



## *Experience Again our Great Salvation*

“... So when the crowd had gathered, Pilate asked them,  
“Which one do you want me to release to you:  
Jesus Barabbas, or Jesus who is called the Messiah?”  
Matthew 27:17



When the crowd assembled before the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate,  
he gave them the option of choosing a saviour:

A murderer named “Jesus son of the father” or  
a righteous man named “Jesus who is called the Christ”.

We too are called to make a similar decision.



### **Intro |**

Did the gospel reading today, take you a bit by surprise?

Perhaps you thought, as I initially did, ‘Oh poor thing, Kirstie (our Parish Office secretary) has made a mistake ... Oh well, we know what it should say!’

Let’s pick up the reading from verse 15. Jesus was being interviewed by the Roman Governor Pontius Pilate.

<sup>15</sup> Now it was the governor’s custom at the festival to release a prisoner chosen by the crowd. <sup>16</sup> At that time they had a well-known prisoner whose name was Jesus Barabbas. <sup>17</sup> So when the crowd had gathered, Pilate asked them, “Which one do you want me to release to you: Jesus Barabbas, or Jesus who is called the Messiah?”

Hang on a minute! Who’s Jesus Barabbas?

If you look in the NIV Bible, you’ll see it says in the notes “many manuscripts do not have Jesus”. So, it is understandable, if this is the first time you’ve heard the full name of the other man also convicted of capital punishment.

His full name was most likely ‘Jesus Bar Abbas.’

As I have mentioned previously, the name Jesus was popular with Jewish families. Jesus or Joshua means 'God is salvation' or 'saviour'. When a Jewish family called their son 'Jesus', they were hoping their son would be the leader God had promised would one day rise up to set His people free and establish His kingdom on earth.

But the second part of his name 'Bar Abbas' is also significant. The word 'bar' means 'son of' and the word 'Abbas' means 'father' (see Romans 8:15).

So, putting it all together, "Jesus son of the father".

Now, interestingly, this man's name is specifically noted in all four Gospels.

In our reading today, he was called a well-known or 'notorious prisoner' (Matthew 27:16). From Mark and John we learn that he had been imprisoned with the insurrectionists, who had committed murder during an uprising (Mark 15:7 and Acts 3:14, John 18:40).

While there is some discrepancy as to the nature of his crimes, he must have murdered a Roman, because crucifixions only went to those who committed crimes against Rome.

Most likely he was a freedom fighter or political terrorist. He also most likely represented the kind of military person the Jews wanted – someone who was prepared to stand up to the Roman establishment and fight for the freedom from oppression God had promised.

If we stepped into the sandals of Jesus Bar Abbas, we could speculate that he was trying to live up to his name 'saviour of the Jews' by taking part in a political assault against Roman oppression. And if we stay in Barabbas' sandals a little longer, we may even catch a glimpse of what it would have been like for him on that day when he received the most well-known pardon in the history of the world.

Imagine Barabbas sitting on death row in a dark Roman prison.

He knew, being a murderer, a cross with his name on it was on its way.

Then the day comes. He can hear the shouts ringing throughout the courtyard: "Crucify him, crucify him!" He's thinking, "Oh no! the day has come."

The guards open the door and drag him outside.

But as they yank him along, the words "Crucify him, crucify him" ringing through the air, you see another man standing before the people.

You see the guards dragging another man to his death—Jesus of Nazareth, who is called the Christ.

You watch him being beaten and flogged and then he is forced to carry a cross.

It's that cross! The very one you had imagined yourself carrying only moments earlier.

You think to yourself, that's my death he's dying.

Barabbas is the one person in history who could say that Jesus literally carried his cross.

I wonder if these were the words that flowed from Barabbas heart?

They are words from a song we sing, when we realise the *Amazing Love* shown not only to Barabbas, but also to us.

My Lord what love is this, that pays so dearly?

That I, the guilty one may go free.

Amazing love, oh what sacrifice, the Son of God given for me

My debt He pays and my death He dies

That I might live.

We know when Jesus journeyed into Jerusalem, riding on that colt, his eyes were set on the cross. Jesus literally lived to die.

"No one takes [my life] from me," Jesus said, "but I lay it down of my own accord" (John 18:18).

"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Corinthians 5:21).

You and I were the ones condemned to death.

We were sitting in a spiritual prison, bound and helpless, awaiting the day when we would receive the just punishment we deserved – eternal separation from God.

But, then the Saviour of the world, Jesus, stood up and says "I'll stand in your place. I'll take the punishment you deserve. I'll die in your place, so that you can go free."

What an amazing new life we have experienced!

It kind of makes you wonder what happened to Barabbas after his release.

The Bible gives no clue, and secular history does not help.

Did he go back to his life of insurrection against Rome?

Was he grateful for the gift he had received?

Did he eventually become a follower of Christ? No one knows.

But the experience of that day is available to us all.

Do we celebrate each day the acknowledgment of what Christ has done for us?

Or have we allowed the shining gift of forgiveness to become dull in our hearts?

It is easy for us to do. The experience of our great salvation, for many of us, occurred years ago.

For some of us, we cannot even remember the day we experienced Jesus gracious offer to take our place.

Others do know what it is like to live in a world of pain, only to be wonderfully rescued.

But it whether it was yesterday, or years ago, we are all vulnerable to letting the joyful glow of our salvation fade.

We get to the stage where our salvation from eternal punishment, just doesn't seem so amazing anymore.

This is what the writer of Hebrews warns us of,

"We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. For since the message spoken through angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will." (Hebrews 2:1-4)

He's warning us:

Don't ever stop celebrating God's extravagant love.

Don't get bored with the truth that you've been forgiven and accepted and protected and strengthened and guided by Almighty God.

Don't forget the enormous sacrifice of Christ's life on the cross.

Don't neglect the indwelling Holy Spirit and the fellowship and friendship of the living Christ.

My prayer for us this morning is that God would shine in our hearts causing us to experience a fresh revelation of how great our salvation truly is — that the experience would be so profound, it makes our lives shine brightly with the light of the knowledge of God in the face of Jesus Christ.