

Tetelestai (It Is Finished)  
John 19:17-30  
April 3, 2015  
Good Friday

I was. You don't understand? Didn't you just ask, "Where you there?" I was there. I was there when Jesus of Nazareth was crucified. I saw the whole thing. Oh, don't get me wrong. I'm not bragging. It was a horrible thing to see. At least, I think it was horrible. Maybe it wasn't horrible. That's a question I've been trying to answer for myself ever since it happened. Was it horrible or was it beautiful? Let me tell you what I saw.

It was after dark and I was on my way home. I had just finished eating the Passover meal with my good friend Abiah. We have eaten the Passover together ever since both of our wives died in the same year. Oh, I'm sorry. You don't want to hear about me. It's just that the memories are always there.

Anyway, when I left Abiah's house I realized how chilly it had become, so I decided to take a shortcut through Gethsemane. Gethsemane is a garden-like area on the Mount of Olives. That's when I heard the ruckus. I could hear many different voices so I knew there must be quite a crowd. That's what first got my curiosity and made me go investigate. There's never very many people in Gethsemane – especially at night.

As I moved closer, I could see the light from what must have been a lot of torches. That many torches meant soldiers. A little closer and my suspicions were confirmed. I heard orders being barked and the sound of obedient answers to those orders. "Surround him, men! The high priest will hold us all responsible if he gets away."

At first, I didn't know the man the soldiers were after. I was hiding behind some bushes so I didn't have a complete view of what was happening. It was when the others ran that I understood who was in trouble. Peter and James ran right passed me. That's when I understood that it was Jesus, who was the center of all this commotion.

The soldiers tied up Jesus like he was some kind of dangerous criminal. I thought that was very odd. I had heard Jesus speak on a number of occasions and I never got the impression he was interested in violence. After Jesus was securely bound, the detachment started back toward Jerusalem.

I followed at a distance and tried to look like I wasn't interested in what was going on – like I was just making my way back to town. I saw some of the soldiers push Jesus down as he walked in the middle of them. Others hit him in the head and on the back. One soldier even spit on Jesus and then just laughed at him.

The soldiers took Jesus right to Caiaphas. He was the high priest at the time. Luckily,

I'm somewhat known by the Pharisees so no one stopped me when I followed into where Caiaphas was. This time I was able to see what was happening. They stood Jesus right in front of Caiaphas. I thought to myself, "Isn't it odd that Caiaphas is up and dressed at this late hour. It's like he was planning for this."

What I heard was simply unbelievable. People were stepping forward to give witness against Jesus and they were making the most outrageous claims. Some accused Jesus of inciting riots. Some said Jesus taught that the people should forget about Abraham and Moses. Others said that Jesus had broken various ceremonial laws. But no two witness could agree. It's our law that no one can be convicted of a crime unless there are at least two witnesses in agreement.

At last, two men spoke up and said that Jesus had claimed he could tear down the Temple and rebuild it in three days. That brought quite a laugh, but not from Caiaphas. I think he knew that there would have to be more evidence to convict Jesus of anything.

Caiaphas walked over and stood toe to toe with Jesus. He looked at Jesus and said, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." For a moment, the room was as silent as death. Then Jesus answered, "Yes, it is as you say." Everyone gasped. Then Caiaphas started shouting that they had heard enough. He asked for a sentence and the whole Sanhedrin shouted, "He is worthy of death."

Then most of the members of the Sanhedrin went up to Jesus. They hit him in the face and they spit on him. I would never have believed that these men, who claim to be God-fearing, could act like that. They brutalized a man who was incapable of defending himself. It was shameful. When they had finished, the soldiers and the Sanhedrin headed for Pilot's palace.

I followed along. As we moved through the streets, a crowd began to follow us; mostly because the Pharisees with us were doing their best to see to it there was a crowd. I was really concerned for Jesus' safety. I knew he was innocent but against so many lies how could his innocence ever show through. Jesus' only hope was that Pilot would not be taken in by the false witnesses and the crowd.

Pilot took Jesus inside, away from the people, and questioned him in private. I don't know what was said, but I was sure glad to hear Pilot declare Jesus not guilty of any crime. But the Jewish leaders wouldn't have that. They stirred up the crowd, although now I supposed you'd call it a mob, and the people demanded that Pilot do something.

I almost felt sorry for Pilot. He tried everything. He send Jesus to Herod. Herod sent him back. He tried to save Jesus by offering to release Jesus or a know murderer. The mob chose Barabbas. Pilot had Jesus severely beaten, beaten so badly that Jesus was

covered in blood, but that didn't satisfy the people. They just kept shouting, "Crucify him. Crucify him." Finally Pilate gave up and turned Jesus over to be crucified.

They made Jesus carry his cross. The Romans reasoned that when a prisoner carried his own cross he was admitting his guilt. And Jesus carried that cross even though he had no guilt. When Jesus collapsed, the soldiers grabbed one of the people standing along the street and made him carry the cross. I felt sorry for that man at the time, but now I know I would have been proud to carry his cross.

The procession led outside the city and to a place called Golgotha. That was a favorite spot for Roman crucifixions. There were two other men to be crucified that day. They were thieves. I know that because the Romans always put a sign on the cross as encouragement to others not to do the same thing. The sign over Jesus rightfully called him the King of the Jews.

I'll never forget what it sounded like and what it felt like when they put Jesus on that cross. They stretched out his arms and they nailed him fast to the crossbeam. My heart almost stopped every time I heard the hammer strike the nail. They pounded and they pounded and they pounded. That ringing will never leave my ears. When they had nailed his feet to the platform, they raised the cross and secured it fast.

I wasn't the only one who stayed. Most of the crowd hung around to watch and to make fun of Jesus. They taunted him and insulted him. They said if he was the Son of God he should come down from the cross and prove it. They were very cruel. This man had done nothing but love them and they hated him for it.

However, not everyone was there for that reason. At the foot of the cross were Jesus' mother and some other women, who had followed Jesus from town to town as he preached and taught. I think his mother's name was Mary. I'm sure some of his regular disciples were there but the only one I recognized was the one named John. He was standing next to Jesus' mother and helping to hold her up.

It was at this point that the most unusual things happened. I learned more on that hill that day than I had ever learned in my whole life. I learned what true love is. I saw love shine through the most horrible of circumstances. I witnessed a love I would never have even dreamed possible. And all this happened as Jesus was dying.

The first thing Jesus said, after he was on the cross, was a prayer. That prayer was my first lesson in true love. Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." I couldn't believe my ears. Can you imagine a man, who was being tortured to death, praying for the people who put him on that cross?

Another act of love happened in connection with one of the thieves. At first, both of them

were ridiculing Jesus. Then one of them seemed to come to his senses. He told other one that they were getting what they deserved but Jesus was an innocent man. Then that thief asked Jesus to remember him when he entered his kingdom. Jesus told him that that very day they would be together in paradise. That took love beyond human comprehension.

You'd think that someone in Jesus' spot would think of nothing but himself. But Jesus, dying as he was, cared about the crowd, one of the thieves, and his mother. Jesus saw his mother and John below him. Jesus told John to take care of Mary and he told Mary to consider John her son.

While Jesus hung on the cross, it seemed like even nature was reacting to the injustice of all this. About the sixth hour, you would call that noon, the sky lost its light. I don't mean that it just got cloudy. I mean the sky when black. It was like nighttime. Dark – an eerie dark. There was a great earthquake. When it stopped no one was left on their feet. There was rain and lightning. All of nature was in upheaval.

Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" After he said that, everything grew very still. It was as if the same nature that had so violently objected earlier had stopped to witness what was to happen next. In that deafening silence, I heard Jesus say, "It is finished." With that, Jesus died.

That's what I remember. That's what I'll never forget. I had heard Jesus speak before and, while there was always a ring of truth about his words, I never believed he was actually the Son of God like he claimed to be. I never believe him until I watched him die.

Only God could be so selfless. Only God could love those who so blatantly hated him. Only God could control all of nature to try to make people see the truth. Only God would take the cross of his people to save his people. When I watched him die, I believed. I believed like the centurion standing next to me, who said, "Surely this was the Son of God."