

Barabbas: The Idols We Still Set Free

1. The Trade at the Trial

Pilate offered the crowd an easy choice: Jesus, who _____ and loved His enemies, or Barabbas, a _____ and revolutionary.

2. Son of the Father, Son of the Father

“Barabbas” means “_____ of the _____.” Some manuscripts even call him **Jesus Barabbas**, making Pilate’s question a choice between a _____ **son** and the _____ **Son** of the Father.

The crowd chose the _____, and we still do the same whenever we let something else reign over our lives instead of Jesus.

3. The Idol of Comfort

Comfort quietly leads us to choose _____ over obedience and _____ over Christ.

Jesus never promised comfort but called us to _____ ourselves and take up our cross (Matthew 16:24).

4. The Idol of Control

Control looks respectable but is really _____ in disguise, trusting our own grip more than God’s hands.

Scripture calls us to fully _____ the Lord (Proverbs 3:5), just as Jesus trusted the Father in the garden (Luke 22:42).

5. The Idol of Image

Image is the curated _____ **reel** that hides what’s really going on, rooted in a fear of being truly _____.

Jesus rebuked this same performance in the Pharisees (Matthew 23:25) and instead offers freedom through _____, not filters.

6. Who Will You Release?

Pilate’s question — release Barabbas or Jesus — is a _____ held up to every generation.

We choose daily between our _____ and Christ. The guilty Barabbas walked _____ while the innocent Jesus _____ in his place, a picture of the gospel that asks us: Which will you release — your idols or Jesus?

7. Three Challenges

- 1.** Trade an hour of _____ for an act of obedience — do the thing God has been nudging you to do even when it's inconvenient.
- 2.** Release something you've been _____ **-knuckling** and place it fully into God's hands, choosing _____ over control.
- 3.** Tell someone the honest _____ about what's really going on in your life, stepping out from behind the _____ you've been curating.

Don't just pick one — take a real step in all three areas this week, letting each one confront the idol it targets.

Scripture References

Matthew 27:15-23 (NIV)

"Now it was the governor's custom at the festival to release a prisoner chosen by the crowd... 'Crucify him!'"

Mark 15:7 (NIV)

"A man called Barabbas was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising."

Luke 23:19 (NIV)

"(Barabbas had been thrown into prison for an insurrection in the city, and for murder.)"

Matthew 16:24 (NIV)

"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."

Proverbs 3:5 (NIV)

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding."

Luke 22:42(NIV)

"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."

Matthew 23:25 (NIV)

"You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and self-indulgence."

Mark 2:17 (NIV)

"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick."

Mark 9:24 (NIV)

"I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"

Discussion Questions

1. Before this sermon, had you ever considered that the crowd's choice between Jesus and Barabbas was an 'easy' one on paper? Why do you think they still chose Barabbas?
2. The name Barabbas means 'son of the father.' How does this irony deepen your understanding of what people choose over Jesus?
3. Which of the three idols — comfort, control, or image — do you most recognize in your own life right now? What does it look like practically?
4. Comfort was described as 'resting from God' rather than 'resting in God.' Have you experienced that difference? What did it look like?
5. Control is called 'unbelief with a to-do list.' Is there something you're currently white-knuckling instead of trusting to God?
6. Image is rooted in fear of being truly known. Who in your life could you be more honest with this week?
7. Barabbas is described as a picture of grace — guilty, yet set free because someone else took his place. How does this deepen your understanding of the gospel?
8. What is one concrete step you will take this week in response to today's message?

Key Takeaways

1. The crowd's choice between Jesus and Barabbas wasn't just history — it's a choice we still make every day.
2. Barabbas means 'son of the father' — a counterfeit son chosen over the true Son of the Father.
3. Comfort, control, and image are three common 'idols' we release instead of letting Jesus reign.
4. Comfort chooses ease over obedience; control chooses grip over trust; image chooses performance over truth.
5. Barabbas is also a picture of grace — the guilty set free because the innocent One took his place.
6. Naming an idol isn't enough — real change requires a concrete step of obedience this week.

Additional Notes

- Some ancient manuscripts of Matthew's Gospel record Barabbas's full name as 'Jesus Barabbas.'
- The custom of releasing a prisoner at Passover is not found in Roman law — it was a local tradition to appease the crowd.
- Consider journaling your answer to: 'What is my Barabbas?' and revisit it in a week to track your progress on the challenge you chose.

Did You Know?

Interesting Facts About Matthew 27:15–23

- **Did you know...** Pilate's "Passover prisoner release" isn't recorded in Roman law, but *is* consistent with Roman governors using public gestures to keep peace in tense provinces like Judea.
- **Did you know...** Barabbas' name means "**son of the father**" (*Bar-Abba*) — making the crowd's choice even more ironic, since they rejected **Jesus, the true Son of the Father**, in favor of a violent rebel.
- **Did you know...** Barabbas wasn't just a thief — he was involved in **insurrection and murder** (Mark 15:7). The crowd chose a revolutionary over the Prince of Peace.
- **Did you know...** Pilate *expected* the crowd to choose Jesus. The text says he knew the leaders handed Jesus over "**out of envy.**"
- **Did you know...** Pilate's wife sends him a message during the trial (v. 19, just outside your passage), calling Jesus "**that righteous man**" and warning him because of a troubling dream.
- **Did you know...** The crowd's cry "Crucify Him!" shows how quickly public opinion can be manipulated. The same city that welcomed Jesus days earlier now demands His death.
- **Did you know...** Pilate asks, "**Why? What evil has He done?**" — highlighting that even Jesus' *judge* couldn't find a single crime to justify punishment.
- **Did you know...** This moment is one of the clearest pictures of **substitution** in the Bible:
 - The **guilty** man (Barabbas) goes free.
 - The **innocent** man (Jesus) is condemned. Many theologians call Barabbas a symbol of *all humanity* — freed because Jesus takes our place.
- **Did you know...** The crowd chooses a man who tried to save Israel by **violence**, rejecting the Messiah who came to save Israel by **sacrifice**.
- **Did you know...** Pilate's hesitation shows the tension between **political pressure** and **moral conviction** — a theme still relevant today.

Answer Key

1. The Trade at the Trial

healed; murderer

2. Son of the Father, Son of the Father

son; father; false; true; counterfeit

3. The Idol of Comfort

ease; convenience; deny

4. The Idol of Control

unbelief; trust

5. The Idol of Image

highlight; known; honesty

6. Who Will You Release?

mirror; idols; free; died

7. Three Challenges

comfort; white; trust; truth; image