

THE SCOURGE (John 19:1-3)

Excuse me, but I know some of you. I've seen you in my dreams. You were there just a few days ago, weren't you – in Jerusalem. You were standing there; you held it when I was finished. Just a few days ago – in Jerusalem. Oh, the memories are like hieroglyphics of horror carved on the walls of my soul, paintings that I see every night. I can't get away from them. Re-occurring over and over again, the nightmare of what I did, thinking that I was doing rightly. And you were there with me, I remember – I saw you there standing. You held it. Maybe we should journey back together to that fateful morning in Jerusalem.

THE CHASE

- Up early in my meager surroundings, looked at letter to family on table written night before
- Wanted to be in Rome with them, but stuck here among these rebellious Jews and their ridiculous religion
- Staring at narrow street full of shops and people, noticed Jewish Zealot taunting Roman Guard, skirmish broke out
- Bedlam and mayhem broke out, I found myself joining the chase
- He climbed to the rooftops, leaving broken clay and damaged thatched roofs, watched him climb down baker's shop (HOME!)
- By now, ten or fifteen soldiers in pursuit; he disappeared in a foggy ravine at the edge of town
- We were defeated, he was gone, I felt a flood of rage, like a bear that had been teased by a fox, I was hungry for revenge
- I don't know how many soldiers inferior to my rank I growled at on my way back to my room
- I paced my room for several long moments with irate steps, waiting for an opportunity to enact my tantrum of justice
- And then came a knock at the door, a young soldier glad to be honored with an errand from his superior
- I opened the scroll and read the message from the Procurator, a summons to a special assignment
- A man was to be flogged in the Court of Pavements – and he was a Jew! A smile stretched my lips as I thought of my chance!

THE WHIPPING

- I bent over the musty chest and pulled from its lair my weapon of power
- Like a man reaching for his favorite sword or a charioteer taking the reins of his most trusted horses, this was my weapon
- Straps of death, flimsy bands of butchery, long piercing thongs of punishment, impaling tentacles of torment, cords of correction, a belt of chastisement ... and no one in the empire could use it like I could use it.
- On top of that, the resentment, the animosity, the hatred, the anger, the frustrations, the futility that had mounted
- I had waited for this moment. I would show them what Rome could do! It would be a warning to the hot headed Jews!
- Long teeth of metal and bone were laced into the strips; it could feel like a hundred nails thrust between muscle and skin
- I rushed to the court of pavement; they had this Jew already suspended on the whipping post; I ripped his robe off
- I raised my arm and dropped it with fury, and something was released.
- The lashes left welts, then deep gaping wounds, pulling the flesh from his bones, unplugging rivers of red
- I whipped and bludgeoned him, I let loose of my anger, I let loose of my hatred and my will to kill
- His blood spurted in a thousand directions, as ribbons of flesh were ripped away
- My eyes were glazed in demented pleasure, the sweat from my face mixed with the blood from his back
- I could somehow see myself before Caesar, receiving the accolades for my heroic service in putting down this rebellion

- When I came back to reality, I saw the religious robed Jews smirking. They were pleased as he was ploughed!
- I didn't know who this man was! I was just being patriotic, just doing my duty, fulfilling my orders, releasing my hate ... JUST LIKE SOME OF YOU
- I noticed quickly that those who loved him wept, those who loathed him happily watched, while those who really did not know him just drifted to some distant corner of denial ... LIKE YOU
- When I finished the last blow, I tossed aside the blood-soaked weapon as I heard his wheezing breath, spitting out blood
- The tones of agony gripped my heart, and I hurried away, glancing over my shoulder to see the damage I had done
- I ascended the stairs into my escape, my room. I fell on the bed and somehow managed to fall into a deep sleep ...

AND THAT'S WHEN THE NIGHTMARES BEGAN!

- The glimpses of his bludgeoned body, the exposed spine showing through ribbons of flesh barely stitched on
- The scene played in my subconscious night after night, catapulting me from sleep to cold sweat, tears and fear
- I couldn't get away from it – all I could see was that whip
- I would try to eat – a plateful of blood; I would try to drink – a goblet full of blood!
- If I could only go back, I would throw myself in the pool of his blood in the dust, I would throw my arms around his feet
- Instead of the whipping I would worship, instead of the beating I would bless him, instead of the scourging I would be sensitive to his word ... but I can't go back and change what I've done
- AND YET YOU CAN – that's why I'm here tonight
- I saw you in my dream – you were holding the whip like I held it!

He only wanted you to repent ... and you lashed out at his love
He sent you a preacher to care for you ... and you flogged him with accusations and suspicions of his leadership

You used to know Him, and now you hold the whip!
I've come to beg you not to treat his anointing with animosity, not to bludgeon him with your blasphemy

You can discard his doctrines, but you leave the wounds
You can sequester your soul from his spirit, but you leave the bleeding gashes
You can exclude the new birth experience from your life, but you inflict the gaping injuries

You lacerate the love of God
You abuse his anointing when you turn your back on him!

I DIDN'T DO IT – I WASN'T THERE!

I just lusted for the world, I didn't treat the Lord like that!
How can you deny that you've been a beater of his blessings when the bloody strands of the whip can be found in your hand?
Will you plead insanity on judgment day? What will be your excuse on judgment day for your disregard of the gospel?
For your abuse of truth and holiness? For your rebellious rejection of his spirit?

You can step over the blood of the lamb, but you're no better than the man who flogged him before his death
You can walk out of here nurturing your offenses, but you're no better than those who platted a crown of thorns
You can walk out of here with your excuses as to why you cannot repent, BUT YOU HOLD THE WHIP!

You may not have been there in flesh, BUT YOU ARE THERE TONIGHT IN SPIRIT!

You're holding the whip of your own will!
I would never do that ... but you've done it when you sin willfully
When you are not faithful
When you go back to the world
When you harbour secret sin

God forbid that you could walk out of here with a smirk on your face while you are at odds with the Holy Ghost
As long as you avoid the altar

How dare you sit there having once tasted of the heavenly gift? How dare you not run to the altar and leave your bloody whip?
How dare you not leave your backslidden ways? How dare you go have a decent meal and a good night's rest?
I pray that you toss and turn this night ...

It would have been better for you to be a Buddhist overseas or serve an African god, or bow to a new age spirit
Than to have felt the cleansing blood of the Lord Jesus Christ and then turn your back on him.

THERE IS NO EXCUSE FOR YOU TO BE LOST!

ALL HE WANTS TO DO IS SHARE HIS LOVE WITH YOU - HOW CAN YOU LASH OUT AT THAT?

YOU HOLD THE WHIP!
YOU WHIP HIM WHEN YOU LEAVE HERE WITHOUT MAKING IT RIGHT!
THE WHIP WILL CONDEMN YOU ON JUDGMENT DAY!