

Matthew 27:15-17 states, "Now it was the governor's custom at the Feast to release a prisoner chosen by the crowd. That time they had a notorious prisoner, called Barabbas. So when the crowd had gathered, Pilate asked them, "Which one do you want me to release to you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?" Verses 20-21 states, "The chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed. `Which of the two do you want me to release to you?' asked the governor. "**Barabbas,**" they answered." And, verse 26 states, "Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified." Luke 23:18-19 states, "With one voice they cried out, "Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us!" (Barabbas had been thrown into prison for an insurrection in the city, and for murder.)"

This is a vivid, gripping, incident, however, we are not told very much of Barabbas. A thick shroud of mystery envelops both beginning and the end of Barabbas' life. His life is undispellled by the light of Scripture. These few drops, wrong from very heart of the story of Barabbas is all that we are told. The **story** seems to cry aloud, "**What is the story of Barabbas?**"

Innocence is pursued by temptation; temptation overtaken by sin, then sin pounces upon Barabbas and condemns him to die. **The law demands it!** However, **law** is conquered. Its grip loosened by Jesus! Jesus becomes the Substitute, the one who dies in the sinner's place.

There is a striking type of the human race in this story of Barabbas, we can see a picture of *ourselves*.

Someone has likened our lives to a tapestry being woven upon a loom. Let's view the wondrous, fascinating, unfinished, texture of Barabbas, stretched upon the loom of life. It begins with riotous colors. We will see that Barabbas' tapestry of life speaks of **sunshine** and **shadow; joy** and **sorrow; tragedy** and **triumph**.

The threads of the loom, which hang from the end of Barabbas' life. are frayed, and they hang just as loose and dangling at *beginning* of his life. Looking at Barabbas' life is like picking up the loose ends of threads to weave again the story of the human race, as it is embodied in a study of Barabbas.

The springtime of every child weaves the white threads of innocence. Did Barabbas have a Godly, praying, Mother? Was the beginning of Barabbas' life a picture of a little white-robed form learning to pray at his mother's knee? Or, was his home robbed of a praying mother? If so, he was deprived of the richest treasure a mother has the power to bestow upon her children. Praying mothers produce treasured memories . . . memories that money cannot buy and recollections that time can never destroy!

Did Barabbas have a praying mother? We, of course, do not know. I like to think that he had a mother who instructed him in the Law and the Prophets, a mother who wept and prayed for him as he wandered into bad company and the paths of temptation.

sin.

"Barabbas, be sure your sin will find you out!"

Barabbas, doubtless, meant to call a halt to his waywardness sometime in the near future. He never meant to go so far into sin, however, Barabbas was caught in a criminal act, cast into prison and condemned to die.

The dark threads of warning were put in his way. But the threads of Barabbas' life were tinted rosy with promising colors of golden wealth and remuneration by Satan. Barabbas was led on and on, from one sin to another, until, at last, we read in John.18:40,

"Now Barabbas was a robber."

In all probability Barabbas' *robbing* started in some seemingly simple, trivial, way. Maybe some tiny child-hood theft for which his conscience troubled and accused him at first. The second theft was a little larger, but, this time, his conscience didn't trouble him quite as much. And so, he steals again, and again.

Did a **last** warning come to Barabbas? Maybe he heard, "*Be sure your sins will find you out,*" or, "*Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap,*" or, perhaps, he heard, "*The soul that sinneth shall die.*"

Oh, Barabbas, what a striking type you are of our first parents, back in the Garden of Eden. They were tempted by the *same* sin. They too, *stole* and ate of the forbidden tree. Did Satan whisper in your ear also: "*Eat, ye shall not die?*" Did you feel guilty and sinful afterward and did you seek to hide behind trees of deception, assured that neither God, nor His Law, would ever punish you?

As surely as Adam and Eve, shrinking guilty behind their own false covering, heard the firm footsteps of Almighty God walking through the Garden to meet them . . . as surely as they heard God call out, "***Where art thou?***". . . as surely as God discovered, condemned and punished them, just that surely the footsteps of the law sought and overtook you!

Cunningly, Satan led Barabbas on and on until he found himself a ringleader of an insurrection. Blinded with rage, hot blood surging through his veins, Barabbas was found rioting in the city of Jerusalem. Reason had overstepped her bounds. Quick as a flash, heavy blows were struck, and the limp body of his victim fell with a sickening thud to the ground. Deep-dyed threads of crimson shot through the texture upon the loom of Barabbas' life.

Swiftly, the heavy, relentless hand of the law fell on the shoulder of this guilty wretch, staring with horror upon the work of his hands. Escape was impossible, mercy was out of the question, the law must now take its course.

To and fro, back and forth, flew the shuttle across the loom of Barabbas' life, but now the weaving threads are dark and mournful.

Was it with bated breath and cheeks bleached, or was it the thin veneer of bravery, that Barabbas heard the awful sentence that was pronounced upon him?

Barabbas, with two thieves, who were his companions in crime, were condemned to die and would be hanged upon a cross on Calvary's hill . . . until they were dead!

Barabbas was plunged into the blackness of a dark dungeon beneath Pilate's Judgment hall. With chains clanking on damp flagstones, he writhes in a desperate, agonizing, struggling with pangs of remorse.

Oh, the bitter whiplash of the law and the chains of justice. Barabbas cries, "*Is there no escape from thee, even though I see my err and repent?*" The law, with a voice that is firm and relentless . . . its face like a flint . . . echoing the haunting memories of his mother's teaching: "*And eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth; the murderer shall surely be put to death.*"

Sitting there in the darkness of sin, Barabbas was unable to help himself. The chains, of approaching retribution, were already biting into his flesh. He is beyond the help of any mortal man. Condemned to die, without hope, he has nothing to look forward to - except death!

What a picture of the human race is Barabbas. Scripture teaches, "*By Adam, sin entered.*" The first sin ever recorded is that of theft, and the second, is that of murder.

God, in His infinite holiness, could not look upon sin with the least degree of allowance, said, "*The soul that sins shall die.*" Death, (eternal despair), followed in the wake of sin. A great gulf was **fixed** between God and man. The strong arm of the law fell heavily on the human race. After a fair trial, the verdict of "**guilty**" was brought in and the sentence of "*death*" was passed upon all men.

Man, like Barabbas, was plunged into the dark prison of captivity, beneath the judgment hall, waiting the hour when judgment would be executed upon him!

Oh, that someone would come to open the prison door of those who are bound. Oh, for an arm to save. Oh, for one who would bear the grief and carry the sorrows of a sin-stricken race . . . one who would be wounded for man's transgression and pay the sinner's debt.

Who knows the thoughts that throbbed through the aching brain of Barabbas during the days that followed . . . the stabbing pain of remorse . . . the memories of other days . . . thoughts of "*What might have been.*" Did these reflections bring Barabbas sleepless nights and hopeless days, where there was not one ray of hope to pierce his gloom? Did the voice that pronounced his sentence in the judgment hall keep ringing in his ears? Did he hear over and over the words, "*You will hang on a cross between two thieves **until you are dead?***"

die, a shameful, dishonoring death?

Barabbas sat in the silent darkness of his cell with no sound other than the drip, drip, of sweat dropping from the ceiling, felling like tears on the flag-stone at his feet.

Did the vision of the cross, his cross, rise before him, ever drawing nearer, and nearer, as the hour of his crucifixion approached?

Steadily on, the shuttle flies across the loom of his life, only, now in gloomy, desolate, colorings of melancholy depression.

What is this, are threads of wild terror and panic being shot through the loom of Barabbas' life?

Barabbas sits upright, rigid, as though turned to stone. He listens with every nerve tense. Can't you hear it? There it is again, it's his name They are crying his name, "*Barabbas, Barabbas, release unto us Barabbas. Bring forth Barabbas, Barabbas, Barabbas!*"

It's the voice of the rabble multitude, ever growing, swelling in volume. But, how can he hear away down here in the dungeon? The door must be open! Yes, footsteps are echoing along the stone corridor that leads to his cell. Nearer and nearer they sound. Swords are jangling, keys are swinging on their rings! In the background Barabbas hears the imperative roar of the mob, in the judgment hall above. It's a roar that settles into a steady chant and will not accept denial, "*Barabbas, Barabbas, release unto us Barabbas.*"

Louder and plainer comes the tread of soldiers. until Barabbas hears the sharp command, "halt." He hears the rattle of the massive key in the door of his cell, the grating of the lock, the creaking of a heavy door and, then, he hears the words, "*Come Barabbas, another is to die in your place today, you are a free man.*"

Tell me, weaver at the loom, did a faint ray of hope dawn in his heart or did he shrink back and cry from anguish of soul? Did Barabbas cry out, "*Oh, jailer, don't laugh at my calamity, don't mock when my fear cometh. I know that I had a fair trial and was proved guilty, worthy of death. I'll go to my death on the cross, but, oh, don't, don't, mock my calamity. Don't jeer at my hour of sorrow.*"

And, did the keeper replay, "*I'm not jesting or mocking, Barabbas, it is true, you are a free man! A man named **Jesus** is to be stretched on your cross on Calvary's hill, between two thieves, today. With mine own eyes I saw Him tied to the whipping post, his back bared to the smiters, blows of the cruel lash rained on his shoulders. They are leading him now up the hill to be crucified. Come forth, Barabbas, **you are free!** He will be bruised for your iniquity, the chastisement of your peace is to be upon him. He will die in your stead! You are free, **free, FREE!***"

almost to the door and still there is no restraining hand falling upon him. There is no voice jeering him, "*Oh, Barabbas, you have to pay the price of death.*"

Barabbas takes four steps, then he takes five, six more. He's passed the door, he takes seven, eight, nine more steps. He gropes his way along the corridor, stumbling blindly toward the distant ray of light. It is true that the soldiers are marching behind him, but they aren't making any effort to seize him.

What did it mean? Will the soldiers seize him in the last moment? Surely, that must be it. This was just some cruel trick! But, no, they were turning off in another direction. They are leaving him alone.

Barabbas walks toward the ever-growing light that was piercing his unaccustomed eyes. At last he reaches the yawning doorway, clinging to its portals with one trembling hand and shading his eyes with the other. What were his thoughts as he gazed upon sunlight once again? When he heard the singing of the birds and the voices of children around him, what was going through his mind?

Were there golden threads of hope and resolution being woven into the texture of his life, in his bewilderment? Oh, those dangling threads that hang loose from the end of the texture. Tell me, how does the story finish? Did Barabbas catch sight of the throng wending their way to Calvary? Did he hear the hissing and jeering of the multitude leading the condemned one out to Calvary? Did he see that lonely man, robed in white, fall beneath the burden of the Cross? Did he run, perhaps, to an old cottage home and hug his wife and little boy? Did he cry? Did he say to his wife: "*Come with me, let's go and see the man dying in my place. Today was the day set for my execution. Today, I was to be hanged on the cross, to die a felon's death, but another man, an innocent man, is dying - dying for me. Oh, come, let's go and look upon his face, that we may fathom the mystery of such love.*" Tell me, is that what happened?

Did Barabbas push his way through the throng, up the hill, never stopping until he reached the foot of the cross? And, as Barabbas gazed into that face, most fair, and saw nails in his hands and feet, the drops of blood streaming down from His brow and, as Barabbas looked into those eyes of unutterable love, and heard the words fall from anguished lips, "*Father, forgive them,*" did Barabbas cry, "***Oh, Jesus Your love has won my heart. There are the two thieves, one on the right, the other on the left, but there, on that middle cross, there's the cross upon which I should have died?***"

And, stooping down, did he take a little son up in his arms, pointing to that cross, did he sob in his ear, "*Son, look, that is the cross your father should have died upon. That's the place I should have hung, the death I should have died, but that lonely Man, whom they call Jesus, is dying in your father's place! Oh, wife, oh, my son, oh, my heart, let us ever love, live and work for this Jesus Who gave Himself for me!*"

As Barabbas gazed steadfast into the eyes of Jesus, did the face of the Lord turn toward

The doubt of love I owe
Here, Lord, I give myself to Thee
Tis all that I can do

Was Barabbas there when the mangled body of Jesus was lowered from the cross and laid in the tomb? Was he there on the morning when Jesus appeared and ascended in clouds? Was he among the 120 on the Day of Pentecost who received the Holy Spirit and went forth proclaiming the message of **Jesus' power to save?**

We can't be sure, but this one thing I **DO** know that this world of ours was wrapped in darkness, imprisoned by sin and death, and, "*The Spirit of the Lord came upon Jesus, anointing Him to preach the gospel to the poor, to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, and to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.*"

I do know that Barabbas was no greater sinner, **no more devoid of hope**, than this world of lost sinners. And, that Jesus was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities, and the chastisement of our peace was upon Him and by His strips we were healed, that when we like sheep had gone astray, and had turned every one to our own ways, the Lord laid upon Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment. He was cut off from the land of the living. For the transgression of the people was He stricken. He made His grave with the wicked in His death, yet, He had done no violence, neither was there any deceit in His mouth. He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors.

I know this, that mankind was in the dungeon of despair, awaiting death, that, "*By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men - for all have sinned,*" [Romans 5:12].

What a hopeless, miserable, dungeon man has placed himself in by his sin and disobedience to God. No matter how he might search, there is no way out. The great, massive, door of mercy was his only hope! The law, stern jailer that he is, refuses to open the door! Death reigns supreme upon his throne. But, sitting there, within prison cell of despair, came the day "*when people which set in darkness saw a great light, and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death - light is sprang up.*" [Matthew 4:16].

The footfalls of **Deliverance** were heard coming along the corridors of time. Grace, heaven's sent turn-key, bore the key of divine sacrificial love that turned the lock of condemnation and swung wide the great door of mercy! Mercy and love stepped within the prison cell, loosened the bands of despair and broke the power of sin's strong chains!

The grace of God called to all mankind, "**Come forth, you are free men, another died in your place. One named Jesus has born your cross, paid for your redemption, oh, COME FORTH, COME FORTH!** *Oh, trembling soul, why sit longer in the valley of the shadow of*

chains and darkness, rather than liberty and light? What opinion would you have of Barabbas, if he had been such an ingrate, so void of appreciation, and gratitude, that he did not even take the trouble to climb Calvary, to **see** and thank this Jesus Who died for him?

Jesus died for you. Your prison door stands wide open. The Holy Spirit calls you, "*Come forth.*" The sunlight of God's love and mercy awaits to pardon you. God's peace is yours for the taking. Will you turn to Calvary now? Will you wend your way to the cross, and gaze into the face of your Savior . . . that face which was marred more than the face of any man?

There are your two old companions, **SIN** and **DEATH**, hanging upon their two crosses beside your Lord. For the first thief, **SIN**, there can be no allowance, no excuse. Sin must die to you, and you to sin "*How can we that are dead to sin live any longer therein?*"

For the second companion, **DEATH**, the 11th hour of his pardon has come, "*death is swallowed up in victory. For the sting of death is sin!*"

When anyone turns to Christ, he can say, "*Oh, death where is thy sting? Whether the body sleeps in death, or awakes, it matters not because to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord!*"

The dying thief, who turned to Christ had the promise that he would be with Christ in Paradise **that very day!**

Friend, Jesus paid it all, all to Him you owe. Turn to Him now. Thank Him for His great love and for shedding His precious blood for you. As, you gaze upon Him, your heart will be melted and tears may fall from your eyes!

*"My Jesus I love Thee, I know Thou art mine
For Thee all the follies of sin I resign
My gracious Redeemer, my Savior art Thou,
If ever I love Thee, my Jesus - this now!"*