

Choices

Sunday, April 5, 2026

Matthew 27:15-18; 20-26

15 Now it was the governor's custom at the festival to release a prisoner chosen by the crowd. 16 At that time they had a well-known prisoner whose name was Barabbas.

Luke provides this added detail

Luke 23:19

19 (Barabbas had been thrown into prison for an insurrection in the city, and for murder.)

17 So when the crowd had gathered, Pilate asked them, "Which one do you want me to release to you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called the Messiah?" 18 For he knew it was out of self-interest that they had handed Jesus over to him.

20 But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed.

21 "Which of the two do you want me to release to you?" asked the governor.

"Barabbas," they answered.

22 "What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called the Messiah?" Pilate asked.

They all answered, "Crucify him!"

23 "Why? What crime has he committed?" asked Pilate.

But they shouted all the louder, "Crucify him!"

24 When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. "I am innocent of this man's blood," he said. "It is your responsibility!"

25 All the people answered, "His blood is on us and on our children!"

26 Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

This part of Jesus's Crucifixion story has been on my heart for some months now. Particularly the thought of "Which One Would You Choose?"

Just four days earlier the crowds in Jerusalem were shouting their choice of Jesus as savior and King... And now many of those very same people were making a different and opposite choice.

Give us Barabbas! We choose Barabbas!

And while it is easy to blame "THAT CROWD" for the choice they made that day; don't we often do the same. Aren't we as guilty of choosing our own Barabbas (our sin) over Jesus.

As we learned from Romans chapter 3 last week...

Romans 3:10-12

10 ...“There is no one righteous, not even one;11 there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. 12 All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.”

Isaiah prophesied about this very moment with these words...

Isaiah 53:6-8

6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. 7 He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. 8 By oppression and judgment he was taken away. Yet who of his generation protested? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was punished.

Which choice would you have made? Which choice **DO** you make every day of your life?

This morning I would like you to meet someone who represents THE CHOICE that was made that day and perhaps give us a little bit of insight as to how such a choice could be made.

KEZIAH BAT SIMEON: “THE VEILMAKER’S CHOICE”

(A monologue from a woman in the crowd)

(Keziah enters with a small piece of cloth—simple, rough linen. She holds it like it matters. She does not rush. She speaks softly, as if she’s not used to being listened to.)

I am **Keziah... bat Simeon**.

A widow. A seamstress.

Jerusalem keeps me in **thread** and **silence**.

(She rubs the cloth between her fingers.)

These hands... mend what is torn.

Sleeves split by hard work. Cloaks snagged on stone. A hem pulled loose by children who grow too fast.

And then there are the other jobs.

The ones no woman advertises.

When grief comes—when it comes like a fist—women come to me for a veil.

Something to cover their faces. Something to hide behind while the world keeps moving like nothing happened.

(Small, dry humor—gentle.)

Jerusalem has many needs. And most of them... require stitching.

(Pause.)

So believe me when I tell you—

I know what it looks like when something is tearing.

I felt it in the city that morning.

The air itself felt thin... like cloth stretched too tight.

You could hear it—voices pulling, pulling—until the weave begins to give.

BREAK # 1

EVERYONE makes CHOICES

John Maxwell said - "Life is a matter of choices, and every choice you make makes you"

Several sources suggest that the average person makes 35,000 choices per day

Assuming that most people spend around seven hours per day sleeping, that makes roughly 2000 decisions per hour or one decision every two seconds. Now granted, not all of those choices are on the level of a Jesus or Barabas Choice.

1. Micro-decisions, nonconscious - approximately 20,000–30,000 per day

These include: sensory filtering, shifts of attentional focus, bodily and motor responses. They occur without conscious involvement.

2. Operational decisions, semi-conscious - approximately 1,000–3,000 per day

These are tied to: speech and wording, phrasing and formulation, task switching. They are what create the subjective feeling of constant choice.

3. Conscious decisions - approximately 50–200 per day

This is where cognitive and emotional load accumulates.

4. High-impact decisions - approximately 0–5 per day



Some think they can escape the responsibility of making particular choices by deciding not to make a choice.

But NOT CHOOSING is a CHOICE...

The often quoted adage

The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing.

Reminds us of the truth that NOT CHOOSING is a CHOICE

One way or another, all of us face the choice of Jesus or Barabbas

(She looks down, as if seeing it again.)

I knew **Barabbas** before he had shoulders broad enough for trouble.

His mother and I—

we were girls together. We traded bread when we were hungry and secrets when we were lonely.

We laughed on rooftops and promised each other we would never become bitter women.

(A small, tender smile.)

We failed at that... some days.

But I was there when her labor pains came.

I was there when he arrived—red-faced, furious, alive—like he had already decided the world owed him something.

She held him to her chest and said, “He will be free.”

And I thought she meant from sickness. From hunger. From Rome.

From all the things that press on a mother’s heart.

I watched him grow.

At first, he was a boy who ran too fast and climbed too high.

A boy who stole figs and blamed the goat.

A boy who had a laugh that sounded like breaking rules.

And then... he became the kind of man whose name makes people speak lower.

Barabbas.

(She swallows.)

Some call him a murderer. Some call him a hero.

In Jerusalem, we have many words for the same wound.

(Beat.)

BREAK # 2

CHOICES are often made WITHOUT ADEQUATE INFORMATION

I wonder how many of those shouting their choice that day truly knew who Barabbas was or for that matter how many truly knew who Jesus was?

Because CHOICES are Based on what we see (or have awareness of) not on what we don't see (don't have awareness of). This doesn't excuse us of our responsibility. That's why Paul says in Romans 1:20 "*People are without excuse*"

Frame the choices that were made that day this way. Picture a more direct line of questioning about the choice between Jesus and Barabbas

- who would you choose to fight your battles?
- who would you choose to heal your sickness?
- who would you choose to meet your needs?
- who would you choose if you needed guidance?
- who would you choose if you needed forgiveness from sins?

Though I'm sure there were people there who had experiences with Jesus that would lead you to believe their answers to those questions would be Jesus. And yet they made the choice for Barabbas. Either they chose to willfully ignore the information they had or they truly didn't know or (didn't understand) the truth of the information surrounding the choice they were making.

That's why, as believers in Jesus, it is so important that we get the message of Who Jesus Is out to the world - So they can make a choice. That's why, as believers in Jesus, we need to be growing in our knowledge of the truth of God's word and in our relationship with Him so we can make the right choices in our lives.

And then there is **Mary**.

(Her tone changes—gentler, reverent, curious.)

I did not know Mary when she was young. I did not know her stories.

I only know what I have seen lately— a woman who carries sorrow like a lamp.

Not loud... but steady.

We met the way women do. In small places. Ordinary places.

A shared jar of water. A borrowed bit of thread. A moment when your hands are full and someone helps without making you feel small.

She is not a woman who demands attention.

She is a woman who makes you want to **listen**.

And she spoke of her son. Not like a mother bragging. Not like a woman trying to convince you.

She spoke as if she was still trying to understand what God had done.

“The Lord...” she said once, and her eyes went distant, “...the Lord has looked on the lowly.”

(Keziah’s voice softens.)

Lowly.

That word is a blanket for women like us.

I had not met Jesus. Not truly. I had only heard the rumors—like everyone else.

A teacher. A healer. A man who spoke with authority and didn’t seem to need anyone’s permission.

A man who touched lepers. A man who ate with the kind of people polite women pretend not to see.

And something about that... intrigued me.

Not because it was safe.

Because it felt... clean.

(Pause.)

But intrigue is not courage.

Intrigue is what you do from the edge of the crowd.

Courage is what you do when the crowd turns and looks at you.

(She folds the cloth once, neatly.)

BREAK # 3

CHOICES are often made HALFHEARTEDLY

actions done without enthusiasm, energy, or interest or determination

To me that means there is no real commitment to the choice. There are three scriptural illustrations that remind me of this truth about choices.

The first we have already touched on... The fact that, there had to be people in this crowd who just a few days earlier seemed to be enthusiastic about their choice for Jesus... But they weren't committed to that choice... When things took a turn, so did their choice

The second scriptural illustration about half-hearted choices is found in Jesus' Parable of The Seed and The Sower.

Matthew 13:18-23

18 "Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: 19 When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path. 20 The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. 21 But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. 22 The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful. 23 But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."

And the third illustration for Scripture that speaks of this type of choice is found in Luke Chapter 9

Luke 9:57-62

57 As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go."

58 Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

59 He said to another man, "Follow me."

But he replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father."

60 Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God."

61 Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family."

62 Jesus replied, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."

Choices can be INFLUENCED BY OTHERS

20 But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed.

How often are your choices swayed by the people around you?

Exodus 23:2

2 "Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong. When you give testimony in a lawsuit, do not pervert justice by siding with the crowd,

I find it interesting that when pushed by Pilate about their decision, they responded "*His blood is on us and on our children*"

Just remember the consequences for your choices rest on you and on you alone... YES, your choices may affect other people, but you are responsible for the choices you make and the fact that others made the same choice doesn't lessen your personal responsibility.

That morning, news moved through Jerusalem like wind through dry reeds.

Pilate was making a display.

There was a custom—release one prisoner at the feast.

One.

And suddenly the whole city became a throat clearing itself for a shout.

(Her breathing tightens.)

I went because everyone went.

Because even quiet widows are not invisible when a crowd surges.

And I thought—

I thought I would stand at the back, listen, go home.

Like always.

(Beat.)

But the back... is not safe when the crowd has a mind of its own.

I saw Barabbas' mother first.

She was not shouting.

She was pale... watching the soldiers... as if her eyes could pry open the prison doors.

Her hands were clasped so tightly her knuckles looked like stone.

And my chest tightened—because I knew that posture.

I have stitched it into women's shoulders for years.

The posture of a mother trying not to crumble.

Then I saw Mary.

Not near Pilate. Not near power.

Just... there.

Standing like a woman who has already said "yes" to something she doesn't want.

Standing as if she had no other place to put her love.

Two mothers.

Two kinds of sorrow.

And then they brought Jesus out.

(Keziah speaks slower.)

He did not look like a rebel.

He did not look like a man trying to win.

He looked... bruised.

And still—there was something about Him that unsettled me.

Not the loudness of Him.

The quietness.

The way He stood as if He did not need the crowd's approval to be who He was.

(A small shake of her head.)

I remember thinking something I did not want to think:

“If He is the Holy One... why does He look so breakable?”

And another thought followed, quick and sharp:

“What good is a Messiah who lets Himself be handled?”

(She inhales, ashamed.)

You see? I am not proud of my thoughts.

Pilate spoke. The choice was offered.

And the leaders... they moved through the people like fingers through fabric—

pressing here, tugging there—

whispering, coaching, stirring.

“Ask for Barabbas.”

“Ask for Barabbas.”

“As for this Jesus... He is trouble.”

And trouble... trouble is a word the powerful use when they feel threatened.

(Beat.)

I looked again at Barabbas' mother.

I remembered Barabbas as a boy—his mother wiping his mouth, scolding him softly, kissing his forehead like she could kiss the rage out of him.

I thought of her alone at night.

I thought of her prayers—angry prayers, desperate prayers, mother prayers.

I looked at Mary.

And I thought—she is new to me.

Her son is... strange to me.

Holy, perhaps. But holy does not feed you.

Holy does not overthrow Rome.

And then the crowd began to chant.

Not everyone at once—

that would have been too honest.

First a few voices.

Then more.

Then it swelled until it felt like the stones under my feet were shouting.

“Barabbas!”

(Keziah’s voice drops to a confession.)

I did not lift my voice at first.

I didn’t.

I stood there with my mouth closed and my heart pounding, thinking, “I will not be part of this.”

But then someone bumped me—hard.

And someone’s elbow struck my ribs.

And someone behind me shouted so close to my ear I felt their breath.

And suddenly my body—my frightened, small body—did what bodies do in crowds.

It tried to survive.

And without meaning to—

without planning to—

I opened my mouth...

(A long beat.)

...and I said it.

“Barabbas.”

(Silence. She looks down.)

I said the name of a guilty man...

and I helped release him.

(She folds the cloth again, tighter.)

They brought Barabbas out.

And I saw him.

Not as a baby. Not as a boy.

As a man who had made choices.

As a man with eyes like flint and a jaw set against the world.

He looked at the crowd like he expected worship.

Like we owed him.

And the crowd roared—because people love a man who reflects their anger back to them.

(She swallows.)

And then... they led Jesus away.

And I watched Mary.

She did not scream.

She did not throw herself on the ground.

She did not bargain.

She stood there... like a woman pinned to the earth by faith.

And something inside me—

something I had tried to keep sewn shut—

split open.

Because I realized what we had done.

Not just politically. Not just emotionally.

Spiritually.

We had chosen the kind of salvation we understood.

We chose a man who would fight like we wanted to fight.

A man who would spill blood we thought deserved spilling.

We chose **strength** that looks like violence.

And we rejected strength that looks like surrender.

(Her voice trembles.)

We rejected... innocence.

BREAK # 4

CHOICES have CONSEQUENCES

The choice we make concerning Jesus and Barabbas has profound earthly and and eternal consequences.

Galatians 6:7-8

7 Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. 8 Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.

CHOICES don't have to be PERMANENT

Although the consequences to some choices may be permanent, we are not locked in to having to make the same bad choices over and over again. Just because we made a sinful choice in our past doesn't mean we can't make a right choice now

Micah 7:18-19

18 Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. 19 You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.

That's why Peter preached to the crowds who were astonished when the man who was lame from birth was healed after Peter said to him

"Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk."

Acts 3:19

19 Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord,

(Beat.)

Later, I went back to my work.

Because life does that.

It pushes you back into ordinary tasks as if nothing has happened.

A woman came to my door that afternoon.

Her eyes were swollen. Her voice was thin.

"I need a veil," she said.

I reached for my cloth.

My fingers did what they always do—measure, cut, fold.

And as I stitched, I thought:

How many veils have I made for grief I did not cause?

And how many will I make now... because I did?

(She looks up, haunted.)

I do not know what happened to Barabbas after he walked free.

Some say he disappeared into the alleys. Some say he took up his cause again.

I only know this:

Mercy followed him out of that place...

and he did not deserve it.

And then I realized—

that is the story of all of us, isn't it?

(A softer, humbler tone.)

The guilty walking free.

The innocent taking the sentence.

I am a seamstress.

I know what it means to mend.

To take what is torn and make it hold again—one small stitch at a time.

So this is my confession:

I chose Barabbas with my mouth.

But I cannot choose him with my life anymore.

Because if Jesus is who Mary believes He is—
then the true revolution is not swords and shouts.
It is hearts.

It is forgiveness.

It is a King who does not climb over the guilty...
but steps into their place.

(She holds the cloth out like an offering.)

And now... I stitch differently.

Not veils to hide behind.

But small mends of repentance.

A quieter courage.

A prayer I did not have the strength to pray that day:

“Lord... forgive me.

I did not know my own voice.

Teach me to choose You... even when the crowd is loud.”

(She lowers the cloth, almost a whisper.)

I stood between two mothers...

and I broke one of their hearts.

But if Jesus can carry the cross I helped place on His shoulders...

perhaps He can carry even my shame.

There is a DEADLINE on the one CHOICE THAT MATTERS MOST

James 4:14

14 Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.

Hebrews 9:27-28

27 Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, 28 so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

2 Corinthians 6:2

2 ..I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.

TITANIC (April 14, 1912)

2224 passengers and crew

1,514 lives perished

705 rescued by way of life boats

AS THE DARK, FRIGID WATERS of the Atlantic crept slowly up the decks of the Titanic, **John Harper** shouted, "Let the women, children, and the unsaved into the lifeboats!" Harper gave his life jacket—his last hope of survival—to another man.

During those fifty minutes, a young man from Scotland who was clinging to a board drifted near John Harper. Harper, who was struggling in the water as well, cried, "Are you saved?" The answer returned, "No." Harper shouted words from the Bible: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." Before responding, the man drifted away into the dark night. Later, the current brought them back in sight of each other. Once more the dying Harper shouted the question: "Are you saved?" Again the man answered, "No." Harper repeated the words of Acts 16:31. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." Bereft of strength, Harper released his hold and sank downward into his watery grave. The man to whom whose soul Harper had with his last breath thrown a verbal lifeline was indeed saved. That man not only put his faith in Jesus Christ but also found himself rescued by the SS Carpathia's lifeboats. In Hamilton, Ontario, four years later, this survivor whose identity remains a mystery (although some investigation might lead one to believe he was John "Jack" Stewart, one of the ship's stewards), described what happened and testified that he was John Harper's last convert.

CHOICES Should CONTINUE