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Barabbas' Unintentional Portrayal of the Gospel; Matt 27:11-26

GPBC

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Introduction – The narrative before us explains how Jesus is sentenced to crucifixion under Roman authority. We already knew the Jewish leaders wanted Him dead but being occupied by Rome, they did not have the authority to carry out a sentence of death. So how will they maneuver the Roman authorities to carry out their devious plan?

In this narrative the Jewish leaders know exactly what's happening. Pilate knows what's happening. He knows he's been backed into a corner and for the sake of keeping the peace will have to give the leaders what they want, even though he, the top government official of the territory, doesn't agree. Barabbas, however, has no idea what's going on. Not only is he not in on the scheme of the narrative, but he is also unaware of how this narrative portrays the gospel. Scheming, treasonous, good-for-nothing Barabbas unintentionally leaves us a gospel picture.

Baptism, on the other hand, is quite intentional in displaying the gospel. We've observed baptism this morning. We'll observe more baptisms this evening. When someone is baptized they are proclaiming through the method of baptism that they are followers of Jesus. As they are lowered into the water, they are professing I have died to my old self of sin, and as they are raised up out of the water, they are professing that in Christ they have been given a brand new life!

Barabbas' role in this passage demonstrates what took place on the cross that allows us to find forgiveness and salvation and new life in Christ.

- I. Barabbas Was Guilty Yet He Was Set Free
  - a. Barabbas was actually in prison under the charge of inciting insurrection against Rome. That carried the charge of treason and was punishable by execution.
  - b. You see Barabbas was set to die by crucifixion that day. Three crosses had been prepared. Presumably the 2 robbers who were crucified with Jesus were probably somehow connected with Barabbas.
  - c. Then Jesus is brought forward with Barabbas. Imagine the scene. You have one notorious prisoner, who is actually guilty of treason, and

you have the innocent Son of God, who has been falsely accused of insurrection too.

- d. You see when Pilate asks Jesus, “Are you the King of the Jews?” he was trying to determine if Jesus was actually guilty. If you go around Roman territory claiming to be a king, then you are challenging the throne of Rome. There can only be one king, one emperor, of Rome.
- e. Jesus’ response, “You have said so,” means something like “Yes, I am but not in the sense you are thinking.”
- f. To stay in good graces with the people he rules over, Pilate would release one prisoner during the highlight of their year – the Passover. Knowing this to be the case, the leaders stir up the people to request the release of Barabbas and demand the crucifixion of Jesus.
- g. Pilate is distressed. He knows in his heart Jesus is innocent. He tries to reason with the crowd. He is warned by his wife. But the mob mentality takes control, and Pilate gives in against his better judgment.
- h. Jesus, the innocent, is condemned with the crime Barabbas had committed. And Barabbas, the guilty, is set free.

## II. We Are Barabbas

- a. This is really the main point I wanted to bring out from the text today. We are Barabbas. We are the guilty ones. We are the sinners. We are the ones who stand condemned before God. We are the ones awaiting the just sentence of God’s wrath upon our rebellion.
- b. Just as that cross had been prepared for Barabbas to bear, so our judgment has been prepared for us to bear. For the wages of sin is death, Rom 6:23.
- c. The only way we can be set free, rescued, saved, from our deserved sentence of eternal death is if someone worthy and willing takes our place. If someone who is able would come before the judge of all the earth and say I’ll take his place. I’ll bear his judgment. I’ll take her cross so that she can be set free.
  - i. Rom 3 says God put Christ forward as the wrath-bearer for our sin, so if we receive Christ by faith, we are redeemed. Our freedom from the guilt of our sin is purchased by Christ because He has paid for our sin upon the cross.

- d. You see Jesus, who wasn't guilty of insurrection, took Barabbas' guilt and his cross, who was guilty of insurrection, and Barabbas was released as a free man.
  - i. For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. We are Barabbas.
- e. But in order for that type of transaction to take place on the cross, there must be some mechanism in place that allows and explains that transaction. Just like Barabbas. In order for him to go free even though he was guilty, there had to be some mechanism in place that would allow and explain it. That mechanism was Pilate's custom.
- f. The mechanism in place to explain the transaction of the cross was Passover. Note, this took place during Passover. The Passover feast was an annual reminder of the Passover in Egypt, where God delivered His people from slavery.
  - i. The people of God were to sacrifice a lamb, put the blood on the door, and when God sent judgment upon Egypt, the angel of death passed over the homes covered with the lamb's blood.
  - ii. That was the mechanism God put in place that allowed and explained the transaction on the cross. A sacrificial substitute.
  - iii. Now here we are in our text. Jesus is the perfect, sinless, blameless Lamb of God. It is Passover. He is our sacrificial substitute. On the cross, He bears the punishment for our sin. So that, if by faith, we are in Christ, God's judgment does not fall upon us because it has fallen on the sacrificial substitute.
  - iv. If the blood of Christ is applied to our hearts, the sentence and execution pass over.
- g. We are Barabbas. Once you truly begin to grasp the wondrous exchange that took place on the cross, once it sinks down in our hearts, we can't help but praise Him, worship Him, love Him, and live for Him.
- h. We are Barabbas. We had condemned ourselves to eternal death, Christ took our place, and set us free!

### III. What About Pilate?

- a. Pilate tried political maneuvering because he knew Jesus was innocent. He put the choice before the crowd twice. He tried to reason with them. And finally he tried to rid himself of the guilt he bore in issuing the sentence. He washed his hands, symbolically saying this is not on me. But symbols do not change reality. It was on him. He is the one who released Barabbas. And he is the one who delivered Jesus to be crucified. Even though the crowd agreed to take all the blame, and wash his hands all he might, he remained guilty.
- b. That's the same for us when we reject Christ. We know who Jesus is. Others have spoken to us. We try to work it out on our terms. Eventually, we walk away and try to wash away our guilt by another means. But just like Pilate, we remain guilty when we reject Christ.

Conclusion – before He was crucified, Pilate had Jesus scourged. That is to be whipped. In Jewish custom, you could only receive 40 lashes so that judgment would be tempered with mercy. But for Rome, there was no such limit. They lashed upon the condemned until they gave up. Leather thongs were plated with bits of bone and metal. The victim was stripped, tied to a pole, and reduced to a bloody pulp. It was brutal, violent, and bloody. In other words, they just about killed Christ before they led Him to Calvary to kill Him. What does such a bloody scene of the Savior mean?

Isaiah 53:5-6.