

The King On a Cross

Valley Center Seventh-day Adventist Church

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The trial of Jesus had just concluded, if you could call it a trial at all. It was defective and flawed as far as being a legal proceeding, conducted during the early morning hours of that Friday, at the home of the high priest! It was completely out of order, marred by the testimony of hired witnesses who couldn't agree with each other, and the high priest committing blasphemy by tearing his garments (See Exodus 39:23) while charging Christ of blasphemy. Abuse and mockery surrounded the spotless Son of God, as they rushed toward their objective, His death.

Then Pilate, the weak and reluctant governor, threw the dice in a deadly gamble. He offered to the mob a choice between Barabbas, a Charles Manson sort, or Jesus, the quiet and dignified Teacher and Healer of the sick. The crowd could choose between these two who might be released, as the Passover custom allowed. It was a bold, daring move on Pilate's part. Surely they would not want the barbaric Barabbas to be released back into their society!

But in shocking disdain of common sense, the crowd clamored, "Release Barabbas, release Barabbas." Pilate asked, "What then do you want me to do with Jesus, called Christ?" Back came the answer, without a moment's hesitation, "Crucify Him, crucify Him."

"Now as they led Him away, they laid hold of a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian, who was coming from the country, and on him they laid the cross that he might bear it after Jesus." Luke 23:36. In a strange, mysterious irony, Jesus was led out of the city of Jerusalem through what was known as the "sheep gate," so named because through it for centuries the animals designated for sacrifice had been led, to be offered on the temple's altar. Now the One to Whom all those sheep had pointed passed through its portals. Now at last would be answered the question posed 18 centuries before by the youthful Isaac, "Where is the lamb?" Genesis 22:7.

Destiny had laid her hand on the God-Man of Nazareth, the great Jared of Salvation, the Immanuel of history, to be the Sacrifice for sins; our sins, my sins. He was not here by compulsion: "For this purpose came I into the world," He testified. It was a willing, voluntary sacrifice. "There were also two others, criminals, led with Him to be put to death. And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left." Luke 23:32, 33.

The place spoke of death. It had been given the name *Calvary*, coming from the Latin for skull (*Golgotha* in Hebrew), because of the rough resemblance of a human skull within its rocky crags. Dried and faded blood stains on the granite base told their stories of the previous effects of scourging. Holes hewn into the rocky surface, into which the foot of the crosses would be placed, gave witness to other occasions of execution. Everyone knew what happened here.

The two crucified with Jesus were probably companions of Barabbas. Their struggles to avoid the Roman spikes was in sharp contrast to the non-resistance shown by Jesus. During His ministry He had stood unshaken by the continual verbal jousts of scribes and Pharisees, and now He was calm and compliant at the brutal impact of the nails that would fasten Him to the cross.

“Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, ‘If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us.’ But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, ‘Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong.’” Luke 23:39-41.

A change had come over one of the thieves. Up to that time, the pain of the torture had been accompanied by the trial of his tortured soul, disturbed by the consciousness of a wrecked and wasted life. Guilt and sorrow for his misdeeds added to the agony of the crucifixion. The foreboding of a future judgment day clouded his spirit.

But now, something was different. Memories stored from childhood were awakening. Scriptures buried away in the back of his mind were coming back to life. A thirst for truth was being quenched. Pieces were being fit into a picture. Threads were being woven into a pattern. Faith was stirring. Courage was forming. Something in the presence and demeanor of the One crucified next to him was planting hope in his heart. Could this Jesus be the “One”? Could he find peace at this last hour in Him? Could his conscience find rest in Him? Putting aside all fears he rebuked his compatriot in crime and threw his helpless soul on his new-found Savior. “Then he said to Jesus, ‘Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.’” Luke 23:42.

What a statement of faith was this! “When You come into Your kingdom.” Somehow that repentant thief had come to the way of thinking that there was “something beyond” all this. “This” was not the end. He somehow came to understand that whatever that “tomorrow” might hold, the crucified One next to him would be there, and would reign as King. In the tortured and abused body of Jesus He came to see his Messiah. A faith rarely confessed even by the disciples was born in his heart and expressed by his lips.

He didn’t ask to be saved. He didn’t dare to request for himself a place in God’s kingdom. He didn’t ask that his sins be forgiven. He just asked, “Lord, remember me.”

He simply threw himself on God’s mercy. But in that heart-felt prayer, Jesus read his intent, his every experience, his new repentance. Quickly came back the answer from Christ, “Assuredly, I say to you today; today when it looks like I have no kingdom; today when it looks like the enemy

has won; today when it looks like there will be no tomorrow; today when it looks like I am anything like a King; today I say to you, you will be with Me in Paradise.” Luke 23:43.

They could take away His dignity by stripping Him of His clothes. They could take away His freedom by pinning Him to wooden beams. They could take away many things, but there is one thing they couldn't take away: they could not take away His divine right to save sinners! That is what He had come into the world to do, and He would not relinquish that purpose though nailed to a tree. He is “able to save to the uttermost” all who come to Him.

His enemies made Him look like a criminal, but He reigned as King, yes, God Almighty. Golgotha became heaven's court of justice and mercy. The cross became His throne as Jesus pronounced this new-born child of faith “not guilty.” A peace and quietness filled the heart of this new convert as he rested in the love and salvation of his Lord.

Three crosses were there that day. In the middle, One died for sin. On one side of Him died one in sin, forever lost. On the other side one died to sin, with salvation granted full and free. Jesus' open arms extend still today. Won't you ask Him into your heart and receive Him as your Savior