

Mark 15:1-15
November 14, 2010
Lynchburg, Virginia

EXHORDIUM

Mark gives us many contrasts. He continues that in chapter 15. We have the contrast of the Jesus with Pilate, but also with Jesus and Barabbas.

Jesus makes a good confession to Pilate but Pilate either does not believe Jesus or fails to act upon his belief. As a result, he crucifies our Lord through the fear of man. Incidentally, Pilate refuses great counsel. His wife tells him to have nothing to do with Jesus because she had suffered in a dream because of Him. But Pilate does not take her counsel. Thus, he is remembered as a scoundrel through all eternity.

Barabbas and Jesus are set at contrast. Jesus does good deeds and is condemned to death. Barabbas does wicked deeds and is set free. Jesus is the Son of who his Father is well pleased. Barabbas, the name means son of the father, is a foolish son who displeases the father.

Jesus represents Israel, the restoration of the Kingdom, the victory over the enemies of God and the fulfillment of all of the promises of the Messiah. Israel's long awaited king has come and God's people merely need to recognize and submit to Him to see the blessings of God flow into their land. Barabbas, sought to be a savior, using the means of insurrection, war and murder. But he failed miserably and was utterly defeated by his enemies.

Jesus is crucified on the cross, the seeming victory of His enemies, but the Scriptures tell us that on the cross, Jesus made a spectacle of the enemies, triumphing over them through His death on the cross.

Barabbas is such a small threat to victory, that even his enemies set him free.

EXEGESIS

15 And straightway in the morning the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council, and bound Jesus, and carried him away, and delivered him to Pilate. 2 And

Pilate asked him, Art thou the King of the Jews? And he answering said unto him, Thou sayest it.

Jesus again owns the title of King of the Jews. The chief priests, elders and scribes are not angry at Jesus simply because they think He is a false Messiah. We should keep this in mind. Pilate himself, knows that they delivered Him to them because of envy.

What were they envious of? They were envious of His success with the common people. He taught with authority and not as one of the scribes. So, the leaders of Israel wanted Jesus dead not simply because they thought Him a false Messiah but because there was some reason to believe that He was a true Messiah. They did not want rivals.

They deliver Him to Pilate. Pilate is the Roman Governor and they needed his help if they were going to kill Jesus without a lot of trouble. But they are also bargaining here. Later on the elders lead expeditions to harass and persecute the brothers. They stone Stephen to death, laying their garments down at the feet of a young man named Saul. So, they could have killed Jesus. But they wanted to make a point of turning Jesus over and having Him publicly humiliated. This was particularly abominable on the part of the leaders of Israel. Jesus has done nothing to accuse Him to Pilate. Pilate wonders if Jesus is, indeed, a king. That would concern him. But Pilate seems to think that Jesus is not a threat. How wrong he was.

3 And the chief priests accused him of many things: but he answered nothing. 4 And Pilate asked him again, saying, Answerest thou nothing? behold how many things they witness against thee. 5 But Jesus yet answered nothing; so that Pilate marvelled.

What occurs here is interesting. Jesus answers Pilate, saying that He is indeed a King. That is the one charge that was likely to get Him in trouble with Pilate. But as to the other charges laid against Him by the Jews, He says nothing. Of those charges, Jesus could have given a defense, called witnesses to testify on His behalf and maybe even been set free after proving His innocence.

But He is not interested in going free. His mind is now set towards the cross. Pilate marveled, not only that Jesus said nothing but the way that Jesus said nothing. Jesus has stated that His kingdom is not of this world. If

it were, His servants would be fighting. He was saying that He was capable of carrying on an armed rebellion but that is not His purpose.

Pilate turns out to be a coward but he was a good judge of character. He marveled at Jesus and easily understood the character of those who were accusing Jesus. So, being a good judge of character does not necessarily make you a man of good character.

6 Now at that feast he released unto them one prisoner, whomsoever they desired. 7 And there was one named Barabbas, which lay bound with them that had made insurrection with him, who had committed murder in the insurrection. 8 And the multitude crying aloud began to desire him to do as he had ever done unto them.

Pilate attempts to use a custom of the Romans releasing a prisoner to set Jesus free. No doubt, the Romans had arrested some Jews who did not necessarily deserve it. Jesus is one of those people. No doubt there were others. This was an opportunity for the Romans to earn some good favor among their subjects to promote peace. The Jews could have asked for one of these good men to be released. As it is, they ask for Barabbas.

We tend to think of Barabbas as a wicked man. He had committed murder in the insurrection. But who had he killed? And which insurrection was it? Again, we do not know. But Barabbas was a crowd favorite. His role in the insurrection was not looked down upon but perhaps admired. His name was at least popular enough to get the crowd to agitate for him instead of for Jesus.

It is interesting that the Jews accuse Jesus of saying that He wanted to be a King. They insist that they have no king but Ceasar. But Barabbas was an insurrectionist, and was leading revolt, either against the Roman authority, or against one of the lesser Jewish authorities, that were also subject to the Romans. Either way, he is guilty of the very thing they accuse Jesus of.

Barabbas, son of the father. Interesting name. Jesus is the premier son of the Father. There is some extra-biblical evidence that Barabbas was named Jesus Barabbas. He was the savior, the son of the father. Jesus Christ, was also the Savior, the Son of the Father.

Pilate offers the Jews Jesus Christ but they choose another savior, Barabbas. Barabbas represents Israel better than Jesus Christ. He is a patriotic and religious zealot. He despises the authority of Rome over Israel. He tried to do something about it and the Israelites relate to him. Perhaps that is the occasion that chief priests use to rile up the people. See, Jesus Christ has done nothing to overthrow the Romans, but Jesus Barabbas, he has risked his life and even killed in the name of Yahweh.

All through the book of Mark, Jesus is teaching His disciples about another way, the only way. They are not to rule by force but by the power of the gospel of the Lordship of Jesus Christ. This is not good enough for them. But they will soon see that Jesus's way of insurrection works.

Barabbas deserved to die. He was a malefactor. But Jesus took his place. Barabbas was a good representative of a bad Israel. Jesus represented Israel, taking upon Himself the punishment that was due them. But their delivering up of the Savior to the Jews is their downfall. They deliver up the innocent and free the guilty. In doing so, their nation, represented well in Jesus is taking from them, and a desolation is given to them, represented by the malefactor Barabbas.

9 But Pilate answered them, saying, Will ye that I release unto you the King of the Jews? 10 For he knew that the chief priests had delivered him for envy. 11 But the chief priests moved the people, that he should rather release Barabbas unto them. 2 And Pilate answered and said again unto them, What will ye then that I shall do unto him whom ye call the King of the Jews? 13 And they cried out again, Crucify him. 14 Then Pilate said unto them, Why, what evil hath he done? And they cried out the more exceedingly, Crucify him.

The chief priests, the scribes and the elders are the more guilty party here. They know that Jesus is innocent and yet they seek His death. Pilate is working against them and since the crowd is agitated, he is working against the volatile mob. We can see that he is less to blame than the Jews but he is most surely to blame. It is a gross wickedness to condemn a man to death that one knows is innocent. Pilate fears the ability of the priests to cause trouble for him.

He made a promise to set one man free and he desired that man to be Jesus. But his promise to set one man free did not mean that he was required to condemn Jesus. But we remember the deeds of Pontias Pilate weekly, 'he suffered under Pontias Pilate.

15 And so Pilate, willing to content the people, released Barabbas unto them, and delivered Jesus, when he had scourged him, to be crucified.

Pilate did the will of God. He condemned Christ and let the wicked one go free. He did it out of the fear of the people but God meant it out of His great grace and love for His children.

EXHORTATION

There are still more comparisons and contrasts between Jesus Christ and Jesus Barabbas.

Jesus was the perfect Israel, the perfect example for us. We are to become more like Him as we move from grace to grace. But we must remember that it is from grace to grace. What does that mean? If we are moving from grace to grace, we must receiving the forgiveness of God. We know that He has covered all of our past sins, but He also covers our current and future sins. They are all covered in the blood of Christ. But in order for us to continue in His grace and mercy, we must continue to walk in it, confessing sins, turning away from rebellion, embracing the One true King Jesus.

Barabbas was also a representative of Israel. He represented Israel, in fact and indeed. He was worthy of death. He was committed acts of rebellion and sin, insurrection and murder. He did not trust in the abundant grace and power of the Lord but took vengeance in his own hands. His high ideals were not connected to true faith and practice. Barabbas was a wicked man. He was caught, tried, condemned. This was all very just and Barabbas deserved to die, like all malefactors in the Roman empire, death by crucifixion.

The people, an unruly mob agitated by wicked priests, got to choose their savior, Jesus Barabbas or Jesus Christ. They chose Barabbas and refused the Christ.

Like many of these stories, it is helpful for us to realize who we are in the story. We love Jesus Christ and we hate the deeds of Herod, Pilate, the priests and even the failures of Jesus's own disciples. But who do we identify with in this section?

Barabbas is Israel. Barabbas has failed. He is a malefactor. Barabbas deserves death. But Barabbas has taken the freedom of an innocent man who paid his debt. Barabbas goes free and in his stead the Lord Jesus defeats the enemies of Barabbas, the enemies of Israel and of His and our enemies. These seems all backwards but it is the way that it must be. It was, indeed, expedient that One man should die for the people. Barabbas was a wicked man and could not do so but Jesus was a righteous man, a perfect Lamb and thus a perfect sacrifice to make divine justice.

Because I love Jesus and desire His victorious work of grace to apply to me, I see who I identify with in the story. I am Barabbas.