

THE MAN



BY ROBERT
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It was a day I will never forget. He was a man like no other. I had executed men before – all of them liars, thieves and cheats, vile, angry and aggressive. He was different. So different.

When the governor declares there is no fault in a man, that should be final. But the chief priests wanted the man killed. He had claimed to be a king and the Son of God. Pilate seemed to believe him and declared his innocence. However, the crowd, riled up by the chief priests, left Pilate with no choice but to crucify him.

I am a centurion. It's my job to guard prisoners and administer justice. I thought the man would be just like all the other revolutionaries but I was wrong.

At just over thirty, the man was aged well beyond his years. Dark rings shaded his eyes. He looked worn out. Covered in blood from a

beating and whipping, he was so weak he could barely walk. As he carried his cross to the execution site, even hardened spectators turned their faces away from him. He looked nothing like a king or a god – even wearing the crown of thorns.

The man didn't behave like a criminal. When we stripped him naked, he co-operated despite the indignity of the spectacle. He did as he was told, lay down on the cross and willingly spread his arms out, laying his hands flat so I could hit the nails in. He positioned his feet on the stake and I nailed them home. It was like he was in control. In spite of his pain he never swore, cursed, lashed out or tried to resist. Where was the anger? Where was the rage? How can a man who knows he is innocent be so willing to die?

As we hauled the cross upright and dropped it into the hole, I heard him groan in agony. With raspy breaths he recited scripture and prayed while my colleagues gambled for his clothing. The chief priests cursed and taunted him as he hung there and so did the thieves on either side of him. He breathed a prayer that God would forgive them and he looked at me. What sort of man asks forgiveness for the people killing him?

Suddenly as the sun reached its zenith, everything went dark. My soldiers freaked out. We stood tense in the darkness while the men on the crosses wheezed and groaned. After three hours the light returned, leaving us shaken and bewildered.

Stretching up on the cross the man took a deep breath and cried out, "It is finished!" I watched him sink down and breathe no more. He chose when to die. And as if his words were the cue, a great earthquake shook the city.

I stared up at his lifeless body hanging limply on the cross after the earthquake. This moment and this man would be forever etched on my mind. Could there be any doubt? "Surely," I said, "this man was the Son of God."

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