

From The Pulpit

by Rev. Donald M. Clark

"PERSONAL PROFILES AT CALVARY" (The Centurion)

THE STORY OF THE PASSION and Suffering of Jesus Christ has been told and written thousands of times. For me but to add to the multitude of words would be both superfluous and presumptuous on my part. I would rather have you listen to the story, old, yet ever new, by those whose lives are silhouetted against the horizon of Golgotha, thus giving to us "Personal Profiles at Calvary". These can tell us the dramatic record with vivid realism and graphic truth, for they were there--they heard Him teach--they saw Him betrayed--they witnessed the forsaking by friends and the failure of His followers--they heard the heartrending cries of Calvary--they saw Him die. . .

"Yes, I saw Him die. Who am I? I was the Centurion, proud soldier of the mighty Caesar, whose job it was to keep order among that loathsome Jewry! Oh, how I hated it! This was one of the worst assignments under the Imperial Eagle. A "watchdog" over a crowd of mangy, selfish, pseudo-religious Jews in a run-down country where you burned with heat at noon, and shivered under the cold stars at night--what a job! The only relief from the dread monotony, from the aching loneliness and yearning for family and home, was when we had a crucifixion to perform. We made it a sporting event, gambling over the few scarce pieces of property left by the condemned, and in guessing the length of time before the "accursed animal-Jews" would die. Oh, it gave us something to talk about as we lolled around the fires in the barracks, and something to think about in the lonely hours of sentry duty.

So when Passover came, and it became evident that the blood-lust of the mob was to be satisfied, I was glad. I was especially pleased, for one of the victims promised to be more exciting than any of the others. He was a fanatic from the North, Nazareth, I believe it was, and it was rumored that His followers would attempt armed defense of him. What made it more interesting was the insistent talking by Fortinius, recently transferred from Capernaum, that this Jewish fanatic was a god! He kept saying something about the healing of one of His servants by this--this Jesus! We laughed at such a fantastic notion, for even the Jews had a saying--"can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

OH, WE ENJOYED IT as we prepared the crucifixion, for this One claimed to be the "King of the Jews", so we "took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers. And we stripped Him, and put on Him a scarlet robe, and when we had platted a crown of thorns, we put it upon His head, and a reed in His right hand; and bowed before Him, and mocking Him, said, 'hail, King of the Jews'. Then we spit on Him, and took the reed, and smote Him on the head. After we had mocked Him, we took the robe away from Him, and put His own raiment on Him, and led Him away to crucify Him. (Matt. 27: 27-31) And, as we led Him out, He stumbled and fell, so we forced a black man, Simon of Cyrene to carry the cross up the hill.

We watched the jeering, jostling mob closely, for we were wary of an attack by His friends, but looking into those faces, we soon realized there were no friends here--only venomous hatred, vile and vicious invectives being spewed out of their mouths like acid, burning and scalding the very atmosphere. My enjoyment began to turn to disgust, but soon we were at the top of the hill, and the work of fastening the victims to the crosses occupied our time and our minds. The other two fought and kicked, screaming insults and cursing their tormentors, but this Jesus did nothing but sigh as the spikes impaled



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Him to the wood. After having lifted the crosses and having dropped them in the holes prepared for them with a sickening thud, we looked over our loot, the possessions of the crucified. . . nothing much to choose from; the malefactors had left nothing but stained clothes and worn sandals. . . and Jesus, well we took his garments and made four parts, to every soldier a part; and also his coat which was without a seam, woven from top to bottom. So we said among ourselves, let us not rend it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be' (John 19:23,24), and I won the robe! What a stroke of fortune!

THERE WAS NOTHING much to do now, but wait, so 'sitting down, we watched him there' (Matt. 27:36). But then something strange seemed to happen, for though it was barely noon, an ominous darkness was descending over the earth. It was as though Nature were robbing herself in the garments of grief. We looked at one another, doubtless calling to mind Fortinius' warning that this One, was different, that he was a god! Could it be that the gods were angry at this crucifixion? Even one of the thieves being crucified at his side seemed to sense that he was no ordinary person, for with a fear-filled voice he said to Jesus, 'Lord remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom; (Luke 22:42). It would have been humorous, this talk about a kingdom, except that his voice came as from another world --'Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise' (Luke 22:43). What was he talking about? Is this a land entered into only by death? Is it a kingdom of another world on the other side of the black curtain of death? My heart began to pound with excitement, but it soon passed as Flavius jumped up and offered Jesus some vinegar to dull the pain. He didn't seem to drink it though, the liquid merely trickled out, spilling on his matted beard. Finally, he lifted his eyes heaven-ward, and cried 'It is finished' (John 19:30) and he died. . .

THE MOB WAS QUIET now, the darkness was like a blanket of doom, and it was as though my heart were wrapped about with swirling vapours from another world. My hands shook as I took my spear, for it was my duty to see if He were really dead--I thrust it into his side, and as I did, oh, merciful heaven, will I ever forget that awful moment--from his side poured forth blood and water (John 19:34). The sky above seemed to thunder its protest, and the earth beneath convulsed with mighty grief as its frame shook with emotion when its Creator died. My soldiers dropped their spears and ran over the heaving ground; the mob silent with fear, scattered, and I was alone. . . alone with Him. Suddenly, the realization broke upon my tortured soul as the sun shone through the jagged rent in the dull mantle of unnatural sky, and I sobbed out the confession of my heart--'Truly this man was the Son of God' (Mark 15:39).

It was then that I noticed Fortinius, who came as the others left. He smiled, grasped my hand, and looking up into that marred, scarred face, murmured: 'It is even as Isaiah wrote, Marcus --I never fully believed it until this moment. . .

'He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and we hid as it were our faces from Him; He was despised, and we esteemed Him not. Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows, yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to His own way; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment. . . He was cut off from out of the land of the living; for the transgression of my people was He stricken, and He made His grave with the wicked, and with the rich in His death; because He had done no violence, neither was

any deceit in His mouth. Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He hath put Him to grief; then thou shalt make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed. . . He shall see of the travail of His soul, and be satisfied; by His knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for He shall divide the spoil with the strong, because He hath poured out His soul unto death; and He was numbered with the transgressors,' (Isaiah 53:12).

(RENO, from page 11)

Scholar



Francine Nelson, 16, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Frank Nelson of Sun Valley is a junior at Sparks High School. Francine is studying hard to keep up her scholastic grades in order to acquire a scholarship. Her hobbies are reading, ceramics, adding to her collection of dolls from all over the world.

What Does The New Year Hold For You?

MANY OF THE OUTER gifts that a person receives for Christmas are laid away after the day is done. They are pretty and pleasing to the eye, but many have little use. And so it is our gifts are often stored away along with the cards of a Christmas past.

Not so the gifts that God bestows. These gifts cannot be hidden away. Every one of them is intended for immediate constant use. The manner in which you use these gifts will answer the question, "what does the new year hold?"--for you, for your loved ones, and for the world.

God's first gift to the world was light. His first gift to man was His image-likeness; of the Father, a gift that made man forever a child of God, a Son, and heir to all the Father has. This gift to you, and to all men, established the Fatherhood of God, and assures man of eternal love and provision.

Within his soul every child bears the image-likeness of the Father, even as you bear God's image-likeness. Jesus Christ was godlike in all things. He knew and proved his oneness with God. He used the gifts the Father bestowed, never withholding, never minimizing; and every year Jesus lived on earth among men was a year of redemptive achievement for man.

GOD HAS GIVEN you and the world the gift of life. Jesus Christ fully appreciated this wondrous gift from the Father. He used it to the utmost, and by the use He made of life he bestowed more abundant life upon all mankind. To Jesus every year was a year of increasing ability, increasing faith, increasing love, until He reached the pinnacle of all overcoming in mastering death.

What does the new year hold for you? It holds a new spiritual power and achievement as you remember, reunite with your God-like image. Within you is the very Christ of God. You can do all things through Him whose image you bear. Nothing is impossible to you when you use the gifts that God has bestowed upon you. Remember always, His love for you is constant and eternal.

The world is changing. Its mode of living and of serving is changing, yet, God is the same forever, and His gifts will never change. Divine Love will work as surely through you as it worked through Jesus Christ to harmonize life, heal, forgive, and bless. The gift and principle of faith that Jesus Christ used is exactly the same principal and gift that God has given you. The peace possessed by Jesus you possess. The joy He shares is the joy that is yours.

The use you make of the gifts that God in His Love and Wisdom has bestowed upon you will determine the fullness of the measure of goodness you will receive in the New Year. Beloved friend, start the New Year aright with your faith and love lifted in God. Keep your mind and heart open, receptive, and willing to accept and bestow His gifts in all that you think, say, feel, and do, and the New Year will be replete with blessings of health, strength, joy, security, and prosperity for you. . .

AS YOU STEP confidently across the threshold of the new year know that every one in this great world-wide movement stands with you in spirit and in truth, rejoicing in the gifts that God bestows, seeking, with you, to make the best possible use of His every gift through every hour of every day.--By Earl C. Fremont
(Reprint from Reno's "Radiant Living")