

Good Swap or Bad Swap

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[0:00] Maybe to get us going, have a think is what we need to think about. When was the last time that you did a swap? Maybe it was Pokemon cards.

Maybe it was your packed lunch. And that's just the adults, kids, isn't it? When was the last time you did a swap? You know, Thursday night in our house is date night. Sometimes Alex and I go out for food.

And this is the swap that I think of every time. Every time we go out, I'm just waiting for that point in the meal when Alex will inevitably turn to me. And I know what's coming because I've seen the food envy in her eyes that's been there for the moment the waiter brought it out.

She'll turn to me at some point in the meal and say, how would you feel about a swap? I'll be honest, we've married for nearly 16 years. And to this day, I'm still not quite sure what I make of that request.

But have a think about it, right? When was the last time you did a swap? And here's the further question for you. You should think about that swap. Good swap or bad swap? Yeah?

[1:03] Good swap or bad swap? That's the question I want us to ask tonight. As we meet this man in this passage, you'll see him there at verse 18.

Barabbas. Fun fact for you. The only time Barabbas is mentioned in the Bible is in this episode. But so important is it that Matthew, Mark, Luke and John all record this episode.

And why that's surprising is that Barabbas, if you noticed it, if you look at it there, the guy doesn't even make an appearance. He's mentioned by name two times.

Do you see with me verse 18 and 19? And there's one kind of subtle reference to him there at verse 25. As you take him in there, here's the thing to notice. The man doesn't utter a single word.

He could not be more passive in this drama. And yet, here's the thing we're going to take in. He so profoundly represents all of us.

[2:24] So we're introducing him there. Do you see it? Verse 18. What do we learn about him? We learn that this guy's notorious. Right? Now, if you Google notorious people, what comes up are names like Jesse James, that American bank robber, Pablo Escobar, the Colombian drug lord, Lance Armstrong, the cyclist.

You get it. Notorious people. People who have a reputation, a bad reputation, and the whole world kind of knows about it. Okay? Notorious.

That's Barabbas. Notorious. Everyone knows that he is one of Jerusalem's bad guys. So think about it. Okay? He's the kind of guy you don't want to come across in a dark alley at night.

The kind of guy you're hoping your daughter doesn't bring home and say, Mom, Dad, meet my new fiancé. Learn in the text that Barabbas is a zealot.

So he's a Jewish freedom fighter who's got one aim in life. And it's to see that the Romans, who are the occupying force of the day, it's to see that the Romans are kicked out of Jerusalem.

[3:33] And that's probably the reason that he's in prison in the first place. Do you see verse 19? Luke wants us to know, and we get this detail twice, that Barabbas has been involved in an insurrection.

So that's just someone who riots and plots in order to take down the ruling authorities. You can kind of think it's like Guy Fawkes. Barabbas hates the Romans.

He hates them with a passion. And he's likely committed murder in the process of carrying out his hate. So this is a guy with a lot of hate in his heart. This is a guy with a lot of rebellion in his heart.

This is a guy with a lot of anger in his heart. This is a rebel of the highest order. So try and picture Barabbas. You've got to use your imagination here tonight.

Okay, try and picture him. He's sitting in that dingy prison cell. He knows he's there because he's guilty. The guy has no rights.

[4:36] There's no appeal system that he can use. There's no legal aid that he can apply for. There's no, you've got one phone call. And I don't even imagine with all of that that this guy gives two hoots.

The only thing that's in his diary is my death. He doesn't know when it's coming. All he knows is that it is coming.

And it's a death by crucifixion. That barbaric Roman form of execution reserved for the worst of people. This is Rome's way of making a public statement to the watching world that says, if anyone, anyone dares to try and set themselves up as a king, they want to rebel against Rome's king, then this is the fate that's going to await them.

They're sending a message, sending a signal to the watching world. Don't you dare. Because that's what's going to happen to you. Now, use your imagination to picture this scene, right? Get inside Barabbas' shoes.

Maybe he's in his cell. And from his cell, he hears this crowd baying for blood, screaming.

[5:47] See it in the text, verse 20. Crucify him. Crucify him. Crucify him. Crucify him. And he hears this in his cell. And he thinks, this one must be for me.

Let's put on a brave show for the people. Let's go out a defiant hero. The adrenaline starts pumping in his body. And he thinks, vive la revolution. That's what I want to happen here.

I'm going to go out. I'm going to go out with a bang. And all of a sudden, he hears the clinking of keys. And the guard, the one who's probably utterly delighted to see him behind bars, shouts his name, Barabbas.

And he's told to his utter astonishment, not, it's time to go. He's told, you're free to go.

So up he gets. And he's probably shoved out. And he covers his eyes because he's not seen the sun in days. Forgot what the smell of fresh air is like.

[6:56] And as Barabbas is led away to life, he sees another man passing him, going in the opposite direction, who's being ushered away to his death.

And it dawns on Barabbas that that man, as he goes, going in the opposite direction to the one that I'm going in, that man has taken my place.

And I wonder whether Barabbas, he keeps on walking because he doesn't know what to do with himself, right? And he finds himself roaming the streets of Jerusalem as a legally free man. I wonder if he grabs somebody who was in that crowd in this scene and he asks them, what on earth?

What on earth? Happened back there? Now what did happen back there, let me just try and get you into the history behind this.

It's widely understood that there was a custom that had developed over the years between the Romans and the Jews. One that took place every Passover festival in Jerusalem.

[8:06] I guess this is kind of like a goodwill gesture from the Romans to the Jews to try and keep them sweet. And the deal was that every year the people were presented with two Jewish prisoners.

Prisoner A, prisoner B. And they got to choose one of them to be released. The Romans, as it were, saying to them, because we're nice people deep down and we kind of want you to tolerate us, but we're kind of going to give you one of yours back to keep you sweet.

That's what's going on here. And on this particular Passover day, the choice was Barabbas or Jesus. The notorious Roman killer with blood in his hands or the innocent Jewish carpenter.

And I wonder if you picked it up, I even just noticed that there as we were having that Isaiah 52 reading for us that no deceit was found in his mouth.

Did you pick that up? The prophecy about who Jesus will be. And I think to myself, why was no deceit found in his mouth? Well, of course, no deceit was found in his mouth because there was no deceit in his heart.

[9:20] Totally innocent, totally blameless, and yet here he is, Barabbas or Jesus. Now, we use that phrase in our culture, don't we? It's a no-brainer. When we speak about a really obvious decision that's right in front of us, well, this would seem to be your no-brainer.

And what's more, if you start piecing this together, Pilate, the Roman governor overseeing this whole transaction, he's not neutral on this one, right? It's not like he's still to make up his mind who he would want to see released.

He wants Jesus off the hook and so he's probably picked the worst prisoner he can possibly imagine that he knows he's got in the prison in the form of Barabbas to go up against Jesus as if to say, come on.

I mean, Barabbas isn't just the underdog in this fight. He's not even the Leicester City 500 to 1 outside shot. Surely Barabbas as he goes up against Jesus has got absolutely no hope.

However, Pilate's hugely underestimated just how much hatred and hostility there is towards this man Jesus.

[10:35] So imagine Barabbas, we're back in his shoes, he's still hearing this report of what happened from the guy in the street. Remember he's gotten by the scruff of the neck, what on earth happened back there? He's hearing all this from him. The guy says back to him he was got by the scruff of the neck, he says to Barabbas, what happened is that Pilate asked the crowd which one of these men do you want me to release to you?

That's what Pilate asked us and after some strong arm persuasion from the religious leaders against all the odds the crowd chanted back not Jesus' name they chanted back your name Barabbas they wanted to see you released they wanted you to go free and so the crowd we made our feelings crystal clear to Pilate and Pilate in a stunned tone said he was just going to punish Jesus but we weren't satisfied with that because we got ourselves going at this point and although we could tell by the tone of his voice that he thought this was deeply unfair verse 23 regardless with loud cries we kept insisting angrily we kept insisting crucify him send Jesus to the cross because he's the real rebel and if you look at it in the text here this is what they're trying to do they set Jesus up as the real rebel against both Rome and God and that's a double whammy and so we just kept on shouting we shouted crucify him crucify him and then Pilate gave the order to release you and to condemn

Jesus here's the long and short of it Barabbas the cross the one that had your name written all over it guards tripping over each other to be the first to bang the nails into your hands and to say good riddance they put Jesus on that cross instead of you and at that moment I'm sure it becomes crystal clear to Barabbas that this man Jesus of Nazareth physically took his place the rebel declared to be innocent and the innocent declared to be a rebel so good swap or bad swap well as is so often the case in the bible friends there is glorious depth to this to be honest

I haven't really seen them until recently and here it is Barabbas' name means son of the father so bar son abba father Barabbas right Barabbas is the son of the father and in Jesus we have a son of the father so the choice here really is between two sons and for all intents and purposes as you consider this whole chaotic scene I mean it is utter bedlam here isn't it utter bedlam it looks like they've condemned the wrong son but here's what we need to see and I think it's the thing that Luke wants us to see despite all this chaos despite all this noise and commotion and anger and rage and injustice even though the Jews and Pilate put forward the wrong one God put forward the right one because it looks like

Pilate the one in the earthly seat of power has totally lost control of this situation however the Lord the one who sits in the place of all power the heavenly seat of power in contrast is in total control as the one who so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that all who would believe in him would not perish but have eternal life and so see verse 25 somewhat mysteriously Luke just kind of drops in that detail right at the end there that Pilate surrendered Jesus to the crowd's will and that's kind of the view from the street level however the view from 3000 feet what's actually going on is Jesus wholeheartedly surrendering himself to his father's will in pursuit of his people

[15:29] Barabbas is the one man in history who can say that Jesus literally took the cross that was reserved for my wrongs Jesus bore the guilt the shame the curse that he deserved and he received the release freedom and life that Jesus deserved but this man Barabbas so profoundly

represents all of us and we might not share his life but we certainly all share his sin and shame and because we share his sin we share his sentence rebels guilty awaiting death and couldn't care less totally helpless totally passive when it comes to this cosmic drama and yet Jesus took our place he gets what we deserved and we get what he deserved and that's why Martin

Luther the famous reformation individual looked upon the cross of Christ and he called it the great exchange the greatest exchange in all of history Jesus gives up his life so that all who would come to him in faith and trust in him can by faith know the joy of forgiveness of sins past present and future we can go free and we can live as sons and daughters of the living God we can live our lives as the sons of the father loved forgiven ransomed!

adopted! This is the glory of the cross how marvelous and yet how horrific is this place that God the father sent God the son who willingly came to die for people like Barabbas and people like us and he holds out his nail pierced hands tonight and says would you come would you come and see that I died in your place for your sin for your forgiveness would you have faith in me friends good swap or bad swap the words of Charles Wesley and can it be that I should gain an interest in the saviour's blood died he for me who caused his pain for me who him to death pursued amazing love how can it be that thou my God should die for me so just in a few moments we are going to sing and then we're going to move into a time of communion together but why don't we just be silent and be still before our

God bring before him our anxieties our worries our sins run to him knowing the forgiveness that is found in this man who took our place and then I'll pray and we'll stand to sing God made him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God and so father we praise you this evening for sending your son Jesus to rescue us through his precious blood shed on the cross thank you for the forgiveness and the peace and the newness of life that we have in him lord help us savor it more father for those of us here tonight lord and we feel distant we feel far lord would we be reminded that by our faith we are connected to the most loving and strong of saviors father for those of us maybe here tonight we're not sure what we make of all this stuff would your spirit be taking the message of the cross and be applying it deep into our hearts convince us of the truth that there's none like him and so be with us now lord as we sing and as we take communion together we pray all of these things in Jesus's precious name amen