

The Crucifixion

By Mark Warns

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I.

The Cross

Counted in the booty skinned from Carthage,
Plundered with the people Rome enslaved,
Stolen with their art and artists,
Victor legions shipped home the cross.
Brutal, slow, relentless cross.
Public torture unto death.
Carthage-made but Rome-perfected.
Death and degradation engineered.

Cross. Too cruel for citizens,
Saved for slaves and primitive provincials.

Spikes. Three spikes. Precise triangulation,
Stretching arms and bending knees, they pounded
Spikes through thickest bones of hands and feet for
Geometric agony that focused
On its lowest point, the spike transfixing
Feet to post. For if erect, their weight all
Borne on iron-scraped bones around that spike, they
Still could breathe. They still could live. But sinking,
Hearts and lungs would drown within their chests,
A rattling death to end their torture.

If unbeaten and unscourged,
Victims could survive for days,
With crows by daylight, rats by night,
Deaths sadistic sport for hecklers.

But Jesus Christ they beat and beat,
With hands and hate-clenched fists and sticks.
They stripped and scourged Him back and front,
A round-end scourge that left Him clothed in royal purple bruise
From neck to calves. They spat, and mocked, and crowned
The Jews' new King with thorns they hammered deep.

Christ, crucified, collapsed in hours. And, hanging from the spikes,
He struggled through His last few breaths as earthly death drew near.

II. Called to Song

The ninth hour found Him hanging limp,
Spikes driven through His hands and feet.
As death advanced from fingers, toes,
By inches to His lymph-filled chest.
His hands and arms, His feet and legs,
Gone numb – no more to agonize –
But gone as well their strength to hold
Him up, allowing Him to breath.
Compressed in fluid, strangling, squeezed,
His lungs and heart were drowning then.
His breath in pain-shot gasps, His heart
Pain-strained to pump what blood remained.

His life reduced to minutes, breaths,
He looked out on His fellow Jews.
The crowd, who just five days before
“Hosanna in the highest!” cried,
And called Him “Rabbi” all that week,
Had then today called for His blood.
Sanhedrin stoked, their fiery hate
Had not consumed their Rabbi’s love.
Instead, His love for them unchanged,
The Christ, their Rabbi – Shepherd, too –
Reached out with love to these His sheep –
Lost sheep – with these His last few words.

How many words could He gasp out?
A few to use His last full breath.
But how explain this day’s events,
Foretelling deeds in days to come?
With nothing left, no nothing but
His brilliance and divinity,
He fought to lift His wounded head,
Looked past their wicked sneers to love
Their errant souls. And from the cross
That Friday as Shabbat approached,
As in a village synagogue,
Their Rabbi called them all to song.

“Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani.”

These words begin a song – a Psalm
Of David – etched upon the souls
Of every Jew on Golgotha.
Despite themselves, they sang it then.
They sang it in their hearts by heart,
And heard it deep within their souls,
With Him who hears inside us all,
The Christ who called them each to song.
In silence, they sang prophecy
Of every sin they'd witnessed there,
As well foretelling us today,
All nations turning to the Lord.

Some hardened hearts grew harder still,
To persecute the early Church.
But some who sang that Psalm awoke
Aghast to think what they had done.
For some would fifty-one days hence,
At Pentecost, with thousands more –
The Spirit-filled – repent their sins,
Convert to Christ, and know His love.
And some would preach the Word themselves,
And some of them were martyred too,
Enduring all to spread the Faith,
To preach the Good News to the world.

So, in the silence at His death,
He heard a thousand hearts as one.
They sang His death and death's demise,
For it was finished...and begun.

*This Psalm is the 21st in the Septuagint and
the 22nd in Western translations of the Bible.*