

# The Insurrectionist? Or the King of the Jews?

Mark 15:6-15

24 January 2021, 10:30 AM

## Introduction:

Today we will continue our sermon series in the Gospel of Mark.

- We have come to Mark 15. Mark 15 is the chapter about the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- We noted last week that Mark has the most abbreviated account of the four gospels, a feature which has the effect of bringing the general features of the crucifixion into clear focus and keeping us from getting lost in the details.
  - Mark might be compared to a map of Canada that shows the provinces and principal cities versus one that shows you lots of smaller cities and details.

Last week we looked at the first five verses of Mark 15 and we saw how the Sanhedrin, which was the highest court of the Old Testament church, eagerly brought Jesus to Pilate, accusing Him of claiming to be the King of the Jews.

- Jesus affirmed that this was so, and did not try to defend Himself against their charges, even though many of them were false, because He was there to bear the sin of His people before God. There was no defense that could be given for His people's sins.
  - As the Son of God who became flesh, He was the only one who could atone for their sins. He had to offer Himself to suffer the pains of hell in their place.
  - He was willingly subjecting Himself to be punished for our sins.
  - Pilate was left to marvel. Here was a prisoner who seemed innocent, but would not defend Himself.
    - Mark emphasises that Jesus does not try to defend Himself.

This week, we are going to look at verses 6-15.

- The emphasis here is on the choice that the people were given between Barabbas the insurrectionist, and Jesus, the King of the Jews.
- Pilate, in a ploy to obtain the release of Christ, puts this choice before the people. Mark focuses his narrative on this.
  - As readers for whom the Word of God was written, we ought to consider the fact that there is a similar choice before us today as the people of God.
  - Today, I want to put this before you all.

Please give attention now as I read the passage to you. It is Mark 15:6-20. This is the word of God:

**Mark 15:6-20:** Now at the feast he was accustomed to releasing one prisoner to them, whomever they requested. <sup>7</sup> And there was one named Barabbas, *who was chained with his fellow rebels; they had committed murder in the rebellion.* <sup>8</sup> Then

the multitude, crying aloud, began to ask *him to do just as he had always done for them.* <sup>9</sup> But Pilate answered them, saying, “Do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?” <sup>10</sup> For he knew that the chief priests had handed Him over because of

envy. <sup>11</sup> But the chief priests stirred up the crowd, so that he should rather release Barabbas to them. <sup>12</sup> Pilate answered and said to them again, “What then do you want me to do *with Him* whom you call the King of the Jews?” <sup>13</sup> So they cried out again, “Crucify Him!” <sup>14</sup> Then Pilate said to them,

“Why, what evil has He done?” But they cried out all the more, “Crucify Him!” <sup>15</sup> So Pilate, wanting to gratify the crowd, released Barabbas to them; and he delivered Jesus, after he had scourged *Him*, to be crucified.

May the Lord add His blessing to the reading of His holy and infallible word.

You can see in this passage that Pilate is in a bit of fix.

- The Sanhedrin have brought Jesus to him, declaring that He is guilty of claiming to be their king (the King of the Jews).
  - The implication of course is that Jesus is presenting Himself as a king in place of the Roman emperor Tiberius.
  - Pilate, of course, would have been very suspicious of this from the leaders of the Jews who wanted nothing more than independence from Rome.
  - As it says in verse 10, he knew that the Sanhedrin were acting out of envy.
- After examining Christ, Pilate was convinced that Jesus had done nothing worthy of punishment.
  - He saw rightly that Jesus was not a revolutionary who was looking to overthrow Rome by force.
  - Yet, the Sanhedrin were adamant and Pilate did not want to contradict them if he did not have to.
- Since he knew that Jesus was popular with the people, he devised what he thought to be a clever plan when he saw the crowd gathering for the customary release of a prisoner—an indulgence that Pilate granted to them each year at the Passover feast.
  - Rather than opposing the Sanhedrin himself by refusing to crucify Jesus, Pilate thought he could easily get the people to call for the release Jesus.
  - Since Jesus had been delivered to him because of envy, he supposed that the crowd would oppose their leaders and want to let Jesus go.
  - But this really wasn't so clever. It was a gross miscalculation.
    - The delight the Jews had in this custom of releasing a prisoner was in gaining the release of popular antagonist to Rome, and Jesus had not been taken prisoner by Rome, but by the Jewish Sanhedrin.
    - They were not in a mind to give Pilate, a governor that none of them liked, the release of the prisoner that *he* wanted to be released.
      - It was easy for the Sanhedrin to convince them to ask for Barabbas instead.
      - Pilate did not realise that many of Jesus' followers would have had better things to do with their time at Passover than come to demand the release of one of their freedom fighters.

As we look into this passage and how it relates to us, let's begin by looking at:

#### **I. The options: Barabbas or Jesus?**

- The people were asked to declare which of these they wanted?

- This is a question that confronts us down through the ages—do we want Jesus or some other deliverer?
  - Consider these two candidates.
    - First, we will look at:
- A. Barabbas the insurrectionist.
1. It is interesting the way Mark first introduces him—as *one named Barabbas*.
    - When we consider that the name means *son of the father* (*Bar* means son, *abba* means father), Mark’s wording that he was *called* the son of the father is suggestive that he was not actually the son of the father—like Jesus is.
      - Of course the name could simply mean that he was the son of a father, certainly someone important, but not *God the Father*.
    - But it is interesting that this name puts him as a competitor with Jesus...
      - This name which he was called, Barabbas, suggests that he is a leader, and indeed he was—apparently a popular one at that.
      - So the question is, “Do you want the insurrectionist who is called the son of the father or do you want the King of the Jews who is the Son of the Father?”
      - There is even not a little evidence that Barnabas was actually also named *Jesus* (a very popular name in the first century). This makes both of them to be called Jesus Barabbas.
        - Nevertheless, to keep things simple, I will call the freedom fighter *Barabbas*, and Jesus Christ the Lord *Jesus*, as I continue.
  2. Mark tells us that Barabbas was an insurrectionist—that is, a freedom fighter.
    - He was one of the Jews who led the rebellion against Rome, and in doing so he had been charged with murder along with others with whom he had been chained up in prison.
      - Probably the others are the two men who are crucified on either side of Jesus. Barabbas was supposed to be the one in the middle, but Jesus was given his place.
    - These men, as involved in the rebellion (a particular insurrection that was known to Mark’s readers), were looking to free the Jews from Roman dominion.
      - They hoped to follow in the footsteps of Judas Maccabeus and his brothers who had put up effective resistance against the Greeks in previous days.
      - This was a very popular movement in the time of Jesus.
        - As we have seen, many who encountered Jesus in Galilee and who saw His divine power, very much wanted (and expected) Him to take on the role of leading a rebellion against Rome.
        - Surely with His power to raise the dead, heal the sick, and multiply the loaves and fishes, He could lead them in triumph against these Romans as Moses, Joshua, David, Asa, Hezekiah, and so many others had led them against their enemies in the days of old.
- B. The second candidate for Pilate’s release (amnesty) was Jesus Christ.

1. He is presented by Pilate, and rightly so, as *the King of the Jews*.
  - Jesus is that to be sure. John the baptiser proclaimed that the kingdom was at hand because the King had come.
  - He is the Son of David who came, indeed, to set His people free from their enemies, and not only take the throne of David, but take that throne forever as elevated to the right hand of the Father!
  - He had demonstrated and declared that He was not only born of a woman, but also the Son of God who was sent from heaven where He had been from all eternity with the Father, co-eternal, co-equal, and of equal power.
- But His work had been disappointing to many.
  - While His teaching and His miracles were impressive, He did not lead the people to take up arms and overthrow the Romans.
    - He lacked a revolutionary spirit.
    - He had something else in mind—something far more important.
2. He came to save His people—and people from every nation of the world—from their sins.
  - He came to call all people to repentance and to give His life a ransom to God for their sins—as the way that God had promised to secure their pardon.
    - His objective was to reconcile them to the Father and to bring them to Him forever as His own.
    - He was much more interested in freeing them from the rebellion that was in their heart (and life) against God than He was in leading them in rebellion against Rome.
  - He had promised to come in His glory to judge the world at the last day...
    - But His present agenda for them was preaching the gospel of reconciliation among the nations and bearing reproach for Him as a persecuted people.
3. At this juncture, there were not many who had identified with this purpose.
  - There were a few—the woman who washed His feet with the precious oil was certainly such.
    - And to some extent, His disciples had resonated with this purpose—but their passion for it still left much to be desired—they did not yet understand the cross.
  - But the crowds as a whole, especially this mob that had initially come to Pilate to seek the release of a prisoner that Rome had taken,
    - had not been inflamed with a passion for the agenda of Jesus to deliver the world from sin.
    - They rested in the fact that they were already God’s people and saw little need for the kind of work that Jesus had come to do—especially giving His life a ransom for their sins.
      - They were unregenerate men who had not come to see their need of such radical measures.

- Until Jesus actually went through with the cross and reconciliation by the cross began to be proclaimed, they did not see a lot of hope in this prophet from Galilee who now was before them battered and bruised in chains, at the mercy, it appeared, of the Roman governor.
- Yes, Barabbas had been arrested too, but at least as a hero who was putting up a fight. Surely he would do it again.
- It was easy for the Sanhedrin to persuade this crowd to choose Barabbas.

## **II. You need to see that the same two candidates are before you today.**

A. Barabbas represents salvation by the wisdom and power of man—perhaps even men who are fighting for what seems to be God’s cause.

- This has been a constant temptation in the world.
1. We may go back to Cain, when he, unlike his brother Abel, sought to gain the approval of God by his own works.
    - This led the murder of his brother Abel who looked to God in faith, not depending on his own righteousness.
    - Cain was followed by many who became mighty in the world, but who pursued power and success without looking to God. They did not look to God to give them power and success, but much more, they increasingly did not pursue holiness and sanctification at all—they did not deliverance from sin and reconciliation with God by the grace of God.
    - They followed Barabbas. They became desperately wicked so that God destroyed the world with the great flood, sparing only Noah and his household, who looked to the Lord for salvation—to God who saves by His Son.
  - But though only Noah’s family was left, they did not all continue in faith.
  2. As they began to multiply, they came together at Babel to build a city, to make a great name for themselves by their own power.
    - They felt that by man—by Barabbas—they could made themselves secure and prosperous. They would do so in the strength and the way of man.
      - The result would not be reconciliation with God, but independence from Him, bringing them further and further from a holy walk with Him, deeper and deeper into sin.
      - The cause they were pursuing was not itself so bad, but the way they were doing it would lead them away from God and was not focused on becoming what God wanted them to be.
        - How important to consider what we are pursuing—is it the agenda of the Lord, or is it Barabbas?
    - Lest all depart from Him, God confused their language and scattered them, and then called Abraham, giving him the promise that He would bless him and make his name great—protect him and give him safety. In other words, God would do what the men at Babel sought to do for themselves.

- God promised that through Abraham, He would raise up His Son to save the world.
3. But even with this promise to Abraham and his descendants, the struggle continued between Barabbas (the one who saves by human power) and Christ (the one who saves from sin by divine power).
    - Even among these holy people, set apart to God by His covenant with all their ordinances to testify to their need of salvation from sin and the promise of salvation by God's Son, they constantly gravitated to salvation by man.
    - Often they turned to the nations, relying on Egypt or on Assyria.
    - Time and time again, they look for prosperity and blessing in the world without seeking salvation from their sin and growth in a holy walk with God.
    - Time and time again, God had to punish them and restore them again to His way of salvation through His prophets.
      - And by His faithfulness, there were always among them a remnant that continued until Jesus came.
  4. And when Jesus finally came, we have before us the situation at which we are looking today, where they chose Barabbas rather than Jesus.
    - They seek salvation by man to bring them political and economic liberty rather than salvation by Jesus Christ who came to save them from their sin.
    - We could go on with how this struggle between Barabbas and Jesus has continued until modern times—
      - The reformation was a return to the pursuit of God's salvation instead of salvation by popes and priests who had become the new Barabbas—the way of salvation by human effort—buying indulgences, doing the rosary, the stations of the cross, relics, and prayers to the dead.
  5. In the protestant church, Barabbas immediately began to emerge and was brought to forefront about 120 years ago when so many religion men in the name of Christ began to proclaim that war and poverty would end.
    - They spoke of it as the New Jerusalem coming of age and as the kingdom of God coming to fulfillment.
    - There was one huge problem, however, with their dreams.
      - They ignored the problem of sin.
        - By God's grace and the fruits of His Spirit among the people, there had been growth in love, in generosity, in morality and integrity.
        - But these kingdom seekers attributed these fruits to the innate goodness of man, ignoring the fact that we are ruined by the fall and in need of redemption.
    - They began to downplay the cross and the call to holiness, except that they continued to promote good deeds to our neighbours and basic morality.
      - They began to institute worship according to the dictates of their own hearts, presuming that they had light and goodness within.

- They downplayed confessions and creeds, presuming that truth comes from within rather than from the word of God and the Holy Spirit.
  - This all led to the confusion and immorality that we have today, still pretending that we are enlightened.
- B. Jesus continues to stand through all the ages as the only name by which men can be saved.
1. Salvation is not found from ourselves. We do not have it within ourselves either to atone for our sin, to turn our hearts to God, or to walk according to His will.
    - Nor can we even do the things we presumed we could do—end poverty, end war, improve ourselves.
    - Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the one we preach to the nations and to our own people.
  2. Through all the ages, there have been those who looked for a city whose builder and maker is God.
    - Many of them have already been mentioned. Abel, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, the prophets—always there were those whom He kept.
    - In the early church, there were those who continued looking to Him even though they were put in prison and tortured and burned in the Colosseum.
      - They did not cower when called before rulers and governors but testified that they served another Master, King Jesus, who saves His people from the sins and who will judge the world at the last day.
    - They held to His truth when heretics came and denied that Jesus was fully God or said that He had not truly come in human flesh...
      - Or when they turned from the living God to dead idols and icons and began to trust in Barabbas—in men and priests—to save them.
    - They are the ones who preached salvation by grace through faith, who translated the Bible into the language of the people and preached so the people could understand.
      - Who condemned all the immorality, extravagance, pride, sacrilege, and elevation of men to high seats like the papacy that Christ did not establish.
      - They turned from man-made salvation to the salvation proclaimed by the apostles in the Holy Scriptures.
  3. And I say, even to this very day, there remain those who are kept by the power of God through faith.
    - Those who choose Christ instead of Barabbas as the one they want.
    - Yes, I tell you, you must all make that choice.
      - Either you look for salvation from this world and in this world by Barabbas or you look for the salvation that Christ alone can give you—reconciliation by His blood and eternal life through His grace.
      - Oh that God might open your heart that you might see how vain it is to look to man and how blessed it is to look to Christ.

- The decision boils down to two things: what you are looking for and how you hope to attain it.
  - If you are looking for deliverance from sin and reconciliation with God, you will choose Christ as the only one who can save you.
  - If you are looking for deliverance from the things you don't like in this world, you will look to man to save you—the right politician, the right business deal, the right doctor, the right therapist, the right vaccine.
    - But I tell you, there is not eternal salvation and no reconciliation with God to be found in any of these things.
    - Man cannot deliver us at last—man cannot save us from our sins—only Jesus can do that.
      - So which one do you want?
        - Barabbas who promised prosperity and freedom and peace now, or Jesus Christ who alone can reconcile you to God forever and make you forgiven and holy?
        - I say as He said, what will it profit you to gain the whole world and lose your own soul?

### **III. So how to you go about choosing Jesus instead of Barabbas?**

- I hope I have convinced you that this is what you ought to do—or rather that God the Holy Spirit has convinced you... but how do you have Him?
- A. It begins with a definitive choice that you will serve Him instead of Barabbas.
1. Outwardly, you embrace Him by baptism and profession with your mouth.
    - By baptism, you declare that you are looking to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to wash you and your children from your sin.
      - The symbol is not a symbol of obtaining houses and lands, or great riches.
      - It is the symbol of cleansing water, signifying that by the cleansing of His blood and the renewing of His Spirit you enter into His kingdom forever.
        - He gives you and your children a bath at the door.
  2. And in connection with your baptism, you profess with your mouth that He is your Lord and your Saviour in whom you trust.
    - You come among His people, and you confess before them that you are looking to Him, not Barabbas, not to yourself, not to other men, but to Him to save you.
    - You renounce sin and you promise to follow Him as His disciple and you commit yourself to His people, submitting to those He has appointed to oversee His church in a local congregation, and promising to pursue the purity, peace, and prosperity of His people.
    - Those who were baptised as children make this profession when they come to years and maturity to do so, and those who are already of age make this profession when they are baptised.
      - Some of you emerging adults that were baptised a babies need to consider if the time has come for you to profess your faith and assume for yourself the responsibility to examine yourself and to confess the Lord.



3. But of course all of this is in vain if you do not believe in your heart that Jesus is Lord and truly look to Him for your salvation.
  - In other words, you must be sincere in your profession.
  - You must be one who realises that your greatest need is for the salvation that Jesus gives rather than the salvation that Barabbas gives,
    - And you must truly call upon the Lord to have mercy on you and to save you from your sins.
    - The outward form of baptism and a profession of faith cannot save you—it is faith alone that saves you.
      - Baptism and profession must be the outward expression of inward faith and repentance—of turning to Jesus for mercy and looking to Him to reconcile you to the Father forever.
      - It is a definitive choice.
  - You don't have to know the time and the date, but you must have the trust in Him alone and the commitment to Him as your Lord.
    - Sitting on the fence will not do—choose you this day—will be Barabbas or Jesus? Baal or the LORD? Salvation by man or by Jesus the true Son of God?

TRANS> So yes, the relationship is one that you enter into in a definitive way—you choose Christ openly and publicly and you embrace Him in your heart.

B. But with this definitive choice, there must also be an ongoing daily choice of Jesus instead of Barabbas.

1. Jesus calls those who are His to take up their cross daily.
  - a. Each day, you must choose Him instead the way of man and man's promises.
    - This is how you show truth of your profession, the reality of your faith.
    - You died to yourself and you live for Him who gives you life with the Father, renewing you more and more each day in righteousness and holiness after His image and in the knowledge of Him.
    - There is more love and more obedience as you go on.
      - Not that there are no bad days or bad seasons, but these must never become the norm.
      - If they do, it may be that there is in you a false heart, an evil heart of unbelief. There is no way to tell until you return to your Lord.
    - There are those little choices that add up and make such a difference... will I go with Jesus and read His word and pray to Him, or will I choose Barabbas and go with my flesh and check my social media instead?
      - Will I take that extra piece of cake, that extra helping when I have had enough? That drink when I have had enough? Will I indulge that sinful fantasy? Will it be Barabbas or Jesus that I choose?
      - Will I indulge in that pity party about how hard my life is or serve Christ and look to grow in my walk with Him in the trials that He has sent?

- Will I speak to that neighbour of Him, or will I choose Barabbas?
  - Will I let my anger loose or will I reign it in and speak words that honour my Lord?
- b. This daily choice is also to be encompassed by the weekly Sabbath where you come to commune with the one that you have chosen to serve.
- It is His day, when you come to remember afresh what He has done for you to save you and how He has graciously called you and kept you.
  - On that day, in particular, you receive His word through the public ministry of the word preached and you embrace Him afresh in the sacrament, renewing your commitment to Him as He refreshes your walk and makes Himself known to you.
  - He has appointed the weekly assembly and you dare not skip it unless you have very good reasons for doing so.
    - Some of you have settled for only one service, but God has appointed a morning and evening sacrifice for His people. Surely you know that it will be better for you. Don't turn the day into a half Sabbath—the whole day is to be kept holy to the Lord.
    - It is a choice between Barabbas and Jesus.
- c. And speaking of that, there are those temptations and turning points in life that set before your Barabbas and Jesus...
- Will I take a job that will compromise my relationship with God?
  - Will I enter into that relationship with someone who does not love God but who I find attractive—Barabbas or Christ? It can have a huge effect on your future walk with God.
  - Will I take up that affair or will I go with Christ?
  - Will I go into debt to satisfy my desire for that house or that car that I cannot afford, or will I restrain so I can honour Christ with my tithes and with my support of those who are in need? Christ or Barabbas?
- C. The crowd made a very sorry choice that day when they chose Barabbas.
1. For some of them, that was the choice that defined the rest of their lives.
    - They continued living on for this vain world that could never satisfy them and then they died in their sins and went to their condemnation forever, beholding the one at judgment that they had rejected for Barabbas.
    - Truly the fire will not be quenched and the worm of conscience will gnaw away at them forever.
  2. But there were surely others who, although they chose Barabbas on that wretched Friday, later chose Jesus, perhaps on Sunday when they heard the gospel proclaimed.
    - When they saw to their shame that they had rejected God's Christ who had come to save them from their sin in pursuit of earthly deliverance by Barabbas.

- They saw what wretches they were to reject Christ, delivering Him up to be crucified in exchange for a man who was sinful flesh.
  - In choosing Him, what delight it must have given them to think that just as Jesus took the place of Barabbas on the cross and died in his place, so He had taken their place, bearing the wrath and curse of God that they might be spared.
    - What love, what comfort, what assurance and joy was now theirs in Christ.
    - Not only because of what He had done for them while they were yet sinners, but that even now He would freely embrace them as soon as they turn to Him—even they who delivered Him up in place of Barabbas.
3. Like them, you may have made some sorry choices too—certainly you have along the way.
- But like them, if you come to Jesus, He will pardon you and He will receive you.
    - It doesn't matter what you have done.
    - The reason He went to the cross was to save sinners—not the righteous, but sinners who are not looking merely for relief from the hardness of the world, but for deliverance from their wretched sinful lives to walk with God.
      - His is a sure and a grand deliverance.

**Conclusion:** There is a crazy irony in all of this.

Pilate was the man with all the worldly power behind him, but completely lost control and had to give himself up to the will of the Sanhedrin.

- And the Sanhedrin. They were supposed to be those who shepherded God's people and who represent Him, yet they rejected the one that God had promised, yet in doing so helped Him to accomplish His saving work.
- And the mob who rejected Christ, they also rejected the only one who could save them, but in doing so they also helped Him accomplish His saving work.

The only one who got what He wanted in this whole scene was the prisoner who was crucified.

- By this, He bore the sin of His people and redeemed them, giving them eternal life and reconciliation with God forever.
- By this, He glorified the Father, showing His honour, justice, mercy, love, wisdom, power, goodness, and grace.

The outcome for the world is that whoever believes in Jesus crucified and raised again will not perish, but have everlasting life...

- Because just as He physically took the place of Barabbas, so before the Father He took the place of the guilty sinners He came to redeem and redeem them He has.
- Choose Him and you will not be disappointed.