

## **We want Barabbas (A Passion Play)**

During the Easter Vacation of 1962 a group of students from Manchester University Methodist Society took part in a Holy Week Mission to Keighley.

On Good Friday of that week the Mission culminated in a Passion Play performed in Temple Street Methodist Church – a play that had been written by the students themselves. It was subsequently published as a “Wyvern Play” by the Epworth Press.

The excerpt below is the final part of the play - Barabbas watching and commenting on the crucifixion of Jesus. The Passion Play was followed in the natural way for a Mission with an appeal.

**Barabbas:** Go on, knock ‘em in, good and hard. That’ll stop His meddling. He deserved it if anybody did.  
*To the accompaniment of appropriate drill orders the CROSS is gradually raised.*

**Barabbas:** Go on, give it a good shake. That’ll make it hurt.  
*When the CROSS has reached its final position a spotlight is shone on it from behind, and the original spotlight swings onto Barabbas.*

**Barabbas:** This’ll show Him what the Jews really think of Him! This’ll show Him what a useless failure He’s been. He thought He’d hold a sceptre and wear a golden crown. That’s a laugh. Now all He’s got is four nails and a ring of brambles.

**Crowd:** You saved others, now save yourself.

**Barabbas:** After all those miracles, you’d think He’d do a few for Himself, instead of just hanging there with the nails tearing through the bones of His hands, and the blood and sweat dripping off His toes.

**Crowd:** He saved others, Himself He cannot save.

**Scribe 1 (from among the audience):** If You’re the King of the Jews, come down from your Cross.

**Scribe 2:** He trusted in God to save Him.

**Scribe 3:** He called Himself the Son of God.

**Barabbas (turning angrily on audience):** Trust those blasted Scribes to go on hitting a man when he’s down. Why can’t they leave Him alone? Eh, but the sun’s hot. It’ll not be long before their crawling off to their afternoon rest and leaving Him in a bit of peace. By God, those nails must hurt. You can see the lines of pain on His face, and the blood from the thorns keeps getting in His eyes. He’s got guts though, carrying on a regular conversation with those two rogues strung up there with Him.

What’s He saying? ‘Today you’ll be with me in Paradise?’ What does He know about Paradise? Isn’t that woman over there His mother? She must be going through it. Why she’s turned up at all I don’t know. And that fellow’s one of His disciples. Fine lot of friends they turned out to be. One bit of trouble and they all rushed off and left Him.

What’s He saying? Sounds as though He’s telling the young fellow to look after His mother. He may not be such a bad bloke. Some folks always said He had a good word for the poor and the sick. More than you can say for those priests half the time. Anyway, this’ll show them a thing or two. He’s certainly living up to His name now. Priests - huh – think they’re the nobs with their long robes and fine speeches.

But it's getting rather dark all of a sudden. Going to be a storm I shouldn't wonder. Well, a bit of rain will be welcome to Him, no doubt. Look at His face now. Never did I see such suffering – even when they caught that Roman up in the hills the other week and strung him up by his thumbs. Aye, I've seen a thing or two. Not many ways of killing a man I haven't tried. Yes, but those Romans deserve it. Let one of them get left on his own without his pals when I'm around, and that's the last thing he does.

The same goes for those spying tax-collectors – in league with the Romans, betraying their own people.

But there's none that don't go in fear of the name of Barabbas.

What's He saying now? 'Father, forgive them.' I'd forgive them, I would. Catch me forgiving them. I'd not rest till I'd murdered the whole lot of them – High Priests, Romans, the lot. But they were rather powerless. The crowd had a lot to do with it. Crowds are funny things. You think they're on your side, then all of a sudden they turn nasty. There they were last Sunday, waving palm leaves and shouting their heads off as if He really was the Messiah. And now by Friday, they're out for His blood. Any crowd's the same – cruel, selfish, swayed by every whim and fancy. He was quite a good bloke really, yet they shouted for Him to die as if He were the meanest fellow who ever lived.

*(Turning on audience):* Yes, you, the crowd. You shouted 'Crucify'. He's up there dying because of what you did. Do you realise this?

You, the bank clerk.

You, the housewife.

You the turner, the fitter and welder, the manager and the shop-girl, the postman and the parson  
*(and other trades appropriate to audience).*

You don't have to be a drunk, or a murderer, or a prostitute or a thief to crucify Him. You just have to be yourself – comfortable, respectable, going about your own business, doing your own job. Don't say you didn't shout 'Crucify', because by your every action day by day you do just that. You, like Peter, pretend you don't know Him. You, like Pilate, wash your hands of the whole business, don't get involved, don't get committed. But you are committed; you can't get away from it. You shouted 'Barabbas'.

My God, what am I saying? That's me! If he weren't up there dying, I would be.

I, Barabbas, leader of the Zealots, self-confessed murderer – He's being crucified instead of me.

If God is just, is that the way it should be? I deserve to die for all the things I've done. He only went round healing folk, and helping them. I should be up there. It's me they should have crucified.

But He's going to speak. 'My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?' Well mate, if He's forsaken you, He's most certainly forsaken us who helped to put you up there.

My God, what am I saying? What if he really is the Messiah?

What if this is God's last offer to stop this horror of bloodshed and selfishness.

Perhaps because He was good He had to die. Perhaps this was the only way it could be.

*(Turns towards the CROSS):*

Speak to me – Are you really God's Messiah? He's dead. He's gone. We've killed Him.

How could anyone live and suffer like that unless He really was God.

O God, forgive us. What have we done? We your chosen people have killed your Son.

We didn't know. We didn't recognise Him.

O Lord, have mercy on us. *(Kneels at foot of CROSS)*