

I Am Barabbas

Matthew 27:1-2, 11-14

Lent 5—April 1, 2020

Introduction

There is a method of Bible study I like to employ from time to time. It's a form of *role playing*. You pick a character in the story and see the events unfold from his or her **perspective**. It's easiest if you pick someone you can **identify** with. However, if you pick someone you don't identify with, the exercise helps you understand that person better. Who do you identify with in this story today?

The Choices

There are several choices here. There's Jesus, Pilate, the crowd, the Jewish leaders, Pilate's wife and Barabbas. I want us to look at the story through the eyes of **Barabbas**. We might understand him better. Maybe by the time we're done, we'll even identify with him.

Comparing Jesus and Barabbas

Let's begin by comparing **Jesus** and **Barabbas**.

1. Jesus is the **SON OF GOD THE FATHER**. The name "Barabbas" means *Son of the father*. According to **Origen** and other scholars, his full name may have been *Jesus Barabbas*, since Jesus was a common first name at that time. If so, the crowd had the choice of two men named **Jesus**.
2. Barabbas was a convicted felon. **Mark 15** and **Luke 23** tell us that he was in prison for committing **murder** in the **insurrection**. Jesus was convicted of heresy by a kangaroo court in the middle of the night.
3. Barabbas was **guilty** as charged. Jesus was **innocent**.
4. One would **die** so the other could **live**.

An Interesting Custom

It was a **PASSOVER** custom that Pilate would release a prisoner of the Jews own choosing. He gives the crowd the choice of **Jesus** or **Barabbas**. From Pilate's perspective, it's a no-brainer. He's looking for a way to get off the hook when it comes to Jesus. Surely, they won't ask for the release of a murderer, would they? We don't know what the crowd would have said had they not been urged on by the elders. Stirred up by them, the crowd called for the release of Barabbas. But what about from Barabbas' perspective? He's convicted, sentenced to be crucified, and suddenly, he's brought out and given a possibility of life and freedom. What did he feel when the crowd called his name—relief, joy, astonishment? And what would he feel when he heard the people call for Jesus to be crucified?

He Died for Me

We don't know what Barabbas felt that day when he was released, and they called for Jesus' blood. Barabbas was guilty and deserving of death. The innocent Jesus died in his place. Jesus **died** so Barabbas could **live**. Maybe we should ask the question, "How do I feel?" You see, **I AM BARABBAS**. Of all

the people there that day, Barabbas is the one I identify with. Just like him, I am **guilty, deserving death**. But Jesus died so I can live. Thank you, Jesus for dying in my place. **I AM BARABBAS.**

*May the peace of God,
Which passes all understanding,
Keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
