

## **SERIES: “A Journey into Forgiveness”**

But...This Isn't Fair – Luke 23:18-31

Today we look at what many call the “injustice” of Barabbas being released in place of the innocent Jesus of Nazareth. So, just WHO was this Barabbas guy? He is mentioned in ALL FOUR Gospel accounts of Jesus' trial! From Holman's Dictionary we get this description: BARABBAS was a murderer and insurrectionist held in custody at the time of the trial of Jesus. All four Gospels record that when Pilate offered to release Jesus, the assembled crowd demanded the release of Barabbas instead. Pilate gave in to the demand, ordered Jesus crucified, and set Barabbas free. Nothing is known of Barabbas' subsequent history.

From a commentary by Dr. George Beasley-Murray of Spurgeon's College in London, we read: “a description of the name reveals this, ‘one who takes booty’ and was used for violent men, whether robbers or pirates or rampaging soldiers on the loot. Josephus consistently uses it of the Zealots (of which Judas was a member). From the Roman point of view the Zealots were guerrillas who had to be exterminated; from the popular Jewish point of view such men were HEROIC FREEDOM FIGHTERS! Barabbas would have been a leader among those who sought to make way for the kingdom of God through violence. The very name of the man is intriguing. “Barabbas” is a patronymic, meaning “son of the father” though some early exegetes interpreted it as “son of the rabbi.” In Matthew we read the variant reading of his name “Jesus Barabbas” and studies show that to be original. Either way, we get this conclusion: the Jews, at the instigation of the high priests, who normally repudiated the Zealots and all like them, asked for the release of “Jesus Barabbas”--the epitome of messianic Jewish nationalism, and called for the death of “Jesus of Nazareth” - whose fulfillment of the messianic promises was through the redemptive path of the Servant of the Lord and the Son of Man. It was the greatest tragedy of the ancient people of God for all time.”

So, how did this trade or what some would call a “travesty of justice” take place? To understand one must look at the custom of “Paschal Clemency.” In Mark 15:6 we read, “it was custom at the Feast to release a prisoner whom the people requested.” “Paschal Clemency” was the name of this custom and it was as “Roman” as it was “Jewish” and it may have been a custom but IT WASN'T A COMMONLY USED CUSTOM! Some little known facts you should know about this are:

A. Scholars have been perplexed at being unable to trace reference to this custom in secular or Jewish literature. There is just one rather ambiguous passage in the Jewish Talmud. So, it was a custom, but not a commonly used custom.

B. Situations were tricky in Roman government. They had to apply laws differently when a Palestinian and Jew were involved; or a Jew and a Roman; or a Jew and - well you get the picture. Laws were stretched, appealed, amended (often on the spot), and sometimes administered at the whim or fancy of the procurator (in this case Pilate) or governors (Herod was governor in Jesus' time). Romans used this “Paschal Clemency” law in administration as a gesture of goodwill to characterize a festal season. In this case, the Passover for the Jews — to give a “token assurance to the people that they would not be harassed during the feast.”

C. What must be considered in the whole situation of releasing Jesus or Barabbas: even the Jewish leaders hated Barabbas because his murder and insurrection upset their already “uneasy balance” with the Roman government, yet they sided with him because of their blinding hatred of Jesus and what His teachings had called them to do: repent, change what they're doing, and quit using their own agendas against God's people. Funny how “fairness” takes on different views depending on where one is in a difficult situation!

Another thing we can't miss here: We get so caught up in the injustice of the people choosing Barabbas over Jesus that we miss one more horrible injustice done to our loving Savior, that of the "flogging." Just what was it? Here is a description from historian J. Blinzler: "the delinquent was stripped, bound to a post or a pillar, or sometimes simply thrown on the ground, and beaten by a number of torturers until the latter grew tired and the flesh of the delinquent hung in bleeding shreds. In the provinces this was the task of soldiers."

Three different kinds of implements were customary: 1) rods were used on freemen; 2) military punishments were inflicted with sticks; 3) for slaves scourges or whips were used, the leather thongs often fitted with a spike or with several pieces of bone or lead joined to form a chain. The scourging of Jesus was carried out with the latter." A note of importance: it is generally believed that the suffering of this severe scourging was the reason why Jesus was unable to carry His cross all the way to Golgotha and why He died so soon after being crucified. No matter how you look at it, it all played into God's hands and fulfilled the Scriptures as we read in Isaiah 53, "he was smitten by God, and afflicted." This may have been unfair, but it was part of God's plan to save guilty sinners like you and me, by sacrificing His innocent Son and shedding His blood for our deliverance.

Now, let's look at Barabbas and Us ... Unfortunately we have some things in common!

1. It's ironic, isn't it that Barabbas was guilty of every crime he committed and was released, and Jesus committed no crime and yet was declared guilty. But, the same is true for us. God forgives our every sin and declares us "not-guilty" when we come to Him in Jesus' name. Jesus, the innocent one, took our sins upon himself.

2. Like Barabbas, we are criminals and deserve to die; like Barabbas, we have been set free through Jesus Christ.

3. Like Barabbas, we, too, will be thrown into the "prison of our sins" many times in our lives as situations arise out of the injustice brought about either by our own hand or at the hands of others. But unlike Barabbas at the time, we "know the end of the story" and can rely on the death and resurrection of Jesus as the triumph over all evil and thus live with hope and courage even in the face of all the injustice that comes our way.

There is a story about an Atheist farmer who had often ridiculed people who believed in God. He wrote the following letter to the editor of a local newspaper: "I plowed on Sunday, planted on Sunday, cultivated on Sunday, and hauled in my crops on Sunday; but I never went to church on Sunday. Yet I harvested more bushels per acre than anyone else, even those who are God fearing and never miss a service." The editor printed the man's letter and then added this remark: "God doesn't always settle His accounts in October."

That editor was right! Sometimes even dedicated Christians are tempted to complain because of what they see in the world around them. Perplexed by the success and prosperity of the wicked, oftentimes at the expense of the righteous, they ask, why doesn't the Lord do something about it? Why doesn't He reward those who fear Him, and judge those who disregard Him? It just isn't fair!! Be patient. He will! True, He doesn't always "settle His accounts in October," but He does settle His accounts! So if you're trying to do the will of God and you become discouraged because unjust people are getting ahead, don't be shortsighted. Listen to what the King David advised in Psalm 37: "Fret not yourself because of evildoers; be not envious of wrongdoers. For they will soon fade like the grass, and wither like the green herb." He went on to say, "For the evildoers shall be cut off, but those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land." (Ps. 37:1,2,9)

Listen to what James Dobson once said: "There is no greater opportunity to influence our fellowman for Christ than to respond with love when we have been unmistakably wronged. Then the difference between Christian love and the values of the world are brilliantly evident. Your response to a vicious assault can instantly reveal the Christian values by which you live."

Because of Christ we have a strength that the world cannot give us to stand up against such miscarriage of justice. We don't have to cry out, "I'll take Barabbas" or "This isn't fair" but instead, we can stand firmly in our faith and forgive those who send injustices our way and defend those wrongly accused. God has our "backs" and we need only to trust Him and HIS fairness and justice, which in the end, is always better and always wins out.

Thank you Jesus! Amen.