

You will excuse me if I appear tired tonight. It has been an exceptionally long day for me. These old bones hurt and I have a bit of a headache. I suppose I must be getting too old to handle the sort of commotion I had in here today. Oh, but you don't want to listen to an old man complain. You see, this is my carpentry shop. Here is where I have spent the last 51 years of my life. I can tell you -I have seen days come and I have seen days go, but today is one like I never want to see again ...ever.

But before I get into that, let me show you what I am working on here. I am planing the groove on this beam of wood so that it will fit snugly into the groove of this other beam of wood. Have any of you ever seen a cross? That is what the finished product will be once these two beams of wood are fitted and bound together with rope. Then the soldiers of the Roman army will take this cross and carry it just out of town to a hill they call "The Place of the Skull." Believe me, this is a fitting title for such a place. It gives me goose flesh just to mention it. The Place of the Skull is the location where criminals are taken and executed. They are hung on a cross, like this one, for a torturous death by slow suffocation. Oh, I would rather not talk about that if you don't mind. It really is very gruesome.

You are probably wondering then why it is that I make these crosses, if what they are used for repulses me so. That's a good question, and I probably don't have a good answer for you. All I can say is I have been a carpenter all my life and I am just too old to fight. I have been chosen, you could say - commissioned by the Roman military to make these crosses for them. To refuse ... well, as I say ...I am just too old to face the consequences.

I come from a long line of carpenters. My father likes to tease my grandchildren. That would be my children's children. He tells them that our family has been in the carpentry trade since Noah. He tells them that Noah was the greatest carpenter who ever lived. My father loves to tell illustrative tales to the children about how large the ark was that Noah made. In fact, my father made a small model of the ark to use in his re-creation of the story of the great flood. The great-grandchildren marvel at the story just as my children's children did, as my children did, as I did ...and still do. Holding up his model ark filled with all the animals he spent days whittling, my father tells the story with such conviction.

"In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened. The rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights." Seems just yesterday when we were all so young. My father can no longer work with the wood. He's too old, just as I will be very soon. My father is quite unhappy with these crosses I make. He says they are a waste of God's good creation. "Trees were made to provide shelter for God's creatures and to sustain life," he says, "and now they are cut down and you turn them into instruments of death? Shame on you, my son." Well, some days I can just shrug his words off as the ranting of an old man. But, today ...well, today his words haunt me.

Three soldiers barged into my tent early this morning demanding that I give them three crosses. I had heard that two thieves would be executed this week, so in anticipation of their request, I had already produced two crosses. However, the soldiers laughingly told me that they had sentenced to death another. They obviously were in need of three crosses instead of two. So they left here with the two, saying they would return for the completed third cross in the morning. The one I am working on is that third one. I asked them, as they were leaving, who the other thief was they would crucify. They informed me that he was no thief at all ...he was a king, they said. "King of the Jews," they laughed. Well, this sarcasm caught me off guard since I am a Jew and know of no such king among my people. I followed the soldiers out of the tent, imploring them to tell me the name of this king. "Jesus of Nazareth," they told me

as they ran off. As I turned to walk back in to my shop it dawned on me that I have heard of this Jesus of Nazareth. In fact, I have heard him speak in person. Briefly. Just a few days ago in Jerusalem, he was speaking to a crowd. I was passing through on my way to market when I heard this man quoting the words of our prophet, Isaiah. I must admit that I have not been devout in my religious practice for a long time. But I remember the words of our prophets from my learnings as a child. This man was quoting Isaiah and saying strange things I did not understand.

He said something like, "Whoever believes in me believes not in me but in the one who sent me. And whoever sees me sees him who sent me." He said something about not coming to judge the world but to save it. I inquired from someone in the crowd who this man was who was speaking. They told me he was a rabbi, Jesus, from Nazareth. That did not strike me as odd since there are many rabbis who roam the land teaching in each city as they go. But then, as I recall, this Jesus of Nazareth said something peculiar. He said he does not say the things he says on his own but the Father who sent him commands him about what to say.

Now, as I mentioned, what I heard from this Jesus was very brief and I did not quite understand it all. But something in his voice was quite powerful. I remember thinking how the power and authority with which he spoke seemed to make the prophet's words he used come alive! And the things he said following them, though I did not understand their meaning, seemed to have the ring of truth in them. I heard people in the crowd say that this Jesus is the one who has been healing the sick and forgiving the sins of people in the region. When I encountered Jesus earlier this week it was the first time I had even heard of him. Now this very morning, just a few days later, these soldiers tell me that this same Jesus who was speaking in the town center would be hung alongside two convicted thieves to suffer perhaps the most cruel death I could ever imagine? I am a bit mystified about it all. Could I have misjudged this wonderful speaker so greatly that he is really no more than a criminal?

I remember the crowd in Jerusalem that day was very large and as I stood listening to him, I was caught up in a surge which carried me to where I no longer was within hearing distance. I fought to get back to where I could hear, but it was no use. The flow of people made it too difficult. I thought to myself that perhaps another opportunity would come for me to hear him. Yet that day I would have liked to linger for a while and listen to what this rabbi from Nazareth was saying. I felt at the time that something in his voice seemed quite authentic ...full of authority. I had a sense that he was speaking words I needed to hear. Listening to him that day reminded me that I have been in search of something through-out my life which I know I have never really been able to find ... something missing. I am probably too old now to ever find it, but I have always prayed for a chance. I feel like I might have had that chance if I could have only heard and perhaps understood more of what this Jesus had to say. I suppose I won't get the chance now. As I mentioned earlier, a cloud of foreboding has been lingering over me all day long. I feel a sense of regret that I will not have the opportunity to hear the words and teachings of the rabbi Jesus. He will be executed ...crucified for a crime that I know nothing about. And what's more, he will hang on a cross that I made with my own hands.

So, do you understand why my sense of remorse is great? My father's admonition over this cross-making business has caused me to be quite disturbed this day. Particularly since I know it will be upon this one that the rabbi Jesus will hang. Have I made a grave mistake by agreeing to make these crosses ...this cross? His message seemed to be very powerful and, if what they say about his healing and forgiveness is true, am I now to be responsible for its termination? Is my cross to be the end of Jesus? God help me.