

Title:                    **BARABBAS**  
**A PICTURE OF SUBSTITUTION**

Text:            Matthew 27:15-26

Subject:        *Substitution*

Date:            Sunday Evening — August 29, 2010`

Readings:      *Larry Criss and Merle Hart*

Tape #          Z-96a

Introduction:

This morning I showed you what I trust the Lord God will do in our midst during our conference.

(Psalms 28:9) “Save thy people, and bless thine inheritance: feed them also, and lift them up for ever.”

If you will turn with me to Matthew 27, tonight I want to preach the message by which the Lord God performs these mighty operations of grace. This is the message you will hear next weekend from eight gospel preachers. It is the message we preach incessantly here and around the world. That message, the message of this Book, is Substitution. Our text will be Matthew 27:15-26.

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(Matthew 27:15-26) “Now at [that] feast the governor was wont to release unto the people a prisoner, whom they would. 16 And they had then a notable prisoner, called Barabbas. 17 Therefore when they were gathered together, Pilate said unto them, Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus which is called Christ? 18 For he knew that for envy they had delivered him. 19 When he was set down on the judgment seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him. 20 But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus. 21 The governor answered and said unto them, Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you? They said, Barabbas. 22 Pilate saith unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ? [They] all say unto him, Let him be crucified. 23 And the governor said, Why, what evil hath he done? But they cried out the more, saying, Let him be crucified. 24 When Pilate saw that he

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could prevail nothing, but [that] rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed [his] hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye [to it]. 25 Then answered all the people, and said, His blood [be] on us, and on our children. 26 ¶ Then released he Barabbas unto them: and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered [him] to be crucified.”

My subject this evening is **BARABBAS** — **A PICTURE OF SUBSTITUTION**. Of all the doctrines taught in the Word of God, none is so vitally important as the doctrine of substitution. Men everywhere talk about the doctrine of substitutionary atonement. They speak much about Christ, the sinner’s Substitute. But their language is vague. And very few people understand what the Bible teaches about substitution. It is for this reason that I want us to look at the story of Barabbas. **Here we have a clear illustration of the nature of Christ’s death. It was a substitutionary sacrifice and atonement. The innocent died in the place of the guilty, and the guilty must go free.**

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You are all familiar with the story. It is recorded by all four of the gospel writers. During the days of Israel's subjection to Rome, a strange custom was regularly practiced. On the day of the Passover the Roman governor released a guilty prisoner. No doubt, this was intended to be an act of benevolence on the part of the Roman authorities toward the Jews. The Jews probably accepted it as a significant compliment to their Passover celebrations. Since on that day the Jews were themselves delivered out of the land of Egypt, they may have thought it a most fitting thing for some prisoner to obtain his freedom.

Now since some prisoner must be released on the Day of Atonement, Pilate thought that he now had opportunity to allow the Savior to go free, without compromising himself in the eyes of his superiors at Rome. So he asked the people which of the two they preferred, a notorious criminal or the holy Savior. Without hesitation or dissension, the crowd cried for the release of Barabbas and the death of Christ. Pilate's last effort to release Christ had failed —

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*“And so Pilate, willing to content the people, released Barabbas unto them, and delivered Jesus, when he had scourged him, to be crucified” (Mark 15:15)*

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Who Barabbas was we do not know. His name signifies — “His father’s son.” Some mystics think that there is an indication here that he was particularly and specially the son of Satan. Others suppose that it was an endearing name, a name given to him because he was his father’s darling, a child indulged by his father, or as we would say his daddy’s boy. These writers add this observation — Indulged, spoiled children are the most likely persons to become injurious to society, griefs to their parents, and curses to all around them.

**Certainly, there is a warning here for us.** Looking at the cases of Eli’s two sons, Absalom, and Barabbas, we are warned as parents not to be too

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excessive in the indulgence and pampering of our children.

At any rate, **Barabbas appears to have committed at least three crimes.** He was imprisoned for murder, sedition, and robbery. We might well pity the father of such a son. **This wretch is brought out and set in competition with the holy Son of God!** And the poor inhabitants of Jerusalem were so hardened in their unbelief and sin, so thirsty for the innocent blood of Christ that they prefer this obnoxious creature to the man who is God's own Fellow!

**SUBSTITUTION**

This fact is very significant. There is more teaching in it than we might realize at first glance. **In this act of freeing the guilty and binding the innocent, we have a vivid example of salvation by substitution.** The guilty is set free and the innocent is put to death in his place. Barabbas is spared, and Christ is crucified. We have in this striking event a display of the manner in which God pardons and justifies the

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ungodly. He does it because Christ has suffered and died in their stead, the Just for the unjust. We deserve to die for the punishment of our sins; but a mighty Substitute has suffered our punishment. Eternal death is our due; but a glorious Surety has died for us. We are all in the position of Barabbas by nature. We are guilty, wicked, condemned, and shut up under the law. But when we were without hope and without strength, *“in due time Christ died for the ungodly.”* And now God, for Christ’s sake, can be just and yet *“the Justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.”*

In the Old Testament rite of cleansing lepers, two birds were used. One bird was killed, and its blood was poured into a basin. The other bird was dipped into the blood, and then, with its wings covered with crimson, it was set free to fly into the open air. The slain bird typified our Savior whose blood was shed at Mt. Calvary. And every soul that by faith is plunged into the...

“Fountain filled with blood,  
Drawn from Immanuel’s veins,

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is set free, owing its life and liberty to the Savior who was once for sinners slain. This is substitution. It comes to this — Barabbas must die, or Christ must die. You the sinner must perish, or Christ, the immaculate Lamb of God, must be slain. Behold, the Incarnate God dies that we may be delivered.

**Proposition:** The Lord Jesus Christ suffered in the place of sinners like Barabbas, satisfying the wrath and justice of God; and like Barabbas all those sinners for whom Christ made satisfaction must go free.

**Divisions:** May God the Holy Spirit be our Teacher as we look into this subject: — **BARABBAS** — **A PICTURE OF SUBSTITUTION**. And may he grant pardon and salvation to guilty sinners by Christ. I want you to see four things about this man Barabbas.

1. Barabbas was a man guilty of many offenses.
2. Barabbas was a prisoner under the sentence of the law.
3. A Substitute was provided to die in Barabbas' place.



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4. Because Christ died, Barabbas was set free.

**A GUILTY MAN**

The first thing I want you to see is this: — **Barabbas was a man guilty of many offenses.** We sometimes say that a man is “as guilty as sin.” Well Barabbas was as guilty as sin. His life was a life of riotousness and sin. He was tried in a court of law and found guilty of robbery, sedition, and murder. As such he is a fair representative of all men by nature. We could all be named “Barabbas.” We are all the sons of our father Adam. His image, his nature, and his character is reflected in us all.

**Like Barabbas, we are all rebels.** Barabbas stirred up sedition. He was a revolutionary. That is a modern name for rebels. He would not submit to authority. This is the problem with our race. We are proud, self-willed rebels. We hate authority.

1. In our father Adam, we rebelled against God’s command.

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2. We are born with a rebellious nature.
3. In pride and self-will, we rebelled all the days of our lives against God's throne.
4. We sinfully rebel against God's holy law. Man acts like he does, simply because God says, "Don't do that." Man sees the good and refuses to do it, simply because God says, "Do it."
5. And we are steadfast and persistent in our rebellion.
  - As children, we rebelled against parents and teachers.
  - As adults, we rebel against moral and civil authority.
  - Even as believers, we have a nature within us that rebels against everything holy and good (Romans 7:14, 15, 18).

(Romans 7:14-15) "For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. 15 For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I."

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(Romans 7:18) “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not.”

**And Like Barabbas, we are all robbers.** It was Adam’s determination to rob God of his authority, of his creation, and of his glory. And that is what man does by his sin.

1. We have robbed God of his glory, refusing to worship him.
2. We have robbed God of his honor, refusing to believe his Word.
3. We have robbed God of his creation, stealing that which God has made for himself and using it for ourselves, without regard to him.
4. We have robbed ourselves and our children.
  - Of the blessedness of our original creation.
  - Of fellowship with God.
  - Of the image of God.
  - Of true freedom.
  - Of the favor of God.
  - Of life.

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Through our sin and rebellion our race is reduced to nothing but emptiness and vanity. Once we were princes of God's creation. Now we are empty handed thieves.

**Ephesians 2:11-12** “Wherefore remember, that ye *being* in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; (12) That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:”

**Once more, like Barabbas, we are all murderers.** In the course of his rebellion and robbery, Barabbas had committed murder. So have we all. There is not a guiltless one among us.

1. We have all committed multiple murders in our hearts — Envy, hatred, anger, wrath, and malice

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are in the eyes of God's law equal to murder (Matthew 5:21-22).

(Matthew 5:21-22) “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: 22 But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.”

2. We have infected our children with the deadly disease of sin. Sin is a plague of the heart. It is a family disease passed on from generation to generation.
3. What is more, we are all guilty of the blood of the Son of God. Yes we are guilty of slaughtering the Lord of Glory!
4. We must never to forget what we are by nature.

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**Matthew 15:19** “For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.”

There is not an evil deed, or atrocious crime, or an infamous sin recorded on the pages of human history which does not reside, in potential, in the heart of every man, woman, and child in the world. Well could we all be named “Barabbas”!

- We are all the descendants of Adam.
- We are all of our father the devil.
- We are all the children of wrath, even as others.

Look to the book of God’s law. Read every command of God. By them we stand judged. The verdict is guilty! Guilty! Guilty! Like Barabbas we are men guilty of many offenses.

**A PRISONER**

Now, in the second place, **Barabbas was a prisoner under the sentence of the law.** Barabbas had been

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found guilty. The sentence was passed. **Barabbas must die**. On the day when the Jews observe their Passover, two thieves will be crucified. And Barabbas will be crucified in the midst of them, for he is the vilest of the three. Take him away. Bind him hand and foot in the prison until the day of his execution.

Picture Barabbas in that prison. He expected very soon to be taken out, nailed to a cross and hung up to die, as the just payment for his crimes. He was held under the sentence of the law. That is just the condition of every person in the world by nature.

**John 3:36** “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.”

**Romans 3:19** “Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before

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God.”

**Galatians 3:10** “For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed *is* every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.”

**Galatians 3:22-23** “The scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. (23) But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed.”

**Ephesians 2:3** We all “were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.”

**Man’s bondage is as cruel and terrible as it is sure.** Men today like to boast of their independence and freedom. We are told, “I’m going to do my own thing.” But they are only doing exactly the same thing that men have been doing for six thousand



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years. Man is not free. He is in bondage. He is in bondage to religious tradition, social custom, and peer pressure. **And man by nature is in bondage to sin. He is in bondage to his own nature, and the lusts of his own heart.**

- Man is in bondage to his sinful nature. — “*Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil*” (Jeremiah 13:23).
- Men are taken captive by Satan at his will (1 Timothy 2:26).
- Man by nature is prone to every kind of evil. It is only the restraining grace of God that keeps you from that wicked thing that you pretend to abhor.
- Listen to me, you who are yet without Christ, you are bound under the chains of darkness, and your will is held in captivity by the fetters of iniquity.

You have resolved many times to change. You may have even succeeded in reforming your outward behavior somewhat. But your character, your nature, your will is in bondage.

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- You are in the bondage of despair.
- You are in the bondage of helplessness.
- You are in the bondage of hopelessness.

**Christ alone can set the prisoner free!** — *“If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed!”* We were *“such as sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, being bound in affliction and iron.”* Then we cried unto the Lord in our trouble, and he saved us out of all our distresses. — *“He brought us out of darkness and the shadow of death, and brake our bands in sunder!”* (Psalm 107:10-14). **Oh imprisoned sinner, cry out for mercy. Christ can make you free!**

**I tell you also that the law’s sentence is fixed and immutable.** — *“The soul that sinneth, it shall die!”* God has spoken. There is no reprieve. There is no amnesty. There is no repeal.

- God’s law says you must die.
- God’s holiness says you must die.
- God’s justice says you must die.

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I tell you that man by nature is under the sentence and curse of God's holy law.

The law of God demands your death. You are not on probation. You are on death row. The God of heaven judges you to be guilty. Your own conscience consents to the verdict. The sentence is passed. The only thing lacking is the appointed day of execution.

- We died spiritually in our father Adam (Romans 5:12).
- Physical death is the consequence of sin.
- And every unbelieving sinner must die eternally, because of God's immutable law.
- Every sinner out of Christ is dead at law.

**Is there therefore no hope for a sinner like Barabbas? Must all the guilty forever perish? Will God not have mercy? Is there anyway whereby God can be faithful to his holy law and yet pardon sin? Is there any means whereby God can both satisfy his justice and let the sinner live?** God will not show mercy at the expense of his justice. But he will show mercy if justice can be satisfied in a

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Substitute. **Blessed be the name of the Lord, there is hope for sinners, for the Lord God has found a Substitute!**

**THE SUBSTITUTE**

So mark this third fact and rejoice — **A Substitute was provided to die in Barabbas' place.** The Roman soldier came and unlocked Barabbas' prison door, took off his shackles, and said, "Barabbas, you're free to go. Jesus of Nazareth is going to die in your place." That, my friend, is real substitution.

**Illustration:** *One Room Schoolhouse*

Now, beloved, that One who suffered and died as Barabbas' Substitute is our Substitute. His name is Jesus Christ, the Lord. He is God's own, well-beloved Son. He is the only Substitute God can or will accept.

**Romans 3:24-26** "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ

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Jesus: (25) Whom God hath set forth *to be* a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; (26) To declare, *I say*, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.”

**2 Corinthians 5:21** “For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”

**1 Peter 2:24** “Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.”

**The sinner’s Substitute must be a suitable person, able and willing to redeem.** Whoever undertakes to reconcile a holy God and sinful men, must himself be both God and man.

- He must be God, for only God is able to make infinite satisfaction.

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• He must be man, for man must be punished.  
Behold, the God-man, our Savior. Being God he is able to redeem. Being man he is able to suffer. Being the God-man he is an all-sufficient Redeemer, both able and willing to save! **In order to be a Substitute for others, our Redeemer must be perfect and sinless** — “*He knew no sin.*”

**The Lord Jesus Christ suffered the just punishment due to our sins, as our Substitute.**  
Christ was made sin for us; and because he was made sin for us the holy Lord God imputed our sins to his darling Son!

- God took his Son without the camp.
- God hung his Son up in our place between two thieves.
- God forsook his well-beloved Son.
- God killed his Son!
- God buried the body that bore our sin.

And by a marvelous transfer of grace, the Lord God has made us the righteousness of God in his Son, Christ Jesus.

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**BARABBAS SET FREE**

Now, in the last place, I want you to see that **because Christ died in his place, Barabbas was set free.** Jesus Christ took Barabbas' place at Calvary. Therefore Barabbas did not die. There is a glorious truth here. All of those for whom the Son of God died at Calvary must be set free.

It is not possible for the law to punish my Substitute and punish me too. Not one soul for whom Jesus Christ died shall be found in hell. The cross of Christ can never be discovered a miscarriage. The blood of Christ cannot be spilled in vain. — *“He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied.”* This is real substitution. Any doctrine that teaches that God will both punish Christ and punish those for whom Christ died is not substitution and is not the gospel.

**Illustration:** *“Let these go their way” (John 18:8).*

From whence this fear and unbelief?  
Hath no the Father put to grief

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His spotless Son for me?  
And will the righteous Judge of men,  
Condemn me for that debt of sin,  
Which, Lord, was charged on Thee?

Complete atonement Thou hast made,  
And to the utmost farthing paid  
Whate'er Thy people owed:  
Nor can His wrath on me take place,  
If sheltered in Thy righteousness,  
And sprinkled with Thy blood.

If Thou has my discharge procured,  
And freely in my room endured  
The whole of wrath divine:  
Payment God cannot twice demand,  
First at my bleeding Surety's hand,  
And then again at mine.

Then turn, my soul, unto thy rest;  
The merits of thy great High Priest  
Have bought thy liberty.  
Trust in His efficacious blood,



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Nor fear thy banishment from God,  
Since Jesus died for thee.

**Understand this: — The sin-atoning death of our Lord Jesus Christ was a satisfactory substitution!**

- It satisfied the designs of his Father.
- It satisfied the desires of his own soul.
- It satisfied the demands of his law.
- It satisfied the debts of his people.

**And every guilty sinner for whom Jesus Christ died at Calvary must be set free! So the question to be answered is this: For whom did Christ die?**

He died for the ungodly.

He died for men who are without strength.

He died for men who are his enemies.

He died for his people.

He died for every sinner who trusts him!

**How does the Son of God set the prisoners free?**

- He gives them life.
- He casts Satan out.
- He breaks the power of canceled sin.

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- He subdues their wills.
- He silences the law.
- He gives them faith.
- He promises the resurrection. We will die physically. But the grave cannot hold Christ's free men. He will raise these bodies to life and immortality.

Oh may Christ open the doors of the prison for you tonight and set you free.

**APPLICATION**

Listen to this preacher, you are under the sentence of God's holy law and you will surely die, unless you find a place of refuge in Christ, the Substitute God has provided. Somehow, you must get to Christ. Christ alone can set you free.

**How does a guilty sinner come to Christ?**

- You must come as you are. — Naked — Helpless- Filthy — Bound.
- You must come in submission.

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- You must come by faith.

**What does Christ give those who come to him?**

- Life!
- Freedom!
- Righteousness!
- Peace!
- Joy!
- Cleansing!
- Pardon!
- Sonship!

**Children of God, live as those who have been made free by Christ.** Live as ransomed sinners...

- In Peace.
- Full of Thanks giving.
- For the Glory of God.
- Devoted to Christ.

You are bought with a price, the price of the precious blood of Christ. Let us therefore glorify God in our bodies and in our spirits. We are not our own. We have been bought with the precious blood of Christ!

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Amen.