



Mark 15:9-15

MW Lent 5, April 2, 2025
Pastor Sam Rodebaugh

And he answered them, saying, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" ¹⁰ For he perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered him up. ¹¹ But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release for them Barabbas instead. ¹² And Pilate again said to them, "Then what shall I do with the man you call the King of the Jews?" ¹³ And they cried out again, "Crucify him." ¹⁴ And Pilate said to them, "Why? What evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify him." ¹⁵ So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.

Sounds of the Passion: The Shout of the Crowd

If you ever look at reviews online before trying out a new restaurant, you might have noticed something funny about the reviews. In my experience, when you're on Google looking at the reviews of a restaurant, the vast majority of the reviews will be either five-star reviews or one-star reviews. The food and experience are either *excellent*, or they are terrible. There will also be reviews somewhere in between, but for the *most* part, the highest percentage of reviews will be either five stars or one star.

And the reason for that seems obvious: for someone to take the time to post a review online, *usually* they have to feel pretty strongly one way or another about their experience. Either they had a *fantastic* meal, and they want to help the restaurant out, or they had an awful experience and they want to keep other people away. You won't find a lot of people that have just an average experience and feel passionately enough to post a review about it; there aren't a lot of three-star reviews.

The same thing is true of shouting. If someone is shouting, it is because they feel a certain way *strongly* enough to shout about it! So, a child might shout with joy when they hear they're getting a new puppy. A parent might shout with anger when their words are being ignored. A person might shout excitedly when their favorite team wins a close game. Or a person might shout in agony after they stub their toe or while giving birth to a child. Shouts come from a place of *strong* feeling—you only shout if you really feel passionately one way or another; there aren't a lot of three-star shouts.

But, I must confess, I often find myself wanting to think of *this* crowd as giving a three-star shout. I don't like to think about those people *really* feeling passionately about crucifying Jesus. Instead, I latch onto the fact that ***"the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release for them Barabbas instead."*** It was the chief priests that felt strongly enough to crucify Jesus, not necessarily the crowd—they didn't know what they were doing. Or sometimes people will speculate that this is just a different crowd from the crowd that shouted out triumphantly on Palm Sunday; perhaps this is a crowd that was hand-selected by Jesus' enemies, filled with people who hated Jesus. Or others speculate that there were bad actors planted throughout the crowd shouting out the rehearsed lines, and the mob mentality then just took over and the rest of the crowd naturally joined in. The crowd couldn't *really* have felt so passionately about crucifying Jesus. No, *this* must be a three-star shout.

And the reason I want to think that way is that I don't like the implication when I think about this crowd now shouting out ***"crucify Him,"*** perhaps being the same crowd that was there on Palm Sunday

shouting out, ***“Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!”*** (Mark 11:9-10) Could the crowd who shouted out that five-star review on Sunday really be the same crowd that shouted out this one-star review on Friday? Again, I don’t like the implication behind that thought.

I don’t like the implication, because it means that perhaps *I* could do the same. We have a lot in common with that Palm Sunday crowd. They shouted out, ***“Hosanna,”*** literally meaning, “Save us, we pray.” And that is the same cry of faith that *we* shout to the Lord. They recognized Jesus as the Messiah who was coming to fulfill the promise given to King David, that He would have a descendant who would sit on his throne, the increase of whose government and peace there would be no end. (cf. Isaiah 9:7) And we see in Jesus the same. We know Him to be ***“the Son of the Most High. . . [Who] will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”*** (Luke 1:32)

But if that Palm Sunday crowd who shouted out the same praise to Jesus that we give—if they could possibly be the same crowd that just five days later shouted out, ***“Crucify Him,”***—well that means that I could possibly do the same. And so could you.

Why did *they* do it? It’s no secret that the Jews had been conditioned to expect an earthly ruler when the Messiah finally came. Even though Jesus told them that He had *not* come to establish an earthly kingdom or to offer freedom from Rome—He had come to offer freedom from the bondage of sin—still most couldn’t shake their fleshly expectations. And so now they changed their minds about Jesus. Before, they had been mystified by His miracles, and now those had come to an end. They had been captivated by His radical ideas, but now those had lost their charm. They had been inspired by His leadership, but now He was bound and seemingly helpless. And so yes, while Jerusalem *had* rung out with shouts of ***“Hosanna,”*** on Sunday, now the crowds shouted, ***“Crucify Him!”***

Isn’t it possible for the same to happen to us? Isn’t it possible to get so wrapped up in the expectation of what we want God to do for us that we become disillusioned when His answer to our prayer is otherwise? Isn’t it possible for us to treat God’s Word as old news so that we don’t gladly hear and learn it but instead just turn it into another part of our weekly schedule? Isn’t it possible for us who have been led by Christ to instead start turning aside and be led instead by every craving and every desire and every whim that *we* have instead?

Dear friends in Christ, not only is it possible, it has happened. Yes, we have a lot in common with that Palm Sunday crowd, but we also have a lot in common with that crowd on Good Friday, raising up the shout of ***“Crucify Him! Crucify Him!”*** Because when we do what we know Christ would not have us do, and when we treat His Word as not being worth hardly *any* of our time, and when we think we know better what we need than the *Lord* does—we are joining in with the shout of the crowd. We are crying out that we want nothing to do with Him, away with Him—because we have no need of Him.

That is often how we—the members of the crowd—feel about Jesus. But it would be good also to consider how Jesus feels about each of us. Jesus is silent in this reading, He’s the passive party, but that does not mean that He’s not doing anything. Even here, as ***“He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him,”*** (John 1:11)—and not only did they not receive Him, they used the voices that He had given them to sing His praises to instead shout for His destruction—even here, Jesus

loved the crowd. That's what John describes for us: ***"Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end."*** (John 13:1)

Think about the other times when Jesus was with a crowd. Think of the time when He came to Nain, and a funeral crowd processed through the gates, mourning the death of the only son of a widow. ***"When the Lord saw her, He had compassion."*** (Luke 7:13) And He raised that boy and returned Him to His mother. Or think of the time when He and His disciples went across the lake for a much-needed retreat, and they were met on the other side by a crowd of 5,000 men plus women and children. ***"When He went ashore, He saw a great crowd, and He had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd."*** (Mark 6:34) Or think of the time when Jesus taught the crowd that He knew would soon reject them; He pleaded with them, ***"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!"*** (Matthew 23:37)

This crowd was no different. Even as the shout of the crowd rung out to reject Him, Jesus had not rejected them. He was moved with compassion for them, and in love, He *allowed* Himself to be scourged and to be delivered up to crucifixion so that He could remove their guilt forever—yes, even for everyone who joined in the shout. He loved them to the end, and He loved you to the end too.

Whenever I picture this text, I always picture myself standing there among the crowd crying out, ***"Crucify Him!"*** Because that's the truth of it. It's as we just sung, *"Whence come these sorrows, whence this mortal anguish? It is my sins for which Thou, Lord, must languish."* As Jesus and Barabbas stand side-by-side as equals, and as the tumult rises against Jesus to crucify the innocent and free the guilty, as the scowling murderer is set loose to the crowd and the crowd receives Him with glee while watching as the Son of God is led away to the slaughter—yes, I am right there in that crowd. My guilt is just as strong as any of theirs, because I've shouted along with them.

But rather than picturing yourself in that crowd, I want you instead to picture yourself somewhere else. I want you to picture this scene and envision standing next to Jesus in Barabbas' place. The whipping, the crown of thorns, the spitting, the beating, the scourging—that's what you deserve, because you're guilty! But instead, Jesus has taken your place. He goes to the cross, He receives your death sentence, and, like Barabbas, you walk free.

Yes, you *were* a member of this crowd. Your life has given the shout that you have no need of Jesus, ***"Crucify Him!"*** But thanks be to God, Jesus has picked you out of the crowd. He has set you apart. He has set you free from the chains of sin, no more guilt or blame can be held against you at all. He goes to the cross, and you walk free into eternal life.

And you know what this means, don't you? It means that you have been given something to shout about. Let this be no three-star shout. *"Love so amazing, so divine, Demands my soul, my life, my all."* Demands a shout that cannot be silenced. A shout of praise. A shout of release. A shout of joy. A shout that you will give as part of another crowd, as part of a host arrayed in white. And heaven's halls will echo as your shout is raised up, ***"To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power forever and ever!"*** (Revelation 5:13) Thanks be to God, in Jesus' name. Amen.