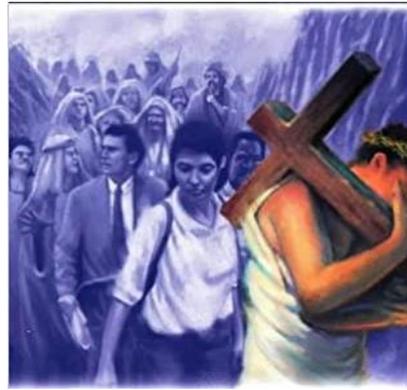


On the way to Calvary - Hilary McDowell
Week 6 - The final Furlong
Thursday - Eye Witness



Now it was the day of Preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jewish leaders did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down. The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other. But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe. These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken," and, as another scripture says, "They will look on the one they have pierced." John 19:31-37 (NIV)

The traveller never fully considered herself an eye witness. A time-traveller only 'visits', but John was there. On that fateful day before the Sabbath, when all hell seemed to lose itself in earthquake and darkness upon the unsuspecting population of Jerusalem, John remained by the cross.

As light returned to the chaotic scene and the officials and soldiers, under orders from the authority, attempted to regain a sense of control, their immediate problem was how to affect a clean and speedy clear-up job. Since the following day, Saturday, was the Sabbath and a special festival Sabbath at that, the remains of the criminals and suchlike must be well away by dusk, so the clear-up job had to be done without delay. At all costs, religious niceties must be observed and the Sabbath kept holy and without blemish, so the Jews asked Pilate to have the criminals' legs broken. This was often done to hasten death and aid effective disposal of the remains.

For John, it provide to be yet another confirmation of prophecy fulfilled, for, having broken the legs of the other occupants of the crosses, they found Jesus already dead and did not do the same to him. John must have thanked the Father for sparing his Master the protracted death that the criminals

suffered. To John, Jesus was indeed the perfect replacement sacrifice for the Passover lamb (Exodus 12:46; Numbers 9:12). How this beloved disciple agonized over his friend's suffering, noticing every development in the horrific saga, imbuing the spear-thrust to Christ's side with more meaning from Scripture (Zechariah 12:10). Perhaps it is only those who fully appreciate the cost of the sacrifice that Jesus made and, in love, know the pain, who can then grasp the significance of the creator's unremitting dream from the beginning of time to the cross and beyond. John, the beloved disciple, whose head had rested upon the Lord's breast at the last supper, knew.

Another eye witness who was there that day also knew the truth, not because he had lain close enough to the Master's breast to feel his pain, but because he stood facing that pain as Jesus breathed his last. The centurion, just doing his job, nevertheless kept his eyes, ears and mind fully open to observe the facts. He heard Jesus forgive his enemies, and who better than the chief soldier on guard to know what Jesus had been through at the hands of his enemies? He saw him show compassion to the women, to John, and to the repentant criminal, and who better than the head soldier to know of what Jesus had been falsely accused in the kangaroo courts? Who better than the centurion to know, at first hand, how the Lord had behaved during his degrading treatment from soldiers and crowd alike; and now, at the last, who better than he to watch Jesus die and to be qualified to compare his death with who knows how many others that month, that year, that full period of Roman occupation? This Roman, this professional officer, this man of authority of the ruling establishment was there to testify to what most of the disciples, in their absence, could not: 'Truly this man was God's Son!' (Mark 15:39)

Dear Jesus,

Open our minds to see what the world tries to mask. Break down the walls of doubt and scepticism and fear until we stand, unafraid, before your cross and see you as you truly are, the Saviour of our lives - you the perfect sacrifice and we the sinners. Then can we lay our heads upon your breast in full submission and take forgiveness like a dying thief. Amen