

Our **GUIDE**

for little ones

Published by the
Protestant Reformed Sunday School Association
Writer: Don Doezema Artist: Connie Meyer
Designers: Judi Doezema & Brenda Brands

IN THE SUNDAY SCHOOL

Lesson 49

Jesus or Barabbas

Matthew 27:15-25

At the time of Jesus' trial before Pilate, there was in prison a man by the name of Barabbas. He *deserved* to be there. In fact, he deserved *more* than that. He deserved to *die*. He was a *robber* and a *murderer*. He was, we might say, public enemy number one. Everyone knew about him. Everyone knew that he deserved to be locked up, and that he deserved to be put to death for his crimes.



That was Barabbas. Let's see, now, how a man like Barabbas became part of the story of this first Good Friday long ago.

Pilate, you will remember, had already decided that Jesus was *innocent*. Pilate should, therefore, have let Jesus

go. But the leaders of the Jews, almost *seventy* of them here at the judgment hall, were complaining loudly, insisting that Jesus had committed *crimes*, crimes that were worthy of *death*. That made Pilate *nervous*. He didn't want to *displease* the Jews. If he were to make them all *angry*, they could make *trouble* for him.

So, what to do? It was still very early on this Friday morning, but already crowds of people were beginning to gather before the judgment hall. "Ah!" thinks Pilate, "the *people!* I can't get anywhere with the *leaders*. They're stubborn. They want this man Jesus *killed*. Guilty or

Note to Parents: These papers are intended for the younger Sunday School students — grade 3 and below. Vocabulary and concepts are such that children in this age group, even the 3rd graders, will profit most if the stories are read *to* them, not *by* them. Most lessons have two stories, for two sittings if that proves to be beneficial. Our hope is that parents will find these lessons to be useful tools in the teaching of Bible stories and Bible truths to their children in the "off" season.

innocent — it matters not to them. But the *people* — maybe I can get *them* to demand that Jesus be let go.”

So Pilate decides to try to trick them into doing so. Listen.

Every year, at the Passover Feast in Jerusalem, Pilate would let a prisoner out of jail. Pilate would first select *two* prisoners, and then let the people choose the one that they wanted to be released. “Okay,” said Pilate, “I will give you your choice. Right now. Two men. Whom do you want me to set free, to walk again among you — Jesus, or ... *Barabbas*?”

That was a good trick, wasn't it? Just think about who these two men were! Jesus had done only *good*. He *healed* people. He even raised some from the *dead*. Barabbas was *bad*. He made *trouble*. He even *killed* people. With a choice like *that*, who in their right *mind* could possibly choose for ... *Barabbas*?

Pilate would give the people a little time to think about it.

While he was waiting for the people to make up their minds, a messenger came to Pilate to give him a message from his wife. His wife had been frightened by a dream. We would probably call it a *nightmare*. It was about *Jesus*. In her dream she saw Jesus as being no *ordinary* person. He was *innocent*. And *big trouble* could follow for anyone who would do anything to hurt Him. When Pilate's wife woke up, she was worried about her husband, for he was judging Jesus. This, she thinks, is serious business! What could her dream be but a

supernatural warning — a warning from the *gods*? She must tell her husband about it, even if it means interrupting a trial. So she sends to Pilate this message: “Have thou nothing to do with that just man, for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him.”

Pilate was already afraid of Jesus. Now he's even *more* afraid. “But,” he thinks, “soon I'll be rid of this problem because the people, given the choice of Jesus or Barabbas, will surely ask that *Jesus* be set free.”

Trouble is, the leaders of the Jews had gone right to work. They had seen right away how clever Pilate was in offering the people a choice between Jesus and Barabbas. So they moved among the people, telling them how they should vote. “Don't let the Roman governor get away with this *trick*,” they would argue. “Don't let Pilate decide for *you* what should be done about Jesus. Vote for *Barabbas*.”

And, believe it or not, the people *did*. When Pilate finally asked them, “Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you?” they answered all together, “Barabbas!”

Pilate was dumbfounded. What ails these Jews? Do they all hate this man so much that they would rather have a *murderer* walking on their streets than *Jesus*? “What, then, do you want me to do with Jesus, who is called Christ?” Pilate asks. And they all cry, “Let *him* be *crucified*!”

Yes, *all*! Can you believe that?

Nobody said “No!” True, the people had been *stirred up* by their leaders. But they *knew* what the choices were. They knew that Barabbas was a *murderer*. *God’s* judgment would be: Barabbas must *die*. *Theirs* was: let him go *free*.

So *different* was the life of Jesus — a life that He had lived *before their very eyes*. They knew that He had fed the hungry, healed the sick, even raised the dead. Many of these same people had once been so excited by those miracles that they wanted to make Jesus *king* — until they discovered that His kingdom was of a different *kind*. Then they gave up on Him. “If He is not interested in being king in Jerusalem, then we are not interested in Him. He’s of no use to us.” So, putting aside all the proof that *this man is approved by God*, they say to Pilate, “We don’t want Him! Let *Him* be crucified!”

Would *you* have said that?

So easy it is for us to say, “Not I! I would *never* do what those wicked old Jews did.” But think hard. The Jews had to *choose*. They had to choose, really, between the things of *God* ... and the things of the *world*. So do we. Every day we make choices. Do you always do what pleases *God*? ... or do you do what, by nature, pleases *you*? Look hard in a mirror, and know it to be true — Jesus had to *die* for *sinners*, like *you* and *me*.



Pilate knew nothing of this. But he

was afraid of Jesus. And he was scared by his wife’s dream. He did not want to be responsible for *this man’s* death. He wanted the Jews to understand that *they* would be responsible for it, because they *demand*ed it. So he took water, and in front of all the people he washed his hands, saying, “I am innocent of the blood of this just person. See ye to it.”



Pilate was mistaken. The stain of Jesus’ blood cannot be washed from his hands. It’s there still today.

Astoundingly, however, the Jews were perfectly willing to accept it. “That’s okay to us,” they said to Pilate. “We will accept responsibility for this man’s death. His blood be on us, and on our children.” And it is.

But His blood is on us too — in a different way. Did you know that? We are *washed* in it. Heaven ... is built on it. Think about *that*.

How Well Did You Listen?

1. Why was Barabbas in prison?
2. Pilate let the people choose between two prisoners. Who were they?
3. While Pilate was waiting for the people to decide, what message did he get from his wife?
4. Who persuaded the people to vote for Barabbas?
5. When Pilate asked the people what he should do with Jesus, what did the people say?
6. What did Pilate do, then, with *water*?

The Scourging and Mock Coronation

John 19:1-12

Those are big words, aren't they? "Scourging" and "mock coronation."

Do you know what they mean? A scourging is a whipping. A really *hard* whipping. Not at all like a good spanking. A spanking just stings for awhile. But a prisoner who was scourged by Roman soldiers was sometimes hurt so bad that he *died* from it. And that's what Pilate commanded the soldiers to do to Jesus. Right there in front of the people Jesus was whipped till His bare back was a mass of bloody wounds.

Can you imagine that? That's what Pilate did to Jesus — after declaring Him *innocent*. And yet, Jesus just stood there, silently, and took it. The prophet Isaiah had foretold it. "I gave my back to the smiters," said the prophet. And then this: "With his stripes we are healed." That's about *Jesus*. And about *us*. Jesus *bore it all* for ... *us*. Never forget that! What must we learn when we see how much Jesus suffered? We must learn to hate ... our *sins*.

After the terrible scourging, there was the mock coronation. A coronation is a *crowning* of someone to be *king*. The Roman soldiers had been watching Jesus' trial. They had heard Him tell Pilate that He was indeed a King. The soldiers looked at Him now and thought that this was a joke. This man — a King?!? Who

would ever believe that? So, after whipping Him, they led Him back into Pilate's judgment hall and mocked Him. You're a king? Well, then, you'll need a *scepter*.

And they put a *stick* in His hand.

You'll need a *crown* too.

And they pressed on His head a crown of *thorns*.



You must also have a *robe*. And they put over His shoulders an old purple coat. Now you're a king, they say. And they all line up to bow before Him and say, "Hail, king of the Jews."



Even that wasn't enough. They began to hit Him. First, with their hands. Then they took the stick from His hand and hit Him over the head. And then, to top it all off, they spit on Him.

Think again of Isaiah's prophecy: "I hid not my face from shame and spitting." Jesus endured it all — for *us*.

Do you hate your *sins*?

Pilate watched his soldiers mock Jesus. He *let* them do it. Why? Perhaps it was a last, desperate attempt to satisfy the Jews — without actually *killing* Jesus. They had seen Jesus tortured by the cruel scourge. Pilate will now show them Jesus with blood and spit running down His face. Will they not now *pity* the man? Do they have hearts of *stone*? Will they not finally say, This is *enough*?

Jesus is led back out before the people, still wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. "Behold the man," says Pilate.

The Jews did behold Him. And what did they say? “Crucify him!” they shouted. “Crucify him!”

Once more Pilate repeats it: “I find no fault in him.” Will Pilate therefore now *release* Him? The Jews were afraid he *might*. For Pilate had *rejected* all of the false charges that they had brought against Jesus. Before Roman law, Jesus has been declared by the governor to be *innocent*. What else can the Jews say? What other charge can they bring? There was, really, only one other charge. It was, in fact, the *real* charge. “We have a law,” the Jews said, “and by *our law* he ought to die, because he made himself the *Son of God*.”

We can be sure that *that* charge made Pilate sit up and take notice. “What if,” he wondered.... “What if that’s *true*?” He thought about his wife’s dream. He thought about Jesus’ behavior. “If this man is really the Son of *Jehovah*, what will happen to *me* if I condemn Him to *death*?”

So back Pilate goes, with Jesus, into the judgment hall. “Whence art thou?” Pilate asks.

But Jesus had already told Pilate all that he needed to know to judge this case rightly. Besides, Pilate had already given his verdict — Jesus is *innocent*! The verdict stands. Nothing more need be said. And Jesus said nothing.

That angered Pilate. “How do you dare not answer *me*?” Pilate asked. “Don’t you know that I have power to crucify you, and power to release you?”

Now Jesus will speak. His words were few. But when He stands before rulers He gives a good testimony. Pilate may *think* that, as governor of Judea, he has the last word at this trial. But it isn’t true. There is a *higher* power. God’s! And Jesus will tell Pilate so. “Thou couldest have no power at all against me,” Jesus said, “except it were given thee from above.”

Yes, there *was* a higher power. That’s what Pilate was afraid of, from the beginning. An unbeliever? — yes. But afraid of *God*! When Pilate went back out to the Jews, therefore, he tried still to find some way to convince them that Jesus should be let go.

But it didn’t work. The Jews knew that Pilate had *another* fear — a fear of *them*. A fear of what they might tell *Caesar*, the mighty emperor of Rome. A fear, therefore, of losing his *job* ... if not his *life*. “If thou let this man go,” they said, “thou art not Caesar’s friend.” Why? Because “whosoever maketh himself a king (like this man Jesus tries to do) speaketh against Caesar.”

That decided it. If Pilate must choose between God and self, he will choose ... *self*.

But God still rules in the heavens.

How Well Did You Listen?

1. What did Pilate tell his soldiers to do to Jesus?
2. What did the soldiers then give to Jesus for a scepter and a crown?

3. What did the soldiers say when they bowed to Jesus?
4. When Pilate presented Jesus to the people, battered, bloodied, and bruised, what did the people say?
5. What charge did the Jews finally make against Jesus before Pilate?
6. When Pilate still wanted to let Jesus go, what did the people tell him?

How Well Do You Understand?

1. Pilate let the people choose between Jesus and Barabbas. Why did Pilate pick a man so *bad* as *Barabbas*?
2. The people's choice of Barabbas was a terrible sin. How do we show, in our lives, that we are no better?
3. Can you explain why Pilate washed his hands in front of the Jews?
4. Whose prophecy was fulfilled when Jesus was scourged?
5. What did Pilate hope the Jews would say

when they saw Jesus after He was whipped and spit upon?

6. Why was Pilate so disturbed by the new charge that the Jews brought against Jesus?
7. What was Pilate afraid the people might do if he would release Jesus?

Memory Verse

Isaiah 53:5c "With his stripes we are healed."

Complete the dot-to-dot and color the picture.

