

The Gospel According to Barabbas

Tyler Velin | July, 8 2012 | John 18:28-40

My name is Tyler, I am one of the pastors here and I get the privilege of preaching the to you guys for the month of July while we give pastor John and his family a sabbatical. We are very grateful for what he and his family mean to this church, and we want to bless them so that he can come back refreshed and ready to roll in August.

With that said, while he is gone if you guys could start coming to both services, that would be great. If I can get numbers up during the summer, I might be in line for an office with two windows someday. So that would be great.

But I am very excited for our next few weeks here because we will be looking at the death and resurrection of Christ. This is what the gospel is about, and I am so amazed that it is my job to proclaim the beauty of this event.

With that said let's **pray** and get moving here.

Our passage today begins in **John 18:28**.

So before we get too far in today, you guys are going to get a history lesson. Because John is the master of dramatic writing and to fully understand the court scene we are about to see, we have to understand the underlying reasons and hidden tension amidst this procession.

This story is taking place around 30-33 AD, in Jerusalem, under Roman rule. Yet there has been much political unrest leading up to this point. If you go back 200 years (**331-164 B.C.**) you will see that much of the Jewish land was ruled by the Greeks. It is in this time where Greek culture spread so rampantly, that couple hundred years later, the New Testament authors wrote in Greek.

But the Greeks were not very accommodating to the Jews and their cultural beliefs, so in **164 B.C.**, a Jewish family called the Hasmoneans led a revolt and overthrew the Greek government in won independence for the Jews. This family was also known as the Maccabee's and most of you have probably heard of a period known as the Maccabean Revolution in your history classes. The Maccabee's ruled until **63 B.C.** and then they were overrun by the Roman general Pompey, who established Roman rule. About fifty years into (**4-5 B.C.**) this Roman rule, Jesus was born, and thirty years later (**30-33 B.C.**) Jesus is standing trial in Pontius Pilates headquarters.

I say these things because I want to get across the point that there has been much political unrest and abuse towards the Jews. Because of this, some Jews were hostile towards whatever government was in place. In fact one of Jesus' disciples was Simon the zealot, who was one of those militant Jews against Rome.

So Jewish authorities and Roman authorities are in a sort of cold war. The Jews know they could be crushed by Rome, yet Rome knows the Jews are capable of leading another Revolution.

There will be a quiz at the end of the sermon. Yet here is why this is important. **John 18:28-32.**

So the Pharisees visited the High Priest last week, and he sent them to Pilate because Pilate was a higher court than the religious court. Now you have to understand here that Pilate really doesn't care about Jewish traditions.

He has bigger fish to fry. The Jews bringing Jesus to Pilate is the equivalent of a bunch of Bobcat fans bringing a Grizzly to the State Supreme Court wanting to try him because he is saying the Grizzlies are a better team. Rome doesn't really care about Jewish religion, it doesn't care that this Jesus has upset some of the religious leaders, what it cares about is the health of its nation.

That is why initially Pilate tells the Pharisees to try Jesus under their own religious law. Now here is the thing, whenever the church killed someone for heresy or heinous sins, it was via stoning. Execution by crucifixion was a strictly Roman punishment. So at this point if the Jews would have turned away and condemned Jesus, they would have stoned him, and if they stoned him, he would not have been crucified and if he was not crucified then Jesus would not have fulfilled the prophecies of the OT, and if Jesus did not fulfill the OT, then he is not the messiah.

But look back at what the Jews said to Pilate, **"The Jews said to him, 'It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death.' This was to fulfill the word that Jesus had spoken to show by what kind of death he was going to die"**

That's because, due to the political unrest in the nation, the Romans had forbidden the church to execute people except for rare circumstances. Because the Pharisees wanted Jesus dead, the only option was Roman execution, which was crucifixion.

Three times in the book of John, Jesus referred to his death as a time where he would be "lifted up." Quoting the OT Paul says this in **Galatians 3:13.**

It wasn't an accident that Jesus was crucified. It wasn't because it was common for religious criminals to be crucified. Jesus was crucified because God, before the foundations of the world deemed it the best way for Jesus to die, and worked history in such a way, that 200 years before the death of Christ, the cross was made possible through an unstable political landscape.

We serve a powerful God.

Let's read on **John 18:33.** So John's gospel doesn't go into a huge amount of the details here, but the other gospels fill in the gaps. Like I said, Pilate really had zero concern about Jesus being a religious heretic. But if Jesus claimed to be King of the Jews, that posed a threat. The Pharisees knew that and played the King card to get buy in from Pilate. Luke shows us the shrewdness of the Pharisees in **Luke 23:2.** They play Jesus as a zealot against Rome, now Pilate needs to make a decision.

John continues **John 18:33-36.**

This is a big passage here. Because Jesus is establishing his authority and Kingship. You see as much as some of Jesus' disciples hoped, and as much as Roman officials feared, Jesus did not come to set up a worldly Kingdom. Palaces and Presidents are not regal enough to hold the Kingdom Christ wishes to establish.

Jesus said that if he wanted a physical kingdom, nothing would stop him. He's Jesus; he can take what he wants. And while Jesus' kingdom includes this world, it is not limited to this world. Jesus Kingdom is consuming. Jesus didn't want to establish a kingdom through forced reign, but through righteous worship.

So the irony is that the Pharisees and the Roman rulers will kill Jesus to try and crush his kingdom, what they actually do is consummate the Kingdom. Because Colossians 1:20 tells us that through the cross Christ reconciles all things to himself. Both invisible and visible, both earthly and heavenly.

Pilate then counters Jesus with another question: **John 18:37-38**

Here we have Jesus' mission statement loud and clear. Now I love the confusion of Pilate here. He is frustrated, he is tired and he apparently doesn't like riddles. Because Jesus gives his mission statement clear here, "I have come into the world to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice."

"What is the truth!" I want you to try and answer that question in your minds right now. What is the truth that Jesus is talking about? Because for those of us in here who are Christians, we need to learn to love this truth.

To be honest when I sat down to do my prep for this, I knew what Jesus meant when he said "the truth" but it never really occurred to me who "the truth" was. I know the truth is the truth, but who is the truth? Jesus is the truth, and while that realization may not be groundbreaking, the implications are.

Because Jesus says here that it is his life goal to bear witness to the truth, and to speak to those who are of the truth. So is Jesus going on a power trip here? Because we have seen Jesus say before that he has not come on his own authority, but by the father's. Is Jesus stepping out of rank and saying that everything is about him. Well yes and no.

We saw Jesus earlier in John say "I am the way, the truth and the life." But remember way back in the beginning of John. Way back in chapter one. John answers this question for us. **John 1:14,16-18**

Jesus is the truth in that he is the fulfillment of the old testament law, and Jesus is the truth in that he is God. So by bearing witness to his own glory, he is bearing witness to his father who is in heaven. We see God when we see Jesus. It is for this claim that he will be crucified.

Now here is my favorite part of this passage. **John 18:38b-49.**

So Pilate, cannot find anything wrong with Jesus. He cannot find the claims of him leading a zealous revolution to be substantial. He does not care that he claims to be God, he just wants to prove himself as a good leader to the people. He wants justice, and he wants fame.

Pilate cannot find sin in Jesus, because Jesus is sinless, yet at the same time, he has an angry mob to deal with. So he knows that the Passover is near. Now at the beginning of the text we saw

that the Pharisees refused to go into Pilate's house because if a Jew were to enter the house of a Gentile during the Passover they would be made unclean and could not celebrate it.

Now for those of you who need an Old Testament refresher. The Passover is a festival to represent the saving acts of God in Exodus 12. A few thousand years ago, the Jews found themselves enslaved under a different ruler, Pharaoh.

They were slaves and captives in the land of Egypt. But God made a covenant with them that they would be a nation among nations, that they would be powerful and mighty. So God in his great mercy was going to bring them out of slavery into freedom.

Enter the story of Moses and the ten plagues. Now the last plague was the plague of the first born. On this night, an angel of death was going to Passover the entire nation of Egypt and kill the firstborn male in every house.

But God made a provision. He said that if you slaughtered lamb, and painted the door frame of your house in the lamb's blood, that the angel would pass over your house and spare your son.

So that night the nation of Israel, every household killed a lamb and spilled its blood on the doorframe of their house, and they were spared. Pharaoh, grieving the loss of his son, then allowed the nation of Israel to leave slavery and become free people. The Passover feast was the largest celebration of the Jews, and celebrated the Exodus out of Egypt.

Now the Roman government wanted to win over the hearts of the Jews to keep them from rebelling, so not too long before Jesus stood in Pilate's courtyard, the Roman's made a rule that each Passover, the Jews could have back one of their prisoners from Roman captivity.

Now typically they would want to choose someone who was arrested for fighting against Rome, someone who loved the Jews and hated the Romans.

Pilate then asks the people, who would you rather have released, the King of the Jews, or this man called Barabbas.

Now as we will see, John gives us very little information about Barabbas, but the other Gospels describe him as a rebel insurrectionist who had committed murder. This is no Ghandi.

Look at the last verse of the passage as the people choose between Jesus and Barabbas: **John 18:40.**

So this is the part of the story, where most preachers would probably challenge you by saying, will you choose Barabbas or Jesus. Your sin will hurt you, yet Jesus will save you. Yet the more I thought about this, the more I was convicted that was the wrong emphasis.

You see, without Jesus, Barabbas was going to die. He would not have been the first pick out of death row, yet Pilate tried to force their hand and make them pick an innocent man or a murderer. The crowds picked the murderer.

You see, we are not the crowds who pick, Pilate who judges, or Jesus who died. We are Barabbas.

We deserve death, and yet we are spared from it by the slaughter of the ultimate Passover lamb. We were held in captivity, but through the death of the firstborn, we are freed.

We committed treason against God, we rejected his kingship, we surrendered his truth, we murdered his son. We deserve death, yet Jesus, the spotless and blameless took our spot on the cross.

Barabbas was freed because Jesus claimed to be God. We are freed because Jesus is God. Barabbas was the physical representation of the spiritual truth that Jesus brought on the cross. Quoting the prophet Isaiah, Jesus read this scroll in the temple: **Luke 4:18-19**.

After reading this scroll Jesus gave it back to the attendant, sat down and said, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your presence."

Jesus is the ultimate Passover lamb, setting his people free from slavery and death, Jesus is the ultimate liberator of spiritual captives. Jesus' Kingdom is established forever, that whosoever believes in the Truth of Christ, the reality of God and the Gospel of the cross, they can step out as Barabbas did, and allow the blood of Christ to cover your offenses.

Everything comes down to power of Christ. No group of Zealots could have planned a story or a savior better than this. But God works all things in such a way that he aligned the power, the politics, the prisoner and the Passover to work for his glory in the cross of Christ.

Jesus came to bear witness to the truth of himself. I urge you, listen and worship that truth. Embrace the lamb led to the slaughter, and revel in King Jesus.