

The Independent Witness

‘Master! Master! Centurion, Sir!
the panting boy raced in –
an urgent message – above Passover’s din I heard him cry -
‘from Pontius Pilate Sir!’

Three prisoners to execute today –
on one a scourging order –
Well, Company, stand to, we’ve work to do –
and may these rot in hell.

We marched to the Praetorium and found without delay
two Judean bandits, murderous thieves and robbers
whose hate-filled shifty eyes gave their identity away.
With them - a little Galilean – calm and still –
a most unlikely criminal - why on him the whipping order?

But I’d no time now to questions pose,
I ordered the execution squad -
‘take these two scum to Golgotha,
wait there - we’re on a side trip first
to do our worst with the scourger’s whip’.

Now I’m no stranger to blood and gore,
I’ve fought the ruthless Roman war o’er half the world –
killed and maimed beyond conscience –
why did the little man make me uneasy?
Bring the scourge – with luck he wouldn’t last -
and so be spared the second blast of torture in extremis.

Now I’ve seen them writhe and scream
and curse and call upon their gods,
but not this man -
He suffered – that was plain enough;
The interwoven pottery chips and flints along its length
ripped repeatedly through his flesh
and drained away his strength –
yet even when his back was but a bloody mess –
his face all sweat and agony - silence on his lips.

My men stared incredulous, ‘Who is he Sir?
What’s his crime? Give us the news!’

‘According to Pilate – Jesus, King of the Jews!’
How we laughed at that – ‘King of the Jews!’
Let’s make him king then shall we?
Let’s give him purple robe and crown –
that briar will do -
with four inch spikes on it
he’ll think he’s got a coronet Ha! Ha! Ha!’
‘Hail! King of the Jews, sit on your throne and bleed
while we spit on you and beat you with this reed.’

‘Enough, said I, we’ve more to do this day,
Prisoner, take up the cross, to your death - this way.’
Soon he fell and prompted by my boot he staggered up
and on to fall again
the heavy cross crashing down upon his tortured flesh.

Among the crowd the women wept –
they felt a mother’s anguished tears for a beloved son
‘Don’t weep for me’, called he to them,
‘but for yourselves you women of Jerusalem!’

‘By the gods’ I declared, ‘what man is this,
who crushed by a Roman cross
thinks not of self but of others loss?’

A third time down and cannot rise,
this king covered in blood and dust –
‘Damn, we’ll never get there but we must –
Ah! There in the crowd a broad black African back.
‘You there! Put your shoulder to this cross
and carry it up the hill.’

‘Not I!’, said he, one Simon of Cyrene,
‘I’ll not do it, you’re not my boss!
Why should I bear your cursed cross?’
‘You’ll bear worse if you don’t’ said I
and made to draw my sword.
When he saw steel without a word he gripped the cross
and set off up the hill.
Jesus the prisoner painfully rose
and summoning all his will
he slowly followed.

At last all three were readied for their fate,
we nailed them hand and foot;
the heavy spikes we hammered home -
iron through flesh to wood –
‘make sure you’ve nailed them straight!’

Mid screams and vile abuse the robbers fought their foe –
(it was the usual thing –)
yet silence and submission from the pathetic Jewish king.

The thieves abused him.
‘Save yourself you Saviour and us as well’,
the rabble jeered them on,
the pompous priests concurring -
‘So much for he who would the Temple build
in three short days –
now cursed of God he’s dying and on his way to Hell!’

I saw his mother standing there
broken with grief and nearly done.
A young man stood beside her.
At Jesus’ word made her his own and he became her son.

Through his suff’ring Jesus
said the most amazing words I’d ever heard –
the words to all who’d put him on the cross,
the Law, the priests, the crowd,
yes even I it later dawned upon me
‘Father forgive them, they know not what they do’.

One thief fell silent,
the other’s gasping torrent of abuse droned on
‘Silence!’ his companion croaked,
‘you know that we’ve done wrong
but this man Jesus – can’t you see - is innocent?
‘When you Lord to your kingdom come –
remember me.’

Through marred distorted features Jesus replied
‘Today we’ll be in Paradise – you’ll see!’

Sudden darkness on the scene – a cold intense eclipse,
uncanny - yet within I felt a presence,

someone in command.

I knew authority well enough,
my own was proven in the rough of battle
where 'twas lead or die.

But this command, so soft, so strong, a man, a cross,
a darkness bleak - a song?

I swear, a power so vibrant, awesome, pure
– more than I'd ever known
was present there -
and far surpassed the mighty power of Rome.

A blinding daylight – then a shout,
a cry of victory rang out,
'Tis finished!

A smile so brief and so he died
but lest there be a hint of doubt
'Soldier! your spear - right through his side!'

My duty done I called my guard –
'done gambling for his robe?'
'Come on boys don't stop to think!
Time to go and have a drink, or two or more!' –
but something held me though I fought so hard.

The gift of life, the power of love,
came from the cross and from above –
within me I began to see this Jesus as a king - for me.
I felt his grace possess me so and it has never let me go.

So I declared to all though it sounded odd
that despite the cursed path he'd trod
this Jesus was my Saviour, God.

John Marcon

j_marcon@clear.net.nz