



Barabbas

Joe Crews

The time is 31 A.D. The place is Pilate's judgment hall. You are there! It is early in the morning, but already things are astir in Pilate's judgment hall, for very early this morning soldiers came bringing a prisoner; One who was taken captive last night out in Gethsemane; One who has already been tried by the Sanhedrin and found guilty. In fact, the Sanhedrin has sentenced him to death. Inasmuch as the Jewish Sanhedrin does not have power to actually put a man to death, they must gain permission of Pilate. Rudely awakened, he wonders why this can't wait. He comes out, and we can see that he is quite upset with having been called so early in the morning. He says, "What is the matter? What is going on here?" And the priests bow and scrape and smile saying, "Sir, all we want you to do is to approve our findings. We have found this man guilty and deserving of death. All we ask is that you approve of what we have found. Then we will not bother you any more."

Impatiently, Pilate looks into the face of the prisoner. He feels a strange tug at his heart strings somehow, but turns it aside. He says, "Am I a Jew? Why should I be interested in you?" And he again turns aside the invitation to accept truth and Jesus. Yet the very bearing of Christ gives Pilate the impression that He is innocent and that it will be impossible to condemn an innocent man. We see Pilate leave the prisoner and go back before the people. By this time many more have gathered, and hundreds are now milling around, curiously watching and wondering what is going to happen next.

They surge momentarily as Pilate steps out, but then become quiet as Pilate raises his hand and begins to speak. "You brought this man to me as one who is guilty and deserving of death, but I find no fault in him at all. I find him innocent, but will have him beaten and then released". What kind of justice is this? He finds no guilt in him and yet he will have him scourged? He found him completely innocent and yet to please the people, Pilate was willing to have Jesus beaten. "I will therefore release Him."

At the very mention of the word 'release' the religious leaders, as though devil possessed, begin to shout, "No! No! Not this man." They were thinking, we have worked for a long time to get Jesus right where he is now and we are not going to lose out. The mob cries out, "Crucify Him, Crucify Him! He is guilty. He deserves death!" Pilate asks, "Why, what has he done?" Then they give their accusations:

Barabbas

"This man has stirred up the people. He claims to be a King. He wants to overthrow the government. This man has stirred up the people every place he has been from Galilee to Judea."

At the mention of the word, 'Galilee,' Pilate senses a way to escape making a decision. "If he is from Galilee, he comes under Herod's jurisdiction, not mine," he says. Oh, how many today are like Pilate. They say, if only I can put off making any decision. If only I wouldn't have to make a definite decision concerning truth and the teachings of Jesus. Pilate commanded the centurion to take Jesus to Herod, but alas, it wasn't that easy.

Poor Pilate! He thought he was going to get out of making a decision, but he couldn't, and neither can you or I. When the Lord Jesus brings to our attention the truths of His Word, it is impossible to sidestep a decision. We must make one. It was but a short time till Pilate found Jesus standing before him once again.

Herod made no decision, except not to accept Jesus at all. His mind was completely closed and not even curious or interested in truth. Herod turned his back completely on Christ. Now, Pilate however, is truly curious. He asks, "What have you done? Why are they so against you?" Christ is silent to this questioning, and Pilate demands, "Why don't you answer me?" We listen as Pilate boasts of his power saying, "Don't you know that I have the power to either free you or crucify you?" Poor Pilate! He really had no power at all, and no backbone either.

Jesus looks at him in pity and says, "You could have no power at all against me except it were given you from above." These very things were happening that the Word of God might be fulfilled.

Again Pilate asks a question, "Are you a King then?" This time Jesus responds, "You say that I am a King. To this end was I born and for this cause came I into the world, that I might bear witness unto the truth". This question of 'truth' had been discussed at great length throughout Jerusalem, and there were many different ideas of what truth was. Almost with scorn Pilate remarks, "Truth-what is truth?" Without waiting for an answer, he immediately turns and goes out before the people, wondering how to deal with this situation.

Suddenly, an idea flashes into Pilate's mind. Since it is the time of the Passover, he will set a prisoner free. And downstairs in the dungeon right now is one of the most notorious prisoners ever to be captured in Palestine-Barabbas. He had traveled from place to place, raising up insurrections against the government. He plundered and stole from the rich, and like Robin Hood, gave to the poor. Wherever he found a Roman outpost he left the sentries dead. The Roman soldiers finally had captured him, brought him before Pilate, where he was tried, found guilty and condemned to death. In fact, his crucifixion would be today, his cross has been made and is ready. In just a few hours it is to be carried to the top of Calvary.

So Pilate thinks, since I am to release a prisoner, I will give the people a choice between Jesus and Barabbas. I won't need to make the decision after all, and surely they will choose to set Jesus free.

Now we move quickly downstairs to that dungeon and stop in the hallway just outside Barabbas' cell. Moving closer to that great iron door, we can peek through the one little window that lets a bit of light shine through. We can't see much, but as we listen, we hear the heavy breathing of a man who is nervously crouching way back in the shadowy corner. We wonder what the people will decide. Who will they choose?

Footsteps echo down the cobblestone corridor as soldiers march up to the door and halt. A centurion steps forward and puts the huge key into the lock, swings the door open, and steps inside. "Barabbas," he calls, "Barabbas, you must come with me. Pilate wants to see you upstairs in the judgment hall." There is no answer, only the sound of shuffling feet as Barabbas tries vainly to shrink back farther into

Barabbas

the shadows. This is the moment he has been most dreading. He knew the centurion would soon come and take him out to be crucified. "Did you hear me?" the centurion repeats, "Pilate wants you to come upstairs to the judgment hall again."

Barabbas is confused. He wonders, Why would Pilate want me upstairs again? I've been condemned to be crucified. Why would he want to see me again? As he slowly, skeptically steps forward the centurion is explaining, "It is the Passover, Barabbas, and at this time Pilate always releases a prisoner. Early this morning another prisoner was brought in, and Pilate is going to give the people their choice between you two."

Suddenly, hope springs anew in Barabbas' heart. There may be a possibility that I may be set free! At least I'll have a fifty-fifty chance, he thinks. So he moves forward and takes his place between two of the soldiers, and the centurion shouts, "Forward march!"

We hurry upstairs again, for we want to be there when Barabbas steps in and catches his first glimpse of Jesus, that other prisoner. Here he comes through the door, his face hopeful, but only for a moment. At his first look at Jesus, all hope vanishes. Probably this is the first time he has ever looked upon the face of the sinless, divine Son of God. The expression on Jesus' face is one of royalty, and of love, kindness and mercy as He stands there resigned to all that is transpiring about Him.

What a study in contrasts is before us! On one side is Jesus, and on the other side is Barabbas. What a difference! In the face of Jesus we see peace, as compared to the hardened lines of sin in the face of Barabbas. Barabbas' eyes are filled with hatred. The set of his jaw is that of one whose life has been full of crime, hatred, and revenge. As they stand there we look at the two and somehow are led to say, surely anyone, anyone, given the choice between these two would choose Jesus. It seem as though it would be that way.

Pilate speaks out once again, "Whom will ye that I release unto you?" There is but a moment's lull before the answer comes, swelling the cry from voice to voice throughout the multitude. "Barabbas, Barabbas! Give us Barabbas!"

Pilate is stunned. Barabbas is shocked! I, I'm to be set free? Can it be the people chose me? Now Pilate asks, "What then shall I do with Jesus, which is called the Christ?" The crowd demands, "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

My friends, what does all this have to do with you and me? We are there. You are there. Even in these modern days, you and I are standing in Pilate's judgment hall, and we too must make the decision, "whether of the twain shall I release unto you?"

Barabbas stands for all that is false, all that is a counterfeit of truth. As the two stand there in Pilate's judgment hall, the decision is between truth and error. Between the genuine truth of God's Word and the counterfeit teachings of man. That is the decision they made, and friends, that is the decision you and I face in these last days. Today we must decide.