



**CAPITOL
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Reaching Capitol Communities for Christ

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Mark 15:1-15

I Am Barabbas and So Can You

There once was a boy who struggled with math and so parents enrolled him in a Catholic school. After the first day of school, the boy returned home and immediately went to his room to study. He continued this routine each night for nine weeks when he returned home with an “A” in math on his report card. His mother was perplexed. Why the sudden change? “Is it the nuns?” she asked. “No,” he responded. “Was it the school, the principal, the administration, the books?” “No,” he answered again. “Then what was it?” “On my first day of school,” he explained, “I walked into my math class and saw a man hanging on a plus sign. At that moment I knew these people took math seriously!”

Clearly that the little boy misunderstood why there was a man on a “plus sign,” but, sadly, most of us don’t quite understand the meaning of the cross either.

The passage opens with **The Characters** (vs. 1-8). The ecclesiastical trial of Jesus is now over and thus they hand Jesus over to the civil authorities. We are then introduced to Pontius Pilate (vs. 1b). Governors like Pilate had one primary job: keep the peace. The Roman system didn’t want to keep putting down riots and outbreaks. Judea was full of both. Most agreed, Judea was the worst place to serve as governor.

Pilate loved annoying the Jews repeatedly seeking to convert Judea to the religion of Rome. For example, Pilate once set up imperial standards with the image of Caesar in Jerusalem. A blasphemous act to the Jews. A mob surrounded Pilate’s house in Caesarea for five days. Despite threats to have them slayed, they remained fearless and so, in the end, Pilate relented.

Later, Pilate placed golden shields on Herod’s Palace in Jerusalem which included the inscription “son of divine Augustus” in reference to Tiberius. Pilate knew this would offend the people as even the sons of Herod the Great petitioned to remove them. When he refused, they complained to Caesar Tiberius who reprimanded Pilate.

Another incident involved Pilate using the temple treasury to pay for a new aqueduct to Jerusalem. The construction of this aqueduct was a good thing, but it was financed by blasphemous means. Another mob formed wherein the governor ordered his troops to beat the mob. Some suspect this event happened months prior to Jesus arriving bound and delivered by the Jewish authorities.

The Jewish authorities brought Jesus to Pilate because they could not legally execute him. Roman law allowed the Jews to follow their religion generally, but capital crimes were limited to Roman authority. Pilate wanted to know the answer to only one question, “are you the king of the Jews?”

(vs. 2). Those who claim royalty stir trouble and violence. If Jesus thought he was a king or, even worse, the Messiah, Pilate had an obligation to remove the threat.

We are then introduced to another character named Barabbas (vs. 6-8). Combined, the Gospels suggest that Barabbas was a rebel who led an insurrection culminating in murder. What likely happened was that Barabbas, perhaps the leader of the group, tried to overthrow Roman rule in Judea. This was not uncommon. Inspired by the Maccabees, many sought to overthrow Rome by violent means.

Clearly not convinced Jesus was a threat, Pilate tried to manipulate the ecclesiastical authorities and the mob assembled outside by letting them choose the worse criminal for the innocent. To his shock, the crowd chooses to liberate the violent insurrectionist over the carpenter's son. In a cowardly act, Pilate gave in to the mob and allowed the injustice to continue (vs. 12-15).

The scene concludes with **The Cross** (vs. 15). It is worth highlighting who Jesus was crucified next to. No doubt, the two men crucified with Jesus at Golgotha were part of the Barabbas's insurrection. It could be said that he was the chief of criminals. If this is true, then what we have here is Jesus taking the place of a guilty man.

That is the gospel!

The gospel, in essence, is simply Jesus paying a price he did not owe because we owe a price we cannot pay. At Calvary, Jesus died upon a cross reserved for Barabbas. He does the same for us today. Christ paid the price of our sin while we go free. The reason that Jesus had to die on the cross was to bear the burden and judgment of our sin so that we wouldn't have to. God couldn't overlook sin because then He would cease to be God. Therefore, judgment must be laid on the guilty but Jesus intervened taking the burden and judgment of our sin on himself.

The story goes that a little boy had a sister who desperately needed a blood transfusion. The doctor explained that she had the same disease the boy had recovered from two years earlier. Her only chance for recovery was a transfusion from someone who had previously conquered the disease. Since the two children had the same rare blood type, the boy was the ideal donor. "Would you give your blood to your sister?" the doctor asked. The boy hesitated. His lower lip trembled as he thought about the question. He eventually agreed saying, "Sure, for my sister." Soon the two children were wheeled into the hospital room. As the nurse inserted the needle into his arm the boy watched the blood flow through the tube. With the ordeal almost over, his voice, slightly shaky, broke the silence. "Doctor, when do I die?" Only then did the doctor realize why Johnny had hesitated. He thought giving his blood to his sister meant giving up his life. Fortunately, the brother didn't have to die to save his sister. Each of us, however, has a condition more serious than that little girl, and it required Jesus to give not just his blood but his life.