most common answer in regards to what people do with Jesus of Nazareth: they admire him. Jesus was a great teacher. Jesus was a prophet sent from God. [This is the answer the religion of Islam gives.] Jesus was a spiritual leader. Many people think that it is enough to admire Jesus. This was the attitude of the Palm Sunday crowd. They praised him, for Jesus represented the trend of the day. It is easy to follow Christ in a crowd, along with everyone else. Too often people think that all that is needed is to simply think nice thoughts of Jesus.

In a conversation about becoming a follower of Jesus I heard a man say to his friend, "I will follow Jesus to a point." His friend came back quickly, "To what point?" [I thought to myself, "Good question!"] The first fellow struggled to find an answer to that question, so his friend suggested, "You will follow Jesus until it becomes personally costly to you." His friend replied that it was so. The first man spoke kindly, but truthfully, and said, "You are an admirer of Jesus, but you are not a follower of him."

Pilate asked, "What will I do with Jesus?" Some folk are satisfied to merely admire Jesus. They nod their head in ascent, wave the palm branches along the way, when its trendy and socially accept able to do so. Nothing more is offered or given: no commitment, no personal sacrifice, and no abiding love for him or his will. Some people admire Jesus.

Some People Mock Jesus: 15:17

¹⁷ And they clothed him in a purple cloak, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on him.

Some people mock Jesus. There are those who declare that religion is a crutch. If you were emotionally strong and socially mature, you do not need religion. Faith is a thing for weaklings: for children and old women. The soldiers mocked Jesus. They felt superior to him. Their mocking is an attempt to devalue. We make that which we mock less in our eyes, and in the eyes of others.

In anticipating writing this sermon I assumed that I would offer several illustrations of modern examples of those who mock the Lord Jesus. In military jargon, doing so was a "*target-rich*" environment. The more I thought about it, the less inclined I was to be specific. I could name artists and movies, music and television. I could give examples of the blasphemous, the ugly, the profane, or the pornographic. But I decided not to do so. You know the truth of this point. I do not need to illustrate it. The sad fact is that there are those who, in answer to the question, "What shall I do with Jesus?" choose to mock, ridicule, and offend. In this regard, human nature has not changed.

Are you ever tempted to mock the Lord Jesus? Do you think that religion and faith is a thing for others but not for you; that religion is beneath you. Remember: mockery is a false sense of superiority. The very reason we mock, ridicule, scorn or despise is because we know that that the thing we tear down has more worth than we are willing to admit. We would not mock it if we did not know that there is more there than we are willing to acknowledge and confess. The key thing is to stop the self-deception: to acknowledge to ourselves the worth of Christ; to acknowledge what we know to be true.

Pilate asked, "What shall I do with Jesus?" Some answer that question by simply and merely, admiring Jesus. Others reject Jesus. They mock him. They seek to dishonor him. Next, we find that some condemn Jesus.

Some Condemn Jesus: 15:13

¹³And they cried out again, "Crucify him."

Do you remember the movie the Poseidon Adventure? In the story a cruise ship is overturned in a tropical storm. Passengers and crew members seek to climb through the upside down ship in order to find a way of escape. It is an ensemble piece following the stories of a dozen people randomly brought together seeking to solve the puzzle of how to escape with their lives intact. One of the characters is a radical clergyman. He sees their efforts to escape being trapped as a reflection of the human predicament. Somehow, God is to blame for the difficulties of life. God opposes us. Near the end of the movie this clergyman, like Jesus Christ, gives his life for the sake of the others trying to escape. But, in the noble act of sacrificing his own life, he harangues and verbally abuses God for his divine failure to be more of a help in life!

This is human hubris at its best. Stand bravely as you reject God. Shake your fist in his face. Tell God that he is not worthy of your belief. And, in doing so, we believe that there is something noble in our rejection. Unfortunately, that is not how things unfold. Notice how Pilate condemns Jesus. Pilate does so while turning against his own judgment on the matter. Pilate knows there is no basis to condemn Jesus of Nazareth. He knows that Christ has been falsely accused. He allows the judgement of others to determine what he will think of Jesus. He condemns Christ by turning against his own mind and giving himself over to the judgement and opinion of others.

This too, is how we condemn and reject Christ. Our rejection is not bravery but laziness: we are too lazy to commit ourselves to our own convictions. We are too cowardly to commit ourselves in spite of the rejection of others. Is that where you are this day my friend? Perhaps you too permit the judgement of others to determine what you think of Jesus – what your family says; or what other religions say; or the judgment of your friends and coworkers. Remember: ultimately, it does not matter what they think. The question is: "What do you think?" Do not be like Pilate and turn against your own self.

Some people admire Jesus. Some reject Jesus. Some mock the Lord. Some dishonor the Lord. Others condemn. But, finally, and importantly, there are those who confess faith in Christ.

Some People Confess Jesus: Mark 15:39

³⁹ And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!"

Do you know the legend of "Quo Vadis"? The story is told that the Apostle Peter is preaching in Rome. God has blessed and gifted his preaching. Many respond in faith and belief. Many also respond in threats and conspiracies. Peter knows there are those who are plotting against him, to arrest him, to execute him. And the fear gets the better of Peter. He leaves the city at night, in disguise. As Peter is leaving the city in secret at night, he sees the Lord Jesus, heading in the opposite direction, *into* the city. Peter stops and stares at Jesus. He asks Jesus, "Domine, Quo Vadis?" (Lord, where are you going?) Jesus replies to Peter, "To Rome, to be crucified again." Then, strengthened by this vision, Peter returns to Rome. He stands firm in his own faith in Christ, facing whatever fate God has given to him to face.

In the end, in asking the question "What shall I do with Jesus?" what is at issue in the question is this: "**Who** is Jesus of Nazareth?" We treat people according to who they are in relation to us. Friends and family are treated one way. Co Workers are treated according to work etiquette. In a similar way we treat famous people, or kings or presidents, differently: according to their office. We must give the appropriate response based upon who the person is.

Consider Pilate's question: "What am I to do with Jesus?" The answer depends a great deal on the answer you give to the question, "Who is Jesus Christ?" Who is Jesus Christ? If you believe that he is the Son of God, come into the world. to die and be raised again; that he is God incarnate, God come to dwell among us: then you will respond to Jesus appropriately. What you do with Jesus is determined by what you think of Jesus.

Who is Jesus of Nazareth? He is the Son of God. He is God's Messiah. He is the Savior of the world.

What will you do with this Jesus?

Say "Amen" somebody.

Mark 15: 6 - 15

Pilate Delivers Jesus to Be Crucified

⁶Now at the feast he used to release for them one prisoner for whom they asked. ⁷And among the rebels in prison, who had committed murder in the insurrection, there was a man called Barabbas. ⁸And the crowd came up and began to ask Pilate to do as he usually did for them. ⁹And he answered them, saying, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" ¹⁰For he perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered him up. ¹¹But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release for them Barabbas instead. ¹²And Pilate again said to them, "Then what shall I do with the man you call the King of the Jews?" ¹³And they cried out again, "Crucify him." ¹⁴And Pilate said to them, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify him." ¹⁵So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.