

703 Are You Barabbas?

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God's Answers to Life's Questions

The angry mob cried out for the blood of Jesus that day, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” What do you think was running through the heart of Barabbas, when they took Jesus away? Today we’re asking the question, “Are you like Barabbas?” Mark 15:6-15 says: Now at *the* feast he used to release for them *any* one prisoner whom they requested. The man named Barabbas had been imprisoned with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the insurrection. The crowd went up and began asking him *to do* as he had been accustomed to do for them. Pilate answered them, saying, “Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?” For he was aware that the chief priests had handed Him over because of envy. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd *to ask* him to release Barabbas for them instead. Answering again, Pilate said to them, “Then what shall I do with Him whom you call the King of the Jews?” They shouted back, “Crucify Him!” But Pilate said to them, “Why, what evil has He done?” But they shouted all the more, “Crucify Him!” Wishing to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas for them, and after having Jesus scourged, he handed Him over to be crucified.

Imagine with me that you are being held in a Roman prison in Jerusalem in the year 30 AD. You have been tried and condemned to die because you were notoriously involved in an insurrection against Rome. In this insurrection (an open rebellion against the government), you committed murder against a Roman officer. You also plundered, and so were a robber. This is high treason against Rome, for which there is only one penalty—crucifixion. So the Romans are preparing three crosses, one for you and two for your buddies that were captured with you. Rome always crucified for insurrection, so they might publicly demonstrate the price you pay for a crime against them. You knew what the penalty was even before you acted. You also knew that you were guilty of these crimes. Luke said in Luke 23:39-41 One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, “Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!” But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.”

Your name is being recorded in the annals of all four gospels; your name is Barabbas. Tradition says your full name is “Jesus Barabbas,” Joshua the son of Abbas, Joshua the son of Father. Incarcerated, you are waiting your execution. Already, three crosses are being prepared, and because you are the notorious one, the ringleader, you are going to die on that center cross. They will scourge you and they will nail your hands and feet. Then they will leave you there to die. Some folks lived for a couple of days before they died. But the news comes to you that at Passover—the very season it is now—Pilate has previously released to the crowd whomever the people wanted. And the wonder of it all is that the crowd is crying out they want you, Barabbas, released. If Pilate releases you, you won’t have to be scourged or crucified, although in your soul you have already imagined what anguish you would endure. They take that leather whip with pieces of glass and bone and metal on the ends and whip you until they literally tear the flesh from your body. They won’t stop at 39 lashes either. When one man gets tired he hands it to another. They will beat you so mercilessly people won’t recognize you. Then they will parade you through the streets carrying a cross and telling everyone the charge against you to humiliate you. Finally they’ll crucify you, leaving you in the most agonizing position possible. Thirst, fever, the inability to breathe, the

pain of the wounds, the exhaustion, the pressure, and the helplessness afflict you as you are suspended between heaven and earth. That is what you had imagined in your soul since they condemned you.

But the word comes to you, and it is official—the crowd has asked for you to be released. You are going free, Barabbas, you are going free! In the midst of all the commotion, you learn that another has been condemned. They are going to take the cross they prepared for you and give it to him. The man’s name is Jesus, who is called the Christ. From what you hear, he is a prophet; some say He is the Messiah. He hasn’t done anything wrong. You are wondering why they chose guilty you and are going to punish an innocent man... They are taking him right now to scourge him while you escape the punishment. You are free, but the notion of a righteous man dying in your place is not so easy to dismiss. You realize this Jesus is a substitute for you. Had you died, the guilty one, He would have gone free; but since you go free, He must die. His taking the stripes due you and is going to die in agony and suffering. Perhaps you remember what Isaiah said in Isaiah 53:3-6, “He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

You realize further that there is no merit on your part; you were not released because of any good works on your part or because of your righteousness. The amazing thing is that because this man died and you were released, the law will never touch you again for those crimes in the past. The Romans who condemned you have a maxim, that no person shall be put twice in jeopardy. When Jesus dies, you will go free forever. You will never come under condemnation to them again. You are indeed free. Paul reminds us of God’s wonderful grace in Ephesians 2:1-10. “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

There are times in the Old Testament that one animal would be sacrificed while the other was released to go free. This serves as somewhat of a type of what happened with Jesus and Barabbas. For instance, on the Day of Atonement in the Old Testament, the priest used two goats. One goat would be sacrificed, and the other goat went free. One dies and the other becomes a scapegoat that was to be led out into the wilderness and released, never to be seen again

(Leviticus 16). In the cleansing of leprosy, two birds were used. According to Leviticus 14 one turtledove or pigeon was sacrificed, and the live bird was dipped in its blood. Then the live bird was allowed to go free in the open. In both cases there was a death of an animal and the removal of an animal that would go free. One died for sin, and the other completely removed the sins from us. When we realize that the reason we are free is because Jesus was sacrificed, we have learned a most valuable truth. Jesus took our place.

Barabbas knew some vital things that are important for us to know. Here is what Barabbas knew: First, he knew that he stood condemned. He had gone through his trial and knew the verdict. Second, he knew the one taking his place was innocent. Jesus had been sentenced on the basis of false charges. Third, he knew that Jesus was a true substitute. The cross Jesus bore was the cross that had been made for him. If the crowd had not cried out for Jesus to be crucified, Barabbas would surely have been the one scourged and hung on a tree. Fourth, Barabbas knew he had done nothing to merit going free. He couldn't point to any great act of charity or any act of penitence that could free him. And fifth, Barabbas knew that Christ's death meant he would go free forever. The Romans couldn't condemn a man for the same crime twice. Peter said in Acts 2:22-23 on the day of Pentecost, "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men." A little later Peter explained to the Jews in Acts 3:13-15, "The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses."

Now there's something very important for you to realize at this point. Jesus didn't just die for Barabbas—He died for you and me. This, my friend, is both startling to our conscience and yet good news. There are some things in our heart of hearts that we know too. We know first that we stood condemned. You can easily look back into your life and see all the sinful things you have done. You have not only sinned but were dead in your trespasses and sins. Second, you also know that the One taking your place was innocent. Jesus never sinned. Peter said in 1 Peter 3:18, "Christ also died for sins once for all, *the* just for *the* unjust, so that He might bring us to God." Third, we all need to recall that Jesus is a true substitute. His death on the cross was sufficient to pay for your sins and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness. Peter quoted Isaiah 53, saying, that by His stripes we are healed. Isaiah further says in 53:10-11, "But the LORD was pleased To crush Him, putting *Him* to grief; If He would render Himself *as a* guilt offering...As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see *it and* be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities." Fourth, we realize we have done nothing on our own to merit going free. No one can say to God, "I've been so good that You owe me salvation." If any of us are saved at all, we are saved by the grace of God through the blood of Jesus Christ. Being obedient to the will of God is not the same thing as earning our salvation. No one can be saved without obedience, but our obedience arises out of faith and love. Fifth, we realize that Christ's death means we will be forgiven.

When Christ forgives us, our trespasses are no longer counted against us, ever (2 Cor. 5:19). David said in Psalm 103:12, "As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us."

Jesus was and is so very good to us. He has never abused us, never lied to us, but has done everything He can to bless our lives. Jesus said in Matthew 10:45, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." To ransom someone is to buy them back from slavery or from punishment. The purchase price of your freedom was his life. Jesus knew what he was doing. He chose to die for you, because He knew you had no other hope. Paul said in 1 Tim. 1:15-16, "The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life." When we realize our terrible state of condemnation and death, we also see that there is no way out but Jesus Christ. Only through Him will there be any hope of our salvation. If there were any other way than for the death of Jesus to pay for your sins, then Jesus died in vain. My friends and brethren, if we are saved at all, we are saved by the blood of Jesus Christ. I hope that you will give your heart and life to the Lord who loves you. That you will remember that you too are like Barabbas.

Can you imagine Barabbas saying, "I don't believe it," or "I won't accept it"? Can you imagine him turning down freedom from the scourging and crucifixion? If someone offered you a pardon, would you accept it? Martin Dalton died March 23, 1960 at the age of 91. He had been in prison for 63 years in Rhode Island. He murdered a New York businessman in East Providence in 1897, was found guilty and sentenced at the age of 28. In 1930 his case was review. He was granted a full pardon and could go free being 61 years old. But he refused. He chose to remain in prison. According to a decision by the US Supreme Court in 1830 he could refuse a pardon. In 1830 George Wilson was sentenced in Pennsylvania to be hanged for robbing the US mail and for murder. Though President Andrew Jackson pardoned him, Wilson refused the pardon. Wilson insisted that it was no pardon if he did not accept it. The sheriff didn't know what to do. Chief Justice John Marshall ruled: "A pardon is a piece of paper, the value of which depends upon its acceptance by the person implicated. It is hard to be supposed that one under sentence of death would refuse to accept pardon, but if it is refused, it is no pardon. George Wilson must hang." Many a Barabbas today refuses the pardon Jesus offers to a much greater condemnation than hanging or even crucifixion. They say no to the saving gift of a loving Savior. Only you can decide your eternal destiny. Peter said in 2 Pet. 3:9, "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance."

I hope that you will come to repentance if you haven't already. I hope that with your love and faith and repentance, you will also be baptized into Christ. Christian baptism is an immersion in water in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. When you are baptized, God acts to wash you clean from all your sins by the blood of Jesus. You see, we are baptized into His death, where the blood was shed. When you are baptized, the Lord adds you to His church or family, or kingdom. As a saved person, you enjoy all the blessings of being a child of God. I hope you won't wait another day to have the blessing of God. Out of faith and love, obey the Lord today.

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