

Eternity Daily Bible Study - No. 322

Series: St. John's Passion - Gospel of John chapters 12-21

Verses: John 18:38-40

Topic: Jesus or Barabbas

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[John 18:38-40 MKJV](#) Pilate said to Him, What is truth? And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews and said to them, I find no fault in him. (39) But you have a custom that I should release one to you at the Passover. Then do you desire that I release to you the king of the Jews? (40) Then they all cried again, saying, Not this man, but Barabbas! But Barabbas was a robber.

Barabbas (son of the Rabbi OR son of the father) gets a mention in all four gospels as a murderous violent criminal involved in an insurrection who was chosen for release by the Jews instead of Christ. (Matthew 27:15-26, Mark 15:6-15, Luke 23:16-25, John 18:38-40). He was an utterly lawless person.

In a spiritual sense Barabbas is “lawlessness” - the untamed wild violent destructive urges of the psyche that engage in rebellion and want nothing more than release from imprisonment by the law. Of course Barabbas was a real historical person. Yet he is also a spiritual principle of lawlessness and anarchy. Barabbas is the sort of person that should be in jail - and he is also the part of us that must never be let loose. He is almost an anti-Christ figure, a brutal representation of the “mystery of lawlessness” that Paul speaks about in Thessalonians. (2 Thessalonians 2:7)

In the movie “Born To Be Wild” lawlessness was idealized as “freedom” but it is not viewed in such a positive light in the NT:

Matthew 7:23 MKJV And then I will say to them I never knew you! Depart from Me, those working lawlessness!

1 John 3:4 MKJV Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness, for sin is lawlessness.

So we see that lawlessness is not freedom, nor is it just the product of a bad upbringing, it is the nature of sin itself!

Lawlessness takes two main forms in society today. The first is overt criminality like that of Barabbas. The second is trying to live beyond the law like the rich and powerful and to philosophize away good and evil and conscience and God as outmoded things, no longer useful and to reduce all of life to a quest for power.

We thus see three choices here – the lawless life (Barabbas), the life under the law (the priests), and the Spirit-filled life under grace (Christ). Strangely the enmity is not between the first two, but between the last two! Wicked sinners and legalists need each other. But grace overthrows both of them!

The priests and their followers had a choice – between freeing lawlessness and releasing grace. The legalistic priests preferred Barabbas released – because he

would just transgress again and be put back in his cage. But Christ released will overthrow them utterly. For he who lives by the Spirit is not under the law. (Galatians 5:18)

Did Barabbas repent? There is no mention of it. Grace seems to have been wasted. Showing good to the wicked generally does not work. Isaiah puts it thus: Isaiah 26:10 MKJV Let favor be shown to the wicked, yet he will not learn righteousness; in the land of uprightness he will deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of Jehovah.

Last Sunday's LA Times told the story of a predator who was given chance after chance to change – and still persisted in his evil ways. The Barabbas types are simply and purely evil and know no other mode of being.

There is evil in our midst; pure violent rebellious evil, and the Jews chose it instead of Christ. Similarly there is evil in our hearts, and the decision to release it is a terrible one. It may feel liberating, but you will be liberating a murderer.

Some Christians have been brought up under the law and they rebel. In their rebellion they choose Barabbas – they decide lawlessness is better than confinement. This is because they misunderstand grace. The love of Christ is better than any law and is ultimately more liberating than any lawless act.

You may be contemplating some very sinful “act of liberation”. Don't do it! But don't remain under the law either! Discover grace in the face of Jesus Christ your Lord and Savior. Discover the joy of living in the Holy Spirit and by faith.

Barabbas is not your friend. Christ is the lover of your soul.

Barabbas was freed as an act of pure spite. Pilate seems to have been amazed at the choice. The mob did not really want Barabbas to be freed – they just wanted Jesus to be crucified. In our attempts to “kill God” we inevitably release evil. German philosophers such as Nietzsche said “God is dead and it is we who have killed Him” and their teaching unleashed both Nazism and Communism. When we “kill God” in our society and ban Him from the schools and the courts and even from the homes then unspeakable evil will certainly be released. We will find all sorts of “liberation” occurring – that ends up being lawlessness itself.

Then there are the consequences, what happened when the mob went home? Did they find Barabbas lurking behind a tree with a knife in his hand?

Blessings,

John Edmiston

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