

Good Friday  
April 7, 2023  
"Jesus for Barabbas"  
(John 18:35-40)  
By Rev. Ed Weber

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, our text for this Good Friday is from John 18:35-40.

**"35 Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me. What have You done?"**

**36 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here."**

**37 Pilate therefore said to Him, "Are You a king then?"**

**Jesus answered, "You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."**

**38 Pilate said to Him, "What is truth?" And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, "I find no fault in Him at all.**

**39 "But you have a custom that I should release someone to you at the Passover. Do you therefore want me to release to you the King of the Jews?"**

**40 Then they all cried again, saying, "Not this Man, but Barabbas!" Now Barabbas was a robber.**

Here ends our text.

Decision time. Jesus or Barabbas. One can go free because of the Paschal Pardon. It was a custom to release one prisoner at the time of the Passover. We have Presidential pardons in the United States, a power given to the President according to article II of the Constitution, for "offenses against the United States", except for impeachment although that has never been tested by the courts.

A pardon is an expression of the President's forgiveness and ordinarily is granted in recognition of the applicant's acceptance of responsibility for the crime and established good conduct for a significant period of time after conviction. It does not signify innocence.

A quick glance at modern history reminds us that President Ford pardoned President Nixon before he was to be indicted. President Carter pardoned 534 people including draft dodgers of the Vietnam War. President George H.W. Bush pardoned 74 people including those connected to the Iran-Contra affair. President Clinton pardoned 396 people including billionaire fugitive Marc Rich and his own brother Roger Clinton. President Obama? 212. President Trump pardoned 143 people including Michael Flynn, Paul Manafort, Charles Kushner, his son-in-law's father. The 143 represented 2% of the total who applied for clemency. Which of all those people would you have pardoned if you were president? People who committed millions of dollars of fraud, drug dealers, murders?

The last five presidents granted between 2-6% of the requests they received. How were the fortunate few chosen? Was there any favoritism or political bias shown by the President in office? Was there any political bias in the recent decision by a grand jury in New York to indict President Trump on 34 felony charges?

The Governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate, gave the people the power of pardon at the Passover. Jesus or Barabbas. Was there any bias? Well, Pontius Pilate found no fault in Jesus and neither did Herod (Luke 23:14-15). His wife told him to have nothing to do with this "just Man", having suffered much in a dream. (Matthew 27:19). Judas Iscariot gave back the silver coins because he said "**I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.**" (Matthew 27:4) The Sanhedrin themselves could not find any crime against Jesus (Matthew 26:60).

On the other hand, Barabbas was a notorious prisoner (Matthew 27:16) who was a robber (John 18:40), a rebel and murderer (Luke 23:19). Jesus or Barabbas? Seems like no brainer decision. Yet, I read to you the decision from Luke 23.

**18 And they all cried out at once, saying, "Away with this Man, and release to us Barabbas"— 19 who had been thrown into prison for a certain rebellion made in the city, and for murder. 20 Pilate, therefore, wishing to release Jesus, again called out to them. 21 But they shouted, saying, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" 22 Then he said to them the third time, "Why, what evil has He done? I have found no reason for death in Him. I will therefore chastise Him and let Him go." 23 But they were insistent, demanding with loud voices that He be crucified. And the voices of these men and of the chief priests prevailed. 24 So Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they requested. 25 And he released to them the one they requested, who for rebellion and murder had been thrown into prison; but he delivered Jesus to their will."**

There was no reason to crucify Jesus. There was a preponderance of innocence, of course. Only the evil will of the people prevailed. Mob rule. Yell and scream until you get your way. Yes, they willingly accepted an evil man, Barabbas back as one of their own. For the truth is that Barabbas was one with them - a sinner. What is truth? Pilate had asked. The truth is that the Jewish leaders and mob chose out of envy (Mark 15:10) as Pilate surmised.

Jesus had said to Pilate, **“Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.”** And they were not of the truth, but heard the voice of their father, the devil, the father of lies. They even admitted their lies against Jesus by saying **“His blood be on us and on our children.”** (Matthew 27:25)

Had you been part of the crowd, would you have chosen differently? Would you have given into the peer pressure or fear? Would you have denied Jesus like Peter? Run away from Jesus when He was arrested like the other disciples? Have you given into peer pressure or fear and not followed the truth of God’s Word? We all must admit that we have. Romans 3:23 **“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,”** Each of us has decided against Jesus the Son of God the Father. And we have chosen our Barabbas’ in life. Literally his name means “the son of the father”. Barabbas truly represents the son of the father Adam in whom we have inherited our sin.

And sinful man cannot give true freedom. Yes, Barabbas was released and Scripture doesn’t say what happened in his life. Did he find true freedom? We don’t know. Those who were pardoned by the Presidents over the years and received freedom, have they found true freedom? Only God knows. God wants all men and women and children to know of the truth that truly sets you free – by the death of Jesus Christ. For Romans 3 continues with this truth:

**For there is no difference; 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,**

All have sinned, yet all have been justified freely by Jesus’ redeeming death. Jesus set you free from sin. He gives you the true Paschal Pardon for He is the Lamb of God who took away the sins of the world on the cross. Indeed, we want the blood of the Lamb to be upon us and our children through faith, not because of our hatred, but in faith Jesus washes us of all our sins.

That is the great Biblical substitute. Jesus for Barabbas and thus for all the sinful world. That is not a temporal freedom, a temporal pardon or reprieve. But it is an eternal pardon.

**“Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.” (John 8:36)**  
And Jesus continues in that same chapter and says, **“51 Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death.”**

For Jesus’ death removed the sting of death. He died once and for all so that all who keep Jesus’ word through faith in Him will live eternally. This was His Father’s gracious and merciful will. God the Father made the decision to offer up His Son for the sins of the world. So Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane: **“O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.” (Matthew 26:39)**

On Pentecost, the murderous mob heard this truth of God’s gracious plan proclaimed from a pardoned Peter in Acts 2. They heard of the resurrection of Jesus.

**22 “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know— 23 Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; 24 whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it.”**

The Jewish mob chose evil. Crucify Him. Jesus for Barabbas. But God used their evil decision for good, for the good of all people – not just 2% of the people. God shows no favoritism and no bias. **“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”** And that is why this is a Good Friday. For you and me – and all people!

But would God possibly pardon the very people who crucified His Son? Peter continued.

**“36 “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”**

**37 Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?”**

**38 Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.”**

And about 3000 were baptized. God turned their envy into repentant hearts. He has done the same for us and for our children, baptized people of God. Jesus has given His Paschal pardon to you and me through faith, sealed in your baptism!

How can you be sure that Jesus’ death has pardoned you from your sins? Well, we know, and we will celebrate again in three days the wondrous truth that Jesus rose from the dead. The full debt of sin is cancelled. You are set free – free to serve the King of Kings. Free to serve Him in His Kingdom which is not of this world - His Kingdom of grace which sets you free to proclaim Jesus’ truth.

Jesus for Barabbas. Jesus for you! The forgiving, life giving blood of Jesus, the Paschal Lamb is upon us. You are pardoned. You are forgiven and set free, indeed. Blessed Good Friday.

**Amen.**

**The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your heart and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)**