

# None Were with Him

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*Trumpeted from the summit of Calvary is the truth that we will never be left alone nor unaided, even if sometimes we may feel that we are.*



**T**hank you, Sister Thompson, and thanks to the remarkable women of this Church. Brothers and sisters, my Easter-season message today is intended for everyone, but it is directed in a special way to those who are alone or feel alone or, worse yet, feel abandoned. These might include those longing to be married, those who have lost a spouse, and those who have lost—or have never been blessed with—children. Our empathy embraces wives forsaken by their husbands, husbands whose wives have walked away, and children bereft of one or the other of their parents—or both. This group can find

within its broad circumference a soldier far from home, a missionary in those first weeks of homesickness, or a father out of work, afraid the fear in his eyes will be visible to his family. In short it can include all of us at various times in our lives.

To all such, I speak of the loneliest journey ever made and the unending blessings it brought to all in the human family. I speak of the Savior's solitary task of shouldering alone the burden of our salvation. Rightly He would say: "I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me. . . . I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold [me]."1

As President Uchtdorf so beautifully noted earlier, we know from scripture that Jesus's messianic arrival in Jerusalem on the Sunday preceding Passover, a day directly analogous to this very morning, was a great public moment. But eagerness to continue walking with Him would quickly begin to wane.

Soon enough He was arraigned before the Israelite leaders of the day—first Annas, the former high priest, then Caiaphas, the current high priest. In their rush to judgment these men and their councils declared their verdict quickly and angrily. "What

further need have we of witnesses?" they cried. "He is [worthy] of death."<sup>2</sup>

With that He was brought before the gentile rulers in the land. Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Galilee, interrogated Him once, and Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor in Judea, did so twice, the second time declaring to the crowd, "I, having examined him before you, have found no fault in this man."<sup>3</sup> Then, in an act as unconscionable as it was illogical, Pilate "scourged Jesus, [and] delivered him to be crucified."<sup>4</sup> Pilate's freshly washed hands could not have been more stained or more unclean.

Such ecclesiastical and political rejection became more personal when the citizenry in the street turned against Jesus as well. It is one of the ironies of history that sitting with Jesus in prison was a *real* blasphemer, a murderer and revolutionary known as Barabbas, a name or title in Aramaic meaning "son of the father."<sup>5</sup> Free to release one prisoner in the spirit of the Passover tradition, Pilate asked the people, "Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you?" They said, "Barabbas."<sup>6</sup> So one godless "son of the father" was set free while a truly divine Son of His Heavenly Father moved on to crucifixion.

This was also a telling time among those who knew Jesus more personally. The most difficult to understand in this group is Judas Iscariot. We know the divine plan required Jesus to be crucified, but it is wrenching to think that one of His special witnesses who sat at His feet, heard Him pray, watched Him heal, and felt His touch could betray Him and all that He was for 30 pieces of silver. Never in the history of this world has so little money purchased so much infamy. We are not the ones to judge Judas's fate, but Jesus said of His betrayer, "Good [were it] for that man if he had not been born."<sup>7</sup>

Of course others among the believers had their difficult moments as well.



Following the Last Supper, Jesus left Peter, James, and John to wait while He ventured into the Garden of Gethsemane alone. Falling on His face in prayer, “sorrowful . . . unto death,”<sup>8</sup> the record says, His sweat came as great drops of blood<sup>9</sup> as He pled with the Father to let this crushing, brutal cup pass from Him. But, of course, it could not pass. Returning from such anguished prayer, He found His three chief disciples asleep, prompting Him to ask, “Could ye not watch with me one hour?”<sup>10</sup> So it happens two more times until on His third return He says compassionately, “Sleep on now, and take your rest,”<sup>11</sup> though there would be no rest for Him.

Later, after Jesus’s arrest and appearance at trial, Peter, accused of knowing Jesus and being one of His confidants, denies that accusation not once but three times. We don’t know all that was going on here, nor do we know of protective counsel which the Savior may have given to His Apostles privately,<sup>12</sup> but we do know Jesus was aware that even these precious ones

would not stand with Him in the end, and He had warned Peter accordingly.<sup>13</sup> Then, with the crowing of the cock, “the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord. . . . And [he] went out, and wept bitterly.”<sup>14</sup>

Thus, of divine necessity, the supporting circle around Jesus gets smaller and smaller and smaller, giving significance to Matthew’s words: “All the disciples [left] him, and fled.”<sup>15</sup> Peter stayed near enough to be recognized and confronted. John stood at the foot of the cross with Jesus’s mother. Especially and always the blessed women in the Savior’s life stayed as close to Him as they could. But essentially His lonely journey back to His Father continued without comfort or companionship.

Now I speak very carefully, even reverently, of what may have been the most difficult moment in all of this solitary journey to Atonement. I speak of those final moments for which Jesus must have been prepared intellectually and physically but which He

may not have fully anticipated emotionally and spiritually—that concluding descent into the paralyzing despair of divine withdrawal when He cries in *ultimate* loneliness, “My God, my God, why hast *thou* forsaken me?”<sup>16</sup>

The loss of mortal support He had anticipated, but apparently He had not comprehended this. Had He not said to His disciples, “Behold, the hour . . . is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me” and “The Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him”?<sup>17</sup>

With all the conviction of my soul I testify that He *did* please His Father perfectly and that a perfect Father did *not* forsake His Son in that hour. Indeed, it is my personal belief that in all of Christ’s mortal ministry the Father may never have been closer to His Son than in these agonizing final moments of suffering. Nevertheless, that the supreme sacrifice of His Son might be as complete as it was

voluntary and solitary, the Father briefly withdrew from Jesus the comfort of His Spirit, the support of His personal presence. It was required, indeed it was central to the significance of the Atonement, that this perfect Son who had never spoken ill nor done wrong nor touched an unclean thing had to know how the rest of humankind—us, all of us—would feel when we did commit such sins. For His Atonement to be infinite and eternal, He had to feel what it was like to die not only physically but spiritually, to sense what it was like to have the divine Spirit withdraw, leaving one feeling totally, abjectly, hopelessly alone.

But Jesus held on. He pressed on. The goodness in Him allowed faith to triumph even in a state of complete anguish. The trust He lived by told Him in spite of His feelings that divine compassion is never absent, that God is always faithful, that He never flees nor fails us. When the uttermost farthing had then been paid, when Christ's determination to be faithful was as obvious as it was utterly invincible, finally and mercifully, it was "finished."<sup>18</sup> Against all odds and with none to help or uphold Him, Jesus of Nazareth, the living Son of the living God, restored physical life where death had held sway and brought joyful, spiritual redemption out of sin, hellish darkness, and despair. With faith in the God He *knew* was there, He could say in triumph, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."<sup>19</sup>

Brothers and sisters, one of the great consolations of this Easter season is that because Jesus walked such a long, lonely path utterly alone, *we* do not have to do so. His solitary journey brought great company for our little version of that path—the merciful care of our Father in Heaven, the unfailing companionship of this Beloved Son, the consummate gift of the Holy Ghost, angels in heaven, family members on both sides of the veil, prophets and apostles, teachers, leaders, friends.

All of these and more have been given as companions for our mortal journey because of the Atonement of Jesus Christ and the Restoration of His gospel. Trumpeted from the summit of Calvary is the truth that we will never be left alone nor unaided, even if sometimes we may feel that we are. Truly the Redeemer of us all said: "I will not leave you comfortless: [My Father and] I will come to you [and abide with you]."<sup>20</sup>

My other plea at Easter time is that these scenes of Christ's lonely sacrifice, laced with moments of denial and abandonment and, at least once, outright betrayal, must *never* be re-enacted by us. He has walked alone once. Now, may I ask that never again will He have to confront sin without our aid and assistance, that never again will He find only unresponsive onlookers when He sees you and me along His *Via Dolorosa* in our present day. As we approach this holy week—Passover Thursday with its Paschal Lamb, atoning Friday with its cross, Resurrection Sunday with its empty tomb—may we declare ourselves to be more fully disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, not in word only and not only in the flush of comfortable times

but in deed and in courage and in faith, including when the path is lonely and when our cross is difficult to bear. This Easter week and always, may we stand by Jesus Christ "at all times and in all things, and in all places that [we] may be in, even until death,"<sup>21</sup> for surely that is how He stood by us when it *was* unto death and when He had to stand entirely and utterly alone. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

#### NOTES

1. Isaiah 63:3, 5; see also D&C 76:107; 88:106; 133:50.
2. Matthew 26:65–66; see footnote 66b.
3. Luke 23:14.
4. Matthew 27:26.
5. See Bible Dictionary, "Barabbas," 619.
6. Matthew 27:21.
7. Matthew 26:24.
8. Matthew 26:38.
9. See Luke 22:44; Mosiah 3:7; D&C 19:18.
10. Matthew 26:40.
11. Matthew 26:45.
12. See Spencer W. Kimball, *Peter, My Brother*, Brigham Young University Speeches of the Year (July 13, 1971), 5.
13. See Mark 14:27–31.
14. Luke 22:61–62.
15. Matthew 26:56.
16. Matthew 27:46; emphasis added.
17. John 16:32; 8:29.
18. See John 19:30.
19. Luke 23:46.
20. John 14:18; see also v. 23.
21. Mosiah 18:9.

