Barabbas or Jesus

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[0:00] Now let us turn our thoughts this morning for a short while to Matthew 27, and we look at verse 17.

Therefore when they were gathered together, Pilate said unto them, Whom will ye that I release unto you, Barabbas, or Jesus, which is called Christ?
Barabbas, or Jesus, which is called Christ? In our complex life, we are often enough faced with choices.
We choose the work that we want to do. That is, if we can do so. We choose the people who are going to be our companions.
In marriage, we make choice of the one with whom we are going to share our lives. And so it goes on. When it comes to electing councillors, we make the choice of who will represent us at local authority level.
[1:20] When it comes to an election for parliament, we make our choice with regard to who is to represent us on the national scene.

Now, these choices that we make involve us, whether we know it or not, in crisis.
Because the choice that we make will determine for us our happiness or otherwise in days to come.
And in the passage that is before us, we have recorded here a choice that had to be made by the Jewish people.
It was a simple enough choice. Here are these two men standing before these Jewish people.
[2:21] One would have thought that the choice would have been obvious. But you see, here was a moment of crisis. Indeed, you might say that this was the greatest crisis that faced these people.

On the one hand, Barabbas, and all that Barabbas stands for. And on the other hand, Christ, and all that Christ stands for.
But before we dismiss this piece of history and say, well, it has nothing to do with us because it happened so long ago, now almost 2,000 years ago.
What has it to do with us? Well, it has everything to do with us because, you see, this is the choice that is still before us. This is the choice that still has to be made.
And this is the choice that you have to make. Barabbas or Jesus?
[3:25] A simple enough choice, you might say. But oh, what a crisis you are in. Christ Jesus had been arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane.

He had been brought before Annas, the high priest, and then on to Caiaphas, the high priest. You might say, why were there two high priests? Because the Jews were only allowed to have one high priest.
Well, Annas, you see, had had to resign by the Roman authorities. For whatever reason, we don't know.
He had to resign. And so his son-in-law, Caiaphas, had been appointed by the Roman authorities in his place. But in the eyes of the Jews, Annas, the older man, was still the high priest.
And that is why you find Jesus, first of all, being brought to Annas. And then in order for the sentence to be confirmed, he is passed on to Caiaphas.
[4:35] When he was ultimately brought before Caiaphas, the official sentence was passed. What was the indictment? It was precisely this, that Jesus had been guilty of blasphemy.

He had made himself God's son. He had made himself equal with God. And that, in the eyes of the Jew, was one of the most offensive things that you could be guilty of.
And it merited the death penalty. So they passed the death sentence on Jesus. But they couldn't carry out the death sentence.

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Because they were under the domination of Rome. And they had to get legal sanction from Rome in order to carry out the death sentence.
And that is why they brought Jesus from Caiaphas to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor. The representative of Roman law.
[5:43] But you see what they did. They didn't accuse Jesus of the charge that they had charged him with. That was blasphemy.

Because they knew that that wouldn't be accepted in a Roman court of law. So they changed the indictment. And they said, you know, this man Jesus, he's guilty of one of the vilest crimes against the Romans.
Because he is calling himself a king in opposition to Caesar. And now, of course, Pontius Pilate had to take cognizance of that.
If a man was guilty of treason. If a man was guilty of fomenting sedition. By calling himself a king. Then that was something that Roman law could not pass over.
And it was a crime that was guilty of the death sentence. And so, Jesus was tried by Pontius Pilate.
[6:58] Pilate found nothing worthy of death in him. Pilate's wife sent to him and said to Pilate, have thou nothing to do with that just man? You would have thought that Pilate would have released Jesus.

But no, he wanted to be friends with the Jews. You know, you get lots of people in the world today and they sit on the fence. They're neither the one thing nor the other. It's like the church of Laodicea, isn't it?
Of which Jesus said, I wish you were either cold or hot. If you were just the one thing or the other. And Pilate was like that.
A ditherer. You couldn't depend on him. You couldn't rely on him. He was afraid, you see, to take sides with Christ.
Poor Pilate. But let's consider this incident. You see, it was a choice between the divine and the human.
[8:12] That's what it boiled down to. It was a choice that these Jewish people had to make between what was divine and what was human. Before these Jewish people, there were these two men.

One unique in his person, the other debased in his character. Who will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas or Jesus? Barabbas the debased man. Jesus. The divine man.
In order to determine who Jesus, which is called Christ, is. We've got to examine his life and work. And that life and work of our Lord is unfolded for us in the gospel. In the gospel records. Who was Jesus? Well, he was the virgin born son of Mary.
[9:13] No human being was ever born into the world as Jesus was born.

And no human being ever will be born in the same fashion. You see, Mary had been chosen from among women to bear the humanity of our Lord.
And although he called himself the son of man, yet as it has been put, he was no man's son. Remember that.
It's William Childs Robinson who puts it like that. The Canadian scholar. The son of man was no man's son.
Mary had been informed by the angel, the Holy Ghost shall come upon thee.
[10:19] And the power of the highest shall overshadow thee. Therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the son of God.

God, you're going to give birth to a son. Not produced by man, but produced by the Holy Ghost in your womb.
And so when Jesus, the eternal son of God, made his advent into our world, he did so through the womb of this virgin.
And he took from her our humanity, bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh. He was the son of God.
Who stooped to become the son of man. By coming in our own nature through the womb of this woman. He was the son of God. He was the son of God. But not born of man.
[11:28] Born of the Holy Ghost. And the whole life of Jesus was a testimony to the divine character of his being. You see, when we examine the life of Christ, it's a life that testifies to his divinity.

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We've often said this, we say it again. There was his blameless life. Our Lord was able to say to these Jews, which of you convinces me of sin?
And nowhere, and at no point can you raise the finger and say of Jesus, well, he made a mistake here, or he made a mistake there, or he erred in life here or there.
You see, we're not long in each other's company before we find out each other's weaknesses. Isn't that true? You wouldn't be very long in my company before you found out my faults. And I wouldn't be very long in your company before I would begin to find out your faults.
[12:40] But in the company of Christ, you won't find any fault. He's faultless. There's no sinful frailty about Jesus.

There's no inconsistency about Jesus. He was perfect. And as perfect, he was no ordinary man. But not only is it his perfect life that you and I see, which testifies to us the divine character of our Lord.
His teaching. He spake as it was confessed of him, as never man spake. And those who listened to our Lord, marveled at the gracious words that came from his lips.
And they wondered, how was it possible? Wasn't he the carpenter's son? He had never gone to the schools of learning. And yet he could speak so profoundly.
[13:50] No man has ever spoken about God as this man Jesus. You can go to all the philosophers of the world.

Or listen to all the religious geniuses of the world. And they can't speak to you about God as Jesus could speak about God. Not only does our Lord speak about God, but doesn't he speak about man? He gives us that psychological insight into human nature that no other psychologist can give. He speaks about heaven. He speaks about heaven.
He speaks about hell. And shows the reality of these places. And when you and I consider the teaching of Christ, it testifies, doesn't it, to his divine character and nature.
That this is no ordinary man. Or take, for instance, his omnipotence. The power that he displayed. The miracles he performed.
[15:11] His supernatural control over natural laws. How he heals the sick. How he raises the dead. Is there any man that has ever been able to do what Jesus did?

Control the waves of the sea? Suspend the law of gravity and walk across the waves of the sea? Any man ever raised back to health and strength a leper?
Or the man suffering from paralysis? Or the woman with the disease? The cancerous disease that was destroying her?
He healed them all. He gave sight to the blind. He raised the dead. Jesus.
Jesus. Which is called Christ. He was none other than God's son in the flesh. Well here he is. Christ.
[16:22] And in contrast with Christ, here is Barabbas. Oh, the pathetic Barabbas. Barabbas. And what is Barabbas?

Barabbas, you see, is essentially human. And he is a creature of our space-time world. And there he stands.
This man Barabbas. A man who has shown himself to the world at large. In all his sinfulness and in all his shamelessness.
Here he is, Barabbas, a prisoner of justice. Why? Because he has committed murder and robbery. And wouldn't you have thought that the choice would have been obvious?
Christ on the one hand, Barabbas on the other. And yet, it's staggering.
[17:30] They chose Barabbas. They chose Barabbas. It's staggering.

But before we think too harshly of these Jews, what of us? They rejected, you see, the claims of Christ.
But are we not guilty of that? If we are without Christ here today? The question put by Jesus long ago is the question that is put to us.
What think ye of Christ? Is Christ to us just a man among men?
Who somehow became the Son of God? Or is Christ Jesus to us the Son of God? Who became a man?
[18:37] In order to save us. And what is to be your choice or mine? Is it the divine?

Represented by Christ? Or is it the human? Represented by Barabbas? But the choice here was not just a choice between the divine and the human.

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It was a choice between the righteousness of God and the depravity of man. If Jesus is the Son of God, which he claimed to be, and which is claimed for him by the apostles, and which has been substantiated, then why?
We ask this, why did Jesus come into our world? What was this extraordinary mission that Jesus came to perform?
Why should the Son of God, living in the eternity of God there with his Father, why should he leave that? And humble himself, and come through the womb of the Virgin into our world, in order to suffer and in order to die.
[20:03] Why did he do that? Death is an appalling thing, isn't it? And none of us want to die.

We're terrified of death. And if it was left to you as to whether you would live or die, what would you choose?
Wouldn't you choose to live? If you're well and strong, wouldn't you choose to live? And yet here is our Lord, and he chose to die.
Why? There must be a reason for it. What was this mission of his that he accomplished? Well, his name, you see, suggests his mission.
This was the name that was to be given to our Lord. Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins.
[21:13] So his mission, you see, was a mission of salvation. He came to make an atonement for the sins of his people. And that could only be by means of death.

You recall how throughout his ministry, our Lord spoke about death. And he said this, a corn of wheat has to fall into the ground and it has to die.
But in the process of dying, it brings forth life. It yields fruit.
And this was what was to happen in his case. In the Old Testament dispensation, the function of the priest was to act as a mediator and offer a sacrifice to God for the sins of God's people.
It was just a temporary arrangement pointing forward to things that were to come. The sacrifices offered by the priest were totally inadequate.
[22:22] But you see, the life of the sacrifice was given for the life of the sinner. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, life for life.

And when Jesus came into our world, it was in the capacity of God's high priest. And also in the capacity of the offering for sin.
And by his death, he offered up the atoning offering for the sins of his people. He took the place of the guilty.
He died in their room and in their stead. It was an act of surpassing love. Greater love hath no man than this, than that a man laid down his life for his friends.
And let us remember that his life was a life of obedience from the cradle to the grave. He fulfilled the law of God for others.
[23:33] Christ Jesus is the Savior. But what about Barabbas? You see, Christ Jesus as the Savior shows his love.

It's self-giving, self-offering. But look at Barabbas. And what is he?
Supremely a self-centered and self-motivated man. And Barabbas is not interested in anyone else but in himself.
And all Barabbas' life had been lived in order to satisfy his passing whims. And if anything got in his way as far as satisfying his whims were concerned, then that obstruction was dealt with ruthlessly.
if Barabbas wanted something, if he wanted to satisfy the cravings of his heart, then whatever got in his way was thrust aside.
[24:58] Well, when the choice was presented of Christ, on the one hand, the Savior, and Barabbas on the other, it was in reality, wasn't it, a choice between God's righteousness and man's sinfulness.

sinfulness. It boiled down, you see, to a choice between these two things, the righteousness of God or the sinfulness of man.
Are we like the Jews whom Paul accused of going about to establish their own righteousness rather than submitting to the righteousness of God?
In other words, we have to ask ourselves today, do we prefer the sinfulness of human depravity to the holiness and purity of the Son of God?

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That was the choice that faced the Jews. Whom do you want? Christ and his righteousness or Barabbas and his wickedness.
[26:25] Is that the choice that faces you today? No wonder we said that it was a crisis and it still is a crisis if we haven't made up our minds.

And lastly, the choice was between the blessedness of Christ or the sinfulness of Barabbas. What did Jesus, which is called Christ, what did he have to offer men?
Well, we have already said that his mission was to make propitiation for the sins of men and women and thereby reconcile them to God. But the Lord Jesus, he offers us much more than that.
Oh, that's a great thing to be reconciled to God. That's a great thing to have your sins forgiven. That's tremendous. tremendous. It's tremendous to know that every single sin that you've committed can be removed by Christ.
And it's a tremendous thing to know that you can be reconciled to this holy God. But I say, Jesus is offering to you much more than that.
[27:54] You see, he had come to inaugurate the kingdom of God and to proclaim the blessings of that kingdom. And what are the blessings of the kingdom of God? Well, first of all, there is the love of God.

And who can comprehend the love of God? And what Jesus is offering to you is not only a reconciliation with God, but he is offering to you and to me God's love in its totality.
You know the song that Beverly Shea used to sing at the Billy Graham campaigns. It was a beautiful song.
It went like this. Could we with ink the ocean fill and where the sky of parchment made and every stock on earth a quill and every man ascribe by trade?
To write the love of God above would drain the oceans dry. Nor could the scroll contain the whole.
[29:16] Ah, that is the love of God. To write it would empty the oceans of the world if these oceans were made up of ink. to write the love of God you would need all the heavens made of parchment.

And that is what Christ is offering to you and to me God's love in its totality. But more isn't he offering us joy?
I am come that your joy might be full. You know we ought to be joyful Christians and I speak to my fellow Christian believers here sometimes we've given a wrong impression to the world.
We've given the impression to the world that the Christian life must be pretty dead and dull unbelievably dull. Oh it's not dull nor is it dead anything but the joy that you get from Christ it's unspeakable.
And not only does he offer you joy but he offers you life and peace. peace. I am come that in me you might have life and life more abundant.
[30:45] Peace I give unto you not as the world giveth give I unto you. So then what was Christ there to offer to these Jewish people as they stood before him and as they had to make up their minds about him?

Christ was there to offer them not only reconciliation to God but he was there to offer them God's love there to give them joy and peace and life and Christ still offers the same and I speak to the younger folks in this congregation here this morning and I say this to you you know you haven't yet begun to live if you haven't become a Christian.
I know what the devil is saying to you and I know what the world around you is saying to you it's saying to you if you become a Christian you're going to lose all sense of joy and peace and life will become terribly miserable for you.
There was never a greater lie spread about than that lie. Christ doesn't spoil your life Christ adds a new dimension to your life what does Barabbas offer?
it tells us that he was a notable prisoner and Mark tells us why he was a prisoner of justice if you read the gospel of Mark it says Barabbas lay bound with them that had made insurrection with him who had committed murder in the insurrection so that in that uprising Barabbas had violently destroyed life and John in his gospel he says Barabbas was a robber so then Barabbas symbolized hatred Barabbas symbolized violence Barabbas Barabbas symbolized cruelty
[33:18] Barabbas symbolized death and the choice that these Jewish people had to make on that memorable day in their lives was this Christ who could give them blessing unbelievable blessing or Barabbas who would bring back into their society violence hatred cruelty death do you think that

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once Barabbas was released that he would be a good man I'm sure that once Barabbas was released there would be many a Jew who would go to bed that night in terror would Barabbas strike again would Barabbas destroy someone else again and yet they chose

Barabbas is not is that not typical of the choice of man he prefers the way of sin to the way of God and the choice is placed before so many today in our churches and so many in our own free churches and still they'll go away preferring their Barabbas to Christ long ago people debated who Jesus was some said that he was John the Baptist back from the dead others said that he was Elijah one of the old prophets risen again others said that he was Jeremiah but Jesus asked his disciples whom say ye that
I am never mind said Jesus what other people say about me but what is your attitude to me what do you believe about me what is your response to me going to be Peter answered thou art the Christ the son of the living God do you know Christ the son of the living God happy you if you do what a happy person you are to know Christ or is it the case that you said I think I prefer Barabbas and you allow Barabbas to control the situation what have you got to look forward to if it's
Barabbas we were talking earlier to the young folks about the tiger cub it's so nice and cuddly isn't it when you see it small and fluffy but when it turns into the monster and that's how it is with sin don't choose it choose Christ let us pray oh Lord we pray thee that we might indeed be among those who make choice of Christ Christ and his righteousness Christ and the blessings that he has to offer and to give may our choice be him and not the sinful choice symbolized by
Barabbas be with us take us to our homes and safety bless the service that follows this one be gracious to thy people and thy servant and grant thy blessing upon us as we gather here in the evening for Jesus sake Amen I

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