



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Gospel of Matthew

“Barabbas, the Man for Whom Christ Died,” Matthew 27:15-21 TRANSCRIPT

At the 8:30 service, the auditorium was about, I would imagine, about a third-filled, speaking evangelistically. [Laughter] And when I sat down on the bench there, on the on the chair, the person making the announcements at the 8:30 service said, the revelers apparently have not been able to make it for the 8:30 service, so I want to give welcome to the revelers [more laughter] who have made it to the 11 o'clock service. We want to wish you on behalf of the elders a most happy and prosperous new year, spiritually prosperous, particularly.

The Scripture reading is Matthew chapter 27 verse 15 through verse 21. I must apologize to you that we have not, for the fact that we have not had a special Christmas message in the 8:30 and 11 o'clock services, nor a special New Year's message, and this was intentional, but I am not sure that it was the best idea. I feel that we've been in Matthew a very long time. I hate to wait and put off the completion of it, because when I started this series of studies I did not really anticipate being 102 messages in the completion of it, which it appears that it will be now.

But another reason why we have not stopped for a particular message on Christmas and on New Years and on other so-called festival days in Christianity is that in the case of Believers Chapel, most of the people who attend our meetings do attend

regularly. That is we generally speaking do not have Easter visitors or Christmas visitors when the time for the Christmas meeting is more propitious than Sunday morning on Christmas Day. So during the course of the exposition of the Gospel of Matthew, we have had occasion a number of times, to stress the incarnation of our Lord, and of course to stress the importance of the new life in Christ. So this is kind of an apologia for not giving you a special message but continuing the study of the Gospel of Matthew.

The Scripture reading for today is verse 15 through verse 21, and we are going to study Barabbas. Now in verse 15 Matthew writes,

“Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to releasing unto the people a prisoner, whom they would. And they had then a notable prisoner, called Barabbas. Therefore when there were when they were gathered together, Pilate said unto them, Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?”

Incidentally, I once knew a man who was very prominent Christian man and taught in one of our Christian institutions whose name was Barabbas, but he insisted that it be pronounced BEAR-abus in order not to be too closely identified with this character, so if I should occasionally give the other pronunciation, you’ll understand why.

“For he knew that for envy they had delivered him. When he was seated on the judgment seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have Thou nothing to do with that righteous man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him. But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask for Barabbas, and destroy Jesus. The governor answered and said

unto them, Which of the two will ye that I release unto you? They said, Barabbas. Perhaps we may also read verse 26. Then released he Barabbas unto them: and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.

May the Lord bless this reading of his word.

The subject for today is “Barabbas, the Man For Whom Christ Died.” There is an amazing array of striking and interesting persons in the word. Of some of these men there is a large amount of descriptive material. Of others there is little more than the mention of their names and a sketchy account of their part in the inspired drama. I know that you, like I, would love to know more of the individuals who have made up the inspired record.

Many times in reading the accounts of the word of God and coming across a man such as Melchizedek, I have dropped the page of the word of God and wondered a little bit about his previous life and then his latter life after he had his encounter with Abraham which is the subject of Genesis chapter 14. He is described in the word of God as a man without beginning of days or end of life, and for that reason some have thought that perhaps he was the Lord Jesus himself. Still others probably the great majority have thought that he was a type of Christ. But nevertheless, we would like to know this man and know more about him of so much has been made in the word of God. In fact, I do not see how we would have an Epistle to the Hebrews if we did not know about this man Melchizedek with whom Abraham had that brief meeting.

Then we have often wanted to know more about the rich young ruler who had such promise, who came running to our Lord, knelt down before him and ask him what good thing he might do that he might inherit eternal life. He seemed so eager to know the truth of God, but then after the encounter with the Lord Jesus, he turned his back upon him and walked off into anonymity, and we would like to know what happened to

the rich young ruler. Tradition has it that because the Lord Jesus said he loved him, that he found his way among the faithful, but of course we do not know.

There is Joseph of Arimathea, the rich man who was a disciple of Jesus waiting for the kingdom of God but secretly on account of the fear of the Jews. But at the last and critical moment – we shall consider him later on in a few weeks – at a very critical moment, his faith in Christ broke the bounds of his fear, and he came and boldly asked Pilate for the body of the Lord Jesus. We’d like to know more about Joseph of Arimathea.

And then I would like to know more about Barabbas, this notable prisoner as Matthew describes him. Evidently others have had the same desire to know more about Barabbas, because novels have been written about him in the English language and probably in other languages as well. They are usually cheap and tawdry, and they usually deny the truth at the expense of interest and appeal, but nevertheless it witnesses to the fact that there is an interest in the characters of the Bible who appear for a moment on the pages of the word of God. In Barabbas’ case, he appeared rather strongly in a movie concerning Christ made a couple of generations ago in which Jeff Hunter played Jesus – that was a joke in itself – but nevertheless many felt after reading or after seeing the movie that the real hero of it was Barabbas. Barabbas must be a fairly important character because thirty-eight verses in the Bible revolve around him.

Now we know that Judas is, but only thirty-two verses have to do with Judas. More verses have to do with Barabbas than have to do with Judas, and yet Barabbas did no work. He spoke so far as we know no words—spoke no words of which we have a record. And he’s known only for that brief hour in which his path crossed the path of the Lord Jesus Christ. Many men of course have prominence only insofar as their lives do cross the path of the Lord Jesus, and I do think that’s a biblical principle that our lives have significance only insofar as they, too, cross the path of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Barabbas is the only man in the Bible who could ever say in the physical sense alone, Christ died for me. He thus becomes a rather eloquent illustration of the story of the cross.

Before we look at the story of the cross, we must look at the background and Matthew first of all tells us about the ancient precedent which was invoked by Pilate in the hope that Jesus might be freed, but as it turned out, in the freeing of Barabbas. We read in the 15th verse, “Now at that feast the governor was accustomed to releasing unto the people a prisoner whom they would.”

We know from all of the accounts of the Bible that it was the multitude, probably of the supporters of Barabbas, who was a very popular insurgent, evidently, asked Pilate for the freedom for one of the prisoners. They of course hoped that he would opt for the freedom of Barabbas—Pilate was hoping of course that the people would decide for the freedom of Jesus, and thus get him off the horns of a dilemma, because he did not really believe that Jesus was guilty. But he had on the one hand uh appeal of his conscious and on the other the political appeal of expediency. And so the multitude asked him that he give them as the custom was a freeing of a prisoner.

In Roman language that was the *abiliteo*, a custom of dealing with a conquered people in this way in order to gain some rapport with them. So Pilate, not really believing in Jesus’ guilt, took the politically expedient course of dealing with him in terms of paschal amnesty. It seems that every year it was the custom for the Romans to give over a notorious prisoner to the people in order to seek to encourage good will.

Perhaps this custom arose as a result of its relationship to the Passover itself, because remember the Passover time was a time at which Israel celebrated their deliverance from the land of Egypt, so it would have been rather fitting and rather typically fitting for a prisoner to be given over to them as an illustration of deliverance of someone who was destined to die. The prisoner is described in the 16th verse as a

notable prisoner, and if you put all of the descriptions of Barabbas together, you really do have a fascinating picture.

Let’s notice first of all that word, notable. Well let’s notice first of all his name. His name is Barabbas. Now in Aramaic the term *bare* or *bar* is a word that means “son” and *abba* is the term for father, the emphatic form usually translated “the father.” So Barabbas’ name literally meant, “son of the father.” It was a surname that was not uncommon among the rabbis, so that it would be frequently the case that a rabbi might be named Barabbas.

A child of the manse, was that Barabbas was originally was? Was he the son of some rabbi, and had he grown up in the ministry? Had he grown up with the traditions of the religious aristocracy? Had he grown up with the traditions of the law? Had he been a lover of the Nation Israel and therefore a lover of Israel’s glory and had he also been irked by the fact that Israel was under the Roman yoke at the present time? Incidentally, it’s not uncommon for a son of the manse—for a pastor’s son—to become a kind of revolutionary. We have seen a number of cases of that in our own contemporary life. Frequently, the sons of men who are no longer true to the word of God and who substitute social concerns for the spiritual concerns that are more prominent in the word of God. Barabbas, though means son of the father, and it may well be that he was a man who had a very interesting and a very significant background with the rabbinic leaders in the land of Israel.

He is called a notable prisoner. That adjective occurs twice in the New Testament. In Romans chapter 16 and verse 7 it’s used in a good sense: notable in a good sense. But here it almost, according to the almost universal testimony of the interpreters, has a bad sense, and so we probably should call it or should give it the meaning of notorious. Was a he a member of the free Hebrew movement? Was he a kind of young De Gaulle or a Steve Biko? Whatever he may have been, the fact that he was a notorious prisoner is

probably to be understood in the light not so much of his beginnings as what he later developed into.

Mark tells us in his account that he had to do with an insurrection. He led an insurrection. Jerusalem was seething with discontent at the present time, just like Hungary was seething with discontent in 1955 or 1956, and as many nations seethe in discontent politically from time to time. Was it possible that he was the product of this seething discontent and a zealot? Our Lord Jesus had one of his apostles as a Zealot: Simon Zealotes. The Zealots were dedicated to the freeing of the Nation Israel from the Roman yoke. So it may well have been that that was his beginning.

But the Bible describes him in further ways which are not so complimentary. John says that he was robber. It is said, “Hope deferred maketh the heart sick.” I’ve always associated that with a young lady who keeps saying no to a young man who is in love with her, but it probably is a principle that applies to other kinds of action too. Hope deferred does make the heart sick. And this man, Barabbas, who became a hunted man by the necessity of the kind of life that he had to live also evidently became a hardened criminal.

Rome was very ruthless in persecuting people who sought to rebel against the establishment and in the light of the fact that they were hunted all over the land by men with superior forces, to survive it was necessary for them to do brutal things, and so Barabbas had become a hardened, brutal criminal. The Apostle Peter, preaching in Acts chapter 3 after the resurrection described or says to Israel that they chose a murderer over our Lord Jesus Christ. So we know that it was the common knowledge of the people at the time that Barabbas was not only a robber he was also a murder. Death was his only future.

But the most striking thing about him when you put it all together is the fact that Israel preferred him to the Lord Jesus. Now it might seem hard to understand why Israel the nation would prefer a robber – an insurrectionist, a murderer, a notorious criminal –

to our Lord Jesus Christ. But I don’t think it’s really too hard to understand. He was a daring, dashing, captivating, fierce, soul patriot. True he was a criminal, but we tend to glamorize people like that, and we glamorize them in the 20th Century as well. And while they did not have the skills of our present media, the tendency still is to glamorize the man who is the revolutionary and he was that.

And in addition, his good beginning, if he did have a good beginning may have contributed to the fact that he was well known. So on the one hand, we have this daring dashing revolutionary patriot, and on the other hand we have the silent, meek Galilean carpenter who went around saying that everybody in Israel was a sinner and faced divine judgment.

Now there is another thing about this account that I want to mention before we move on and while it’s a little technical, I think its rather important. In verse 16 and verse 17, we have two striking readings in the Greek New Testament. In the Greek New Testament and many manuscripts in verse 16, we read, “And they had then a notable prisoner, called Jesus Barabbas.” And then in verse 17, “Therefore when they were gathered together, Pilate said unto them, Whom will ye that I release unto you? Jesus Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?”

Now that’s a striking thing. These manuscripts are not the most significant New Testament manuscripts but there are a number of them that have this additional name for Barabbas. Now Jesus was a very common name. Jesus was the Greek equivalent of Joshua. And we know for example in the Old Testament there were a number of men who were named Joshua. It was a popular name. You might expect it to be so. So when our Lord came on the scene, his name was Jesus or Joshua, but there probably were a number of other Joshuas in the day of our Lord Jesus. So it would not have been strange for Barabbas to be named Jesus or Joshua Barabbas.

Furthermore, it is possible to think of a situation in which a scribe copying the New Testament might be inclined to drop out that word Jesus before Barabbas. Let’s

think of a Christian scribe or a Christian professing scribe—and many of the early scribes were that. That’s why we have so many copies of the New Testament available to us, because people did want to copy the New Testament to study the word of God. We have far more manuscripts of the New Testament than we have of any other ancient writing because the church was interested in studying the Scriptures.

Now you can see a Christian scribe, reading this passage, and looking at the text before him, and seeing Jesus Barabbas as the name of this hardened criminal, would be inclined out to drop out the Jesus to keep from associating this hardened criminal with the Lord Jesus Christ, thinking that surely the scribe who wrote the copy before him, the one that he is copying, was guilty of an error of the eye and inserted Jesus from the fact that in verse 17 we do have Jesus who is called the Christ. So a Christian scribe would have the tendency and also the motive to drop out the word Jesus – all the more reason for believing that it might be a part of the genuine Matthean text.

Furthermore, notice in verse 17 he says, “Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?” Now that last clause Jesus who is called Christ suggests that the other Jesus Barabbas, the Jesus who is called Barabbas, might well have been in the text before so that we would have then, whom will ye that I release unto you? Jesus Barabbas, or Jesus who is called the Christ? It makes good sense; it suits the context; and it would explain the actions of Christian scribes.

Nevertheless in the light of the fact that the great majority of the New Testament manuscripts do not have it, we should not be dogmatic. But you can see that we have here a very interesting parallel. The parallel exists whether Jesus is a legitimate reading or not, but it’s as if Pilate were saying to this multitude of Jewish people, we have two people here. We have Jesus the son of the father, and Jesus the Son of the Father. That is, we have two people who are the son of the father. We have Jesus Barabbas and we have Jesus who is called the Christ. Or, Jesus the son of the father; Jesus the true Son of the true Father – and whom will ye that I release unto you? The decision that Pilate

called upon the nation to make becomes thus much sharper if that reading is a genuine reading, but it’s not necessary because the decision still is there. We have Barabbas the son of the father and we have the Lord Jesus Jesus who is called the Christ who is the eternal Son of the Father.

Now Pilate would like to have a loophole to avoid condemning what this person whom A. T. Robertson said, “Pilate must have thought to be a harmless lunatic, the Lord Jesus,” and so he sought to get out of the difficulty like any good politician. A politician always loves to get out of decision making, and if he can sit on the fence and thus please both sides, he thinks that when the election takes place he will be the winner.

So we notice now Pilate’s activities and his tactics. He has said in verse 17 Whom will ye that I release unto you Barabbas or Jesus who is called the Christ, for he knew that for envy they had delivered him. He know that the Lord Jesus was not guilty of the charges that had been brought against him, but he knew also that the scribes and the Pharisees and the multitudes were jealous of the fame the power and the following of the Lord Jesus.

It is always true. In spiritual things, those who have so to speak the establishment view, they are interested in maintaining the establishment and if there arises some movement in which there is an evident presence of the power of the Holy Spirit, the intention of those who are in authority is to somehow or other throttle it, because they become envious of the fame of the individual, and the individuals. They become envious of the power of the movement, its success. They become envious of the following of the movement. We see this so beautifully illustrated in liberal theology today, which is so envious of the remarkable resurgence of evangelical theology and evangelical ministry in the last twenty-five years. For envy they sought to destroy him.

Now there is a sudden interruption. You know, men, there are times when we should listen to our wives. Now I know what you are thinking, is there any time when we do not have to listen to them? [Laughter] But there are time when we should pay

attention to them, and this is one time when Pilate should have paid attention to his wife, for there comes a sudden interruption, and we read in the 19th verse, “When he was seated on the judgment seat, his wife said unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that righteous man: for I have suffered many things in a dream because of him.” Evidently this was a nightmare that she had had, and this nightmare was so vivid to her that she could not help but send immediately to Pilate.

Incidentally we are to consider Pilate in our next study, but it’s very revealing of the relationship that existed between Pilate and his wife. Evidently, they had a very good relationship. We could perhaps put it in the sphere of love, and the very fact that there was this good relationship between Pilate and his wife makes the decision of Pilate negative to our Lord Jesus, even the more pathetic, because here was a man in whom there did dwell a true love for a woman, and a man in whose heart there dwells a true love for a woman, has demonstrated thereby the capacity to love, and therefore Pilate’s decision to give our Lord Jesus over to the multitudes, as I say, becomes even more pitiful. It was a providential warning. It was God speaking to the wicked heart of this Roman prefect again before he makes the fatal decision to hand over our Lord Jesus Christ.

But Pilate, a man who had the Roman’s love for justice, and at the same time the warning, the providential warning from his wife, nevertheless does not heed either one of them and speaks to them saying which of the two shall I release unto you, and they said Barabbas. So even though he has a Roman’s love for justice and even though he has been warned by his wife, he gives our Lord Jesus over in order to be punished to death. As Samuel Crossman put it, “A murderer they save the prince of live they slay.”

Now in the conclusion of the message I want to say a few things about the remarkable illustration this is of the fact that Christ died for our sins and also about the perennial madness of the multitude’s choice. Now it is important of course that we apply the word of God. I sometimes think that one of the failures that I have in my own

ministry is that I do not seek to apply the word of God sufficiently. It is very important that the things we learn in the word of God be applied. That is, that they be made vivid and real to us.

Now in the ultimate sense only the Holy Spirit can apply the word of God. The preacher cannot do that. He can only call attention to the teaching of the Scripture, and it is the work of the Holy Spirit to bring conviction illumination and conversion. Only the Holy Spirit can do it. But it is important for us to appeal and to apply, for the apostles give us good illustration of that.

There is an old story which I’ve liked of a young man who was acting in a college play. Now it was a play that had as one of its climactic scenes a scene in which he was to, this young man, was to get down upon his knees in front of a lovely young lady and propose to her. But at the same time that he was on his knees proposing to the heroine, the rejected suitor was to open a window and to fire in with a rifle and shoot him, and he was to say in the key line, after he had been shot, “Good heavens I’m shot!” But it didn’t come out with any kind of realism.

I had incidentally, a call this past week from a place in Louisiana. A young man who used to go to the seminary and who is now a very successful businessman, and they formed a new church in a in a smaller city in Louisiana, and they were interested in having someone come and preach. And he said you know Dr. Johnson, we have had six men come from the seminary, and we have not been able to find one of them that is satisfactory. Now it may be that the reason for that is the audience; I don’t know. But I asked him I said, What’s the matter? He said well, to be perfectly frank with you, they cannot preach. He said, they stand up and they give us outlines, they pass out summaries of what they are going to say, but they do not really know how to preach. What they say does not really have any true realism about it.

You can tell that what they have done is take notes which they have derived from their professor, and now they are giving them to someone else and said, incidentally, Dr.

Johnson a few of those notes are some of your notes. [Laughter] He was very frank. But he did stress an important point and that is that in the preaching of the word of God it is important that we should have had an experience with the Lord that brings reality into our message. Well anyway, this young man was having difficulty saying, Good heavens, I’m shot, and the director of the play was very unhappy over it and just before opening night, he happened to go upstairs into his son’s room, and he was looking at the mess all around his son’s room and trying to straighten it out a little bit and he noticed that he had an air rifle over there, and a demonic thought came into his mind and he determined to carry it out.

And so that night at a crucial point when the young man was kneeling before the young lady and proposing to her, it was the director who opened and as the rejected suitor opened the window it was the director who fired in with the air rifle and hit him right in the pants. He jumped about six feet in the air and said, Good heavens I am shot! [Laughter] That’s what you call application [more laughter].

Now in the application of the word of God, it is important that we determine what is the spiritual significance of the account and lay some stress on it, and I do think in Barabbas’s story there is a remarkable illustration by fate and an eloquent testimony to Christ died for our sins.

Now of course we’re talking about the physical as an illustration of the spiritual, but think for a moment about the condition of Barabbas. He was a man whose condition was hopeless. The wages of sin is death, the Bible says, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. As far as Barabbas was concerned, he had no future at all. He was a murder, a seditionist. The Romans were going to put him to death by crucifixion. All of the hours before his release he had no doubt been thinking about what was going to be his future: nothing.

I am told incidentally that people who are to be executed cannot escape from thinking about what faces them. For example, people who are going to be hanged, it is

the testimony of those who have observed them that they cannot keep their hands away from their throats, and if a person is going to be gassed, electrocuted by gassing, they practice holding their breath; in fact practice holding their breath so long that their eyes almost pop out of their head, because they know that they have few breaths left.

Now Barabbas was thinking about the Roman judgment of crucifixion, and no doubt his thoughts were concentrated upon that. He was a man who was a sinner. He was guilty, and he stood condemned. A beautiful picture of course of all of us for that is what we are we are sinners. We are guilty before God, and we are therefore condemned.

But Barabbas had a release. Now we read in the New Testament in the epistle that Paul wrote to the Galatians, “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law being made a curse for us.” I’m sure that it did not take a great deal of thought for Barabbas to have a pretty good theory of the atonement. Charles, or a rather C. I. Scofield once said, “It’s easy to see Barabbas need not have been a theologian to form a good working theory of the atonement. He knew from experience what it was to be delivered and to have someone else take his place. For you see, ultimately, the Lord Jesus is the one who hangs upon that middle cross in the place of what Barabbas thought would be his cross.”

Now we might reconstruct this. I’m not sure exactly how this did happen. Where the Roman prison was with a view to the place where our Lord was crucified, well, we know from what we know now of that area that it might have been possible for one of the prisoners to look out across to the mountain, the Mt. Golgotha where the Romans did their work of execution. It might have been possible for him to look out and see preparations made for the three men who were going to suffer death, and it certainly would have been Barabbas’s thought that he would be one of those men.

And on the day of the crucifixion, as the jailers came to take the prisoners out, it might have been his experience that they came and he heard the sound of the tramping of the soldiers, he heard the clanging of the chains, he heard the lock inserted into the cell, and he heard it opened and one of the prisoners go out – and we of course do not

know all about this account – it’s possible that he might have seen one go out to the mount and there by the cross, and he might have seen the same thing happen for the second and still for the third, thinking that as he heard the sounds it was this time for him.

But instead as the door was swinging open, he heard a strange voice from the Roman soldiers, Barabbas you’re free, and then learn that it was by virtue of the multitude’s choice that he himself had obtained redemption from the death that he was to die. So he had a kind of theory of the atonement that put in the words that we might put it in would be a good statement of the atonement. The Messiah, Jesus who is called the Christ, died for me in my place. In other words the cross on which our Lord Jesus was hanging was the cross ultimately that Barabbas should have been hanging upon.

It’s even possible that he went out to that mountain and took a look, for surely he would have been greatly impressed by what happened to himself. And if he had gone out there with that multitude, and as he gazed upon our Lord Jesus, he could truly say in the physical sense that man died for me. That man is the one in whom as my substitute I have borne the penalty, because he bears the penalty that I should have borne.

Now one of the things that we stress in the atonement that our Lord Jesus has accomplished is that in our substitute in the Lord Jesus we have borne our penalty. That’s why we shall not have to bear the penalty again. He has borne the penalty for sinners, and in the case of those who have believed in him, they have a substitute in whom they have borne the penalty. That’s why we cannot bear the penalty. That’s why the divine law has no case whatsoever against us, because our penalty has been paid in our substitute. So Barabbas beautifully illustrates that. I don’t guess there’s anybody who could sing with more gusto, “He breaks the power of canceled sin; he sets the prisoner free.”

Now transferring that from the physical to the spiritual sense we have an illustration of the atoning work of our Lord Jesus. He was our penal substitute. And then if I may just emphasize one more thing. Barabbas, by virtue of the fact that he had been

freed by the authorities and by virtue of the fact that Jesus had died under the judgment of Rome, Barabbas is a man who now stands righteous before the Roman government. “O mysterious, wonderful exchange,” the ancient fathers used to say, “by which my unrighteousness becomes the unrighteousness of the Savior and the righteousness of the Savior becomes my righteousness. O mysterious, wonderful exchange.” He hath made him to be sin for us him who knew no sin that we might become the righteousness of God in him, and Barabbas, as he stood looking at the cross, stood looking as a free man – one who had been delivered by the authorities and now stood right before them.

Now the second thing I think that is so important is to notice the perennial madness of the multitude’s choice. Which of the two will ye that I release unto you? They said, Barabbas. And to make it even worse, in a moment after Pilate has sought to free himself from guilt, they’ve answered and said to Pilate, His blood be on us and on our children. Oh, the madness of the choice of the multitude that selects a Barabbas instead of a Jesus.

Now don’t be too critical. It’s that same kind of choice that we have made until the day that by the grace of God we came to Jesus Christ as our own Savior. When a man decides that he will put his business over the claims of Christ, or his family over the claims of Christ, or his pleasure over the claims of Christ, he is guilty of the same kind of decision that prefers a Barabbas to the true son of the Father the Lord Jesus Christ.

George Tenworth, in one of his terra-cottas has a beautiful master touch. He has pictured Pilate seated on his judgment throne. He has pictured two doors, and out of one has come Barabbas and the crowd is gathered around him, the Roman soldiers are extending hands of congratulation to him, rudely, coarsely congratulating him on the good fortune that has happened to him. And the crowd of his friends among the insurgents is patting him on the back and all of that is going on on one side of Mr. Tenworth’s work, but on the other side there is the Lord Jesus coming out in chains, being led out by a Roman soldier. But there is a woman with a little child in her arms

over on the side and she is looking on our Lord with the compassion and love of someone who has come into relationship with him. It’s a beautiful picture of the madness of the multitude’s choice, and I think also the madness of the majority’s choice because it is that way.

May I close by saying there is a need for a decision and a need always for a decision now. Now is the accepted time. Now is the day of salvation, the Apostle Paul has said. There stands before us the two men, Barabbas who is the son of the father, and Jesus who is the true Son of the Father, who is the Christ, but this Barabbas will never cleanse you. He will never heal you. He will never be able to give you forgiveness of sins. He will never enable you to stand justified before God. He will never be able to meet the trials of life by the comforting, strengthening power of the Holy Spirit.

On the other hand, there is the Lord Jesus Christ who has offered an atonement for sinners, and he is able to cleanse you. He is able to forgive you. He is able to give you justification of life, and he doesn’t stop there, but he goes on and gives us all that we need throughout our Christian lives and ultimately ushers us into his presence, perfects us and uses us for his glory throughout all eternity. The two men stand before you: Jesus Barabbas and Jesus who is called the Christ.

We don’t have to talk about the simplicity of the answer that we should give. What do you do when you are sick and someone comes in and says, I have the medicine that is designed specifically for the thing that you have. What do you do? Well, you trust the medicine. You take it. Or if there is a blind man unable to get around and someone comes and says, I have someone or something that will be a guide for you, what do you do as a blind person? Why you trust the guide. You see the answer is trust. We trust the Savior. I set before you Jesus Barabbas and Jesus who is the Christ. May God by his wonderful grace enable you to put your trust in him who is able to save to the uttermost the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you’re here this morning, and you’ve never believed, we encourage you to put your trust in him, to abandon all of these other trusts, abandon all of these other choices which were wrong and make the one decision that brings to life by the grace of God faith in Jesus Christ. It’s very simple. All one need do is, within his heart, acknowledge before God his own sinful condition, acknowledge that the Son of God has offered the atoning sacrifice and receive it the benefits of it as a free gift. It’s that simple. But it’s that significant. May God work in your heart to that end. Let’s stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we are so grateful to Thee for these wonderful accounts in the gospels which almost in each text challenge us to give ourselves over to a loving triune God. Deliver us, Lord, from the pulls and the stresses of the flesh, the world and the devil. Enable us by Thy grace through the ministry of the Holy Spirit to repent and to turn to our Lord Jesus to receive life.

O Father, if there is some one person here who has not yet come to Christ, O give them no rest nor peace until they do. May, O God, this day, the first day of the new year, be the day of new life for some. Thou knowest Lord, how often we have prayed. O God give us souls, give us souls for the glory of the Son of God, we do pray.

May grace mercy and peace be with us.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.