

Barabbas

You have probably heard my name. It is actually Jesus Barabbas, which increases the contrast between me and the other Jesus, the one who was crucified.

You might wonder why I was on death row while two petty thieves were on the crosses with the other Jesus. The answer is “knowledge is power.”

I am a survivor, not only because I am ruthless but because I am smart. I found out things and used that information to my best advantage. First it was simply knowing where the most prosperous travelers could be waylaid. I developed a band of followers with my knowledge. Getting my share of the profits required effective threats.

Finally, I got knowledge of secrets that could be used for favors or money. And I learned who could be bought.

The most amusing were the religious leaders, who railed against “sin” but practiced the most interesting indiscretions in secret. I controlled prostitution and knew who the customers were. The other Jesus also apparently knew what the leaders did, I am not sure how, because he was not privy to my networks. He seemed to want them to repent. I just wanted “favors.”

With the Romans, it was different. Their moral code was lax, but they could be bought. On the other hand, their willingness to kill for a good cause meant I needed to maintain security.

Sure, I got arrested this time for insurrection, but with my “information,” I always expected it to be temporary. It’s a dangerous business but potentially very profitable.

When Pilate offered the crowd the choice of releasing me or Jesus of Nazareth as the Passover Pardon, I knew that the average Jew did not want me loose. But those pitiful hypocrites in the fancy robes knew how to sway them and preserve their own lives and lifestyles.

Two of my petty thieves hung on those crosses. One died like a man, cursing and defiant, the other acting in a way that mystified me. He had impressed me as someone with potential. Of course, he had failed the first test -- by getting caught. But something was happening to him. He had begun to have regrets.

I had seen this before. Some of my brightest turned on themselves and committed suicide. This one didn’t have to because the Roman Army was doing it for him. But he called out to Jesus of Nazareth, accepting as fact that he was a king and asking to be remembered in the coming kingdom.

How do I know this? I was watching, discretely of course. I heard Jesus of Nazareth claim, by his answer, that he had a coming kingdom, he called it paradise, and that this failed thief would be with him – that very day! Then Jesus, speaking loudly, forgave everyone who had condemned and crucified him as well as those who cursed, insulted and tormented him.

Who was he really? What is this mysterious kingdom he spoke of? I was suddenly not so sure of the life I had made for myself and did not know what to do about it. I had been given more time to think about it. Why?

Matthew 27, Mark 15, Luke 23, John 18, Matthew 23, Luke 11