

## The Power and Triumph of the Cross

I wrote this chapter as a dramatization. The intent is to bring the reader to the final scene of the crucifixion. However, this dramatization not only contains a description of the final events of the crucifixion and the emotional response of Jesus' apostles and disciples; it also teaches the meaning of the cross and the resurrection for us today.

### The Drama

It was late afternoon and a strange, unnatural darkness had begun to blanket the little hill of Golgotha and all of Southern Palestine. The only lights one could see were the flickering lamps from the great holy city of Jerusalem, the shepherds' fires in the countryside, and the far off fires on the other side of the Jordan valley. There was a feeling of gloom everywhere. Most of the people had already left the tragic scene of the crucifixion and the rest were beginning to take their leave. There were only a few newcomers remaining, mostly shepherds and farmers who had been unable to come earlier. Some of the priests and scribes still remained near the cross. A few Galileans were waiting to bury their beloved leader and teacher.

The victims on the cross were expected to die at any moment, but life seemed to linger for these three unfortunate ones. Sabbath was approaching and burial must be completed before sundown in accordance with religious law. The priests and elders were worried that the men would not die before the Sabbath. They were very anxious for death to do its work.

Jesus' wounds were covered with flies and other insects. His body was weakening rapidly. At times he appeared as though he were already dead, but then he would move his head and look at the diminishing crowd. The pain of the crucifixion itself seemed to lessen as death slowly spread over his physical form.

Jesus once more became the target of insults. Some of the taunters shouted: "Your blood be upon your own head! You have trusted in God, let him deliver you!" His revilers were not content to see him dying this horrible death. They wanted to inflict new wounds upon him, wounds that neither sword, spear, nor arrow could inflict—wounds of scorn, bitterness, and blasphemy. These painful verbal arrows pierced his soul.

In that dark hour Jesus had no comforters. No one dared to speak a good word about him. His own disciples and followers were bewildered, not knowing what to make of this sudden turn of events. They had been hoping for a triumphant leader. They had hoped that the kingdom would be restored to Israel and their Master-Teacher crowned lord of lords and king of kings. Everything now looked hopeless and discouraging.

The life in their loving teacher was ebbing, and the expectation of a miracle was disappearing. Doubt was increasing in their hearts and minds. Jesus perceived that some of his followers shared in the doubts of his enemies, and he cried in a loud voice: 'el, 'el, lmana shawakthanil "O God, O God, to what a purpose you have kept me!" Or, according to the Lamsa translation of the Aramaic text: "My God, my God, for this was my destiny!"

The remaining spectators rushed toward the cross. A puzzled look appeared on the faces of the scribes and priests wondering what that strange utterance could mean? Some said he had called on Elijah for help. Others became tense, as though expecting Elijah to appear and perform a miracle. But the Galileans who were standing near the cross knew Jesus did not cry for Elijah to save him. They understood his words that were uttered in the Galilean dialect of Aramaic. It was a cry of victory and not of despair or desperation.

Now as the disciples were watching this scene and heard those words of triumph, they began to recall all that their lord had told them about his suffering and death. They understood that his cry was uttered as a consolation for them. It was a cry of affirmation of his mission. A mission that revealed meekness and love. It unmasked the face of death and unveiled the mysteries of life that would liberate men, women, and children throughout the entire world.

The end was nearing and suddenly Jesus cried out: "It is fulfilled." All the prediction concerning the Messiah had come to fulfillment. Its final chapter was written on the hill of Golgotha. Jesus completed his work and finished the prophecies. He had revealed God as a loving and forgiving parent. He had proved his teachings, not with mere words of logic and philosophy, but by living and demonstrating his truth. His earthly ministry of preaching was vividly and dramatically summarized in a few hours on the cross. This was the end of Jesus' suffering but not the end of his life. He was soon to manifest God's power through his death and bring life and immortality to light.

The two criminals who had been crucified with Jesus occasionally uttered some confused remarks, calling on their relatives for water, or complaining of their wounds and the bitter end that they had met.

Jesus had been silent now for quite some time. His eyes were closed and his body was motionless. Some were saying that he was dead. Others were saying that he was dying, still others expected another cry before his end would come. The body of Jesus moved once again. His face was completely colorless. He slowly opened his eyes and spoke, but this time his voice could scarcely be heard. "Father, into your hands I surrender my spirit." Throughout all of his suffering he had not said a word of disappointment, nor even expressed a word of doubt. Death finally removed Jesus from his agony on the cross.

It was late Friday evening. The soldiers were drawing near the crosses, one of them with a hammer in his hand. A few people gathered near the dead men. One of the soldiers began breaking the legs of the criminals to be sure they were dead. When that soldier came to Jesus, he could see that he was already dead. But he took his spear and pierced Jesus' side and gazed at the face of the victim to see if there were any signs of life. Jesus never felt the spear. His spirit was totally in the hands of his Father. Some water and blood flowed from his pierced side.

Jesus' body was hastily removed from the cross and was wrapped with a white linen cloth that one of his followers had provided. But the complete burial would have to wait until the Sabbath was over. The body was to be anointed with spices and given a permanent resting place. None of the disciples dreamed that the tomb would be found empty when they returned to complete his burial on the first day of the week.

Soon, these disciples were to awaken to a revelation of life that would forever transform them. They were soon to know the power and victory of the cross. They were to learn that no grave could hold the living Christ. His body was to be the first fruit of the resurrection that would awaken humankind to the realization of life eternal. The consciousness of humanity would now transcend its earthly boundaries and encompass a complete and limitless heavenly order of life.

The symbol of the cross that had always been the symbol of finality and total annihilation was to become the symbol of life and glory. This cross was to be known as the way of enlightenment and nonviolent way of life. Jesus' teaching brought him to the cross. He had impressed on the minds of his disciples the fact that death would not be the end of his mission but the beginning of a new spiritual era, the inauguration of a heavenly order. It is no wonder the apostle Paul so clearly exclaimed in his letter to the Corinthians: "O death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory? But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus the Messiah!"

Rocco A. Errico, *And There Was Light "The Power and Triumph of the Cross"* pp. 132-136