

## “Choosing Barabbas”

### The Pursuit of Peace

#### **Luke 23:13–25**

**13** Pilate summoned the chief priests and the rulers and the people,

**14** and said to them, “You brought this man to me as one who incites the people to rebellion, and behold, having examined Him before you, I have found no guilt in this man regarding the charges which you make against Him.

**15** “No, nor has Herod, for he sent Him back to us; and behold, nothing deserving death has been done by Him.

**16** “Therefore I will punish Him and release Him.”

**17** Now he was obliged to release to them at the feast one prisoner.

**18** But they cried out all together, saying, “Away with this man, and release for us Barabbas!”

**19** (He was one who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection made in the city, and for murder.)

**20** Pilate, wanting to release Jesus, addressed them again,

**21** but they kept on calling out, saying, “Crucify, crucify Him!”

**22** And he said to them the third time, “Why, what evil has this man done? I have found in Him no guilt demanding death; therefore I will punish Him and release Him.”

**23** But they were insistent, with loud voices asking that He be crucified. And their voices began to prevail.

**24** And Pilate pronounced sentence that their demand be granted.

**25** And he released the man they were asking for who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, but he delivered Jesus to their will.

We wake each morning to a barrage of headlines that have this in common: *America languishes under the heavy cloud of anger and violence*. Cities are in chaos. Historic buildings and local businesses are vandalized, looted and burned. Homes are now being invaded by ‘protestors’ with a seemingly implacable hatred for – ‘who knows what’? Shots are fired at police and security forces – shots are returned. People are crying, suffering; dying.

We wake each morning to what is happening. And then our minds are filled with commentary. From the right, from the left – commentary that looks at what is happening and seeks to tell us what must happen now. More police. Less police. More protests. Enough protests. More violence. Stop the violence. More racism. No racism.

As Christians, we can watch and we can see, like anyone else, WHAT is happening. We can even, as citizens of the United States, shape an opinion about WHAT MUST HAPPEN NOW. However, as Christians, as aliens here – men and women whose citizenship is in heaven – children of God who long for a better city with strong foundations, whose builder and maker is God – as Christians we must never rush from WHAT is happening to an opinion of WHAT MUST HAPPEN NOW. We know better. We know something others do not. We know WHY it is all happening.

**James 4:1–2**

**1** What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?

**2** You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel.

**James 3:16**

**16** For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.

**Romans 1:28–31**

**28** And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper,

**29** being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips,

**30** slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents,

**31** without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful...

It is clear, isn't it? It is not hard to take our Bibles and learn from God's divine insight the WHY of what is going on. This is the rebellious, self-seeking, envious, jealous and depraved result of a nation of hearts that did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer. Don't look at WHAT is happening and then look around to see WHAT MUST HAPPEN NOW. The problem isn't out there – it is *in* there – it lies in the depths of the human heart. Only the believer, using the insight of God's revelation, can see into the depths of the human heart. Only the Christian can look beyond WHAT is happening and see WHY it is happening.

**Mark 7:18, 20-23**

**18** And He said to them, "Are you so lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him,

**20** ... "That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man.

**21** "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries,

**22** deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness.

**23** "All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man."

The anger, the violence, the abuse of power and the injustice don't come from what is going on around us – they come from what is going on in us. And once you see that – it becomes abundantly clear WHAT MUST HAPPEN NOW.

We don't need a better civic policy, new elected officials, universal sensitivity training, more active police, less active police, reparations or reciprocations. And, it has to be said, the very last thing we all need is to be treated fairly. No one who understands the depravity of the human heart and the righteousness of God wants to be treated fairly. That won't end well. All the pains of this life, all of the suffering of this life, will only be multiplied in the next as every sinner gets what they deserve: eternal judgment under the unmitigated wrath of an angry and righteous God.

**Hebrews 10:31**

**31** It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Christians must look at WHAT is happening – understand WHY it is happening – and then do WHAT MUST HAPPEN NOW ... ***we must call sinners to repentance.***

We must proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ.

We must look into the face of unrest and offer rest.

We must look into the heart of fear and offer hope.

We must look into the eyes of anguish and offer peace; real peace – lasting peace – a peace that is beyond understanding.

Don't be tempted to choose a side in this war – both sides lose. Both sides are fighting for the Enemy, whose sole mission is to steal and kill and destroy (John 10:10). Don't listen to Pilate; a deceived man offering you a thief. ***Don't choose Barabbas.***

It is very helpful in times like these to remember that there is nothing happening here that is new.

**Ecclesiastes 1:9**

**9** That which has been is that which will be, And that which has been done is that which will be done. So there is nothing new under the sun.

WHAT is happening isn't the result of recent history. It doesn't stem from the last election. It doesn't come from some unfinished work of the Civil Rights movement. It isn't because of slavery in the 1860's or the 1790's. It doesn't come from the shores of America or Africa. No – WHAT is happening now comes from a garden – its roots are found in the tragic choice of our first ancestors – it is the Fall; it is sin.

But even then – shouldn't someone pay for this tragedy? Shouldn't someone be held accountable for all this injustice, all this violence? Yes. Someone was held accountable. Someone already paid the price. Someone took the full brunt of all the insult, injustice, anger and murderous intentions of an angry mob. Someone already felt the blows of an authoritarian police force. Someone already fell victim to the religious hypocrites.

Someone already died so no one else would have to.

Jesus, the only innocent man to ever live, gave His life freely for the sins of all who would believe. His cruel crucifixion did little to satisfy the angry, sinful, and jealous hearts - - they would live to hate another day. But, His death completely satisfied the righteous demands of a holy God; and by that – sinners can be set free.

And to be set free by Jesus Christ ... that is to be free indeed.

Listen brothers and sisters: don't be caught up in the fray; stand above the crowd. Don't speak YOUR TRUTH into this dark and depraved cloud of unrest. Speak HIS TRUTH - - the truth of the gospel.

Jesus saves. Jesus forgives. Jesus delivers.

Jesus is coming again.

His kingdom will never end.