

From The Pulpit

by Rev Donald M. Clark

PERSONAL PROFILES AT CALVARY
(The Tomb Guard)

AMONG THE HUNDREDS who were witnesses of the fact of the Living Christ, there were none who had been present at the actual time of the resurrection. Some had seen the empty tomb; others had walked and talked with the risen Lord, but none had been there when it happened. None, that is, except the tomb guards. . . they were the only spectators as the greatest and grandest climax in history's most tremendous drama occurred.

To us who have come to accept the fact of Easter with little or no understanding of its eternal reality, these come and speak this morning. . . Let us listen to one as he speaks. . .

"I let my sword, belt, buckle and all, fall with a clattering noise to the pavement by my couch, caring not whether the Captain heard--I was tired! For two days I'd had no rest. My mind was numb; my muscles were filled with a dull aching; my eyes burned with fatigue. So weary was I, that I didn't even take time to remove the sweat-stained leather skirt, but threw myself on my couch and fell asleep, as though drugged by some strange potion of the gods.



REV. D. M. CLARK

But hardly had I closed my eyes, it seemed, when a rough hand shook my shoulder, and a rougher voice ordered me to attention. The captain was standing there, and without a word about the disarray of my uniform, he silently motioned me to follow him, and strode out. Fumbling with my belt and sword, I stumbled after him, too drunken with the brief, deep draught of sleep to consider why he had thus summoned me. At first, I thought it must be morning, and that I'd slept away the hours as if in a moment. But, no, for when I stepped outside, I saw that the sun-god had but recently brought his fiery chariot to rest in the West.

Beyond this, though, I had no time for thoughts, for the Centurion, Captain of our century, told us, there were two of us, that we were assigned to guard the Galilean's tomb, for that day the chief priests and pharisees came together unto Pilate, saying, 'Sir, we remember that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, after three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead; so the last error shall be worse than the first.' (Matt. 27:62-64) And Pilate the fool, had sent orders along for this to be done!

MY HEART SANK for what had started to be just another crucifixion has changed into an ordeal. I needed sleep, a man can't be constantly on the alert against Jewish uprisings, and then undergo the added strain of yesterday's experience on Golgotha, without rest! And now, just when I thought that sleep was mine, to refresh my aching muscles, to blot out the memory of the awful terrifying darkness and earthquake; I had to stand guard all night at the grave of a dead Jewish fanatic. Oh, these superstitious, suspicious chief priests! We well knew that no man could come back from the dark country of death, and if he could, how could he move the huge stone from its place? Ha! What folly! And to think that those cowardly disciples would dare to steal the body, after their desertion yesterday--Why, they were weaklings, sentimental fanatics, who were even now hiding in some miserable Jewish hole! Pfah! I threw my helmet in the dirt in disgust!

But orders were orders, so we made our reluctant way in the purple twilight to the garden where the tomb was. . .

'All that night I watched with sleepless eyes; Great stars arose and crept across the skies. The world was too still for mortal rest. For pitiless thoughts were busy in my breast.

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GIRL SCOUT WEEK
March 7-13

The night was long, so long, it seemed at last I'd grown old and a long life had passed. Far off the hills of Moab, touched with light, Were swimming in the hollow of the night. I saw Jerusalem all wrapped in cloud, Stretched like a dead thing folded in a shroud.

Once in the pauses of our whispered talk I heard a something on the garden walk. Perhaps it was a crisp leaf lightly stirred. . . Perhaps the dream-note of a waking bird. Then suddenly an angel burning white Came down with earthquake in the breaking light.

And rolled the great stone from the sepulchre, Mixing the morning with the scent of myrrh. And lo, the Dead had risen with the day: The Man of Mystery had gone His Way!

(E. Markham on Matt. 28:2-4)

AT FIRST, I FEARED that I'd dreamed the whole awful scene, but there was the open door, like a great grotesque laughing mouth, laughing at our attempts to seal the grave of a--god! There was the tomb, empty, having yielded its prisoner in answer to the angelic summons.

I couldn't remember what happened since the first blinding vision of the angel, or the first rocking tremor of the earthquake. All I could hear now was the hysterics of happy women as they ran from the garden.

Crazed with the double fear of the unearthly happenings and the prospect of Pilate's punishment for our failure, we half stumbled, half ran down into the city 'and showed the things that were done' (Matt. 28:11) to the chief priests. How they understood the frantic babbling, I'll never know, but they left us alone while they met in council to decide our fate. We waited, trembling, our bodies wet with the cold sweat of apprehension, our hands and legs shaking. Uncontrollable sobs convulsing our bodies, the flashing brilliance of the angelic visitant burning our minds, until we could bear it no longer. . . we had to hear from the chief priests; we couldn't go to our Centurion, it meant death for a Roman soldier to lose a prisoner, especially a "dead" prisoner.

SUDDENLY THE DOOR to the inner room opened, and the chief priests and elders came slowly into the room where we huddled. I was the first to notice the two large money-bags, which they thrust towards us, saying, 'say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole Him away while we slept, and if this come to the Governor's ears, we will persuade him and protect you.' (Matt. 28:13,14)

What could we do? Of course, we took the money; it was more than I had ever seen at once in my life! It was the only solution; Pilate would have to do as the Chief Priests said, for he was in no position to do anything else, and we were weary weren't we? We could have slept and dreamed it all, couldn't we? The angel, the earthquake may have been part of it, so, we did as we were told.

But, despite our lies, there swept across the city a swelling tide, beginning in a quiet assured murmur, and increasing until it was a veritable shout of victory. It seemed that we had to shout to be heard--'He is dead! The disciples stole his body! He is dead!' But our burning lies were soon extinguished, submerged by the swelling tide of truth, as if a heavenly anthem winged its way to the hearts of men. . . .

Anniversary Programs

BEGINNING WEDNESDAY night, March 9 and continuing through Sunday, March 13, the Bethel Baptist Church, 400 Adams Ave., will present a four-day program commemorating the 7th Anniversary of the Rev. J.W. Wilson's Pastorship of the Church. The tribute will be paid to Rev. and Mrs. Wilson with "Flowers While Living" as its theme.

On Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday evenings the program will begin at 7:30 p.m. Sunday morning, March 13, the regular order of services will be conducted at 11:30 a.m., with the anniversary program's closing presentation scheduled for Sunday afternoon at 3 p.m. Various guest churches will participate in the ceremonies at all of the programs celebrating the anniversary.

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YESTERDAY, Wednesday, March 2, The Grace Emanuel Baptist Church began a four-day Commemoration Program celebrating the occasion of the Church's Fifth Anniversary.

Additional programs scheduled are for Thursday, March 3 (today), and Friday, March 4, at 7 p.m. and Sunday afternoon, March 6, at 2:30 p.m.

Pastors of the other Baptist Churches in the community and their memberships will participate in the various Services, and the Grace Emanuel Baptist Church has extended an open invitation to all Quartets at their convenience.

HOUSING REQUIRED

SEVERAL HUNDRED PERSONS WILL BE DISPLACED BY FREEWAY CONSTRUCTION IN THE LAS VEGAS AREA.

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