

#1 Matt. 27:15-26 “His Life For Mine”

I remember sitting with a person who attended church all their adult life, in the last few months before they died, and in the course of the conversation they asked me; “Why did Jesus have to die on the cross?” That is actually a very thoughtful question; and I was momentarily silent, **for once**. I did my best to explain the logical truth from Scripture, but quickly realized that the real answer to this question has to be personally experienced.

There has to come a moment in time when you realize in your head and heart that “Jesus had to die on that cross **because of me!**” And there isn’t a better example in the entire world for helping us each understand that truth for ourselves than Barabbas.

#2 ¹⁵ Now at *the* feast the governor was accustomed to release for the people *any* one prisoner whom they wanted. ¹⁶ **At that time they were holding a notorious prisoner, called Barabbas.**

“**a notorious prisoner, called Barabbas**” The Greek word translated **#3** “notorious” (*episemos*) really means eminent or outstanding. He was a famous prisoner but not necessarily one that the Jews regarded as an undesirable character. He was more of a messianic figure, a hero rather than as a villain, in the minds of most Jews, than Jesus was. Tom Constable

#4 Mark 15:7 (NKJV) And there was one named Barabbas, **who was chained with his fellow rebels; they had committed murder in the rebellion.**

#5 Luke 23:18 (NLT) Then a mighty roar rose from the crowd, and with one voice they shouted, “Kill him, and release Barabbas to us!” ¹⁹ **(Barabbas was**

in prison for taking part in an insurrection in Jerusalem against the government, and for murder.)

#6 Barabbas was a revolutionary ("bandit"), "the word the Jewish historian Josephus always employed when talking about revolutionaries" Robert Eisenman ("Son of the Father" – this may have been a title rather than his actual name)

Barabbas was guilty of treason, murder and felony and was destined for the center cross that day, as a lesson to the people that revolution against Rome would not be tolerated. He was the living picture of the prodigal son, in the pig pen.

What do we know about Barabbas? He was a murderer and a rebel against the Roman and Jewish authority. I believe it is fair to say that he was an angry man – angry at Roman rule, angry at the injustice – angry enough to lead an insurrection and kill Roman soldiers and possibly others.

Paul tells us in Eph. 4:31 that anger is one stop on the road to murder. We can also know he was fearful at this moment – chained in a dungeon waiting for the day – possibly he knew it was *this* day – that he would be crucified at center stage. At this point, his fear of a painful death on a Roman cross was undoubtedly superseding his anger and his discouragement for failure.

He was a lost man; for John tells us that: **#7 1 John 3:15 (NKJV)** "...you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him." There is no mention of any relationship with God, and no reason given to suspect he had one! He was awaiting the judgment of man to be carried out and at the same time looking into eternity facing the coming judgment of God! The writer to the Hebrews

reminds us of a truth we all should face: **#7a** Hebrews 9:27 “it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment”

#8 ²¹ **But the governor said to them, “Which of the two do you want me to release for you?” And they said, “Barabbas.”** ²² Pilate said to them, “Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?” They all said, “Crucify Him!” ²³ And he said, “Why, what evil has He done?” But they kept shouting all the more, saying, “Crucify Him!” ²⁴ When Pilate saw that he was accomplishing nothing, but rather that a riot was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd, saying, “I am innocent of this Man’s blood; see *to that* yourselves.” ²⁵ And all the people said, “His blood shall be on us and on our children!” ²⁶ **Then he released Barabbas for them; but after having Jesus scourged, he handed Him over to be crucified**

“Which of the two do you want me to release for you?”
 “Jesus Who is called the Christ” – Pilate’s designation of Jesus substantiates what some of the earliest manuscripts of the NT tell us, that Barabbas first name was Joshua (Jesus). These texts refer to him as “Yshua” or Joshua (Gr. Jesus) Barabbas – the early church fathers recognized this as being true. Joshua was a common name, one that many mothers would use in hopes their son would be the Messiah. Jesus Barabbas had led a messianic revolt against Rome!

#9 Pilate’s question then becomes, *Do you want “Jesus Barabbas” or “Jesus who is called the Christ?”* Craig Bloomberg

Jesus really took the place of one of the rebels, Barabbas, partially because the people preferred one who tried to overthrow Rome’s power to the Messiah that God had provided for them. (*They were looking at a*

strong insurrectionist in Barabbas versus a helpless, beat up Messiah of love and truth standing before them!) This shows their insistence on having a Messiah of their own design – like Israel did during Samuel’s day. Tom Constable **#10** **1 Samuel 8:1–22 (NLT)** ⁵ “Look,” they told him, “you are now old, and your sons are not like you. **Give us a king to judge us like all the other nations have.**” ⁶ Samuel was displeased with their request and went to the LORD for guidance. ⁷ **“Do everything they say to you,” the LORD replied, “for it is me they are rejecting, not you. They don’t want me to be their king any longer.** [This is a picture of all those without God in this world – we don’t want God to rule over us!]

Put yourself in Barabbas’ place that day. Chained in the dungeon of the Antonio fortress waiting crucifixion: **#11** In his book *The Darkness and the Dawn*, Charles Swindoll paints a word picture of Barabbas’ situation:

On the day of the crucifixion you can just picture this man in a cell waiting to be crucified for his crimes. There is no hope of escape, he is chained and the Roman soldiers are guarding him closely. He hears a crowd of people in the distance yelling his name "Barabbas, Barabbas." What he doesn't hear is Pilate asking the crowd "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" But he does hear the roar of the crowd say "Barabbas."

Now Pilate asks the crowd "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called the Christ?" Barabbas cannot hear the one voice of Pilate, but he does hear the crowd's answer "Let Him be crucified". All he can hear is the crowd yelling "Barabbas...let him be crucified." I don't know how brave a man Barabbas was, but I'm sure the thought of the slow painful death by crucifixion, and all this taking place before the end of the day, would bring uncontrollable fear to anyone.

So here he is sitting and waiting. And then he hears the heavy footsteps of the soldiers on the stone pavement coming to get him. The cell door opens, one of the soldiers growl: "Get out of here

Barabbas." He is now close to faint. But then he hears "You're free to go."

#12 Pastor Swindol adds: "How keenly his life models the doctrine of substitutionary atonement." If there's any man in history, who knows he had a substitute on that center cross, a man who died in his place for his sins – it's Barabbas. Barabbas missed his cross because another Man literally took his place.

Barabbas is a picture of all men and women separated from God by their sin. **#13** But let's not forget, Jesus was our substitute too. He bore our sins and died the death that we deserve, just as He died the death Barabbas deserved. He hung on the cross intended for Barabbas, just as He hung on the cross in our place.

All of us were condemned murderers, awaiting our center cross, deserving of death, chained in our sin. Paul described our condition in his letter to the believers in Ephesus: **#14** **Ephesians 2:1–3 (NKJV)** And you (*He made alive*), **who were dead in trespasses and sins...and were by nature children of wrath (of the devil, of disobedience), just as the others.** He further described our condition in Chapter **#15** **4:17** "...in the futility of their mind, ¹⁸ having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; ¹⁹ who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.

The minds of those still in darkness rebel against this description of their lives and refuse to admit their sin. Like modern Pharisees they say: "Wait I've never killed anyone; I'm not a murderer like Barabbas. I am a good person, not like Barabbas who deserves the slow painful death. This attitude comes from the pride of life – we call it self-righteousness! Paul had a word for people with this attitude: **#16** **Romans 2:1 (NLT)**

When you say they are wicked and should be punished, you are condemning yourself, for you who judge others do these very same things. (Matt 5 – murderers and adulterers)

God has told us what He thinks of us: **#17 Romans 3:9–12 (NLT)** Well then, should we conclude that we Jews are better than others? No, not at all, for we have already shown that all people, whether Jews or Gentiles, are under the power of sin. ¹⁰ As the Scriptures say, “No one is righteous— not even one. ¹¹ No one is truly wise; no one is seeking God. ¹² All have turned away; all have become useless. No one does good, not a single one.”

There is another attitude that also comes from the pride of life. This one says – yes I am like Barabbas – in fact I am worse than he was and I am beyond help. “Leave me chained here; I don’t believe You can free me, because I am so bad that I am beyond Your love and mercy.” That too is pride: pride that you are not like the common sinner – you have the distinction of being the one person on the whole planet that Jesus’ shed blood is inadequate to save. The truth is that no helpless sinner is so bad as to be beyond God’s love.

We are all in the same condition as Barabbas, and we are all within the reach of the Savior’s love. **#18 Romans 3:21–25 (NLT)** But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law, as was promised in the writings of Moses and the prophets long ago. ²² We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are. **#19** ²³ For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard. ²⁴ Yet God, with undeserved kindness, declares that we are righteous. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. ²⁵ For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. **#20** People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood.”

The Bible and history are silent about what happen to Barabbas after he was released. He may have realized who died for him, thanked God, asked for forgiveness and used his freedom to serve the Lord in the early days of the church.

On the other hand he may have failed to thank God for His release, chosen to ignore Jesus, and used his freedom to return to his old ways, stealing and murdering again or fighting in one of the future insurrections against Rome.

Either way, his life highlights the choice that all of us have when we find out what Jesus has done for us. We can choose to believe that He gave His life for ours, lay our lives at the Master's feet and follow Him all our days. We can give our life to Him because He gave His life for us!

Or we can choose to ignore or reject what God has done for us and go on living for ourselves – going back to the pigpen of our own making.

Hopefully, someone here is asking; “How do I give my life to Him and receive His love?” It is by believing God loves you and has come to save you from the cross you deserve. It is by thanking Him for what He did for you and giving Him the rest of your earthly life to do with as He pleases.

Once you believe and surrender then you will easily make public statements of your faith and relationship to God through Jesus: **#21 Romans 10:8–10 (NLT)** And that message is the very message about faith that we preach: ⁹ If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ **For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by confessing with your mouth that you are saved.**

How about it, Barabbas? Do you understand now why Jesus died for you, on *your* cross? Will you accept the gift of God's

willingness to take your place on the center cross? Will you experience for yourself freedom from the chains and dungeon of sin. Will you bow before your Savior and give Him the life He has paid for with His own blood?