

Devotion on Holy Week (First Day – Sunday) - 13 April 2014, Anno Domini (In the Year of our Lord)



Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus which is called Christ?

13 Then said Pilate unto him, Hearest thou not how many things they witness against thee? 14 And he answered him to never a word; insomuch that the governor marvelled greatly. 15 Now at that feast the governor was wont to release unto the people a prisoner, whom they would. 16 And they had then a notable prisoner, called Barabbas. 17 Therefore when they were gathered together, Pilate said unto them, Whom will ye that I release unto you? **Barabbas, or Jesus which is called Christ?** 18 **For he knew that for envy they had delivered him.** 19 When he was set down on the judgment seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him. 20 **But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus.** 21 **The governor answered and said unto them, Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you?** They said, Barabbas. 22 Pilate saith unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ? **They all say unto him, Let him be crucified.** 23 **And the governor said, Why, what evil hath he done?** But they cried out the more, saying, Let him be crucified. 24 When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, **he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person:** see ye to it. 25 Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children. (Matt 27:13-25) (KJV)

This is the first day of Holy Week which will run seven days (including today through Saturday) and the eighth day, appropriately, is Easter Sunday. I say 'appropriately' because the number eight in Holy Scripture symbolized new

beginnings. Christ observed Sabbath in the Tomb from Friday sunset until the end of Sabbath (seventh day) the next day. He arose on the eighth day (Sunday)! You will recall that the eighth day (of age for a baby) was the day of circumscribing the child into the covenant fellowship of Israel in the Old Testament. There were, as well, eight souls saved in the Ark of Noah's Day. There are seven notes on the musical scale, and the eighth is the beginning of the next scale of notes. And, so, Christ arose on the eighth day to institute the New Beginning for all who believe.

The great William Shakespeare asked, *"What's in a name? that which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet."* The essence of a Rose is not in its name, but in its characteristics and qualities. It is a flower of beauty, of a lovely fragrance, and its unfolding beauty is a constant revelation of its natural art. But we are faced with two names today that stand out in the text – that of Jesus (the Son of God) and of Barabbas (a desperate murderer and criminal). The world loves its own, and it loves the Barabbases of the earth far more than the Lord of Glory and His followers.

Now in considering those two names, there is one which is immutable and stands alone – that of Jesus of Nazareth. The other name, Barabbas, also identifies a single historical figure; but it also has a much wider application than to a single man. The name, Barabbas, applies to each one reading this devotion. *"How can that be?"* you may ask? Because we are all evil and without merit in the eyes of God. We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. *"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."* (Romans 3:23) Well, you may respond, *"But I have never been as bad as Barabbas – I have never murdered!"* The very first spiteful sentiment that you ever entertained toward another immediately labeled you as a murderer. Besides, there are no exemptions to avoid Hell based on good conduct. We have all sinned, and no sinner will be admitted to Heaven. The wages of one sin, and many thousands, is the same: eternal death and damnation! *"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."* (Romans 6:23) We shall not escape that death penalty that was levied against Barabbas unless one who is able to redeem us of our sins takes our place – the Lord Jesus Christ. *"Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."* (Romans 3:24)

Poor Barabbas. He was hunted down and trapped like the rabid dog that he was. He was just like you and me. He was caught red-handed in his sin and sentenced to death; yet, One took His place on the cross and Barabbas was set free. Now do you recognize your own soul represented by Barabbas? He deserved no mercy or grace, but he received both!

Poor Pilate! He would have made a better caliber politician than we have in Washington, D.C. today for he readily acknowledged the innocence of Jesus and sought how he might set Him free. His virtue, however, ends there. As a good politician, Pilate felt the need to satisfy the crowd and compromise his principles. Though he attempted to wash his hands of *"the blood of this just person,"* it was to avail. No amount of washing can cleanse us of our sins and cowardice apart from the shed blood of Jesus Christ. Jesus was pronounced innocent by the Roman Prefect of Judea. He was unwittingly pronounced Savior of Israel by none other than the High Priest of that year, Caiaphas: *"Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, What do we? for this man doeth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation. And one of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. And this spake he not of himself:*

but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation."
(John 11:47-51)

Jesus died in the place of Barabbas – the righteous One in place of the guilty. He died in the place of you and me. It is by His righteousness and His grace that we may gain Heaven and none of our own – for we have NO righteousness.

Like Barabbas, we have been imprisoned for a time. Have you been? Of course, we were in bondage to sin and the Prince of the Air until Christ came along and paid our penalty. When we receive Him, that penalty is remitted just as it was for Barabbas. Have you received your pardon, Friend?