

All Is Now In Readiness

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[0 : 00] Let us pray. Loving and gracious God, we ask You now, Thou who hast given Thy word and inspired it through Thine own Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, God the Holy Ghost, breathed by that same Spirit through these pages of sacred Scripture once more.

Bring them alive unto us and quicken us, O Lord, by that same Spirit, that we, reading and understanding, may be brought alive and may be fed upon this bread of life, upon that which Thou dost provide for us.

So, Lord, as what we have before us is only a small portion, yet just as the wee boy who brought the five loaves and two fish to the Lord, and he prayed over it and he blessed it and it was abundant for all who would gather, so that when they had all had sufficient, yet they gathered up abundance afterwards.

So, Lord, bless this small portion of Thy word and grant that by Thy blessing it may be sufficient for the needs, the hunger, the requirements, the desire of all who have gathered seeking thee today. Lord, we pray Thy blessing on it, then, that Thou wouldst forgive our sins and continue with us now, for Jesus' sake. Amen. In Mark chapter 15, we read in verse 6, now, at the feast he used to release for them one prisoner for whom they asked, and among the rebels in prison who had committed murder in the insurrection, there was a man called Barabbas.

[1 : 33] Barabbas lay bound in prison with the other rebels. Indeed, it sounds almost from the context and the other other gospel accounts as though he was almost like a leader of one of those rebels, a chief amongst them.

And in a sense, we could say we too lie bound in bondage in prison because of our rebellion, not against the Roman authorities, but against the ultimate King of kings, the ultimate emperor and Lord of all.

And if you think, well, we're not really in bondage, are we? I mean, well, scripture would tell a different story. Galatians 4, verse 3, we read in the same way. We also, when we were children, that is children in the faith, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world.

That's when we were not brought to Christ. We were in bondage. We were enslaved to the elementary principles of this world. And Paul then goes on later on in that same chapter to illustrate this with reference to Abraham's wife, Sera, and also to her maid servant, Agar.

He said, this may be interpreted allegorically. These women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery. She is Agar. Now, Agar is Mount Sinai in Arabia.

[2 : 47] She corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free. And she is our mother.

Now, chapter 5, verse 1, again in Galatians, he writes, for freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, do not submit again to the yoke of slavery.

Now, that implies that we are enslaved. That implies that we are in bondage. We are bound, we're effectively in a prison until such time as we are set free by Christ.

Now, Barabbas was in bondage, despite having, as we've been looking at in the last day or two, trying by our own efforts to do our best. He had tried by his own efforts to make, as he saw it, the world a better place.

That's putting the best possible gloss on his activities. Whatever may have motivated his murder or rebellion or insurrection, he no doubt thought he was making Judea a better place if it could be made rid of the Romans.

[3 : 48] So he tried in his own perverse way. We might say to do his best. And perhaps we're not murderers or rebels in that sense, but we've all tried that. We've talked about that in the last day or so.

How about we all tried it by our own efforts? You might say, you know, again, but I'm not a murderer. I'm not a rebel. Not bad like Barabbas. I'm not a terrorist. Well, are we not rebels? We've looked in the last day or two again at Romans 8, verse 7, for the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law.

Indeed, it cannot. We don't submit to God's law. What are we if we're not rebels? Well, I'm not a murderer. Well, again, we've made reference to Jesus in the sermon on the Mount.

He says, if anybody is angry with his brother without a cause, he's effectively murdered him in his heart. Isaiah tells us, of course, chapter 64 and verse 6, we have all become like one who is unclean.

[4 : 45] And all our righteous deeds are like polluted garments, like filthy rags. We all fade like a leaf and all our iniquities like the wind take us away.

The key thing at the end of the day is not what we think of ourselves, but rather what God thinks of us and whether he will judge us to be guilty of rebellion or murder according to his word.

And his word says that that is precisely what we are guilty of and precisely how he will judge us because he has to judge righteously. But in the meantime, going back to Barabbas, there he is lying bound in prison.

He has tried to change the world and his own situation by his own efforts and he's got caught and he has been condemned. Again, going back to when it says in Romans in chapter 2, verse 12, all who have sinned without the law, and Barabbas was an outlaw, will also perish without the law and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law.

There's a tendency I think for some of us to think, well, if I don't believe in God, then I don't get judged by God's laws. I just follow my own thing and if I was a Viking, then I would go to Valhalla and if I was a Hindu, then I'd just go round and round and constantly reincarnation and if I'm Muslim, then I'll go to the paradise of Allah and so on and it just depends on what I believe and that's what follows through.

[6 : 14] And if I don't believe anything at all, well, I just die and that's it. Sadly, perhaps we might say, well, not sadly really, but sadly for those so deluded, if we are outside or put ourselves outside of God's law, then we are judged certainly without any reference to law, we're just condemned.

But if we say, oh, no, no, we're under, we're under God's law, we try to obey, we try to do good, we try to be faithful to God, yes, we put ourselves under his law, then we'll be judged by that law one way or another, as Corinthians tells us, we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

We will all be judged either without the law because we've disregarded it or by the law, under the law, because we've said that we are seeking to honour it. But Barabbas has done his best as a terrorist, as a so-called freedom fighter, he's got caught and he's been condemned.

The price of his crime is soon and infallibly to be required. It's going to be crucifixion, he's not under any illusions of that and he can't exactly complain about it, doubtless like the thief on the cross, the one who said to his colleague, well, don't criticise Jesus, we are condemned for crimes we committed.

Maybe in their day they might have thought it's a wee bit of a disproportionate crime for being a thief, it's to be crucified, but the Romans crucified criminals and slaves. And everybody knew what the punishment was if you were caught, but Barabbas may not relish the prospect of crucifixion, in fact nobody would, but he can't deny he knew this was going to be the price if he was caught.

[7 : 49] He's been caught, he's been condemned, he knows the price is going to have to be paid and the judgment will fall. But he can't really say, oh well I didn't deserve it, he knows what he's guilty of, he knows what he's done and so with us, the price of our own sin, our own rebellion is simply just biding its time to be paid.

We may look around and say, oh well I defy God all this time and look, lightning hasn't fallen from the sky, earth hasn't opened and swallowed me up, look and find, see nothing's happened, it's just biding its time.

God's perfect time to give us much opportunity for mercy, just like Barabbas waiting in prison is nothing and hey, this is great, I haven't been crucified yet, it's just biding its time until the sentence is to be carried out.

In Barabbas's case, the legal authorities do not want to let him go, that is quite clear, Pilate does not want to let this terrorist go.

Similarly, the devil, who if we can say it without appearing to give him credit, the devil is the lawful claimant on the lives and souls of sinners. He has, if you like, almost a contract in the so far as

those who rebel against the Lord, they belong to him, they are his booty, his bounty.

[9 : 09] And the devil, you could say, has that lawful claim on us, he is the lawful authority with a lawful claim on all sinners and rebels, and he does not want to let us go either.

Just as Pilate did not want to release Barabbas, but he was made to, the devil does not want to release us. But like Pilate, he is made to, and he is made to accept the substitute.

This is not the work simply of the mob. The mob are being used by God to bring about his plan and his purpose. In fact, it almost sounds, you know, if we read the context, as though when the mob turned up that day, all they wanted was a prisoner released, all they wanted was their one little moment of sweet victory when the Romans had to release somebody to them.

It does not even sound from the context as though they actually went there that day wanting Barabbas. You know, the chief priests stirred up the crowd, but when the crowd first came, they came and began to ask Pilate to do as he usually did for them.

In other words, release a prisoner. It does not say they came seeking Barabbas, it says, the chief priests stirred them up to demand Barabbas. They probably never thought they had a chance of getting Barabbas released, but they made them demand it.

[10 : 27] Although the mob is the instrument used, this is the Lord's work and the Lord's plan, the Lord bringing it to pass. So, Barabbas is released at the price of Jesus being condemned.

That is the price that's being paid for Barabbas. It is the same price which now already paid is being offered to you as having been paid for you if you will have this man for your Savior.

Barabbas was in many ways the last of his kind, the last of a line, for Jesus had not yet died. He's still on trial, but he's still alive.

Pilate still had the power to say, look, I don't care what you say, I'm not condemning this man, I'm not convinced of his guilt, I'm going to let him go, go and crucify Barabbas or somebody else, but this guy walks. He had the power to say that.

Jesus is not yet put to death. He had not yet died, but Barabbas was set free on the strength of the fact that Jesus was now certainly going to die.

[11 : 36] That of Barabbas, of course, was a physical deliverance. We don't know what his spiritual condition was, but the spiritual deliverance of all the Old Testament believers was on exactly this basis.

He was on the promise that the Messiah who had not yet died for their sins was infallibly going to. He would certainly be slain to atone for the sins of his people.

On the strength of that promise, all the Old Testament saints from Adam to Enoch and Noah to Abraham and Moses, David and Samuel and Elijah and Elisha and all the rest were saved.

Not on the basis of how many sacrifices were offered up, although the sacrifices all pointed to Christ one way or another. They're on the basis of their faith in the promised Messiah who would in the fullness of time be put to death to pay the price of sin for all who would trust and believe in his name.

For them it's a long stretch. It's maybe hundreds, maybe thousands of years for some of the Old Testament saints. In the case of Barabbas's physical deliverance, we're only looking at the matter of maybe an hour or two at the most.

[12 : 48] But although the time is short in one and long in the other, it's the same basis. You release one because somebody else is going to be killed in their place. Somebody else is going to die and pay the price.

That is the basis on which all the Old Testament saints were saved. The basis of the promise that Christ, the Messiah, would pay the full price of sin for them in the fullness of time.

That we, if we are saved, are saved on the basis of something already done. Not on a promise of what shall be, but a promise of something already done once and for all.

And the symbols of it, of course, will soon be uncovered on the table in front of us. We read in verse 26 that the superscription, the inscription above Jesus' head, the charge against him read, the king of the Jews.

Now, Barabbas was a Jew. Was Jesus his king? Well, is Jesus our king? You're today might think, yeah, it's a bit different, you know, because I'm not really a Jew, so it doesn't really count that way in the physical sense.

[13 : 56] Well, we read in Romans 2 in the last two verses of that chapter, no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly. Not all is circumcision outward and physical, but a Jew is one inwardly.

And circumcision is a matter of the heart by the spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man, but from God. This is the basis on which anyone is a member of the Lord's people.

This is the basis on which the Jews were set apart, on which Israel was made special, on which any of us who are saved are saved, not because of whatever is on the outward appearance, but rather what is in the heart.

If we look to the cross and we think, well, what do we see there? Well, we know it's Jesus on the cross, obviously, for us. We know it's Jesus, but what do you see him as?

This man in charge of the world? This man in charge of the universe? This man who's the king of the Jews and the king of kings? Well, we know the man in charge of putting him to death, he knew exactly what he thought about him, because you read that in the last verse we read when the centurion who stood facing him, literally watching him die, and saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, truly this man was the Son of God.

[15:18] That's what the centurion said. But what do you say? More to the point, what do you do with what you say? The word of God is clear, Acts 16, verses 13 and 31, when the Philippian jailer asks Paul in silence, what must I do to be saved?

Sowers, what must I do to be saved? They said, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved on thy house. That's what the word of God says. But it's not enough if we're going to just say, okay, I believe, and that's it.

I've said it, you know, I've said it, so that's it, okay. Now, James tells us in chapter 1, verses 22 to 25, be ye doers of the word, and not heirs only, deceiving yourselves.

But if anyone is a heir of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in the mirror, for he looks at himself and goes away, and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no heir who forgets, but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

It's not just a case of what to be think, what do we believe, what might we say, it's what do we do about it afterwards. What do we do with the faith we claim to have?

[16:35] How do we put it into practice? What deed now will you do if this is who you think, as is what you think about Jesus, that he is our king, that he is our savior?

What deed will you do that the name above the cross reads the king of the Jews? His name is Jesus. My name, to all intents and purposes, is Barabbas.

And maybe yours is too. For I was in rebellion against God, staunch in my enmity, trying by my own hand to make the world, no doubt, a better one.

And all I got was bound in captivity. The sentence of death rested upon me, although I didn't know it in a spiritual sense, I certainly felt it in my life.

My name effectively is Barabbas, or it might as well be, but yours could be too, for all I know. You see, we'll never know what Barabbas did with the life he so unexpectedly got back.

[17:44] And it would be unexpected, you know, Barabbas did not wake up that morning in his prison cell thinking, yes, this is the day I'm going to be released. He would be completely unaware of all that had gone on between Judas and the chief priests and the betrayals and Gethsemane, and all that had gone on with the sort of kangaroo court of a trial during the night.

He wouldn't be aware of the prisoner that had been brought to Pilate at the crack of dawn that morning. The first thing he would know would be when he celled or opened and he would have been trembling in himself thinking this is it.

They're now going to take me to the cross. I hope I don't let myself down. I hope I can be brave and have courage, expecting to die in that most horrible of ways, only to be told, okay, you're free to go. We can't begin to imagine what went through his mind, his thoughts, apart from the unbelieving relief there must have been. There would have been confusion. Why? How am I able to go suddenly?

What's happened? Pilate suddenly gone soft towards terrorists or whatever. What's happened? We'll never know what Barabbas did with the life he was so unexpectedly given back.

[18:57] Maybe he became a Christian. Maybe he was so struck by the one who paid his price and went in his place. Maybe he was so amazed that he wanted to find out more and he became a Christian.

Maybe he went back to terrorism and murder. Maybe he was caught again and maybe he was crucified after all. We don't know because history does not relate.

Maybe he teetered on the brink of commitment to following Christ for just too long and now spends a lost eternity wondering what might have happened if he had only followed the crucified savior. One way or another in earthly terms Barabbas is out of time. He has been for 2,000 years. He's been out of time. But you're not.

For all is in readiness. As we mentioned earlier, we are redeemed by something that has already been done. It's not for us now as it was for the Old Testament saints.

[20 : 05] Something which was promised as a future event. This is something already done, already accomplished, a price already paid. It has been done. The cost has been met. The price has been paid.

And all is in readiness. The supper has been prepared. Remember the king who sent out the invitations to his guests and said, you know, come now, everything's ready, everything's prepared and they made their excuses.

My goodness, we're good at making our excuses, aren't we? But it's all prepared. All the plausible excuses. Oh, I've got a field to have to go and look at.

Oh, sorry, I've just got married. I have to go off with my wife and so on. I can't come. Oh, I've just bought 5 yoga vaksana. I've bought a tractor. I've bought a new car. I have to try it out. You know, there's always some reason why I can't give myself to the Lord because, you know, I'm just too busy just now.

Let me tell you, eternity will have more than enough time to think of whether or not those were wise priorities. But all is in readiness. You're not out of time.

[21 : 08] And even if has yet, you're behind the table and still considering, should I, shouldn't I? There is still time. The session is still open. They'll be happy to meet with anyone who feels the Lord, the servants of old under that parable, compelling them to come in.

The supper is prepared. The cost has been met. And the King has sent his servants and his messengers to bid his guests. And you can't say, oh, it doesn't really apply to me because you are invited.

Therefore, in the light of the one who has taken your place, if you will have them, who has gone to the cross, not just instead of Barabbas, but instead of us, if we will believe and trust in his name for his sake and because of his invitation, come, come now, because all is in readiness and the feast is prepared.

Let us pray. Almighty and everlasting God, we don't pretend to know all that went through Barabbas' mind when he was saved from crucifixion.

We don't know, Lord, if he was saved from ultimately a lost eternity. But we know, Lord, that just like for him, through all of our lives, that was often delivered us from one disaster or calamity and another, that was often intervened for us.

[22 : 37] Perhaps there's been times when we wished that was intervened and that was not done so and we've perhaps grieved against God or railed against God or shaken our fists against heaven, but we have to acknowledge as we sit here today, hither to what the Lord helped us.

We've been delivered out of many disasters, many difficulties, many problems. And even if as we look back over our lives, we think on many tragedies or problems or difficulties or challenges we have had, we cannot help but say that through them all the Lord has brought us.

And here we are today confronted once again with the remembrance of his death and the table spread with the elements symbolizing his broken body and shed blood. All is prepared. All has been done now.

It's not a future promise now, it's an accomplished fact. So, Lord, help us to accept and receive this invitation and to enter into that which Christ has prepared for them that will love him, that will have him.

So, continue with us now and bless thy word to us and forgive our sin for Jesus' sake. Amen. We come now to the fencing of the Lord's table, which we'll do by reading a portion of Scripture and a couple of thoughts upon it.

[23 : 53] We'll read in Genesis in chapter 7 verse 1 and then verses 7 to 16. Genesis chapter 7 at the first verse, the Lord said to Noah, go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you are righteous before me in this generation.

And then at verse 7, and Noah and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives went with him into the ark to escape the waters of the flood of clean animals and of animals that are not clean and of birds

and of everything that creeps on the ground, two and two, male and female, went into the ark with Noah as God had commanded Noah.

And after seven days the waters of the flood came upon the earth. In the six hundredth year of Noah's life in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth and the windows of the heavens were opened and the rain fell upon the earth forty days and forty nights.

On the very same day Noah and his sons Shem and Ham and Javeth and Noah's wife and the three wives of his sons with them entered the ark, they and every beast according to its kind and all the livestock according to their kinds and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth according to its kind and every bird according to its kind, every winged creature, they went into the ark with Noah two and two of all flesh in which there was the breath of life.

And those that entered male and female of all flesh went in as God had commanded him and the Lord shut him in. Amen.

[25 : 21] Despite being a historical event that actually happened in history of course, the ark and the flood speak to us more eloquently than many things in Scripture about the coming wrath of God and that there is only one way to be saved.

To put it bluntly, Christ is our ark. Those within the ark were saved. Those outside of it perished. Not because they weren't nice people, sure some of them were, very nice people, not because they failed to be religious, many of them worshiped all sorts of things, perhaps some even acknowledged the God of Noah and perhaps offered up the occasional sacrifice to him.

No, they perished for the simple solitary reason that they were outside of the ark when the flood came. The door stayed open until God shut it.

Noah didn't shut it. Noah spent a hundred years building and preparing the ark and everyone had plenty of time to know why he was doing it. They just didn't believe him.

[26 : 31] Our Lord tells us in the Gospel that right up until the day the flood came, folk carried on with business, buying and selling, building homes, having weddings, looking to a future that in fact they would never have because they were outside the ark instead of in it when the flood came.

God shut the door when the time had gone. Now we fence the table today to underline the fact that the ark, our Saviour Christ, has an inside and an outside and there is a clear outward demarcation between the two.

The church does not make the boundary any more than Noah shut the door. The church does not make the boundary. The boundary has always been there.

From all eternity the boundary has always been there. And even if you think in terms of the word of crofting, one would be in big trouble if one tried to claim territory but there is an extra ground for your croft just by a little uproot the fence.

I'll just move a few hundred yards in one direction, build a new fence there and I'll just get a bigger croft that way. That would be nice, wouldn't it? It would be in trouble once that gets discovered and it's no use saying, well look that's where the fence is.

[27 : 53] I made it, the fence is there, you can see the fence is there. Yeah, but the fence isn't meant to be in that position. The only reason the fence has validity is because it is marking a boundary which in law already exists.

The fence marks what is to the outward view already the case. You'd be in trouble if you claim territory simply by raising a fence other than upon an existing, recognised and recorded boundary line.

The fence marks what is to the outward view already the case. It does not make it so. Higher powers have already determined the boundary, whether in crofting, whether in legal properties or whether in the people of God the fence merely marks it.

But this is a fence with a gate and a door. You can cross in, I suppose theoretically out. You can enter in just as folk could had they so chosen, entered into the ark while there was still time.

You're not allowed to climb over the fence, you have to go through the gate. Jesus said anybody who climbs in by some of their ways a thief for a robber, that won't do you any good. But there is a gate, there is a door. There is an open way to come in.

[29 : 12] You can cross it, you can enter in just as folk could if they had chosen to enter the ark while there was still time. There was an open door until finally God shut it. You can go through the door, you can cross the fence, but then you're inside instead of outside.

You can never be in both categories at the same time. You must be by definition one or the other. But you can come in because until God shuts it, the door is open. And as with entering into the ark, yeah, well life will never be the same again once you have entered in.

But it is life that you will have, life in all its fullness because he has died that we might have such a life. This fence, this reality is all about Christ.

This is his table and you are welcome to his table if you will have him as your saviour, if you will enter in. And Christ said, I am the door, by me if anyone enters in, you'll go in and out and find pasture.

[30 : 23] It's his table. It's not the table of any denomination, of any one branch of the church. And to that end, I now in his name invite you, invite all who are in full communion with any recognised branch of the church of Jesus Christ upon earth.

If they've not already done so, come forward and take a place at the Lord's table. And if as yet you're not outwardly in Christ, there is this opportunity now, if you would, to come and to profess your faith.

And yes, we can take that, it's all right, there's nobody who's going to say, oh you know somebody actually came forward, I was late for my lunch, my goodness, because they took up all that time.

The elders are not going to say, oh come on, we won't go on with the lunch, who's this person now coming?

Wanted to say that they believe in Christ for goodness sake. No, they'll be delighted. Anybody will be delighted to be delayed with their lunch or their dinner because somebody came forward.

How much joy there will be in heaven over one soul that will come forward even at this eleventh hour. So I invite you in His name, if you will have Him as your Savior and all who are in full communion with the Lord at present to come and take their place at the table.

[31 : 38] It is His table, it's not ours. It is not the table of any one branch of the church, it is the table of the Lord. So let us now sing to the Lord's praise, the Psalm 118 as we prepare the elements and set them upon the table.

We will sing to the Lord's praise in Psalm 118 verses 15 to 23. These six stanzas. Psalm 118 in verse 15, in dwellings of the righteous has heard the melody of joy and health, the Lord's right hand at ever valiantly, the right hand of the mighty Lord exalted is in high, the right hand of the mighty Lord ever valiantly, and so on to the verse 23, that stone is made head cornerstone, which builders did despise, this is the doing of the Lord and wondrous in our eyes.

We sing these verses as the elements are prepared and opened upon the table.