

READING

The Saddest Day



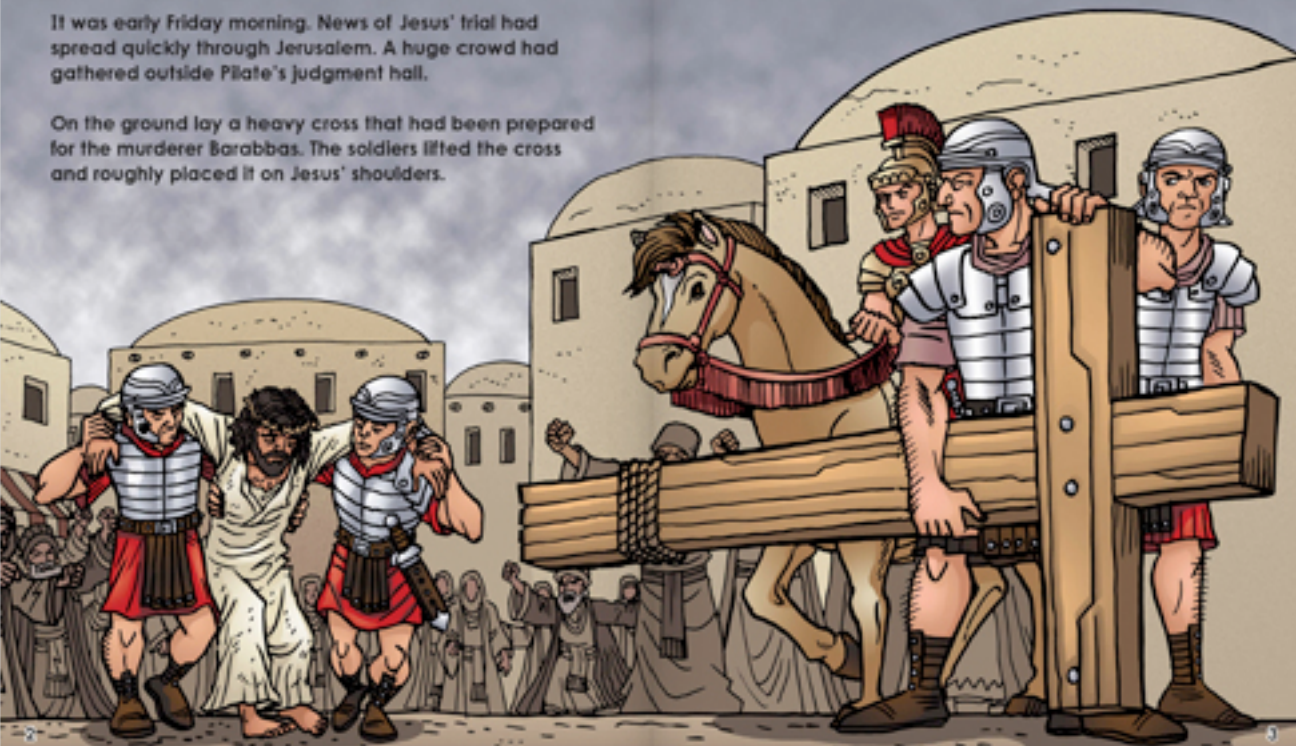
The Saddest Day



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Illustrations Steven Butler

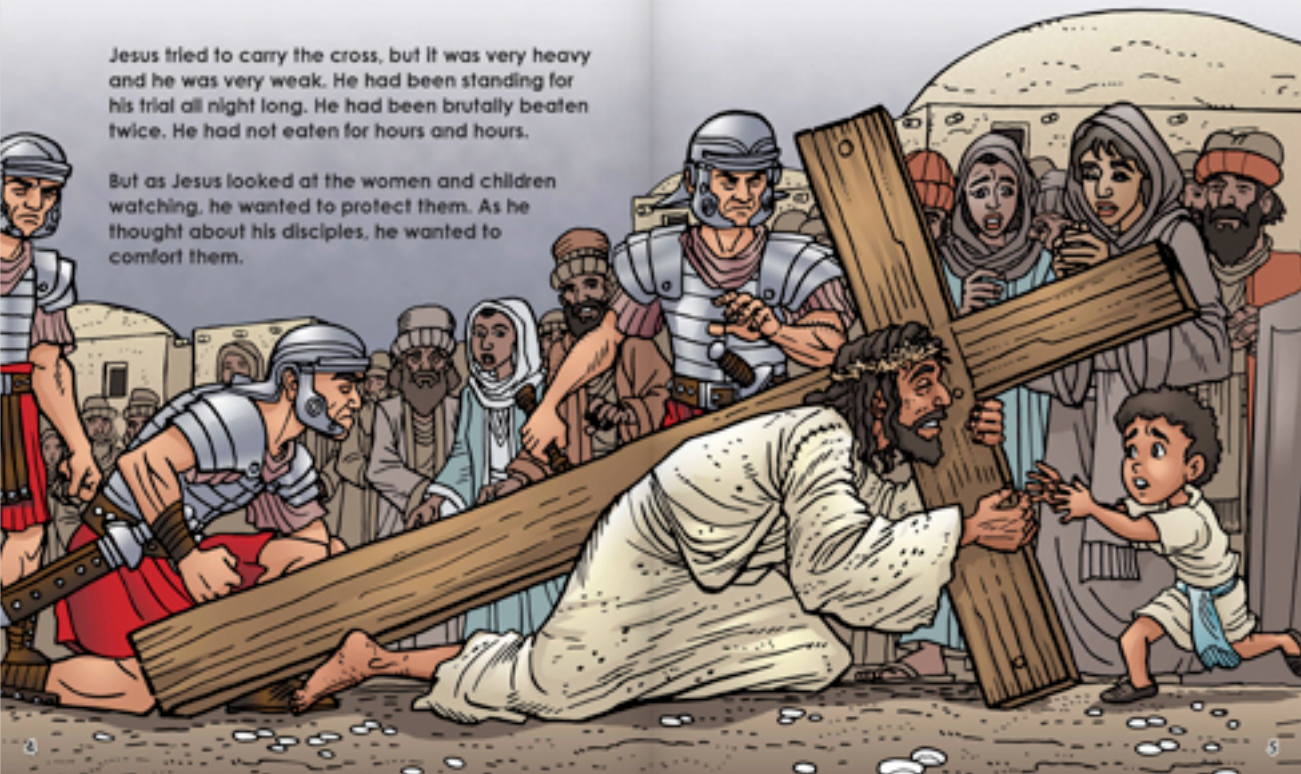
It was early Friday morning. News of Jesus' trial had spread quickly through Jerusalem. A huge crowd had gathered outside Pilate's judgment hall.

On the ground lay a heavy cross that had been prepared for the murderer Barabbas. The soldiers lifted the cross and roughly placed it on Jesus' shoulders.



Jesus tried to carry the cross, but it was very heavy and he was very weak. He had been standing for his trial all night long. He had been brutally beaten twice. He had not eaten for hours and hours.

But as Jesus looked at the women and children watching, he wanted to protect them. As he thought about his disciples, he wanted to comfort them.



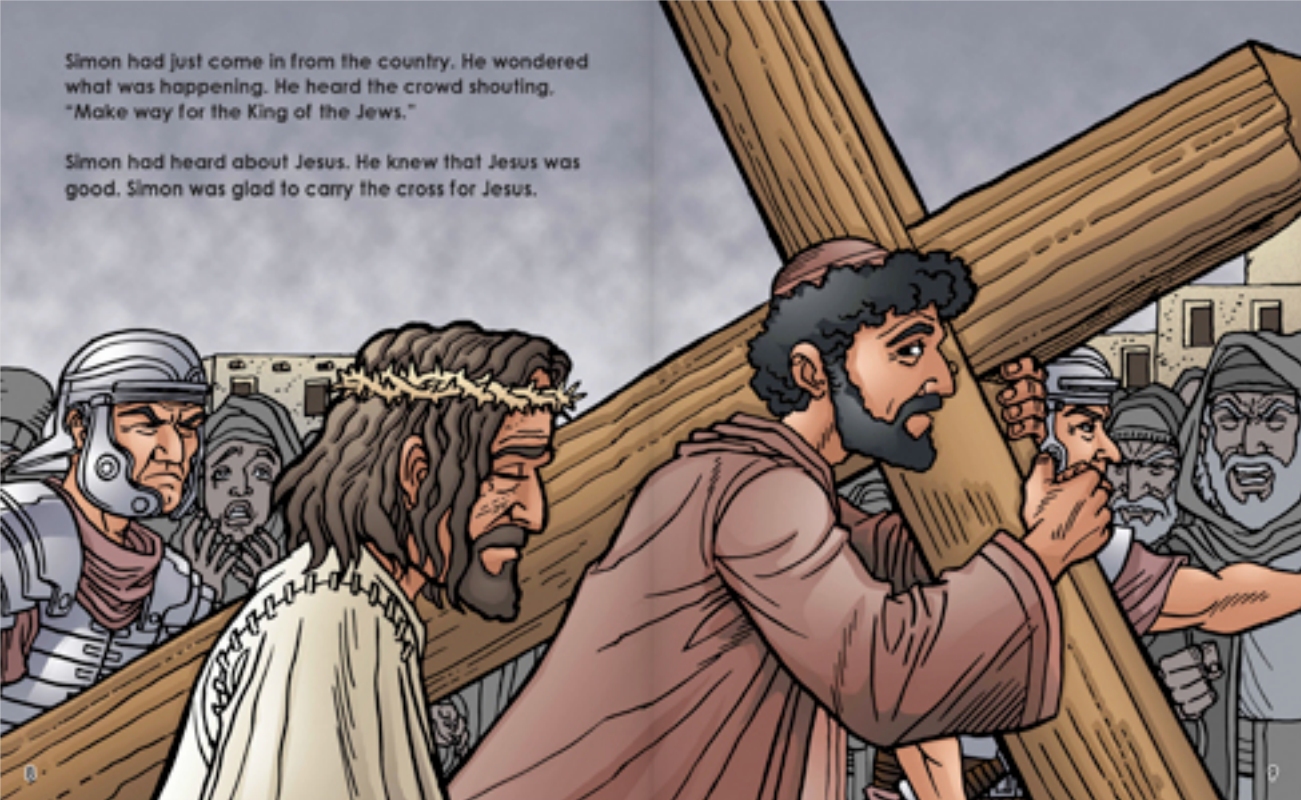


With all his strength Jesus tried to carry the heavy cross.
But again and again he fell to the ground.

The soldiers began looking for someone else to carry the cross. They saw a stranger in the crowd. His name was Simon. The soldiers quickly grabbed Simon and placed the heavy cross on his shoulders.

Simon had just come in from the country. He wondered what was happening. He heard the crowd shouting, "Make way for the King of the Jews."

Simon had heard about Jesus. He knew that Jesus was good. Simon was glad to carry the cross for Jesus.



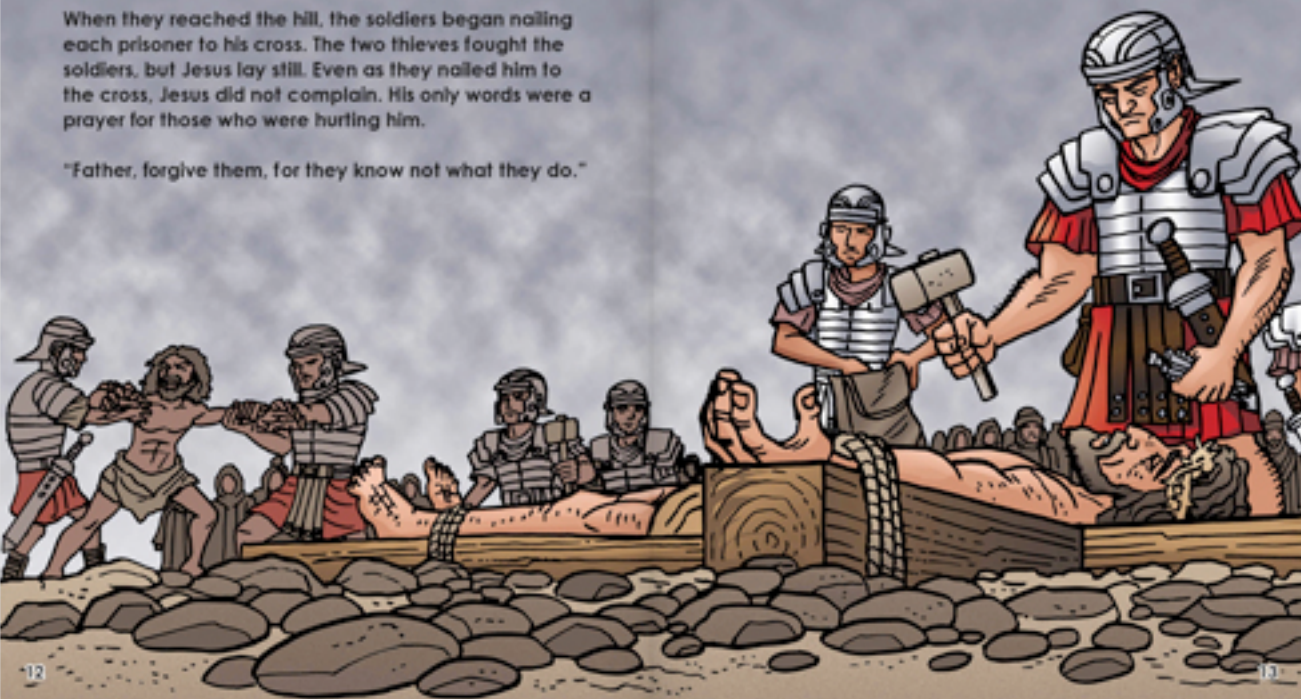
There were women in the crowd that followed Jesus. He had healed their loved ones who were sick. He had spoken words of comfort to them.

The women wept with sorrow as they saw the way that Jesus was treated.



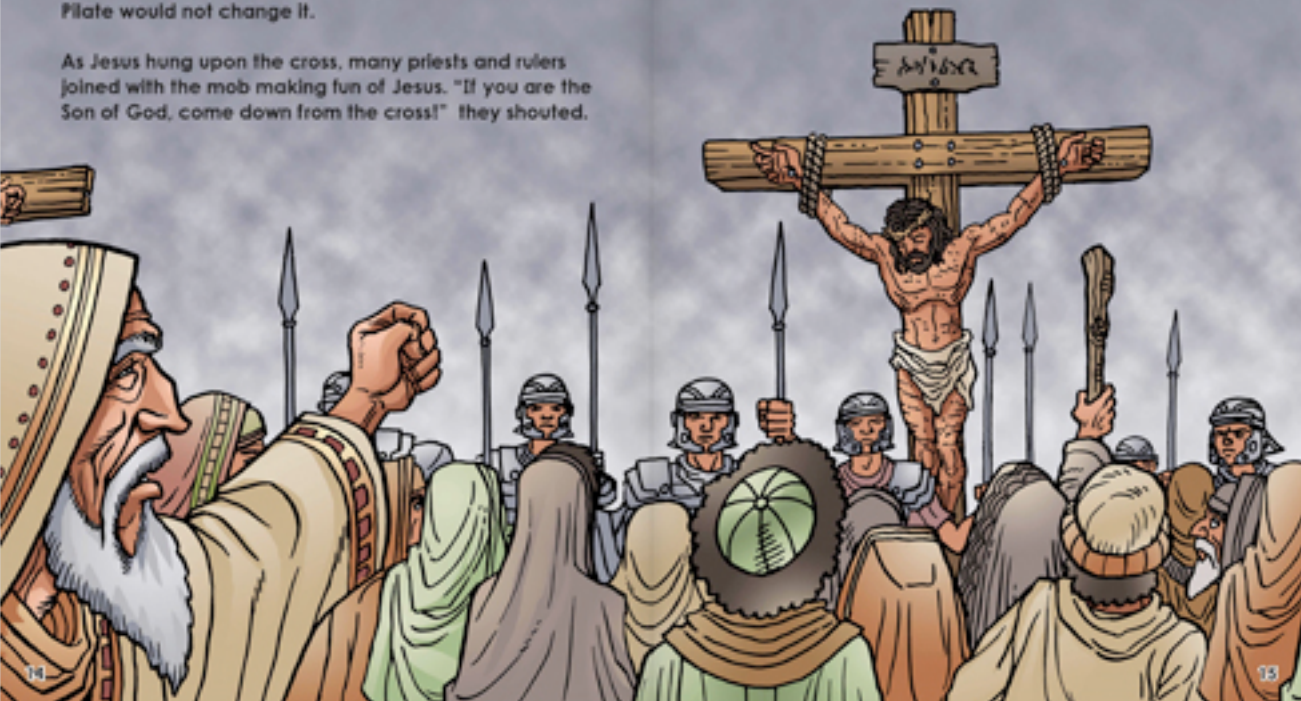
When they reached the hill, the soldiers began nailing each prisoner to his cross. The two thieves fought the soldiers, but Jesus lay still. Even as they nailed him to the cross, Jesus did not complain. His only words were a prayer for those who were hurting him.

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."



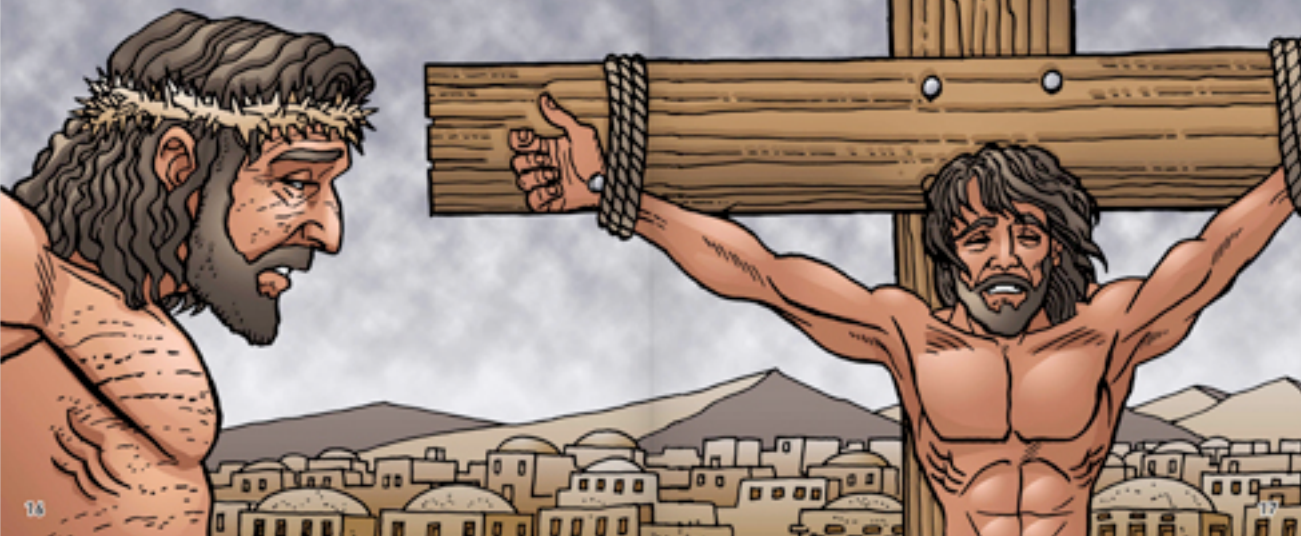
Above Jesus' head they nailed a sign that read, "King of the Jews." The priests were angry about this sign, but Pilate would not change it.

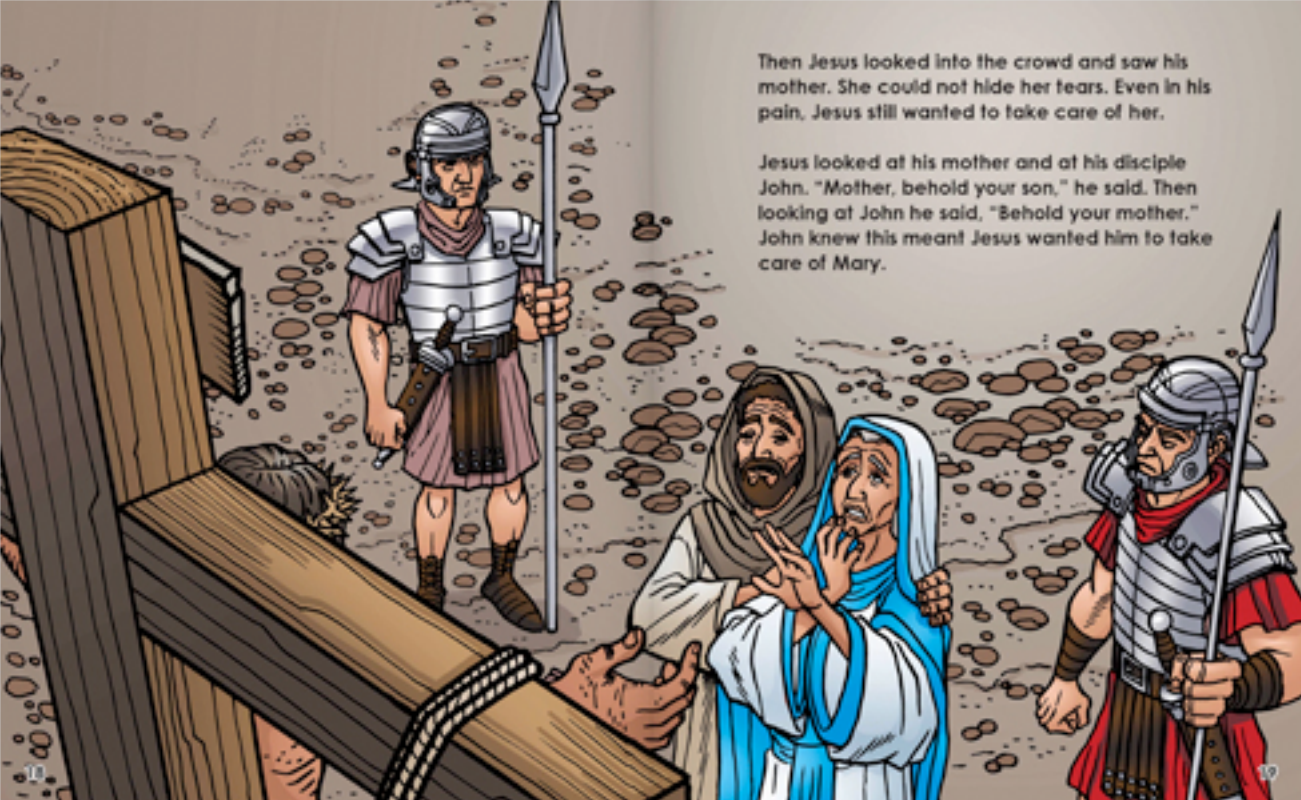
As Jesus hung upon the cross, many priests and rulers joined with the mob making fun of Jesus. "If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross!" they shouted.



One prisoner began to curse, but the other prisoner spoke to him. "Aren't you afraid of God?" he asked. "We deserve our punishment, but he has done nothing wrong."

Then he looked at Jesus. "Remember me when you come into your kingdom," he said. Then Jesus replied, "You will be with me in heaven."





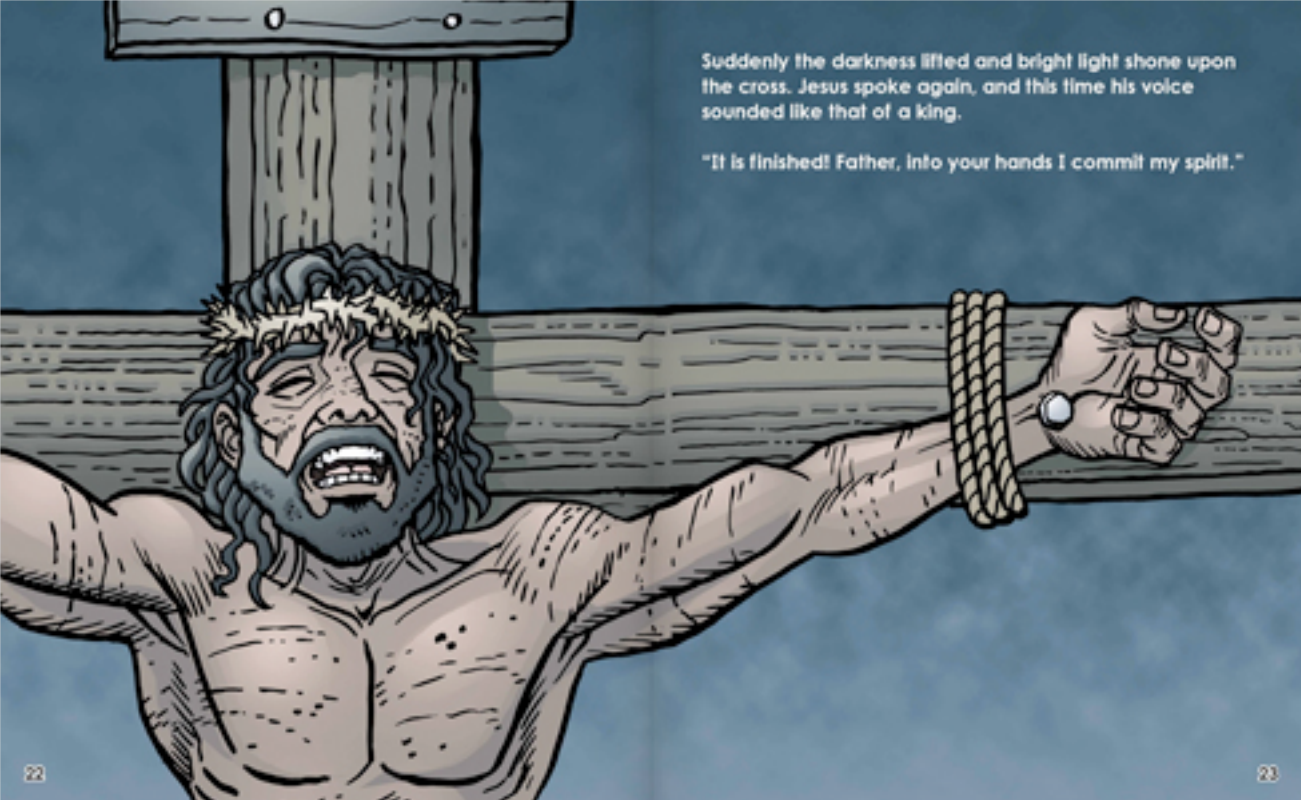
Then Jesus looked into the crowd and saw his mother. She could not hide her tears. Even in his pain, Jesus still wanted to take care of her.

Jesus looked at his mother and at his disciple John. "Mother, behold your son," he said. Then looking at John he said, "Behold your mother." John knew this meant Jesus wanted him to take care of Mary.

Now the sky became very dark, and heavy clouds covered the cross. It seemed that even nature did not want to look upon the death of the Son of God.

And Jesus was heard crying out, "My God, why have you forsaken me?"





Suddenly the darkness lifted and bright light shone upon the cross. Jesus spoke again, and this time his voice sounded like that of a king.

"It is finished! Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."

Then Jesus bowed his head and died.



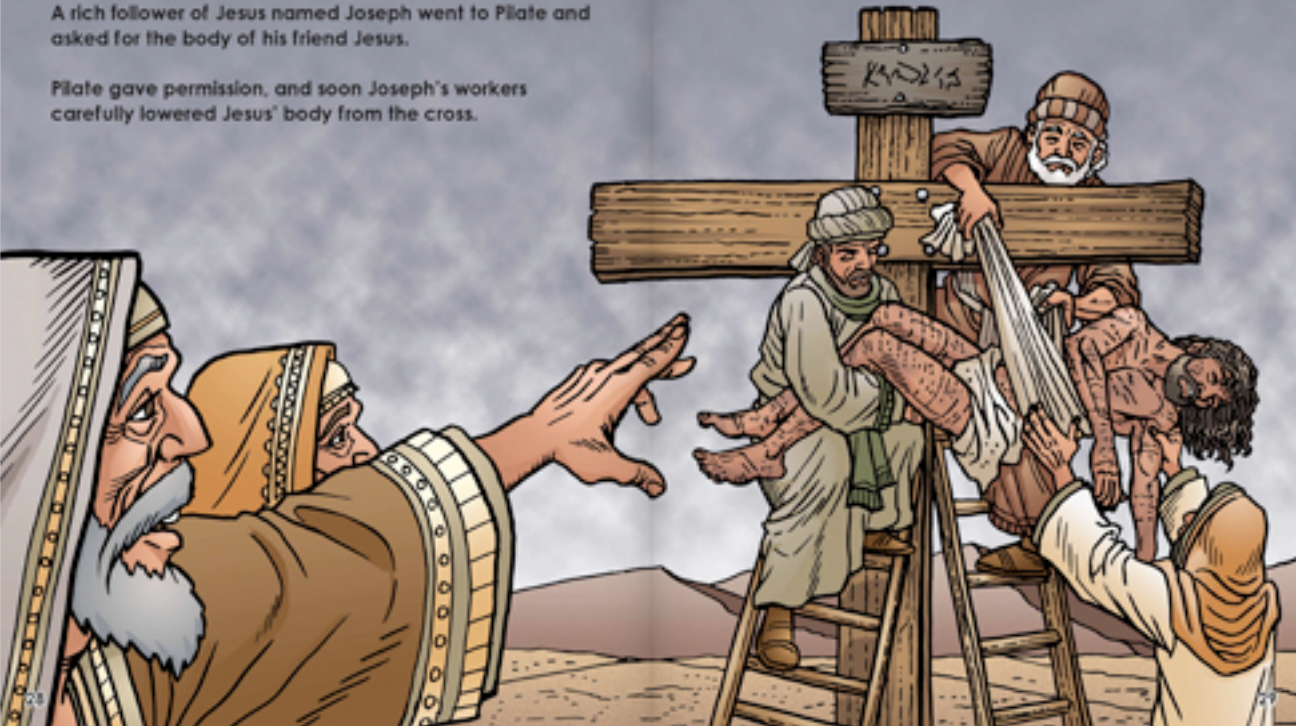
The captain of the military unit handling the executions was standing guard at the foot of the cross. He heard the words of Jesus as he died.

Looking up in awe and amazement he cried out, "Surely this was the Son of God."



A rich follower of Jesus named Joseph went to Pilate and asked for the body of his friend Jesus.

Pilate gave permission, and soon Joseph's workers carefully lowered Jesus' body from the cross.



Joseph had Jesus' body wrapped in a clean, linen cloth. He had the workers place Jesus' body in Joseph's own new tomb. This tomb had been cut into a small cliff of solid rock.

Then Joseph had a huge stone rolled in front of the doorway to seal the tomb.

Jesus' friends were heartbroken. They couldn't believe that Jesus was dead. They cried and cried as they thought about the events of this long, sad day.





They didn't realize that a glorious new day would be coming soon. Jesus would rise again!