

I Met My King On His Glorious Throne

Luke 23:35-43 • November 24, 2019 • Christ the King Sunday



My name is Dismas. At least that's what most people call me. Since my name isn't recorded in the Bible someone gave me that name and it just stuck. But my name doesn't matter. Most of my life people just referred to me as simply "scumbag." I was born over 2000 years ago. I suppose by your calendar it would be something like the year 10AD. For me, life was difficult. And you might say it ended in the worst kind of way. But I say it ended in the most amazing way. I remember the last day of my life so clearly because on that day I met my King. I met him on his glorious throne. Let me tell you how it all happened.

The day began with me in my cell. I had been caught during my latest skirmish against the authorities. A word of advice: don't ever plot and commit a crime against the Roman authorities. If they catch you, you're lucky if you can just get run through with a sword. I'm ashamed to mention my crime. Let's just leave it at this: the price I had to pay was a clever bit of torture designed by the Romans. They were going to put me on display hanging from a beam of wood. My two prison mates and I were to be strung up for torture. The three of us were going to have nails driven through our hands. They would then fasten us to a cross beam of wood. We were to be lifted up on those beams and left to hang. Usually a person would just hang in agony for days until they finally couldn't find the strength to lift themselves up and grasp for air. I knew that day wasn't going to end well.

I was surprised when the soldiers came and grabbed my one of my cellmates, Barabbas. He was guilty of murder and insurrection. The governor wanted the crowd to select which prisoner to release according to the yearly custom at this time. You can imagine my shock when the governor picked Barabbas as one of those who might be released by the crowd. Why would they ever want to release that man? I had no idea what was going on outside the prison. I heard lots of shouting. I could faintly make the crowd crying out "crucify him." They were loud and determined. At that moment I thought Barabbas was doomed. But I was even more surprised when Barabbas didn't come back. They had let him go. Another man was going to die instead. I was thinking, "Who did they nab last night that the crowd hates more than Barabbas?"

Soon afterwards they came for me and my remaining prison mate and led us outside. There we saw the third man who was supposed to be worse than Barabbas. The soldiers had already whipped him good. He was so disfigured with bruises and whip lashes it was pitiful. The soldiers treated all three of us brutally. They gave us beams of wood to carry and told us to start marching. We were to carry the very instruments of our torture. They were heavy, but not as heavy as my heart at the thought of what they were going to do to us.

It was after they started to lead us along that I started to gather that this other man wasn't like Barabbas at all. I heard a few voices, women, who followed saying things like, "He hasn't done anything wrong." Then I realized some of them started referring to him as Jesus. He was that man I had heard about before. He was that Nazarene who was claiming to be the Messiah and the promised king. I laughed to myself then at the sight of him thinking only, "Good luck fulfilling that prophecy." My cellmate started chiding him. "Hey, I heard once that you could do miracles. Can you do me a favor and get this thing off my back." I'm ashamed to admit it now but I started laughing too.

The new guy clearly had a rough morning. He collapsed under the weight of the cross beam. When the soldiers realized it didn't matter how much they whipped him, they finally grabbed someone else to carry it. They led us all out the city and up a small hill near the road. A crowd was following us. I didn't expect that, but they were there for the new guy, Jesus.

Some it seemed really wanted to see him suffer. They mocked him and taunted him. There were so many doing it that it just seemed best to join in with the soldiers and crowd. You know how it is, right? Even when you are in pain you join in mocking others in the hope that at least you won't stand out or be mocked. It was easier to direct all the shame at him then let the crowd dwell on mine. So my former prison mate and I joined in the mockery. It was some pitiful parade.

I think I started thinking differently about the man from Nazareth when I noticed how he took it all. My cellmate and I were raging against the death that awaited us. He just walked on silently like a lamb to the slaughter. And when he did speak, it caused everyone to listen in amazement. He told his mourners not to weep, but spoke something of a prophecy of the pending destruction that would hit Jerusalem. My cellmate mocked, "Oh, so you can't do miracles today, but you can prophesy? That helps a lot!"

But when we came to a stop his words struck me the most. They placed his cross in the center and my former prison mate and I were on each side of him. As they drove the nails in, I let out such a yell of agony and words that aren't fit to repeat here. But Luke recorded for you the words that I heard that day. When they drove the nails into his hands and lifted him up, he did let out a gasp of agony. But when he spoke, he simply prayed in front of all his tormentors and all the mockers around him taunting him, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." Was he praying for me too?

Then the rulers of the Jews, the spiritual teachers, came and sneered at him. "He saved others; let him save himself if he is God's Messiah, the Chosen One." They mocked him for claiming to be the Son of God. The messiah was supposed to save Israel. He was just hanging there helpless. The soldiers joined in the mockery, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself."

They said that because the governor had a sign placed over that man's head which read, "This is Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." My former prison mate looked up at the sign and just laughed the way you laugh when there is nothing else to do because you are exhausted and in pain. But he managed to join the game and he started tossing insults at him.

It was in that moment that I realized who he really was. His behavior was unlike any other. He was so humble, and lowly. Why did the crowds praise him before this day? He had done wonders. When they mocked that he had "saved others" it had to have been true. That's why there were those who wept and followed him. That's why so many people loved him too. And there was nothing like this: someone who seemed willing to die a death he didn't deserve. I could easily believe the claim he had done nothing wrong. Why did the rulers hate him? It had to have been jealousy. They clearly were filled with a jealous hatred against this dying man. I thought about what I had once learned about the Messiah. It was prophesied that the Messiah would be a king. It was foretold that as a king he would come to save us all. Yet the prophecy foretold of him coming as a humble king. And what about the prophecy of a suffering servant who would die for us all? Jesus fit it all. Finally, every word he spoke built up a conviction in my heart: this man has done nothing wrong, but he dies for a greater reason. He spoke of forgiveness. He said that those around him didn't know what they were doing. What if behind the sign, the mockery, the prophecy, behind all of it was the truth? I suddenly realized it was all true. It was the most amazing turnaround. Like scales had fallen off my eyes and I saw him for the first time. I no longer wanted to mock him or dismiss him. At that moment I started to hang on every word he spoke with eagerness. I knew that on that cross, hanging next to me, was my king. And that cross was the most glorious throne as he hung there. "This is no ordinary man," I thought "this is my king!"

When the other criminal started the mockery I couldn't take anymore. I had to speak. I turned towards my former prison mate and rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," I said, "since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." Then I looked towards the man in the middle of us and said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

Then Jesus lifted himself up to speak and shared Words which comforted me beyond all my imagination. "I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise." This promise, this assurance, was all I needed. Believe it or not even as I hung there and faced that torture a smile came over my face and I wept tears of joy. My king, my Savior, had promised me, one who only deserves to be punished for my sin, a place in his kingdom, a place in paradise!

If I could leave anything with you today it would be this: Jesus is a glorious king. He is glorious because although he had done nothing wrong, he came to die for us all. And I do mean all of us. I had spent my entire life ignoring all the messages I had heard about Jesus. If ever there was someone who dismissed God, it was me. I knew of the reports of the miracle worker from Nazareth, but I never ran off to learn more. I just laughed at those who did follow Jesus as dream chasers. And I did a lot of things I regret. My life was anything but good. I was dying for what I deserved. But Jesus told me, a condemned criminal, that I would be with him forever in paradise! If he wants me and wants to forgive me, he forgives you too! His promise of paradise is good for even the worst criminal. Trust him! He is a glorious king because he came for all!

And even if the whole world seems to reject and mock him, don't be ashamed of him. It might seem like it is easier at times to just join the crowds. It is far better to join me! And there might be times when you are thinking "I don't know if I should speak up for Jesus. I will end up being mocked along with him. It is better to just stay silent." I can tell you it is far better to join me and speak up! He is your king! With him you will find words of promise and comfort that outweigh everything else!

And finally, if you are looking for a king to come and save you, look no further than this man who died on a cross. It might seem glorious to have a king who removes all your troubles immediately. You might want a king who can show his glory by taking away your suffering right away. But it is far better to have a king who takes your place to remove sin's curse. He promises you that your present time of suffering will end. He promises that the curse of sin is gone. He promises that you will be with him in glory. With his promises you can face anything. His promises of forgiveness and eternal life will get you through the hardest of days. Because at the end of the day -even the worst day of your life- you belong to him. Look no further than Jesus if you are looking for a king. He left his glorious throne in heaven to hang on a cross. He left the praises of angels to receive the mockery of the devil and wicked men. He gave it all up for you. He promises all who trust in him that they will be with him. And when he was hanging on his cross it was the most glorious sight I have ever seen!

The rest of that day was full of unusual events. The sun stopped shining for about three hours. Then Jesus cried out that all was accomplished. He called out in a loud voice and gave up his spirit. After that the whole earth shook and the rocks split. When the centurion and those watching Jesus saw this they said, "Surely this man is the Son of God!" "Amen," I thought. The man who died next to me was the very Son of God in the flesh, prophesied to come into the world to give his life for sinners. God my Savior.

Just before sundown orders were given for the soldiers to break my legs. With that I suffocated, unable to lift myself up to breath. My body was tossed aside to return to dust until God would resurrect it at the last day. But my spirit was carried up to God. And just as promised, I met my king in paradise. That day I met my king on his glorious throne.