



Choose GRACE instead of JUSTICE

Now at that feast he released unto them one prisoner, whomsoever they desired. And there was one named Barabbas, which lay bound with them that had made insurrection with him, who had committed murder in the insurrection. And the multitude crying aloud began to desire him to do as he had ever done unto them. But Pilate answered them, saying, Will ye that I release unto you the King of the Jews? For he knew that the chief priests had delivered him for envy. But the chief priests moved the people, that he should rather release Barabbas unto them. And Pilate answered and said again unto them, What will ye then that I shall do unto him whom ye call the King of the Jews? And they cried out again, Crucify him. Then Pilate said unto them, Why, what evil hath he done? And they cried out the more exceedingly, 'Crucify him.' (Mark 15:6-14)

The charges against this villainous man, Barabbas, were extensive and included sedition, insurrection, and murder. He was not simply a malcontent with misguided intentions, he was a wanton murderer who probably enjoyed the act. Having been taken in the act of insurrection, Barabbas was given a trial before the Prefect of Judea and sentenced to die on the cross on the date of the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ.

As you sit smugly reading this devotion, I hope you will not doubt that this same Barabbas was just as much you and me, since we are all guilty before God without the salvation of the blood of Christ. Remember the elementary catechism question: "What must one do to go to Hell?" Of course, the answer is NOTHING since we have ALL deserved the fires of Hell, and stand convicted just as surely as did Barabbas: "Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God." (Romans 3:22-25)

If you remember nothing else of this devotion, please remember this: the Holy Scriptures serve to reflect our true character as a mirror to our souls. When we read of the wickedness of Adam in his disobedience, or of David in his murderous adultery, or the poor wretched woman taken in adultery, I hope you will see your own depravity and hopelessness without the substitutionary death and redemption made available through the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. There are only two ways to appear righteous before God the Father:

1. By imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ which is an act of Grace;
2. Your personal acts of righteousness which do not belong to you, but to Christ who works in your members. In actually, these two are one and the same.

So, Mr. Barabbas, and Mrs. Barabbas, who read these lines stand likewise guilty before the bar of God's Justice. As you will know, The Prefect, Pontius Pilate, sought grounds whereby he might release this man (Jesus) whom he had already declared innocent. (Matthew 27:24) It was customary to release a prisoner of the people's choosing prior to the Passover Meal. Pilate felt with certainty that the multitudes would demand Jesus be released before a hardened criminal such as Barabbas. The scribes and Pharisees worked the crowd into a frenzied and feverish state of mind – the same multitudes who had greeted the Lord just days earlier at the gates of Jerusalem with the praise 'Hosanna!' now screamed "release unto us Barabbas" and "crucify Him" (Jesus Christ). At the same time, they demanded the release of Barabbas! You may believe this to be unfair and a travesty of justice – and surely it was just that! Would you have called for Barabbas to be released? If not, why not? Did the Lord Jesus Christ not die in your stead just as surely as He died in the place of Barabbas?

The Scriptures do not tell us what became of Barabbas after that fateful day, but I am compelled to wonder about his future disposition. Did he give deep thought to what great goodness had been done to him by a Stranger whom he had never met? It is my hope that Barabbas, too, repented and sought the salvation of his own soul just as surely as he had been granted a physical salvation from a cruel death on the cross.

The whole matter boils down to this: We are saved by Grace and by no good merit of our own. Being dead (as a door nail, as my mother would say) we could do nothing to revive our dead souls. (Ephesians 2:1-3) "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." (Eph 2:8-9)

The Article of Religion bears this out:

XVII. Of Predestination and Election

Predestination to Life is the everlasting purpose of God, whereby (before the foundations of the world were laid) he hath constantly decreed by his counsel secret to us, to deliver from curse and damnation those whom he hath chosen in Christ out of mankind, and to bring them by Christ to everlasting salvation, as vessels made to honour. Wherefore, they which be endued with so excellent a benefit of God, be called according to God's purpose by his Spirit working in due season: they through Grace obey the calling: they be justified freely: they be made sons of God by adoption: they be made like the image of his only-begotten Son Jesus Christ: they walk religiously in good works, and at length, by God's mercy, they attain to everlasting felicity...." (partial quote)

So Barabbas' case was not really settled out of court because he stood convicted and taken in the very act of murder and mayhem; yet, he received grace to live out his earthly days through the blood of Christ which granted him pardon. We have a greater privilege to live out our Eternity through the shed blood of Christ if we have been accounted among God's Elect. Each of us deserve that horrible death that Jesus died in our stead, but we have been redeemed by that propitiatory death that the only Begotten Son of God was uniquely and singularly qualified to suffer. We have been set scot free without the sentence of death, well deserved, being rendered against us. That sentence was lifted at Calvary's brow.

The Law is totally and surely unable to save to the least iota; but GRACE is a saving virtue that only God can grant in reprieve of our sentence of death. So, in great distress of soul, God the Father, sent His only Begotten Son to die in the place of

miscreants, thieves, murderers, adulterers, and hardened criminals (which we all have been before coming to faith through grace).

I pray that you, good friend, will take the time to reflect on your own soul and its standing with God. Have you, too, been pardoned and redeemed by the blood of Christ? When the multitudes have condemned you and called for your death, have you thrown your soul on the altar of grace through Jesus Christ? If not, is it not time to see to it?