

Over-Estimating Popular Opinion.

Text: Mark 15:14-15

Suggested Hymns:

T: 48, 55, 620, 51, 71

A: 48, 323, 55, 620, 71

1) As We See It In The Day Of Christ

2) As We See It In Our Own Day And Age

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Mark 15:14-15, ***“Then Pilate said to them, “Why, what evil has He done?” But they cried out all the more, “Crucify 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.*** (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

People in Rome used to say, *“The voice of the people is the voice of God.”* This precept is far from true. Frequently the voice of the multitude, the voice of the people, is not the voice of God, but the voice of sin, and the voice of Satan.

Still millions of people act as though the old saying was true. Selfish politicians, whose real aim is personal enrichment, personal advancement, seemingly are eager to catch the faintest whisper of the voice of the people. Such people will violate their own conscience. They will stoop to almost anything if they think there is popular demand for such a thing and if it will bring them a few extra votes.

This spirit of bowing to popular opinion, this politician’s view of the voice of the people, we also see in the Passion Story. We see one who was to represent the power, majesty, and the justice of imperial Rome cowering before a blood-thirsty mob. The one who was to judge on the basis of facts yielded limply to unjust popular demand. The one who was to protect the innocent and punish the guilty, reversed the process because of popular demand, because behind popular demand there lurked the threat for his own safety, prestige, and power.

Pontius Pilate, the Roman judge, shamefully over-estimated popular opinion. There are many modern Pilates. These are the people who over-estimate popular opinion in the State, the Church, and the home. Let us therefore consider on basis of our text the great human weakness of over-estimating popular opinion. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Over-Estimating Popular Opinion As We See It In The Day Of Christ

In the Passion Story we see Jesus on the way to Gethsemane and Peter over-estimating self. We see Judas, swayed by one great passion, over-estimating money, bargaining with Jesus' enemies, and shamefully betraying Him in Garden. We see Peter again, in the same garden, over-estimating physical power, trying to save the omnipotent Jesus with just one sword. We see Jesus before the leaders of His people and before the Sanhedrin. Shamefully they under-estimated Christ, His life, His doctrine, His person, His work, and condemn Him to death. Today we see Jesus before a Gentile judge, and we see the same leaders making frantic efforts to have Him nailed to the cross.

The Passion Story records the charges against Jesus. We read in Luke 23:1-2, ***¹ Then the whole multitude of them arose and led Him to Pilate. ² And they began to accuse Him, saying, "We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, saying that He Himself is Christ, a King."***

They accused Jesus firstly, of perverting the nation and inciting rebellion, secondly, forbidding to pay tribute to Caesar (but Jesus had said, ***"Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's,"***¹ and thirdly, claiming to be king.

The first two charges Pilate dismisses at once. He briefly examines the claim to kingship.² Then Pilate forms His opinion, which is recorded three times by John. We read in John 18:38, ***³⁸ Pilate said to Him, "What is truth?" And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, "I find no fault in Him at all."*** Then we read in John 19:4, ***⁴ 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."*** And later in John 19:6, Pilate said to them, ***"You take Him and crucify Him, for I find no fault in Him."***

In other words, Pilate agreed with Judas and with Herod, “This Jesus is innocent.” The proper thing for Pilate to do would have been to set Jesus free and to reprimand the Jews for bringing Jesus to him. But yielding to popular opinion, yielding to clamour of mob, Pilate did not set Jesus free.

It is true that Pilate came to the conclusion that Jesus should be set free. He tried to set Him free. But again he was influenced by popular opinion. We read in Mark 15:6-8, ⁶ *Now at the feast he was accustomed to releasing one prisoner to them, whomever they requested.* 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.*

They placed innocent Jesus besides guilty Barabbas. The mob, stirred by the priests, demanded the release of a guilty murderer. Pilate did not say, “This will never do. I cannot set such a man free.” He yielded to popular demand, held Jesus prisoner and set Barabbas free. He had over-estimated the spirit of fairness of the frenzied mob.

Next, Pilate under-estimated the lust of blood in that angry crowd. Against all law and order, against every dictate of fairness, Pilate had Jesus scourged, *the soldiers twisted a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and they put on Him a purple robe.* ³ *Then they said, “Hail, King of the Jews!” And they struck Him with their hands.*³ This scourged Christ was intended to arouse sympathy, but Pilate miscalculated the crowd.

Louder came the shouts “**Crucify Him!**” Our text says, *Then Pilate said to them, “Why, what evil has He done?” But they cried out all the more, “Crucify Him!”* Yielding to popular opinion, Pilate had committed great wrongs against innocent Jesus. He over-estimated the influence of these people at the court of Tiberias, and then he added still greater wrong, 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 knew that it was wrong to crucify Christ. We read in Matthew 27:24, ²⁴ *When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather that a tumult was rising, he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, “I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it.”*

He wanted to shift the blame upon the Jews. And they assumed the blame. The curse was, *And all the people answered and said, "His blood be on us and on our children."* But this does not leave Pilate blameless. Great was the weakness of Pilate, terrible was the sin of over-estimating popular opinion, refusing to do what was right, and yielding to wrong.

Pilate was so near, yet so far from the truth. For the sake of the mob he rejected the truth offered by Jesus, rejected the Son of God, rejected his personal Saviour, and rejected personal happiness for time and eternity.

Pilate was a miserable coward. He dared to do wrong because he was encouraged by others, but did not dare to do right, although encouraged by his own wife.⁴ He hoped to save himself temporary embarrassment at the court of the emperor, but brought upon himself permanent trouble in the court of heaven. Yielding to the voice of the people, Pilate ignored the voice of God. Pilate's weakness in yielding to popular opinion did not help him. Soon he was accused by the Jews, called to Rome, banished to Gaul, and is supposed to have taken his own life. What a price to pay for over-estimating popular opinion.

In sharp contrast with Pilate we have Jesus. Jesus did not over-estimate public opinion when it was for Him nor when it was against Him. Remember Jesus feeding the five thousand. People wished to make Him king. Popular demand did not sway Him from the path of duty. He corrected the wrong viewpoint of people in regard to daily bread.

Public opinion was with Jesus on Palm Sunday. He acknowledged the acclaim of the people, but did not overestimate it. Quietly Jesus continued to do the task before Him. He drove the money changers out. He was prepared for Gethsemane and Golgotha. He remained true to course when public opinion against Him in His last suffering. He spoke the truth and nothing but the truth. He even tried to help the judge to find the way of truth and salvation.

Jesus was true to His Father's business, whether this business found favour with the multitude or not. But many have not learned from Jesus. Many people, also many church people, many Lutherans, over-estimate public opinion today.

2. Over-Estimating Popular Opinion As We See It In Our Own Day And Age

Popular opinion is over-estimated by many politicians and statesmen today. Thinking only of their own political future, they listen to the multitude and do things that are opposed to the Word of God. Because the mass demands it, powerful business interests clamour for it, they do things that are absolutely dishonest. But often they discover that the multitude is fickle, and they find out, like Pilate, that they are just digging their own political grave. They face a spiritual debacle because they yielded to the clamour of the masses.

Popular opinion is also over-estimated by many pastors and church people. They are swayed in matters of faith and life by the multitude. So many *“are tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind of doctrine.”*⁵ Because many will not endure sound doctrine, having itching ears, some pastors trim their sermonic sails to the wind of popular demand.

Popular opinion is over-estimated by many Christians in life. Because we live in a country of loose morals, abortion, euthanasia, easy divorces, dishonesty; because we are thrown into contact with worldly people and things so consistently, reading worldly trash, seeing worldly pictures, so many Christians have learned to listen to the voice of the people rather than the voice of God.

When facing a problem, they ask, What will the people say? rather than, What does God say? Since so many so-called Christians condone much that is sinful, and therefore many other Christian people think that it is ok to do likewise. They make a shipwreck of their faith and go to their doom.

The final exhortation is to examine public opinion in light of the Bible. If the Bible agrees, well and good. But if the Bible disagrees, then have the moral stamina to stand up for what is right even though the whole world is against you.

Let the example of Pilate be a warning. Let the example of the wonderful Saviour be our inspiration. Always judge public opinion in light of the Word of God. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Mark 12:17

² John 18:33-37

³ John 19:2-3

⁴ Mat 27:19

⁵ Ephesians 4:14