

LIBRETTO

Passion according to St. Luke (1775)

1. Chorale

Lord, strengthen me to contemplate your suffering,
to immerse myself in the sea of love
that moved you to redeem us
from all blame of evil!

2. Recitative

EVANGELIST. And he came out, and went, as he was wont,
to the Mount of Olives; and his disciples also followed
him. And when he was at the place, he said unto them,

JESUS. Pray that ye enter not into temptation.

EVANGELIST. And he was withdrawn from them about a
stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, saying,

JESUS. Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from
me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.

EVANGELIST. And there appeared an angel unto him
from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony he
prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great
drops of blood falling down to the ground.

3. Chorale

Give me strength, Lord, through your suffering
in my last agony of death!
Your bloody sweat shall comfort and refresh,
when the burden of sins greatly oppresses me.

4. Recitative

EVANGELIST. And when he rose up from prayer, and was
come to his disciples, he found them sleeping for sorrow,
and said unto them,

JESUS. Why sleep ye? rise and pray, lest ye enter into
temptation.

EVANGELIST. And while he yet spake, behold a multi-
tude, and he that was called Judas, one of the twelve, went
before them, and drew near unto Jesus to kiss him. But
Jesus said unto him,

JESUS. Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?

EVANGELIST. When they which were about him saw
what would follow, they said unto him,

CHORUS. Lord, shall we smite with the sword?

EVANGELIST. And one of them smote the servant of the
high priest, and cut off his right ear. And Jesus answered
and said,

JESUS. Suffer ye thus far.

EVANGELIST. And he touched his ear, and healed him.

Then Jesus said unto the chief priests, and captains of the
temple, and the elders, which were come to him,

JESUS. Be ye come out, as against a thief, with swords
and staves? When I was daily with you in the temple, ye
stretched forth no hands against me: but this is your hour,
and the power of darkness.

5. Aria

Hell arms itself for the war,
it rejoices terribly.

O hell, rejoice over no victories;
the Son triumphs over you.

The stronger will triumph.

You will behold the victor.

To parade you out in triumph,
he will soon rise again.

6. Recitative

EVANGELIST. Then took they him, and led him, and
brought him into the high priest's house. And Peter fol-
lowed afar off. And when they had kindled a fire in the
midst of the hall, and were set down together, Peter sat
down among them. But a certain maid beheld him as he
sat by the fire, and earnestly looked upon him, and said,

WOMAN. This man was also with him.

EVANGELIST. And he denied him, saying,

PETER. Woman, I know him not.

EVANGELIST. And after a little while another saw him,
and said,

FIRST MAN. Thou art also of them.

EVANGELIST. And Peter said,
 PETER. Man, I am not.
 EVANGELIST. And about the space of one hour after another confidently affirmed, saying,
 SECOND MAN. Of a truth this fellow also was with him: for he is a Galilaeen.
 EVANGELIST. And Peter said,
 PETER. Man, I know not what thou sayest.
 EVANGELIST. And immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew. And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.

7. Aria—Accompanied Recitative—Aria

I lift my gaze,
 God, toward your heaven!
 Look down upon my remorse,
 see, how I am frightened!

I, I denied you often with my sins!
 Ah, all of them can already be found
 in the book of judgment.
 My life has flown by in the service of vanity.
 Ah God, might I yet take it upon myself
 to plead with you for mercy?
 Forgive me all my sins!
 I wish to tread the path of sinners no longer.

You shall find comfort and mercy.
 Only seek out my countenance!
 I do not think of your sins
 or misdeeds.

8. Recitative

EVANGELIST. And the men that held Jesus mocked him, and smote him. And when they had blindfolded him, they struck him on the face, and asked him, saying,
 CHORUS. Prophecy, who is it that smote thee?
 EVANGELIST. And many other things blasphemously spake they against him. And as soon as it was day, the elders of the people and the chief priests and the scribes came together, and led him into their council, saying,
 CHORUS. Art thou the Christ? tell us.

9. Chorale

Into the hands of sinners
 God's lamb is delivered,
 that your downfall might be averted.
 Jews and heathen bear him ill will
 and refuse this stone
 which should be their cornerstone.
 Ah, this righteous one suffers
 for the wicked servants of sin.

10. Recitative

EVANGELIST. And he said unto them,
 JESUS. If I tell you, ye will not believe: if I also ask you, ye will not answer me, nor let me go. Hereafter shall the Son of man sit on the right hand of the power of God.

11. Aria

Now, disciples, I go forth into my father's kingdom,
 and you must still suffer for my sake.
 Yet open your heart
 to as-yet-unfelt joys:
 the spirit of the Father,
 the comforter, comes to you.

12. Recitative

EVANGELIST. Then said they all,
 CHORUS. Art thou then the Son of God?
 EVANGELIST. And he said unto them,
 JESUS. Ye say that I am.
 EVANGELIST. And they said,
 CHORUS. What need we any further witness? for we ourselves have heard of his own mouth.
 EVANGELIST. And the whole multitude of them arose, and led him unto Pilate. And they began to accuse him, saying,
 CHORUS. We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that he himself is Christ a King.
 EVANGELIST. Pilate asked him, saying,
 PILATE. Art thou the King of the Jews?
 EVANGELIST. And he answered him and said,
 JESUS. Thou sayest it.
 EVANGELIST. Then said Pilate to the chief priests and to the people,
 PILATE. I find no fault in this man.

13. Chorale

No, indeed, truly no!
He is without sin;
yet the agony mankind
should justly feel,
the sickness, fear and sorrow
rightly due us,
these it is that led him
up to the cross on high.

14. Recitative

EVANGELIST. And they were the more fierce, saying,
CHORUS. He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout
all Jewry, beginning from Galilee to this place.

EVANGELIST. When Pilate heard of Galilee, he asked
whether the man were a Galilaean. And as soon as he
knew that he belonged unto Herod's jurisdiction, he sent
him to Herod, who himself also was at Jerusalem at that
time. And when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceeding glad:
for he was desirous to see him of a long season, because
he had heard many things of him; and he hoped to have
seen some miracle done by him. Then he questioned
with him in many words; but he answered him nothing.
And the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently
accused him. And Herod with his men of war set him at
nought, and mocked him, and arrayed him in a gorgeous
robe, and sent him again to Pilate. And the same day
Pilate and Herod were made friends together: for before
they were at enmity between themselves. And Pilate, when
he had called together the chief priests and the rulers and
the people, said unto them,

PILATE. Ye have brought this man unto me, as one that
perverteth the people: and, behold, I, having examined
him before you, have found no fault in this man touching
those things whereof ye accuse him: No, nor yet Herod:
for I sent you to him; and, lo, nothing worthy of death is
done unto him. I will therefore chastise him, and release
him.

EVANGELIST. (For of necessity he must release one unto
them at the feast.) And they cried out all at once, saying,

CHORUS. Away with this man, and release unto us Barab-
bas:

EVANGELIST. (Who for a certain sedition made in the
city, and for murder, was cast into prison.) Pilate therefore,
willing to release Jesus, spake again to them. But they cried,
saying,

CHORUS. Crucify him, crucify him.

15. Chorale

You bear the punishment of wrongdoers
and have never sinned,
you, the righteous, God's son;
so was it foretold.
The brazen crowd lusts for your blood.
Divinely great, you endure the fury,
in order to save souls.
Your murderer, Jesus, was I too,
for God cast the guilt of all upon you,
that we might have peace.

16. Recitative

EVANGELIST. And he said unto them the third time,
PILATE. Why, what evil hath he done? I have found no
cause of death in him: I will therefore chastise him, and
let him go.

EVANGELIST. And they were instant with loud voices, re-
quiring that he might be crucified. And the voices of them
and of the chief priests prevailed. And Pilate gave sen-
tence that it should be as they required. And he released
unto them him that for sedition and murder was cast into
prison, whom they had desired; but he delivered Jesus to
their will.

17. Aria

Surrounded by the pack of evildoers
he complains, and the complaint is unto his God;
God is angry, and his thunders menace.
The Shepherd is struck down by him;
all his torments strike him:
his wrath breaks his bones.

18. Recitative

EVANGELIST. And as they led him away, they laid hold
upon one Simon, a Cyrenian, coming out of the country,
and on him they laid the cross, that he might bear it after
Jesus. And there followed him a great company of people,
and of women, which also bewailed and lamented him. But
Jesus turning unto them said,

JESUS. Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep
for yourselves, and for your children. For, behold, the days
are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the bar-
ren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which
never gave suck. Then shall they begin to say to the moun-
tains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us. For if they do
these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?

19. Trio

In silent tears I wish to lament,
God Creator, Lord, over my days!
How terrible for me the sinner it will be!

I have betrayed my Lord.
For all my misdeeds
must I see the Holy One suffer?
How terrible for me the sinner it will be!

In his scales of justice
God takes the measure of all my days:
How terrible for me the sinner it will be!

The Righteous One bears this all,
and we, we are useless servants.
How terrible for me the sinner it will be!

20. Recitative

EVANGELIST. And there were also two other, malefactors, led with him to be put to death. And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left. Then said Jesus,
JESUS. Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.

21. Chorale

Forgive me too, o Father, all sins,
and the evil I still find within me.
I am, oft overcome by flesh and blood,
separated from you.

22. Recitative

EVANGELIST. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots. And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided him, saying,
CHORUS. He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God.
EVANGELIST. And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar, and saying,
CHORUS. If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself.
EVANGELIST. And a superscription also was written over him in letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew, This Is The King Of The Jews. And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying,

FIRST MALEFACTOR. If thou be Christ, save thyself and us.

EVANGELIST. But the other answering rebuked him, saying,

SECOND MALEFACTOR. Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss.

EVANGELIST. And he said unto Jesus,

SECOND MALEFACTOR. Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.

EVANGELIST. And Jesus said unto him,

JESUS. Verily I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with me in paradise.

23. Chorale

When finally I shall enter
the joys of your kingdom,
then shall this blood be my purple robe;
I wish to clothe myself in it.
It shall be my head's crown,
in which I wish to go before the throne
of the highest Father,
and for you, to whom he promised me,
like a richly adorned bride
to stand at your side.

24. Recitative

EVANGELIST. And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. And the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst. And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said,

JESUS. Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit:

EVANGELIST. and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.

25. Accompanied Recitative—Chorus—
Accompanied Recitative

The Holy One departed:
rebels, retreat! Flee, murderers, flee!
The sun refuses to shine:
flee, you unholy ones! Can you still shed tears?
No, no tears, weep blood!
Weep for yourselves, curse your rage!
The earth trembles,
the abyss is shaken:
Flee into the hills!
Hide yourselves and tremble!
He dies!
The God-man goes up to Golgotha;
here the Divine One dies!
And what did he do?

We went like wandering sheep;
we had deserved malediction and death:
yet he bore our guilt and punishment,
and now we are reconciled with God.

I sinned like all my forebears:
and you, you died like an evildoer!
I wish to draw near to your cross,
Crucified One, I worship you!
Let me find life through your death!
You have been victorious;
and I wish to overcome through you.
The word from the cross shall be my wisdom.
When I one day in death commend
my soul into your hands, Lord,
then may your hero's courage flow in,
and comfort and faith!
You have indeed redeemed it: now is it yours!

26. Chorus

Have mercy, you man of sorrows!
We sinners weep bitterly.
We dedicate our hearts to you:
Lamb of God, God, have mercy!

27. Chorale

O Lord, my salvation, in whose blood I believe,
I lie here before you bowed down in dust,
lose myself with grateful spirit
in your goodness.

Translation © 2017 by Ruth B. Libbey

Translator's note:

To keep the focus on the original text, the choice was made to follow the German as literally as possible. I thank Ulrich Leisinger for his kind assistance. Biblical portions are from the King James Version.