

## Call to Worship

P What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits to me?

**C I will offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving and will call on the name of the Lord.**

P I will pay my vows to the Lord now in the presence of all his people,

**C in the courts of the Lord's house, in the midst of you, O Jerusalem.**

P Jesus humbled himself and became obedient unto death,

**C even death on a cross.**

## Hymn of Invocation

*606 I Lay My Sins on Jesus*

- 1 I lay my sins on Jesus,  
The spotless Lamb of God;  
He bears them all and frees us  
From the accursèd load.  
I bring my guilt to Jesus  
To wash my crimson stains  
Clean in His blood most precious  
Till not a spot remains.
  
- 2 I lay my wants on Jesus;  
All fullness dwells in Him;  
He heals all my diseases;  
My soul He does redeem.  
I lay my griefs on Jesus,  
My burdens and my cares;  
He from them all releases;  
He all my sorrows shares.
  
- 3 I rest my soul on Jesus,  
This weary soul of mine;  
His right hand me embraces;  
I on His breast recline.  
I love the name of Jesus,  
Immanuel, Christ, the Lord;  
Like fragrance on the breezes  
His name abroad is poured.

*Text: Horatius Bonar, 1808–89*

*Text: Public domain*

P Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

**C Happy are those to whom the LORD imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.**

P While I kept silence, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long.

**C For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.**

P Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity;

**C I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and you forgave the guilt of my sin.**

P Therefore let all who are faithful offer prayer to you; at a time of distress, the rush of mighty waters shall not reach them.

**C You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with glad cries of deliverance.**

P Many are the torments of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the LORD.

**C Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.**

*Stand*

### Confession & Absolution

P If You, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?

**C But with You there is forgiveness; therefore You are feared.**

P Since we are gathered to hear God's Word, call upon Him in prayer and praise, and receive the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ in the fellowship of this altar, let us first consider our unworthiness and confess before God and one another that we have sinned in thought, word, and deed, and that we cannot free ourselves from our sinful condition. Together as His people let us take refuge in the infinite mercy of God, our heavenly Father, seeking His grace for the sake of Christ, and saying: God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

*Kneel/Stand*

**C Almighty God, have mercy upon us, forgive us our sins, and lead us to everlasting life. Amen.**

P Almighty God in His mercy has given His Son to die for you and for His sake forgives you all your sins. As a called and ordained servant of Christ, and by His authority, I therefore forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the † Son and of the Holy Spirit.

**C Amen.**

Glory to the Father be,  
And to Christ, eternally.  
Glory to the Spirit raise.  
Join all nature in her praise:  
From creation's ancient shore  
Unto life forevermore.

Hymn

*437 Alas! And Did My Savior Bleed*

- 1 Alas! And did my Savior bleed,  
And did my sov'reign die?  
Would He devote that sacred head  
For such a worm as I?
- 2 Was it for crimes that I had done  
He groaned upon the tree?  
Amazing pity, grace unknown,  
And love beyond degree!
- 3 Well might the sun in darkness hide  
And shut his glories in  
When God, the mighty maker, died  
For His own creatures' sin.
- 4 Thus might I hide my blushing face  
While His dear cross appears,  
Dissolve my heart in thankfulness,  
And melt mine eyes to tears.
- 5 But drops of grief can ne'er repay  
The debt of love I owe;  
Here, Lord, I give myself away:  
'Tis all that I can do.

*Text: Isaac Watts, 1674–1748, alt.*

*Text: Public domain*

## Gospel Reading

<sup>1</sup>And as soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole Council. And they bound Jesus and led him away and delivered him over to Pilate. <sup>2</sup>And Pilate asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” And he answered him, “**You have said so.**” <sup>3</sup>And the chief priests accused him of many things. <sup>4</sup>And Pilate again asked him, “Have you no answer to make? See how many charges they bring against you.” <sup>5</sup>But Jesus made no further answer, so that Pilate was amazed.

<sup>6</sup>Now at the feast he used to release for them one prisoner for whom they asked. <sup>7</sup>And among the rebels in prison, who had committed murder in the insurrection, there was a man called Barabbas. <sup>8</sup>And the crowd came up and began to ask Pilate to do as he usually did for them. <sup>9</sup>And he answered them, saying, “Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?” <sup>10</sup>For he perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered him up. <sup>11</sup>But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release for them Barabbas instead. <sup>12</sup>And Pilate again said to them, “Then what shall I do with the man you call the King of the Jews?” <sup>13</sup>And they cried out again, “Crucify him.” <sup>14</sup>And Pilate said to them, “Why, what evil has he done?” But they shouted all the more, “Crucify him.” <sup>15</sup>So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.

## Theme Hymn

*450 Herzlich Tut Mich*

The voices of the Passion,  
Those words from ancient days—  
What message do they fashion  
As on your cross I gaze?  
In words that once were spoken,  
In speech now overheard,  
Grant me, O Lord, this token:  
To hear your living Word!

## Overheard

*Barabbas and Caiaphas*

### Cast Of Characters

**Pastor**, who delivers the Sermonic Introduction and Sermonic Conclusion.

**Caiaphas**, the high priest--smooth, assured, pompous

**Barabbas**, recently freed from prison--confused and concerned.

A **Maid** in the service of the high priest, a small part at the beginning and end of the drama.

## Sermonic Introduction

- P *Have you ever had a close call, a really close call, a situation in which you were certain you were going to die ... and then, at the last minute, something happened that meant the difference between life and death? Perhaps it was in an automobile or an airplane ... perhaps while swimming or skiing ... an accident ... an incident ... but you were SURE you were going to die.*

*If you have been through such a close call, remember it now. If not, you will have to try to imagine one. And do so with this question: When it was all over, was there someone who ought to be thanked? Besides God, I mean--someone who was personally responsible for the fact that you lived instead of dying?*

*How do you thank someone for sparing your life? Is it always possible to know exactly whom to thank? And behind all these, perhaps a more basic question: Why are some lives spared, and others not? More specifically: Why are YOU allowed to go on living ... while others die instead?*

*Tonight we have the opportunity to overhear a conversation that might have occurred if BARABBAS had gone to the temple that fateful Friday (that day that had been scheduled to be his execution day) to confront CAIAPHAS there--the high priest who was somehow responsible for a reprieve. Barabbas had just survived a "close call" ... and in his questioning wonder about it all, perhaps we can confront our own.*

## Drama

Maid *(urgently)* I'm sorry, but you can't come in here now; he's busy.

Barabbas But I must see him. This is important.

Maid But the Sabbath is beginning, the Passover Sabbath ...

Barabbas *(interrupting)* I know that, but ...

Maid *(continuing)* ... and the high priest has sacred duties to attend to, sacrifices to supervise ...

Barabbas But this is *important!* It's a matter of life and death!

Maid *(quite loud)* Some other time, perhaps. Right now, I'm afraid ...

Caiaphas *(interrupting)* Is there some problem, miss?

Maid Yes, noble Caiaphas. This man has come barging in here ...

Barabbas (*interrupting*) Sir, if I may have a moment of your time ...

Maid (*interrupting*) I tried to tell him that this is not the proper time for that kind of thing, that you have sacred duties to perform for the Passover, that ...

Barabbas (*emphatically*) My name is Barabbas!

Caiaphas (*quite surprised*) Bar ... abbas! Oh, I see.

Maid I tried to tell him, sir ...

Caiaphas It's all right, my dear. I will speak with him.

Barabbas Thank you, high priest.

Caiaphas You may go, Abigail.

Maid (*protesting*) But the sacrifices ...

Caiaphas (*emphatically*) You may go, Abigail!

Maid Yes, sir.

Caiaphas (*after a pause, during which the maid has presumably left*) Now, then, Barabbas, what is it you want of me?

Barabbas I'm not exactly sure, sir. I guess I've come to express my thanks.

Caiaphas (*almost relieved*) Well, you have certainly come to the right place. No more fitting place than the temple to offer thanks to the Lord. If you will present yourself to one of the Levites, I am sure he will help you determine the proper sacrifice to express your appreciation to the Almighty ...

Barabbas It's not exactly the Almighty I was intending to thank, sir; it was you.

Caiaphas I beg your pardon?

Barabbas Thanks to you, sir--and to your fellow priests--the sacrifice has already been made, so to speak.

Caiaphas Please don't talk in riddles, boy; I don't have the time.

Barabbas I am told that it was you who led the crowd this morning in shouting for my release from the death cell.

Caiaphas (*hesitantly*) Yes, I suppose it looked that way ...

Barabbas And I want to thank you ... for my life, I guess. It is not often that one such as I--a robber, a murderer, a convicted and condemned criminal--has a high priest to plead for his life.

Caiaphas (*trying to brush him off*) Well, you certainly are welcome, my son. It was nice of you to stop by and express your thanks ... although, I assure you, completely unnecessary. You are now a free man. May I suggest that you enjoy your newfound freedom ... and be careful not to get yourself in trouble with the authorities hereafter. And now, if you will excuse me ...

Barabbas Please don't leave, sir. I need some answers. I don't understand what happened today.

Caiaphas (*almost matter-of-factly*) Why, you were set free! The Romans have a custom, you know, to set someone free each year at holiday time, and you happen to be the one.

Barabbas No, if you will forgive my saying so: I don't *happen* to be the one. You caused it to be so.

Caiaphas Ah, not I alone, my son. It was the crowds who wanted you released, the crowds who called out for you.

Barabbas I heard that. But why would the crowds want *me*?

Caiaphas (*searching*) You are a ... a hero, my boy--a patriot, of sorts. Everyone loves you.

Barabbas If I'm such a hero, how is it that you didn't even recognize me?

Caiaphas (*oily*) Why are you questioning me, young man? You are free! Your life is spared. You have been given the gift of life. Why don't you just accept it, thank the Lord for it, and be on your way?

Barabbas (*urgently*) Because I want to know *why*!

Caiaphas Why (*pausing to rephrase*) not just regard it as the will of the Lord, my son? Or the whim of the governor?

Barabbas The governor sentenced me to death.

Caiaphas But the people wanted you free.

Barabbas I don't believe that. Look, I'm a common thief, a murderer. By all rights I should have been crucified today, and most of the people would have applauded the fact, and you know it. Now why didn't it happen that way?

Caiaphas If you must know, someone else was crucified in your place.

Barabbas That much I've been told ... but *why*?

Caiaphas His death was ... shall we say ... *expedient*.

Barabbas Expedient. And mine wasn't?

Caiaphas Necessary, that's what it was. A political matter which I don't expect you to understand, but necessary.

Barabbas Necessary? A *murder* was necessary?

Caiaphas You needn't call it murder, my son, for it surely was not that.

Barabbas What, then?

Caiaphas You've got to see the whole picture. Call it rather ... a purging ... yes, a holy and necessary cleansing of the people of God.

Barabbas I'm not sure I see the difference.

Caiaphas It's very much like when Aaron's grandson, Phinehas, took up his spear in his zeal for the Lord, to purge God's people of the Midianite abomination in their midst. He put both the woman and the man to death together, you may recall; and so God spared his people.

Barabbas My father was a rabbi, sir. You needn't treat me like one of his pupils.

Caiaphas (*continuing anyway*) Or recall old Mattathias the Maccabean, who slew the Syrian official when he sought to offer an abomination upon the altar of God.

Barabbas But those were foreigners they put to death—Gentiles, enemies of our people.

Caiaphas Enemies of our *religion*, my son. Abominations that needed to be purged from our midst if we were to be God's holy people.

Barabbas And today? What was *his* abomination? Why did he need to be purged from among us? Was *he* an enemy of our religion?

Caiaphas (*smiling*) My son, trust me, for I am the high priest. He was an abomination ... to our nation, our people, and our religion. It was expedient that one man should die for the people, rather than that the whole nation should perish.

Barabbas (*persistent*) But why? What evil had he done?

Caiaphas We have our laws, revered and sacred laws. I wouldn't expect a common person like you to understand them all.

Barabbas My father was a rabbi.

Caiaphas (*angry*) Then you should have learned to respect your elders! (*calming a bit*) Rest assured that we tried him in our religious courts according to our religious laws, and we judged solemnly that he deserved to die.

Barabbas Just like that.

Caiaphas We didn't do this for ourselves; we did it for God! That man had blasphemed the Lord, and so, following the sacred necessity laid upon us, we solemnly saw that he was done to death.

Barabbas (*calmly*) When I did that, they called it murder.

Caiaphas Yes, but you were taking the law into your own hands, you see; and when one does that, one must often expect to pay the price.

Barabbas But you took the crowd into your own hands. Isn't that the same thing?

Caiaphas What I did ... (*rephrasing*) ... what we did this morning was all quite correct and proper. Both in our own courts and before the Roman authorities, we followed all the prescribed legal steps. That's the difference, don't you see?

Barabbas What I see is that tonight a man is dead as a result.

Caiaphas And tonight another man is *alive* as a result; don't forget that. Why don't you simply accept that blessing, undeserved as it is, and go on your way with profound thanksgiving? A man was crucified today ... and it was not you.

Barabbas In other words, he died for me.

Caiaphas You might look at it that way.

Barabbas He died for me.

Caiaphas Although I would prefer to say that he died for a reason a bit more noble and necessary than that. He died so that the Romans would not come and destroy both our place and our nation. He died so that the rest of us might go on living, peacefully, and with a future. You might say he died for his people. He died for all of us.

Barabbas He died for *me*. Strange, isn't it? If I had put him to death--murdered him myself with my own hands--I would still have had to suffer the punishment; his blood would have been on my hands. But ... because he died the way he *did* ... in my place--I ... am free! I almost have the feeling that I should be thanking *him* somehow for saving me.

Caiaphas (*smiling*) Too late for that, of course. He's dead, after all; and good riddance, I might add.

Maid (*interrupting*) Sir, the ram's horn has been blown, and they are waiting for you.

Barabbas (*reflectively*) You know, I was wondering when I first came in here whether it was proper to offer a sacrifice tonight ... but it does seem as if that has already taken place, doesn't it?

Caiaphas How so, my son?

Barabbas Whatever your motives, high priest, and whatever your methods ... that is finally the result, isn't it? I am alive and free, almost as if I have been given the gift of a new life to live, and perhaps a new reason for living it.

Maid (*urgently*) Sir, please. The sacrifice ...

Barabbas The sacrifice has already taken place. He died for me.

## Sermonic Conclusion

P *So, why was the life of Barabbas spared that day? And why is ours? Was it merely political--"expedient," as Caiaphas insisted? Or was the reason more profound?*

*Barabbas was correct, of course. Another life had been sacrificed so that his might be spared. Perhaps Caiaphas should have been the one to point that out. He was, after all, familiar with the idea of sacrifice. This very week he had been leading his people in preparation for Passover, that great celebration of sacrifice, of lives preserved because of another's death--the sacrifice of the lamb.*

*And that is what John the Baptist had called Jesus, wasn't it? Isaiah had used the term centuries before--"the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world," by whose death our lives too have been spared, by whose blood our sins have been forgiven. The punishment we deserve has been borne by Another, innocently, and so we are free--free from paying the price for our sin, as Barabbas was free from paying the price for his sin.*

*And yet, as Barabbas also noted in our imaginary dialog, there was more involved in such being set free than merely "passive obedience." Someone had taken an ACTIVE part in his release. "It is not often that one such as I has a high priest to plead for his life," Barabbas observed. And so may we; for Scripture assures us that even now, as we cower condemned in our sins and doomed to death eternal, we have THE High Priest--not a corrupt and conniving Caiaphas, but Jesus Christ, the holy Son of God himself--pleading before the throne of grace in our behalf. "If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the Expiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world." (1 John 2:1-2)*

*We may not always realize as we should that every sin against our God is a "close call," an appointment with certain death. It is good, then, that we have come here this day, to the house of God, that we may learn the wondrous answer once again, and know ourselves to be free, through the eternally pleading sacrifice of the Lamb, our Substitute.*

Theme Hymn

Herzlich Tut Mich 450

O Lamb of God, e'er pleading  
Before God's throne of love,  
For sinners interceding,  
Our great High Priest above:  
Lord, in your crucifixion  
Give me firm faith to see  
With Spirit-wrought conviction  
That "Jesus died for me!"

## Offering

### Prayers

P Not what we have done, O God,

**C but what your Son has wrought for us we bring before your throne of grace. P Not what we deserve, O God,**

**C but what your Son has merited we offer on the altar of your praise.**

P Not what we propose, O God,

**C but what your Son has willed for us we look to as our great and only goal.**

P Remove from us, we pray, the pride that seeks our way and will alone,

**C that places what we consider "expedient" above what may be good and right and just.**

P Forgive our self-will for the sake of him who pleads his sacrifice in our behalf,

**C who bids us all, unworthy though we be, to come before your majesty with confidence and joy;**

P who gave his life for our release,

**C that freed and pardoned, we may be the signs and instruments of love so broad and arms so opened wide that even we may find a place among the ransomed and the free;**

P in whose great name, and at whose word we now are bold to pray:

### Lord's Prayer

**C Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven; give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.**

### Benediction

P The grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ ✝ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

**C Amen.**

### Closing Hymn

- 1 Cross of Jesus, cross of sorrow,  
Where the blood of Christ was shed,  
Perfect man on thee did suffer,  
Perfect God on thee has bled!

*428 Cross of Jesus, Cross of Sorrow*

- 2 Here the King of all the ages,  
Throned in light ere worlds could be,  
Robed in mortal flesh is dying,  
Crucified by sin for me.
  
- 3 O mysterious condescending!  
O abandonment sublime!  
Very God Himself is bearing  
All the sufferings of time!
  
- 4 Cross of Jesus, cross of sorrow,  
Where the blood of Christ was shed,  
Perfect man on thee did suffer,  
Perfect God on thee has bled!

*Text: William J. Sparrow Simpson, 1860–1952*

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