



ON MEETING CHRIST

Talking heads from the first century
The Lamp Drama Group on Zoom for Lent
Wednesdays in Lent and Good Friday, 2022
8pm-8.45pm on Zoom

1	(Ash Wednesday) Wednesay March 2 nd	Malchus
2	Wednesay 9 th	Jesus
3	Wednesay 16 th	Jesus
4	Wednesay 23 rd	Annas
5	Wednesay 30 th	Herod
6	Wednesay April 6 th	Nathanial
7	(Easter Week) Wednesday April 13 th	Jesus
8	Good Friday April 15 th	Enoch

Please note that characters can be played by male or female!

Bible excerpts all from NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION (UK)

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84120895223?pwd=VGNOZiY0T1FLU3IUMGQ2VYVzZg4QT09>

Meeting ID: 841 2089 5223 Passcode: 947085

DAY 1: Luke 22:47-53 Jesus arrested

⁴⁷ While he was still speaking a crowd came up, and the man who was called Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him, ⁴⁸ but Jesus asked him, 'Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?'

⁴⁹ When Jesus' followers saw what was going to happen, they said, 'Lord, should we strike with our swords?' ⁵⁰ And one of them struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear.

⁵¹ But Jesus answered, 'No more of this!' And he touched the man's ear and healed him.

⁵² Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple guard, and the elders, who had come for him, 'Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come with swords and clubs?' ⁵³ Every day I was with you in the temple courts, and you did not lay a hand on me. But this is your hour – when darkness reigns.'

Malchus, Personal Assistant to the High Priest

It's a good job – well paid, some travelling, a fair amount of responsibility and authority, I can't complain. I work for the High Priest, you see. Caiaphas keeps a strict regime with his servants: timings have to be fairly critical. He holds the High Priest position though Annas, his father in law, has massive influence. I doubt whether Caiaphas would do anything without checking it out with Annas beforehand.

Caiaphas has to be here and there for this and that, dressed appropriately, fed appropriately. It was a demanding job and there was little room for mistakes. One of us had to be with him all the time. The job suited me down to the ground. At least it did until the arrest that evening.

I had been involved in the negotiation with Judas. He was going to ensure we knew when Jesus was away from the crowds, preferably on his own, though we all thought that kind of moment was pretty unlikely. Then, by a kiss, he would identify Jesus. Having organised the moment of arrest, it would be unfortunate if we arrested the wrong man!

And, I'm delighted to say, it went to plan. We were not expecting much resistance. The reports all held that Jesus was focussed on love, not on violent rebellion, so we took just a few sticks and clubs, with a sword or two.

Jesus was, there with others – a small crowd. It was past six in the evening, so no longer the Passover, which made the arrest safer. Here he was, in a garden, in the dark. A good moment, I thought. Judas had done a good job on the timing, and, given the darkness, it was not easy to see who was who, but he identified Jesus, as we agreed, with the kiss.

Jesus could have expected nothing else, after all we were armed, pretty obviously on the prowl for an arrest.

'Oh Judas,' Jesus cried, 'Judas – after all we've been through together: all the shared ministry, all the discussions about how people are changed, you betray me with a kiss: a kiss - the sign of love.'

Judas said nothing. I could read nothing in his face.

Was it money driving Judas, I wondered, or frustration of inaction – lack of insurrection from his point of view – I don't know. Somehow the kiss was ironic. It was a reflection of what he knew Jesus to be like, yet in the sign of love came this man's idea of instigating a revolution. I think he wanted a fight, a fight that he thought Jesus was bound to win.

The disciples with Jesus were wondering how to react. One of them asked whether they should strike with their swords. If they had swords they were well hidden, I thought. Jesus was adamant – no violence.

The next thing I remember was a flash of moonlight off something metallic, and an unbearable burning sensation on the right side of my face. It all happened so quickly. There was blood gushing from somewhere which was warm on my hands, what's more I could hear the blood! How do you hear blood? It took, probably only a second or two, but it seemed like ages, for me to realise that some fool had decided to slice open my head with a sword. I had shifted, just enough for him not to kill me – but hack off my ear instead, a sword that I'd seen only a split second before I was injured. I was in agony. I was trying to hold my ear, which was hanging by a thread, desperate to stop the blood.

I knew this could be fatal – even if not immediately – longer term it would be. The pain was excruciating, like toothache but worse. I was whimpering an agony. Even then I thought this is probably just what

Judas wanted to happen.

But rather than take advantage of the surprise and start to fight, Jesus was angry with the disciple. 'Stop it,' he shouted. 'Put away your sword. This is not our way.'

He walked up to me. Through my tears I saw a man of love cover my blooded right hand with his hand, and hold my ear up to my head. Then, in an instant, I moved from unbearable pain to no pain at all. There was still blood everywhere but I knew my ear was restored as if nothing had happened to it.

As he held it he said, 'Does it look as though I am leading a rebellion against you? Do you really need weapons to arrest me? All those days you could have taken me in the Temple, in the light; but you chose to work in the darkness. That just about says it all, the dark authority you wield.' He took his hand away and there was a gasp of disbelief. Irony and contradiction were everywhere. If he was leading a rebellion, healing the enemy was not a wise move.

They often said, afterwards, that I had been imagining it. That it was just a nick, that it was a nose bleed or something like that. I tell you categorically Jesus replaced my ear.

I lost my job. Annas would not allow Caiaphas to have, on his staff, someone who had been healed by a miracle from Jesus, whilst at the same time be seeking to murder him. I was glad to go. Longer term I joined the Christians. And I have discovered a truth: violence is not the strongest force, but love is.

- 1. Why did Judas conspire to do this? What if Judas had not turned up? Is the betrayal of God's Son by God's design?**
- 2. The disciples brought a sword with them, yet Jesus is angry it is used. What does that say about then and today?**
- 3. Why does the drama suggest Malchus would have kept his job?**
- 4. In the drama, Malchus is moved to Christianity, but Caiaphas is not. Why not?**
- 5. Malchus is only named by John, not the other gospels, only Luke talks of the ear being healed. The rest of the story is in all of them... what do you deduce by that?**

DAY 2

Luke 22:54-65 Peter disowns Jesus

⁵⁴ Then seizing him, they led him away and took him into the house of the high priest. Peter followed at a distance. ⁵⁵ And when some there had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat down with them. ⁵⁶ A servant-girl saw him seated there in the firelight. She looked closely at him and said, 'This man was with him.'

⁵⁷ But he denied it. 'Woman, I don't know him,' he said.

⁵⁸ A little later someone else saw him and said, 'You also are one of them.'

'Man, I am not!' Peter replied.

⁵⁹ About an hour later another asserted, 'Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean.'

⁶⁰ Peter replied, 'Man, I don't know what you're talking about!' Just as he was speaking, the cock crowed. ⁶¹ The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: 'Before the cock crows today, you will disown me three times.' ⁶² And he went outside and wept bitterly.

The guards mock Jesus

⁶³ The men who were guarding Jesus began mocking and beating him. ⁶⁴ They blindfolded him and demanded, 'Prophesy! Who hit you?' ⁶⁵ And they said many other insulting things to him.

Jesus

They arrested me and took me to the home of Caiaphas, the High Priest where they tied me up. I was aware that Peter and some of the others were following at a distance. Did it make any sense them being arrested as well as me? Probably not, but it was good having their support even it was at a distance. Peter remained visible. The servants had built a fire in the courtyard and he had joined them there. One of them, a girl, recognised Peter and confronted him publicly about knowing me.

My heart knew what Peter would say before he said it. He was loud

and clear. He said it loudly with certainty and strength, determined to deliver something definite.

‘Woman, I don’t even know him,’ he said. He didn’t just say ‘I don’t know him’, but said ‘I don’t *even* know him,’ and somehow it was all emphasised by calling the servant girl, Woman. The authority killed any comeback from the girl.

It was much the same again, later, when Peter was accused as being one of my followers. ‘Man,’ he said, ‘I am not.’ The sureness, the definiteness just hurt, but at the same time it dispelled any argument.

I sat there for another hour while they decided what to do with me. Then I heard someone shouting, ‘I’d recognise your accent anywhere, you are a Galilean, aren’t you? You must have been one of those with Jesus.

Peter shouted back. ‘I don’t know what you’re talking about.’ It hurt me more than I thought it would. At the same moment the first rooster of the morning crowed. I knew it would remind him that I had said he would deny me three times before the morning. I felt for him. For him it was a combination of fear and friendship, one enabling him to deny me, the other keeping him nearby. He glanced at me and his face crumpled. He left the courtyard, weeping. I think the others knew that he was one of my followers, but were happy that he had openly, and visibly denied it – after all he wouldn’t be a future problem to them if he was that easily persuaded to drop the cause.

From then on the violence started. They began slapping me around, beating me. They blindfolded me and asked me to tell them who had hit me last. I was a game, I was someone to poke fun at someone they could vent their fury on. They called me everything they could think of. It was pathetic – is this what is going to be like?

- 1. Peter didn’t walk away, the drama suggests that Jesus knew that – despite denying knowing him three times. Why did Peter hang around?**
- 2. Why did the guards insult him, play a game with him, poke fun at him – why not leave him alone – tied up? Is this how they treat all prisoners, or was Jesus special?**
- 3. Is it significant that this happens in the High Priest’s house?**
- 4. Eventually Peter leaves. Why? Or is it planned?**

DAY 3

Luke 22:66-71 Jesus before Pilate and Herod

⁶⁶ At daybreak the council of the elders of the people, both the chief priests and the teachers of the law, met together, and Jesus was led before them. ⁶⁷ 'If you are the Messiah,' they said, 'tell us.'

Jesus answered, 'If I tell you, you will not believe me, ⁶⁸ and if I asked you, you would not answer. ⁶⁹ But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God.'

⁷⁰ They all asked, 'Are you then the Son of God?'

He replied, 'You say that I am.'

⁷¹ Then they said, 'Why do we need any more testimony? We have heard it from his own lips.'

Jesus

I didn't sleep that night. I felt betrayed, disowned and when Peter had left the courtyard, I felt very alone. I had been beaten and become game for bullies. Then there was a lull until the sun came up and they had brought together the Jewish leaders, the leaders of the Jewish faith and the law interpreters. They met together and once again I saw the poverty of this great nation. This was the Sanhedrin, the High Council. Their spokesman asked: 'If you are the Messiah, own up to it now!'

Catch twenty-two, they call it. I was going to be damned whatever I say, after all it was they who had arranged my arrest, my beating, they who were instilling fear in my friends. I would have been a fool to think they would even blink if I claimed to be God!

'And what are you going to do if I answer you?' I asked, 'If I say yes then can we debate further, be open, honest and reasoned to each other? You are not going to allow that to happen are you?'

They knew I was speaking truth.

'But this I do say,' I said, looking at them without fear, 'After today,

you'll see **me**, this Son of Man, sitting at the right hand of Almighty God.'

The was an audible intake of breath. This was not something they could cope with. It didn't fall in their laws, their traditions, their comprehension – a beaten man without friends or earthly authority in pride of place.

One of them started, then they all joined in. 'So you are the Son of God, then, are you?' they were asking, some in fun, laughing raucously, but some seriously.

'You've said it,' I replied.

That was enough for most of them. The discussions around the room were noisy. They were all there, collecting sufficient evidence that I should be disposed of, and those words did it. After that they were convinced they needed no witnesses. For most of them, my claim to be Messiah, or God's Son, was simply gross, dreadful, deeply anti-Jewish. It was the beginning of the end.

- 1. The text includes a 'me' (highlighted), is that reasonable?**
- 2. Can you see why it was a 'catch 22'?**
- 3. Given that the Israelites were expecting the Messiah to come, why couldn't the leaders of the church and the nation accept this was the Messiah, the Son of God, in front of them?**
- 4. Explore 3 a bit further – where does shame, guilt, power and forgiveness feature in all this?**

DAY 4

Luke 23:1-7

Then the whole assembly rose and led him off to Pilate. ² And they began to accuse him, saying, 'We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Messiah, a king.'

³ So Pilate asked Jesus, 'Are you the king of the Jews?'

'You have said so,' Jesus replied.

⁴ Then Pilate announced to the chief priests and the crowd, 'I find no basis for a charge against this man.'

⁵ But they insisted, 'He stirs up the people all over Judea by his teaching. He started in Galilee and has come all the way here.'

⁶ On hearing this, Pilate asked if the man was a Galilean. ⁷ When he learned that Jesus was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time.

Annas – the High Priest's Father in Law (previously High Priest)

Most of the Council were missing the point. The crucial factor was not whether Jesus was actually guilty of anything; what we needed to do was to get rid of him, somehow. Manufactured evidence would be fine. I was in the business of protecting our authority. If authority become doubtful then personal positions and personal fortunes become insecure; the law becomes less important and all that delivers is anarchy.

Anarchy would lead to Jewish revolt and no one can afford that, so the long and the short of it is, I'm protecting the nation. That's my reason for being here and being part of the Council; my reason for taking this Jesus to Pilate. Rid the nation of him, and others like him and we return to safety, to proper tiers of privilege, to a legal system that gives stability.

Pilate, at his best, was not an easy character to deal with. Of course he was a Roman, and his job was to ensure maximum Roman control with the minimum of fuss. He had the power of life and death. That power was wrested from us when the Romans invaded. Years ago we would not have had to defer to this Gentile usurper and, to be honest, it is demeaning to so now; all the more demeaning if he questions our judgement.

'He is subverting our nation,' I said, which was partly true, 'and opposing the payment of taxes to Rome,' which wasn't really true at all, but was just about spin-able.

It needed some Roman reason for Pilate to take notice. Claiming to be the Son of God, or to be the Messiah were words of mad people. That wasn't enough for a death sentence – however encouraging people to refuse to pay their taxes is bound to draw Roman anger.

Pilate was a fox. He knew what we were about. I suspect he had

been pre-warned.

‘So, are you the King of the Jews?’ he asked, ignoring my line of thought and hitting on precisely our issue with the man Jesus.

‘You’ve got it,’ said Jesus. Pilate knew this was why we were really there with Jesus. It wasn’t about not paying taxes, after all none of us liked doing that. There was no way that Pilate was going to bow to spurious wishes of the Jewish Council. Jesus calling himself king when he clearly wasn’t, was a problem for psychiatrists or exorcists, not for Romans.

‘Drop it,’ he told me, flatly, ‘as far as I can see, there’s no evidence against this man.’

‘Just a minute,’ I said, ‘he’s a revolutionary. He’s teaching insurrection in Judea, and people are listening to him. He’s been causing trouble ever since he started on his mission in Galilee.’

Maybe Galilee struck a chord with Pilate. He had dealt with a lot of tough problems in the north of his area of control, and Galilee was in the middle of it.

‘So you come from Galilee do you?’ he asked Jesus. ‘Well how fortunate,’ he said to me, ‘you can go and present Jesus to Herod. He’s in town for the Passover. Herod likes to think himself the King of the Jews, at least in the north. See what he thinks about the man.’

I was not amused. Herod couldn’t impose a death sentence, and Pilate knew it.

- 1. Why was Annas so determined to get rid of Jesus?**
- 2. Why does Pilate ask if Jesus is the King of the Jews, and then, when he does sentence him, put that notice above him on the cross?**
- 3. What is the issue about Galilee, why did that matter?**
- 4. Is Pilate passing the buck – and if so, why?**
- 5. What is the power play going on here, and what is the real irony?**

DAY 5

Luke 23:8-12

⁸ When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he had been wanting to see him. From what he had heard about him, he hoped to see him perform a sign of some sort. ⁹ He plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer. ¹⁰ The chief priests and the teachers of the law were standing there, vehemently accusing him. ¹¹ Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him. Dressing him in an elegant robe, they sent him back to Pilate. ¹² That day Herod and Pilate became friends – before this they had been enemies.

Herod

I was here for the Passover and it was just my luck to be around at the time that this man, Jesus, was arrested. I had already disposed of his prophet, John, (not my decision, not my fault) and some were saying that Jesus was actually John come back to life. I wanted to see the man for myself and clarify what had really happened. He was also described as a miracle maker, and I could do with a good show. People create such stories, I wanted to see if it was all exaggeration.

Initially the Jewish High Council had taken him to Pilate. My dealings with Pilate had never been good. He had no respect for me nor I for him. Nevertheless, probably for convenience sake, and because Jesus was a Galilean and because Jesus was allegedly calling himself the king of the Jews, Pilate sent him to see me. The Council was not mightily pleased that they hadn't been able to get a death sentence from Pilate, and thought I was probably just a means for Pilate to pass the problem elsewhere. Whilst Pilate was quite capable of facing down the Council, sending Jesus to me, as one of my subjects, was a clever option. It also bolstered my authority, given to me originally by the Romans, so that was good. Actually, from then on, my relationship with Pilate definitely improved.

It was all a damp squib. I asked Jesus lots of questions, I ordered him to do some magic but he said nothing and did nothing. The leaders of the church and the law interpreters were making all the noise, accusing him of everything they could think of, but I got nothing at all from Jesus.

It angered me. This pathetic tortured man claiming to be king and God and all he really was, was a bit of nothing. I told him that. My soldiers joined in the abuse and someone got a robe from somewhere and we dressed him in it and pretended we were in the business of doing homage to this waster. It passed the time I suppose.

I sent the man back to my new friend Pilate. He gets paid to deal with scum.

- 1. Why did Jesus do no miracle? Why did he say nothing?**
 - 2. Why did this cement a new relationship between Herod and Pilate?**
 - 3. The drama claims that it was not Herod's decision to kill John, why is that? Why is Herod so touchy about it.**
 - 4. Why is Herod so dismissive? Why send him back to Pilate?**
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DAY 6

Luke 23:13-26

¹³ Pilate called together the chief priests, the rulers and the people, ¹⁴ and said to them, 'You brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him. ¹⁵ Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us; as you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death. ¹⁶ Therefore, I will punish him and then release him.' ^[a]

¹⁸ But the whole crowd shouted, 'Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us!' ¹⁹ (Barabbas had been thrown into prison for an insurrection in the city, and for murder.)

²⁰ Wanting to release Jesus, Pilate appealed to them again. ²¹ But they kept shouting, 'Crucify him! Crucify him!'

²² For the third time he spoke to them: 'Why? What crime has this man committed? I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore I will have him punished and then release him.'

²³ But with loud shouts they insistently demanded that he be crucified, and their shouts prevailed. ²⁴ So Pilate decided to grant their demand. ²⁵ He released the man who had

been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, the one they asked for, and surrendered Jesus to their will.

The crucifixion of Jesus

²⁶ As the soldiers led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus.

Nathanael

To be honest most of us were simply frightened. Jesus was arrested, and by all accounts was being treated like a criminal, Peter had just disappeared, and the rest of us were just desperate for news. On the Friday morning after a sleepless night, we gathered outside the Praetorium in Jerusalem, with a crowd. Word had it that Jesus had been moved there from the palace where Herod was staying. The crowd was just a random crowd. Jerusalem was packed with people at this season, probably hundreds of thousands. The crowd was a few thousand only – many of them little more than tourists. For them the big event of the day was the release of prisoners by the Romans. Apart from that everything else was confusion. We eventually saw Pilate with a contingent of the Jewish leaders and evidently he had questioned Jesus while they were there with him. He put his hand up to get some peace from the crowd. We stilled. Then he announced that despite all his open questioning he had heard no real evidence of the alleged crime: that Jesus was inciting the people to a rebellion against Rome.

I wasn't surprised. There was no rebellion in our ministry, perhaps if there had been Jesus would not have been on trial. Jesus simply did not take a political stance.

'Even your king Herod of the Jews doesn't seem overly concerned about this man claiming to be the king,' boomed Pilate, smiling broadly, 'There simply is nothing in all this that deserves a death sentence. I intend to have him flogged and released.'

There was a faint groan from the crowd. It was as if they were expecting something more, more drama.

There were two things that I realised suddenly became crucial. The first was the reality that virtually all the people in the crowd were Jews who hated the Romans. If they could do anything to make Pilate uncomfortable or to undermine his position or undermine Roman justice, they would. The second was the chaos. Some of us knew Jesus well, some had heard Jesus and some more had heard good things of Jesus, but many were tourists. Jesus was incidental to their stay in the city. What did he stand for? Where was his power base? What were his plans? How would giving Jesus their allegiance make any difference? Because they knew no better, the people listened to the leaders. That was always the safe bet. And the leaders told them that Jesus was no good. The Jewish leaders were telling the people to demand the release of a murderer and rebel. The rebel was called, unfortunately, Jesus Barabbas, which means Jesus, son of father. If you wanted more confusion and irony - there it was - in the names. Even some of Jesus' supporters were mistakenly shouting for the release of Jesus the son of the father.

Ultimately the whole thing turned on getting a largely uninformed crowd to support the Jewish leaders in preference to the Roman Procurator. That was always a popular move. The few voices we could raise to release **our** Jesus were bound to fail. It was heart-breaking that we could do absolutely nothing.

Three times Pilate tried to get his way, telling the crowd that he couldn't find any evidence against our Jesus, and asking them what else they thought Jesus must have done to merit a death sentence. Each time, despite our pathetic remonstrations, the crowd bayed for the blood of our Jesus. 'Crucify him!' they shouted, over and over again. All the time we were able to do nothing, you have to believe me. By the end of it the crowd persuaded itself in one direction, led predominately by, of all people, the chiefs of the faith. Maybe the crowd knew who they wanted and who they didn't want. They wanted to save the active murdering rebel – giving them some vague hope for an end of Roman rule. They wanted to rid themselves of the peacemaker.

In the end Pilate had had enough. He released Barabbas and condemned our Lord to death. So much for justice, it was awful – and we

stood by and did nothing.

- 1. The drama suggests that if Jesus had instigated a rebellion against Rome, Jesus would not have been tried like this. Do you agree?**
- 2. If you had been in the crowd what would you have done differently?**
- 3. The drama suggests that the crowd was largely uninformed about who Jesus was, that they wanted some action and they were willing to trust their national leaders. Is the author right? Does this correspond to media coverage of present democracy today?**
- 4. Do you think there could have been confusion over names?**

DAY 7

Luke 23:27-33

²⁷ A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. ²⁸ Jesus turned and said to them, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. ²⁹ For the time will come when you will say, "Blessed are the childless women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!" ³⁰ Then

"they will say to the mountains, 'Fall on us!'
and to the hills, 'Cover us!'"^[a]

³¹ For if people do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?'

³² Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. ³³ When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals – one on his right, the other on his left.

Jesus

I did not realise how appalling, how pathetic, how dreadful both Judean and Roman leadership and justice had become. God's chosen nation was not interested in truth, just in blood and revolution. Satan needed to do

nothing. It is people who are driving this evil. Pilate tried to force his will on the rabble, but they didn't want his justice at any price. They wanted blood, my blood, because I preached love rather than insurrection. Ironic, isn't it, that I get condemned to death for starting a revolution, and the crowd supports it because I would not give them a revolution.

I was in a poor state. It was difficult to remain upright because, by that time, I had been severely beaten. Some of my friends were in the crowd including some women wailing for me. I knew I could hear my mother.

It was a long, painful final walk. Two others were being crucified with me and their crosses were coming too. We had to keep stopping, and on one occasion I got the chance to speak to the mourners.

'You need to know that it's going to get much worse than this.' I told them. 'This evil is happening when the country is stable. Just imagine what will happen when there is a real insurrection. Instead of weeping for me it would be better for you to weep for yourselves and your children when that happens. Then you'll all be wishing you'd never been mothers. Like Hosea, you'll be wishing that the mountains will fall on you and the hills would hide you.'

Eventually we got to the place where the crosses were to be erected. It's called The Skull. They hung me on a cross between the other two. The pain was excruciating. No words can describe it. Why do people do this to each other?

- 1. The Chief Rabbi was once asked where God was in the Holocaust. His reply was that it was the wrong question. The right question was 'Where was humankind'. The drama has Jesus asking why people do this to each other, and Satan needed to do nothing. Are there parallels today?**
- 2. Luke writes this after the revolution in AD 66-79 when many (1.1 million according to Josephus) Jews were killed and many women raped. Does this account for why he includes the verses 28-31?**
- 3. Where is God in this?**

DAY 8

Luke 23:34-49

³³ When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals – one on his right, the other on his left. ³⁴ Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.'^[a] And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

³⁵ The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, 'He saved others; let him save himself if he is God's Messiah, the Chosen One.'

³⁶ The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar ³⁷ and said, 'If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.'

³⁸ There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

³⁹ One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: 'Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!'

⁴⁰ But the other criminal rebuked him. 'Don't you fear God,' he said, 'since you are under the same sentence?' ⁴¹ We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.'

⁴² Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.'^[b]

⁴³ Jesus answered him, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.'

The death of Jesus

⁴⁴ It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, ⁴⁵ for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. ⁴⁶ Jesus called out with a loud voice, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.'^[c] When he had said this, he breathed his last.

⁴⁷ The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, 'Surely this was a righteous man.' ⁴⁸ When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away. ⁴⁹ But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

Enoch, the main man

I doesn't matter what I did, just don't ask, save it to say I'm an old thug who deserves punishment. And we all take the chance that one day we may get caught, don't we? The Passover is a time when some of the religious types begin to feel guilty about their way of life, and this week some of them grassed on me. I'm now nailed to a wooden cross beam fighting for each breath which is so painful, lifting myself up to keep my lungs filling to continue what little I have left of life. What's the point? I'd die if I could, but I can't make myself die. I've tried to end it quickly but I can't stop breathing, My body forces me to struggle. O God, what a way to go.

The man next to me they call Jesus. He's a preacher. I've seen them before, eking out a living with vague promises and hopes that never happen. I've extracted money from preachers in the past. My experience is that they soon change their tune when they're in pain. This man is different.

'Forgive them, Father,' he said through gritted teeth, 'for they have no idea what they are really doing.'

It takes a strong character to ask forgiveness for those bent on torturing you painfully to death. He says he thinks they don't know what they are doing. I think they have a pretty good idea. They're killing criminals – well two of us at least. The preacher doesn't deserve this. I saw the soldiers rip the clothes off the guy and draw straws as to who could keep the clothes for themselves.

The people shouting at me were those I'd given pain in the past. They were bent on getting their revenge. But the people, even the national leaders were shouting at Jesus telling him to do a miracle.

'Get yourself off the cross if you're the Messiah. Go on! Save yourself like you saved others.' they shouted. Mostly it was mocking. You know I really think some of them thought he might do just that: stupid, stupid fools. We could all do with a bit of magic now, though.

Even the soldiers had a go at him. They gave us burning vinegar to drink when we were baking in the sun with thirst. 'Go on then, Jewish king,' they shouted at him, 'show us what you're made of.'

We each had a note above us saying what our crime was. His simply

said THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS. The outlaw the other side of him started mouthing off, in between breaths, 'Yeh, go on mate, if you are what that notice says you are, then get us all down from here.'

I told him to shut it.

'Do you really think a preacher deserves the death sentence?' I asked, 'What's he done wrong? At least we are being punished for our crimes.'

Complete depression enveloped me. I felt it was all waste; my life was full of pain for others and and it's ending in excruciating pain for me. I've brought no joy into the world. I've been a peddler of hate and lies. Then I strained my head round and looked at Jesus. 'Look mate, whenever you get to your kingdom, if you are a king, whatever that kingdom is, will you remember me?'

He strained his head round towards me. 'Truly, we'll meet tonight in the garden of my palace,' he said.

In those never-ending moments before I died I kept his words in my mind. All the bitter shouting from the crowd was dulled by this wonderful picture of meeting with the preacher king after we both die. It sounds utterly hopeless but it delivered me from depression, it was as if moments before I died I was born again. The world had not forgiven me, the world wanted to forget me and dump me a valueless waster, but the king forgave me and he would not forget me. The king said he would remember me.

We had been hanging there some time in the sun, but when the sun was at its highest some clouds came over and the whole place became dark. It was a blessing. The coolness made the struggle for what little life we had left, less intense. I remember thinking that that was the last time I was likely to see the sun. It was as if darkness was covering the whole earth. The dignitaries were called away because the Temple curtain had split in two – like an omen.

Then about half way through the afternoon, Jesus died. His last words were barely audible. He looked up and said, 'Father, take into your hands the breath of life within me.' And his head fell back to his chest and his breathing stopped. Lucky man, I thought.

The captain of the guard was tormented by the travesty of justice. He angrily said what we were all thinking: 'There's absolutely no way that

man was guilty of anything.’ The mood of the crowd changed. They knew what they’d done and started beating their breasts as they left. His grief-stricken friends, including the women, just watched from a distance.

Pain or no pain, I saw it all and I tell you, I was honoured to be among the last people he spoke to.

I’ve seen and caused much death in my life but I had no idea that this one more death could have such an effect on me. I died a different man. After the people started leaving I remember nothing except this, and I have no way of explaining it or proving it, you understand, but he and I did meet, you know, in something like a palace garden, that evening.

- 1. Jesus promises life after death. The drama has the man in his torture, comforted by that. Are you?**
- 2. Peter left but the women stayed. What does that say about a male orientated society?**
- 3. The criminal was not asking for forgiveness. Why does he ask Jesus to remember him? Is there any faith or hope in that? A walk in the garden – perhaps the one they can see from the cross?**
- 4. A guaranteed a place in paradise simply because of what?**
- 5. God forgives when the world does not. Are you comfortable with that? Who would you not forgive?**