

Barabbas - Matthew 27:26

The death of Christ receives a lot of emphasis in scripture. More focus was on the D/B/R of Jesus than any other aspect of his life. Tonight let's consider one of the little known characters involved on the final hours of the Lord's life – Barabbas. Matt 27:15 we are introduced to him. ***Matthew 27:15-16 Now at that feast the governor was wont to release unto the people a prisoner, whom they would. {16} And they had then a notable prisoner, called Barabbas.*** Barabbas is referred to as a “notable (notorious)” prisoner. He was a thief/murder/rebel; he was a bad fella that needed to be locked up. He had been convicted of his crimes and scheduled to die. Had it been any other day and had the choice been between any other than Jesus, then Barabbas would have died. Perhaps it would have been Barabbas between those two thieves. But this was a unique day with special circumstances and the man who should have died was set free.

Now it was a custom of the Roman government to release a prisoner to the Jews during the period of the Passover. Likely this was done in order to maintain the goodwill of the people. Judea was a tough place to govern because of the large population of Jews and their influence. They had an independent streak that ran deep and long that constantly created turmoil and problems for the Roman governor. So to stay on their good side and to secure his position, each year the governor would allow them to choose a prisoner that he would allow to go free. This year, he allowed a choice between two, Barabbas or Jesus. ***Matthew 27:21 The governor answered and said unto them, Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you? They said, Barabbas.***

Pilate seemingly was trying to get himself out of a bind. He knew that Jesus was innocent and he also realized the Jews motive was envy. Jesus hadn't committed any crime and Barabbas was a notorious criminal and surely between the two they would choose Jesus, but instead and to the surprise to Pilate, they chose Barabbas. ***Matthew 27:22-23 Pilate saith unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ? They all say unto him, Let him be crucified. {23} And the governor said, Why, what evil hath he done? But they cried out the more, saying, Let him be crucified.***

This custom has been questioned by some historical critics. One such critic is a man named Tim O'Neill. O'Neill writes, *“The whole “Barabbas” story is almost certainly not historical and no such person ever existed. The idea that any Roman prefect would have a tradition where he released someone at the whim of the crowd into the volatile and politically-charged environment of Jerusalem at Passover is absurd, and there is no evidence of this dubious and unlikely “tradition” in any of the non-Christian sources describing Roman rule in this period. The whole idea simply makes no sense as history.”* While it might not make historical sense, the Bible says it happened.

I imagine that day Barabbas was more surprised at the happenings than was Pilate. Most likely, Barabbas didn't hear all the discussions to know what was taking place in the judgment hall. Probably when he heard those footsteps coming toward his cell and that key unlocked his door and those Roman guards took him by the arm and escorted him outside the jail, he thought, *“This is it. My time has come.”* But to his surprise, when they got outside that jail, they turned him loose.

I wonder what he did the rest of that day. I imagine there was some kind of celebration. I wonder if he wondered over to the vicinity of the cross to get a look at the one who was dying in his place; and if he did, I wonder what he thought. If there was ever a person that understood what Jesus did on the cross, it should have been Barabbas because he knew that there was somebody there who was dying in his place.

The gospels don't say what Barabbas did after he was released. But some ancient sources do preserve some traditions about him. According to one tradition, on the day he was released he went to Golgotha and

watched Jesus die on the cross. Another source says that he was later killed while taking part in another revolt against the Romans.

Now we look at that scene and wonder what that has to do with us because we're not a thief or murder. We are not sentenced to death for some of those violate crimes. But let me suggest that there is more similarity between us and Barabbas than we'd like to admit. Just as Jesus died for Barabbas, he has died for each of us. He went to the cross in our stead; he substituted his death for ours. While we may not be guilty of crimes that cause us to be locked up, we are all guilty of sin and because of sin, there had to be a sacrificial death. That's what Jesus did when he went to the cross.

1 Thessalonians 5:9-10 For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, {10} Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him. Peter tells us that the righteous died for the unrighteous to bring us to God. Jesus endured the curse that we deserve; he died the death that was rightfully ours. He sacrificed his life for us but he also substituted his death for us.

A few years ago, Mel Gibson produced a movie entitles The Passion of Christ. There was one scene where they were nailing Jesus to the cross and as they do, the cameras focus in to where you only see a left hand that is holding the spike that was to be driven through the hand of Jesus. I've been told that that hand belonged to Mel Gibson, the producer of the film. That was the only place where he appears in the entire production. He said that he wanted it to be his hand there because he was the first in line that caused the death of Jesus Christ. He recognized that we are all responsible for his death because of our sin. So when he died, he took our place and suffered the punishment that we deserved.

When Jesus went to the cross, he satisfied God's justice for me.

Romans 3:25 Whom God hath set forth to be a PROPITIATION through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God. Notice that word propitiation (atoning sacrifice). It's a word that has reference to the OT term "mercy seat." It's the idea that something pays the price that needs to be paid. It's the idea of a sacrifice that satisfies a demand; an atonement. To atone means that something has satisfied a debt. When Jesus went to the cross, the justice of God was satisfied. Justice says that sin has to be dealt with; somebody has to pay.

Sometimes it seems that people view sin as no big deal. Others wonder why God doesn't just ignore sin and pretend that it never happened. BUT GOD CAN'T DO THAT AND REMAIN GOD! Here's why. God is loving, merciful, and forgiving. But God is also pure, holy, and just. God cannot ignore sin without compromising his holiness. The scripture says in ***Habakkuk 1:13 Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity:...*** The mercy of God wants to forgive the sinner; the justice of God demands that sin be dealt with. Therein is the dilemma. So God has devised a way where he can be merciful to the sinner and still be just regarding that sin, and that plan was to allow Jesus to pay the debt we owe. So Jesus went to the cross because justice says, "Somebody's gotta pay" and that payment needs to be complete and full. Jesus died so God can be just in dealing with sinners.

Salvation involves three words – MERCY, JUSTICE, AND GRACE and all three were involved in the cross. MERCY deferred the payment of sin. JUSTICE demanded the payment of sin, and GRACE delivered the payment for sin. It was grace that Jesus went to the cross. ***Titus 2:11 For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men.*** The road to heaven is by the cross. So Jesus said in ***John 14:6 Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.*** You cannot do enough good things to earn your way to heaven. Your attempt at obedience will never fully pay your debt of sinfulness. The only way to salvation is thru the cross. That's why Jesus died. He died for me that I might live WITH him for all eternity. He also died for me that I might live FOR him.

If you are obedient to the gospel of Christ and allow Jesus to deal with your sins, then you don't have to worry about it again. Unlike those animal sacrifices, the sacrifice of Christ is full, final, and complete. It dealt with sin effectively and when the blood of Christ washing away your sins, they are gone forever.

While on the cross and as his life was ebbing away, Jesus said, "***It is finished.***" That word for finish comes from the Greek word *keoleski*. It literally means to be paid in full. It was used frequently in a judicial system. When a person was convicted of a crime and he went to prison, the judge would take a piece of parchment and he would write on that parchment the crime for which the person was charged along with the penalty which was to be paid. This notice was nailed to the door of his cell and when he had served his time, they would write across that parchment *keoleski* – paid in full. When I come to Christ in obedience and he forgives my sins – indeed they are finished. They will never be remembered or brought against me again. They have been "*paid in full.*"

Now a few closing questions for you to ponder.

- Have you taken advantage of the forgiveness available to you by the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross?
- Have you had your sins washed away?
- If not then why not?

Invitation