

## The Great Exchange

Mark 15:6-15

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An exchange is when you give one thing and receive another in return. The Great Exchange has everything to do with Easter...with our existence...and with our eternity.

I experienced what an exchange is all about this week when something that was pretty bad turned into a pretty good deal. In an effort to help my wife Beth on Monday morning I pulled out the crock-pot, added two packages of stew meat, onions, cream of mushroom soup and some seasoning and hit “go.” I was pretty proud of my efforts. Beth had to work Monday night so this super stew was slated to be supper for Megan and me.

When it was time to serve the stew I gently poured it over some steaming rice. It was then that I noticed a large black piece of slimy black absorbent plastic that was half-melted in the stew [Hold up – it looked something like this].

I set it aside, thinking we could just ignore it and eat our savory stew. When we sat down at the table, we prayed and then, just before we picked up our forks, I told Megan that we had to throw it away [that was a quick answer to prayer, wasn't it?] I explained that this piece of plastic had come from the packaging and had simmered with the stew all day, spewing toxins into our tasty supper.

We decided to *exchange* our stew for a fast food drive-through. After we placed our order and pulled up to the window, the employee told us that their computer system had crashed. After waiting for a while, I turned to Megan and told her that I thought they were going to give us free food. Sure enough, because of their snafu, our meals were free.

After we ate, I remembered I had a “buy one, get one” coupon for Orange Leaf, so we filled our cups to overflowing with froyo and a ton of toppings. When it came time to pay, I gave them my frequent flier card and the manager told me that I had enough credits so our desserts were free! Then on Thursday, I was in Panera working on the sermon, and an Edgewood member came up to me and gave me a gift card, which allowed me to have lunch for free!

What started out bad turned out pretty good, wouldn't you say? As I was contemplating the exchanges that had taken place, I realized that this was an opportunity for Megan and I to have a significant spiritual conversation. I was already thinking about how we got some free food in exchange for my toxic concoction and how that was like what Jesus did for us on the cross.

Looking forward to a deep theological discussion, I turned to Megan and asked, "*What do you think the principle is that we learned tonight?*" Her response was quick, "*Never let dad make dinner?*"

As a way to help us ponder the principle of *exchange*, I want us to imagine that my name is not Brian, but Barabbas. Barabbas is mentioned by name in all four gospels, occupying 38 verses, which is more space than what is given to Judas. Much of what I'm going to share reflects what is found in the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter of Mark.

Here's the main idea for the message: *Jesus exchanged His life for yours so your life can be changed.*

I'll come back out of character and become Brian in a few minutes.

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I am Barabbas. My name "Bar-Abba," literally means, "*son of the father.*" I don't think my dad was ever delighted in me because I came out of the womb at war with the world. I rebelled against the authority of my parents and when I got older I revolted against the authority of Rome. *I guess you make your choices in life...and then your choices make you.*

I preferred to call myself a freedom fighter but your gospels refer to me as a notorious insurrectionist, a reprobate rebel and a robber. John called me a bandit...I like the sound of that. I was actually an outlaw and a murderer though I favored the term terrorist because it always made people afraid of me. I liked watching crowds cringe with fear when I showed up. To help you relate, there's not much difference between me and Osama Bin Laden or Bashar al-Assad or the worst ISIS terrorist you could imagine.

My proudest moment was when I helped ignite an insurrection against Rome. Things were going pretty well until the Roman militia showed up. I had somehow avoided capture, knowing that if I were ever arrested I would face the death penalty, not to mention extreme torture and mistreatment.

But my luck ran out that day. My two friends, fellow freedom fighters with me, were also arrested. We were bound and thrown into a dark and dank dungeon, awaiting our sure death by crucifixion, the cruelest form of capital punishment ever invented.

I still remember what happened on that fateful Friday morning. My buddies and I knew that this was our execution day. I don't ever remember being afraid when I was out causing chaos but I was really scared that morning. I had seen crucifixions before. This kind of death was embarrassing and excruciating.

As we waited, I heard loud noises coming from the courtyard. It was hard to make out what people were saying but I thought I heard them yell, "*Barabbas!*" And then I heard shrieking shouts, "*Crucify him! Crucify him!*" I pressed myself against the back wall of our cell, trying to get as far from the door as possible.

After just a few moments, I heard the guards outside our cell and then the key turned in the rusty lock. They gruffly called my name and when I didn't answer they come in with their spears ready to strike, forcing me out of hiding. Since I was the leader of the terrorist cell, they probably wanted me crucified first.

When I stumbled out of the cell, I was blinded by the sunlight and was stunned to hear a soldier say, "*You've been released. You're free to go.*" What? I couldn't believe it! Were they just teasing me? Maybe they wanted me to start walking away so they could throw a spear into my back.

I heard one of them mutter something about a Passover custom, in which Pilate could set a prisoner free, like an "execution amnesty." Unbelievably, the people wanted me to be free! I didn't understand this because I was guilty of all the charges I was facing.

And then I heard that someone named Jesus would be taking my place on the cross that had been picked out for me! That didn't make sense because while I didn't know much about Jesus I had heard that He was a righteous man. I knew what I had done was considered treason and I knew what they did to terrorists! I deserved my death sentence. Why would a righteous man trade places with a rotten man?

I didn't spend much time standing around because I didn't want the authorities to change their minds. I ran through the crowded courtyard while people continued to scream, "*Crucify Him! Crucify Him!*"

I eventually made it outside the city limits before I could catch my breath. I sat down in the shade and fell fast asleep. I don't know how long it was before I was jarred out of my slumber by the sounds of a crowd cheering and soldiers jeering. Others looked sad and were wailing loudly.

Then I saw my two buddies carrying heavy crossbeams up the hill. It was then that I noticed Jesus. He had just fallen to the ground when a soldier enlisted someone else to carry his cross. I wanted to run away but another part of me wanted to watch everything. I moved closer. When we all arrived at Golgotha (you know it as Calvary), my two buddies were cussing and cursing. Jesus was obviously in pain but He was quiet.

Then a soldier shoved my two terrorist friends to the ground while another soldier quickly nailed their hands and feet to their crosses. Another grabbed Jesus and did the same to Him. And then all three crosses were lifted up. And then it hit me again. I was supposed to be on the middle cross! Why would Jesus take my place? He was going to die the death I deserved!

And then I heard the Savior shout, "***Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.***" Are you kidding me? How could Jesus ask Abba to forgive those who did this to Him? For a fleeting moment I wondered if I could be forgiven as well.

Just then one of my friends started cussing again. It was hard to hear everything but I think he said something like, "***Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!***" Unbelievably, for the first time ever, my other partner in crime stood up to our crass comrade and rebuked him sternly, "***Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? We are being punished justly but this man has done nothing wrong.***"

And then, I could hardly believe my ears! My friend, who had never been religious in his life, turned to the cross in the middle, my cross, and said, "***Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.***" It looked as if Jesus smiled and then He said these words, "***Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.***"

There were some other things that Jesus shouted but there was one word I couldn't get out of my mind: "***Tetelestai!***" which means, "*It is finished because the debt is paid in full.*" I also remember Jesus looking up into heaven as He said, "***Abba, into your hands I commit my spirit.***" This was truly the "son of Abba." And then he breathed his last. One of the Roman centurions was standing at the foot of the cross and started praising God, declaring, "***Certainly this man was innocent.***"

I got queasy as I realized that an innocent man had died in my place! I then felt an earthquake and all sorts of other crazy things happened like the thick curtain in the temple was torn in two, from the top to the bottom. I got out of there as fast as I could and didn't stop running until my legs and lungs gave out.

I kept replaying those words, "*Father, forgive them...tetelestai [it is finished]...this man was innocent.*" An innocent man had died instead of me! At the last minute, we changed places, and in the greatest exchange in human history, He was killed on my cross. The guiltless died for the guilty! He died on a tree so I could go free! He lost His life so I could live!

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I'm back to Brian now...or am I? Actually, I *am* Barabbas...and so are you.

The Bible says that you and I are reprobate rebels. Romans 3:23 says, "***For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.***" Our trespasses are toxic, just like this piece of absorbent black plastic [hold up].

And we deserve death according to Romans 6:23: "***For the wages of sin is death...***" The last half of this verse describes the Great Exchange – we can have eternal life as a gift because Jesus died in our place: "***...But the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.***"

*Jesus exchanged His life for yours so your life can be changed.*

Isaiah 53:5, written some 700 years before the Greatest Exchange in history, says this: "***But He was pierced for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His wounds we are healed.***" That means the Savior went through all He went through for us, *instead of us, in our place.*

You may wonder why we've been emphasizing the death of Jesus Christ on Easter. Here's why. Until we understand why Jesus died and that he died in our place as our substitute, by giving His life in exchange for ours, we won't understand why Easter is so amazing. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is confirmation that the sacrifice of Jesus' life satisfies the payment for our sins. Easter is the exclamation point for the Great Exchange!

The core truth of Christianity is this: *Jesus exchanged His righteous life for our rotten life by paying for our sins through His substitutionary death and resurrection from the dead.* 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 gives a concise summary of the gospel: ***“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.”***

The resurrection of Jesus is a really big deal. In fact, 1 Corinthians 15:17 says: ***“And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.”*** Check out how Romans 4:25 links both His death and resurrection to our forgiveness and our justification: ***“Who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.”***

We could say it like this: *Our rottenness is reckoned as righteousness because of the perfect righteousness of Jesus who died **for** us and was raised **for** us.*

Now don't miss this. None of this is automatically applied to your life. You must believe it and you must also *receive it*. If we back up one verse to Romans 4:24, we read that, ***“it will be counted to us who believe in Him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord.”***

As far as we know, Barabbas was not changed because he didn't accept the spiritual exchange that Jesus provided. After Jesus ascended to heaven and the first church began, Barabbas is still referred to as a “murderer” in Acts 3:14: ***“But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you.”*** Barnabas would not have been called a murderer if he had been converted – it was not the practice of the early church to name a man's sins after becoming a Christian.

Barnabas is the first person who could literally say that Jesus died in his place. Jesus changed places physically with Barabbas but because Barabbas did not believe and receive Jesus Christ as his personal sin substitute, he was not saved spiritually. He was so close and yet so far away.

Some of you are close as well but until you accept the exchange there will be no change!

*Jesus exchanged His life for yours so your life can be changed.*

Once you accept the exchange, you can experience new life according to Romans 6:4: ***“Just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”***

Jesus died in our place, which frees us from the *penalty* of sin; and because He rose from the dead, we are freed from the *power* of sin!

To put it mildly, United Airlines has had a rough week in the not-so-friendly-skies after a video was released showing a passenger being forcibly removed from his seat. I don't want to get into all the details but I do want to just make this point. If you are a born again believer, you will never get bumped off your flight to heaven because Jesus paid for your seat here and for your room when you get there!

*Jesus exchanged His life for yours so your life can be changed.*

So here's a question: *Have you accepted this exchange so you can be changed?*

I like what Ravi Zacharias says: *“Jesus didn't come to make bad people good, but to make dead people alive.”*

1 Peter 1:3 says, ***“According to His great mercy, He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”***

Incidentally, we stand in solidarity with Coptic Christians in Egypt who are not having Easter services this weekend in the aftermath of Palm Sunday bombings in two churches that killed 49 and injured more than 100. Barabbas was just like one of those terrorists. When I consider our brothers and sisters not gathering for worship, I'm grateful that we can meet together in safety and freedom. In fact, it's no accident that you are here today to hear this message. You are here on purpose.

In the early 1800s George Wilson murdered a government employee in cold blood while stealing from the U.S. Postal Service. Wilson was found guilty and sentenced to be hanged. For some reason, the President of the United States, Andrew Jackson, granted Wilson a full pardon. Strangely, Wilson refused to accept it. No one knew what to do about this because it had never happened before.

Eventually the case made it all the way to the Supreme Court. Chief Justice Marshall summarized their ruling: *“A pardon is a slip of paper, the value of which is determined by the acceptance of the person to be pardoned. If it is refused, it is no pardon. George Wilson will be hanged.”* And hanged, he was.

*You make your choices in life and then your choices make you!* What about you? You’ve been pardoned because of the life, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ but you must accept the exchange before it can be activated in your life. If you don’t receive the greatest exchange in history, you’ll be history because you will spend eternity in a hot place called Hell...but you don’t have to go there. There’s a pardon waiting for you...with your name on it.

Every other religion in the world is spelled with two letters: D-O. Christianity is spelled with four letters: D-O-N-E! There’s nothing you need to DO because it’s already been DONE for you. I sense that some of you are ready to receive the Great Exchange right now. Would you close your eyes and pray this prayer along with me silently?

*“Jesus, I’m a sinner and I have failed big time. I admit that I’m a rebel just like Barabbas. I repent by turning from how I’ve been living and trust what you accomplished on the Cross when you died in my place as my substitute, paying the price for all that I’ve done and then rising on the third day. I believe and now I receive you into my life. I accept your pardon. Save me from the penalty of my sins. I want to be born again to a living hope through your resurrection. Please give me resurrection power to live the rest of my life for you and under your leadership, for you are my Savior and my Lord. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.”*

If you prayed that prayer and meant it, I’m going to ask you to raise your hand so we can rejoice with you. I’m going to count to three and when I finish, would you just raise your hand to indicate that you received Jesus Christ into your life?

As we prepare to sing our closing song, could you take your Connection Card and indicate any decision you've made today? There's a space on the bottom to let us know if you've received Jesus Christ and another box to mark if you've rededicated your life to Christ. After the service, simply take this card to the table in the lobby and you'll receive a free gift.

I love the lyrics to our closing song: *"I was dead in the grave, covered with guilt and shame. I'm alive today, because He lives! And because He lives, I can face tomorrow."*

**Testimony Song: "Because He Lives"**

**Promo next series called Context and mention normal service times.**

There's an Easter tradition that I like to follow as we end our service. I'm going to say, ***"He is Risen!"*** and then I'd like you to respond with, ***"He is Risen Indeed!"***