

## **Barabbas: What His Release Teaches Me About the Savior**

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Barabbas- a criminal; a man guilty of serious wrongdoing, even murder (see Luke 23:19), he was a prisoner who deserved punishment under the law. Jesus, on the other hand, had committed no sin. In a remarkable turn of events, the crowd chose to release Barabbas and to condemn Jesus to death (see Matthew 27:21–26). At first glance, Barabbas seems completely disconnected from our lives, but spiritually speaking, we are all like Barabbas.

### **Why Is Barabbas Included in the Easter Story?**

It's natural to feel bewildered that Barabbas appears in the sacred narrative. Why would God allow a guilty man to be freed instead of His perfect Son? But then the truth settles in: Barabbas is each of us. We may not be criminals, but we have all sinned and fallen short (Romans 3:23). We are freed because Christ was not freed. The story of Barabbas is not a detour in the Easter message; it is a mirror, so we can see ourselves in the Savior's atoning sacrifice.

### **Why Did the People Choose Barabbas over Jesus?**

The decision to release Barabbas instead of Jesus may initially seem unthinkable. But many of the people in Jerusalem may have misunderstood Messiah. In Luke 23:19, we learn that Barabbas had taken part in an insurrection, likely against Roman rule. In contrast, Jesus had taught, "Love your enemies" and "Turn the other cheek." They saw Jesus stand silent before Pilate (see Matthew 27:12–14), which may have made him appear weak or perhaps guilty. Some in the crowd may have seen Barabbas as a symbol of resistance who could offer immediate political freedom. Religious leaders, who felt threatened by Jesus's teachings and authority, actively stirred public opinion against Him. Their influence over the crowd led to the people's devastating choice (Matthew 27:20).

## **Who Do We Look to for Deliverance?**

We might think we would have made a different choice than the crowd since in hindsight the true Deliverer is obvious. It may surprise us that we face a similar choice as the crowd in our own lives. For example, when we feel disappointed in how the Lord is answering our prayers, do we begin to doubt His power or goodness? Are we tempted to think the world's teachings will bring more immediate deliverance than the Lord's? When popular voices speak out against Christ, His Church, or His prophets, do we let them persuade us? While these moments may not be as dramatic as the scene before Pilate, we too choose to whom we will look for deliverance.

## **He Took Our Place**

Barabbas didn't earn his release. It was a gift of mercy, just as the Atonement of Jesus Christ is a gift offered freely to each of us. Like Barabbas, we are unable to free ourselves from the spiritual consequences of our choices. Jesus willingly paid the price for our sins. "He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief ... He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:3, 5).

As we prepare for Easter this year, we could consider adding to our our Easter symbols, a set of handcuffs or simple chains to represent the imprisoned Barabbas who gained his freedom while Jesus was left bound. The story of Barabbas is not just about a guilty man who escaped punishment, it's about a loving Savior who took on the punishment of us all.