

The Lord's Message: Am I Guilty? Belief that No One Can Love Me

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Where: Tilghman UMC

Scripture Reference: Matthew 27:15-17, 20-22, 26

I have become a firm believer that everyone is loved by God. Unfortunately, there are people that do not think that anyone can love them, let alone God. They have this thinking, that comes from the devil, that they are unlovable. In **2 Corinthians 2:11**, Paul tells us that as Christians we need to be aware of the devil's schemes, so that we will not be outwitted by him. Peter says that Christians need to be alert for the devil's schemes, **1 Peter 5:8-9**. One of the most successful schemes that the devil uses is to convince people that God does not love them. The devil convinces people that there is no way that a Holy God could love them for what they have done. The truth is that God loves them, not for what they have done, but what Jesus has done for all of us. Am I guilty of believing the devil's schemes that no one can love me?

Let us pray.

Of all the people at the time of Jesus' betrayal, arrest, sentence to death, death on a cross for your sins and mine, and his body placed in a borrowed tomb, Barabbas is the person that epitomizes someone who is firmly convinced that God does not love him. Some people have looked at this as a prisoner exchange. Jesus for Barabbas. We might have overlooked that Jesus and Barabbas are charged with the same crime. Their conviction is a crime of sedition, insurrection, or treason. Jesus was charged with claiming to be the King of the Jews. Barabbas is charged with starting an insurrection against Rome.

The irony is that the charges against Jesus are never proven. As a matter of fact, there is no evidence to convict Jesus of this crime. In **John 18:33-38**, Pilate questions Jesus about this charge of insurrection. Pilate finds no evidence to charge Jesus with this crime.

Unlike Jesus, there is plenty of evidence against Barabbas. In **Mark 15:7**, we have the evidence. Not only has Barabbas started an insurrection, but he committed murder. Barabbas is easily convicted of his crime. No evidence can be found to convict Jesus. Barabbas deserved death. Jesus deserved freedom. Barabbas has sinned. Jesus has not.

I would ask you to please close your eyes. Imagine that you are Barabbas. You are sitting in a Roman jail. You are underground. It is dark, damp, and filthy. Hardly any daylight is visible. You are chained to the wall of the cell. The chains are cold and heavy. You can hear a person cry out in pain with the punishment of 40 lashes. You know what that is like. You have experienced that. The flesh of the back being ripped open by the end of whip containing glass or sharp stone. You hear the soldiers coming for those prisoners to be taken to the cross for crucifixion. You hear the prisoners cry out as they are being dragged from the prison. You have seen the crosses throughout Palestine. You have heard the agony of those being crucified. You know that is what awaits you. The Romans reserved crucifixion especially for the ones that tried to overthrow their rule. Those Romans got what they deserved. The soldiers will be coming for you. You hear the boots of the soldiers coming down the wooden stairs. They are coming for you. They walk into your cell and unchain you and say you are free to go. Is this some kind of a trick? They say, "You get out of here. You are free."

Please open your eyes. Now, we do not know what Barabbas was thinking. We can only perceive what thoughts and feelings we might have if we were in Barabbas' situation. Yet, I would say that there are people in a prison. Not a physical prison, but one that is created by themselves or others. The prison is a mental and spiritual one. This mental prison confines people. One that is created when people believe that they are less than others, that no one cares about them, that no one loves them. These are all lies. Lying is sin. These lies come from the father of all lies as Jesus describes in **John 8:44**. Christians are to acknowledge these lies and to tell the truth. That everyone is a child of God. As Christians, we need to be at work to break down these prisons. We need to show love to our neighbors as God has shown love to us.

We also need to realize that we are all Barabbas. We have all sinned. We all deserve to be in God's prison. In **Romans 3:23**, we have all sinned. There are not degrees to sin. Sin is sin. In **Romans 6:23**, the punishment for sin is death.

Christ Jesus paid the penalty that Barabbas was supposed to pay. Christ Jesus paid the penalty that you and I were to pay. The Good News is that, even though we have all sinned, Christ Jesus paid for our sins. The biblical term for this is "atonement."

God told Moses that the people were to bring either a bull or a goat to be sacrificed. In this way, the blood from the animal would make an atonement for the people's sin. This is found in **Leviticus 17: 11**. In **Hebrews 10:10**, Jesus made atonement for us. The reason for Jesus to be born a human being was to save us human beings from our sins. In **Matthew 1:21**, the name Jesus means savior. Why would Jesus save us from our sins? The answer is that He loves us. In **John 3:16-17**, the verses say that we are loved by God.

So, two individuals are convicted of insurrection. These two individuals are both named "Jesus," which means savior. One thinks to save people is to kill and murder to overthrow the Romans. The other knows to save is to show His love by dying for the sins of others. One thinks that no one can love him. The other loves everyone unconditionally. One is set free. The other pays the crime makes atonement for all of us.

Who are you going to listen to: Jesus Barabbas or Jesus Christ? One who thinks that no one can love him or one who says I love you no matter what you have done. Who are you going to believe? Am I guilty of believing that no one can love me? Only you and God can answer that question. Amen.