

“Pacify the Crowd”

I, like many of you did recently for Easter, spent time reading over the events that led to Christ’s crucifixion and rediscovered a very relevant yet disturbing reality. This reality is found in the actions of Pontius Pilate, the Governor of Judea, who sentenced Jesus to be crucified upon the insistence of the Jewish leaders. I rediscovered that, often times, knowing what is right and *doing or saying* what is right can be miles apart. The manifestation of what is known to be right or truthful is never realized. This is evident in the actions by Pontius when confronted with right and wrong. Even though, he did not know Jesus from a hole in the wall and probably perceived Him as just another Jewish quack spewing religious rhetoric and causing trouble, he knew that condemning an innocent man to death was wrong. This is why he goes on to question the Jewish leaders with “Why?” and “What crime has he committed?” He even goes as far as “washing his hands clean in front of the crowd and declaring himself innocent...” Matt 27:24. Yet, why did he still sentence Jesus to death? The Bible answers that question. He did it to “pacify the crowd...” (Mark 15:15) At that moment, for Pontius, doing what was right and standing up for what he believed was not as important as succumbing to crowd pressure in order to avoid controversy and certain backlash from Tiberius Caesar. In other words, he caved in and appeased the Jewish leaders to save his own hide. His decision to pacify the crowd led him to do what he knew was wrong. Sadly, there are times that we do the very same thing. Wouldn’t you agree? We pacify the crowd for personal ambition or gain, political expediency, the lure of success and notoriety, self preservation or gratification. We can become more interested in being “pleasers of men rather than pleasers of God” and as a result cave in to doing what is right. I am aware that there are many incidences in history that can highlight this point, however, personally, we have all at one point or another committed this “Pontius act”. We have abandoned sense and reason to accommodate some other personal agenda.

Unfortunately, no one is immune to this. In fact, we can see this happen to many individuals in different ways. For example, take a presidential candidate who, upon being asked when he believes that life begins, he claims that the question is “above his pay grade”, thereby not taking a position. I suppose that if he gave the answer which he knew was right and believed in (based on his profession of being a Christian) he would have alienated voters. At that moment, it was more important for personal gain and political expediency to pacify the crowd than to say what was right or take a position. In another, yet different form of this behavior is a popular world renowned evangelist, who has throngs of church members and is listened to by millions worldwide. His success lies in the fact that in his “feel good preaching” there is hardly any mention of sin, repentance, or hell. Quite the opposite, his messages of hope and encouragement are a milk toast, creamy, fat-free version of Christianity. I believe that his success is due in part to pacifying a crowd that is not interested in being confronted about sin, repentance, or the reality of hell. These topics do not fill stadiums and sell books, yet can bring someone to the realization of their need for Jesus. Finally, on a brighter side, recently the world got a chance to see what it means to take a stand and not say or do something just to pacify the crowd for personal gain. The recent Miss USA contestant, proudly, showed us all what it means to not cave into your beliefs just to pacify the crowd. This true champion showed us all that it is more important to stand for your beliefs than to be a pleaser of men. In a nationally televised pageant, she took a position on marriage as being between a man and a woman, probably knowing that it would cost her the title of Miss USA being that the question came from a gay judge. Bravo, to this uncrowned, yet true champion!

I know that we can all look back at our own lives and see when we have made decisions just to pacify the crowd. It is easy for us to travel the path of least resistance. It is a challenge that we are confronted with on a frequent basis. The water can get muddy when we are confronted with knowing what is right and the actually doing it. It is in this moment that we are reminded that...“Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.” (James 4:17)

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