

A Cloud of Witnesses: An Easter Devotion for Women

Narrator: The scene is Golgotha – the place of the skull – a hill outside Jerusalem where the Romans execute their criminals.

Three people have been crucified today and are enduring that long, agonizing death process; struggling for every breath. Two are criminals, but the other, the one in the centre, is a political prisoner of sorts. No one is quite sure how he ended up being crucified. Less than a week ago he was hailed as a peace king as he rode a colt into the city. But since then he'd been arrested just after the Passover Meal, brought before the High Priests and Governor Pilate, and now is dying on a cross.

The centurion stands watching his charges. A notice over the centre one reads "This is the King of the Jews." Who is this man and why has everyone deserted him? Only a couple of his followers stand near the cross – most have fled lest they be arrested too. As the centurion ponders this man it seems he is joined by other people – no, they're not really present, but their voices come loud and clear. The centurion can't help but listen to their compelling words.

Voice 1: I'm Anna. I was very old even when Jesus was born. When his parents brought him to the Temple, I knew that this was the one we'd all been waiting so long for. I gave thanks that I'd been able to lay eyes on our Messiah.¹

Voice 2: Jesus amazed me. He asked me for a drink – something Jews wouldn't normally do because I'm a Samaritan. And then he did something even more amazing – he offered me living water, and told me all about myself – he knew even the details of my life that I'd never told anyone. He stayed in our town for two days and taught us. Then we knew he really was the Saviour of the World.²

Voice 3: I'd seen Jesus and heard him speak as he passed through our district. I knew he was the one who could stop my bleeding. I know that by the law I was not supposed to even be out among the people, but I had to do it. It only took a touch of his cloak for me to be healed. But then came the really embarrassing part – Jesus knew I'd touched him and spoke to me – identifying me before everyone. So it wasn't a private faith anymore – I was testifying before the crowd that I'd had faith in Jesus. He said tenderly, "Take heart, daughter, your faith has healed you." I'll never forget his eyes, his voice, his presence. He certainly was a great man of God.³

¹Luke 3:36-38

²John 4:1-42

³Luke 8:43-48

Voice 4: Jesus is my only son, my first-born. Such a special baby, conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit. I knew before his birth that he was the messiah. When he grew up I didn't always understand his actions and words, but I still supported him and followed him. But I really don't understand the events of the past few days. Why did they need to kill him? Yet I know God is faithful and knows what he's doing.⁴

Voice 5: Such a great man – he was even willing to heal my daughter. When he came to our area his disciples wanted to send us away, but Jesus allowed me to kneel before him. He told me he'd been sent only to the Jews, not us Phoenicians, but I said, "Couldn't I have a few crumbs that fall from the master's table, just as a dog does?" He smiled then, and said that I had great faith – then he healed my daughter, without even touching her.⁵

Voice 6: I owe my health to Jesus. I'd been crippled for 18 years, so bent over that I couldn't stand up straight. No one could help me. Then Jesus saw me at the synagogue and said, "You are set free from your infirmity." He put his hands on me and I was able to straighten up. What did I do then? I praised God of course! But that wasn't the end of it – Jesus was criticised because he did this healing on the Sabbath. I think some of the synagogue rulers were jealous because Jesus had done what they couldn't. Anyway, I wasn't worried that he might have broken a law – I was, and I still am, healed.⁶

Voice 7: I'm James' and John's mother and I always knew Jesus was great. I was proud when he chose my sons to be his disciples. But then I got a bit big-headed and ambitious for my sons, and asked that my sons be able to sit at his right and left hand in Jesus' kingdom. He put me in my place – told me they couldn't do this unless they did the same as him – and now that's ending in death. Does this mean my sons will be killed too? Where is Jesus' kingdom now? As I watch him suffering I wonder where God's plan has gone.⁷

Voice 8: Jesus certainly changed my life. He came to our town of Nain as we were taking my son's body to be buried. I'm a widow and this was my only son. Jesus saw me and said, "Young man, get up!" And incredibly, he did – he sat up and started talking. We were all amazed and praised God. Jesus certainly is a great prophet. We knew then that God had come to help his people.⁸

⁴ Luke 1:26-38; 2:19, 33-35, 48-51; 8:19-21

⁵ Matthew 15:21-28

⁶ Luke 13:10-17

⁷ Matthew 19:20-28

⁸ Luke 7:11-17

Voice 9: I would follow Jesus anywhere – there’s no one like him. I watch him suffering on the cross and I wonder why, yet I cannot doubt that he is God. He was the one who forgave me for all of my sins. I made a fool of myself by entering a Pharisee’s house uninvited, and weeping over Jesus’ feet. Then I wiped his feet with my hair and poured perfume on them. I knew people disapproved of me and wouldn’t understand these actions but I had to do it. And Jesus – he accepted me – and forgave me of my sins. Only God can forgive sins!⁹

Voice 10: Jesus has been such a good friend to our family. My sister Mary, and brother Lazarus, and I, Martha, have learnt so much. Jesus taught me about priorities in my life – I was fussing about in the kitchen and was annoyed that Mary wasn’t helping, when Jesus said that sometimes it’s important just to stop and listen to God. That’s hard for me, but I’m learning. And then of course Jesus healed Lazarus – he’d been dead 4 days but Jesus called him out of the tomb and he was fine. That really makes you think. Now Jesus is dying – will he too be raised from the dead?¹⁰

Narrator: Now the voices fade away. It is clear that Jesus is dying, He calls out, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit,” and dies. Suddenly the earth shakes and rocks split. The centurion and his men are terrified – as is everyone present. Never before has such a thing happened at a crucifixion.

With authority and conviction the centurion speaks: “Surely he was the Son of God.”¹¹

⁹ Luke 7:36-50

¹⁰ Luke 10:38-42; John 11:1-42

¹¹ Matthew 27:32-56