

## The Wednesday Word, March 28, 2018: Barabbas and the Gospel

*And so Pilate, ... released Barabbas unto them, and delivered Jesus, ... to be crucified (Mark 15:6-15).*

Pilate freed Barabbas, the felon, and sent Jesus to the cross. Pilate, as you remember, had no love for Barabbas, but he wanted to save Jesus. So, he hit on the idea of offering the people a choice between the two men. It was customary to free a prisoner at the time of the Feast of Passover; so, Pilate asked the crowd, "Which of the two do you want me to release?" (Matthew 27:21-22).

He was astonished when the people enthusiastically called out, "Barabbas!"

Who was Barabbas?

To the Romans, Barabbas was a terrorist who had committed murder during a rebellion (Mark 15:7). John adds that Barabbas was also a robber (John 18:40).

The name Barabbas is interesting. It means "son of the father." Some suggest that it means son of a Rabbi. If so, Barabbas was a preacher's kid! ... and so was John Wesley Hardin, one of the most notorious killers of the Wild West.

Barabbas had been condemned to die. He was a rebel against the law, a robber and a murderer. He was now was under arrest under the condemnation of the law and on death row.

(By the way, everyone reading this who has not come to Christ as a hell-deserving sinner looking for mercy is sitting on death row. You are not on probation but under damnation.)

Suddenly, people were calling his name, "Barabbas! Barabbas!" The next thing he heard was a crowd yelling, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" Perhaps, Barabbas thinks it's a lynch mob. He's terrified. Then, he hears the prison door slowly opening and a bewildered guard probably said something like, "Barabbas! There's a man named Jesus who is going to die in your place. He is going to be nailed to your cross. You are free to go."

As Barabbas emerged from the jail, the crowd was surging toward Calvary. And legend has it that Barabbas followed them. Think of it: he hears the hammer and knows that the blows that are fastening Jesus to the cross were meant for him. He knows that, quite literally, he, Barabbas, is the one who should be executed.

Hopefully Barabbas, as he looked at Jesus on the cross, received a clear understanding of the Gospel. If he did, he must have thought,

"That man took my place.  
I am the one who should have died.  
I am the condemned murderer.  
That man did nothing wrong.  
He is dying instead of me."

If Barabbas actually saw Christ upon his cross, he certainly learned something about Gospel substitution. Barabbas must have known that he was a guilty, worthless wretch, under the condemnation of the law.

Barabbas might have seen the meaning of the cross since Jesus was actually dying in his place, even though he had done nothing whatever to deserve Christ dying in his place. He knew that Christ's death for Him was an act of pure, undeserved grace.

Because of the cross, Barabbas was free from the penalty of the Law. Suppose a soldier had recognized Barabbas and tried to arrest him. He legally could not have done it! Barabbas was a free man. A substitute had died in his place.

All Barabbas would have needed to say was "Jesus has died for me." Likewise, when the Law points its condemning finger and says we're guilty we point toward Jesus and say, "He died for me and I am free!"

Remember this, if sin speaks louder in our conscience than Christ, it is because we have taken our eyes off the Gospel.

To be frank, I've never liked Barabbas. I wanted the crowd to yell,

"Release Jesus!"

"Crucify Barabbas!"

But instead, they roared for the opposite.

Barabbas, a villain, was set free and Jesus took his place. I hate that.

But, when I look inside myself I realize I am Barabbas. I'm in the same shoes. And you are Barabbas, too. We're the guilty ones. We are the scoundrels, but we go free because Jesus died in our place.

And that's the Gospel Truth!