

Pastor Don Nelson

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“BY OUR HANDS? FOR OUR SAKE! BARABBAS”

Luke 23:18-25

✝ It was by our hands.

→ The apostle Peter put it like this on Pentecost: Jesus **“was handed over to you by God’s deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross”** (Acts 2:23). Many of Peter’s listeners were physically present during Jesus’ trial and execution fifty days earlier. Some shouted {Lk 23:21} **“Crucify him! Crucify him!”**

→ None of us were there. Even so, we share the blame, since it was the sin of all humanity (past, present, and future) that made the cross necessary. The Messiah {Is 53:5} **“was wounded for the wrong we did; he was crushed for the evil we did.”**

✝ It was for our sake.

→ **“The Lord Jesus ... gave himself ...to rescue us from”** bondage to the kingdom of the world (Galatians 1:4); **“He “gave his life to free us from every kind of sin, to cleanse us, and to make us his very own people”** (Titus 2:14); **“The punishment”** he suffered **“brought us peace...and by his wounds we are healed”** (Isaiah 53:5).

→ We are, all of us, beneficiaries of Christ’s sacrifice. He **“gave himself as a ransom for all people”** (1 Timothy 2:6); **“He is the atoning sacrifice...not only for [our sins] but also for the sins of the whole world”** (1 John 2:2) – even those who reject him and his gift.

It was by *our* hands and for *our* sake. And so each of us is, in a very real sense, another Barabbas.

☐ Please turn to Luke 23:18-25: With **“A mighty roar”** the chief priests, rulers and people shout, **““Kill [Jesus], and release Barabbas to us!’ (Barabbas [is] in prison for murder and for taking part in an insurrection... against the government.)”** Pilate argues for Christ’s release, but the crowd shouts **““Crucify him!’ louder and louder... So Pilate [sentences] Jesus to die”** but **“he [releases] Barabbas.”**

What do we know about Barabbas?

① He is **“in prison for murder.”** If Barabbas is guilty, then he is capable of almost any sin.

② He has also taken **“part in an insurrection.”**

To Rome, Barabbas is a rebel and a terrorist. He must be eliminated in order to preserve the empire’s power and status.

The Jewish public is divided.

To some, Barabbas is a worthless agitator who recklessly risks bringing Rome’s wrath down on everyone. He must die so the nation can survive.

Others see Barabbas as a valiant freedom fighter who has struck a vital blow for liberty and justice. He must live to fight another day.

③ John 18:40 ~ the apostle John calls Barabbas a ληστης (*lestes*), a bandit, a robber, a violent thug.

→ Jesus uses the same word in the Parable of the Good Samaritan: {Lk 20:30} **“A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the**

hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead.”

Barabbas’ love of country has not prevented him from preying on his own people. He is the kind of man who steals from the rich and gives to himself.

④ Matthew 27:16 adds that Barabbas is **“a notorious prisoner,”** an *infamous* prisoner, a *notable* prisoner. Applaud him or curse him, people know who he is. His name has become a household word in Jerusalem.

This is all that Scripture reports about his actions and life situation. This is the man whose release **“the chief priests, the rulers and the people”** demand.

⑤ But there is one more detail: his name.

📖 Barabbas combines the Aramaic prefix *bar-* (“son of”) and the noun *abba* (“father”), so it means “son of father.” It is a patronymic: i.e., it is his last name, and it is derived from his father’s personal name (his dad was called *Abba*). In that way, Barabbas is similar to names like the Scottish *MacDonald*, the *Scandinavian* Nelson, and the English *Williamson*.

→ So, what is his first name? Some translations record it in Matthew 27:16.

🕯 Barabbas’ first name is Jesus.

That sounds odd, even irreverent, to a 21st century gringo; but there is nothing strange about it. *Jesus* is actually pronounced *Yeshua*, and is the precise equivalent of our Joshua. *Yeshua* means “God is salvation,” and it is a common name in 1st century Palestine.

☛ This does not undermine the uniqueness of Jesus. His run-of-the-mill earthly name reflects his incarnation: **“Though he was God...He made himself nothing; he**

took the humble position of a slave and appeared in human form” (Philippians 2:6, 7). **“He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him”** (Isaiah 53:2), and that extends to his ordinary name.

Anyway, put it all together, and the full name of the criminal is Yeshua bar-Abba, Jesus Barabbas, Jesus son of father.

“Away with this” Yeshua of Nazareth, {Jn 3:16} **“one and only Son”** of *the* Father, screams the mob. **“Release...to us”** Yeshua son of *another* father!

The names are easily mixed up. Otherwise, it is impossible to confuse these two.

☼ Yeshua bar-Abbas of Nazareth says, {Mt 5:39} **“If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also.”** And that is what He does.

The other Yeshua bar-Abbas is famous for defiance. Not only so, he is the bully who usually slaps first.

☼ Yeshua bar-Abbas of Nazareth says, {Mt 5:44} **“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”** He will do so even from the cross, when He cries {Lk 23:34} **“Father, forgive them”!**

The other Yeshua bar-Abbas hates his enemies. If he ever utters their names in prayer, it is to demand that the Almighty destroy them.

☼ Yeshua bar-Abbas of Nazareth says: all who want {Mt 16:24} **“to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”** That’s what He is doing right now.

The other Yeshua bar-Abbas knows nothing of self-denial. He does {Jud 21:25} **“what is right in his own eyes”** and struggles to avoid the cross.

☼ Yeshua bar-Abbas of Nazareth is {Heb 7:26} **“holy, blameless,”** and **“pure,”** for {Heb 4:15} **“has been tempted in every way, just as we are”** yet he has never sinned and never will.

The other Yeshua bar-Abbas is a sinner through and through. He is fatally infected with iniquity. His soul is badly corrupted.

{Rom 6:23} **“The wages of sin is death,”** and Barabbas has earned his sentence. On the other hand, Holy Jesus is completely innocent.

■ Even a man as jaded and cynical as Pilate can see the difference. In Luke 23:14 and 15 he says: **“I have found no basis for your charges against”** Jesus of Nazareth. **“he has done nothing to deserve death.”** In contrast, Pilate does not doubt Barabbas’ guilt; nor, for that matter, do Jesus’ enemies.

Yet, Yeshua bar-Abbas the murderer, terrorist, and thug will be released.

Meanwhile, Yeshua bar-Abbas the Messiah will take his place on the cross.

♥ This narrative is at the heart of the Gospel. It is the most concrete expression of the truth revealed in Romans 5:8 ~ **“God demonstrates his... love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”**

Maybe we do not entirely like that. It is popular to agree that the Deity loves humanity, but to deny the necessity of Christ’s death on our behalf.

Many find the concept of substitutionary atonement inherently offensive. They bristle at the suggestion that their sin separates them from God, that their good deeds are not enough to bridge the gap, and that the only solution is for the Son to reconcile them to the Father.

However, it is no good to point fingers. I have always believed Jesus died for my sins. So why is that I sometimes assume my sin is not as bad as my brother’s? Why do I sometimes imagine my blame is less offensive than that of the average guy? Why do I sometimes feel that my share of Jesus’ burden inflicted less pain on him than my neighbor’s bit?

- I need to hear the Word of the Lord! It plainly declares that God’s **“one and only Son,” “had no sin, but God made him become sin so that in Christ we could become right with God”** {2 Co 5:21}.

- And **“When [Christ Jesus] was hung on the cross, he took upon himself the curse for our wrongdoing”** {Gal 3:13}.

- And He **“suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring [us] to God”** {1 Pet 3:18}.

What did the criminal Barabbas do with his second chance? I don’t know.

As for my second chance, I want to receive it with humility and gratitude. I want to seize the opportunity to repent of my sin, love the LORD God with my whole being, love my neighbor as myself, live as Christ’s disciple, and serve the kingdom of God.

It was by our hands. It was for our sake. Thanks be to God!