



SUNDAY SCHOOL

PARTICIPANT: 09/09/2018

HIGHLIGHT: Matthew 27:15-25

H

¹⁵At the festival the governor's custom was to release to the crowd a prisoner they wanted. ¹⁶At that time they had a notorious prisoner called Barabbas. ¹⁷So when they had gathered together, Pilate said to them, "Who is it you want me to release for you—Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Messiah?" ¹⁸For he knew they had handed Him over because of envy.

¹⁹While he was sitting on the judge's bench, his wife sent word to him, "Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for today I've suffered terribly in a dream because of Him!"

²⁰The chief priests and the elders, however, persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to execute Jesus. ²¹The governor asked them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?"

"Barabbas!" they answered.

²²Pilate asked them, "What should I do then with Jesus, who is called Messiah?"

They all answered, "Crucify Him!"

²³Then he said, "Why? What has He done wrong?"

But they kept shouting, "Crucify Him!" all the more.

²⁴When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that a riot was starting instead, he took some water, washed his hands in front of the crowd, and said, "I am innocent of this man's blood. See to it yourselves!"

²⁵All the people answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!" ²⁶Then he released Barabbas to them. But after having Jesus flogged, he handed Him over to be crucified.



EXPLAIN

v.16 “a notorious prisoner called Barabbas.”

“**Notorious**” is the Greek word *episēmos*, which is used in one other New Testament passage. It is translated in Romans 16:7 as “noteworthy.” While *notorious* carries a negative connotation, Barabbas’ reputation among the Jews in this crowd may not have been as negative as “notorious” implies. This is partially informed by the word we have translated “prisoner.”

“**Prisoner**” is an accurate translation for Matthew’s word *desmion*, but Mark, Luke, and John paint Barabbas as a *lēstēs*: an insurrectionist. This was probably no cold-blooded murderer of Jewish lives, but a revolutionary who had specific, violent beef with the Romans occupying Jewish land. The people chose the leader of a rebellion over the Savior who came to quell the grandest one of all: one waged by human hearts against their creator.

Barabbas is not the last of the *lēstēs* we see in this narrative; Jesus was hung beside two of them. Therefore, it is not an enormous stretch to say that the two men hanging on the crosses beside Jesus were part of the same rebellion for which Barabbas was convicted, seeing as how they were sentenced to die alongside him. Jesus quite physically took the place of a rebellious man with a physical death sentence in order to save a rebellious species with a spiritual one.

“**Barabbas**” comes from two words: *bar*, meaning “son of,” and *abba*, meaning “the father.” Furthermore, early manuscripts and early church fathers maintain that Barabbas’ first name was “Jesus” (which is not *necessarily* a stretch—it was a decently common name at the time). We are given many alternatives to Christ every day—some may even look a lot like Him. They claim to be able to satisfy us as Jesus, son of a father, but they will never be Jesus, Son of God.

v.24 In the Greek Orthodox and Coptic churches, Pilate and his wife are heralded as saints. Images of Pilate with his back turned to the crowd and washing his hands of Jesus’ blood appear on sarcophagus reliefs. However, his public declaration of Christ’s innocence is not sufficient to prove his own: he had the ultimate authority in this situation to execute or save Jesus of Nazareth but chose wrongly. His failure to exonerate the “righteous man” sealed his guilt and proved his heart. He put himself and his own desire to see the situation ended in a peaceable a manner (for him) before sparing the life of a man he knew was innocent.



A

APPLY

1. What stuck out to you or challenged you in what you heard in the sermon or read in the text?
2. Jesus said in Matthew 12:30, “He who is not with me is against me.” **How do we have to make this choice today? Name some areas in which we must choose to follow either Christ or the crowd, and describe what following Christ looks like in those situations.**
3. The Jews in the crowd chose Barabbas over Jesus. Everyone’s “Barabbas” looks different from their neighbor’s. For some it might be lust. For some it might be comfort. **How do you, personally, feel pressure from the crowd to choose something other than Jesus?**
4. **Speculate: How do you think Barabbas felt when they called his name that day? How about when he heard the crowd chanting his name? When he learned what Jesus was doing in his place? In what ways are we like Barabbas?**
5. Jesus went into this situation knowing how it would unfold. He went to the cross knowing that people would choose sin over His sacrifice every day. **How did Jesus treat the people who asked for His death? What does He offer you, even when you fail Him?**

R

RESPOND

Challenge your group to respond either privately or corporately to this question:

- **Think of someone you can show the kind of mercy, compassion, and forgiveness that Jesus shows you and how you can show it to them.**

Encourage one another through email, text messages, or coffee dates throughout the week to build up and encourage each other.

