

## Thief on the Cross – fictional Story

Their names were Jamal and Salim. Thieves caught stealing the Roman's stores, their fate was sealed. Their companion in crucifixion was another story. He was some Jewish rabbi who claimed to be King, a miracle worker or something. As they struggled up Golgotha, some of the women openly wept for Jesus. His response to them was strange, otherworldly. "Women, do not weep for me, weep for yourselves and your children." He wondered what Jesus knew about the future?

There certainly weren't any tears being shed for Jamal and Salim. Common thieves, they deserved what they got. When they were affixed to their crosses, the Roman guards hoisted them into place and their death machines slid into place upright with a thug on that forlorn hill. Ugh, the weight of their bodies pulled on those cruel nails holding them in place. The crowd of soldiers, Jewish leaders and bystanders mocked this Jesus, and in frustration and despair, so did Salim and Jamal. "You who can destroy the temple and build it again in 3 days, save yourself!" "Yeah", Jamal and Salim chimed in "and save us too if you can!" Salim said, "you trusted in your God, now come down from your cross. "Include us in your miracle Rabbi."

And then Jesus said something that Jamal would never forget. "Father, forgive them for they know not what they are doing." Forgiveness, Jamal exclaimed, you've got to be kidding". I would steal, cheat, lie – even kill to survive. What does the rabbi mean, he forgives them."

"Yes, now its coming back to me" Jamal pondered to himself. He had heard stories about this miracle worker in prison. The word repent was used in his meetings – repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." What in the world is this 'kingdom' thing all about? Could this man be the revered "Messiah" that the Jews had long awaited? Jamal, his body wracked with pain, tried to think. His strength was waning, his mind searching the stories he had heard in prison about this itinerant preacher. God, could there be a God and how did this guy figure in?

Then Jesus said from the cross, "I'm thirsty". God, how Jamal was thirsty, not just for something to drink but for something that would revitalize his soul. Dying like this on a forlorn hill in Palestine made his loneliness all the more staggering. He'd been a part of the crowd all his life. What had that got him. Now they mocked Jesus, and he'd gone along with it.

"I'm done with this lot" he said to himself. And he was done following along with his older brother Salim. A fat lot of good this had gotten him. "In a moment of careless abandonment, Jamal confronted his brother. "This is not right, Salim. This rabbi did nothing to deserve his cross. You and I are guilty, but he is innocent." Salim scoffed "you've gone soft Jamal. "Yeah, you miserable thief," someone cried out from the crowd. "What do you know about this cursed Rabbi," shouted another. "Shut your mouth you filthy criminal," a Pharisee screamed. "Why don't you come up here and make me," shouted Jamal. He was done with this bunch of hypocrites – they are the guilty ones. They are the *real* criminals, putting an innocent man on a cross.

God, where had he got the boldness to say these things? But then what did he care about what his brother thought of him, this crowd of hypocrites or those oppressive Roman soldiers. He'd rather land on the side of this Jesus than that sorry lot.

"I wonder, I just wonder" said Jamal, could it be true? Were goodness and forgiveness real and was a new chance at life actually possible?"

He would appeal to Jesus, he would go way out on a limb – who cares what others thought of him, they could not save him, maybe Jesus could?

"Jesus, could you just remember me when you come into your Kingdom"? It was a simple request. Jamal just didn't want to be forgotten. He wanted someone to remember that he was a human being, a lost soul, a drift in an expansive universe. He wasn't expecting much. Please, just don't forget that I existed.

Salim, the Jewish leaders and the soldiers laughed him to scorn, but Jamal maintained a determined gaze at the suffering Jewish rabbi. And then he saw it on Jesus' face, compassion, acceptance and heard those precious life affirming, life giving words, "Jamal, oh Jamal, you are so precious to me and it is my joy to assure you that I love you and , today, YOU will be with me in paradise." I can't speak these same words to the others at the foot of our crosses. Though I have asked my Father in Heaven to forgive them, they have not responded as you have. The faith that you have demonstrated in turning from your old ways of thinking and from following the crowd all your life and the value you have placed on me that I would remember you has brought us into a relationship, forever. We are friends now Jamal, see you soon.