

Title: **BARABBAS — A PICTURE OF SUBSTITUTION**
Text: Luke 23:1-33
Subject: *Substitution*

Introduction:

(Luke 23:1-33) “And the whole multitude of them arose, and led him unto Pilate. (2) And they began to accuse him, saying, We found this *fellow* perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that he himself is Christ a King. (3) And Pilate asked him, saying, Art thou the King of the Jews? And he answered him and said, Thou sayest *it*. (4) Then said Pilate to the chief priests and to the people, I find no fault in this man. (5) And they were the more fierce, saying, He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Jewry, beginning from Galilee to this place. (6) When Pilate heard of Galilee, he asked whether the man were a Galilaean. (7) And as soon as he knew that he belonged unto Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who himself also was at Jerusalem at that time. (8) And when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceeding glad: for he was desirous to see him of a long *season*, because he had heard many things of him; and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by him. (9) Then he questioned with him in many words; but he answered him nothing. (10) And the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused him. (11) And Herod with his men of war set him at nought, and mocked *him*, and arrayed him in a gorgeous robe, and sent him again to Pilate. (12) And the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together: for before they were at enmity between themselves. (13) And Pilate, when he had called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, (14) Said unto them, Ye have brought this man unto me, as one that perverteth the people: and, behold, I, having examined *him* before you, have found no fault in this man touching those things whereof ye accuse him: (15) No, nor yet Herod: for I sent you to him; and, lo, nothing worthy of death is done unto him. (16) I will therefore chastise him, and release *him*. (17) (For of necessity he must release one unto them at the feast.) (18) And they cried out all at once, saying, Away with this *man*, and release unto us Barabbas: (19) (Who for a certain sedition made in the city, and for murder, was cast into prison.) (20) Pilate therefore, willing to release Jesus, spake again to them. (21) But they cried, saying, Crucify *him*, crucify him. (22) And he said unto them the third time, Why, what evil hath he done? I have found no cause of death in him: I will therefore chastise him, and let *him* go. (23) And they were instant with loud voices, requiring that he might be crucified. And the voices of them and of the chief priests prevailed. (24) And Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they required. (25) And he released unto them him that for sedition and murder was cast into prison, whom they had desired; but he delivered Jesus to their will. (26) And as they led him away, they laid hold upon one Simon, a Cyrenian, coming out of the country, and on him they laid the cross, that he might bear *it* after Jesus. (27) And there followed him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented him. (28) But Jesus turning unto them said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. (29) For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed *are* the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck. (30) Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us. (31) For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry? (32) And there were also two other, malefactors, led with him to be put to death. (33) And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left.”

My subject this evening is **BARABBAS — A PICTURE OF SUBSTITUTION**. Of all the doctrines taught in the Word of God, none is so vitally important as the doctrine of substitution. Men everywhere talk about the doctrine of substitutionary atonement. They speak much about Christ, the sinner’s Substitute. But their language is vague. And very few people understand what the Bible teaches about substitution. It is for this reason that I want us to look at the story of Barabbas. Here we have a clear illustration of the nature of Christ’s death. It was a substitutionary sacrifice and atonement. The innocent died in the place of the guilty, and the guilty must go free.

BACKGROUND

You are all familiar with the story. It is recorded by all four of the gospel writers. During the days of Israel's subjection to Rome, a strange custom was regularly practiced. On the day of the Passover the Roman governor released a guilty prisoner. No doubt, this was intended to be an act of benevolence on the part of the Roman authorities toward the Jews. The Jews probably accepted it as a significant compliment to their Passover celebrations. Since on that day the Jews were themselves delivered out of the land of Egypt, they may have thought it a most fitting thing for some prisoner to obtain his freedom.

Since some prisoner must, by the arrangement of divine providence, be released on the Day of Atonement, Pilate thought that he now had opportunity to allow the Savior to go free, without compromising himself in the eyes of his superiors at Rome. So he asked the people which of the two they preferred, a notorious criminal or the holy Savior. Without hesitation or dissension, the crowd cried for the release of Barabbas and the death of Christ. Pilate's last effort to release Christ had failed. — *"And Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they required. And he released unto them him that for sedition and murder was cast into prison, whom they had desired; but he delivered Jesus to their will"* (vv. 24-25).

Who Barabbas was we do not know. His name signifies — "His father's son." Some suggest that there is an indication here that he was particularly and specially the son of Satan. Others suppose Barabbas was an endearing name, a name given to him because he was his father's darling, a child indulged by his father, or as we would say "his daddy's boy." — Overly indulged, spoiled children are the most likely persons to become injurious to society, griefs to their parents, and curses to all around them.

Certainly, there is a warning here for us. Looking at the cases of Eli's two sons, Absalom, and Barabbas, we are warned as parents not to be excessive in the indulgence and pampering of our children.

SUBSTITUTION

At any rate, Barabbas appears to have committed at least three crimes. He was imprisoned for robbery, sedition, and murder. We might well pity the father of such a son. This wretch is brought out and set in competition with the holy Son of God! And the poor inhabitants of Jerusalem were so hardened in their unbelief and sin, so thirsty for the innocent blood of Christ, that they preferred this obnoxious creature to the man who is God's own Fellow!

This fact is very significant. There is more teaching in it than we might realize at first glance. In this act of freeing the guilty and binding the innocent, we have a vivid example of salvation by substitution. The guilty is set free and the innocent is put to death in his place. Barabbas is spared, and Christ is crucified. We have in this striking event a display of the manner in which God pardons and justifies the ungodly. He does it because Christ has suffered and died in their stead, the Just for the unjust.

- We deserve to die for the punishment of our sins; but a mighty Substitute has suffered our punishment.
- Eternal death is our due; but a glorious Surety has died for us.
- We are all in the position of Barabbas by nature. We are guilty, wicked, condemned, and shut up under the law.
- But when we were without hope and without strength, "in due time Christ died for the ungodly."
- And now God, for Christ's sake, can be just and yet "the Justifier of him which believeth in Jesus."

TWO BIRDS

In the Old Testament rite of cleansing lepers, two birds were used. One bird was killed, and its blood was poured into a basin. The other bird was dipped into the blood, and then, with its wings covered with crimson, it was set free to fly into the open air. The slain bird typified our Savior whose blood was shed at Mt. Calvary. And every soul that by faith is plunged into the...

“Fountain filled with blood,
Drawn from Immanuel’s veins,

is set free, owing its life and liberty to the Savior who was once for sinners slain. That is substitution. It comes to this — Barabbas must die, or Christ must die. You the sinner must perish, or Christ, the immaculate Lamb of God, must be slain. Behold, the Incarnate God dies that we may be delivered.

Proposition: The Lord Jesus Christ suffered in the place of sinners like Barabbas, satisfying the wrath and justice of God; and like Barabbas all those sinners for whom Christ made satisfaction must go free.

Divisions: May God the Holy Spirit be our Teacher as we look into this subject. — **BARABBAS — A PICTURE OF SUBSTITUTION**. And may he grant pardon and salvation to guilty sinners by Christ. I want you to see four things about this man Barabbas.

1. Barabbas was a man guilty of many offenses.
2. Barabbas was a prisoner under the sentence of the law.
3. A Substitute was found to die in Barabbas’ place.
4. Because Christ died, Barabbas was set free.

A GUILTY MAN

The first thing I want you to see is this — Barabbas was a man guilty of many offenses. We sometimes say that a man is “as guilty as sin.” Well Barabbas was as guilty as sin. His life was a life of riotousness and sin. He was tried in a court of law and found guilty of robbery, sedition, and murder. As such he is a fair representative of all men by nature. We could all be named “Barabbas.” We are all the sons of our father Adam. His image, his nature, and his character is reflected in us all.

Like Barabbas, we are all rebels. Barabbas stirred up sedition. He was a revolutionary. That is a modern name for rebels. He would not submit to authority. This is the problem with our race. We are proud, self-willed rebels. We hate authority.

In our father Adam, we rebelled against God’s command. — We are born with a rebellious nature. — In pride and self-will, we rebelled all the days of our lives against God’s throne. — We sinfully rebel against God’s holy law. Man acts like he does, simply because God says, “Don’t do that.” Man sees the good and refuses to do it, simply because God says, “Do it.” — And we are steadfast and persistent in our rebellion.

- As children, we rebelled against parents and teachers.
- As adults, we rebel against moral and civil authority.
- Even as believers, we have a nature within us that rebels against everything holy and good (Rom. 7:14, 15, 18).

And Like Barabbas, we are all robbers. It was Adam’s determination to rob God of his authority, of his creation, and of his glory. And that is what man does by his sin. — We have robbed God of his glory, refusing to worship him. — We have robbed God of his honor, refusing to believe his Word. — We have robbed God of his creation, stealing that which God has made for himself and using it for ourselves, without regard to him. — We have robbed ourselves and our children.

- Of the blessedness of our original creation.
- Of fellowship with God.
- Of the image of God.
- Of true freedom.
- Of the favor of God.
- Of life.

Through our sin and rebellion our race is reduced to nothing but emptiness and vanity. Once we were princes of God's creation. Now we are empty handed thieves.

(Ephesians 2:11-12) "Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; (12) That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:"

Once more, like Barabbas, we are all murderers. — In the course of his rebellion and robbery, Barabbas had committed murder. So have we all. There is not a guiltless one among us.

- We have all committed multiple murders in our hearts — Envy, hatred, anger, wrath, and malice are in the eyes of God's law equal to murder (Matt. 5:21-22).
- We have infected our children with the deadly disease of sin. Sin is a plague of the heart. It is a family disease passed on from generation to generation.
- What is more, we are all guilty of the blood of the Son of God. Yes we are guilty of slaughtering the Lord of Glory!
- We must never to forget what we are by nature.

(Matthew 15:19) "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies:"

There is no evil deed, or atrocious crime, or an infamous sin recorded on the pages of human history which does not reside, in the heart of every man, woman, and child in the world. Well could we all be named "Barabbas"!

- We are all the descendants of Adam.
- We are all of our father the devil.
- We are all, by nature, "*children of wrath, even as others.*"

Look to the book of God's law. Read every command of God. By them we stand judged. The verdict is guilty! Guilty! Guilty! Like Barabbas we are men guilty of many offenses.

A CONDEMNED PRISONER

Now, in the second place, Barabbas was a prisoner under the sentence of the law. Barabbas had been found guilty. The sentence was passed. He must die. On the day when the Jews observe their Passover, two thieves will be crucified. And Barabbas will be crucified in the midst of them, for he is the vilest of the three. Take him away. Bind him hand and foot in the prison until the day of his execution.

Picture Barabbas in the prison. He expected very soon to be taken out, nailed to a cross and hung up to die, as the just payment for his crimes. He was held under the sentence of the law. That is just the condition of every person in the world by nature.

(John 3:36) "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."

(Romans 3:19) "Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God."

(Galatians 3:10) "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them."

(Galatians 3:22-23) "The scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. (23) But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed."

(Ephesians 2:3) We all "were by nature the children of wrath, even as others."

Man's bondage is as cruel and terrible as it is sure. Men today like to boast of their independence and freedom. People think, "I'm going to do my own thing." But they are only doing exactly the same thing that men have been doing throughout history. Man is not free.

- He is in bondage.
- He is in bondage to religious tradition, social custom, and peer pressure.
- And man by nature is in bondage to sin. He is in bondage to his own nature, and the lusts of his own heart.
- Man is in bondage to his sinful nature. — "*Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil*" (Jer. 13:23).
- Men are taken captive by Satan at his will (1 Tim. 2:26).
- Man by nature is prone to every kind of evil. It is only the restraining grace of God that keeps any of us from the wicked things we pretend to abhor.

Listen to me, you who are yet without Christ, you are bound under the chains of darkness, and your will is held in captivity by the fetters of iniquity. You have resolved many times to change. You may have even succeeded in reforming your outward behavior somewhat; but your character, your nature, your will is in bondage.

- You are in the bondage of despair.
- You are in the bondage of helplessness.
- You are in the bondage of hopelessness.

Christ alone can set the prisoner free! — "*If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed!*" We were "*such as sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, being bound in affliction and iron.*" Then we cried unto the Lord in our trouble, and he saved us out of all our distresses. He brought us out of darkness and the shadow of death, and brake our bands in sunder! (Psa. 107:10-14).

(Psalms 107:10-14) "Such as sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, *being* bound in affliction and iron; (11) Because they rebelled against the words of God, and contemned the

counsel of the most High: (12) Therefore he brought down their heart with labour; they fell down, and *there was* none to help. (13) Then they cried unto the LORD in their trouble, *and* he saved them out of their distresses. (14) He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and brake their bands in sunder.”

Oh imprisoned sinner, cry out for mercy. Christ can make you free.

I must also tell you that **man’s sentence is fixed and immutable**. — “*The soul that sinneth, it shall die!*” God has spoken. There is no reprieve. There is no amnesty. There is no repeal.

- God’s law says you must die.
- God’s holiness says you must die.
- God’s justice says you must die.

Yes, man by nature is under the sentence and curse of God’s holy law. The law of God demands your death. You are not on probation. You are on death row. The God of heaven judges you guilty. Your own conscience consents to the verdict. The sentence is passed. The only thing lacking is the appointed day of execution.

- We died spiritually in our father Adam (Rom. 5:12).
- Physical death is the consequence of sin.
- And every unbelieving sinner must die eternally, because of God’s immutable law.
- Every sinner out of Christ is dead at law.

Is there therefore no hope for a sinner like Barabbas? Must all the guilty forever perish? Will God not have mercy? Is there anyway whereby God can be faithful to his holy law and yet pardon sin? Is there any means whereby God can both satisfy his justice and let the sinner live? God will not show mercy at the expense of his justice. But he will show mercy if justice can be satisfied in a Substitute. Blessed be the name of the Lord, there is hope for sinners, for God has found a Substitute!

(Job 33:24) “Then he is gracious unto him, and saith, Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom.”

A SUBSTITUTE FOUND

So mark this third fact and rejoice. — A Substitute was found to die in Barabbas’ place. The Roman soldier came and unlocked Barabbas’ prison door, took off his shackles, and said, “Barabbas, you’re free to go. Jesus of Nazareth is going to die in your place.” That, my friend, is real substitution.

Illustration: One room schoolhouse.

That One who suffered and died as Barabbas’ Substitute is our Substitute. His name is Jesus Christ, the Lord. He is God’s own, well-beloved Son. He is the only Substitute God can or will accept.

(Romans 3:24-26) “Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: (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; (26) To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.”

(2 Corinthians 5:21) "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."

(1 Peter 2:24) "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed."

The sinner's Substitute must be a suitable person, able and willing to redeem. Whoever undertakes to reconcile a holy God and sinful men, must himself be both God and man.

- **He must be God**, for only God is able to make infinite satisfaction.
- **He must be man**, for man must be punished.

Behold, the God-man, our Savior. Being God he is able to redeem. Being man he is able to suffer. Being the God-man he is an all-sufficient Redeemer, both able and willing to save!

- **In order to be a Substitute for others, our Redeemer must be perfect and sinless.** — "*He knew no sin.*"

The Lord Jesus Christ suffered the just punishment due to our sins, as our Substitute. He was made sin for us. — He made our sins his own! Oh, wondrous grace!

- God took his darling Son without the camp.
- He hung his Son up in our place between two thieves.
- God forsook his well-beloved Son.
- He killed his Son!
- And he buried the body that bore our sin.

And by a marvelous transfer of grace, the Lord God has made Christ's perfect righteousness our righteousness. We have been made the righteousness of God in him!

BARABBAS SET FREE

Now, in the last place, I want you to see that because Christ died in his place, Barabbas was set free. Jesus Christ took Barabbas' place at Calvary. Therefore Barabbas did not die. There is a glorious truth here. All of those for whom the Son of God died at Calvary must be set free.

It is not possible for the law to punish my Substitute and punish me too. Not one soul for whom Jesus Christ died shall be found in hell. The cross of Christ can never be discovered a miscarriage. The blood of Christ cannot be spilled in vain. — "*He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied.*" I am talking to you about real substitution. Any doctrine that teaches that God will both punish Christ and punish those for whom Christ died is not substitution and is not the gospel.

Illustration: "*Let these go their way*" (John 18:8).

From whence this fear and unbelief?
Hath no the Father put to grief
His spotless Son for me?
And will the righteous Judge of men,
Condemn me for that debt of sin,
Which, Lord, was charged on Thee?

Complete atonement Thou hast made,

And to the utmost farthing paid
Whate'er Thy people owed:
Nor can His wrath on me take place,
If sheltered in Thy righteousness,
And sprinkled with Thy blood.

If Thou has my discharge procured,
And freely in my room endured
The whole of wrath divine:
Payment God cannot twice demand,
First at my bleeding Surety's hand,
And then again at mine.

Then turn, my soul, unto thy rest;
The merits of thy great High Priest
Have bought thy liberty.
Trust in His efficacious blood,
Nor fear thy banishment from God,
Since Jesus died for thee.

Understand this. — **The sin-atonng death of Christ was a satisfactory substitution.**

- It satisfied the designs of his Father.
 - It satisfied the desires of his own soul.
 - It satisfied the demands of his law.
 - It satisfied the debts of his people.
- And every guilty sinner for whom Jesus Christ died must be set free.

Do you ask, "For whom did Christ die?" he Scriptures tell us plainly.

- He died for the ungodly.
- He died for men who were without strength.
- He died for men who were his enemies.
- He died for his people.

How does the Son of God set the prisoners free?

- He gives them life.
- He casts Satan out.
- He breaks the power of canceled sin.
- He subdues their wills.
- He silences the law.
- He gives them faith.
- He promises the resurrection. We will die physically. But the grave cannot hold Christ's free men. He will raise these bodies to life and immortality.

Oh may Christ open the doors of the prison for you this very night and set you free.

Application:

Listen to this preacher. You are under the sentence of God's holy law and you will surely die, unless you find a place of refuge in Christ, the Substitute God has provided. **Somehow, you must get to Christ. Christ alone can set you free. How does a guilty sinner come to Christ?**

- You must come as you are. — Naked — Helpless- Filthy — Bound.
- You must come in submission.
- You must come by faith.

What does Christ give those who come to him?

- Life!
- Freedom!
- Righteousness!
- Peace!
- Joy!
- Cleansing!
- Pardon!
- Sonship!

Children of God, live as those who have been made free by Christ. You are bought with a price, the price of the Christ's precious blood. Let us therefore glorify God in our bodies and in our spirits. We are not our own. We have been bought with the precious blood of Christ!

Do you remember the story of Eddie Rickenbacher?

Imagine this scene: You are on the Florida coast, not far from a little town near Jacksonville called Switzerland. The sun is setting like a gigantic orange ball. It's a cool evening on a vacant, isolated stretch of beach. The water is lapping at the shore, the breeze is blowing slightly. There are one or two joggers and a couple of fisherman. Most people have gone home for the day.

You look up and you see an old man with bent shoulders, bushy eyebrows, and bony features hobbling down the beach carrying a bucket. He carries the bucket out onto a pier. He stands there and you notice he is looking up into the sky and all of a sudden you see a mass of dancing dots. You soon recognize that they are seagulls. They are coming out of nowhere. The man takes out of his bucket handfuls of shrimp and begins to throw them on the dock. The seagulls come and land all around him. Some land on his shoulders, some land on his hat, and they eat the shrimp. Long after the shrimp are gone his feathered friends linger. The old man and the birds.

What is going on here? Why is this man feeding seagulls? What could compel him to do this--as he does week after week?

The man in the scene is Eddie Rickenbacher, a famous World War II pilot. His plane, "The Flying Fortress," went down in 1942 and no one thought he would be rescued. Perhaps you have read or heard how he and his eight passengers escaped death by climbing into two rafts for thirty days. They fought thirst, the sun, and sharks. Some of the sharks were nine feet long. The boats were only eight feet long. But what nearly killed them was starvation. Their rations were gone within eight days and they didn't have anything left.

Rickenbacher wrote that even on those rafts, every day they would have a daily afternoon devotional and prayer time. One day after the devotional, Rickenbacher leaned back and put his hat over his eyes and tried to get some sleep. Within a few minutes he felt something on his head. He knew in an instant it was a seagull which had perched on his raft. But he knew that they were hundreds of miles out to sea. Where did this seagull come from? He was also certain that if he didn't get that seagull he would die. Soon all the others on the two boats noticed the seagull. No one spoke, no one moved. Rickenbacher quickly grabbed the seagull and with thanksgiving, they ate the flesh of the bird. They used the intestines for fish bait and survived.

Eddie Rickenbacher never forgot that visitor who came from a foreign place. That sacrificial guest. Every week, he went out on the pier with a bucket of shrimp and said thank you, thank you, thank you.

That's what you and I are called to do in response to God's grace and mercy in Christ.

(Romans 12:1-2) "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is your reasonable service.* (2) And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.*"

Amen.

Date: Danville — Sunday Evening — May 28, 2006
Grace Bible Church, San Leandro, CA — (SUN PM 06/06/06)
Tape # Y-95b
Readings: *Rex Bartley and Merle Hart*