

12 A Thief

(Luke 23:39-43)

I knew I deserved it. My life of crime deserved only one thing, justice. The pain I had caused, the distress and hardship I had inflicted on others as I just took what I wanted, what I told myself I needed. O yes, it was right, it was deserved and it was inevitable. It was when I started on the homes of the Romans that I knew I was playing with fire. But the temptations were too great. The audacious way they displayed their wealth. The gold, the jewels, the silks and fine fabrics. It was right there in your face and it was too much to resist.

I was never caught. No, I was too clever for that. Rather it was an informer, a traitor who turned me in. I had a gold bracelet to sell, a beautiful gold bracelet. Trouble is someone recognised it and that someone told someone else and they went to the Romans and so, so well the inevitable happened.

I'd watched others go through the same thing of course. In my line of work you make friends, very similar friends and several had experienced Roman justice and I'd watched it happen. But of course nothing can prepare you for the moment when ten brutal Roman soldiers smash your door down, take you and shackle you, beat you and abuse you and drag you through the streets to face trial.

It didn't take long. In fact I didn't really know that it had happened so half conscious was I from the beating, but soon I had the weight of a cross bar across my shoulders and I was waiting to follow in the footsteps of others. Through the city and up to Golgotha.

I wasn't the only one. A second man was bent low close beside me as he struggled to stand under the weight of his cross bar. I knew his face, he knew mine. Our eyes met for a moment but we said nothing, we didn't need to say anything.

There was a delay, a third man was on the way. How long it was I don't know, the haze of pain and exhaustion that I was in as blood dripped from my open wounds had robbed me of any sense of time. But when he arrived I couldn't believe what I was seeing.

I'd seen him many times before. In the city, in the temple courts, on street corners and in the market places. I'd seen him and heard him. You see the crowds who gathered to listen to him made easy pickings for someone in my line of work. I'd done well out of him. But every time I'd heard him I had to fight to close my ears to his words, to his voice. I had to fight to close my ears, my mind, my heart to something that seemed to come from this man. Something that

seemed as if it wanted to get inside of me, to penetrate my mind even my heart. I'd fought it off then, and now, as he stood in line with the two of us, more beaten and bruised than you can imagine, with blood pouring from his head where vicious thorns had cut deep into his scalp, I found I had to fight it off again. Not that he spoke, he didn't need to, but rather something seemed to flow out from him, flow out from him threatening to engulf me, to over take me, to drown me.

I shook it off, rejected this thing, whatever it was. The orders were barked and we were walking, walking to Golgotha.

They put him up first and a few seconds later, screaming and swearing, spitting and convulsing, I found myself beside him. He was in the middle with me on his right and the other guy on his left.

I wanted to just let go, to just relax and let the weight of my own body suffocate me as I knew it would. I'd often watched other crucifixions and wondered why people didn't do just that. Wondered why they struggled and so prolonged the suffering. I wanted to just relax and die, but for some reason I couldn't. for some reason I still felt the need to fight to breathe, to fight to live even for these last few hours.

The jeering started, but most of it was directed at him, not at us.

"Save yourself if you are the Christ!"

"Come down from the cross so we can believe!"

They shouted many things but as I struggled on the boundary of consciousness, fighting for every breath and heartbeat, I suddenly realised that the guy on the other side of him was joining in.

"Save yourself and us if you are the Christ!" he taunted. "Not much different from us criminals now are you, King of the Jews!"

But as I heard his words something inside of me seemed to catch fire. Something inside of me seemed to burst into a raging flame.

"Shut up man!" I shouted. "Leave him alone, we are getting what our deeds deserve, but him? He has done nothing. Leave him alone!"

And then I turned my head and looked at him, and to my surprise, to my shock, he was looking at me. He said nothing, a look was all that was needed, and in that moment I let go. His look smashed through the hard shell I had built around me, his looked smashed through all of my defences and I could resist and fight no more. Something touched me, touched me deep inside. Something flowed out from this man and touched me, filled me, changed me. Where the words came from I don't know, but I heard myself say:

"Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

And his words, yes his words:

"I tell you. Today you will be with me in Paradise."

He died soon afterwards. It seemed dark, but maybe my sight was going by then. I seemed to linger on. To linger on in the fog of semi-consciousness until, as a new wave of pain shot through my body, it was over.

Copyright (c) John Beauchamp/Kingdomstory.net 2010 All rights reserved.
Please refer to www.kingdomstory.net for copyright restrictions and permissions.