

“What Is The Worst Decision You Ever Made?”

John 19:1-16

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What is the worst decision you ever made? If you are like me, you would have a hard time ranking them. Think about it though. Was your worst decision something you failed to do that you have regretted ever since or something you can hardly believe you did. How have you handled the guilt and pain that accompanied that dreadful decision? Let's talk about it during this sermon.

I cannot imagine Pilate making a bigger mistake than his decision to turn Jesus over to the Jewish officials for crucifixion. **Why was this such a bad decision?** He knew Jesus was innocent and did not deserve to die.

It is one thing to make a bad decision if you don't know better because of ignorance, inexperience or immaturity. It is another to make a bad decision knowing it is wrong when you make it. That's what Pilate did. He knew this decision was wrong when he made it. Three times he tried to release Jesus before it got to this point. He even had Jesus flogged in order to drum up sympathy for him. All attempts to rescue Jesus failed because his efforts were matched each time by the determination of the Jewish officials to crucify him. So, Pilate turned Jesus over to those who hated him knowing all the time it was a bad decision.

Why did Pilate do it? Why did he deliberately make a bad decision? According to John 19:8, he was afraid. Fear overruled his sense of justice and turned him into a coward.

Fear is a common emotion, isn't it? Counselors tap into it all the time to understand a person's behavior. No where does scripture provide a better example of the two types of fear we experience than Pilate's decision about Jesus' fate. Here we see the difference between healthy and unhealthy fear.

Healthy fear will keep you from doing wrong. Healthy fear will keep you from touching a hot stove, driving recklessly or succumbing to any temptation that will harm you or another.

Unhealthy fear will keep you from doing right. Pilate's fear was unhealthy. He was afraid of the price he would have to pay if he did what was right. He knew it could cost him his job, power, lavish lifestyle and maybe his life. As a result, he let fear control him and keep him from doing right.

We don't need to be too hard on Pilate, though. All of us have made bad decisions based upon our fear of the wrong things. Unhealthy fear has blinded us, too.

What do you do if you have made a bad decision, especially if you knew it was bad when you made it? Is there any hope for recovery or must you live in misery the rest of your life? Thankfully, there is hope.

What must you do to recover from a bad decision? **Acknowledge** you made a bad decision. Quit blaming others for what you decided. Other people may have influenced or persuaded you, but they did not make the decision for you. You did that all on your own.

In the spiritual realm, we call this confession. It is to the soul what water is to a wound. It cleans, purifies and makes healing possible. Infected wounds don't heal, physically or spiritually.

Ask for forgiveness from God and others. Saying "I am sorry" may be difficult, but it is a necessary step to recovery. Apologies force us to see who we have hurt with our faulty decisions.

Accept the consequences that accompanied your decision and deal with them. Don't run from your responsibilities and make a bad situation worse but face them. Salvage whatever you can from a bad decision and make good things come from it.

I have tried to follow the advice, "Either make the right decision or make the decision right." That's not easy to do but recovering from bad decisions has never been easy.

Cut your losses. Let's face reality. Sometimes a bad decision cannot be made right as hard as you try. Those decisions may involve other people who are not cooperative. What do you do in that situation? Stop the bleeding. Quit spiraling downward. Cut your losses and move on.

This doesn't mean you run from your responsibilities. You accept and fulfill them in light of the changes you must make.

Learn from your mistakes and make a commitment to do better the next time you are faced with a choice. That's called maturity. It comes with experience but must be activated.

Share with others what you have learned from your ordeal so they will not make the same mistake. Help them to see your pain and resolve to overcome that pain. Helping others is therapeutic. It gives bad decisions a redeemable purpose.

Rely upon God for grace and power. Bad decisions have a way of haunting and paralyzing us. They are bigger than we are. We must have help in order to forgive ourselves and move on. Without His help, we will beat ourselves over the head and repeat "if only" until our joy and energy are depleted.

Recently, I attended a conference at McAfee School of Theology where I heard Dr. John Claypool say, "The great tragedy in Judas' life was not his betrayal of Jesus but his suicide. He did not wait to see what God would do with the mess he made." He sold God short. He did not give God a chance to redeem him. He underestimated the grace and power of God by not staying around until Easter. Thank goodness Simon Peter did not also commit suicide. Look how Jesus used Peter after his betrayal. He became the leader of the early church What a recovery!

Do you think Pilate did any of the things I have mentioned that lead to recovery? Do you think the decision to hand Jesus over to the religious authorities haunted him to his dying day? I don't know. Scripture doesn't tell us.

How about you? Are you still haunted by your mistakes? What do you need to do to break free? Let me encourage you to do it by asking for God's help. That's where recovery begins and that's the most important decision you will make. Conversely, refusing His help will move to the top of your "worst decision" list. Don't let that happen!