

Mark 15:6-15

Jesus and Barabbas - The Great Exchange

Introduction

What would you think if a criminal guilty of murder and robbery was released from prison and in his place an innocent man was sentenced to die? Your answer might be "That's unfair, outrageous, ridiculous, unjust, radical; who would come up with a plan like that?"

Well, the truth of the matter is that this is God's plan, the good news, the gospel. It's the story of the great exchange - Jesus and Barabbas. The guilty man went free and the innocent man was condemned. Righteousness was exchanged for unrighteousness; holiness was substituted for unholiness; the sinless took the place of the sinner and the King of kings was replaced for a murderer and a robber. Here's the scripture, [Mark 15:6-15](#).

There are two points in this message that we need to pay attention to: 1) Only the perfect sacrifice of Jesus can accomplish the great exchange where the sinner goes free and the Lord is punished in his place and 2) in the great exchange, God wants us to see ourselves as Barabbas and the fact that you and I have no hope, except for freedom in Christ alone.

Background

It was the Passover and as was the custom at the Passover, the governor would release a prisoner of the crowd's choice. In this case, the chief priests and elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas' release and Jesus' execution.

Barabbas was a notorious criminal. Notorious means widely known and regarded unfavorably. He had been thrown into prison for a rebellion in Jerusalem and for murder. He was guilty of these crimes, while Jesus was innocent of the crimes He had been accused of, namely blasphemy of God. Pilate even told the crowd that he could find no wrong in Jesus and washed his hands to signify his innocence of having Jesus executed. Yet the crowd, stirred up by the chief priest and elders, wanted Barabbas released and Jesus crucified.

The Great Exchange

1. Only in Christ's Perfect Sacrifice - The Great Exchange Accomplished

God wants us to see this great exchange as a beautiful picture of His grace and mercy in Christ. In fact, the story of Jesus and Barabbas is found in all four New Testament books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Yes, it's important for us to see that only in Christ's perfect sacrifice can the just be exchanged for the unjust, the righteous for the unrighteous, the sinless for the sinner, the King of kings for a criminal.

The great exchange of Jesus for Barabbas, which is an often neglected and forgotten story, is proof of God's great love for the unlovable. We need to realize that a great price was paid for this great exchange. That God, not sparing His own Son, would purpose Jesus' death on the cross in order that people like you and me would be rescued from sin

and made right with God. The following two verses of scripture explain it well: [Isaiah 53:10a](#)

Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief;
[Isaiah 53:10a](#) (ESV)

and [2 Corinthians 5:21](#).

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

[2 Cor 5:21](#) (ESV)

2. Seeing Ourselves as Barabbas – No Hope for Freedom Except in Christ

Yes, God wants us to see ourselves as Barabbas. So rebellious. So prone to do wrong. So undeserving of freedom. So deserving of punishment for sin. In 1986, God, by His grace, rescued me from sin and set me free in Christ. That was my “Barabbas moment”. But it wasn’t until reading a men's devotional Bible in 2016 that I saw myself as Barabbas. Jesus took my place as the criminal. He received punishment for my crimes, past, present and future. Crimes such as adultery, pride, as well as a critical and resentful spirit. Jesus Christ, the righteous, was condemned; Steve Thompson, the unrighteous, went free.

Scripture states that none is righteous, no, not one. Scripture also states that we all fall short of God's glory. Then how can it be that God Himself in the flesh, the Lord Jesus Christ, would die for such messed up people like us living in a messed up world like ours? Here's the answer in [Romans 5:8](#).

...but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
[Romans 5:8](#) (ESV)

In what was the most unjust exchange in history, the justice of God was served. God exchanged perfect love, grace and mercy while we were still sinners through the perfect sacrifice of Jesus' death on the cross. While prisoners to sin, we were set free from the penalty of sin and death, even though we didn't deserve it. That's grace! You and me deserving of a certain death, yet not receiving it. That's mercy! But how can that be? Jon Bloom, author and co-founder of Desiring God states "Our freedom isn't achieved by anything we do; it is achieved by Jesus dying in our place."

Our Response to the Great Exchange

As we have heard God's message on the great exchange, God's perfect love, amazing grace and rich mercy in Christ, exchanged for the deplorable, detestable and horrific sin of people like Barabbas, people like you and me; what is our response? What is our response to this unfair, outrageous, ridiculously radical story of the unjust exchange of a guilty man for an innocent man?

The only response is to receive the message of the great exchange by trusting Jesus. Jesus is the only One who would willingly exchange His perfection for our shame, His glory for our rebellion and His sinlessness for our sinfulness. He is the only way to freedom.

Freedom from sin. Freedom from shame. Freedom from worrying about whether or not others approve of us, which is what I'm doing right now. Yes, I need to stop worrying about your approval of me. I need to be reminded that God's approval of me is all that matters and is found only in Christ, whose perfection was exchanged for my imperfection.

What about you? If you haven't trusted Christ, you're still in prison with the door locked. Jesus is your only hope of freedom. When the guards came for Barabbas, did he stay? No! Why would anyone stay? My plea is that God would open your eyes to see that Jesus holds the key to your freedom. Right now, you can receive God's gift of love, grace and mercy through simply trusting Jesus. What will your response be?

What about those of us already trusting Jesus? If you're like me, the troubles of the world can seem like shackles around the wrists and ankles. Whether we realize it or not, the shackles came off when we first believed. And they're still off! Jesus has overcome the world and promised to take the heavy burdens from us and give us rest. Trust Him at His Word! We're still free in Christ and nothing can change that.

Conclusion

So, as this message concludes and we prepare for Communion, remember this; there is freedom in Christ. Scripture says it well in [John 8:36](#).

So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

[John 8:36](#) (ESV)

The Lord Jesus came to die for us so we could live abundantly and eternally. He came to set us free from sin, from God's wrath and from ourselves. For those trusting Him, there's an assurance that we're ***former*** criminals, no longer imprisoned to sin, but set free in Christ. Set free because of the great exchange. Amen.