

The Final Days of Jesus  
**THE MAN WHO MISSED HIS CROSS**

Saturday, March 30

Reading: John 18:28-40

**John 18:39** *But it is your custom for me to release to you one prisoner at the time of the Passover. Do you want me to release 'the King of the Jews?'* **40** *They shouted back, "No, not Him! Give us Barabbas!"*

One of my favorite scenes from a Bible movie comes in the 1962 film “Barabbas” starring Anthony Quinn in the title role. It pictures Barabbas going to Golgotha to see the Man who was dying in his place. What makes the scene so interesting is that it was filmed during an actual eclipse which makes the darkness around the cross very eerie. The movie itself is a fictional account of what might have happened to the man who was released instead of Jesus.

We know very little about Barabbas. He appears in the pages of the gospels at Jesus’ trial and disappears right after his release. We do not find his name in any ancient historical texts other than the four gospels. To the Romans, he was just one of thousands of Jewish rebels who caused trouble and didn’t merit a mention in their records.

From the gospels, we know that Barabbas was part of that band of Jewish zealots who did whatever they could to drive the Romans from Palestine. In one of these battles Barabbas had killed a Roman soldier and was captured (Mark 15:7). He sat in Pilate’s dungeon awaiting his death. Interestingly, most of the New Testament manuscripts we have do not even give us Barabbas first name! He is simply called Barabbas which means “son of the father.” However, a few ancient manuscripts of Matthew cite that Barabbas’ first name was Jesus (a fairly common name in 1<sup>st</sup> Century Palestine; it is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua). Here was another man with the same first name who had been condemned for the same crime as “Jesus, who is called Christ” had been accused! Surely the crowd would want the gentle Teacher released over the criminal. But instead, Jesus of Nazareth ended up dying on the cross that had been planned for Barabbas.

Imagine Barabbas’ surprise when the soldiers came that morning. Expecting to be hauled off to his death, he is instead set free. Jesus had taken his place! I wonder if he went to Golgotha that day to look at the Man who was dying on his cross. I wonder if this experience with Christ did anything to change Barabbas’ life.

**LESSON:** We are all like Barabbas. More than anyone else, Barabbas knew what it meant to have Jesus die in his place. And Jesus died on the cross in our place as well. He took the penalty for our sins that we deserved and allowed us to go free when we trust in Him. With eyes of faith, take a moment to look at the One who hung on that cross for you. Have you thanked Him lately? Has what He did for you changed the way you live for Him?