

## SEVEN SONNETS FROM THE CROSS

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*These seven sonnets composed by Dr Don Carson are based on the N.I.V. rendering of the passages which stand at their head. Dr Carson is Associate Professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois, U.S.A.*

I

LUKE 23.27-34

The wracking pain of crucifixion played  
Upon the outstretched body of the Lord.  
The taunts of earthlings, like a verbal sword,  
Made ugly wounds far worse than flesh sore frayed.  
The Victim bleeds; some women are dismayed;  
The soldiers do their job, a trifle bored,  
The simple homespun cloth the only hoard.  
Can fiery vengeance justly be long stayed?  
If men do things like these when wood is green,  
What then will happen when the wood is dry?  
Try as they might, they can't escape, unseen  
Beneath the mountains, from the wrath on high.  
The victim sighs an answer wholly new:  
'Forgive them, for they know not what they do!'

## II

## JOHN 19.25-27

The mother changed his diaper, tied his shoe.  
 She wiped his grubby hands, caressed his face,  
 Surrounded him with stories of their race,  
 And listened to his prattle as he grew.  
 The Son, once public figure, claimed his true  
 Disciples were his mother: thus he placed  
 Between his parent and himself a space,  
 A gentle distance, kind but absolute.  
 With painful slowness Mary learned the best  
 He gave stemmed from his other Parentage:  
 This distant Son, once nestled on her breast,  
 Her Saviour, too. But then, from hell's black edge,  
 He speaks with filial care (redemption won)  
 And nods toward John: 'Dear woman, here's your son'.

## III

## LUKE 23.39-43

One man on Golgotha, anonymous,  
 Whose eyes still glowed with hate, devoid of fear,  
 Of love, of conscious guilt, with malice leared:  
 'Aren't you the Christ? Then save yourself – and us!  
 Another bore a gaze less venomous,  
 That stared past death and groaned, 'Do you not fear  
 The God of truth? This Christ, in torment here,  
 Is innocent. Our punishment is just!  
 Quite crushed by guilt, his eyes now see a Friend,  
 His sight improved by fledgling faith and prayer.  
 'Remember me', his eyes and voice cry, 'when  
 You come into your kingdom'. Soldiers stare.  
 This man outlived his guilt. He heard the Christ:  
 'Today you'll be with me in Paradise.'

## IV

## MATTHEW 27.45-46

The darkness fought, compelled the sun to flee,  
 And like a conqu'ring army swiftly trod  
 Across the land, blind fear this despot's rod.  
 The noon-day dark illumined tyranny.  
 Still worse, abandonment by Deity  
 Brought black despair more deadly than the blood  
 That ran off with his life. 'My God, my God',  
 Cried Jesus, 'why have you forsaken me?'  
 The silence thundered. Heaven's quiet reigned  
 Supreme, a shocking, deaf'ning, haunting swell.  
 Because from ans'ring Jesus, God refrained,  
 I shall not cry, as he, this cry from hell.  
 The cry of desolation, black as night,  
 Shines forth across the world in brilliant light.

## V

## JOHN 19.28f

'If any man is thirsty, let him come  
 To me and drink' – this drink that can't be sold  
 Or bought, thirst-quenching nectar, spirit gold,  
 This fountain out of heaven, giv'n, not won.  
 Beyond all praise, beyond all princely sum,  
 The heav'nly draught bestows a wealth untold,  
 The life of God. The thirsty may be bold  
 To claim the gift held out by God's own Son.  
 A drink so rich could not be wholly free:  
 Fulfilling Scripture, Jesus speaks again:  
 He gives the draught – transcendent irony –  
 Who whispers, 'I am thirsty', through his pain  
 A human thing, this agony of thirst  
 By which the arid chains of death were burst.

VI

JOHN 19.30

The Triune God, in all-wise counsel, knows  
The deathly choice will damn the rebel brood.  
Unable to ignore, unwilling to  
Destroy, he plots a pardon for his foes.  
Degenerating in the troubled flows  
Of time's relentless tide, the rebels' mood  
Fails to discern this plan both wise and good:  
The Son will don the race to take its blows.  
    His humble life, the suffering of his way –  
    Indifference and rejection, treason, greed –  
    His lonely, violent death, the price he paid,  
    Articulate in lurid dress our need.  
The words triumphant, 'It is finished!', ring  
Proclaiming perfect pardon from the King.

VII

LUKE 23.44-46

Behind the heavy curtain was the room  
Where none except the designated priest  
Dared go – and then but yearly, on the Feast.  
Death threatened all who brashly might presume.  
With warm lamb's blood, drawn from the mortal wound,  
Unwilling victim dead, the holy priest  
Sought on behalf of sinners full release  
Before the Presence shrouded in the gloom.  
    Outside, the willing Victim calling to  
    His Father, 'To your hands I now commit  
    My spirit', signalled to the watching few  
    The sins the holy God would now remit.  
The Lamb breathed out his last, the curtain torn:  
The Priest provides bright access to the Lord.