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Moral Discourse

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MORAL DISCOURSE

There were these three prisoners. All three had heads on their shoulders. The fact that they were prisoners didn't mean they were stupid. Indeed, they had a serious talk. At least, two of them did. The third mostly kept his mouth shut while the others spoke about him. He was widely held to be innocent, the victim of injustice and, what's more, was said to be some sort of wise man.

That riled the first one, who grumbled, "If you're so smart, why didn't you do something to get us out of this?"

But the second one interrupted, "Well, we did do what they say we did. Let's face it: we deserve this, we really can't complain. So why whine? But this guy's different. He ought to complain. Yet he's taking it like a man."

This conversation went on while all three were dying on crosses. They pondered what might have been and what could be; they mulled over innocence, guilt, and responsibility while nails were tearing into their flesh.

At least, that's what Luke says. But Luke, or whoever wrote those words, never says anything about pain. Surely, there must have been pain, excruciating pain. Yet Luke overlooks it. Instead, he focuses upon moral issues, philosophical problems, sober (if occasionally grumpy) discourse. This is how he views the scene. Others might see it otherwise.

For instance, when Jesus tells the second prisoner, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise," someone might wonder why he didn't make that same promise to the first guy who did, after all, raise a genuinely provocative issue and hadn't bothered with flattery. But another observer here might be conscious only of the pain. And someone else might ask, "In such a situation, what's the point of discussing anything?"