

The Day the Criminal was Set Free

Mark 15: 6-15

This had been a week of extreme emotion for all involved. Jesus, our precious Lord, was in His last hours prior to the crucifixion. These events have taken place very early on Friday morning. Just five days before Jesus had made His triumphant entry into Jerusalem, honored and exalted as the King. Monday found Him cleansing the Temple as He cast out the money changers. Tuesday and Wednesday were spent as final days of teaching at the Temple. Thursday had brought the final meeting in the Upper Room, where Jesus and the disciples observed the Passover and He washed their feet. From there, as night had fallen, they made their way to the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus prayed in agony. It was there that Judas brought the mob to arrest Jesus and He was led away to stand trial before the Sanhedrin in the very early morning hours of Friday. At around 5 am, Jesus was taken to stand before Pilate. After His first encounter with Pilate, He is sent to stand before Herod and once again sent back to Pilate. All of this has taken place in less than a week. Our minds cannot begin to imagine the circumstances surrounding the events that we have just read.

Typically, this passage is preached in light of the injustice that was brought against our Lord. Truly He was innocent of all charges and wrongfully accused. An innocent, holy, and sinless man stood condemned before His accusers. Today I would like to approach this passage from a different angle. I want to look at these verses from the perspective of Barabbas. We will, in no way, detract from the deity or holiness of our blessed Lord. In fact, we will magnify Him as we look at the circumstances that surround these moments in Barabbas' life. I want to look at the [unending truths](#) surrounding: [The Day the Criminal was Set Free](#).

I. The Reality of Barabbas – Usually as we move through verses in a passage I like to make application as to how they apply to us. We will make application later, but right now I just want to focus on the life of Barabbas.

A. He was Detained in Prison (7) – [And there was one named Barabbas, which lay bound with them that had made insurrection with him, who had committed murder in the insurrection.](#) Barabbas was found guilty of specific crimes and he lay bound in prison. He had been apprehended, found guilty, bound in prison and was awaiting punishment for his crimes.

- We are well aware that crucifixion was the preferred method of punishment in those days for those found guilty and deserving of death. The Scriptures do not specifically say, but I am convinced that the cross our Lord died upon had been reserved by Pilate for Barabbas.

- This man had been found guilty of crimes he had committed, and he was facing execution for his crimes. There was no way of escape. He was bound and held by the Roman authorities for his heinous acts. History tells us that Roman guards were responsible with their own lives for the safekeeping of prisoners. Escape was out of the question for Barabbas.

B. He was Deserving of His Punishment (7) – This verse reveals one of the crimes Barabbas had committed was [murder](#). This was a crime punishable by death and in most cases, execution was carried out.

- Also, we find Barabbas was involved in an [insurrection](#). This reveals his involvement in an “*uprising, dissension, or controversy*” presumably against the Roman government and its authority in Jerusalem. Barabbas was an insurgent against the ruling authority of his day. He had determined in his heart that he would not submit to those who held authority over him. Simply put, Barabbas was a rebel who resisted the rule of law.
- John’s gospel also reveals that Barabbas was a [robber](#). He was one who took from others for his own gain and prosperity. He was unconcerned about the welfare of those around him. He was only concerned with satisfying his own desires no matter the cost.

C. He was Desired by the People (9-11) – [But Pilate answered them, saying, Will ye that I release unto you the King of the Jews?](#) ^[10] [For he knew that the chief priests had delivered him for envy.](#) ^[11] [But the chief priests moved the people, that he should rather release Barabbas unto them.](#) We can imagine the desire of Pilate to pass judgment upon Barabbas. He was an enemy of the state. He had committed crimes that compromised the peace and authority Rome sought to defend. As Pilate gave the people a choice, they chose Barabbas over Jesus. The world identified with him and chose him over the Lord. Pilate consented to the demands of the people rather than doing what he knew was right.

- We need to note however, they apparently did not choose Barabbas out of love or concern for him. They chose Barabbas because they hated Jesus. He was simply used as a tool to get what they desired. They would rather have a murderer loose among them than to accept the Lord and His redemption.
- I do need to make an application here. The same is true in our day. The world will always embrace others or worldly ideals above the Lord. They will look to any avenue other than submitting to the Lord. But, we need to understand that their motives are usually not out of concern. The world has no desire for your prosperity or well-being. It only seeks to promote its

agenda whatever the cost or association. Never assume this world has your best interest at heart. It will use you as long as you are profitable and then it will drop you as if it had never known you.

II. The Release of Barabbas (15a) – [And so Pilate, willing to content the people, released Barabbas unto them.](#) After being pressed of the Jews, Pilate released Barabbas from his bonds. One who was guilty was set free. That is how all of humanity stood. All were bound by sin, guilty and apart from God, and yet in His mercy, He made a means of escape for all who will come to Him in repentance and salvation. I want to point out a few truths about the release of Barabbas. First, we can see that:

A. It was Undeserved – Remember, Barabbas had committed murder; he was involved in an uprising revolt against Roman authority; he was a thief and a robber, one who took from others to satisfy himself. He had been convicted of the crimes he had committed and was deserving of the punishment he had received.

- Is that not how each of us was? We had not committed murder, but an innocent Man died so that we might be forgiven. In our sin, we had rejected the Lord and the price that was paid for our redemption. Our lives were lived at enmity with God. We resisted His authority and refused to submit ourselves to His righteous demands. We determined to live our lives according to our desires rather than living according to the will of God. We were guilty of insurrection against the Kingdom of our Lord. We may not have committed robbery, but we lived a life that had one purpose – to please ourselves, no matter the cost or consequences of others. Clearly, we too were undeserving of any pardon. We were the guilty and deserved punishment for our guilt.

B. It was Unexpected – The text doesn't reveal anything about how Barabbas felt during all of this. We don't know if there was any remorse for his crimes. We don't know if any of his accusers were there that day. All we really know is that Pilate argued for the release of Jesus rather than Barabbas. (He ultimately cast judgment on the Lord and will stand accountable for that, but we don't find any concern or desire to release Barabbas.) One could rightly assume that Barabbas never expected to be released as Jesus took his place.

- That is certainly how it was for me. I had no intention of getting saved. I was not seeking the Lord, but praise His name He was seeking me. I didn't get up that morning expecting to receive the greatest gift ever given. I had no idea that the Lord of glory was about to arrest my soul and bring salvation to one who was undeserving.

C. It was Unconditional (15a) – *And so Pilate, willing to content the people, released Barabbas unto them.* That may seem rather insignificant in a way, but when we look closely it was a miracle. The word *released* means “*to set free; to dismiss; to forgive a debt; and to acquit one accused of a crime and set at liberty.*” This was a complete and unconditional release. All of the charges brought against Barabbas were dismissed and he was set free. He was no longer considered guilty; he was forgiven.

- My what evidence we find of redemption in Christ. This is salvation fleshed out before Jesus ever died upon the cross. The guilty was set free and cleared of all charges. That surely does something for my soul today. I too was like Barabbas. I was guilty as charged, deserving of eternal death. I had no hope within myself of being set free. And then, Jesus came to me and forgave my debt. All of the sin I was guilty of was forgiven and forgotten. My debt was marked “paid in full by the blood of the Lamb!” Jesus completely forgives!

III. The Reflection of Barabbas – In our text, the life of Barabbas bears a reflection that all need to comprehend. Consider:

A. The Picture – We may not like to admit it, but Barabbas pictures us all. Each and every one who ever lived stood in the same place as Barabbas. We may have never committed crimes such as his against society, but we committed those crimes against the Son of God. We were all guilty and condemned before God.

B. The Proceedings – As we look at this passage and consider the proceedings of this trial, there is a profound discovery. In all of the arguments and discussions, Barabbas was never once cleared of guilt. He was never found to be innocent of the charges brought against him. He was proven guilty and that never changed.

- The focus was not on the guilt of Barabbas; the focus was on the fact that Jesus was innocent. *V.14 – Then Pilate said unto them, Why, what evil hath he done? And they cried out the more exceedingly, Crucify him.* Jesus was the focal point of these proceedings.
- The same is true for all of us. As we stand before God, clearly, we are all guilty. That is proven and it is undeniable. The point is not whether we are guilty or deserving of condemnation. Jesus is the focal point of our salvation as well. He is the One who will make the difference.
- When we stand before God, there will be no use to hope the good deeds outweigh the bad. The basis of our deeds or our guilt will not be in question. We are guilty of sin and that is certain.

The only thing that will bear weight as men stand before the Mighty Judge is whether the blood of Christ has been applied. We must have His righteousness or we will remain condemned and accountable for sin.

C. The Pardon (15) – [And so Pilate, willing to content the people, released Barabbas unto them, and delivered Jesus, when he had scourged him, to be crucified.](#) Crimes had been committed; justice had to be served; someone had to stand accountable for the crimes. Barabbas, the guilty, was set free, while Christ, the innocent, was condemned and crucified. Jesus took Barabbas' place upon the cross. He died so that one who was guilty might be set free. Even as the events of the crucifixion played out on earth, Jesus became the substitute for one who deserved death. Barabbas was allowed to live because Jesus was willing to die!

Conclusion: We were not there on that sovereign day. We were not on trial and our crimes were not being discussed. Even though we were not mentioned before Pilate, we too stood condemned and worthy of death. The evidence is clear and we were all guilty.

Jesus paid the price that we might be set free. He took our sin and our shame so that we might be reconciled to God and receive salvation. We are offered life because Jesus chose death. Do you know Him in the free pardon of sin? If not, come to Him today.