**Calvary Fellowship 3.26.2023 Matthew 27:15-31 “Give us Barabbas”**

* **So let’s start by making a couple of assumptions:**
* #1 - That we have all made at least 1 bad decision in our lives
* #2 - If U knew then what U know now, you’d decide differently
* **Before we really get into this, I’m going to tell U 1 of my mistakes**
* This is a Laser Disc - it played movies & they cost $50 a movie
* It was the worst possible experience U could have watching a movie - U would start watching & then have to get up every 30 minutes to flip the disc
* What’s amazing about this, is that not only did I buy 1 but I used my power of persuasion to get my friend to buy 1 also - which he still hasn’t forgiven me for
* But we went to Brandsmart & I’m sorry to say this, but I don’t like Brandmart
* Every time I buy something from there, I feel like I’m committing a crime
* U tell the guy U want to buy something & he writes down a number on a random piece of paper & then he says, “I want to U take this to my friend & give him the money.” - U pay for it & that person tells U go around the back of the building & talk to another guy at the dock
* Then U hand them this other paper & he hands U some boxes w/ your stuff
* Anyway, before we bought them, he said to me, “U know I heard they are going to put out movies on disks the size of CD’s.”
* I said, “Yeah! Maybe you’ll be able to drive your flying car to buy them!”
* U can imagine my surprise when DVD’s were released 6 mos. later
* Most people keep their accomplishments on the wall to remind them of good things they’ve done - I don’t - I have no idea where my college degree is
* I found the certificate of my ordination into ministry in my garage the other day
* But I’ve kept this Laserdisc w/in 5 feet of my desk for more than 20 years to remind me what happens when I’m unwise
* There’s a saying: “experience is a wonderful teacher if U can afford the tuition”
* But there’s something even better than experience being your teacher & that’s the experience of others being your teacher - why?
* B/c U get the same lessons but w/o the pain & regret of going through it
* **So we’re in message #44 in our series the Gospel of Matthew & it’s 6AM on the Passover & Jesus has been arrested & handed a death sentence**
* But there’s a wildcard that might get Him out of this situation
* The governor, Pontius Pilate like to release 1 prisoner every year at Passover
* And Pilate wants Jesus to be released, but the religious leaders won’t have it
* And we’re going to meet another character - Barabbas - and the people are going to be given a choice - who do they want to be free?
* Here’s what I want U to think about in our time together: we’re Barabbas
* We’re the guilty 1 & Jesus is taking the punishment that we are due
* It will change the way U see this story & it will change the way U make decisions in your life b/c Jesus stood in your place for every single sin & rebellion against God that we’ve committed…

**———(v. 15-20)———**

**#1 - I Need to Live for an Audience of One**

* **So let me set the scene - Pontius Pilate, the governor of the region is in town for the Passover - the reason for that was to provide more security**
* Typically, during the feast days is when riots would break out, so there was extra security using Passover to keep things in line
* But Pilate wanted to see the more extreme groups pacified, so he would release a prisoner every Passover
* That’s why there’s crowd outside of Pilate’s door 1st thing in the morning
* This would be friends, family members, & associates would be there to plead their case so their person was the 1 released
* In this case, we meet a guy named Barabbas - in fact, some of the Greek manuscripts actually have his name listed as “Jesus Barabbas”
* Now, Jesus, or Yeshua in Hebrew was a very common name - it roughly translates to the name Joshua in English - Yehoshua is literally Joshua
* But the early church father Origen wrote that Barabbas’ name was Jesus Barabbas - now, Barabbas is 2 words in Hebrew: Bar & Abba
* “Bar” means “son of” & Abba means “Father”
* So think about this - there’s a terrorist named Jesus, son of a father & there’s Jesus, son of the father - these are the options
* “Now at the feast he was accustomed to releasing one prisoner to them, whomever they requested. And there was one named Barabbas, who was chained with his fellow rebels; they had committed murder in the rebellion.” (Mark 15:6-7 NKJV)
* **But then we get this little detail - the chief priests & elder persuaded the people to ask for Barabbas & destroy Jesus**
* Listen, 6 days earlier, 1,000’s of people lined the streets saying that Jesus is the Messiah - today, they want a murderer over Him
* **Here’s the point - if you’re living your life to please a crowd, you’re going to be very frustrated b/c crowds are fickle - they change in a moment**
* Our culture is changing what is loves & what it hates almost every day
* Living for an audience of 1 means that U orient your life around pleasing God above anyone else & we are actively seeking to honor God
* **A few months ago, I decided to take an off day from my eating plan**
* I don’t like the phrase “cheat day” b/c I don’t like to be associated w/ the word “cheating” - probably b/c I’m a NE Patriots fan, we like to keep it on the up & up
* Well, I took the day off & I really wanted some Reese’s Pieces - they’re like M&M’s except 1,000 times better & I had a secret stash of them
* The problem is, my 2 younger kids found it & wiped it out
* So I tell U wife that I’m going to the store to get a couple of items that she needed - she said, “Bob, you’re tired. We’ll go tomorrow.”
* I said, “Carey, it’s really my pleasure. We should never put off until tomorrow what can be done today.” - so I drive to Publix & they are sold out
* The problem is, now I’ve got to buy all this dumb stuff I told my wife I’d pick up for her - so I get all of that stuff & some of it was frozen, so I’m on the clock
* So I make an emergency stop at Walgreen’s & they have it in stock
* So I grab 2 bags - 1 for now & there other to replenish my secret stash
* But then the line is crazy long & there’s only 1 person working the register
* I finally get to the front & I say, “Hey, this is all I want. How much is it?”
* The guy says, “Whoa. Hold on bro. Do U have a Walgreen’s reward card?”
* I said, “Sir, is it humanly possible in the year of our Lord 2022 to be able to buy candy w/o being roped into another rewards situation?”
* Turns out, the answer to that question is no - so I sign up really quick for it
* Then I finally pay & then drive home before my semi-frozen stuff starts melting enough to change shape
* If U live w/ that kind of intensity for God, you’re going to live a blessed life
* But if U put all that energy into pleasing the crowd, they will just an easily turn on U - they think you’re the Messiah on Sunday & by Fri. they want U crucified
* God isn’t like that - He’s good & He love U
* “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.” (Hebrews 11:6 NKJV)
* Here’s what I know from talking to 1,000’s of people over the years & from observing my own bizarre behavior over the course of my life
* We get into a jam & we seek God…once - we read the Bible…once
* We pray…once - We seek out wise counsel…once
* But once isn’t seeking God - that’s checking off a box
* “Diligently seeking” is a work that means to carefully investigate & search out
* When you’re like Sherlock Holmes, but you’re looking at every clue
* U want to know what God is up to & what He wants U to do - when U do that, you’re going to find Him & that’s the kind of person God rewards

**———(v. 21-26)———**

**#2 - I Need to Make Decisions Based on Convictions**

* **Now, remember what I told U last time - that Pilate was in hot water w/ Rome & didn’t want another riot to ensue**
* That’s why once he saw that a tumult was rising, he washes his hands & says, “I’m done w/ this. U guys deal w/ it.”
* “From then on Pilate sought to release Him, but the Jews cried out, saying, ‘If you let this Man go, you are not Caesar’s friend. Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar.’” (John 19:12 NKJV)
* Pilate didn’t want to crucify Jesus, but he was going to be out of a job if he allowed the crowd to get out of hand
* So he washes his hands of the situation (this is where that saying comes from) & decides that it isn’t his problem anymore
* But it is his probe & our problem, b/c all of us have to answer Pilate’s question
* “What shall I do w/ Jesus who is called Christ?”
* And our answer is always either crown Him or crucify Him
* And sometimes we’ll try to ride the fence, but ultimately we have to decide
* Being a disciple of Jesus is about setting a new priority where everything else is my life is 2nd to walking w/ God
* And my relationship w/ God frames everything else in my life
* **I was driving though my neighborhood this week & do U know what I saw in every garage? Some piece of exercise equipment**
* Do U know what I never see? People using the exercise equipment
* Instead, I see clothes drying from treadmills & elliptical machines
* But U know, we get excited about working out & we buy all the gear to work out
* Then we watch a late night infomercial & buy some overpriced piece of gear
* We work out 1st day & we think, “I feel awesome. I’m gonna do this every day.”
* Then we wake up the 2nd day & we say, “I’m not going to work out today. I need to let my muscles breathe.”
* Then we wake up the 3rd day & say, “I’m fine w/ the way I look.”
* That’s what happens as we walk w/ God - He’s the most important person in our lives until something else comes along - then He gets move to the garage
* Real discipleship sets Jesus as the priority b/c it is an entirely new way to live
* Listen, choosing Barabbas never leads where we ultimately want to go
* But it takes a little bit of wisdom to look down the road & see where the road leads - b/c Barabbas looks enticing, but it always ends in death
* “To know wisdom and instruction, to perceive the words of understanding.” (Proverbs 1:2)
* That’s what that Heb. word 'Bina' or understanding means - noticing differences
* **It’s the ability to see what others don’t see - how many of U have seen the BBC show “Sherlock”? Well, if U do, watch it w/ subtitles**
* Sherlock is my daughter’s favorite show - it’s absolutely brilliant
* There was a time when I could walk into my house at any given time & Sherlock is playing on the TV
* And here’s what happens - b/c I’ve seen the episodes so many times, I watch the show & say, “Come on guys! Can’t U see who the killer is yet?”
* Now, the 1st time I watched it, I was totally clueless & amazed at the end
* My wife usually figures everything out 10 minutes into the show & then says, “Didn’t U realize the killer was the guy holding the Coke w/ his right hand & he was missing a finger? What were U thinking?”
* I said, “I saw that & thought, ‘Man, I haven’t had chicken fingers in weeks.”
* But this is what wisdom does - it gives us insight about reality that most people don’t see - it allows us to see the outcome of things before they happen
* But it isn’t a blanket gift - wisdom is something we learn as we walk w/ God
* And the wisdom is to say no to Barabbas & yes to Jesus
* This is why people look on at your life & say, “Man, why if your life so different than everyone else’s?” - they’re choosing Barabbas & you’re choosing Jesus
* **Here’s why this scene is so powerful - b/c Barabbas was guilty of crimes & was about to be crucified for his sins - until Jesus took His place**
* Then he got to go free b/c someone else had paid he penalty for him
* That’s why we have to understand that we are Barabbas - Jesus stood in our place & died for us - now we get to live free from everything that imprisoned us

**———(v. 26-31)———**

**#3 - I Need to Do Hard Things**

* **This is something I tell my kid all the time - the goal of life isn’t about getting out of doing hard things - it’s about doing hard things**
* Listen - I didn’t mention it a moment ago b/c I wanted to talk about it now
* Jesus had been beaten & scourged - what is scourging?
* **The Romans had 3 levels of scouring depending on your crime:**
* **#1 - Fustigatio -** this wasn’t too severe, it was more of a warning where they roughed U up a little so you’d stay in line
* **#2 - Flagellatio** - this was a pretty severe beating
* **#3 - Verberatio** - this was a horrible beating that was associated w/ a capital crime & ended w/ crucifixion
* The Romans used something called the cat of 9 tails - it had a short, wooden handle & at the end of which were attached several leather strands
* Each strand was tipped w/ very sharp pieces of metal or bone
* The man to be scourged was tied to a post by the wrists high over his head, w/ his feet dangling and his body taut
* The cat of 9 tails would wrap around the body & muscles were lacerated, veins & arteries were torn open, & it was not uncommon for the kidneys, spleen, or other organs to be exposed and slashed
* Many men died of scourging before they could be taken out for execution
* Now, I’m telling U all of this b/c it’s only when U understand the fact that Jesus has taken a beating that few men would still be alive & He is still standing
* “Pilate then went out again, and said to them, ‘Behold, I am bringing Him out to you, that you may know that I find no fault in Him. Then Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. And Pilate said to them, ‘Behold the Man!’ Therefore, when the chief priests and officers saw Him, they cried out, saying, 'Crucify Him, crucify Him!’ Pilate said to them, ‘You take Him and crucify Him, for I find no fault in Him.’” (John 19:4-6 NKJV)
* Pilate says, “Behold, the Man!” - He looks at Jesus & says, “This is a real man.”
* Understanding the beating that Jesus has just taken, it makes more sense why Jesus needed some help carrying His cross
* “Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.” (Hebrews 12:1-3 NKJV)
* Notice what the writer of Hebrews says - that the cross was joy for Jesus & that we should remember Jesus lest we become discouraged
* The ancient Greeks had a race that was called the Pentathlon - it was 5 competitions that involved running, jumping, discus, javelin, & wrestling
* The wrestling was probably closer to MMA fighting b/c the gloves U wore were made to protect your hands but disfigure your opponent
* **Now, knowing that info, look at the text again - “looking unto Jesus, who endured the cross & sat down at the right hand of the throne of God”**
* So consider Him who endured so much hostility from sinners, lest U become weary b/c U haven’t resisted to bloodshed”
* He’s saying, “Jesus ran His race & was victorious. U haven’t reached the level of opposition to where you’re fighting back punches to disfigure U”
* In fact, I didn’t tell U this earlier, but in verse 1, the word that’s translated “race” is the Greek word “Agon” - which is where we get our English word “Agony”
* The idea is that it’s a race, but it’s a painful race b/c life is painful & anyone who doesn’t tell U that hasn’t really lived a life worth living
* **Here’s the challenge we face - there has never been a culture w/ a lower pain threshold than our current culture**
* Past cultures had kids that were 8-10 years old leading their family flocks
* Today we have a culture that can’t even walk the family dog
* Previous generations in this country fought wars at the age of 18 & saved countless lives - today, we have safe spaces & censor speech we disagree with
* **Here’s the thing that we wish wasn’t the case, but is absolutely true - the only way to grow your faith is through testing**
* **I wish I could get ripped by watching other people work out**
* B/c I really do enjoy watching other people work out
* I love watching the Crossfit Games or the ESPN Strong man competitions
* I’d love to sit on my couch w/ a pizza & a box of donuts & then feel this incredible surge of growth as my muscles just bulge
* Then people would walk up to me & say, “Wow, you’re so muscular. Do U happen to watch a lot of weightlifting?” - “Why yes I do!”
* **But I’ve been trying to eat healthy & lose some weight**
* I’m doing 100 crunches a day - They’re Nestle’s Crunches but it’s a start
* U know in lifting weights, it’s when we challenge our muscles that they grow
* In the same way, faith grows when we accept the challenges God gives us & we allow God to stretch us - b/c we rarely grow when things are going great
* **That's why no 1 talks about their huge spiritual breakthroughs that took place that Disney World - unless it’s patience from waiting in the lines**
* In my life, the moments of greatest growth have been moments of deepest pain
* But the painful moments brought the ability to experience the deepest joy
* **My wife & I are just celebrated 26 years of holy matrimony**
* And hands down, last year was our best year - our marriage has never been better - but do U know what made year 25 so good?
* Having years that weren’t as good & growing through them - learning hard lessons, confronting my own issues & working through them - very painful
* I wish that wasn’t true, but it is - and the only way U get to the joy is by traveling through the hard roads - or U could say that the only way to get to resurrection is through the road of crucifixion & burial
* **That’s why the encouragement has been to fix our eyes of Jesus - b/c Jesus suffered & He suffered well & saw the blessing come to fruition**
* In this regard, Christianity has a leg up on any other belief system of philosophy - why? B/c if you’re a secular person, your suffering has no meaning
* If U subscribe to any other belief system or religious idea, then god is separate from suffering & cannot relate to it
* But in Jesus, we can fix our eyes on Him b/c He suffered w/ His creation & for His creation & He understands suffering like no 1 else
* **So what am I asking U to do? Do hard things - don’t give up b/c things get difficult - instead, realize that good things come from persevering**
* Instead of bailing on your marriage, both of U dig in & say, “We aren’t giving up”
* Instead of hopping from job to job, dig in & build a career U can be proud of
* Instead of cutting people out of your life when U disagree, decide that friendships are more important than being right
* And instead of giving up on God’s plan for your life b/c U can’t see the immediate benefit, have the wisdom to keep going
* B/c there’s a harvest of blessing if you’ll don’t give up
* B/c Jesus in His suffering was seeking us & now the key to handling suffering is to seek Him