

The story of the prisoner Barabbas

John 18 - 19

Hands up if you've never - ever - done anything wrong? Sometimes we do things that are wrong. Sometimes we say things that are wrong. Sometimes we think things that are wrong. What sort of wrong things do boys and girls do today? If you did something wrong at school, would your teacher say "Oh, that doesn't matter..." ? No, we would expect to be told off, or to be punished, wouldn't we?

This story is about a young man who did a lot of wrong things. He's looking out of the window thinking what a nice day to go out with my friends! But he had a problem. What do you think the problem was? That's right, he was in jail. Do people get put in jail because they are good? No, usually it is because they have done something very wrong. This man's name was Barabbas. He was a terrorist. He had probably killed people. He deserved to be in prison and he knew it. The Roman soldiers had caught him, and his punishment would be death. He was probably feeling awful - jail in those days was a horrible experience, very little food, very little water, and rats running over him. YUK.

This particular morning, he heard a loud noise outside the prison. A great crowd of people was passing under his window, it sounded like the playground does when you are all out at playtime. It was the morning that they brought Jesus before the Roman Governor, Pilate. Pilate could find nothing that Jesus had done wrong, but he wanted to please the crowd. There are times when we want to please other people, aren't there? Even when we know what they are doing is wrong. Pilate said "I ought to let him go. It is the custom to release one man from jail at this time. Who shall it be? Barabbas the murdering terrorist, or Jesus Christ, the Son of God?" Whom should they choose?

Barabbas was listening hard. The crowd went quiet and he could hear a man's voice speaking. The next thing he heard was a great shout "BARABBAS, BARABBAS, WE WANT BARABBAS!" (Get the children to shout it out, really loudly). "Wonderful!" thought Barabbas. "It must be my mates, come to get me out of prison!" He began to feel much more cheerful. But then the crowd went quiet again, and again the man spoke.

He couldn't hear Pilate's words, but Pilate was asking "What do you want me to do with Jesus?" The crowd all shouted "CRUCIFY HIM! CRUCIFY HIM! CRUCIFY HIM!".....(Again get the children to shout it out, very loudly). What do you think Barabbas thought?

Yes, Barabbas thought they meant him! He didn't want to be crucified. He cowered away in the darkest corner of the cell. He could hear heavy footsteps coming down the corridor. (make heavy footsteps) A key turned in the lock. The door swung open (make a creaking noise). There stood a big strong Roman guard. "BARABBAS! COME OUT OF THERE! THE GOVERNOR WANTS TO SEE YOU IN HIS OFFICE". Barabbas had no choice. With the Roman guard prodding him with a spear, he was pushed along the corridor to the Governor's office. Pilate said to him "NAME?" "Barabbas, please sir, please sir, I'll do anything Sir, please sir...." "QUIET WHEN I'M SPEAKING TO YOU! You are free to go. GET OUT and NEVER LET ME SEE YOU AGAIN."

What? Barabbas couldn't believe his ears! Free to go? He didn't wait to argue, but quickly scuttled out of the prison to the streets, any minute expecting to be stopped - but all the gates were open to him. When he got outside, he had another shock. He had heard great crowds of people - now there

was nobody. The streets were deserted. Where was everybody? He went to the city gate to look. Let's see where the people were. All going up the hill outside the city wall to the place where prisoners were put to death.

Perhaps Barabbas followed them, we don't know, the Bible doesn't say. If he had, when he got to the top of the hill, he would have seen three crosses. Who was on those crosses? Yes, Jesus, and two thieves.

The Bible says that Jesus was being punished. We get punished when we do things that are wrong, don't we? But had Jesus ever done anything wrong? No. The Bible says that he was being punished for all the things that I have done wrong, or that all the people who believe and trust in him have done wrong.

Maybe Barabbas would have said HE DIED FOR ME.. That is what Christians believe all through the ages. His friends put his body into a tomb not far away, in a garden. The huge tombstone was rolled into place, and sealed. Guards were put on duty. How do you think his friends were feeling? Devastated. Desperately sad. Friday night went by. Saturday, the Sabbath, when nobody could do anything. Sunday early the women went to the tomb first thing taking the spices they needed to embalm his body – and what a shock! The stone was rolled. The guards had fallen down like dead men! Something amazing had happened in the night!

What do Christians believe happened on the third day after Jesus died?

Yes, he had come alive again! The women ran back to tell his friends, and they were amazed and astonished! Over 500 people saw him the days that followed. The Bible tells us that he is alive for ever and ever, and that it is possible to be his friend. Quite astonishing.

When I asked Jesus to be my friend, I prayed a prayer a bit like this: I said: "Dear Lord, I am sorry for all the wrong things I have done. Thank you that Jesus came to die for all the wrong things I have done. Thank you that I can be forgiven, and have a fresh start. Please fill me with your Holy Spirit, and help me to be the kind of person you want me to be from now on. In Jesus' name, Amen." The Bible promises that if we turn to God, he will hear us and help us, and God always keeps his promises. That's why Christians say: I WILL LIVE FOR HIM

Testimony – woven into the story if possible, not landed on them at the end! Prayer.