

At The End Of Time

At the end of time, billions of people were scattered on a great plain before God's throne. Most shrank back from the brilliant light before them. But groups near the front talked heatedly—not with ... shame, but with belligerence.

"How can God judge us? How can he know about suffering?" snapped a young Jewish girl. She jerked back a sleeve to reveal a tattooed number from a Nazi concentration camp. "We endured terror... beating... torture... death!"

In another group, a black guy lowered his collar. "What about this?" he demanded, showing an ugly rope burn. "Lynched for no crime but being black!" We have suffered in slave ships, been wrenched from loved ones, toiled till only death gave release."

In another group, a young girl stared with sullen eyes. On her forehead was the stamp—illegitimate. "To endure my stigma," she murmured, "was beyond, beyond..." and her voice trailed off, only to be taken up by others.

Far out across the plain were hundreds of such groups. Each had a complaint against God for the evil and suffering he permitted in the world. How lucky God was to live in heaven where all was sweetness and light, where there was no weeping, no fear, no hunger, no hatred. Indeed, what did God know of what man had endured in this world? After all, he leads a pretty sheltered life, they said.

So each of these groups sent forth a leader, chosen because he had suffered most. There was a Jew, a black, an untouchable leper from India, an illegitimate, a horribly deformed arthritic, a victim of Hiroshima and one from a Siberian slave camp. In the center of the plain, they consulted with each other. At last they were ready to present their case. It was rather simple. Before God would be qualified to be their judge he must endure what they had endured. Their decision was that God should be sentenced **TO LIVE ON EARTH—AS A MAN!** But because he was God, they set certain safeguards to be sure he could not use his divine power to help himself:

- ❖ Let him be born a Jew, into a poor family. Let the legitimacy of his birth be doubted, so that none will know who is really his father.
- ❖ Give him a work so difficult that even his family will snicker when he tries to do it. Let him try to describe what no man has ever seen, tasted, heard or smelled. Let him try to describe God to man.
- ❖ Let him be betrayed by his dearest friends.
- ❖ Let him be indicted on false charges, tried before a prejudiced jury, convicted by a cowardly judge.
- ❖ At last, let him see what it means to be terribly alone, completely abandoned by everyone.
- ❖ Let him be tortured, and then die! Let him die publicly, horribly, so that there can be no doubt he died. Let there be a great host of witnesses to verify it.

As each leader announced his portion of the sentence, loud murmurs of approval went up from the great throng of people assembled. When the last had finished pronouncing his sentence, there was a long silence. Those who had spoken their judgment of God quietly departed. No one uttered another word. No one moved. For suddenly all knew: God had already served his sentence."

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