

# Barabbas and the Two Criminals

Message 3 of 6 in the series: "Brought to Life"

## A. Some important background information:

Rome couldn't afford to keep large numbers of troops everywhere, so they maintained control throughout the empire by using terror and brute force to punish troublemakers and crush rebellions quickly.

The Romans used crucifixion because it maximized torture and shame and sent a horrifyingly clear message: "This is what we do to people who cross the Roman government." Crucifixion was so brutal that it was illegal to crucify Roman citizens and was usually reserved for only the worst offenders.

## B. Even though Jesus was innocent of any wrongdoing, He was sentenced to be crucified in place of a notorious criminal named Barabbas.

"Now it was the governor's custom each year during the Passover celebration to release one prisoner—anyone the people requested. One of the prisoners at that time was Barabbas, a revolutionary who had committed murder in an uprising. The crowd went to Pilate and asked him to release a prisoner as usual. 'Would you like me to release to you this "King of the Jews"?' Pilate asked. (For he realized by now that the leading priests had arrested Jesus out of envy.) But at this point the leading priests stirred up the crowd to demand the release of Barabbas instead of Jesus. Pilate asked them, 'Then what should I do with this man you call the king of the Jews?' They shouted back, 'Crucify him!' 'Why?' Pilate demanded. 'What crime has he committed?' But the mob roared even louder, 'Crucify him!' So, to pacify the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He ordered Jesus flogged with a lead-tipped whip, then turned him over to the Roman soldiers to be crucified." Mark 15:6-15 (NLT)

*Note:* Barabbas was recognized by everyone as a **bad** person. He was a violent rebel and guilty of murder, trying to overthrow the government, and many other sins. Barabbas deserved to be crucified.

*Note:* Jesus willingly took Barabbas' place. "When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners." Romans 5:6-8 (NLT)

**Life Application:** I am Barabbas. "At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life." Titus 3:3-7 (NIV)

"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."  
2 Corinthians 5:21 (NIV)

**Life Application:** Through Christ, I am Barabbas (son of the Father). "...you received God's Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, 'Abba, Father.' For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God's children. And since we are his children, we are his heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God's glory." Romans 8:15b-17a (NLT)

## C. Jesus was crucified between two criminals.

"So they took Jesus away. Carrying the cross by himself, he went to the place called Place of the Skull (in Hebrew, *Golgotha*). There they nailed him to the cross. Two others were crucified with him, one on either side, with Jesus between them." John 19:16b-18 (NLT)

1. Through His death on the cross, Jesus redeemed us from the curse of the Law.

"But Christ has rescued us from the curse pronounced by the law. When he was hung on the cross, he took upon himself the curse for our wrongdoing. For it is written in the Scriptures, 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.'" Galatians 3:13 (NLT) (*Deuteronomy 21:23*)

**Life Application:** New life is available to everyone through Christ, no matter who we are or what we've done. "But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law, as was promised in the writings of Moses and the prophets long ago. We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we

are. For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins." Romans 3:21-24 (NLT)

2. One of the criminals crucified with Jesus asked Jesus to save his soul.

"One of the criminals hanging beside him scoffed, 'So you're the Messiah, are you? Prove it by saving yourself—and us, too, while you're at it!' But the other criminal protested, 'Don't you fear God even when you have been sentenced to die? We deserve to die for our crimes, but this man hasn't done anything wrong.' Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom.' And Jesus replied, 'I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise.'" Luke 23:39-43 (NLT)

**Life Application:** It's not too late to repent of our sins and come to Jesus through faith. "For God says, 'At just the right time, I heard you. On the day of salvation, I helped you.' Indeed, the 'right time' is now. Today is the day of salvation." 2 Corinthians 6:2 (NLT)

3. Before He died on the cross, Jesus said, "It is finished."

"...Jesus said, 'It is finished.' With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit." John 19:30 (NIV)

"At that moment the curtain in the sanctuary of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom."

Matthew 27:51a (NLT)

"Under the old covenant, the priest stands and ministers before the altar day after day, offering the same sacrifices again and again, which can never take away sins. But our High Priest offered himself to God as a single sacrifice for sins, good for all time. Then he sat down in the place of honor at God's right hand." Hebrews 10:11-12 (NLT)

**Life Application:** "So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most." Hebrews 4:16 (NLT)

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### Connect Group Questions:

Read Mark 15:6-15 & Luke 23:32-49. Then discuss the following questions:

1. Share an Easter memory that makes you laugh every time you think of it.
2. Why did Jesus willingly take the place of a thug like Barabbas?
3. Discuss what the following verses say about Jesus taking the place of filthy, rotten sinners on the cross.
  - Isaiah 53:1-10
  - 1 Peter 2:23-24
  - Romans 5:6-8
  - 2 Corinthians 5:14-21
4. Why do you think only one of the criminals crucified with Jesus asked Jesus to save his soul? What do you think convinced him that Jesus was really the Son of God?
5. How does it make you feel to know that God not only saved us from the penalty of sin but adopted you into His own family? (See Romans 8:12-17) How well do you embrace your new identity as a child of the King and a co-heir with Jesus?
6. Before He died, Jesus said, "It is finished." (John 19:30) What does this mean to Christians? (See Hebrews 4:16)
7. Spend some time as a group praying for people you know who need a personal relationship with Jesus. Ask God to bring people to Centerpoint this Easter season who need to hear about Jesus and need a church home.