

“The Longest Day (The Other Thief)”

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Hello, my name is - well, you don't care what my name is anyway, which is kind of ironic because you all have known me your entire life. But you never think about me, and I don't blame you. I mean my whole life has been a mess anyway. I have made one bad decision after another, which has got me to the place where I want to talk to you about today. You see, I was one of the other two who were hanging on the cross with Jesus that day. I was there because I deserved it. So was the other guy. We were both thieves.

You see, if you were a thief during that time and you got caught, and you were stealing from Jews, well, you got a time in jail - and I had seen my time in jail. But, when you stole from Romans - that was my mistake. Oh, I had a “fool-proof” plan and that “fool-proof” plan got me on a cross, so I knew when I was caught what was going to happen. I was brought before the judge with great fanfare, because the Romans wanted to be absolutely certain every Jew knew that you never stole from a Roman. So, I listened to the judge. But, you know, it still hit me so deep in my gut when they said, “Guilty,” because I knew what that meant. I knew what was going to happen and sure enough it did.

So, the guards took me and put me in a jail cell, like you can imagine. But you can't imagine how horribly cruel those guards were. They were brutal to everyone who was there. So, they would drag me out and occasionally beat me - and they would mock [me]. They had more fun teasing, and harassing, and haranguing me [about] what it would be like when I got nailed to that cross.

It was frightening. Day after day they waited until there were enough [people to hang on crosses] to make it a real show, and then they would all hang us. So, the two of us sat there for a few days until this other person came along. I didn't know who he was, but I knew something was up, because there was a hum outside the jail. You could hear the screaming and the carrying on, but I wasn't quite sure. So, when this other person came into the jail, I knew that it was about time for us to die.

They, oddly, stopped picking on me. They turned it all on this other person in the other cell. So, when it was time, they pulled him out. I could hear it all. They whipped him - but it wasn't like a regular whip. It was one of those that had a whole bunch - nine different ends on it (I had heard about this other places), with silver or metal balls on the ends [and] with hooks - so when it was whipping, I could tell the difference in the way it sounded and the screaming, as it pulled flesh - which was its intension. It didn't happen just once. It didn't happen twice. It happened over and over, and I kept thinking, “Stop! You are going to kill him before it's time.”

You know there is nothing ruder or meaner than a Roman guard. They are brilliant at torture. That is why, they didn't invent crucifixion but, boy, they made it perfect. They know how to keep a body alive, as long as they can, to make the suffering so much greater - and the same with their whips. They know how to take it just to the edge - but not kill you - so you could suffer even more.

Finally, they dragged him back. Then the other one was whipped. But I could tell that I might be alright. It was just a regular whip. Oh, sure, you scream, but you could still function. When they were done with him they dragged me out. I kept saying to myself, "Be strong. Don't give them the joy of letting them see me." But when you are hit, you can't stop it. You scream, and you cry, and you do whatever you have to do, to let it all out.

So, when we were done with that part of it, the three of us walked out as they prepared the crosses for us. I saw the one's [Jesus'] back and I thought, "How in God's name is he ever going to lay anything against that back?" I mean, I knew it was going to hurt mine, but mine wasn't a tenth of what his looked like - felt like.

So, we were told to lay down - and they threw us down and made fun of us, but they were mainly making fun of him. As they tied us to our crosses, they mocked him, and I tried to think, "Who is this guy?" They kept saying, "King of the Jews, get up fight back. If you are a King, where is everyone? Where is your army?" And, I couldn't figure out, "Who *is* this guy?" He is worse than we are. I can't imagine what awful thing he must have done to get that much more brutality than what I had.

So, we were told to get up and so we struggled, and I can't describe after a whipping how hard it is to get your bones moving and pull your knees up - and, they are whopping at you. It isn't a full bullwhip, but it is a whip that just snaps - and it gets your legs, and so you move and bounce up. Somehow, I was on my feet. I looked over and the other guy got up, and here is Jesus - who I heard them screaming his name - getting up. Somehow, after all of that whipping he got up, too.

As we were going along, I saw something that they had done only to him. They had fashioned a crown of thorns and *slammed* it on his head - The blood was just running down. Then I wondered, was he a king of another country? Was he trying to take over Rome? But that seemed awfully silly. I didn't know.

We kept moving, and they kept whacking at him - because he couldn't, kind of, see and he couldn't reach out to wipe his face. We were trying to move, but he couldn't. The other guy was ahead, and I was behind, to keep everything moving.

They kept whacking at us. At one point, I kind of weaved over to the right, because it was a really narrow space. This Jesus had started to really slow down, and I was getting tired of getting whacked, because I wasn't moving ahead. Like I could do anything to get in front of him, in this narrow space.

So, in their frustration, they got somebody to help him a little bit, so it kept it going forward - but then I got hit really hard again, because I was busy watching this other guy, and I wasn't moving fast enough.

And everybody [was] standing above, because there is nowhere to stand in the middle, except [in] the little shops. So, the people were standing inside the shops. It was the Passover time, so everyone was there. It [the town] was packed. It was 10 or 12 times as busy as it usually was, and there was no room - so the guards had moved everyone either inside these shops crammed together, or up on the rooftops looking down. They were all

screaming like this was some sort of Mardi Gras. They were hollering and laughing, and jeering, and spitting. I think that was almost as frightening as the guards.

Finally, we make it all of the way. The hardest part, by this time, wasn't even the weight of the cross - it was going up the Hill of Skulls. It was a really open area. See, the Romans were so smart - they did their crucifixions right along the road side, so that everyone would see. I knew that I would hang there so that everyone could mock and jeer; but even more importantly, they wanted everyone to see along the route usually for days, so they would make a point that no one else had better steal, or whatever he [Jesus] did.

So, we dropped down. They whipped us, so they figured out what they wanted, and we fell - which wasn't hard to do, we were so tired.

They flipped us back onto our backs, and then I knew what was coming. Thankfully, they did us all three at the same time. They nailed us. Wrists - not hands. Hands would break; they would slip apart. Wrists, with the bones in between, would hold - and feet. I can't, nor do I want, to relive that. But I was fortunate, because I passed out at one point, and at least for a few seconds [I] didn't really remember.

Then they dragged us up, but it wasn't far, because we couldn't move by this time and they slipped the crosses into the hole and popped up we went, and we hung there. It hurt. But more than the pain, was the fact that you would have to push up on those pierced feet, to breathe, because all of the weight coming down, from all of the weight holding onto your hands. All of the weight would push down on your lungs, and you couldn't breathe, so you pushed up with those feet to breathe each time.

We are all hanging but we were not getting the ridicule. It is all going to this Jesus guy. They had hung a sign [on Jesus] that said "King of the Jews." I heard one of the religious Jewish guys yelling out, "it should say [He] *Claims* to be King of the Jews." But the Romans wouldn't hear of it. They were making fun of all of the Jews, not just this one hanging up here.

The guards were so brutal. They cast lots for the clothes - the robes. They made fun and joked and they sneered; and they laughed, and other people chimed in. I noticed this older woman and this man, and some others, and I could tell they were with Jesus.

I had been so bad and not lived up to the Ten Commandments. I had dishonored my father and mother so many times that nobody was there for me. But, he [Jesus] had people there for him and that seemed to make the guards even angrier. They made even more fun of him - and beat him and hurt him.

They lifted up this sponge when he said, "I am thirsty." They gave us a sponge. I sucked some, and it was water. And the other guy [thief] - I'm assuming was the same way, because he groaned - but not in a painful way. Then they stuck it [the sponge] up to Jesus. He groaned, and someone said in a laughing way that it was sour wine.

Then he [Jesus] looked up to Heaven and he said, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" And I thought, "Who is he? Who has the right to say that to God?" He [Jesus] said that in a way like they had ripped his very soul out of his body.

Then he [Jesus] started praying for them. It was at that moment that I knew he was different - that he may have an answer that maybe even scared them. He prayed for the guards. He prayed for Pilate. He prayed for the Roman Emperor. He prayed for everyone and it just made them angrier. Why didn't he stop? Because the more he prayed the angrier they got.

And, then I turned to him. I don't even know why. I just turned to him and I said, "Will you remember me when you enter into your Kingdom?" I don't even know where it came from. And, he turned to me and he said, "This night you will join me in paradise,"

I didn't deserve that, but it somehow made the breathing a little easier, it made the suffering a little less painful. And, I could tell he had had it all, when he looked up one more time and he said, "Into your hands I commend my spirit"; and I knew it was almost over for him. He looked one more time at me and looked down at who I think was his mother. He pulled himself up one more time and said, "It is finished," and he was gone. He was gone.

I never got a chance to know who he was. Could he have really been a king? Could it have mattered? What was it? All of a sudden, I knew, because the ground started to shake, the tomb started to open. The rocks split, the curtain severed and at that moment I heard one of those filthy guards say, "This *was* the son of God."

I knew. And in that moment, I was so happy, because maybe there was a chance - after all of the terrible things I have done my whole life - maybe I had a chance to follow him into paradise. Then I heard the guards say, "It is almost the Sabbath." They said, "Take out their knees." I heard the swack and the scream, and I knew they were coming for me, and I thought, "It's OK. I might be going to paradise."

"Ahhhhh, ahhhhh," [I cried], and I slumped. I tried for one more breathe, but there was nothing to pull me up, and I couldn't get that breath. I started to see hazy spots. I looked over at Jesus one more time, and I saw one of the guards with a spear. Then it all went dark.

I woke up to a marvelous light, and I'm not going to tell you anymore, because it is not Easter, yet; but I hope that you will come back and share the Lord's meal on Thursday. I hope you will return and, once again, contemplate on Good Friday, so that, like me - broken - you will be able to experience the light that only Christ can give you on Easter morning - so that he can call you home. And I pray that, on that Easter morning, you will holler out, "Remember me." And, I tell you, if he remembered this horrible thief, he will remember you.