

Barabbas: A Picture of Substitution

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 22 February 2015

Preacher: Jason Webb

[0:00] Who did Jesus save when he went to the cross? Who did he rescue that fateful Friday?! Well, in one sense, he saved only one man.

! Two men's lives hung in the balance, and there was only room on the cross for one. One would be released, and the other would have his life taken under the curse of God. All four Gospels mention Barabbas, but let's look at Luke chapter 23.

Luke chapter 23. And as we read it, you'll see that, in the most historical sense, Jesus died in Barabbas' place.

Luke chapter 23, we'll read the first 25 verses. Then the whole assembly rose and led him, that's Jesus, off to Pilate, and they began to accuse him, saying, We have found this man subverting our nation.

[1:26] He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Christ, a king. So Pilate asked Jesus, Are you the king of the Jews? Yes, it is as you say, Jesus replied.

Then Pilate announced to the chief priest in the crowd, I find no basis for a charge against this man. But they insisted. He stirs up the people all over Judea by his teaching.

He started in Galilee and has come all the way here. On hearing this, Pilate asked if the man was a Galilean. When he learned that Jesus was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time.

When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased because for a long time he had been wanting to see him. From what he had heard about him, he hoped to see him perform some miracle.

He plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer. The chief priest and the teachers of the law were standing there vehemently accusing him.

[2:32] Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him, dressing him in an elegant robe. They sent him back to Pilate. That day, Herod and Pilate became friends.

Before this, they had been enemies. Pilate called together the chief priests, the rulers, and the people and said to them, You brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him. Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us. As you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death.

Therefore, I will punish him and then release him. With one voice, they cried out, Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us! Barabbas had been thrown into prison for an insurrection in the city and for murder.

Wanting to release Jesus, Pilate appealed to them again, but they kept shouting, Crucify him! Crucify him! And for the third time, he spoke to them, Why? What crime has this man committed?

[3:44] I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore, I will have him punished and then release him. But with loud shouts, they insistently demanded that he be crucified, and their shouts prevailed.

So Pilate decided to grant their demand. He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, the one they asked for, and surrendered Jesus to their will.

So whose place did Jesus die in? Well, in the most historical sense, it was Barabbas' place.

So put yourself into Barabbas' shoes. There you are in chains, in prison, and the death penalty is hanging over your head.

And it very well could have been that this was going to be the day that you would be crucified, that you would be executed. Remember, they were crucifying people today.

[4:54] Jesus was not crucified alone, but with two others. So maybe, and very likely, today was Barabbas' day. And so there you are in prison. And then that's when you start to hear the

screaming.

A whole crowd yelling, Crucify him! Crucify him! Crucify him! And their screams suddenly get louder as the prison door opens up.

And the sounds from the outside rush in, and a group of Roman soldiers come marching in, and the cell door clanks open. And you cower in fear, thinking, Those yells are for me.

And these soldiers are coming for me. And without a word, the guard takes a key and unlocks your chains. And not sure what's going on, they escort you down the corridor, past other men and other cells, waiting their turn, out of the jail, to the door, to the sunshine, and to the wind, for the first time in a long time.

And then the officer in charge says, Go home. Don't cause any more trouble. You're free. And for the first time in weeks, you're seeing the sun, and you're feeling the breeze, and you say, What?

[6:20] What? What happened? What's going on? And the man says, Go home. They're killing Jesus in your place. Instead of you. Barabbas went home, and Jesus went to the cross.

But let's go back in time. Let's rewind the tape, and ask, How did we get here?

How did Barabbas get to this place? So before this fateful Friday, how did these things come about? Where did they start? How did Barabbas get into prison in the first place?

Was he unjustly locked away? Was it a case of mistaken identity? Was this a case of harsh, extreme Roman punishment?

They were known for this, and so were they just carried away? No, the Gospels make it clear. And all of the Gospels mention him.

[7:21] And all of the Gospels make it explicit. They describe his crimes. We know more about Barabbas than we do most of Jesus' disciples.

Isn't that interesting? Look at verse 19. Luke 23, verse 19. Barabbas had been thrown into prison for an insurrection in the city and for murder.

John says that he had taken part in a rebellion. No government rules apart from the will of God, Romans 13 says. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.

And that is exactly what has happened to Barabbas. He was angry. He was furious. He was upset that this was the situation.

The Romans, he hated the rule. He hated everything they stood for. He wanted them dead and gone. And so he fought against them. And in so fighting against them, he was fighting against God himself.

[8:31] Luke adds that Barabbas was a murderer. A murderer. Not just hatred in his heart, but he had watched the life go out of a man.

He had with his own two hands killed someone. He was a rebel. He was a thug. Matthew says that he was a notorious criminal. Notorious.

Infamous. He wasn't one of those criminals that, you know, they're in jail rotting away and no one knows anything about him. He wasn't one of the faceless masses that disappear into prisons for some petty crime.

He, everyone knew him. He was infamous. So that means famous in a bad way. The whole city knew about Barabbas.

And I want you to think about that. How much does it take for some, for crime and for someone to go into prison, how much does it take for that to even register in our consciences or to even notice it in the news?

[9:32] We all know about Jeffrey Dahmer, a notorious criminal. We all know about Charles Manson, a notorious criminal. We all know about Bernie Madoff, a notorious criminal.

Crime so terrible, so bad, so cruel, so extraordinary that they are now infamous. They register and we can say, we say, can you believe that?

Can you believe what that guy did? That was Barabbas, a rebel, a murderer, a notorious criminal. And that's what the gospel says.

And that's all there is to say. He was guilty. He was deserving. He had made his bed and now he was going to lie in it.

But Jesus died instead. Now what about Jesus? Was this the bed that he had made?

[10:36] Luke 23, 4. And again and again, in Luke's record, he's going to great lengths to show us that no one could put anything on Jesus, pin anything on him.

Luke 23, 4. Then Pilate announced to the chief priests in the crowd, I find no basis for a charge against this man. In our criminal court system, we have indictment and then a trial.

Just because someone is indicted doesn't mean they're guilty. It means that, well, there apparently is enough evidence that we can now charge him with something. We can bring him to trial. Well, in the Roman court system, it was very much like that.

And Pilate says, I don't even have a reason to charge this man. I don't even have enough to bring him into the court and to see if he's innocent or guilty. In other words, like, what do you want me to do?

We don't even have anything to begin with. There's no basis for even going with these proceedings. And then look at 23, 14, and 15. You brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion.

[11:48] Isn't that ironic? The whole argument was this. This man, Jesus, is causing rebellion. Crucify him. But then when Barabbas comes out, comes up, they take him instead.

Hypocrisy is evident. Pilate says, you brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him.

You've charged him and I can't find anything that I can agree with. I can't find anything to agree with what you're saying. Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us.

As you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death. And then verse 22, and for the third time he spoke to them, why? Why crucify him?

What crime has this man committed? I found in him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore, I will have him punished and then release him. So I'll punish him to get you off my back, but I want you to know there's no reason for me to kill him.

[13:00] There's simply no reason. What about Jesus? He was led like a lamb to the slaughter.

Let that image come in your mind. A lamb. If you have ever seen a lamb in real life, you will know that nothing is more weak and innocent and powerless.

He was led like a lamb to the slaughter. He was assigned a grave with the wicked and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in his mouth.

He was a lamb without blemish or defect. And you could search him and they did. Pilate searched him. Herod searched him. He was able to stand in front of his persecutors and say, which one of you accused me of a sin?

Now, could you bring your enemies in front of you and say, now you find some reason to accuse me? And they said, nothing. For Christ died for sins once for all.

[14:16] The righteous, underline that, the righteous for the unrighteous, the just for the unjust. Barabbas was guilty and he went home.

Jesus was innocent and he went to the cross. And so there you have that first substitution. Guilty, condemned, violent, wicked Barabbas for innocent, pure, spotless Jesus.

Now, what can we say about this? What can we say about Barabbas? And if you have your senses about you, the only thing that we can say is, I am Barabbas.

That's where I fit into this story. I am Barabbas. Barabbas rebelled against Rome. I rebelled against God. So who can look back at their past without shame, without a sense of guilt, knowing God said, do this and I said, no, I will not.

And it's not even so much the things that we did, it was that heart. That heart that dared to say, I will not do what you want me to do.

[15:44] When St. Augustine looked back on his life, he picked out one of the most heinous things he had done and you know what it was? It was stealing pears. Not because stealing pears is such a terrible thing, but it was the heart that that revealed.

There was no need for it. There was no reason for it. It was bad and he did it just because he wanted to. And he said, you want to see my sinfulness? There it is. So that heart, that heart that says, I'll do what I want.

What was your last week like? Were there any places where you knew what God said and you said, going to do it anyway. I won't have you rule over me.

I'll live how I want to live and you aren't my king. I'm my king and I'll have my way and my kingdom will come and my will be will be done.

So mom and dad says, take out the trash and I throw a hissy fit and I drag my feet and I complain and I argue. I don't know God says, obey your parents and I said, I don't want to.

[16:55] I don't want to. God says, don't think those thoughts and I said, I'll think whatever thoughts I want to think. God said, don't say those things and I said, I don't, I'll say whatever I want to say.

God's law, his holy, just, and righteous laws were a yoke that sat on my back and sat on your back and the problem was not the law.

The laws were good. The problem was my heart that chafed against them. It was the rebellious heart and so I am Barabbas.

You are Barabbas. We are Barabbas. The best one here. The best one here. Who can say I have not rebelled against God?

Who is the insurrectionist? Who is the rebel? It's us. I am. You are. And the Bible is clear and our consciences agree that we deserve death.

[18:01] See, it's not all that the crimes themselves are just so heinous. The picking the pears. The not taking out the trash. The saying the word. It's who those things were against and the heart that that displayed and the ugliness of that kind of heart that makes it so bad and so clear that we deserve judgment.

Barabbas was guilty. He had made his bed. He could have and he should have slept in it and I've made my own bed and I deserve to sleep in it. Hell isn't too bad for a person like me.

Hell is where I belong. So when I think of that rebellious, God-hating, irked at God, how dare you tell me what to do?

When I think of that heart, what can anyone here say? What hope do we have? It's just this. Jesus died for sinners.

Now this time, underline that word sinners. He died for sinners. sinners. So while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. While we were ungodly, he died for us.

[19:16] That's the gospel. Barabbas freed. Jesus condemned. Barabbas lives. Jesus dies in Barabbas' place. So I'm set free.

Life is now mine to live because of his selfless love. He sees me in my great distress and my guilt and my shame and the place where I am going and he goes in my place.

And I'll tell you what, the world hates that. Do you want to know if you're a part of the world? Then you don't have any time or any consideration for this. How the world, this irks them.

It bothers them. The world cannot understand it and they don't like it. One blogger put it like this. Christianity and justice seem to be strange bedfellows.

For example, if Hitler had repented, he would have gone to heaven in spite of his crimes. This is one of the problems with evangelical Christianity. It is at its core unjust.

[20:15] Anyone can do anything they like to other people as long as they accept Jesus and repent on their deathbed. Another writes about accepting Jesus, accepting the cross, accepting such a deal would make me a monster.

I don't think justice is served by allowing others to take responsibility for my crimes. Yet somehow, a fundamental precept of Christianity is the doctrine of the scapegoat.

So sorry, I reject the core belief, so I must reject the whole of Christianity, Jesus, get down off that tree, you're doing me no favors. The world hates substitutionary atonement.

The world hates him for me. Him in my place. Him taking the punishment for me. Him suffering for me. It doesn't seem just, it doesn't seem fair, it doesn't seem right.

But can I tell you this? This is the best news that sinners have ever heard. This is the best news that sinners have ever heard. The best thing Barabbas ever heard in his whole life was you go free, Jesus is going in for you.

[21:32] And do you think Barabbas cried unfair? Do you think he cried unfair, unjust, you're taking my dignity away? What do you think he did?

We don't know what he did, but I can't help but think that he probably cried out to God, thank you. Thank you that he saved me. Thank you that it was him and not me.

He didn't say, no, I'm going to suffer. I'm going to suffer for my own crimes. Thank you very much. I'm sure Barabbas had enough humility to say, I'll take it.

I'll take that deal. That is a bargain that I can sign my name to. That's my plan. See, that blogger that said, accepting such a deal would make me a monster, couldn't be more wrong.

Accepting that deal will make you a child of God. It will save your soul from death. And it will save your life from a suicidal pride that would say, no, I'll suffer on my own.

[22:41] Thank you very much. That's not fair and I want things fair. It will rescue you for now and eternity. Jesus and Barabbas lived out the gospel for us to see.

Don't miss it. Don't miss it. And believer, don't miss how good Jesus has been to you.

How good he has been to you. He saved your soul from a fate worse than crucifixion. So what else can we say except thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.