

# *Truth for Today*

## **The Bible Explained**

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## **Easter Message Jesus or Barabbas**

*[Please note: sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.  
English Standard Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

### **Introduction**

When we think of Easter it is often for children with chocolate Easter eggs which have no connection to the Biblical account of what happened on that very first Easter. Some say that the egg is a symbol of new life and that is what Jesus came to give through His death and resurrection. I am not sure that children, or even adults, will think about that as they consume the chocolate!

Many years ago, on 'Good Friday', my wife and I were having a walk and coming off Lindisfarne Island, which is just off the Northumberland coast, we came across a group of people going towards the island. Some were carrying large crosses. Instead of using the causeway they headed out over the sands using the pilgrims' route. We presumed that they would head for the ruined Priory to hold a service in the grounds. At least this was a little closer to the events of Easter than the chocolate.

Today we will consider two characters, Jesus, the Son of God, and Barabbas. Barabbas is mentioned briefly at the end of the four Gospels. In all the Gospels he is described in some way as a thoroughly bad person and his future looked bleak. As to the Lord Jesus the Gospels have shown Him as someone who cared for others, also He was on a mission to fulfil what God His Father had given Him to do.

The Scriptures quoted during this talk will be from the English Standard Version unless otherwise stated.

### **The last journey of Jesus to Jerusalem**

Let us read from Luke 9:51-56,

“And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem, and sent messengers before his face: and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him. And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem. And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did? But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. And they went to another village” (Luke 9:51-56 AKJV).

Although the Lord Jesus had come into the world to undertake the sacrificial work at Calvary and all His life here was leading up to that event, it is in the above Scripture that the Lord sets His face for the final journey to Jerusalem where He would be betrayed, tried as a criminal, and crucified. Now had come the point where He sets His face towards Jerusalem. He was looking for a lodging place on that journey but Samaritans in the first village would not receive Him. They obviously perceived that the Lord was not going to stay there more than overnight. James and John showed an Old Testament attitude, wanting the Lord to call down fire from heaven. They may have had a right motive because Jesus was being slighted but they were not showing grace, a New Testament quality. The Lord's rebuke was to make them aware that He was here to save lives not to destroy. So they moved on to another village.

It is well to recognise that the Lord had still much to do between His rejection by the Samaritans and arriving in Jerusalem, but He was leaving behind His sphere of service both in Galilee and Samaria to concentrate upon Judea and Jerusalem.

### **The King arrives in Jerusalem**

“Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, “Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, ‘The Lord needs them,’ and he will send them at once.” This took place to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet, saying, “Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.’” The disciples did as Jesus had directed them. They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, “Who is this?” And the crowds said, “This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee”” (Matthew 21:1-11).

These few verses commence with the wonderful event of Jesus directing two disciples to go into a village and bring a donkey and its foal. If anyone queries what you are doing then just say, “The Lord needs them.” Amazingly there was no further objection. The Lord demonstrated very clearly that He is God by knowing that the donkeys were there, and the delegated authority to the two disciples was sufficient to allow the animals to be taken. Matthew does not record anyone questioning the two disciples but in Mark and Luke's accounts there are those who question the disciples as to what they were doing.

In Psalm 50 vv.10-11 remind us that the whole of creation belongs to the Lord, verse 10 in particular,

“For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the hills, and all that moves in the field is mine.”

So the Lord's knowledge as to the whereabouts of the donkey and colt is not surprising.

The next thing to notice is that riding into Jerusalem on these animals had been foretold in Zechariah chapter 9:9.

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

This was a clear testimony to the nation that their King was coming to them. The disciples put their cloaks on the animals and the crowd that was with them placed their cloaks on the ground along with tree branches. There was rejoicing with the crowd shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” As this great procession entered the city of Jerusalem the city folk ask the question, “Who is this?” The crowds respond with, “This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee.” What was missing was the recognition that Jesus was more than a prophet, He was their Messiah and King.

### **The final week**

The Lord was extremely busy in this last week before His crucifixion. Let us consider a few things.

### **Jesus anointed at Bethany**

“Now when Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, a woman came up to him with an alabaster flask of expensive ointment, and she poured it on his head as he reclined at table. And when the disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, “Why this waste? For this could have been sold for a large sum and given to the poor.” But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, “Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a beautiful thing to me. For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. In pouring this ointment on my body, she has done it to prepare me for burial. Truly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her”” (Matthew 26:6-13).

We are at the end of the week when Jesus and His disciples are in the house of Simon the leper at Bethany. Houses in those days seemed to have a very relaxed idea about security as anyone seemed to be able to enter. This woman comes in with expensive ointment and poured it upon the head of Jesus. This immediately causes the disciples to exclaim, “What a waste!” Their motives were good about helping the poor. But the Lord silences their disapproval, “Do not trouble the woman because she has done a beautiful thing to me.” Is it not a lovely thing that the Lord could recognise the loving action and say it was beautiful? Jesus also points out that they would always have poor people with them, but He Himself would not always be among them. In addition Jesus credits the woman as to having foresight in relation to His death and burial. This woman was one step ahead of the disciples in understanding what was to come.

### **In contrast, Judas betrays Jesus**

“Then one of the twelve, whose name was Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, “What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?” And they paid him thirty pieces of silver. And from that moment he sought an opportunity to betray him” (Matthew 26:14-16).

For over three years Judas had been in the company of Jesus and to think that all he had learned about Jesus was that He was a source of easy cash. But this was also prophesied long ago in Zechariah 11.

“Then I said to them, “If it seems good to you, give me my wages; but if not, keep them.” And they weighed out as my wages thirty pieces of silver. Then the LORD said to me, “Throw it to the potter”—the lordly price at which I was priced by them. So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the LORD, to the potter.” (Zechariah 11:12-13).

We come to a very precious time that the Lord would spend with His disciples. Celebrating the Passover and at the end of which He instituted the remembrance of Himself. The Passover looked back to when God delivered His people out of Egypt, but this was to be replaced by the remembrance of Himself. This remembrance was to be a simple affair as mentioned by the Apostle Paul when writing to the Corinthians in his first letter.

“For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1Corinthians 11:23-26).

These instructions show the simplicity of the remembrance, and that the focus was to be the Lord Himself. Paul adds to what is found in the Gospels by saying that Christians, “Proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes.” So we not only look back to the sacrifice the Lord made to make it possible for the forgiveness of sins by trusting in Himself, but forward - that He is coming again. For the Christian, this coming again is what we call the Rapture. The event which takes believers living or dead to be with Christ forever in the heavenly mansion as promised by the Lord in John 14.

“Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (John 14:1-3 AKJV).

The Authorised King James Version speaks of “many mansions.” Mansions seem to me to give a greatness to the Father’s house as the intended dwelling place for believers. This is a most precious promise given by the Lord on the night when He was betrayed. The detail of the Lord coming again is expanded for us in 1 Corinthians 15 and 1 Thessalonians 4.

Now Judas had left the scene of the Passover before the institution of the remembrance of the Lord Jesus to make his way to the authorities to betray Jesus. So as the Lord leads the disciples to the garden of Gethsemane to pray unto His Father, Judas is leading a band of soldiers and others to apprehend the Lord. The Lord is taken before the religious leaders first, before being presented to Pilate the Roman Governor to gain his permission to have Jesus put to death. Pilate involves Herod a local ruler but neither Herod nor Pilate found any reason to put Jesus to death.

### **Pilate thinks he has a solution**

Apparent there was a custom at that time of the year for Pilate to release a prisoner to the people. At this point Barabbas comes into the picture. Now Barabbas was a notable or notorious prisoner. He was part of a group of rebels who had made insurrection in the city. During this uprising Barabbas had committed murder and robbery.

Scriptures which give details of the type of person that Barabbas was are quoted here,

Matthew 27:15-26,

“Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release for the crowd any one prisoner whom they wanted. And they had then a notorious prisoner called Barabbas. So when they had gathered, Pilate said to them, “Whom do you want me to release for you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?” For he knew that it was out of envy that they had delivered him up. Besides, while he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, “Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much because of him today in a dream.” Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus. The governor again said to them, “Which of the two do you want me to release for you?” And they said, “Barabbas.” Pilate said to them, “Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?” They all said, “Let him be crucified!” And he said, “Why, what evil has he done?” But they shouted even more, “Let him be crucified!” So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, “I am innocent of this man’s blood; see to it yourselves.” And all the people answered, “His blood be on us and on our children!” Then he released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, delivered him to be crucified.”

Mark 15:7-15,

“And among the rebels in prison, who had committed murder in the insurrection, there was a man called Barabbas. And the crowd came up and began to ask Pilate to do as he usually did for them. And he answered them, saying, “Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?” For he perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered him up. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release for them Barabbas instead. And Pilate again said to them, “Then what shall I do with the man you call the King of the Jews?” And they cried out again, “Crucify him.” And Pilate said to them, “Why, what evil has he done?” But they shouted even more, “Crucify him.” So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.”

Luke 23:18-19,

“But they all cried out together, “Away with this man, and release to us Barabbas”— a man who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection started in the city and for murder.”

John 18:40,

“They cried out again, “Not this man, but Barabbas!” Now Barabbas was a robber.”

Pilate assumed that by giving the crowd a choice between Barabbas and Jesus that they would choose Jesus. Barabbas was known as a thoroughly bad person as the Scriptures just quoted have highlighted. However, Pilate underestimated the chief priests who stirred up the people to

ask for Barabbas. Jesus was well known for His kindness, compassion, healing the sick, casting out demons and raising the dead. Barabbas was a man of opposite character, but by now the chief priests had control of the crowd. Jesus was not a rebel; He had not committed murder and had not robbed anyone. The choice was obvious to any right-thinking person. There were no right-thinking people there that day. What was going to happen to the Lord was foretold in prophecy. Isaiah 53 is prophetic about what would happen to the Lord Jesus.

“He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely, he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:3-5).

In Matthew 27:19 it states,

“Besides, while [Pilate] was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, “Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much because of him today in a dream.””

It was too late for Pilate he was already caught up in the middle of the hatred stirred up by the chief priest. The crowd was past reasoning and the more Pilate tried he was only digging a hole deeper for himself from which there was no way out. Finally the Jews cried out, “If you release this man, you are not Caesar’s friend.” This was the final straw for Pilate, so he gave orders for Jesus to be crucified. This all happened on what we call “Good Friday”. The challenge for us is whether we want to accept Jesus as Saviour or whether we are happy with a Barabbas?

### **The crucifixion**

Barabbas now fades from the scene as Jesus is led to Calvary to be crucified. There are things which we could mention about the Lord’s crucifixion, but one event is very noticeable as it contrasts with Barabbas. The people’s choice was a murderer. When the Lord was crucified two others were crucified one on either side. Initially, both hurled verbal abuse at Jesus then one reconsiders. We are not told what caused the change, let us read the account in Luke 23:39-43,

“One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, “Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!” But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.” And he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.””

Here we have a ‘last minute’ blessing of salvation and sins forgiven. However, not many people are given this opportunity as we do not know when we are going to die. Therefore it is better to accept Jesus as soon as possible before it is too late. The other criminal was just as close to Jesus and heard what was being said but was unmoved. When he died, he went into a lost eternity. For him there was no being with Jesus in Paradise. Jesus died in the place of humanity to make available a salvation that He procured for all who would believe and accept Him as Saviour and Lord. When the Lord Jesus laid down His life, having dealt with sin, two secret disciples, Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus took the Lord’s body down from the cross and placed it in an unused tomb, as recorded in John chapter 19.

## The resurrection day

On a number of occasions the Lord had spoken about His death and that He would rise again from the dead. The disciples for whatever reason had difficulty in understanding this. So we find on the first day of the week, the third day after the crucifixion, that a number of the women disciples made their way to the tomb. What they discovered was the stone blocking the tomb entrance had been rolled away and there were angels proclaiming that Jesus was risen, as we find in Luke 24, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here but has risen" (Luke 24:5-6).

These are remarkable and joyous words speaking of Jesus as living and risen. Christianity is marked by these two wonderful facts that Jesus is alive and that He rose from among the dead. In Revelation 1:18 the Lord's own words state,

"I am he that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen" (Revelation 1:18 AKJV).

Therefore, He is a living Saviour, who can fulfil His promises to all those who believe in Him. Barabbas may have missed being executed but he would eventually die. Jesus became the sin offering to deal with sin and the sins of all who trust in Him. He also conquered death and is now alive for evermore. The challenge to all listeners is, are you a follower of Barabbas or Jesus?

Thank you for listening to this Truth for Today talk on the Easter Message, "Jesus or Barabbas", talk number T1348.

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