

# Jesus - a Bible in Modern English

## **A blending and paraphrase of the 4 Gospels Everything Jesus said and did by Charles Templeton**

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### **Postscript**

Chapters one and two of the Acts of the Apostles.

### **Genealogy of Jesus**

Several accounts have been written about the beginnings of our faith, each being an attempt to compile an accurate record from all the facts passed on by eyewitnesses and disciples. And I - having made a thorough examination of all evidence for some time now - decided to write an orderly account of it all so that you may have before you the truth about the things you have been told.

1. - the introduction to the gospel according to Luke.

The gospel is addressed to "the most excellent Theophilus" who may have been a convert. The Greek word means, "loved by God."

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### Prologue of the Gospels

Jesus Christ is and always has been what God has to say to mankind. He is eternal and he is God. All creation exists because of him. He is life, and his life is a light to show us the way - a light that nothing can extinguish.

At a point in time, God sent a man named John to announce that the light was then coming into the world. John was not himself that light, he was the herald of its coming, so that through him everyone might believe.

Jesus came to the world, and though the world owed its existence to him, it did not recognize him. He came to his own people and they did not recognize him. He came to his own people and they did not welcome him. But to those who did - those who put their faith in him - he gave the authority to be members of God's family; not through ancestry or sexual passion or choice but because they had been adopted by God.

Jesus - God's communication - became a human being and lived briefly among us. We actually saw his glory; the splendor of the only son God ever fathered, the embodiment of all love and truth. When John

announced his coming he said, "He's the one of whom I said, 'Here's my successor; he existed before I was born.' "

We are, all of us, the beneficiaries of his kindness - bounty heaped on bounty - because, although the Law came to us through Moses, love and truth came to us through Jesus Christ.

No one has ever seen God, but he has been revealed to us by his only son, who has now returned to his side.

## CHAPTER ONE

### **An angel appears to Zachariah - the announcement to Mary - Mary and Joseph are married - the visit to Elizabeth - John the Baptist is born.**

During the reign of Herod the Great there lived in the province of Judea a priest of the Order of Abijah by the name of Zachariah. His wife's name was Elizabeth, and they shared a common ancestor, the High Priest, Aaron. They were a deeply religious couple and zealous in the practice of their faith. The major disappointment in their lives was that they were childless - Elizabeth being barren - and had now grown old.

It was common practice among the Abijah priests when it was their turn to serve in the temple to draw lots to determine what duties each would undertake. On this particular day it was Zachariah's responsibility to go into the temple to burn incense. The usual crowd of worshipers remained outside, praying.

In the midst of his duties he was suddenly overcome with fear: to the right of the altar he saw an angel. The angel spoke to him.

"Don't be afraid, Zachariah, your prayers have been heard. Your wife is going to have a child and you are to name him John. His birth will be a time of great celebration because he is destined to be one of God's great men. He will never touch liquor, and will be controlled by God's spirit

even before his birth. He will be a messenger of God, with the strength and power of the prophet Elijah, reconciling parents and their children and restoring deserters to their faith. His mission will be to prepare a people for their Lord."

"But I am an old man," Zachariah said, "and Elizabeth is old. Are you sure?"

"I am Gabriel," the angel said, "and I have come directly from the presence of God to bring you this good news. But you do not believe me. So, from now until all I have said has happened, you will be dumb. Put your faith in God, Zachariah; in due time it will all come true."

In the meantime, the crowd waiting outside was growing impatient. Why was he so long delayed? When finally he did appear it was obvious that he had seen a vision. When he tried to speak, no sound came, so he communicated to them through gestures.

Afterward, when he had finished his duties in the temple, he went home.

It was not long before Elizabeth became pregnant. She kept the fact from her relatives and friends until the fifth month.

"How good God has been to me," she told them when she broke the news. "He has taken away the embarrassment I felt, and my sense of shame at being childless."

At the same time, in the town of Nazareth, in the province of Galilee, there lived a virgin by the name of Mary. She was Elizabeth's cousin and was engaged to a building contractor by the name of Joseph, a direct descendant of the ancient King of Israel, David.

When Elizabeth was in the sixth month of her pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Mary.

"Greetings, Mary," the angel said. "How favored you are! The Lord is with you."

Mary was puzzled. "I am favored by God? I don't understand."

"There is no need to be frightened, Mary," the angel said. "You have pleased God and he has chosen you. You are going to have a baby, a son. You are to name him Jesus. He will become a great man and will be called the Son of the Highest. God is going to place him on David's throne and he will reign over the House of Jacob forever."

"How can that be?" she asked. "I'm not married and I'm a virgin. . ."

"God's spirit will come upon you, his power will hover over you as a shining cloud, and your child will be God's holy son. Think of your cousin, Elizabeth - the one they call the Barren One. You know how old she is and you know she has never had children; she is now six months pregnant. God can do anything."

"I am his servant," Mary said. "Let it happen." And the angel left her.

Before they were married, Joseph learned that Mary was pregnant. He was an honorable man, and not wanting to see her publicly disgraced, he planned to break off the engagement quietly. While he was considering what course to follow, he had a dream and in the dream an angel appeared.

"Joseph, you must be not afraid to marry Mary," the angel said. "Her child was conceived by God's spirit. When he is born you are to name him Jesus, which means 'Savior,' because it is he who will save his people from their sins."

All of these events were the fulfillment of a prediction by the prophet Isaiah who, hundreds of years earlier, had written:

There! - a virgin shall have a child.

The child shall be a son  
And the son shall be called Immanuel. <sup>1</sup>

When Joseph awoke he did as he had been told. He married Mary but had no sexual relations with her until the baby was born.

Early in her pregnancy Mary went to Judea to visit Elizabeth. As they came face to face, Elizabeth felt her baby move within her.

"Oh Mary," she cried, "how marvelously God has blessed you, singling you out from all the women of the world. And how he has blessed your baby! And how honored I am; having my Lord's mother in my home. Mary, the moment you said hello I felt my baby move. How happy is the women who trusts God to keep his promises!"

Mary replied with an outburst of thanksgiving:

"All that is within me praises God, my savior.  
My heart overflows with happiness.  
For he has designed to notice me - a nobody -  
And now, forever, the world will recall my good  
fortune  
And think of me as the woman God favored!  
The almighty has done great things for me. . .  
Holy is his name!  
Through every generation and from age to age  
He has shown kindness to those who revere him.  
How mighty his arm is!  
How he routs the proud and the haughty!  
How he deposes kings and elevates the ordinary!  
The hungry approach and he satisfies them-  
But the rich go away empty-handed.  
And now he has come to Israel's help!

His promise of mercy has not been forgotten:  
The promises he made to our forefathers.  
To Abraham and his descendants. . .  
Forever and forever."

Mary stayed on with Elizabeth and Zachariah for three months and then returned home to Nazareth.

Elizabeth's baby was born. When the word went out that she had had a son, her home was filled with relatives and friends celebrating God's goodness.

When the baby was eight days old, they took him to the temple to have him circumcised. The relatives assumed that the child would be named Zachariah after his father, but Elizabeth said, "No, he's to be named John."

They turned to Zachariah, making signs, and asked him to indicate the name he wanted. He gestured for something to write on, and they handed him a writing tablet. To their surprise he wrote, "His name is John." As he did, his voice was restored and, filled with God's spirit, he began to shout:

"Praise be to God!  
Thanks be to the Lord of Israel!  
He has come to us to bring deliverance.  
He has raised up a mighty Helper,  
The very author of salvation  
For all the descendants of his servant, David.  
It is just as the holy prophets predicted  
From even the most ancient time:  
That we would be delivered from our enemies  
And from those who persecute us.

God has confirmed his covenant of compassion,  
The pledge to Abraham and his heirs,  
That, having been delivered from our enemies,  
We might serve him without fear  
And grow to goodness and to righteousness,  
Living each day of our lives in his presence.

"And you, my little son:  
You shall be called 'The Prophet of The Highest.'  
You shall be a herald for our Lord,  
Preparing the way for him,  
Teaching salvation through forgiveness to his people,  
Through the loving compassion of our God.

"Heaven's dawn is about to break  
Bringing light to those in darkness,  
To those beneath Death's shadow.  
It will light our feet in the path of peace."

The neighbors were filled with a sense of awe. The events of the day were repeated throughout the hill country of Judea. When they heard the story, people were amazed.

"Who will this baby grow to be?" they asked, for it was obvious that God's power was with him.

The years passed and John grew physically and spiritually. He left home and went out to the desert country where he lived alone until the time came to begin his public ministry.

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(1) Immanuel means "God is with us."

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## CHAPTER TWO

**The birth of Jesus - the dedication in Jerusalem - the astrologers follow the star to Jesus - the escape to Egypt - the return to Palestine - Jesus grows up in Nazareth.**

Toward the end of Mary's pregnancy the Emperor Caesar Augustus decreed that a census be taken of the Roman Empire and ordered every one to return to his home town to be registered. Since Joseph was a descendant of David, he went with Mary to Bethlehem - "King David's town."

While they were there, she went into labor and her son was born. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and, because they hadn't been able to get a room at the inn, made a bed for him in a manger.

In the fields outside the town were some shepherds tending their sheep. Suddenly, an angel appeared in their midst, and the fields and sky shone radiantly with God's presence. The shepherds were terrified.

"Do not be alarmed," the angel said, "I have come to announced to the world the most joyful of all good news. The Messiah was come! your savior was born in Bethlehem today. You will know him because he is wrapped in swaddling cloths and his bed is in a manger."

Then suddenly, filling the sky, there was an army of angels, their voices raised in song:

"Glory to God in the highest heaven!  
And on earth, peace to those who please him."

Then, as quickly as they has appeared, the angels were gone. "Come on," said one of the shepherds. "Let's go into town. Let's see for

ourselves what's happened."

They ran into the town and found Mary and Joseph and, as they had been told, the baby in a manger. Trembling with excitement, the shepherds poured out the story of what the angel had said to them. The people in the house listened, astonished. As for Mary, she stored it all in her mind and puzzled over it, but she said nothing. Later, the shepherds went back to the fields, their hearts filled with gratitude that what the angel told them had been confirmed.

When the baby was circumcized on the eight day, he was named Jesus, the name given to him by the angel before he was conceived.

When the time came for the Mosaic ceremony of the mother's purification and the dedication of the child to God, his parents took Jesus to Jerusalem. It was a requirement of the Law that every first-born male be dedicated to God, and that to mark the occasion two turtle doves or two young pigeons be sacrificed.

When they arrived at the temple they were met by a man named Simeon. He was a good man, deeply religious and filled with the spirit of God, who lived in hope of the salvation of Israel. He lived each day in the expectation that on that day the Messiah would come: God had promised him that he would see the Messiah before he died. On this particular day, prompted by God, he went into the temple enclosure and saw Joseph and Mary with the baby. He went to them, took the baby in his arms and prayed:

"Now, oh God, I am content to die.  
To leave this world in peace.  
You have kept your covenant.  
I have been witness to the salvation  
You have prepared for all mankind:  
A light to reveal the unknown to the Gentiles,

A light to bring glory to your people, Israel."

Joseph and Mary listened, thrilled at his words. Simeon gave them his blessing and spoke to Mary. "Your child, "he said," will be the cause of the rising and the falling of many in Israel. He will create controversy and will be opposed because he will reveal men's true motives. And you, Mary, your heart is going to be wounded, as though pierced by a sword."

Also in the temple at the time was a prophetess by the name of Anna, the daughter of a man named Phanuel, a descendant of Asher. She was very old and had been a widow for eighty-four years, her husband having died after only seven years of marriage. The temple had become her home and she never left it, for she worshiped at all hours of the day and night, and sometimes fasted. She, too, came up to Joseph and Mary and said prayers of thanksgiving for the baby's birth. Afterwards, she went to all those who waited for the Messiah's coming and told them she had seen Jesus.

Some time later, a group of astrologers from an eastern country arrived in Jerusalem.

"Where may we find the infant King of Israel?" they asked. "We saw his star and have come to pay him homage."

The news of their arrival in the city and reason for their visit reached Herod and caused him no small concern. Indeed, it created a general air of apprehension in the city. Herod had the chief priests and scribes assembled and put questions to them.

"When the Messiah comes," he asked, "where is he to be born?"

"In Bethlehem," they told him, and quoted the prophecy:

*And you, Bethlehem in Judea's land,  
You are by no means the least of cities,  
A ruler shall come from you  
To govern my people, Israel.*

Herod dismisses them and summoned the visiting astrologers to a private meeting. He pressed them with questions and learned at what time they had first seen the star.

"Now," he said, "I have a mission for you. I want you to go to Bethlehem and to conduct a careful search for the child. When you've found him, send word to me and I'll come and join you in your worship."

They left Jerusalem and followed the star to Bethlehem until - as they watched with mounting excitement - it appeared to come to rest over the house where Jesus was. They went inside, and when they saw Mary with the baby, they dropped to their knees and worshiped him. From their travel bags, they took gifts made of gold and the fragrances of frankincense and myrrh.

When they left Bethlehem for their journey home they deliberately bypassed Jerusalem, having been warned in a dream to avoid Herod.

Shortly after they had gone, Joseph had a dream in which he was warned about Herod. An angel appeared and told him that Herod was about to institute a search to find and kill the child. He was therefore to take Mary and the baby and go to Egypt.

Joseph got out of bed and woke Mary. They packed some of their belongings and left the city under cover of darkness.

Once more a prophecy had been fulfilled. Hosea had written: *I have summoned my son from Egypt.*

When he received no report from the astrologers, Herod realized he had been tricked. In his rage he ordered that every boy under the age of two in the Bethlehem area be killed. (He set the age at two on the basis of what he had learned from the astrologers.)

And so the prediction of the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

*The sound of a voice in Ramah.  
An anguished wail of mourning.  
'Tis Rachel weeping for her children,  
Bereft beyond all consolation,  
For her children, her children lie dead.*

Time passed and Herod died. In Egypt, Joseph had a dream in which an angel came to him from God.

"It is time to go home," the angel said. "Take Mary and the child and return to Israel. Those who tried to murder him are dead."

As they neared the border, Joseph learned that Herod had been succeeded by his son, Archelaus. For this reason he skirted Judea, settling in a town in Galilee called Nazareth; for the prophets had said of the Messiah, *He shall be called a Nazarene.*

It was in Nazareth that Jesus spent his boyhood. He was a deeply spiritual child, wise beyond his years and with God's blessings clearly on his life.

It was the custom of Jesus' parents to go to Jerusalem each year for the Passover, and when the boy reached the age of twelve they took him along. When the festival was over, they started back to Nazareth assuming that he was with relatives or friends in the caravan. It was not until nightfall that, having looked for him for up and down the caravan, they realized he was lost. They hurried back to Jerusalem, searching for him everywhere along the road and in the city. Three days later they

found him sitting among the teachers of the law in the temple, listening to them, asking questions, astonishing them all with his grasp of the law and with the answers he gave. Even his parents were surprised at his composure.

"Why have you treated your father and me like this?" Mary said. "We've looked everywhere for you. Don't you realize that we were sick of worry?"

"But why did you search for me?" he asked. "Surely you know it's my duty to be in my father's house?"

They didn't understand.

After their return home, he was an obedient son. Mary stored all these early experiences in her memory and would often ponder them. As for Jesus, he grew older, taller and wiser, popular among his fellows and loved by God.

### CHAPTER THREE

**The preaching of John the Baptist - he predicts the ministry of Jesus - Jesus is baptized - the temptation in the desert.**

In the fifteenth year of the Emperor Tiberius Caesar's reign, when Pontius Pilate was Governor of Judea and Herod Antipas was the ruler of Galilee,<sup>2</sup> Zachariah's son John was living a hermit's life in the desert country. God spoke to him and he ended his exile. He began to travel the entire Jordan river valley, preaching that men should be baptized as an evidence that they had turned from their sins and found God's forgiveness.

"Repent," he said, "God's kingdom is here!"

John's clothing was simple: a robe woven from camels' hair with a leather belt around the waist. His food consisted of locusts and wild honey. He was the embodiment of the prophecy by Isaiah:

I shall send a herald to prepare your path  
His will be a voice shouting in the desert;  
Prepare a highway for God!  
Fill in the valleys, level the mountains,  
Straighten the twisting, smooth out the rough.  
And all men everywhere shall see God's salvation!

Enormous crowds flocked to hear him: from Jerusalem, from everywhere in Judea, and from all of the Jordan valley. When they confessed their sins, he baptized them in the river.

Some Pharisees and some Sadducees came to be baptized.

"So, you brood of snakes," he said, "somebody has warned you that the judgement is coming! Let us see, then, some evidence that you've turned from your sins. And you don't stand there in self-congratulation saying to yourselves, 'We're descendants of Abraham,' because God can make descendants of Abraham out of these stones. His axe lies at the base of the tree, so be warned; any tree that doesn't produce good fruit is going to be cut down and burned."

"What does God want of us?" someone called out from the crowd.

"If you own two coats," he said, "give one to the man who has none. If you have food, share it."

Some tax collectors asked what they must do.

"Don't collect a penny more than you've been authorized to," he told them.

When some soldiers put the same question, he told them, "Don't extort

money by violence or by threats and be content with your pay."

His preaching created enormous excitement and was the cause of much speculation; many Jews were expecting the Messiah and wondered if John were he. Knowing what was in their minds, he explained.

"My mission is to baptize you with water," he said, "but someone else is coming whose authority goes far beyond mine. I'm not even worthy to bend down and untie his sandals. When he baptizes you it will be with God's spirit and fire. He has his winnowing fork in his hand and he's about to clear his threshing floor. He's going to separate the grain from the chaff, store the grain in his barn, and burn the chaff in a fire that nothing can extinguish."

When Jesus was about thirty years old, he left Nazareth and went to the place where John was preaching, near Bethany on the far side of the Jordan. He sought John out and asked to be baptized. John was reluctant.

"Baptize you," he said, "You should baptize me."

"Do as I ask, John," Jesus said, "In doing this thing together we will be doing fully that which is right."

John consented and Jesus was baptized.

He came out of the water immediately and was praying when the sky suddenly parted. John saw the spirit of God, looking like a dove, descending on Jesus. Then, from above, a voice spoke: "This is my son. I am well pleased with him."

God's spirit then led Jesus into the desert, and for the next forty days he lived there alone except for the wild animals. He ate nothing the entire time and, when the forty days were up, was famished.

It was then the devil came to test him.

"So you're God's son," he said. "Prove it. Change this stone into a loaf of bread."

"No," Jesus said, "The scriptures teach that life is more than food; a man must also feed his spirit on God's words."

The devil then took him to Jerusalem and perched him on the highest ledge of the temple. "Now," he said, "if you really are God's son, jump. Don't you have the promise in the scripture that God will assign his angels to protect you, and they will support you so that you won't even stumble over a stone?"

"True, but there is something else in the scriptures," he said, "Don't put God to foolish tests."

Then Satan took him to the peak of a mountain from which all the nations of the world could be seen in their magnificence.

"It's all yours," he said, "All you need do is bend your knee to me."

"The scriptures teach that men must worship only God," Jesus said, "Leave me alone."

The devil went off to wait for the opportune time, and angels came and met Jesus' needs.

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(2) Herod's brother, Philip, was the ruler of Iturea and Trachonitis, Lysanius governed Abilene, and Annas and Caiaphas were the high priests. [Herod Antipas was the son of Herod the Great.]

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **John's denial that he is the Messiah - Jesus calls Andrew, Peter, Philip, and Nathaniel - the wedding in Cana.**

The leaders of Jewish community of Jerusalem sent a delegation of priests to John to question him as to his identity. One day they put the question directly.

"Tell us who you are," they said.

"If you're wondering whether I'm the Messiah," he said, "I'm not."

"Are you reincarnation of Elijah?"

"No."

"Are you the prophet?"

"No."

"Well, who are you? Tell us straight-out so that we can report back to the people who sent us."

"All I am is a voice," he said. "Just as Isaiah foresaw, I'm a voice calling out in the desert, Prepare a highway for God!"

"But if you're none of these - the Messiah or Elijah or the Prophet - why are you baptizing people?"

"I do baptize," he said, "but only with water. Out there in the crowd, standing among you, is someone you haven't yet recognized: the man who's going to take over from me and whose sandal I'm not worthy to untie."

The following day, John saw Jesus approaching and called out to the

crowd, "There he is - God's lamb, the one who will cleanse the world of sin. He's the one I was referring to when I said, 'my successor existed before I was born.' I didn't recognize him at first, didn't realize who he was, but the God who told me to baptize you with water told me that the one on whom I saw the Spirit descend would baptize with the Holy Spirit. And when I baptized this man I saw just that. I'm telling you, he is God's son."

Again the following day, as John stood talking with two of his disciples, he saw Jesus walk past.

"Look," he said, "there goes God's lamb!"

The disciples set off after Jesus. He saw them following and turned around.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"Where are you staying, Teacher?"

"Why don't you come and see."

They went with him, and since it was already around four in the afternoon, they stayed on through the day.

One of the two was called Andrew. When morning came he went looking for his brother, Simon.

"Simon," he said, "we've found the Messiah!"

He brought Simon to Jesus. Jesus looked him full in the eyes for a moment.

"So you're John's son, Simon," he said. "I'm going to give you another name - Cephas." Cephas translated means Peter, and Peter means "rock."

The following day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. Before leaving he

sought out Philip, who was from the town of Bethsaida, the same town from which Andrew and Simon Peter had come.

"Join me, Philip," he said.

Philip left to search for a friend by the name of Nathaniel.

"We've found the Messiah!" he told Nathaniel when he found him. "The man Moses and the prophets wrote about. His name is Jesus the son of Joseph, and he comes from Nazareth."

"From Nazareth! Can anything good come from Nazareth?"

"Come and see for yourself."

When Jesus saw Nathaniel approaching he called out, "Look there, an Israelite if ever there was one, and a man without an ounce of deceit in him."

"How do you know about me?" Nathaniel asked.

"Nathaniel," he said, "I saw you before Philip even spoke to you. I saw you when you were sitting under that fig tree."

"You are God's son," Nathaniel exclaimed. "You're Israel's King!"

"You have faith in me because of a little thing like that?" Jesus said.

"That's nothing to what you will see. You're going to see the skies open and God's angels coming to me and returning to heaven."

Two days later, Jesus, his mother, and his disciples went to a wedding in the town of Cana, some fifteen miles from Nazareth. During the festivities the wine ran out.

"They have run out of wine," Mary told Jesus.

"Woman," he said, "that's not our responsibility. My time to act hasn't come yet."

Nevertheless, Mary spoke to the servants. "Mind now," she said, "whatever he asks you to do, do it."

There were six stone water pots there, each with a capacity of twenty to thirty gallons, for the Jewish custom of ceremonial washing. Jesus called the servants and told them to fill them. When they were filled, he said, "Take some to the master of ceremonies."

The man tasted it and spoke to the bridegroom.

"Everybody I know serves his best wine at the beginning of the party. Then when his guests have had a few drinks, he brings out the second-rate stuff. But you've kept your best until now."

This was Jesus' first public miracle, first open demonstration of his power, and it deepened his disciples' faith.

## CHAPTER FIVE

**Jesus drives the money-changers from the temple - he predicts the resurrection - the visit of Nicodemus - John speaks of his diminishing role.**

Jesus, his family, and his disciples went to Capernaum for a brief visit and then, with the Passover approaching, continued on to Jerusalem.

There, within the temple enclosure, Jesus could see oxen and sheep and pigeons and, off to one side, the moneychangers at their stands. He took some cords, knotted them into a whip and drove the cattle and sheep out of the enclosure, overturning the money-changers' trays and flinging them aside, coins and all. Then he went to the men who sold pigeons, "Get them out of here!" he said. "How dare you turn my Father's house into a marketplace!"

As the disciples watched him, the scripture quotation came to their

minds: *My zeal for your house will consume me.*

Some of the men standing nearby said to Jesus: "By what right do you do this? Show us your authority."

"Destroy this temple," he said, "and I'll rebuild it in three days."

"Three days!" they said. "It took forty-six years to build it and you're going to rebuild it in three days?"

What they did not realize was that when Jesus used the word "temple" he was referring to the temple that was his body. It was only after he rose from the grave that the disciples remembered his statement and realized its significance.

While Jesus was in Jerusalem for the Passover, a considerable number of people, impressed by what he said and did, professed to become his disciples. He refused to commit himself to them, however. It was not that anyone informed him about them; it was simply that he understood human nature and knew their motives.

One night he had an important visitor, a leader in the Jewish community, a Pharisee by the name of Nicodemus.

"Sir," Nicodemus began, "there's no doubt in many of our minds that you are a teacher sent by God. Nobody could possibly do the miraculous things you do if he weren't."

"Then let me impress this on you," Jesus said. "Unless a man is born a second time he'll never see the kingdom of heaven."

"But I don't understand. How can a grown man be born? Are you suggesting that he can enter his mother's womb a second time and be born?"

"The fact is that if the man isn't born of water and of the spirit he can't get in to the kingdom. He is flesh because he is born of flesh, he will be

spirit if he's born of the Spirit. It shouldn't be too great a mystery to you, my telling you that you must be born twice. Are you mystified by the wind? you can hear it but you don't know where it comes from or where it's going. Spiritual birth is like that."

"But how? I don't understand?"

Jesus looked at him. "You are a teacher of the people and you can't grasp such things? The truth is we don't teach theory; we speak from experience, about things we've seen, but you don't accept that. And if you don't accept what I say when I tell you about things here on earth, what chance is there that you will understand when I speak of the mysteries of the heaven? No one has been to heaven other than the son of man. And, just as Moses raised that replica of a snake over the head of the Israelites, so the son of man must be raised over the heads of men today so that anyone who puts his faith in him will live forever.

"God's love for the world is so great that he gave up the only son he ever had so that anyone who commits himself to his son will live forever. He didn't send his son to the world to condemn it but to save it. Trust his son and you escape judgement: don't, and you stand condemned. And the reason for that condemnation is simply that when light came to world, some, because they were evil, preferred the dark. Evil men avoid the light because it exposes them, but those who live by the truth welcome it: it makes it clear that what they have done has been accomplished with God's help."

When Jesus and his disciples left Jerusalem, they went to place in Judea not far from Aenon to baptize some converts. John was baptizing at Aenon - there being lots of water there - and some of his disciples got into an argument with a man about ritual cleansing. They went to John.

"Teacher," they said, "that man who was with you at the Jordan crossing - you know, the one you praised so highly - well, he's baptizing people

not far from here and everybody's going over to him."

"A man should be content with his lot," John told them. "Where do things come from but from heaven? You yourself heard me say that I'm not the Messiah. My job is to introduce the Messiah, nothing more. The bride isn't for the best man, she's for the bridegroom. The best man is happy if the bridegroom is happy. That's how it is with me: I'm content. He must become increasingly prominent and I must fade away.

"He came from above and he's above everything. My beginnings were here in this world and what can I know other than things related to this world? Yet although he's saying only those things he knows by experience, hardly anyone believes him. Those who do, though, are a demonstration of the truth of God. Jesus was sent here by God and he speaks God's words - the authentic words. God didn't dole out his Spirit to him! The father loves his son and has entrusted everything to him. Commit yourselves to him and you'll live forever; reject him and there's no life for you. Indeed, you'll live your under God's anger."

## CHAPTER SIX

**John is arrested - the Samaritan woman at the well - the healing of the government official's son - Jesus settles in Capernaum.**

Word came to Jesus that John had been arrested and was in prison in Jerusalem. In his sermons John had frequently denounced Herod for marrying his sister-in-law, Herodias, and had spoken out against many other injustices perpetrated by the king. Now Herod had added to his unsavory record by putting John in prison.

At approximately the same time, Jesus learned that the Pharisees had been informed that he was winning and baptizing more converts than John. (Actually, Jesus himself baptized no one; his disciples performed the rite.) He therefore left Judea and headed for Galilee, which

necessitated passing through the province of Samaria.

They arrived at the village of Sychar about noon. The disciples went into town to buy food while Jesus, weary from the journey, sat down to rest beside what is known as "Jacob's Well," since it is near the property Jacob had given to his son Joseph many years ago. A Samaritan woman came to the well to draw water.

"Give me a drink, please," he said.

Now the Jews despised the Samaritans, so the woman looked at him suspiciously. "How is it that you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan, for a drink?"

"If you knew who I am and what God has for you, you'd have asked *me* for a drink and I would have given you living water."

"But you haven't even got a bucket and this is a deep well. Where are you going to get this 'living water'? Are you suggesting that you're a greater man than our forefather Jacob who gave us this well and drank from it himself, as did his family and his livestock?"

"Drink this water and you'll be thirsty again. But anyone drinking the water I have will never be thirsty again. Indeed, it will become a spring, welling up within into a life that never ends."

"I'd like some of that water, sir. Give me some so that I'll never have to come here again and never be thirsty again."

"Go get your husband."

"I don't have one."

"That's the truth. You've had five, and the one you're living with now isn't your husband."

"I see you're a prophet," she said. "All right, our ancestors have

worshiped here on this hillside for generations, but you Jews insist that the only proper place to worship God is in Jerusalem."

"Listen to me, woman," Jesus said, "the time is coming when it won't make the slightest difference *where* God is worshiped. You Samaritans don't comprehend whom you worship, but we do - and don't forget, the world is to be saved through the Jews. The time is coming, it's here now, when men will worship God in the way he wants: in their hearts and in their daily lives. The Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is a spirit and those who worship him can only do so in spirit and in reality."

"Oh, I know that the Messiah is coming - the one they call the Christ - and when he comes he'll explain everything."

"I am he." Jesus said.

It was at this point that the disciples returned from the town. They were surprised to find Jesus talking with the woman but said nothing. As for the woman, she rushed off to the town, forgetting her water jar.

"Come with me!" she said to everyone she met. "You must see this man. He told me all my past. I think he's the Messiah!"

Soon a crowd had joined her.

Meanwhile, the disciples were urging Jesus to have something to eat.

"I have food you don't know about," he told them. They looked at each other, wondering whether someone had brought him lunch. He turned to them.

"Listen to me carefully," he said. "Don't make the mistake of thinking that the harvest time is sometime in the future. Look about you: the fields are ripe *now*. The man who reaps now will not only be rewarded for his effort but will also be harvesting for the life to come. He and the

man who did the planting will celebrate together. That old saying is true: "One man plants, another harvests." You, for instance, are being sent out to harvest a crop you didn't plant. Others did the work, you get the benefit."

The crowd from town arrived. Some of them, who believed in him because of what the woman had said, begged him to stay on in the town. He stayed for two days, and as a result, many more became believers. As they said to the woman later: "We believe he's the Christ, the Savior of the world, not only because of what you told us, but because we heard him for ourselves."

When the two days had passed, Jesus left Sychar and pressed on toward Galilee, although he himself had said that a prophet may be honored anywhere but in his own country. But in his own Galileans welcomed him, since they remembered what he'd done in Jerusalem during the Passover.

When Jesus arrived in Cana, he was met by a government official from Capernaum. This man, having learned that Jesus was heading for Galilee, had gone to Cana hoping to intercept him and persuade him to go to Capernaum to heal his dying son.

"You want to see miracles," Jesus said, "or you won't believe."

The man was not deterred. "Please, sir," he said, "come with me. Please, before he dies."

"Go home in peace," he said. "Your son will live."

The man trusted him and started for Capernaum. He was still on the road when some of his servants met him.

"He's alive! Your son's alive," they said.

"When did the change for the better begin?" he asked.

"Yesterday afternoon. About one."

He knew that had been the time when Jesus had told him his son would live, and he and his entire household became followers.

Jesus and the disciples finally arrived in Capernaum, a city on the shore of Lake Galilee in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali. By settling there he fulfilled the prediction by the prophet Isaiah:

*Zebulun and Naphtali,  
Beyond Jordan toward the sea. . .  
Tiara of the Gentiles.  
Those whose days were dark  
Have seen a great light.  
On those who dwelt in the shadow of death  
That light has dawned.*

## CHAPTER SEVEN

**Demon-possession cured in the synagogue - Peter's mother-in-law is healed - the miraculous catch of fish - Simon, Andrew, James, and John become disciples - Jesus returns to Nazareth and is rejected - a palsied man is healed - Matthew becomes a disciple.**

The Sabbath came and Jesus taught in the synagogue. The ring of authority in his words made a deep impression on the congregation. In the midst of the service there was an interruption. Among those gathered was a man possessed by a devil, and it suddenly let out a deep and strangled cry: "What have we to do with you, Jesus of Nazareth? We know you, you're God's holy one. Have you come here to destroy us?"

"Quiet!" Jesus commanded. "Come out of him!"

The man writhed in a convulsion. With a loud shriek the demon left

him.

There was consternation in the synagogue. Everyone turned to his neighbor, questioning.

"What's going on?" they asked.

"What is this - some new religion?"

"Did you see the authority with which he controlled that devil?"

All this was done to fulfill the prediction by the prophet Isaiah:

*Our infirmities he assumed,*

*Our illnesses he bore.*

After the service Jesus was invited home by Simon and Andrew. James and John had been asked, also. When they arrived, they found Simon's mother-in-law burning with a fever. They told Jesus and he went to her bedside. As he took her by the hand and raised her, her fever disappeared and she got up and prepared the food.

That evening, just before sunset, a crowd gathered outside the house. It seemed the whole town was there and that everyone who had a sick relative or friend had brought him. Some among the sick were possessed by demons. Jesus went out and walked through the crowd, putting his hands on the sick and healing them and driving out the devils. Some of the demons recognized him, and when they came out, shrieked, "You're God's son!" He ordered them to be silent.

In the morning he went for a walk along the shore of Lake Galilee and was soon followed by a crowd. Two boats were pulled up on the shore, and the men who owned them were standing in the water washing their nets. One of the men was Simon. Jesus got into Simon's boat and had him push it out from the shore so that he could sit in it and talk to the crowd.

When he had finished teaching, he said to Simon, "Put out to where the water is deeper and cast your nets."

"But we've been fishing all night, sir, and haven't caught a thing," Simon said. "However if you say, so, we'll give it another try."

They pulled some distance away from the shore and cast their nets. As they began to haul them in they realized that they had encompassed a huge school of fish, so large that the nets began to rip. They signaled frantically for their partners James and John to bring the other boat. When finally they got the fish aboard, both boats were filled to the scuppers and in danger of foundering. It suddenly dawned on Simon what had been happening and he flung himself down at Jesus' feet.

"Go away, sir!" he said. "I'm too wicked a man. . ."

"Don't worry, Simon," he said. "In the future your catch will be men."

When the boats had been beached, Jesus turned to Simon and Andrew. "Come and join me," he said.

They left everything - boats, gear, nets and fish - and followed him.

James and John were in their boat with their father Zebedee, repairing their nets. As Jesus passed he called out, "Come and join me, men."

They, too, turned their backs on everything and followed him.

Next morning, hours before dawn, Jesus got out of bed and walked alone to an isolated place to pray. Simon and some others who had been searching for him finally found him.

"Everybody's looking for you," Simon said.

"I know," he said. "But we must move on. I've got to preach the good

news in other towns as well. That's what I've been sent to do."

Jesus traveled all over Galilee. He taught in the synagogues. He preached the good news of the kingdom and healed every kind of disease and infirmity: even epilepsy and paralysis. He exorcised demons. Everywhere he went he was followed by enormous crowds: men and women from Galilee, from the Decapolis, from Judea, from Jerusalem, from the far side of the Jordan, and from as far away as the seacoast cities of Tyre and Sidon.

Eventually Jesus returned to his boyhood home of Nazareth and on the sabbath, as was his custom, went to synagogue. He stood up in the congregation to read, and the attendant handed him the scroll of the book of Isaiah. He unrolled it until he found the place and then he read:

*"God's spirit rests upon me.  
He has anointed me to tell the good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to announce liberty to the prisoners,  
To the blind, the restoration of their sight,  
To the oppressed, freedom from their bonds,  
And to proclaim the day of grace God has set."*

He rolled up the scroll, handed it to the attendant, and sat down. Every eye was fixed on him.

"Today," he said, "here in your presence, that prediction has been fulfilled."

But he was able to accomplish little, other than to put his hands on a few and heal them. He was astonished at their disbelief; although some were impressed, said complementary things about him, and remarked about the grace of his speech.

"But how does he come by all this?" the people said to each other. "How can he do what he does? Isn't he Joseph's son? We know his mother, his

brothers, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas, and his sisters. Where does he get all this?"

They began to feel offended.

Jesus looked at them. "I suppose," he said, "You are going to quote the proverb to me, 'Doctor, heal yourself.' 'Let's see you do here what they say you did in Capernaum.' How true it is that a prophet may be honored everywhere but in his home town or among his relatives or in his home.

"Let me remind you of some history," he said. "Back in Elijah's time - at the time of the great drought when it didn't rain for three and a half years - there was a famine. Bear in mind that at that time there were many widows in Israel. But was Elijah sent to help them? No, he was sent to a widow who lived in Zarepath in Sidon - a Gentile.

"Back in Elijah's time there were many lepers in Israel. Did Elijah heal any of them? No, the only leper he healed was Naaman, and he was a Syrian."

The congregation was in an uproar. His words has enraged them. They seized him and dragged him out of town to the brow of the hill on which Nazareth is built. They were ready to pitch him over the edge when he slipped through their hands and got away.

Some days later he returned to Capernaum. Word spread through the city that he was back, and the people came flocking, jamming the house until they spilled out of the door. Among those inside were some Pharisees and some teachers of the Law.

Outside, four men, carrying a man paralyzed with the palsy on his sleeping-mat, were trying to get in the house to set the man in front of Jesus. The crowd was too great, so they climbed to the roof, carrying the

man with them, and removed enough of the tiles to permit them to lower him into the middle of the room where Jesus was teaching. He saw what an act of faith had been performed and spoke to the sick man. "Cheer up, my son," he said. "Your sins are forgiven."

The scribes and the Pharisees muttered to each other, "That's blasphemy! Who does he think he is? Nobody but God can forgive sins."

Jesus sensed their hostility. "Why are your thoughts so evil?" he said. "I put this question to you: which is easier, to tell a man that his sins have been forgiven or to tell a man with the palsy to get up, pick up his sleeping-mat, and leave? I ask you, which is easier? And now, to make it clear to you that the son of man is authorized here on earth to forgive sins. . ." He turned to the man with the palsy. "Get up," he said. "Take that bed of yours and go home."

Immediately, the man got up, picked up his mat, and left the house, shouting praises to God as he went.

The crowd in the house was overwhelmed with astonishment and awe.

"We've seen strange things this day," one man said.

"Indeed we have," said another. "Which of us has ever witnessed anything like that!"

When Jesus left the house, the crowd followed him down to the lake where he taught for a while. Afterwards, walking down a street in the city, he saw a tax-collector by the name of Matthew (sometimes called Levi), a son of Alphaeus, sitting at his toll-booth.

"Come and join me," Jesus said.

Matthew got up, left everything behind, and fell in with him.

That night Matthew gave a party. Jesus and the disciples were there as were a number of the least reputable of Capernaum's citizens. Some

Pharisees saw Jesus at the party and were outraged. "Why does your teacher associate with people like that?" they asked the disciples.

The disciples told Jesus what was being said.

"Healthy people don't need a doctor," he told them, "but the sick do. Study that saying of Hosea's, *I would prefer that men showed mercy to their fellows rather than offer sacrifices in the temple*. My mission is to get sinners not the respectable to quit their sins."

It was a time of fasting among the Jews and some of John's disciples came to Jesus.

"We and the Pharisees are observing the fast," they said "Why aren't your disciples?"

"Would you expect wedding guests to be mournful while the bridegroom was still with them?" he said. "They'll fast after he's gone."

He told a series of parables:

"Can you imagine anyone using a piece of unshrunk cloth to patch an old coat? Of course not. When the patch shrinks, it would simply make the hole larger.

"Can you imagine anyone making a batch of new wine and storing it in old wineskins? Of course not. The skins would burst and both the wineskins and the wine would be wasted. New wine must be put in new wineskins so that both are preserved.

"Can you imagine anyone, after drinking some properly aged wine, asking for new wine? Of course not. He'd know the old is better."

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### **1. The healing at Bethesda pool - Jesus defends healing on a Sabbath - disciples are criticized for gathering grain on a Sabbath man with a withered hand is healed - the apostles are chosen.**

Jesus went to Jerusalem to observe one of the Jewish festivals. In the city, near the Sheep Gate, there was a pool called Bethesda. It was encircled by five colonnades and in the alcoves there were a great many invalids - some blind, some lame, some paralyzed. (They waited for what was known as "The stirring of the water," believing that at certain intervals an angel would disturb the water of the pool and that the first person who stepped in would be healed no matter what his illness.)

One of the crowd lying near the pool was a man who had suffered from a lingering illness for some thirty-eight years. Jesus, realizing that he has been there a long time, spoke to him.

"Do you want to get well?" he asked.

"Sir," the man said, "when the water is stirred I don't have anybody to put me in. While I'm trying to climb down, somebody always beats me to it".

"Stand up," Jesus said. "Take your mat with you and go home."

Immediately the man was healed. He picked up his mat and left.

It happened to be a sabbath, and when the temple officials saw the man carrying his bed, they said to him, "What are you doing, man? It's the sabbath. It's illegal to carry your sleeping mat on the sabbath."

"But the man who healed me told me to."

"Who told you to?"

The man didn't know who had healed him because Jesus, not wanting to be recognized by the crowd, had slipped away. He did, however, seek the man out later in the temple.

"You're well now," he told him, "but you if don't change your way of life, something worse may happen to you."

The man went off and told those who had been questioning him that it was Jesus who

healed him. It was because of this that the authorities began to persecute Jesus as a sabbath-breaker. When they charged him with it, his response was blunt.

"Look," he said, "my Father doesn't work on a part-time basis, nor do I."

This kind of comment only deepened the officials' determination to have him executed, not simply because he broke the sabbath Law but because he spoke of God as his own father, making himself God's equal.

He faced them on the question.

"The truth is," he said, "that I, my Father's son, don't do anything by my own choice: I simply follow my father's example. He loves me and has disclosed his purposes to me. He's going to reveal even more astonishing things to me so you had better be ready for it. It is the Father, as you know, who raises the dead; so also the son gives life to whomever he pleases. God no longer judges men: he has put that entirely in my hands so that I may be honored equally with him. If you fail to honor the son, you fail to honor the Father who sent him.

"Pay attention now: anyone who heeds what I say and believes in the God who sent me has eternal life. And, because he will have passed from death to life, he won't have to face the judgment. The time is coming- actually, it's here now- when the dead will hear my voice and, hearing, will live, The Father is the essence of life. He has endowed me with that same life, and with it has given me the authority, as the son of man, to be the judge of all mankind. Don't be surprised at that, because the time is coming, as I said, when the dead will hear my voice and come out of the grave. Those who have done well will live forever and those who have done evil will be condemned. The authority I exercise is not my own; I judge as God tells me. As a consequence, my judgments are fair because I'm not expressing my own will but the Father's.

"Now, if I were to make these claims with no authentication other than my say-so, what validity would they have? But I'm backed by someone else, a man who speaks nothing but the truth. Who? John the Baptist. Didn't you yourselves ask him about me, and didn't he support me? It's not that I need the recommendation of any man, I simply make the point that you may be saved. John was a bright and a steady light; for a while you were happy to bask in that light. But there is an affirmation far greater than anything John may have offered: namely, the things God has empowered me to do, the things I am now doing. *They're* the proof that I've been sent here by the Father. *He* is my witness. None of you has ever seen him, nor have you heard his voice, nor do you accept what he says. The proof of that is that you refuse to believe his messenger. You pore over the scriptures in

the belief that they will lead you into an endless life. Those very scriptures speak of me, yet you refuse to come to me to get that life.

"I am not seeking praise from you or any man. But I know you and know that you don't have a love for God in your hearts. I have come to you on the authority of my Father and you have spurned me, but let someone come on no authority other than his own and you welcome him with open arms.

"How can you possibly be believers? You're content with the honors others can give and don't pursue the honor that comes from the one and only God. But don't worry; I'm not going to be your accuser before the Father. Moses will be that, the very one of whom you've built your hopes! If you really believed Moses you'd trust me because Moses wrote about me. But then, if you don't believe what he has written, what chance is there that you'll believe what I say?"

On a sabbath day, Jesus and the disciples were walking through a wheat field on their way to synagogue. As they went, the disciples plucked some of the grain, rubbed it between their palms to get rid of the chaff, and ate the kernels. Some pharisees saw them.

"Look at your disciples," they said to him. "It's the sabbath and there they are, breaking the sabbath Law. Why?"

"Haven't you read in history what king David and his men did when they were famished?" he asked. "It was at the time Abiathar was the high priest, remember? David went right into the temple and ate the Presentation Loaves-and no one but a priest is permitted to do that. Not only that; he shared the loaves with his men. And haven't you read in the Law that priests are permitted to work on the sabbath without breaking the Law? Listen to me: What we're talking about here is far more important than the temple. If you had any understanding of what is meant by the scripture, *I prefer acts of mercy over the offering of sacrifices in the temple*, you wouldn't have been so quick to point a finger at the innocent. The sabbath was established to benefit mankind and not the reverse. More than that. I am in command of the sabbath." He left them and walked on to the synagogue.

It so happened that in the congregation that day there was a man with a withered right hand. The Pharisees -who were trying to find grounds on which they could charge Jesus - watched closely to see whether he would heal on a sabbath.

Jesus spoke to the man with the withered hand. "Come stand here in the center," he said.

One of the pharisees called out. "Just a moment. Does the Law allow healing to be done on a sabbath?"

He knew what was in their minds so he put a question to them. "Which one of you, if you owned a sheep and it fell into a hole on a sabbath day, wouldn't take hold of it and pull it out? And can one compare the value of a sheep and a man? The question really is: does the Law permit good to be done on a sabbath? I put it to you: which is right on the sabbath - the doing of good or the doing of harm, to save a life or to destroy it? Which?"

There was no reply. Jesus, angry at their callousness, turned slowly in a circle looking into their faces. Then he spoke to the man with the withered hand. "Stretch out your hand!" he said. The man did and it became normal again.

The Pharisees stormed out of the synagogue in a rage and began to discuss among themselves and with the Herodians how they could arrange Jesus' execution. Knowing their intentions, Jesus withdrew to Galilee.

In Galilee he was followed everywhere by enormous crowds. Word of what he had been doing had spread quickly, and people came to see him from as far as Tyre and Sidon to the north, Jerusalem, Judea, and Idumea to the south, and from beyond Jordan to the east. People suffering from a variety of contagious diseases jostled him, and whenever he encountered men and women possessed by devils, the devils would hurl them to the ground in front of him screaming, "You're God's son!" Repeatedly he ordered the devils not to reveal his identity so that the prophet Isaiah's prediction might come true:

*There! - there is my chosen servant,  
The one I love, the one in whom I delight,  
I shall endow him with my spirit  
To herald justice for the Gentiles.  
He will not wrangle, nor will he shout,  
Nor will his voice be loud in the streets.  
The weakened reed will not be broken  
Nor will he quench the smoldering wick.  
'Til justice shall give birth to victory  
And the Gentiles find their hope in him.*

One evening Jesus slipped away from the crowd and climbed a mountain alone to pray. He prayed all night. In the morning he called the disciples and chose twelve from among them. He called them apostles and set them apart to be his closest companions and to be sent out as preachers with the authority to drive out devils.

The apostles included three sets of brothers:

Simon (whom he had named Peter) and Andrew;  
James and John, Zebedee's sons;  
James and Thaddeus, Alphaeus' sons.

The other six were:

Philip,  
Bartholemew (otherwise known as Nathaniel),  
Matthew (otherwise known as Levi),  
Thomas (sometimes called The Twin),  
Simon the Cananaean (sometimes called The Zealot),  
and Judas Iscariot, the traitor.

## CHAPTER NINE

### **The sermon on the mount.**

A great crowd had gathered. Jesus stood for a while looking out at them, then he turned, climbed a hill<sup>3</sup>, sat down, gathered the disciples around him, and began to teach.

"Happy are those who have made themselves poor," he said, "the kingdom of heaven belongs to them. Happy, too, are those who sorrow because they'll be comforted. Happy are the humble; they'll be given the whole world. Happy are those who long for God's justice: their longing will be satisfied. Happy are those who show mercy: mercy will be shown to them. Happy are the guileless: they shall see God. Happy are those who work for peace; they'll be known as 'the Children of God.' Happy are those who are persecuted because they're good: the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

"And happy are you when, because of your loyalty to me, you're ostracized and persecuted and slandered. When that happens, exult and leap for joy. You're in good company- the ancestors of your persecutors

treated the prophets the same way. What a reward is waiting for you in heaven!

"How happy to own nothing in this world but to own God's kingdom; how sad to be rich and to have had all the comforts you'll ever get. How happy to be hungry and know that your hunger will be satisfied; how sad to be sated and know that you're going to hunger. How happy in your sorrow to know the time is coming when you'll laugh; how sad to laugh in the knowledge that sorrow and weeping lie ahead.

"You are to be the world's salt. But remember when the flavor goes from salt it is gone forever, and there is nothing to do but to throw it out.

"You are to be the world's light. But remember, you don't try to hide a city built on the top of a hill nor do you turn on a lamp only to cover it. Instead, you put the lamp on a table so that everyone in the room can see. So it must be with the light that is your life; let it shine! And when people see the good you do they'll praise your heavenly Father.

"Listen to me carefully. I am not here to abolish the Law of Moses or the teaching of the prophets. On the contrary, I've come to bring them to full flower. Let there be no misunderstanding, until the end of time, not an 'i' or the dot over an 'i' is going to be deleted until the Law's purpose has been accomplished. If someone softens even the smallest injunction and so instructs others, that person will rank low in the kingdom. But those who not only teach the Law but practice it will be ranked among the great. And let's get this straight, unless your goodness goes beyond the common practice of the scribes and the Pharisees you won't even get into the kingdom.

"In the Mosaic Law men are told, 'Don't murder.' They are also told that a murderer must stand trial, that if a man shows extreme contempt for a brother he will be accountable to the Council of Elders and that the man who calls down a curse on his brother is liable to the fires of hell. But

here is my teaching: I say that if a man is so much as angry at his brother he is in danger of God's judgement. So, if you happen to be in the sanctuary, praying, and remember a grievance someone has against you, postpone your praying and go and get things settled peacefully. Then, back to your worship.

"If you're due in court to answer a complaint, settle out of court as soon as you can. If you don't you may find that the plaintiff has brought you before the judge, and the judge has sentenced you, and the jailer has put you behind bars. You may be sure that you won't get out until you've paid your debt to the last penny.

"In the Law men are told, 'Don't commit adultery.' But here is my teaching: adultery isn't simply a physical act: to lust for a woman is to commit adultery with her in your mind.

"If your right eye leads you astray, get rid of it. If your right hand is the cause, get rid of it. It's better to live with a part of your body missing than to have whole body thrown into hell.

"In the Law men are told that if a man wants to divorce his wife he must give her a certificate to that effect. But here is my teaching: to divorce a woman on any grounds other than unfaithfulness is to make her an adulteress. Not only that, any man who marries a divorced woman is an adulterer.

"In the Law men are told, 'Don't swear falsely in taking an oath and if you swear an oath to God, carry it out.' But here is my teaching: don't swear an oath of any kind. For instance, don't say 'I swear by the earth' - because the earth is God's footstool. Don't say 'I swear by Jerusalem' - because Jerusalem is the City of the Great King. Nor should you swear 'by my head,' because you haven't the power to change the color of a single hair. When you assert something, let your yes be a simple 'yes' and your no a simple 'no.' Anything beyond that has the taint of

falsehood.

"In the Law men were told, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But here is my teaching: don't even resist an enemy. If someone hits you on one cheek, present the other. If someone sues you for your shirt, give it to him- and your jacket, too. If someone forces you to go a mile with him, go two. If someone demands something of yours, give it to him. If he wants to borrow from you let him, and if he doesn't return it, don't ask for it.

"In the Law men are told, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But here is my teaching: love your enemies. Be kind to those who hate you and pray for your persecutors. That's the kind of behavior that distinguishes God's family. Doesn't God let his sun shine equally on good and evil men and doesn't he let the rain fall indiscriminately on the honest and the dishonest? Treat others the way you'd like them to treat you. If you love only those who love you, what's commendable about that? Scoundrels do that. If you're only friendly with your friends, what is exceptional about that? The pagans do that. If you lend money only to those who are a good risk, how is that to your credit? The wicked do that. You are to be different. You are to love your enemies, to be good to them, and to lend them money without any assurance that you'll get it back. Do that and what a reward you'll get! Best of all, you'll be sons of the Most High. You see, in the same way that your heavenly Father is perfect you're to be perfect. In the same way that he's merciful you're to be merciful. Your Father is kind even to ingrates and to the grasping.

"Take care not to do your good deeds in such a way as to draw attention to yourself; you could lose the reward your Father has for you. When you help people, do it without fanfare, without that ostentation hypocrites employ to get the admiration of others. The truth is, they've already had all the reward they're going to get. That way is not for you. When you help someone, don't let your left hand know what your right

is doing. Keep it secret, and your Father who knows all secrets will reward you.

"Similarly, when you pray, avoid being like the hypocrites who deliberately pray where they'll be conspicuous - standing up in a synagogue and out on the street corner.

The truth is, public attention is all the reward they'll get. That way is not for you. When you pray go into your room, close the door, and pray privately. Keep it secret, and your Father who knows all secrets will reward you.

"When you pray don't repeat an endless stream of mindless phrases. That's what the pagans do. They have the idea that the more they rattle on the better the prayer. That way is not for you. Keep in mind that God is your Father and that he knows what you need before you ask. Pray like this:

Father in heaven,  
May your name be revered.  
We ask that your kingdom may come  
And that your will may be done  
On earth as it is in heaven.  
Grant us what we need for today.  
Forgive us the wrongs we've done  
Even as we forgive those who have wronged us.  
Do not put us to the test,  
And save us from the evil one.

"If you forgive others their wrongs," he added, "your heavenly Father will forgive yours. Don't, and he won't.

"Now in the matter of fasting; don't do as the hypocrites do. What a picture of suffering they present, how woebegone they look. It's all to draw attention to the fact that they're fasting, of course, and you can be

sure that's all the reward they'll ever get. When you fast, none of that. Wash your face, comb your hair, and keep what you're doing to yourself. Your Father will know, though, and he'll reward you.

"Don't put away your valuables for your old age; moths may get at them, they could rust or be stolen. Things like that don't happen in heaven, so build your fortune there. The things you value most will determine the direction of your life.

"The eye is the lens of the body and if the lens is clear your body will be flooded with light. But if your eye is clouded with greed, the light won't be able to pass through. If where there should be light there is darkness, what a darkness it will be!

"No one can be equally loyal to two masters; his loyalties will conflict. Nor can you live for both almighty God and the almighty dollar. That's why I say, don't spend your time worrying about what you're going to put in your stomach or on your back. Surely there's more to life than food and clothing. Learn something from the birds. Do you see them planting, harvesting, and storing food? But your heavenly Father feeds them doesn't he, and aren't you far more important to him than they are? What's more, fretting won't add one second to your life's span. If you can't manage even that, what's the point of worrying about other things like clothes? Learn from the flowers - those field lilies, for instance. Without effort or skill they're better dressed than King Solomon was, and you know how magnificently dressed he was. If God looks after plant life that well - things that are here today and gone tomorrow - won't he take care of you? How little faith you have!

"So don't waste your time worrying about food and drink and clothing - that's pagan behavior. Your heavenly Father knows full well what you need. Let your primary objective be his kingdom and his goodness, and the other things will come as a matter of course. Don't borrow tomorrow's troubles - deal with tomorrow tomorrow. Today's troubles

are trouble enough.

"Don't criticize others and you won't be criticized. Don't condemn others and you won't be. Overlook their faults and you'll be treated in the same manner. God will judge you by the standards you apply to others. Give and you'll get in return, full measure and then some."

Jesus then shifted to teaching through parables. "Can one blind man lead another blind man?" he asked. "Won't they both end up in the ditch? Does a student know more than his teacher? No, but if he completes the course he may know as much. Why are you so concerned about a speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and unconcerned about the plank in your own? The nerve of you, saying to your brother, 'Let me help you get that speck out of your eye,' and there - in your own - is a plank! Hypocrite! Look to yourself first then perhaps you can help others.

"Don't give sacred things to dogs, they'll only turn and attack you. Don't give pearls to pigs, they'll only trample them into the ground.

"Ask and you'll get, search and you'll find, knock and the door will open. The asker will receive, the searcher will find, and the door will open to the man who knocks. I put it to you, you who are fathers: if your son asked you for a piece of bread would you give him a stone? If he said, 'Father, may I have some fish?' would you hand him a snake? Or, let's say he asked you for an egg, would you hand him a scorpion? Well then, if you, sinful as you are, give your children what they ask for, how much more likely that your heavenly Father will give you the Holy Spirit for the asking.

"Let me reduce everything in the Law and the teaching of the prophets to a single sentence. It is this: treat others as you'd like to be treated.

"The gateway to destruction is wide and the road leading to it is broad and thronged with people. The gateway to life is narrow, as is the road

leading to it, and not many make it. Go in that way.

"Be on your guard against the teachers of falsehood. You may easily mistake them for sheep when in fact they're ravenous wolves. What gives them away? The way they live. You don't get grapes from a thornbush, nor do you find figs on thistles. You pick good fruit from a good tree; you cut down an unproductive tree and chop it up for firewood. You can tell a good man or a good tree by what each produces.

"Why do you call me 'Lord' and then disobey me? Let it be understood that everybody who calls me 'Lord' isn't necessarily going to heaven. It's a matter of whether or not they obey my father. When the day of judgment comes, all kinds of people will say, 'Didn't we preach about you, sir? Didn't we perform miracles and drive out devils in your name?' And I'll say to them before the entire assembly, 'Go away. You are strangers to me. You've been on the side of evil.'

"Let me illustrate the difference between those who live by my teaching and those who don't. Those who practice what I preach show the same kind of sense as the man who excavated until he struck rock and then laid the foundation for his house on that rock. Later, a violent storm came up, and although the flood waters swept against the house and the winds howled about it, it stood unshaken. It had been well built on a solid foundation. Those who pay no attention to what I say are as foolish as the man who was indifferent to the need for a solid foundation and built his house on sand. When the storm came, his house was swept away and wrecked."

When he finished, the crowd stood about in awe because, unlike the teaching of the scribes, his words had the ring of authority.

When Jesus came down the mountain he was followed by an enormous crowd. A man, grotesque with leprosy, ran to him and fell to his knees in

front of him.

"Sir," he said, "if you want to you can heal me." Jesus reached out and put a hand on him. "I want to," he said. "You're healed."

In a flash the disease was gone. Jesus spoke to him very firmly. "You're to leave now," he said, "and you're to tell nobody what's happened. One exception: go to the priest and make the offering Moses prescribed as a proof to the people. Away you go now."

The man left but he paid no attention to what he had been told. He talked about his cure to everyone he met. As a consequence it became virtually impossible for Jesus to go into a town. Even though he stayed out in the country, his growing fame caused people to flock to him from everywhere in the area, and he could only find the privacy to pray by going to the desert.

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(3) In Luke's account, the place is described as a plain, or "a level place."

## CHAPTER TEN

**The Centurion's servant is healed - a widow's son is raised in Nain - John's messengers query Jesus - Chorazin and Bethsaida are denounced - a woman washes Jesus' feet - his family doubts his sanity - a deaf and dumb man is healed - the sin that cannot be forgiven - the parable of the seven devils.**

Jesus left the area and returned to Capernaum. As he entered the city he was met by a delegation of elders from the local synagogue. They told him about a Roman Centurion in the city who owned a slave, a slave to whom he was strongly attached. The slave was at the point of

death, paralyzed and in terrible pain.

"Will you help him?" they asked. "He deserves your help. He's a good friend of the Jewish community. He even built our synagogue for us."

Jesus set off with them. They had almost reached the Centurion's house when they were met by some of his friends.

"We have a message for you," they said, "Our friend doesn't want to inconvenience you. And he feels unworthy to have you in his home. That's why he sent us rather than come himself. He said to tell you this: 'I am an army man and I understand authority. I have superior officers whose orders I must obey and I have men who serve under me. I tell them to go or stay, and they do. It's the same with my servant; I tell him what to do and he does it, Consequently, I know that all you need to do is to say the word and my servant will be healed.'"

Jesus was amazed. "What faith!" he said. "I haven't seen faith like that even among Israelites."

He turned to the crowd. "Hear me now," he said. "I will give you a picture of the future: All kinds of people are going to come from anywhere and everywhere, and they will sit at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while on the outside - banished and beyond the pale - will be the legitimate heirs to the kingdom. And oh, the anguish of that day!"

The messengers returned to the Centurion's house and found the servant well.

Shortly afterward, Jesus set out to visit the city of Nain. The disciples were with him, and he was followed by a crowd. As they approached the city, they saw a large funeral procession coming through the gate and learned that the dead man was the young and only son of widow in the town. Jesus saw her grief and his heart went out to her. He left the

disciples and walked over to her.

"Don't cry," he said. He then turned and walked up to the bier and put his hand on it . The men who were carrying it halted.

"Young man , " Jesus said. "Get up!"

The dead man sat up and began to talk. Jesus handed him over to his mother.

The crowd was filled with awe and praised God.

"A great prophet has come to Israel!" they said.

"God has come to visit his people."

Like lightning the report spread through all Judea and beyond.

In his prison cell, John's disciples had kept him abreast of all that had been happening. Now he sent two of his disciples to ask Jesus whether he was the Messiah for whom Israel had been looking or should they continue to live in hope. It so happened that while the messengers were waiting for an opportunity to speak to Jesus they saw him heal a number of the sick, cast out demons, and cure blindness. Finally they were alone with him, and they put John's question.

"Go back to John," he answered, "and tell him what you've seen and heard: that the blind see, the deaf hear and the lame walk. Tell him that lepers are being healed and the dead are raised. Tell him, too, that the good news of God's kingdom is being preached to the poor, and happy is the man who isn't offended by the things I do."

When the messengers had gone, Jesus spoke about John to the crowd.

"When you went to desert to hear John preach, what did you expect? A flimsy reed trembling in the breeze? What did you expect? Surely not some mincing clotheshorse: you find them in royal palaces. What did

you expect to see? A prophet, right? And much more, You are familiar with that passage in the scriptures: Look! - I shall send my messenger ahead of you. He shall prepare the way for you. That passage refers to John. The truth is: no greater man than John has lived yet even the most insignificant member of the kingdom is greater than John.

"From the time John began his ministry until today, men have been permitted to battle their way into the kingdom and some have won the prize by sheer zeal. All prophecy points to John. If you have the insight to grasp it, you will realize that he's 'the Elijah' who is to appear. If you're disposed to listen, pay heed to that.

"When John preached, a great many people, including some of the most disreputable, submitted their lives to God and John baptized them. But the pharisees and the lawyers didn't. Not them: To what shall I compare them? They're like the children you see in the marketplace playing their childish games. You've heard them shout at each other: 'When we wanted to play Wedding you said you didn't feel like dancing. Then when we wanted to play Funeral you said you didn't feel like being sad!' Here's John the Baptist: he doesn't eat bread or drink wine and you say he's crazy. Then I come along and I do eat and drink, and what do you say? You say I'm a glutton and a drunk and that I run with the riffraff. And somehow you manage to rationalize it all!"

He launched into a denunciation of those towns in which he had done most of his miracles but which hadn't responded to his teaching.

"How sad for you, Chorazin, and for you Bethsaida. If I had done in Tyre and Sidon what I did in your streets, they would have repented in tears and humility long ago. I tell you, things will go better for Tyre and Sidon on judgment day than they will for you.

"And you, Capernaum. What about you? Will you be praised to the

skies? No, you'll be brought down to the grave. If Sodom had seen the miracles you've seen it would be standing today. I tell you, things will go better for Sodom on judgment day than they will for you."

He paused to pray: "Oh Father, Lord of heaven and earth, I thank you that it has pleased you to hide these things from the learned and the intelligent and to reveal them to the childlike.

"God has entrusted everything to me," he continued. "No one but the Father really knows who I am, just as I alone know him- I, along with those to whom I choose to reveal him. So come to me all of you who are weary and burdened. I have rest for you. Enroll in my school and learn my teaching. You'll find me gentle and not overbearing. The work will be easy, the burdens will be light, and your spirit will find rest."

He was invited to dinner at the home of a Pharisee named Simon. The meal had only begun when a woman- a notoriously immoral woman who had learned that he was there- came and knelt at Jesus' feet in tears. Her tears fell on his feet and she wiped them away with her hair. After kissing his feet, she opened an alabaster flask, poured some perfumed lotion on them, and smoothed it with her hands.

While this was happening, Simon was saying to himself, "If this fellow really was a prophet he'd know what a disreputable woman this is." After a while Jesus turned to him.

"Simon," he said, "I have something to say to you."

"Go ahead, Teacher."

"Here's a money-lender. He has two debtors. One owes him five hundred dollars and the other fifty. Neither of them can pay, so he graciously forgives both debts. Now, which of the two would be more grateful?"

"The one who was forgive the most, I suppose."

"Exactly."

Jesus turned to the woman at his feet. "See this woman, Simon? When I came to your home this afternoon, you didn't offer me water to wash the dust from my feet. This woman has wet them with her tears and has dried them with her hair, Nor did you give me the customary welcoming kiss. She, on the other hand, has been kissing my feet almost since we sat down. You offered no oil for my head, whereas she has perfumed my feet. I tell you, Simon , her sins - as many as they are - are forgiven because she loves greatly, but to be forgiven little is to love little,"

He turned to the woman," Your sins are forgiven," he said. Then, While the other guests were saying to each other, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" he said to the woman, "You've been saved by your faith. Go, and be at peace."

Jesus now took an extended preaching journey through a number of Galilean towns, talking about the good news of the coming of the kingdom. In the group traveling with him were the apostles and a number of women, some of whom had been healed, other who had previously been possessed by devils. The group included Mary, sometimes known as the Magdalene, who had been exorcised of seven devils, a woman by the name of Susanna, and Joanna, the wife of Herod's agent, Chusa. They saw to it that his needs were met, paying the cost from their own means.

On their return, Jesus went into a house for a meal but such was the press of the crowd that it wasn't possible to eat. His family heard what was happening and, certain that he had gone out of his mind, came to the house to try to take him home bodily.

Inside the house, a man was pushed in front of him . He was possessed

by a devil and was both blind and dumb. Jesus healed him, and the man stood there among them, talking and looking about, obviously able to see. The crowd was simple astounded.

"Do you think it's possible?" they whispered to each other. "Could he be the 'Son of David'?"

Some Pharisees, in town from Jerusalem, overheard them. "The Son of David!" they fumed. "He's the son of the devil! He drives out devils by the power of the prince of devils, by Beelzebub!"

Jesus responded with parables. "Now why would Satan drive out Satan?" he asked. "If there's a civil war within a nation, that nation won't endure. The same is true of a city or a home. Similarly, if the devil goes about driving out devils, what's going to happen to this kingdom? And if, as you say, I drive out devils because I'm in league with Beelzebub, with whom are your sons in league when they drive them out? But if, on the other hand, I drive them out through God's spirit, it must mean that God's Kingdom has arrived and it hasn't dawned on you yet. Surely, you must realize that anyone who wants to break into a strong man's house to plunder it must first deal with the strong man. Anyone not allied with me is opposing me, and if you don't help me gather, you're actually scattering.

"Listen carefully to me: there is one sin that will never be forgiven. Never! It is the blasphemy of attributing to the devil things done by God's Spirit. You may blaspheme against me and be forgiven but you may not speak against God's Spirit. That's an eternal sin. So make up your mind, which will you choose: to be a good tree bearing good fruit or a rotten tree bearing rotten fruit? A tree is known by the fruit it bears.

"As for you, you brood of snakes. You are incapable of saying anything good because you are yourselves evil. What a man says is determined by what he is. Good flows from a good man because he's good, even as

evil flows from an evil man. Hear me now: on judgment day you will have to answer for even your careless words. You'll be acquitted or condemned by the things you've said."

Someone among the scribes and Pharisees called out, "Let's see some proof."

"What a wicked and unfaithful generation you are," Jesus said, "always looking for proof. There'll be no proof except the proof of the prophet Jonah. Just as Jonah was three days and nights in the belly of that great fish, I'll be three days and nights in the belly of the earth.

"On judgment day, the citizens of Nineveh are going to stand up as a condemnation of this generation, because when Jonah preached they repented. And look - someone greater than Jonah is here.

"The Queen of Sheba is going to stand up on judgment day in condemnation of this generation. She traveled great distances to hear king Solomon expound his wisdom. And look - someone greater than Solomon is here!

"I'll give you an illustration of how it will be with this generation: Here's a man who's had a devil driven out of him. The devil goes wandering about in the desert vainly seeking rest. He says to himself, 'I'll go back to where I used to live.' And he does - taking with him seven other devils, each more demonic than he - and finds the place all neat and clean, but empty. So in they go and take up residence, and the man's condition is far worse than it was before. That's the way it will be with this wicked generation."

He paused and a woman in the crowd called out: "Happy the womb from which you were born and the breasts at which you nursed!"

Jesus responded to her. "Happy, rather," he said' "those who hear God's word and obey him."

His family was still outside, unable to get in because of the crowd. Someone told him that his mother and brothers wanted to speak to him.

"Who is my mother and who are my brothers?"<sup>4</sup> he said. He looked around at the people in the room and stretched out his hand toward his disciples. "These are my family" he said. "Anyone who does God's will is a member of my family."

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

**A series of parables on the kingdom - Jesus explains his use of parables - the parables of the buried treasure, the superlative pearl and the fishermen and their catch - Jesus calms the sea - a madman is healed in Gerasa - Jairus' daughter is healed - a woman is healed of a hemorrhage - two blind men are healed.**

He left the house and went to the seashore. The crowd that followed was so large that, in order to teach, he was forced once again to climb aboard a boat and sit in it just offshore. From there, he told a series of parables.

"Here is a man out sowing seed. Some of the seed falls on the road. Passers-by trample some of it into the dust and the birds eat the rest. Some of the seed falls on a gravel patch. It sprouts quickly but when the hot sun comes it withers and dies just as quickly because it wasn't deeply rooted. Some of the seed falls among weeds. It grows, but the weeds grow more quickly and choke it out. Some of the seed falls on fertile soil and brings a great yield, anywhere from thirty to one hundred times the amount sown."

Then he added, "If you have ears, hear."

Later, when they were alone, the disciples asked him why he taught through parables.

"I'll tell you why," he said. "You've been permitted to understand something of the mysteries of the kingdom of God but others haven't. In the same way, the man who has something is given more, much more, while the man who has nothing has even that nothing taken away. I use parables so that my enemies will think they're getting the point when they really aren't. You see, they are the embodiment of the people Isaiah wrote about:

Hear they may, but understand, never.  
See they may, but never perceive.  
For their hearts have grown fat  
And their hearing has grown dull  
And their eyes have grown heavy  
Lest, perchance, they should perceive,  
And hear, and understand,  
And return to me and be healed.

"You're fortunate," he said, "because you are able to perceive and to understand. Believe me, many of the prophets and many godly men longed to see and hear what you've seen and heard, but never had the chance.

"Now, as to the parable: If you didn't grasp its meaning how are you ever going to understand those to come? The seed itself is God's word. The seed that fell on the road may be compared to those people who hear the word but have it snatched from them by the devil before they can accept it and be saved. The seed that fell on the gravel patch is like those people who hear the word and immediately and happily accept it. But, because they're shallow, they can't endure temptation or trouble or persecution and they fade away. The seed that fell among the weeds is

like those people who hear the word, but the problems of daily life, the illusory promises of wealth, or the desire for material things crowd in and slowly choke out their life. The seed sown on fertile soil, however, is like those people who hear the word and understand it and work patiently to produce a bountiful harvest - anywhere from thirty to a hundred times what was sown."

He went on. "No one turns on a lamp only to cover it or put it under a bed: you put it on a table so that it may light the room. Nor am I hiding anything that won't someday be uncovered or keeping any secrets that won't be told. If you have ears, hear.

"See to it that you pay careful attention, because the care with which you listen will determine what you'll be told, and even more. The man with something will be given more, while the man with nothing is going to lose even that nothing."

He continued to teach through a series of parables.

"The kingdom of heaven could be compared to a man who plants some seed. It grows, developing from the first tiny sprout to the full-grown plant. He may not understand how it all happens but that doesn't stop him from harvesting the crop when it's ripe.

"Or, you might think of the kingdom of heaven in this way: A man plants a field of wheat. Under cover of darkness an enemy scatters weed-seeds in the same soil. The grain sprouts but so do the weeds. His hired hands ask him, 'Wasn't that good seed you planted?' 'Yes, it was,' he says. 'Then why the weeds?' 'An enemy of mine sowed them.' 'Do you want us to pull the weeds?' 'No, you might uproot the wheat while you're at it. We'll wait. At harvest time we'll pull the weeds, tie them in bundles and burn them. Then we'll harvest the wheat and store it in the barn.'

"Or, you may compare the kingdom of heaven to a single mustard seed. The mustard plant has one of the smallest of all seeds but when the

plant is fully grown it is larger than even the herbs; large enough for birds to perch on or to sit in its shade.

"Or, you might compare the kingdom of heaven to making bread. A woman takes a bit of yeast and puts it in three measures of flour, and after a while the yeast has permeated all of it."

He told the crowd many more parables-indeed he said nothing that wasn't in the form of a parable, thus fulfilling the prediction :

I will speak in parables.

I will reveal mysteries

Hidden from the dawn of time.

"This is what the kingdom of heaven is like." he continued. "It's like a man who stumbles on a buried treasure in a field. What does he do? He buries it again and goes and sells everything he owns and buys the field.

"Or the kingdom of heaven is like a man who has spent his life buying and selling pearls. One day he comes on the perfect pearl. What does he do? He sells everything he owns and buys it.

"Or the kingdom of heaven is like this: A fisherman casts a dragnet in the sea. When it is hauled up on the shore it contains a variety of fish. The fishermen sit down and separate the edible fish into containers and throw the other away. That's what will be like at the end of time: the angels will separate the evil from the good and throw them into the blazing furnace. And oh, the anguish of that day!" Later, in the house, the disciples asked him to explain the story of the wheat field and the weeds.

"I'm the one who plants the wheat," he told them. "The wheat symbolizes the children of the kingdom. The weeds correspond to the children of the devil, and the enemy who came in the night is the devil himself. The harvest is the end of time. The hired hands are angels. I

spoke of the weeds being gathered and burned; that's the way it's going to be at the end of time. I'll send out the angels and they'll gather up everything that works against the well-being of the kingdom - as well as every wrongdoer - and throw it all in the blazing furnace. Oh the anguish of that time! And, at that same time, the good will shine as the sun in their Father's kingdom.

"Have you understood me?" he asked the disciples.

"Yes, we have."

"Then you have some idea of what it's like for the man who had an understanding of the Law before becoming a disciple; he's like a fellow who not only has valuable antiques in his home but new things as well.

"If you have ears, hear."

That evening the crowds pressed on him again. He instructed the disciples to arrange for a boat. "We're going to cross to the other side of the lake." he told them.

They went aboard and set sail. Other boats followed. Jesus was in the stern on a cushion. After a while he fell asleep. A storm came up and the waves began to break over the gunwales and fill the boat and they were in danger of foundering. The disciples came and shook Jesus into wakefulness.

"Master," they shouted, "we're going to drown! Don't you care? Save us!"

He looked at them. "Why are you afraid?" he said. "Haven't you learned to trust yet?"

He stood up in the boat and said to the wind, "Peace," and to the water, "Be still!" And there was a great calm.

The disciples were trembling with fear and astonishment.

"Who is this?" they said to each other. "He even controls the elements."

As they approached the coastline of Gerasa they were watched by a man,<sup>5</sup> naked and filthy and covered with scabs. The man was demon-possessed and filled with a fierce madness. Often, the people of the nearby village had tried to hold him captive, hobbling and handcuffing him with cords and chains, but each time he broke free. No one in the town had the strength to cope with him. He lived on the outskirts in the area of the tombs, terrorizing passersby. Night and day his screams could be heard and often in his madness he wounded himself with sharp stones.

As Jesus stepped ashore, the man ran to him and fell to the ground at his feet.

"Come out of that man, you filthy devil!" Jesus cried.

"What have I to do with you, Jesus, son of the Most High?" the devil screamed. "In the name of God don't torture me before my time!"

"What's your name?"

"My name is Legion - there are so many of us." He pleaded with Jesus not to consign them to the bottomless pit.

On the hillside, nearby, there was a large herd of pigs, rooting. "If you're going to drive us out," the devils begged, "let us go into them."

"Then, go!"

The devils left the man and entered the pigs, and the entire herd stampeded down a steep slope into the lake and were drowned. The herdsmen ran to the town and told everyone what had happened. The townspeople hurried out to see Jesus. There, seated on the ground at

his feet was the wild man, clothed and sane. The townspeople were frightened and begged Jesus to leave.

He turned and went aboard the boat. As he did, the man who had been healed asked if he might go along. "No," Jesus said, "I want you to go home to your family and your friends and tell them the great thing God has done for you."

The man returned to his former home in Decapolis, and the people to whom he told the story were astounded.

When Jesus and the disciples returned to the other side of the lake, the crowd was still there waiting. While he was on the beach teaching, a man by the name of Jairus, one of the presidents of the synagogue, came and knelt down in front of him.

"My little girl, my only daughter is dying," he said, his voice filled with pleading. "Please come with me and lay your hands on her. Don't let her die. She's only twelve."

Jesus and the disciples went with him and the crowd followed along, jostling and shoving. In the crowd there was a woman who for twelve years had been suffering from a constant hemorrhage. She had been to every doctor she could find and had spent every cent she owned but her condition was, if anything, worse. She had heard about Jesus and had come to believe that if she could merely touch his robe she would be healed. She worked her way through the crowd until she was behind him. Then she reached out and touched him. Immediately, the hemorrhage stopped and she knew she was healed.

Jesus halted and turned around. "Who touched me?" he said.

Denials from all around: "Not me." "I didn't

Peter said to him. "But, Teacher, why do you ask such a question? The crowd is all around, bumping into you, crushing you."

"But someone touched me," he said. "I felt power go from me."

The woman, realizing that there was no way she could escape, came forward trembling and collapsed at his feet. She poured out her story and told him that she had been immediately healed.

"Cheer up, daughter," Jesus said to her. "Your faith has done it. Peace."

As he was speaking, messengers came from Jairus' home. "Your daughter is dead," they told him. "There's no need to trouble the teacher any further."

Jesus disregarded their words. "Don't worry," he said to Jairus. "Just trust. She'll be fine."

When they arrived at Jairus' home, they found chaos. Outside of the house and within, people were wailing, fluteplayers were piping dirges, and the air was filled with sound.

"Why all this racket and this wailing? Jesus said. "Let me through. The child isn't dead; she's just asleep."

They laughed at him scornfully. They knew she was dead.

He went into the house, taking Peter, John, and James with him, and put everyone out except for Jairus and his wife. He led them into the room where the girl lay and took her by the hand.

"Get up, little girl," he said.

Life flowed back into her body, and she got up and walked about the room. Her parents were ecstatic. Jesus spoken to them quite sternly, telling them to recount to no one what had happened. Then, as he turned to go, he said, "Give her something to eat."

As Jesus left the house two blind men fell in behind him, shouting, "Mercy, son of David! Have mercy on us!" They followed him all the way home, even into the house.

"Do you believe I can do what you ask?" he said to them.

"Yes, sir."

He touched their eyes." Receive then as you believe," he said, and their sight was restored. He spoke to them sternly, warning them to tell nobody what had happened, but they were no sooner out of the house than they told everyone they met.

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(5) In the gospel according to Matthew, two men are healed.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

**The commissioning of the apostles - the beheading of John the Baptist - Jesus feeds the 5,000 - the move to make Jesus king - he walks on the water - Jesus, "the bread of life" - some disciples desert.**

Jesus went on another tour of some of the cities and towns in Galilee, teaching in the synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing a variety of illnesses. Everywhere he went, great crowds gathered. Their obvious aimlessness and confusion moved him so deeply - they seemed to him like sheep without a shepherd - that at one point he turned to the disciples and exclaimed, "What a harvest! But what a lack of helpers to reap it. When you pray ask the Lord of the harvest to send more help."

He was ready now to send the apostles out on their own. He called

them apart, invested them with the authority to drive out devils and heal disease and gave them their instructions.

"You're to go only to the lost sheep of the House of Israel," he told them. "Stay away from Gentiles and Samaritans. Here are your duties: Preach that the kingdom of heaven has arrived, heal the sick, raise the dead, cure lepers, and rid people of devils. And remember, you paid nothing for what you have received, so charge nothing for what you do.

"You're to go out empty-handed. Take neither money nor food. Don't take even a knapsack or a walking-stick. As for clothes; take only the sandals you're wearing and the cloak on your back. The good workman need not fear that he won't be recompensed.

"When you first go into a strange town, ask about until you learn the name of some worthy there, and stay with him until you're ready to leave. When you first go into his house, bless it. If it's a good home your blessing will return to you. If someone refuses you lodging or a town rejects your message, leave. As you go stamp your feet to shake off the dust of the place and to let the people know how you were treated. You may be sure of this: things will go better for Sodom and Gomorrah on judgment day than for them.

"I'm sending you out with no more defenses than a sheep would have in a pack of wolves, so be as wary as a snake and as guileless as a dove. Be on your guard; there are men who will have you arrested and brought to trial or hauled into the synagogue to be flogged. Indeed, because of your allegiance to me, you will be dragged before governors and kings - which, incidentally, will give you the opportunity to tell them about your mission and your faith. When you're arrested, don't plan your defense. When the time comes you'll know what to say - God's spirit will give you the words.

"Because of me, brother will betray each other, fathers will betray their

children and children will turn against their parents, even if by doing so they bring about their death. Because you are disciples of mine you are going to be hated on all sides, but stay true to the end and you'll be delivered. If you are persecuted in a city, leave it and go on to the next, and, believe me, before you've gone through the cities of Israel, the son of man will have returned.

"A student is not superior to his teacher nor is a slave superior to his master," he continued. "It's enough that they become like them. So, if they call me - the head of God's house - Superdevil, what will they call you? But don't let that frighten you: ever secret will be told and everything covered up will be brought into the light. I'm telling you things in the dark; you're to tell them in the daylight. I'm whispering things to you; you're to broadcast them.

"Don't be afraid of those who can kill you but who have no power to kill your soul. The one to fear is he who can destroy body and soul in hell.

"Two sparrows sell for a penny, right? Yet not a single sparrow falls to the ground without your Father knowing it. He even knows how many hairs there are on your head! So don't be a worrier: keep what I've been saying in mind and remember how much more valuable you are than a flock of sparrows. If you acknowledge publicly that you are one of my followers, I'll do the same for you in the presence of the Father in heaven: repudiate me here, and I'll do the same to you in heaven.

"Let it be understood: I'm not here on earth to bring peace. On the contrary, my coming will create dissension, dissension between a son and his father, between a daughter and her mother and between in-laws. Some will find themselves opposed within their own homes. If your loyalty to your parents comes before your loyalty to me, you don't deserve to be a member of my family. The same is true if you prefer a son or daughter over me. Nor are you worthy of me if you aren't willing to go with me to the death. clutch too tightly that life of yours and you'll

lose it, but stand ready to lose it for me and you'll find it.

"Anyone who welcomes you is welcoming me, and to welcome me is to welcome the God who sent me. It works this way: if a man welcomes a prophet because he's a prophet he'll earn a prophet's reward. If he welcomes a good man because he's a good man he'll get the same reward as the good man. In the same way, anyone who gives you - insignificant as you may seem to the world - as little as a drink of water because you're one of my followers, you may be sure of it, he'll be rewarded."

He sent them out in pairs and they traveled about, preaching the good news of God's kingdom, telling men to quit their sins, healing the sick, and driving out devils. And Jesus went off preaching, too.

His fame spread swiftly, and he was the subject of discussion in King Herod's court. There was much speculation: some thought he was John the Baptist resurrected. ("How else could he have such powers?") Others argued that he was a resurrected Elijah and others that he was a new prophet.

"No," said Herod. "It's the John I beheaded, back from the grave."

Herod had indeed beheaded John. This is how it happened: In his preaching John had denounced the King for marrying Herodias, his sister-in-law (she had previously been married to his half-brother, Philip). For her sake, Herod had John arrested and imprisoned. He would not, however - though Herodias urged him to - have John executed. Not only was he afraid of public reaction, he was intimidated by John's godliness. So he kept him safe, under close guard. Sometimes he went and talked with John. Herod enjoyed talking to John, even though it left him perplexed.

Herodias saw her chance on Herod's birthday. To celebrate it, he threw a party, inviting the leading citizens of Galilee, his courtiers, and his

senior army officers. While they were feasting, Herodias' daughter danced for them. Herod was entranced, as were his guests. He called the girl before him.

"What would you like as a gift?" he said. "Name it and it's yours. I swear it - anything you ask up to half of my kingdom." The girl slipped out of the banqueting hall and went to her mother.

"What should I ask for?" she said.

"John the Baptist's head on a platter."

She ran back to the hall.

"What will it be?" said Herod.

"Here and now," she answered, "John the Baptist's head on a platter."

The king was sobered by the request, but he had sworn an oath and did not want to go back on his word in front of his guests, so he summoned one of his guards and gave the order. The soldier went off, beheaded John in his cell, put the head on a great platter, carried it to the banqueting hall, and presented it to the girl. She took it to her mother.

News of John's death came to his disciples. They went to the prison and got his body and buried it.

Word of John's death came to Jesus just when the apostles returned, full of reports about their experiences. The situation at the time was chaotic: with the crowd milling about, people coming and going, and no opportunity to eat. So Jesus said to the apostles, "Let's leave here. We'll go somewhere in the desert and take a brief holiday."

They slipped away and took a boat to Bethsaida, but the crowd had seen them leave. Some had managed to find out where they were going, and they ran round the shore of the lake and were waiting when Jesus and the Twelve arrived.

As he stepped ashore he saw the crowd milling about aimlessly and his heart went out to them. He spoke to them about the kingdom and healed those who were sick. As the sun began to set, he climbed a hill and the apostles followed.

"It's getting late," one of them said to Jesus, "and this is a deserted place. You'd better send the crowd away so they can go into the countryside or into the villages to buy themselves food and find a place to spend the night."

"There's no need for that," he said. "Give them something to eat." He turned to Philip and asked, "Where can we buy some food, Philip?" Jesus knew what he was going to do. but he wanted to test Philip.

"It would take a year's wages to buy enough food for this many people," Philip said.

"Somebody see how much food we have." Jesus said.

"We don't have any," Andrew said, "but there's a boy here with five barley loaves and two fish. But what good's that with a crowd this big?" There were five thousand men, plus women and children.

"Bring it here," Jesus said. "Have the people sit down on the grass in groups of hundreds and of fifties."

He took the bread and the fish, raised his eyes and blessed them. Then he broke up the loaves and the fish and gave the pieces to the disciples to distribute. Everyone ate and everyone had enough.

"Gather up the leftovers," he said. "Let's not waste anything."

The disciples gathered up twelve baskets full of scraps.<sup>6</sup>

Some of the men in the crowd held a hurried conference. "It's obvious," they said. "He's the prophet we've been looking for."

Jesus realized what was happening; that they were planning to put him on their shoulders, carry him off, and proclaim him king. He wasted no time. Waving aside any discussion, he instructed the apostles to take a boat and cross to Capernaum while he remained behind to dismiss the crowd. When the disciples had sailed, he said good-bye to the crowd and climbed the mountain. When darkness fell he was there alone, praying.

Meanwhile, the disciples were in trouble. For hours they had been fighting a mounting storm and a strong headwind. As the night wore on the wind increased and the waves rose higher. It was now about three in the morning. Jesus could see them and saw that they had progressed no more than three or four miles, and that they were exhausted from rowing.

Then they saw him - Jesus - walking on the water! They were overwhelmed with terror, certain that they were seeing a ghost. He had almost passed by when he heard their cries of fear. Immediately, he spoke to them.

"Take heart," he said. "Don't be afraid. It's me."

Peter shouted to him above the wind. "If it really is you, Teacher, order me to come to you."

"Come on, then." he said.

Peter climbed out of the boat and started toward him. He was almost there when he became aware of the strength of the wind and grew frightened.

"Save me, Teacher!" he shouted as he began to sink.

Jesus reached out and grabbed him. "How little faith you have, Peter," he said. "You should have trusted me."

With Peter, Jesus crossed to the boat. They climbed aboard and the

wind fell off. The disciples were astounded. In the callousness of their hearts they had not grasped the significance of the miracle of the loaves, but now it all dawned on them and they knelt at his feet and said, "You are indeed God's son."

They beached the boat at Gennesaret. Jesus had no sooner stepped ashore than he was recognized. The people ran home and returned with their sick, some still on their beds, and they laid them on the ground around him.

"All we want is to touch the hem of your robe," they cried. Those who did were healed.

On the other side of the lake, the crowd had not dispersed, and some of the men had been searching for him. They recalled that there had been only one boat and that he had not gone with the apostles when they sailed, yet he was nowhere to be found in the area. A short distance down the shore there were some boats from Tiberias, so some of the men went aboard them and sailed for Capernaum to search for Jesus. They found him in the synagogue.

"When did you arrive here?" they asked.

"Never mind that," he said. "You didn't follow me here because the things you saw revealed who I am. You're here because your stomachs were filled. Don't waste your time in a quest for perishable food, hunger instead for the food that lasts, the spiritual food that I can give you. It sustains forever."

"Tell us what God requires of us?"

"He wants you to believe in the one he sent."

"We're ready to believe. just show us some proof: the kind of proof our ancestors received when they were given manna to eat in the desert. The manna was not only a sign from God, it also fulfilled the prophecy:

He will give them heaven's bread to eat."

Let's get things straight," he said, "Moses didn't provide the manna, my Father did - the same one who now provides the real 'heaven's bread,' the bread that has come from heaven to feed the world."

"Give us that bread. . . every day."

"I am that bread. Look to me and you'll never be hungry, trust me and you'll never thirst. But then I've told you that before, and here I am and there you are and still you don't believe.

"Everyone given to me by my Father will come to me," he said. "When they do, not one will be turned away. I'm here to do God's will not mine, and it is his will that I should not lose a single one of those he has given me but, rather, should raise them on earth's final day. It is his will that anyone who trusts me should live forever and be raised by me on the last day."

Part of the crowd began to mutter among themselves.

"What does he mean, he's heaven's bread?"

"Heaven's bread, indeed! He's Jesus, Joseph's son. We know his parents."

"Exactly. So what does he mean, he came from heaven?"

"Enough of that," Jesus said. "Nobody will come to me who isn't drawn by the Father. The prophet said: God will teach them all, which means that anyone who listens to the Father will come to me. 'Don't misunderstand: I'm not saying that anyone except for me has seen the Father. What I am saying most solemnly is this: believe in me and you'll be alive forever.

"I am the very bread of life. Your ancestors ate manna in the desert and later died. The bread I'm talking about is 'heaven's bread' - eat it and

you will never die. And this bread with which I shall sustain the world is my body."

The crowd got into a heated argument at these words. "What ever is he talking about - our eating his body!"

"The truth is," Jesus said, "that unless you eat my body and drink my blood you aren't really alive. But if you do, you're alive forever, and I will raise you from the grave on the final day. My body is the true food, my blood is the true drink. Eat and drink of me and you'll share with me and I with you. Just as the living God sent me, just as I am alive because of him, so the person who partakes of me is alive because of me.

"What I'm talking about here is the real 'heaven's bread.' Unlike the manna - which couldn't keep your forebears from dying - 'heaven's bread' is that food which, having been eaten, gives life forever."

The disciples, who had been listening carefully, said to each other, "This is an incredible doctrine! Who could possibly accept it?"

Jesus knew what they were thinking. "Is it too much for you?" he asked. "Then what would you think if you saw me ascend to heaven? Don't worry, the Spirit will make it all comprehensible to you: human reason is useless here. The things I've been saying are of the spirit and of the essence of life. The trouble is that some of you don't believe." (He had known from the beginning who they were, even as he knew who the traitor was.) "That's why I told you that no one could come to me unless he was moved to do so by my Father."

This was too much for many of his disciples and they deserted him. He watched them leave and turned to the apostles.

"Are you going, too?"

"To whom would we go?" Simon peter said. "You're the one who has the words of everlasting life. We believe. We're convinced that you are

God's holy son."

"And yet," Jesus added, referring to Judas Iscariot, "Didn't I choose all twelve of you. . . and isn't one of you a devil?"

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(6) See also Mark 8:1-9 and Matthew 15:32-38 for the story of the feeding of the four thousand.

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## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

**The dispute over washing before meals - Syrophenician woman's daughter is healed - reading the "signs in the heavens" - the yeast of the Pharisees - a blind man healed.**

From that time on, Jesus avoided Judea since the officials there wanted him dead.

Now, it was a long-established custom of the Jews to wash their hands carefully before eating and to clean cups, pots, and pans with great diligence. It so happened that a delegation of Pharisees and Sadducees had come from Jerusalem to see Jesus, and they noticed that his disciples ate without having first washed their hands.

"Why do your disciples flout the teachings of the elders and not wash before meals?" they asked.

"What hypocrites you are." Jesus said. "Surely Isaiah was thinking of men like you when he wrote:

These people talk a great faith  
But they don't practise what they preach.  
Their worship is a fruitless thing,

Their teaching is the precepts of men.

"You people are more interested in following your traditions than in obeying God's commandments. For instance, Moses told you to honor your parents and warned that the man who reviles them would die. But what is your response? You teach that it is permissible for a son to say to his needy parents, 'Sorry, I can't help you. What I might have given to you has been dedicated to God.' The result is that in following your traditions God's will is nullified."

A crowd had gathered and he brought them in close. "Listen to me carefully," he said. "Nobody is defiled by food. The things that defile aren't the things that go into a man; they're the things that emerge from him."

Later, inside the house, the disciples said to him, "Surely you realize that you offended the Pharisees by what you said?"

"Forget them," he said. "They're blind men, they're self-appointed guides, and when the blind guide the blind they both end up in the ditch. Don't be concerned about the Pharisees; nothing planted by my heavenly Father will be uprooted."

Simon Peter spoke to him "Then please explain to us what you meant?"

"Didn't you understand either?" he said. "What a man eats can't defile his spirit because it merely goes into his stomach and is passed by the bowels." (In saying this he removed all food from the "unclean" list.) "It is the things that come from a man - base thoughts of fornication, adultery, and lasciviousness, coveting and theft, deceit and slander, arrogance, lying, folly - they are the things that defile. It has nothing to do with washing before meals."

Jesus left Galilee and went to the border area of Tyre. Although he traveled incognito, it was impossible to keep his presence secret. He had

no sooner arrived than a woman who had heard about him -a Canaanitish woman, a Syrophoenician by birth - came to beg his help.

"Sir," she pleaded, "have mercy on me. Son of David have mercy on me. My daughter has a devil and she's in a terrible state."

Jesus made no response to her so she began to badger the disciples. They came to him.

"Will you please tell her to go away. She follows us around, pleading with us every day."

"No," he said, "I've been sent only to the lost sheep of the House of Israel."

The woman was not deterred. Again she came to him, "Please, sir," she begged, "help me!"

"But the children must be fed first," he said. "Would it be right to take food prepared for the children and throw it to the dogs?"

"No, sir," she said. "But even the dogs under the table are allowed to have any crumbs that fall from the children's hands."

"You have great faith, woman," Jesus said to her, "Because if what you said you may have what you ask. The devil has gone out of your daughter."

The woman went home and found her daughter in bed asleep, with the devil gone.

He left the area, passing through Sidon but skirting Decapolis, and returned to the Lake Galilee area. A crowd quickly gathered, and someone brought a man who was deaf and tongue-tied to Jesus. He begged Jesus to heal the man. Jesus took the man's hand and led him away from the crowd. He put his finger into the man's ears, wet his finger with his own saliva and touched it to the man's tongue. Then,

raising his eyes, he sighed deeply and said, "Open!" The man's ear's cleared, his tongue was loosened, and he was able to speak normally. Jesus gave him strict instruction to keep to himself what had happened but, as was usual, the man recounted it to everyone he met. The people were flabbergasted.

"There is nothing he can't do," they said. "He even cures the deaf and dumb!"

The crowds grew even larger. The people brought the sick from everywhere, placing them on the ground in front of him - the lame, the blind, the dumb, the crippled, and others. And as the people watched, mouths agape with wonder, he healed them and they praised God.

With the disciples, he took a boat and crossed to the area of Dalmanutha. There he was met by a group of Pharisees and Sadducees who put a series of questions to him in the hope of trapping him. All the while they challenged him to show them some sign from heaven, some validation of his ministry. He looked at them and heaved a great sigh.

"Signs from heaven? You're the experts at that. When the horizon is red and clouding over in the morning you say, 'Oh, oh, bad weather today. And when the sky is red in the evening you say, 'Fair weather ahead.' You can predict the weather from signs in the sky but you can't interpret the signs of the times. Why is the wicked and unfaithful generation always after proof? I repeat, you'll get no proof except the sign of Jonah."

He turned away, boarded the boat, and crossed the lake. When they were out in open water, the disciples realized that they had forgotten to lay in food and had only a single loaf of bread among them. While they were talking about it, Jesus broke in on them.

"Listen carefully," he said. "Be on your guard constantly against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees."

They looked at each other, perplexed. "What's he getting at?" they asked each other. "Is his reference to yeast a rebuke because we forget to bring bread?"

He overheard them. "How could you think such a thing?" he asked. "Are you so insensitive that you still don't understand? Think back. When there were five thousand people to be fed and only five loaves, how many basketful of leftovers did you gather?"

"Twelve."

"You still don't understand? I was referring to the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees, which is hypocrisy. We have no need to be concerned about bread."

It was then they realized that he had been talking about the insidious, permeating nature of the teachings of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Soon they landed at Bethsaida and were met by some of the villagers who brought them with them a blind man. They asked Jesus to heal him. Again he led the man away from bystanders and out of the village. He spat on the man's eyes and then placed his fingers on them.

"Do you see anything?" he asked.

"Yes. I can see men. They're like trees, only they're walking."

He put his hands on the man's eyes again. The man stared fixedly for a moment, then his vision cleared and he saw perfectly.

"Go straight home," Jesus told him. "Don't even go back to the village."

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

**Peter's declaration that Jesus is the Christ - the cost of discipleship - Jesus predicts his death - he teaches humility through a child - the parable of the lost sheep - forgiving one's brother - the parable of the ungrateful servant.**

Peter's declaration that Jesus is the Christ - the cost of discipleship - Jesus predicts his death - he teaches humility through a child - the parable of the lost sheep - forgiving one's brother - the parable of the ungrateful servant.

Jesus and the apostles were on a tour of some villages in Caesarea Philippi and had paused along the way. Jesus had been praying, with the others nearby. He put a question to them.

"Who do the people think I am?" he asked.

"Some say you're John the Baptist. Others say you're Elijah. Others say you're one of the prophets back from the grave."

"Who do you think I am?"

Peter spoke up. "I think you're the Christ, the son of the living God!"

"How good God has been to you, Simon!" he said. "You didn't come to that conclusion because of others, but because my Father revealed it to you. You are Peter. On this rock I'm going to found my church and even the grave won't be able to defeat it. I'm going to give you the keys to heaven. Anything you forbid on earth will be forbidden in heaven and you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven." He then gave Peter and the others strict instructions to tell no one that he was the Christ.

From that time, Jesus began to hint to the disciples that he would have to go to Jerusalem where he would be put to great suffering, be rebuffed by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, be executed, and on the third day rise from the grave. Once he said it in public, and Peter took him aside and spoke to him sharply.

"Never, Teacher!" he said. "That must never happen to you."

Jesus looked around and saw that the disciples were watching. He rebuked Peter. "Out of my sight, Satan," he said. "If I were to do what you say, I wouldn't be obedient to God. You're not thinking in God's terms but in man's."

He beckoned the crowd and the disciples in closer. "Some of you are considering becoming my followers," he said, "so you should realize what's involved. It will mean denying your own desires and being prepared to go with me to the death. The man who holds his life too dearly is going to lose it while the man who's ready to lose it for the good news of the kingdom is going to find it. Consider - if life gave you everything but you lost your soul in the process, what would be the profit in that? What is so valuable that you would trade your soul for it?"

"If you're ashamed to be identified with me and my teaching in a time as wicked and unfaithful as the present," he continued, "then the son of man will be ashamed to be identified with you when he returns, surrounded with God's glory and his angels. There will be a reckoning then based on what people have done. And hear me now: some of you standing here will live to see the kingdom in its power."

A week later Jesus took Peter, James, and John and led them high on a mountain to pray. As he continued to pray, the disciples fell asleep. Sometime later they stirred in their sleep, and only half awake, saw his entire appearance change as he prayed. His face became as radiant as sunlight and his robes turned dazzlingly white and glistening. As they watched, Moses and Elijah - shining with splendor - took form and talked with him about his impending departure in Jerusalem from the earth.

The disciples began to find their bearings just as Moses and Elijah were leaving. Peter, not quite knowing what he was saying, blurted out: "Teacher... it's glorious for us to be here. Let's build three shelters: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."

As he was speaking a bright cloud moved overhead and enveloped

them, filling them with stark terror. A voice came from within the cloud: "This is my son. The one I love, the one in whom I delight. Listen to him."

The disciples collapsed, trembling with fear. Jesus went to them and touched them. "Get up," he said. "There's no need to be afraid."

They lifted their heads and looked around. There was no one to be seen but Jesus.

As they came down the mountain he impressed on them that they were to keep what they had seen to themselves until after he was resurrected. They puzzled over the reference to his resurrection and finally went to him.

"Why do the scribes say that Elijah must reappear before the Messiah comes?" they asked.

"Because it's true," he said. "Elijah is to come first to begin the renovation of the earth. Now I see what's troubling you. You're wondering how the prophets could possibly have written that the Messiah would be subject to suffering and scorn. Well, let me point out to you that Elijah has already come, and, as was predicted, they've done their worst to him. I'll suffer at their hands, too." It was then they realized he had been referring to John the Baptist.

The following day, when they reached the foot of the mountain, they found the disciples surrounded by a crowd, arguing with some scribes. Those who saw Jesus approaching ran excitedly to welcome him.

"What's the argument about?" he asked. One of the men separated himself from the others and came and knelt down in front of him.

"Sir," he said, "I came here to bring my son, my only son, to you. When you weren't here, I asked your disciples to help but they didn't seem able to. Now I ask you, please have mercy on my son. He's an epileptic; but worse, he has a dumb devil in him. Whenever it brings on a seizure he screams and is thrown to the ground. He foams at the mouth, grinds his teeth, and rolls around in convulsions. He's suffered terribly. Sometimes, when he's in a convulsion, he rolls into a fire or into the water."

"What a faithless and perverse people you are," Jesus said to the

disciples. "How long shall I remain with you and put up with you? Bring the boy to me."

As they were leading him forward, the devil suddenly threw the boy to the ground in a convulsion. He thrashed about, foaming at the mouth.

"How long has he been like this?" Jesus asked.

"Ever since he was little," the father said. "If you can do anything, please have pity and help us."

"It's not what I can do. . . can you believe? Everything is possible to the man who will believe."

Without hesitation the father said, "I do believe! Help me with my doubt."

The crowd was now running toward them, so Jesus quickly spoke to the demon: "Deaf and dumb spirit, I command you: come out of him once and for all!"

The devil came out and the boy lay motionless on the ground. Jesus reached down and took him by the hand and he stood up. He then put the boy's hand in his father's.

Later, when they were alone indoors, the disciples asked him, "Why couldn't we do it?"

"Partly because that kind of devil can only be driven out through prayer and partly because you have so little faith. Believe me, if your faith were no larger than a mustard seed, you could tell this mountain to move from here to there and it would. Nothing would be impossible for you."

They traveled incognito to Galilee where they rested for a few days. The disciples were ecstatic about the events of the past few days, so he spoke to them solemnly.

"Let what I'm telling you sink in," he said. "I'm going to be arrested and handed over to the authorities and they will kill me. But then, "on the third day, I'll rise from the dead."

The disciples were sobered by his words, but they hadn't yet grasped what lay ahead (actually, it was kept from them), and they were afraid to

press him further on the subject.

While they were staying in Capernaum, the collector of the temple-tax came to Peter.

"Doesn't your teacher pay the tax?" he asked.

"Of course, he does," Peter said and went into the house.

Before he could say anything, Jesus spoke.

"I have a question for you, Simon."

"Yes?"

"When the authorities collect taxes and customs-duties, do they exact payment from their own families or only from others?"

"From others."

"So 'family' shouldn't have to pay, Right? But let's not offend them. Take your fishing gear, go down to the lake, and throw in a line. In the mouth of the first fish you catch, you'll find a coin. Use it to pay our taxes."

On the road to Capernaum the apostles had been arguing among themselves as to who would be the most important in the kingdom. When they were all gathered indoors, Jesus brought the subject up.

"What were you discussing back there on the road?" he asked.

They were too embarrassed to answer. He knew what they had been talking about, so he sat down and gathered them around him.

"Anyone who sets his mind on being above all others in the kingdom will end up least of all and the servant of the others," he said.

There was a child nearby. Jesus called him over and sat him on his lap. "Believe me," he told the disciples, "unless you change your thinking and become like this child you won't even get in the kingdom. Have the humility of this little fellow, and you'll be somebody in the kingdom. Would you like to know which of you will be the greatest? The one with the greatest humility."

"Teacher," John said, "while we were on the road we saw a man driving

out devils. He claimed to be doing it on your authority. He wasn't one of us so we told him to stop."

"You shouldn't have done that," Jesus said. "Nobody who uses my name to do some extraordinary thing will find it easy to speak badly of me. Those who aren't opposed to us are for us. Indeed, anyone who gives you even a drink of water because you're a follower of mine will be rewarded. On the other hand, anyone who leads one of the little ones who have faith in me into sin would be better off if he were drowned in the deepest part of the lake with a millstone tied about his neck. Alas, the world is filled with temptations - temptations is a part of life - but miserable will be any man who is responsible for leading others into temptation.

"If your hands or your feet cause you to be ensnared, get rid of them; it's better to enter the kingdom maimed than to be whole and thrown into the unquenchable fire. The same is true of your eye; if it leads you into sin get rid of it. It is better to enter the kingdom with one eye than to have both and to be thrown into that hell of fire, where the worms gnaw forever and the flame never dies. Everyone is going to be seasoned with fire, and seasoning is good if it adds zest. Let yours be an inner seasoning and live together in peace."

He looked down at the child on his lap. "See that you never disdain one of these little ones," he said. "They have angels who are never far from God's presence."

"Now," said, "a question: If a man owned one hundred sheep and one of them wandered off, wouldn't he leave the ninety-nine and go into the hills to find the lost one? And, once he had found it, wouldn't he be happier for that one than for the ninety-nine who didn't stray? In the same way, your Father doesn't want to lose even one of these little ones.

"If you have a brother who has done you wrong, go to him privately and straighten things out. If he listens to you, good-you have a brother again. But if he still won't listen, take one or two others with you as witnesses, and go to him again. If he still won't listen, take the matter up with the congregation. If their decision is that you're in the right, and he still refuses to straighten things out, treat him as you would a pagan or an outcast. Bear in mind that anything you restrained on earth will be

restrained in heaven and anything you free on earth will be freed in heaven.

"Let me emphasize again that if any two of you agree on anything, ask my Father for it and he will do it. Not only that but wherever two or three of you meet in my name, I'll be there with you."

Peter spoke up, "On this matter of a brother who does me wrong: how many times should I forgive him? Seven times?"

"Not seven times, Peter, seventy-seven times."

"Let me give you the example that how the kingdom works. Here's a king. He's settling up accounts with his indentured servants. One - to whom he made a loan of more than a million dollars - couldn't pay, so he ordered him sold as a slave - the man, his wife, his children, and everything he owned. The man fell to his knees and begged for more time, pledging to pay off the debt. The king was touched by man's plea and not only forgave the debt but set him free. What did the fellow do? He went straight to one of his fellow-servants - a man who owned him about seventeen dollars - seized him by the throat and said, 'Pay me or else!' The other fellow pleaded for more time, but no, he had him thrown in the debtor's prison to stay there until he paid up. Some of the king's servants were angry when they heard what had happened. They appealed to the king, and the king summoned the servant.

"'You despicable wretch!' he said. 'I wipe out your debt because you pleaded with me, then you refuse your fellow-servant the same generosity.' He was furious and handed the man over to be jailed until he paid up.

"And," Jesus added, "my Father will treat you the same way if you won't forgive your brother and forgive him from the heart."

As they left the house a scribe came up to him.

"Count on me, sir," he said. "I'm going to follow you. It makes no difference where you go."

"The foxes have dens and the birds have nests," Jesus said. "You should understand that I have no home."

He turned to one of his disciples, "You follow me," he told him.

"Yes, Teacher," the disciple said, "but my father has died. Let me go first and take care of the funeral arrangements."

"Let the dead bury the dead," he said. "You go and proclaim the kingdom."

Another man came to him. "I'm prepared to follow you," he said. "Is it all right if I go home first and say good-bye to my family?"

Jesus looked at him. "No man who puts his hand to the plow and then turns away is fit for the kingdom," he said.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

**Jesus sets out for Jerusalem - he is accused of being mad - "living water" for those who thirst - an adulteress is forgiven - Jesus debates with the Pharisees - a beggar born blind is healed - the parable of the good shepherd.**

The Jews' Feast of the Tabernacles was approaching, and Jesus' brothers, who didn't believe him, came to him.

"Let's go to Judea," they said, "so that your followers there may see what you're doing. Surely no one who wants to be publicly known keeps what he's doing secret. If you really can do all this marvelous things, why not let the whole world know?"

"No," he said. "The time isn't yet ripe for me. It is for you, though - it always is. The world has no reason to hate you, but it despises me because I indict its very way of life. You go on ahead. I'll come later at the appropriate time." The brothers left for Jerusalem.

The time was drawing closer for his return to heaven, and knowing that he must soon go to Jerusalem, Jesus settled it in his mind to go. He did

not, however, travel in a caravan, but privately, sending some of the apostles on ahead to make arrangements for overnight accommodation. During a journey they came to a Samaritan village where, seeing that he was headed to Jerusalem, the villagers refused to let him stay the night. James and John were outraged.

"Teacher," they fumed, "shall we call down fire from heaven and incinerate them?"

Jesus rebuked them for their attitude, and they continued on to the next town.

In Jerusalem, the feast was being celebrated and word spread quickly that Jesus was coming. The residents of the city inquired after him everywhere. He was the principal topic of conversation and the subject of much argument.

"He's a good man," it was said.

"A good man, nothing! He's leading the people astray."

None of his advocates defended him openly because they were afraid of the authorities.

The festival was at its height when he arrived. He went directly to the temple and began to teach. The crowd listened and afterward buzzed with excitement.

"How can he possibly know all these things?" they said to each other. "He's never studied."

"Let me tell you how," Jesus said. "It's because the views I present are not mine but are the wisdom of the one who sent me. If you're prepared to do his bidding, you'll know immediately that they're my thoughts or God's. The teacher who puts forward only his own ideas is after personal glory, but the man whose object is to honor God tells the truth

without deceit. Moses gave you the Law, didn't he? But is there one of you who observes it fully? Then why do you want to kill me because I don't keep it? "

"You're crazy!" a man shouted. "Nobody's trying to kill you.

"Then why do you get so upset when I heal a man on a sabbath?" Jesus said." Consider this: Moses established the rite of circumcision among you (actually it pre-dated Moses) and to avoid disobeying that commandment you circumcize a boy on a sabbath when it's necessary. And yet to get angry at me when I make a man well in all of his body on a sabbath. Stop judging things by appearances, pay attention to what matters.

"Some of the people of Jerusalem began to raise questions among themselves. "He's the man they're out to kill, isn't he? Then how is it that he's teaching here in the temple 'right in the open, and they don't do a thing? is it possible that the authorities believe he is the Christ?"

Others countered the argument. "Look," they said, "we know where this fellow comes from. When the Messiah comes, nobody will know where he's from."

Jesus overheard the discussion and raised the subject while teaching in the temple.

"You know two things about me," he said, "You know who I am and where I come from. What you don't know is that I'm not here by my own choice; I've been sent here by someone I know, the true one, someone you don't know. I'm his representative and his messenger."

Many of the people who heard him believed in him. "Look at it this way," they said. "When the Messiah does come, will he do more miraculous things than this man has been doing?"

The Pharisees and the chief priests got reports of all this and dispatched a detachment of temple-guards to arrest Jesus.

He told the crowd, "I'll be with you for a while yet, then I'm going to return to the one who sent me. You'll search for me but you won't find me because you won't be able to go where I'm going."

The people puzzled over this. "Where will he go that we won't be able to find him? May he'll be go to the Greeks and refugees of the Dispersion. Maybe he's going to teach there? What does he mean?"

On the final and the climactic day of the festival, Jesus stood up in the temple and cried out: "Is there anyone here who is thirsty? Let him come to me and drink. Put your faith in me and, just as the scriptures say, you'll have a source of living water within you." This was a reference to the holy spirit, who would be given to believers after Jesus returned to heaven.

His teaching had divided the crowd. They began to argue about him.

"Surely this man is a prophet. In truth he is!"

"He is. He's the Christ."

"A Christ from Galilee? We know better than that! The scriptures teach that the Christ will come from Bethlehem - 'King David's Town' - and will be a descendent of David." This difference of opinion of people spread even to those who had been sent to arrest Jesus. And none of the guards took any action.

When they reported in, the chief priests and the Pharisees asked, "Where is he? Why haven't you arrested him?"

"But we've never heard anyone like him," they replied." The way he

talks . . ."

"Have you been duped, too?" they said. "Look, ask yourselves; do any of the authorities believe in him? Do any of the Pharisees? As for the rabble, what do they know about the Law; they're already damned."

Nicodemus - the member of Council who had gone to see Jesus previously - spoke up.

"Do we, under our Law, convict a man before hearing his defense or hearing charges?"

They turned on him, "Are you too from Galilee? Go search the scriptures. You'll find that the prophet does not come from Galilee!"

The meeting broke up.

Jesus spend the night on the mount of Olives, and early the next morning went to the temple. He sat down in the midst of a crowd and began to teach. The scribes and the Pharisees, looking for a way to trap him so that they would have grounds to lay charges, brought a woman to him and had her stand at the front.

"Now, Teacher, "they said, "what have you to say about this woman? She's an adulteress caught in the very act. Moses' Law says to stone such a woman, what do you say?"

Jesus bent over and began to write in the dust. They kept after him: "Moses says stone her, what do you say?"

He straightened up. "Go ahead," he said, "stone her. But let the first stone be thrown by a man who has never sinned.

"Again he bent over and traced words in the dust. One by one the men slipped away, from the eldest to the youngest, and Jesus and the

woman were left alone. He straightened up.

"Where are your accusers, woman?" he said. "Is there no one to condemn you?"

"No one sir."

"Nor do I. Go now, and don't sin again."

Later addressing the crowd near the Treasury, he said, "I am the world's light. Follow me and you'll have the light of life. Never again will you have to walk in the dark."

One of the Pharisees taunted him. "You recommend yourself," he said. "Who would trust that?"

"Even if I do," he replied, "that doesn't alter the fact that my words are true and that I know where I've come from and where I'm going. You know nieter and yet you judge as men judge. I judge no one, but if I did it it would be a fair judgement because it would be made in company with the Father who sent me and is with me. Your law states that a fact is authenticated through the testimony of two witnesses. All right then, I'm a witness for myself and so is my Father."

"Where is this Father of yours?"

"You don't know him or me because if you knew me you'd know him."

Later he repeated a statement he had made earlier: "I'm going to leave you," he said. "You'll go looking for me, but because you can't go where I'm going, You'll die in your sins."

"What does he mean," They said, "that we can't go where he's going? Does he means that he is going to commit suicide?"

"There is a fundamental difference between us," he said. "I'm from above and you are from below. You're from this world and I'm not. The

reason I say you'll die in your sins simply because, unless you believe that I am who I am, you will."

"But who are you?"

"I am who I've said I am all along. I might say any number of things to you - just as I might condemn many things in you - but that is not my purpose: my purpose is only those things I have been told to speak by him - by 'the real one.'"

"Since it was obvious that they did not realize he was talking about God, he continued."When you have lifted me up [on the cross] you will realize who I am and that nothing I have done has been done on my own, rather it has all been in obedience to my Father. He is with me, always, and my only desire is to please him.

"Hearing this, many people came to believe in him. To them, he said, "Stay true to what you've been taught and you will truly be my disciples. You will understand the truth and that truth will set you free."

"But we're descendants of Abraham," one of them objected. "We've never been a slave to any man. What do you mean we'll be set free?"

"The fact is," he replied, "that anyone who commits a sin is the slave of sin. A slave isn't a member of the household whereas the son is, so if the son tells you you're free, you really are. I know you are the descendants of Abraham, but that doesn't keep you from wanting to kill me because my teaching isn't palatable to you. I say what I've learned from my Father: you make it quiet clear what you've learned from your father!"

"Abraham is our father."

"If he really was, you'd do what he did. Instead, you're out to kill me, simply because I tell you the truth, truth I got from God. Abraham

wouldn't do that. You follow your father, all right!"

"We're not illegitimate. We have one father ... God!"

"If God was your Father you'd love me because I came from him and have been sent by him. Do you know why you don't understand my teaching? It's because you can't bear to. Your father is the devil and what he wants done you choose to do. He's a murderer from the beginning. He has never had anything to do with the truth because it's foreign to his nature. When he lies it's to be expected; he's a born liar and the father of lies. It is precisely because I speak the truth that you don't believe me. I put it to you: can any one of you charge me with any sin? Then why, when I tell you the truth, don't you believe me? The man of god accepts the words of God; that precisely why you don't!"

"Speaking of the truth," someone called out, "isn't the real truth that you're a Samaritan and possessed by the devil!"

"No, I don't have a devil. My purpose is to honor my Father, yours is to dishonor me. I'm not after praise - someone else looks after that, and he's the judge. The fact remains that anyone who does what I say will never die."

"Now we know you're crazy! Abraham is dead, the prophets are dead, and here you are saying that if a man will do what you say he'll never die. Are you greater than Abraham? Well, he died. The prophets died. Who do you think you are?"

"What would be the use of my praising myself?" Jesus replied. "My Father does that, and you tell me he's your God. You don't even know him. But I do. If I said I didn't, I'd be as great a liar as you are. Not only do I know him but I obey him. Your father Abraham rejoiced in anticipation of my coming, and now that he's seen it, he's glad."

"Sure, sure. Here you are, not yet fifty years old, and you've seen

Abraham. . ."

"The truth is," Jesus said, "that I existed before Abraham was born."

They reached for stones to kill him but he slipped away and left the temple.

On one occasion he was out walking with his disciples and they passed a beggar who had been born blind.

"Teacher," they asked, "why was he born like that? Was it because of some sin of his or because his parents had sinned?"

"Neither," he said. "It was so he could be an example of God's power- and we'd better be busy at the Father's work while it's still day. The night isn't far off when you won't be able to do a thing. I give light to the world, but only as long as I am here."

He bent over, spat in the dust, and made some mud which he spread over the beggar's eyes. "Go wash that off in Siloam Pool," he told him. (Siloam means "sent.")

The beggar did, and his vision was perfect. When his neighbors and others who had known him as a beggar saw him, they talked among themselves:

"Isn't that the blind beggar?"

"Sure it is."

"Can't be. But he certainly looks like him."

The beggar said, "It's me, all right."

"But how is it that you can see?"

"The man they call Jesus made some mud and smeared it on my eyes and told me to go wash it off in Siloam Pool. I did and I can see."

"Where is Jesus now?"

"I don't know."

They took the beggar to the Pharisees. (It should be borne in mind that all this happened on a sabbath.) The Pharisees asked him questions about what had happened.

"A man by the name of Jesus put some mud on my eyes," he told them. "I washed it off and I can see. That's it."

One of the Pharisees said, "But the man you're talking about obviously isn't a good man: he doesn't keep the sabbath."

"But how can he do such miraculous things if he's wicked?" one of their group said, and they got into an argument. After a while they turned back to the beggar.

"You are the one whose eyes were opened, what do you think of him?"

"I think he's a prophet."

The Pharisees refused to believe that the beggar had been born blind, so they sent for his parents.

"Is this your son?" they asked.

"Yes."

"Was he born blind?"

"Yes."

"Then how is it that he can see?"

"We don't know."

"Don't you know who opened his eyes?"

The beggar's parents were afraid to tell what they knew because the authorities had agreed that anyone who said Jesus was the Christ would be barred from the synagogue. So instead they said, "No, we don't know. Why don't you ask him? He's of age, he can speak for himself."

The Pharisees turned to the beggar.

"Come now young man," they said. "You have your sight now. Give God the credit. We know this Jesus is an evil man."

"I don't know whether he is or isn't," the beggar said. "The one thing I do know is that I used to be blind and now I can see."

"All right then, tell us exactly what happened. What did he do?"

"Look, I've already told you and you didn't listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his followers?"

"You're his follower!" they snapped, "We follow Moses' teaching. We know where Moses got his instructions - he got them from God - we don't even know where this fellow comes from."

"I find all this hard to believe," the beggar said. "You don't know where he comes from and yet he opened my eyes. We do know though - don't we? - that God doesn't listen to evil men but only to those who worship and obey him. Do you know of another instance where a man born blind got his sight? If Jesus weren't from God he simply couldn't have done it."

"You misbegotten little wretch!" they raged. "Do you presume to teach us?" and they threw him out of the synagogue.

Jesus heard what had happened and looking for the beggar.

"Do you believe in the son of man?" he asked him.

"Tell me who he is, sir, so that I may."

"Not only have you seen him, he's talking to you."

"I do believe, sir," the beggar said, and knelt at his feet.

"The very fact that I am in the world creates a judgement," Jesus said.  
"Thus those who can see become blind."

One of the Pharisees overheard him. "Are you suggesting that we're blind?" he said.

"If you were, you wouldn't be guilty," he said. "Your guilt lies in the fact that you insist you can see."

He told a parable. "Here's a sheep pen. It has a gate. So, when you see a man sneak in some way other than by the gate, you presume he's a thief. When the shepherd wants to go in he goes to the gate and the attendant opens it. The sheep recognize his voice, and when he has cut out his sheep, he leads them out. That's why they run from a stranger; they don't recognize his voice."

The disciples did not understand the parable, so he explained it later.

"Understand me now," he said. "I am the gate. Those who came before me are the thieves. The sheep didn't heed them. I am the gate to the kingdom, and anyone who enters through me shall be saved and may go in and out readily to find pasture. The thief comes to the pen for only purpose: to steal and to kill. I too, come for one reason: to bring life in all its fulfulness to my sheep. I'm the true shepherd is willing to sacrifice his life for his sheep whereas a hired hand is not. The hired hand doesn't own the sheep nor does he feel affection for them, so when a wolf comes he runs and the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. But I'm the true shepherd. I know my sheep and they know me in much the same way that I know the Father. I will die for my sheep.

"But I have other sheep, too," he continued, "sheep that aren't part of

this flock, and they will hear my voice too. I'll lead them also and make them part of one flock with one shepherd. The reason the Father loves me is that I am willing to die and so to live again. Nobody will take my life; I'll lay it down of my own choice. I have the authority to lay it down and the power to take it up again. That's the task my Father gave me."

There was a great deal of argument among the people when they heard this.

Some said, "He's crazy! He has a devil. Why listen to him?"

Others said, "That isn't the way a man possessed talks. And can a devil make a blind man see?"

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

**The commissioning of the Seventy - the parable of the good Samaritan - dinner with Martha and Mary - the Pharisees' concern for the external - a warning against greed - the parables of the wealthy farmer and the faithful servants - the worshipers killed the temple - the barren fig tree - a woman healed of her infirmity.**

These things behind him, Jesus commissioned seventy of his disciples and sent them ahead in pairs to each of the towns he planned to visit.

"What a harvest there is out there," he told them. "Pray and ask the Lord of the harvest to send help." He gave them essentially the same instructions he had given the apostles when he first sent them out.<sup>7</sup>

When the seventy got back they reported on what had happened to them, exultant over the fact that, as they said, "When we speak in your name even the devils do what we tell them."

Jesus listened and then said, "I recall seeing Satan fall- as a bolt of lightning flashes from the sky to the earth. Yes, I have given you power

to walk among snakes and scorpions and be immune to their venom and immune, too, to the worst the enemy can do to you. But don't let the fact that you have power over evil spirits carry you away: it is far more important that your names have been inscribed in heaven."

Suddenly he was in a transport of happiness. "How grateful I am, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that it has been your pleasure to hide these truths from intellectuals and sophisticates, and to make them clear to the childlike."

An expert in the mosaic Law spoke up, trying to catch him out.

"Teacher," he said, "what must I do to be sure of living forever?"

"What does the Law say?" Jesus asked him. "How do you read it?"

"It says that you must love God with all that you are - with your will, your spirit, your body and your intellect - and that you must have the same regard for your neighbor as you have for yourself."

"Right," Jesus said. "Do that and you'll live."

But the lawyer was looking for a way to justify his views so he said, "Define 'neighbor.' "

Jesus told a story. "Here's a man making a trip from Jerusalem to Jericho. He's attacked by thieves. They steal his money and his clothes, beat him until he's half dead, and then run off. Now it so happens that a priest comes along and sees the man lying there. What does he do? He crosses to the far side of the road and keeps going. Along comes a Levite and he does the same. Then, along comes one of the despised Samaritans. He sees the man lying there and feels sorry for him. He goes to him, cleans out his wounds with oil and wine, and bandages him. Then he props him up on his mule and walks him to a roadside inn where he takes care of him as best he can. The following morning, he pays his own bill and the injured man's and says to the innkeeper, 'Look

after him, please. See that he gets whatever he needs and I'll take care of it when I get back.'

"Now," Jesus added, "there are three men here - a priest, a Levite, and a Samaritan - which of them showed a neighborly spirit?"

"The one who helped."

"You go do the same."

They left the city and went to the village of Bethany where they were welcomed to the home of a woman named Martha. While she was out in the kitchen, her sister Mary sat on the floor at Jesus' feet listening to him. There was much to be done and Martha grew increasingly frustrated. Finally she burst in to the living room and spoke to him.

"Teacher;" she said, "don't you care that my sister has left me to prepare dinner by myself? Tell her to help me."

"Martha, Martha," he said, "You've let a lot of things upset you. Only one thing really matters, and Mary has made the right choice. I'm not going to take it from her."

One day as he was teaching, a Pharisee invited him home for a meal and he accepted. When he sat down to eat without having first washed his hands, his host showed surprise. Jesus looked at him.

"You Pharisees," he said. "How concerned you are that the surface of your cups and plates to be clean and how little concerned you are that you are filthy on the inside with greed and wickedness. Foolish men, didn't the God who made the outside make the inside, too? Let your generosity to the poor emerge from the pure heart and everything will be clean to you."

On another occasion he was speaking to a large crowd and a man called out, "Teacher my brother has come into a legacy: order him to

divide it with me."

"A question for you, man," Jesus replied. "Who appointed me your judge?"

He turned to the crowd. "Guard against greed," he said. "Life is more than merely accumulating things." He told a parable: "A wealthy farmer stood contemplating the latest of a series of bountiful harvests. 'What shall I do,' he said to himself, 'I simply don't have any place to store it. I know what I'll do; I'll tear down all my barns and built a whole new barn, bigger and better than ever, and stash it all away. Then I'll have little talk with myself. 'Say there, old fellow,' I'll say, 'you're doing fine. Your future is secure so take it easy. Live it up.' ' Then comes the voice of God; 'Foolish man, you die tonight. Now who gets the benefit of all this wealth?'

"And that," Jesus added, "is the way it is with the man who is rich in things but impoverished in the sight of God."

He turned to the disciples. "That's why I tell you not to worry about transient things; about what you're going to put in your stomach or on your back. Life is more than food and clothing.

"I want you to think of yourselves as servants waiting for your master to return from a wedding-supper," he continued. "Be dressed and waiting so that the moment he knocks you can fling the door wide. Happy are those servants who are alert and ready to look after their master's needs. I tell you why; because for them the master will prepare his clothes for work, sit them down at the table, and wait on them himself. But, let's say he doesn't get in until after midnight or in the early hours of the morning. If, nevertheless, he finds them ready and waiting, they're fortunate indeed. Look, if the owner of the house knows the exact time at which a burglar was going to break in, he'd be there to stop him, wouldn't he? The point is, be ready at all times, you have no way of

knowing just when I'll return."

"Is that a parable for us. "Peter asked, "or for everybody?"

"The man I'm talking about, "Jesus said, "is that sort of sensible, dependable servant who has been put in charge of the provisions by the owner. How happy the servant will be if, when the owner gets back, he is found doing duty. I tell you, he'll put that man in charge of everything. But let's say the servant says to himself, 'The master won't be back for days,' and he begins to mistreat the other servants and to get into the food and liquor. Then unexpectedly, the owner returns. What will happen to him? He'll be severely punished and demoted to the menial tasks. The servant who knows what his master requires, but who doesn't do it or get it done on time, will be flogged. The servant who may not know what's required, but who performs badly even those things he does, will be punished too, but not so severely. Much will be expected of the man who has been given much. The man who has been given a great trust will be expected to do more.

"I've come to kindle a fire here on earth," Jesus said.

"How I wish it were already ablaze. I have a baptism to undergo and what pressure there is on me until it has been accomplished!"

It was at this point that some men hurried up to tell him about the Galileans who had been butchered by Pilate's soldiers even while they were at worship in the temple.

"What's on your mind?" he asked them. "Are you thinking that these must have been the worst men in Galilee, and that that's why they suffered such a terrible fate? Not true. Indeed, unless you forsake your sins you'll all die as horribly. Remember those eighteen men who were killed when the Siloam tower collapsed; do you think they were the worst men in Jerusalem? They weren't. Indeed, you'll come to a similar end unless you quit your sins."

He told them this parable: "There was once a man who had a garden. In the garden there was a fig tree. From time to time he'd check to see if there were any figs on it. Once when he looked and found none, he called the gardener. 'Look,' he said, 'for three years I've expected fruit on this tree; but nothing. Chop it down. Why let it take up valuable space?' The gardener said to him, 'Give it one more year. I'll cultivate and fertilize it and if we get a yield, good. If we don't, I'll cut it down.' "

One sabbath day when Jesus was teaching in the synagogue, there was in the congregation a woman who for eighteen years had had an infirmity that had bent her almost double and left her unable to stand straight. Jesus saw her, called her over, and placed his hands on her.

"Woman," he said, "you are freed from your illness." She immediately straightened up and happily began to praise God.

This annoyed the president of the synagogue because it was a sabbath day. He spoke to the congregation.

"There are six days set aside for work," he said. "If you want to be healed, come here on one of those days, but not on sabbath."

"You hypocrite!" Jesus said to him. "Don't you and all of your friends untether your ox or or your mule on a sabbath and lead it to the watering trough? Then shouldn't this woman - this daughter of our father Abraham - who has been tied up all these eighteen years by Satan, be untethered on this sabbath day?"

His response left his enemies shamed and silent, but the people were thrilled with the remarkable thing he did.

It was winter. The Dedication festival was on. Jesus was in Jerusalem and was strolling in that section of the temple known as Solomon's Portico. A group of Jewish leaders came to him and formed a circle around him.

"How much longer are you going to keep us wondering?" they said.  
"Out with it - are you or aren't you the Messiah?"

"I've already answered that," he said, "and you didn't believe me. Surely the things I do in the name of God tell you who I am. You don't accept it because you aren't my sheep. My sheep know me for who I am; that's why they come when I call them. In turn, I give them life forever and no one can steal them from him. My Father entrusted them to me - isn't he the greatest of all? - and no one can steal them from him. He and I are one."

They picked up some stones to kill him.

"I've done a lot of good things through the Father," he said. "For which of them are you about to kill me?"

"It has nothing to do with what you've done; it's because you blaspheme. You, a mere man, make yourself out to be God."

"But just a moment. Doesn't it say in your own Law: I said you are gods? Well then, if it speaks of men to whom God's word came as 'gods', and if the scriptures can't lie, how can you say that someone God has sanctified and sent into the world blasphemes when he merely says, 'I am God's son'? If I don't do God's will, don't believe me. But if I do, and you still can't believe in me, at least believe in what I do. Then you may realize that the Father is in me and that I'm in him."

Again they moved to arrest him, but he got away.

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(7) See Chapter 12

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

**Jesus teaches that few will be saved - a man with dropsy is healed - the parable of the unwilling guests - the cost of discipleship - the parables of the coin, the corrupt accountant, and the rich man and the beggar - the resurrection of Lazarus - the council plots Jesus' death.**

Jesus went on a tour through the cities and towns, teaching as he went. One day a man put a question to him.

"Teacher, will only a few be saved?"

"The doorway is narrow," he said. "Do your best to go through it. I'll tell you this: once the owner of the house has gotten up and locked the door there'll be no getting in. You may stand on the outside, banging on the door, and shouting, 'Lord, let us in,' but his response will be, 'I neither know who you are nor where you're from.' You'll say, 'But don't you remember? We had meals together. You taught in our town. . . .' And he'll say, 'I don't even know what town you're talking about. Go away, evildoer.'"

At that moment some Pharisees came up. "You'd better get out of town," they told him. "Herod's out to kill you."

"Go tell that fox that I'll be here for the next two days, driving out evil spirits and performing cures," he told them. "I'll finish my work here on the third day, But then again, perhaps I shall have to leave today or tomorrow or on the third day because it would never do for a prophet to die outside Jerusalem."

One sabbath he went to the home of a prominent Pharisee for a meal. Every eye was on him because right in front of him sat a man suffering from dropsy. At the table were a number of Pharisees and some lawyers. In the course of the meal Jesus put question to them.

"Is it permitted in the law to heal on the sabbath?"

No one would answer. Jesus put his hands on the man, healed him, and sent him away.

"I have another question," he said. "Which one of you, if your mule or ox should happen to fall into a well on a sabbath, wouldn't pull him out?"

The meal continued in silence. Earlier, Jesus had noticed that when the guests were gathering some had chosen the most prominent seats. He spoke to them through a parable.

"When you're invited to a wedding supper," he said, "let me advise you not to take the best seat. Some more distinguished guest may arrive late and your host may come to you and say, 'I'm sorry, but that seat was reserved for this man,' and you'll be in the embarrassing position of having to go to the foot of the table. Instead, take the poorest place. Then, your host may come to you and say, 'Here, take a better seat,' and you'll be honored in front of everybody. Exalt yourself and you'll be put down, even as the humble will be honored."

Now he turned to his host: "When you put on a dinner, don't invite your close friends, your family, your relatives, and your wealthy neighbors. They'll probably return the favor and you'll have been paid back. Instead invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. You'll be glad you did because, when the resurrection of the good takes place, you'll be repaid."

One of the guests said to him, "Think how glorious it will be to be in the kingdom of heaven when they sit down to table there!"

He told this story. "A certain man planned a great banquet and sent out many invitations. Just before the scheduled time he sent out his servants to inform the invited guests that everything was ready. To a man they

began to make excuses. One said, 'I bought some property and I must go and check it out.' 'Sorry,' another said, 'I just bought five team of oxen and I must go and see how they work together.' 'Please accept my regrets,' another said, 'but I just got married and can't attend. 'When the servant reported all this, the host was angry and gave his servants further orders: 'Quickly now, go into the street and the back lanes and invite the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame. 'Soon his servant was back again. 'We've done what you ordered, 'he said, 'and there are still some empty places.' The man said, 'Go out of town, go into the highways and the sideroads and insist that they come in so that my home may be filled. And mark my words: not one of those invited in the first place is going to get so much as a taste of what I'd prepared.'"

Everywhere he went, Jesus was followed by great crowds. At one point he turned and spoke to them about the problems of being a disciple.

"It's not easy to be a disciple of mine, "he warned. "Your allegiance to me must go far beyond family ties and affections. It must even be more important than your life; the man who is unwilling to follow me all the way to the cross can't be a disciple of mine.

"If you were going to erect a building, would you not first work out the cost to see whether you could finish it? How embarrassing to get the foundation in and then run out of money and have everyone pointing his finger at you and sneering, 'Look he started something he couldn't finish!'

"Or, to put it another way: here's a commander-in-chief with ten thousand troops under his command. He's marching to an engagement with an enemy of twenty thousand. Don't you think he'd consult with his staff in advance to determine whether or not he could win? And if the consensus is that he couldn't, wouldn't he send an envoy on ahead to see what peace terms he could get? Bearing all this in mind, I tell you that if you're not ready to renounce everything you cannot be one of my

disciples."

The outcasts and the disreputable were turning out to hear him in great numbers. This irked the Pharisees and the scribes and set them to grumbling.

"This fellow is a friend of scoundrels," they said. "He even takes meals with them."

So he told this parable: "Here's a woman whose entire wealth is ten silver coins. One day she loses one. Don't you think that she would be concerned to find it? Why she'd search every nook and cranny of the house for it and, finding it, would call in her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Come, celebrate with me; I've found the coin I lost.' And I tell you," Jesus said, "that in heaven they celebrate in much the same way when even one sinner quits his sins."

He told another parable: "There once was a man with two sons. One day the younger came to him and said, 'Father give me the share of your estate that will one day come to me.' The Father did and a few days later the young man turned his belongings into cash and took off to a distant country where he squandered the money in carousing and every kind of extravagance. It so happened that, at the time he ran out of funds, there was a serious famine in the area and he found himself in actual need. He took a job as a hired hand whose duty it was to feed the pigs. One day he reached the stage where even the slop for the pigs looked good to him, and there was no relief in sight. At that point he came to his senses said to himself, 'here I am, half-starved, while back home even my father's servants have more than they can eat. I'm going home. I'll say to my father, "Father, I have sinned against God and I've let you down. I don't deserve to be known as your son but let me work for you as a hired-hand."' He headed for home. Before he reached the gate, his father saw him coming and saw how impoverished he looked, and his heart went out to him. He ran to meet him, threw his arms

around him, and hugged him close. The son said, 'I'm a sinner, father. I've sinned against both God and you and I don't deserve to be known as your son.'

"The father turned to the servants. 'Quickly!' he said. 'Bring the best clothes from the house and put them on him. Quickly, a ring . . .and some shoes. And that calf we've been fattening -go slaughter it. We're going to have a party. The son I'd given up for dead is alive! I was sure he was lost but now we've got him back!' The man's elder son had been working in the field all that day. As he drew near to the house he heard the sound of music and the laughter and talk of a party. He asked one of the servants what was going on. The servant told him what had happend. The elder son was furious and wouldn't go near the house. His father came out and pleaded with him, but the son said, 'Look father, all these years I've worked for you. Never once have I deliberately disobeyed you. Yet in all that time you've never given me so much as a young goat so that I could throw a dinner party for my friends. Then, today, your son comes home after squandering your money on whores, and you kill the fattened calf for him.' His father said to him, 'But son, you've been here with me all the time. Everything I have is yours. What was I to do but to be happy and celebrate? He's your brother and I thought he was dead. But he's alive! I thought he was lost, but now he's home again.' "

Then Jesus told a story especially for the disciples. "There was once a wealthy man who put all his affairs in the hands of an accountant. One day some people informed him that the accountant was mishandling his affairs. He called the man in. "What's this I hear about you?" he said. "Turn in the books. You're fired.' Well, the accountant said to himself, 'What am I going to do? I've lost my job. I'm not physically up to doing manual labor and I could never lower myself to beg. I know what; I'll fix it so that even when I'm out of a job people will welcome me to their homes.' So he had his boss's debtors in and said to them. 'Let's see now,

you owe us for one hundred barrels of oil. Quickly, tear up the bill and make out one for fifty!' To another he said, 'You owe us for a hundred bushels of wheat. Make it eighty.' Despite himself the boss couldn't help but admire the rascal's shrewdness.

"In the short term, "Jesus went on, "wordly men are often far wiser than good men. I'm telling you to use money wisely - tainted as it may be - to make friends so that when it runs out they may welcome you into the everlasting houses. A man who is careful in small matters will be careful in important things, and if you can't handle 'filthy lucre' wisely, who's going to trust you with true wealth? Nobody can work for two employers; he's bound to favor one over the other. You can't serve both almighty God and the almighty dollar."

The Pharisees, who were very interested in money, had been listening. When they sneered at what he had said, he spoke to them.

"You Pharisees," he said, "you may parade your piety before your fellow-men, but God knows your hearts. The things that impress men are often abhorrent to God. The standard for men's lives up to the time of John the Baptist was the Mosaic Law and the sayings of the prophets. Since John, the message is the good news of God's kingdom -and throngs are pressing their way in. Nonetheless, remember that heaven and earth will have ceased to exist before even the smallest point in the Law is canceled. For instance, it remains true, as is specified in the Law, that anyone who gets a divorce and remarries is an adulterer. So is the man who marries a divorced woman."

He told another parable. "There was once a wealthy man whose clothes were the finest and whose food was the best. One day they laid the most wretched of beggars at his gate. His name was Lazarus. His body was covered with running sores, and he was so hungry he longed for the crumbs on the floor beneath the rich man's table. The dogs went to him and licked his sores. Time passed. Lazarus died and was carried by

angels to a place right beside father Abraham. The rich man died and was buried. In Hades, suffering, he looked up and saw, in the distance, Abraham with Lazarus at his side.

"Father Abraham," he shouted. "Have mercy and send that beggar to me so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue. I'm in agony in these flames." Abraham replied, "Think back, my son. When you were alive you had nothing but the best even as Lazarus had the worst. But now he's being comforted and you're in torment. Moreover, there's an impassable chasm between us. Even if we wanted to, we couldn't get across to you nor could you cross to where we are." The wealthy man said, "Then I entreat you, father Abraham, send Lazarus to my family-home to talk to my five brothers so they won't come to this place of agony." Abraham said, "They have the teachings of Moses and the prophets; let them heed their words." "I know they have" Father Abraham," the man said. "But if someone were to come back from the dead, they'd repent." Abraham said, "if they won't pay attention to Moses and the prophets, they won't be convinced by the return of a dead man!"

The apostles said to Jesus, "Give us more faith."

Faith?" he said. "If you have as little faith as a single grain of mustard seed you can say to this mulberry tree here, 'Be uprooted and be planted in the ocean,' and it will be. A question: would any of you, if you had a hired hand whose job it was to tend sheep and to plow, say to him when he comes in at the end of the day, 'Come in and have your dinner?' Wouldn't you be more likely to say, 'Get my dinner ready, then change your clothes and serve me. Then when I've eaten, you may.' Does one thank a servant for doing what he's paid to do? By the same token, when you've done what's asked of you, you should think of yourselves as unexceptional servants who've done no more than is expected."

Lazarus of Bethany was sick. Lazarus was the brother of Maratha and Mary in whose home Jesus had visited, and Mary was the women who had washed his feet with her tears dried them with her hair. The sisters sent a messenger to Jesus with the word; "Your dear friend is very ill."

When he received the message he said to the disciples, "It's not a terminal illness: its purpose is to bring honor to God and to be a means by which God's son is honored."

He was very fond of the family, but despite the news, stayed on where he was for another two days. Then he announced to the disciples, "We're going to Judea."

They remonstrated. "Teacher," they said, "Only a few days ago they were ready to stone you there. Do you really think you should go back?"

"There are twelve hours in the day, aren't there?" he said. "One doesn't stumble during the day because he has light. It's only when it's dark, when there is no light, that one stumbles." He paused a moment, silent, and then he said, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep. I'd better go and wake him up."

"But Master, if he has only fallen asleep he'll be all right."

He told them bluntly, "Lazarus is dead. For your sake, I'm glad I wasn't there earlier, since your faith in me may now be strengthened. Let's go."

Thomas turned to the others. "If he's going," he said, "let's go and die beside him."

By the time they got to Bethany, Lazarus had been buried four days. The town is no more than a couple of miles from Jerusalem, and a number of leading Jews from the city had come to see Martha and Mary to offer their sympathy. A message came to Martha that Jesus was on

the outskirts of the town and she ran to meet him.

"Oh, Teacher," she said, "if only you had been here, Lazarus would still be alive. Even now I know God will give you anything you ask."

"Your brother will rise again," he said.

"Oh, I know he'll be resurrected on the final day -"

"But Martha, I am myself the resurrection life. Anyone who believes in me, even if he dies, will live again. And, living with faith in me, he'll never die. Do you believe this?"

"Yes, I do, Teacher. I believe you're the Christ, God's son, the one we've waited for."

She left him and ran home. Inside the house she whispered to Mary, "The Teacher's here. He wants to see you."

Mary jumped to her feet and ran to meet him. The mourners in the house had seen her run off, so they followed her, presuming that she had gone to the tomb to weep. Jesus had not gone into the town and was on its outskirts, at the place where he had talked to Martha. When Mary saw him, she ran to him and collapsed at his feet.

"Oh Master!" she sobbed. "if only you had been here he wouldn't be dead."

Jesus looked at her, shaking with sobs, and at the weeping mourners, and he was deeply moved.

"Where is he buried," he asked.

"Come, we'll show you."

At these words Jesus burst into tears. The mourners standing watching said, "Look how much he loved him."

"But," another said, "surely if he could open a blind man's eyes he could have kept Lazarus from dying."

Jesus walked up to the entrance of the tomb, visibly moved. The tomb was, in fact a cave with a stone covering the opening. He told them to roll the stone out of the way.

"But Teacher, there'll be a stench. He's been dead four days," Martha said.

"Didn't I tell you that if you'd trust you'd see the marvelous things that God can do?" Jesus replied.

When they had moved the stone, Jesus raised his eyes and prayed. "Father," he said, "thank you for having heard me in the past. I know you always do, and I say it now only so that the people here may know I'm here because you sent me."

He paused a moment and then shouted at the top of his voice, "Lazarus, come out of there!"

Out came the dead man, his hands, feet, and face wrapped in burial cloths.

"Take those things off," Jesus said, "so that he may go home."

Many of the mourners who had followed Mary from her house and had seen Lazarus resurrected believed in him; others went to the Pharisees and reported what had happened. The chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the council.

"What are we going to do about this?" they said.

"There can be no question but that this man does some astonishing things, but if we allow him to go on like this everybody will be following him. And that will bring in the Romans. You know what they'll do; they'll

destroy our place and our society."

Caiaphas, the high priest, spoke next. "Realize what's happening here." he said. "Don't you see? It would be better for one man to die for the people than for the whole nation to be destroyed."

Caiaphas didn't himself realize the significance of what he had said. But, as the high priest that year, he had unwittingly be inspired to predict that Jesus would die, not only for Israel but to unite as a family all the dispersed children of God.

From that day on the council met to lay plans to bring about Jesus' execution. Consequently, Jesus stopped his appearances in public and, with the disciples, traveled to the village of Ephraim at the edge of the desert. They stayed there for a while.

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

**Ten lepers are healed - the coming of the kingdom - the parable of the importunate widow - the prayers of the Pharisee and the tax-collector - Jesus' teaching on divorce - he blesses the children - the rich young ruler - the parable of the workers in the vineyard - James and John seek preeminence - blind Bartimaeus is healed - Zachaeus meets Jesus - the parable of the use of God's gifts.**

Jesus and his disciples set out for Jerusalem, following the border between Samaria and Galilee. As they came to the outskirts of a village, ten lepers standing off at a distance began to shout, "Sir! Have pity on us."

Jesus shouted back at them, "Go show yourselves to the priest."

The lepers started off for the town. On the way, they realized they had been healed. One of them turned back and, praising God at the top of his voice, ran to Jesus and fell down in front of him.

"Thank you! Thank you!" he cried.

"I thought I healed ten," Jesus said. "Where are the others? Does only this stranger, this Samaritan, thank God for what he's done?" He spoke to the Samaritan. "Get up man, and go on your way. Your faith has healed you."

A Pharisee standing near asked Jesus a question, "When will the kingdom of heaven come?"

"If you mean in a visible form," he replied, "the answer is, never. You won't hear people say, 'Here it is,' or, 'There it is,' because the kingdom of heaven is within you."

He spoke to the disciples.

"The day is coming," he said, "when you'll long for one of the days of the son of man but it won't be possible. People will come to you and tell you that the son of man is in this place or that, but don't go with them. When the day of the son of man does come, it will come like a bolt of lightning, lighting the sky from horizon to horizon." He paused and then said quietly: "But before that happens, he must go through much suffering and be rejected by the people."

"When his day comes, things will be much as they were in Noah's time. In those days, they took meals, they drank, they got married and so on, right up to the day Noah went into the ark. Then came the flood, and they were all drowned. It was the same in Lot's day. They, too, ate and drank, did business, farmed, and built buildings. But on the day lot left Sodom, fire and brimstone fell from the sky and they all died. It will be like that on the day the son of man is revealed."

He wanted to impress upon the disciples that they should be faithful in their praying and not grow discouraged, so he told them a story:

"There was once a judge who neither feared God nor favored men. In the same city there was a widow who came to him time and again asking him to right a wrong that had been done her. At first he refused, but after some time he said to himself, 'I may neither fear God nor favor man, but this woman is driving me crazy! I'd better see that she gets justice or she'll wear me out with her unending appeals.'"

Jesus emphasized the point: "Notice the judge's reaction," he said. "If he did that, don't you think God will vindicate his chosen ones who entreat him night and day? Will he delay very long? You can be assured, he'll respond quickly." Then he added, "For all that, when the son of man returns, will he find any who've remained faithful?"

He told another parable to a group of people who were smug about their virtues and looked down on others.

"Two men went to the temple to pray. One was a respected Pharisee and the other was a despised tax-collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed to himself. 'God,' he said, 'how grateful I am to you that I'm not like other mortals - greedy, unprincipled, and immoral - like that tax-collector over there, for example. Twice a week I fast, and of every penny I earn, I give one tenth to the temple.' Off in the shadows, feeling himself unworthy even to raise his eyes heavenward, the tax-collector smote his chest and groaned, 'God, have mercy on me. I am a sinful man.'

"Be sure of this," Jesus conclude, "when they left the temple it was the tax-collector and not the Pharisee who went home justified. Every man who sets himself on a pedestal is going to be put down, while the humble will be honored."

Jesus and the disciples left Galilee and crossed the Jordan to the border area of Judea. Great crowds followed as they went and, as was his custom, Jesus taught them and healed the sick.

Some Pharisees arrived with a question designed to trap him.

"Are there any grounds on which a man may divorce his wife?" they asked

"What does Moses' Law say?"

"He says it's permitted so long as he gives her a divorce certificate."

"The only reason Moses allowed that was because you are so unloving," he said. "Think back to the creation story: it says that God made man and woman and commanded that, *For this reason a man shall leave his parents and stay with his wife, and the two of them shall be as one person.* A married couple is a unit, and no one should separate what God has joined."

Later, when they were indoors, the disciples returned to the subject.

"If what you said to the Pharisees is true, then why did Moses say that a man could simply give his wife a divorce certificate and leave her?"

"As I said, because of expedience - because of man's lack of love. But that isn't the way it was laid down in the beginning. What I'm telling you is this : any man who divorces his wife for any reason other than because she has been unfaithful,<sup>8</sup> and marries again, becomes an adulterer. And anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery. Or if a woman divorces her husband and marries again, she commits adultery."

"If that's how it is, it doesn't make sense to get married."

"Not everyone can accept the teaching," he said. "It takes a special man. There are men who are eunuchs because they were born so, others have been made so, and there are some men who are deliberately continent for the sake of the kingdom. If you can live with what I say, do so."

Some women came to him with their children, wanting him to touch them and to pray over them. The disciples tried to put a stop to it. He saw what they were doing and was angry.

"Let the children come," he said. "How dare you stop them. They're what the kingdom of heaven is all about. The truth is that anyone who doesn't accept the kingdom with the simplicity of a child won't get in." He took the children in his arms, put his hands on them, and gave them his blessing.

As Jesus and the disciples turned to leave, a young man, a ruler in the Jewish community, ran up and knelt down in front of Jesus.

"Good Teacher," he said. "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"

"Why do you call me good?" he asked. "No one is good but God. However, you know the commandments, keep them. Don't murder, don't commit adultery, don't steal, don't lie, don't cheat, honor your parents, and have as much regard for your neighbor as you do for yourself."

"But I've done that, ever since I was a boy. What else must I do?"

Jesus looked at him affectionately. "You lack only one thing," he said. "If you want to be perfect, go sell everything you own, give the money to the poor - which will give you wealth in heaven - then come and join me."

The young man's face fell - he was very wealthy. He got to his feet and went away, a picture of dejection. Jesus watched him go. Then he looked into the faces of the disciples.

"How difficult it is, if you are rich, to enter the kingdom," he said.

The disciples looked at him, astonishment on their faces, so he

continued: "Listen my children; it is exceedingly hard for a man who normally puts his confidence in money to go into the kingdom. Indeed, it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle."

The disciples were stunned by this. "If that's so," they said, "who's going to be saved?"

"Humanly speaking, it's impossible," he said. "But God can do anything."

"And what of us?" Peter asked. "We left our homes and everything we owned to follow you."

"Let me assure you," he said, "when I sit on my throne of glory in the world to come, you'll be seated on twelve thrones as the judges of the twelve tribes of Israel. Anyone who turns his back on home and family and possessions for me, and for the sake of the good news of the kingdom, is going to receive - along with persecutions - a hundred times what he gave up. In the world to come, he'll receive eternal life. Many who are important now won't be then, and those who are insignificant now will be first then.

"Let me explain something to you about the kingdom of heaven," he went on. "It's like a farmer who, first thing in the morning, hires some men to work in his vineyard. He agrees with them on a day's pay and sends them off to the vineyard. At about nine the same morning, the farmer is in town and sees some men standing about idly in the market place. He tells them to go work in his vineyard and promises to pay them a fair wage. He does the same at about noon, at about three in the afternoon, and again at about five. At nightfall, he tells his foreman to call in all the men and pay them off - from the last hired to the first - and to pay them all the same wage. The men who had worked from early morning complain: 'Some of these fellows worked no more than an hour. We worked right through - including the hot period of the day -

yet you've paid us all the same. 'The farmer says to one of them, 'But friend, have I treated you wrongly? We agreed on a wage and I've paid it. It so happens that I have decided to pay the same money to the others. Are you looking daggers at me because I'm generous to them? Is there a law that says I can't do what I want with my own money? Take your pay and go.' In the same way," Jesus said, "the last shall be first and the first, last."

They continued on toward Jerusalem. As they went, Jesus walked on ahead, by himself. This surprised and troubled the disciples so he called the Twelve to one side to warn them again of what lay ahead.

"We're going to Jerusalem," he said, "and all the prediction made about me by the prophets are going to come true. I shall be arrested and handed over to the chief priests and the scribes. They'll condemn me to death and hand me over to the Romans who'll make sport of me, spit on me, flog me and crucify me. Then, on the third day, I shall rise from the grave."

For all his explanation, they could not accept what he was saying - actually, it was hidden from them so they might not see the ugly reality too clearly.

James and John, with their mother, came to speak to him privately. She knelt before him.

"Teacher, will you do us any favor we ask?"

"What favor do you want?"

"Give the order that when you've ascended to your throne these sons of mine may sit on either side of you."

"You have no idea what you're asking," he said. "You, James, and you, John, are you prepared to face what I must face?"

"We are."

"And indeed you shall," he said. "But as to granting you the authority to sit on my right and on my left, that's not mine to give. My Father will decide that. The honor will go to those for whom he's prepared it."

When the other apostles heard what James and John had done they were highly indignant. Jesus called them all together.

"You've seen the Gentile officials: the way they lord it over the people, the way exercise their authority. It must not be like that with you. If you want to be important in our group, be the servant of all the others. Follow my example in this: I didn't come to be served but to serve. I came to give up my life, to use it as ransom to set others free."

As they approached the outskirts of Jericho, they passed two blind beggars sitting by the side of the road. One of them, whose name was Bartimaeus, heard the commotion and asked the reason for it.

"Jesus of Nazareth is passing by," they told him.

Immediately, he began to shout at top of his voice, "Jesus! Son of David! Have mercy on me!"

"Hold your peace," they told him. "Be quiet."

The rebuke seemed only to increase his shouting. "Son of David!" he howled. "Jesus, have pity on us."

Jesus halted. "Bring them to me," he said.

They went to the beggars. "Come on, men. And cheer up, he wants to see you."

Bartimaeus leaped to his feet, threw off his cloak, and stumbled toward Jesus. The other beggar followed.

"What do you want me to do ?" Jesus asked.

"Please, Master. Give us our sight."

Jesus' face mirrored the compassion he felt for them. "Go your way," he said, "and go seeing. Your faith has saved you."

At that moment, they saw - and as Jesus walked on, they followed him, praising God.

As Jesus entered Jericho, a man by the name of Zacchaeus - a chief tax-collector and a very wealthy man - stood in the street trying to get a look at him. Zacchaeus was quite short and couldn't get a good view. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree, seeking a vantage-point. As Jesus passed he looked up into the tree and said, "Hurry down Zacchaeus. I want to stay at your place today."

Zacchaeus scrambled down, welcomed him cordially and they went to his home.

Many of the spectators were shocked and grumbled among themselves, "Imagine, he's going to stay the night with that scoundrel."

Later, Zacchaeus the host stood up.

"Teacher," he said, "I've decided to give half of everything I own to the poor, and if I have defrauded any taxpayer, I'll refund the amount four times over."

"Salvation has come to this house today." Jesus said. "My reason for coming was to seek out and save the lost. Zacchaeus is a son of Abraham, too."

While they were digesting what he had just said, Jesus - knowing full well that they were expecting the kingdom of heaven to be set up when they arrived in Jerusalem - told them a parable:

"A certain nobleman was scheduled to visit a distant country to be given a kingdom. Before leaving he called in ten of his servants and gave each of them a sum of money. 'While I'm away,' he said, 'invest this for me.' He was an unpopular ruler and shortly after he had gone, a group of citizens sent an envoy with the message, 'We don't want this man to rule over us.' Nevertheless, he was granted the kingdom and returned home. He summoned the ten servants to give an accounting of what they'd done with the money. The first came in and said, 'Sir, your money has earned ten times its value.' 'Very good,' he said. 'You're an excellent servant. Now that you've shown you can handle a relatively simple task, I'm going to put you in charge of ten cities.' The second servant stepped forward. 'Your money has earned five times its value,' he said. 'You'll be in charge of five cities,' he was told. In came another servant. 'Here's your money back, sir,' he said. 'I know that you're an austere man who takes what he pleases as he pleases and benefits from the toil of others. So, because I was frightened, I took particular care to keep your money safe, hidden here in this handkerchief.' 'You wretched servant,' he said, 'I'm going to judge you out of your own mouth. If as you say you knew the kind of man I am, why didn't you put the money in the bank where at least it would have made interest?' He ordered some men standing nearby to take the money from the man and to give it to the first servant. 'But he already has lots of money,' they said. 'I know that,' the ruler said. 'But I say that those who already have are going to receive more, and those who have nothing are going to lose even that nothing. And now, to deal with those enemies of mine who don't want me to rule over them: bring them here and kill them in front of me.'"

When he finished the story, Jesus turned and walked on ahead of them, on the road to Jerusalem.

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(8) In the gospel according to Mark (10:11-12), the exception is not

included.

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

**1. The entry into Jerusalem - the barren fig tree cursed - the money-changers expelled - Jesus talks to a delegation of Greeks - the basis of judgement - the withered fig tree - a debate with the Pharisees - the parable of the son rejected - the parable of the wedding - supper unattended - paying taxes to the Caesar - a trick question from the Sadducees - the first commandment - the scribes and the Pharisees are denounced - the widow's contribution - the destruction of the temple predicted - the signs of the second coming - the parable of the wise and the foolish bridesmaids - serving God by helping others - Mary anoints Jesus with perfume - Judas is paid to betray Jesus.**

It was almost time for the Passover. Many of the country people, who had come on to Jerusalem in advance of the Festival in order to perform the purification rites, inquired as to whether Jesus was in the city. He was the principal topic of conversation. Citizens and pilgrims alike stood about in the temple each day, gossiping about whether he would dare come to the Festival and about the order issued by the council stating that anyone knowing his whereabouts must report it so that he could be arrested.

Six days before the Passover he arrived in Bethany, the town in which he had brought Lazarus back from death. That evening he attended a dinner party in his honor. The disciples were there and Lazarus himself was at the table. The news that he was in town spread swiftly, and soon a crowd gathered in the street. They came not just in hope of catching a glimpse of Jesus but also on the chance that they might see Lazarus. (The chief priests had marked Lazarus for death because his resurrection had led many people to put their faith in Jesus.)

It was Sunday. As Jesus and the disciples approached Jerusalem they

paused at Bethphage and Bethany on the slope of Mount of Olives. He called two of the apostles aside.

"I have an errand for you," he said. "Go to the village. As soon as you enter the town you'll see a donkey with an unbroken colt beside it. Bring them to me. If anybody asks you what you're doing simply tell them that the Teacher needs them and you'll have no trouble."

They went into town and saw the donkey and the colt standing in the street, tethered to a door. As they were loosening the halter, the owner came by.

"What are you doing?" he asked.

"The Teacher needs them," they said.

There was no argument. They led the animals to Jesus, spread their cloaks over the colt's back and Jesus mounted.

All of this was predicted by the prophet Isaiah:

Tell this to our daughter, Zion:

"Have no fear, your king approaches,  
meek, and mounted on an ass;  
upon a colt, the foal of an ass."

At the time, the apostles didn't understand that their actions were contributing to the fulfillment of prophecy. It was only after Jesus was glorified that it all became clear.

Jerusalem was overflowing with pilgrims, and as Jesus began the ride into the city, the roadway was lined with crowds. Those who had seen Lazarus resurrected had repeated the story far and wide, and this had heightened the already enormous curiosity about Jesus. Knowing he was coming, some of the people had gone into the fields and cut palm branches, which they strewed in his path. Others spread their cloaks on

the road. The air was filled with shouts.

"Save us, oh blessed one of God!"

"Hoorah for the King who comes in God's name!"

"Pray deliver us, King of Israel."

"Blessed be the coming kingdom. . . Blessed be King David's kingdom!"

"Peace and glory in the highest heaven!"

Some Pharisees in the crowd called out to him as he passed, "Teacher, tell your followers to stop."

"Tell them to stop?" he said. "Believe me, if they were to be quiet the very stones would shout."

As they approached the gate, he ran his eyes over the city and they were filled with tears.

"Oh Jerusalem!" he said. "If only you had known. If only you had realized on what your peace depends. If only you had seized your God-given opportunity. But now it is hidden from you. Yet the day approaches when an enemy will surround you and tear down your walls, destroy your citizens, and leave no stone on another."

The Pharisees saw what was happening and turned to each other.

"Look at the people." they said. "Everybody's going over to him. We're getting nowhere."

As Jesus rode into the city it was throbbing with excitement. When those who hadn't heard about him inquired, they were quickly told, "He's the prophet from Nazareth. Jesus the Galilean!"

When he arrived at the temple, the blind and the lame came to him and he healed them. Even the children had picked up the cries of their

parents and were shouting, "Deliver us, son of David!"

The Pharisees were furious. "Don't you hear them?" they hissed.

"Of course I hear them," Jesus said. "And haven't you heard the words of the scripture, From the lips of infants, God has provided perfect praise. "

He left the city and spent the night in Bethany.

As he and the disciples headed for Jerusalem the following morning, he was hungry. Off to the side of the road he saw a fig tree and went to it hoping to pick some fruit. He searched among the leaves but it wasn't the season. As he turned away the disciples heard him say to the tree, "Let no one ever eat your fruit again."

When he arrived at the temple, there were the money-changers and the pigeon-merchants doing business as usual. He drove them out, overturning their tables and upsetting their stands and forbidding anyone to so much as carry a water jug through the enclosure.

"Hasn't it been written," he said. My house shall be known as a place where all may pray? You people have turned it into a haven for thieves!"

A report of what he had done reached the chief priests and the scribes. They discussed possible means by which they might get rid of him. They were hesitant to take any overt action because it was obvious that the people were entranced by the things he did and were hanging on his every word.

A group of Greek Jews - in the city for the Passover came to Philip and asked him to arrange an appointment for them to see Jesus. Philip discussed it with Andrew, and the two of them went to Jesus with the request.

As he met with them he said, "The time has come for me to be glorified. As you know, a grain of wheat produces more wheat only if it is buried and 'dies'. That's why I say that to love your life is to lose it while to despise it is to keep it forever. If you want to serve me, follow me, and the Father will honor you and you'll be with me wherever I go.

"Now that the time has come," he said, "my spirit grows troubled by what lies ahead. But what should I do? Now that everything I came to do is at hand should I say, 'Father, rescue me?' No! I say instead, 'Father, honor yourself.'"

There was the sound of a voice from heaven: "I have in the past, I shall in the future."

"What was that?" someone asked.

"Thunder, maybe?"

"No, an angel spoke to him."

"It was a voice," Jesus said, "but not so much for my benefit as for yours. This is the judgment time for the world, the time when the unseen ruler of the world is going to be expelled. And when I, the son of man, am lifted above the earth. I will draw the whole world to me." In saying this, he gave a hint as to the manner in which he would die.

A man called out from the crowd. "Doesn't the Law teach that the Christ will live forever? What do you mean then when you say, 'the son of man is going to be lifted up? And who is this son of man you're talking about?"

"You'll have the light with you for a little while yet," he said. "While you have it, walk in it, because when the darkness comes you'll be stumbling on blindly. While the light is here, believe in it and become yourselves of the nature of light."

He left them and went off by himself.

Jesus had done many miracles before these people but few believed in him. Their rejection had been prefigured in Isaiah's prediction:

Lord who has believed what we told them,  
And to whom has the Lord's might been shown?

The reason they couldn't believe was also foreseen by Isaiah centuries earlier:

He has made them blind and callous,  
So that seeing they might not perceive  
And comprehend in their hearts  
And turn to me for healing.

Actually, there were many who did believe in him - even some of the authorities - but they were afraid to admit it publicly for fear they would be excommunicated. They were more concerned to have the approval of their fellows than to have God's approbation.

At one point during the preparation for the Passover, Jesus rose in the temple and addressed the crowd.

"When you believe in me," he said. "you are not so much believing in me as in the Father who sent me. To see me it to see him. I am a light. When you believe in me you need no longer live in the dark. Let this be clearly understood: If having heard me you reject my teaching, I won't judge you - I'm not here to condemn the world but to save it - but you will be judged by my teaching. It will be the basis of judgement on the final day. The things I've taught you aren't my thoughts, they're God's. What I say is what he was commanded, and to obey his commandments is to live forever. When you hear me, the voice is mine but the words are God's."

Jesus taught in the temple daily and each evening went out of the city to spend the night on the Mount of Olives. On Tuesday morning he and the apostles set out for the city. They passed the fig tree on which he had looked for fruit the day before. The apostles saw to their surprise that it had withered from the roots.

"Look, Teacher," Peter said. "The tree you cursed has withered. How is that?"

"Faith in God," he said. "The fact is, Simon, that if you have faith and don't doubt, not only will you be able to do that to a fig tree but you'll be able to say to a mountain, 'Move,' and if you believe unwaveringly that it will happen, it will. Anything you ask for, believe that it's yours and it will be."

That day he broke off teaching to take a walk in the temple area. A delegation of chief priests, scribes, and elders approached him.

"We demand to know," they said, "on whose authority you act. Who gave you the right to do these things?"

"First, I'll put a question to you," he said. "Answer my question and I'll answer yours. John's ministry - was it of God or was it merely the actions of a man?"

They drew aside to talk over what their response should be. "If we say John was from God he's going to ask us why then we don't believe what John said about him. But if we say that what John did was not from God, there'll be an unholy row - the people are convinced that John was a genuine prophet. They might even stone us."

They went back to Jesus

"What's your answer?" he said.

"we don't know which it was."

"You won't say? Then neither will I say who gave me my authority."

He told them this story. "Here's a man with two sons. He goes to the first and says, 'Son, I want you to go to work in the vineyard today.' The son refuses but later changes his mind and goes. The father goes to the second son and ask the same thing. The son says, 'Yes, sir, I'll go,' but he doesn't. Now, which son did what his father wanted?"

"The first, of course."

"And I'm telling you that whores and scoundrels are going into the kingdom ahead of you. John came to you - a godly man - and you wouldn't accept what he said. But the outcasts did. But even after you saw their response you wouldn't change your mind.

"I give you another parable," he said. "A man planted a vineyard. He surrounded it with a hedge, dug a pit for the winepress, and built a watchtower for protection. Then he leased out the operation of the place and settled in another country. When the time came, he sent one of his staff to collect his share of the profits. The tenants beat the man. He sent another man. They stoned him. The next man they killed, and so it went. 'What am I to do about this?' the owner said to himself. 'I know; I'll send my only and beloved son. They're bound to respect him.' But the tenants said, 'Look, here comes the heir to the estate. Let's kill him and his legacy will be ours.' So they murdered him and dumped the corpse off the property.

"Now," Jesus said, "I put the question to you: what will the owner do to such men? I'll tell you - he'll destroyed those miserable wretches and lease the vineyard to others."

"God forbid!" they said.

He fixed them with his gaze. "Then what is the meaning of that scripture, The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. That's what

the Lord has done, much to our surprise. The truth is that the kingdom of God is going to be taken away from you and given to a people who will yield some return."

They realized that the parable had been directed at them and would have arrested him on the spot had they not been fearful of the people's reaction.

He told another parable. "The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who, having planned a wedding-supper for his son, sent out his servants to tell the guests to come. None did. He sent the servants out again. 'Tell them,' he instructed them, 'that everything is ready - the meat is cooked and the table is set.' But the invited guests paid no attention and went about their normal pursuits: one his farming, another his business. Some even beat up his servants, killing some of them. Naturally, the king was enraged and sent his army to kill the murderers and to raze their city. Once more he called in his servants. 'The wedding-supper is ready again,' he said. 'The guests I first invited weren't worth to eat it. Go to the fork of road and invite anyone and everyone who comes by.' The servants did as they had been instructed and brought in everyone they met - good and bad - and soon the house was jammed. In came the king. He looked over the guests and spied a man improperly dressed for the wedding. 'Friend,' he said, 'how do you come to be here dressed like that?' The man made no reply. So the king had him bound hand and foot and thrown out into the night.

"There will be sorrow and anger in that day," Jesus added, "because many are invited but few are chosen."

During the past few days the Pharisees had holding meetings, considering a variety of schemes by which they might ensnare Jesus through his public teaching. They had sent out spies - men who feigned a holiness of life - in hope of finding some excuse to arrest him and hand him over to the Roman governor. Now they sent a group of

their students and some Herodians to try to trap him.

"Teacher," their spokesman said, "we know you're an honest man. We know you teach God's way truthfully and that you're not influenced by what men may say or do. So tell us what you think - should we pay the taxes to the Caesar or should we not?"

He was aware of their malice. "You hypocrites!" he said. "Why do you try to trap me so? Let me see a coin." They gave him one. "Now," he asked, "whose name and whose image is on the coin?"

"Caesar's."

"Then give to Caesar what is his and give to God what is his."

He had caught them by surprise. There was nothing further to be said and no argument to be made. Deeply impressed, they turned and left.

A group of Sadducees arrived. (Sadducees say that there is no resurrection.)

"Teacher," their spokesman said, "Moses tells us that if a man dies childless, his brother is required to marry the widow and raise a family for him. Now, here are seven brothers. The eldest marries a woman. They have no children. He dies. The second brother marries her. No children. He dies. The third brother the same and so on until all seven brothers have been married to her. Finally she dies. The question is, when the resurrection comes who's she married to?"

"You're all mixed up," Jesus replied, "mostly because you don't understand either the scriptures or the power of the God. In this age people get married, but in the age to come - after the resurrection - those who have been judged worthy to be raised from the dead won't marry. As a matter of fact they won't even die; in that respect they're all equally sons of God and like the angels.

"Now as to whether or not there's a resurrection," he went on. "Don't you remember - in the Moses, in the passage referring to the burning bush - how God spoke to Moses and said, I am the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob? Obviously, then, he's the God of the living and not the dead. More than that, to God, all men are alive. You fellows really are mixed up."

Out in the crowd a scribe had been watching them disputing each other. He called out, "Well said, Teacher!"

As for the Sadducees, they were afraid to pose further questions.

The scribe spoke up again. "Teacher," he said, "what's the most important of all the commandments?"

"The commandment that goes, 'Listen Israel: the Lord our God is the only God. You shall love him with all that you are - with your will, your spirit, your intellect, and your body.' That's the first commandment. The second is akin to it: 'You shall have as much regard for your neighbor as you do for yourself.' No other commandment is more important than these and everything in the Law and the prophets is predicated on them."

"You're so right, Teacher," the man said. "How much better to love God and your neighbor than to offer every kind of sacrifice and burnt-offering on the altar."

Jesus recognized the man's insight. "You're not far from the kingdom," he told him.

There was a break in the questioning so Jesus put a question to some Pharisees who were there.

"Let us have your view on the Messiah," he said. "Who will be descended from?"

"He'll be a descendant of king David."

"Then how do you account for this?" he said. "David himself, speaking under the inspiration of spirit of God, said, The Lord said to my lord, 'Sit here at my right until I put your enemies underfoot.' Now, would David call the Messiah 'Lord' if the Messiah was his son?"

Again, silence. The crowd watched, entranced, and that was the end of the trick questions.

He turned and spoke to his disciples, knowing that every one could hear.

"Let me warn you about the scribes and the Pharisees," he said. "They have Moses' authority invested in them so do what they say. But don't do what they do, because they don't practise what they preach. They heap heavy and trying burdens the people's backs but they won't lift a finger to help. Even the worthwhile things they do are done to advertise themselves. How they love to enlarge the phylacteries.<sup>9</sup> How they love the longest possible tassels on the corners of their robes. How they love the front seats in the synagogues and at the festivals. How they relish being recognized in the street and being addressed as 'Rabbi.' But don't you let anyone call you 'Rabbi,' - only one of you is your teacher, the rest of you are peers. Nor should you address anyone here on earth with the term, 'Father.' You have one father, and he's not here, he's in heaven. Nor should you refer to yourself as 'Master.' You have one Master and he's the Christ."

He looked directly at the Pharisees. "Oh the grief that lies ahead for you, you hypocritical scribes and Pharisees. You close heaven's door and will neither go in yourselves nor permit other to. Alas for you! You travel to the ends of the earth to make a convert only to the ends of the make a convert only to turn him into twice the devil you are yourselves. Alas for you, you blind leaders. You say such foolish things as, 'The man who

swears by the temple isn't bound by his oath whereas the man who swears by the temple gold is.' You say that if a man swears by the altar it is nothing but that if he swears by the gift on the altar it is binding. Blind fools! Which is more important, the gold or the temple that makes the gold sacred? To swear by the altar means to swear by it and anything on it. To swear by the temple is to swear by it and by the God who dwells in it. To swear by heaven is to swear by God's throne and by God himself. Oh, the grief in store for you, you hypocritical scribes and Pharisees! You are so meticulous in paying the smallest part of your obligation to the temple and so neglectful of the fundamentals of the Law - those parts that deal with justice and compassion and faith. Nothing is wrong with what you do; it's that you don't do the important things. You blind leaders, so concerned that there's a gnat in your drink and blithely gulping down a camel floating there. Alas for you - you hypocrites - scrubbing away at the surfaces of your cups and plates, and indifferent to the filth - the greed and rapacity - within you. First, get the inside clean, then you may get the outside clean. Alas for you, you hypocritical scribes and Pharisees! You're like whitewashed tombs: attractive on the outside but filled with the bones and the stinking corruption of corpses on the inside. How like them you are; you look like godly men but you're filled with hypocrisy and evil.

"Alas for you! You build monuments to the prophets and lay wreaths on the memorials honoring good men, all the while prating, 'If we'd lived back then, we would not have joined with our ancestors in the murder of these men.' You're right to call them 'your ancestors,' because you are indeed the sons of the men who murdered the prophets. Go ahead, complete your ancestors' actions. You snakes! You brood of snakes! How can you hope to avoid being sent straight to hell? Listen to me: I'm going to send prophets and learned men to you even though I realize that you'll murder some and have others crucified. Some you'll drag into the synagogues and flog, others you'll hound from town to town, And, in

so doing, you will be taking to yourselves a share of the guilt for the blood of every good man ever put to death: from the blood of the innocent Abel to the blood of Zechariah, Barachiah's son, whom you murdered in the temple between the sanctuary and the altar. Be sure of it: this generation will answer for it all!

"Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem. How many prophets have you murdered? How many of God's messengers have you stoned? And how many times have I wanted to draw your citizens to me as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you would have no part of it. So now you're to be left deserted. You won't see me again until the cry is, 'Here comes the blessed one, the ambassador of the Lord.'"

Jesus sat down in the temple opposite the Treasury and watched the crowd drop their money into the receptacles. Many wealthy people made large contributions. A poverty-stricken widow dropped in two pennies. Jesus spoke to the disciples.

"The truth is," he said, "that poor widow has given more than all the rest. They gave from their surplus; she gave everything, including all she had to live on."

As they were leaving, some of his followers offered to take him on a tour of the temple complex.

One of the disciples said, "Look, Teacher. Look at the marvelous stonework and at the buildings themselves."

"See all these buildings?" he said. "Every one of them is going to be razed: there won't be one stone left on another."

Later, as he sat resting on the slope of the Mount of Olives, Peter, James, John, and Andrew came to him.

"Teacher," they said, "you said the temple was going to be destroyed. Tell us when. Tell us also how we'll know when you're about to return to

the earth, and when the earth itself will end."

"First," he said, "let me warn you to be on your guard against those who would lead you astray. Any number of imposters are going to appear and claim to be the Messiah, and a great many people are going to be fooled. They'll even claim to be acting on my authority. They'll announce that the end-time has come. Don't pay any attention. You'll hear of wars and of international crises but don't let that concern you unduly. That will happen before the end comes. There will be major wars, brushfire wars, food shortages, and earthquakes in various parts of the world. But they're only what might be termed the first birth-pangs. It will be a time persecution. You're going to be hated everywhere because of your allegiance to me. Some of you will be killed. Many will desert. Some will betray their friends. Brothers will grow to hate each other. Imposters - self-proclaimed prophets - will appear and will draw many away. The moral standards of the society will degenerate, and that will cool the zeal of others. But those who stay true through it all are going to be delivered.

"The end will not come until the good news of the kingdom has been preached as a testimony in every nation of the world. Then, when you see 'the ultimate sacrilege' set up in the Holy of Holies in the temple (let the reader understand what is meant<sup>10</sup>), and you happen to be here in Judea, head for the mountains. If you happen to be on the rooftop of your home, don't go in after your possessions. If you're out in the field, don't go back home for your clothes. It will be terrible to be pregnant then or to be nursing a baby. And pray that it doesn't happen in winter or on a sabbath when travel is forbidden. It will be a time of trouble without parallel in history and never to be matched in the future. Nobody could possibly survive if the days weren't cut short - but they will be for the sake of the people God has chosen.

"If at that time someone tells you that the Christ is in one place or

another, don't believe it. There will be any number of fake messiahs and pseudo-prophets around. They will do all kinds marvelous things. Some of them will be so convincing that, if it were possible, they'd deceive even God's chosen. So, if you hear that I'm out in the desert or that I'm hiding in some room in town, don't believe it. When I come, it will be like the flash of a bolt of lightning across the sky. You know where the carcass is; it's where the vultures are gathered.

"Immediately after the Time of Trouble the sun will grow dim. The moon won't be visible. Stars will fall and the oceans will rage. Entire nations will panic, and men will collapse in fear as the realization of what's about to happen breaks upon them. The very powers of heaven will be shaken. Then, in the sky, they'll see me coming through the clouds in splendor and with all authority. Then, at the sound of a great trumpet-call, the angels will be sent out to gather the chosen from everywhere in earth and heaven."

He used a parable. "When the sap returns to a fig tree and the buds appear, you don't need to be told that summer is coming. In the same way, when you see the things I've been describing, you'll know that I'm about to return, that at the very door. Let me tell you that this generation won't have gone until everything I've spoken of has happened. The earth and the sky may cease to be but my words are eternal.

"If you ask the precise day and the precise hour when all of this will happen, I don't know. Nor do the angels. No one knows but the Father. So, because you don't know when it will happen, stay vigilant and continue to pray. Make sure that you're not hungover from drink or surfeited with self-indulgence or bowed down with worry about making a living, or you'll be trapped when I return with the suddenness of a snare - for that's how quickly it's going to happen. Don't let your guard down. Keep a constant watch and don't stop praying that you may

escape what's ahead and that you may someday stand in my presence.

"Here's what it will be like," he said. "Compare it to ten bridesmaids who took their lamps and went to meet a bridegroom. Five of the girls were provident and took along extra oil for their lamps. The others didn't bother. It so happened that the bridegroom was delayed so the girls all took a nap. At midnight they were awakened by a shout, 'He's coming! Come and meet him.' The girls got up and checked their lamps. The five who hadn't brought extra oil went to the others and said, 'Our lamps are about to go out. Lend us some oil.' The others said, 'But if we do, there may not be enough to go around and all our lamps may go out. Go to the store and buy some.' While they were away the bridegroom arrived. The girls who were prepared went with him to the wedding-supper and the door was shut. When the other girls got back they knocked on the door and called out, 'Sir, sir, let us in.' But he replied, 'Sorry, I don't even know you.'

"Stay prepared," Jesus said. "There is no way of knowing when I'll be back. When I return in my glory and with all the angels, I shall sit on my throne and all the nations of the world will be assembled before me. In much the same fashion as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, I shall set them apart - the sheep to my right, the goats to my left. Then, as king, I shall say to those on my right, 'Come, you whom my Father has loved from the beginning of time. Received the kingdom he has prepared for you. It's yours because when I was hungry you fed me. When I thirsty you gave me drink. When I was lonely you welcomed me. When I was penniless you gave me clothes. And you visited me when I was sick and when I was in jail.' They'll respond, 'But when did all this happen? When did we see you hungry or thirsty and give you food and drink? We don't remember you coming to us as a stranger or without clothes, or helping you out when you were sick or in jail. When did we do all this?' And I'll say, 'When you did such thing for the least notable of my brothers, you were, in effect, doing it for me.'

"Then I'll turn to those to my left and say, 'Leave me, you accursed ones. Go into the undying fire prepared for the devil and his minions. When I was hungry or thirsty you wouldn't help. When I came to you as a stranger you turned me from your door. I was without clothes, I was sick, I was in jail, and you wouldn't lift a hand to help.' They, too, will say, 'But when?' and I'll say, 'The fact is that when you turned your back on the humblest you were turning it on me.' And they'll go off to a punishment that never ends while the good will enter the life that never ends."

Having instructed them on the future, he brought them back to the present. "You realize, do you not," he said, "that the Passover begins in two days and that I shall be arrested and crucified."

Even as he was speaking the chief priests and the elders were meeting at the home of Caiaphas the high priest, reviewing their plans to arrest him by stealth and to bring about his death. There was consensus that it would be unwise to act during the Passover for fear of stirring a riot.

That evening Jesus went with the apostles to Bethany to attend a supper given for him. Lazarus was there and Martha served. While they were at the table, Mary came in with an alabaster flask containing a very expensive lotion - essence of nard - broke the seal, and poured it on Jesus' head and feet, wiping his feet with her hair. The house was filled with fragrance. Some of the apostles grew indignant, among them, Judas Iscariot.

"What's the meaning of this waste?" he demanded. "That perfume could have been sold for at least sixty dollars and the money given to the poor!" Actually, his protest was not motivated by his concern for the poor, but because he was treasurer of the group and custodian of the money bag - from which he used to steal.

Some of the other apostles joined in censuring Mary.

"Let her be," Jesus said. "why do you keep after her so? What she has done is beautiful. You will always have the poor to care for - and you can help them anytime you want - but you won't always have me. It was as though she was preparing my body in advance of my funeral. Moreover, wherever the good news is told throughout the world, what she's done here today will be recounted and she'll be remembered for it."

Satan entered Judas Iscariot and he left to meet with the chief priests to discuss with them and the temple-guard the arrangements for Jesus' arrest.

"What it worth to you?" he asked.

Containing their excitement, the chief priests counted out thirty silver coins and offered them to him. A bargain was struck and from that night on Judas watched for an appropriate time, a time when Jesus was alone.

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(9) Tiny boxes enclosing scripture texts, bound with leather straps to the forehead or forearm.

(10) It is not known for certain what was meant. It is believed by some that the "ultimate sacrilege" was a statue of Caesar.

## CHAPTER TWENTY

**The Passover supper - who will be first in the kingdom? - Jesus washes the apostle's feet - Judas leaves to plan the betrayal - Peter's denial is predicted - the bread and the wine - the holy spirit is promised - the vine and the branches - the command to love each other - Jesus speaks of his death - he prays for the apostles and their successors.**

It was Thursday, the day before the Passover began. Peter and John went to Jesus.

"Do you have any special instructions on where you want to eat the Passover meal?" they asked.

"Yes," he said. "Go to Jerusalem. When you get there you'll be met by a man carrying a pitcher of water. Follow him. Notice the house he goes into and go and talk to the owner. Say to him, 'The Teacher told us to ask you where the room is in which he's to eat the Passover meal with his apostles.' He'll show you a large, furnished upstairs room. Make the necessary preparation there."

That evening Jesus and the apostles sat down together at the table.

"You don't know how I've looked forward to this Passover meal with you before my agony begins," he said. "I shan't eat the Passover meal again until everything it implies has become actuality in the kingdom."

As the meal progressed, some of the apostles got embroiled once more in the argument over who was going to be prominent when the kingdom was set up. Jesus broke in on the dispute.

"Among the Gentiles," he said, "the lives of the people are controlled by their kings, and the authorities are called 'benefactors.' It must not be that way among you. With you, let the eldest be the youngest and let your leader be the servant of all the rest. Normally, who would be more

important - the man seated at a table or the man serving him? Wouldn't it be the man being served? Yet here we are, and I'm your servant. You have stayed true to me through my trials, so - in the same way that my father granted me a kingdom - I'm going to grant a kingdom to each of you so that you may be entitled to sit at a table with me in my kingdom. Each of you is going to be made a judge of one of the twelve tribes of Israel."

Jesus was aware that this was his last night on earth. From the moment he had met each of the apostles he had loved them dearly and would continue to do so until the end came. He was aware, too, that the devil had put it in Judas' mind to betray him. Now - in the full realization that God had entrusted everything to him and in the knowledge that he had come directly from God and was about to return to him - he got up from the table, took off his outer robe, tied a towel around his waist, poured some water into a basin, and began to wash the apostle's feet, drying them with the towel.

He came to Peter.

"Are you planning to wash my feet?" Peter asked.

"You don't understand what I'm doing, Simon," he said. "You will, though."

"You'll never wash my feet."

"If don't, Simon, you can't share my lot."

"In that case, don't just wash my feet; wash my head, my hands. . . all of me."

"When someone has bathed he's already clean and needs no more than to have the dust washed from his feet. And you, my little band, you are clean." He thought of the one who would betray him and added. "But not all of you."

Having finished, he stood up, put on his robe, and sat down.

"I want you to think for a moment of what just happened," he said. "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord' - and that's appropriate because I am - yet I, your Teacher and your Lord, have just washed your feet. Surely then you should be ready to wash each other's feet. What I've done is simply to set you an example. You must surely realize that a servant isn't more important than his master, just as a messenger isn't more important than the man who sends him. Once you realize this and act on it, you'll find happiness in it. I should make it clear that what I'm saying is not addressed to all of you. I knew what I was doing when I chose you; it was necessary to fulfill the scripture, He who ate my supper has turned against me. I'm telling you this now so that, when it happens, you'll know I am who I claim to be."

Suddenly he was in deep anguish, "It's true," he said. "One of you is a traitor, one of you here at the table with me. My end has been predicted by the prophets, but alas for the man who is the instrument by which it is achieved. He'd be better never to have been born."

The apostles looked at each other sadly and with doubt in their eyes. Each of them asked, "Is it I, Master?"

"The traitor is the man who dipped his bread in the dish with me," he said.

John, the disciple for whom Jesus had a special affection, was seated closest to him, so Peter signaled to him, "Find out who he means?" he said.

John leaned close. "Who is it, Master?"

"The man to whom I give this chunk of bread after I dip it in the herbs," he said. He dipped it and gave it to Judas.

"Is it I, Teacher?" Judas said

"It's as you say, Judas," he replied. Then he said to him. "Go do what you have to do."

The significance of what he had said did not dawn on the others. Since Judas was the treasurer, they assumed that Jesus was telling him to buy something needed for the Festival, or to take something to the poor. Judas, however, knew, and he went out quickly.

It was night.

When Judas had gone, Jesus spoke to the apostles.

"The time has arrived for me to be glorified and for me to glorify God. If I honor him he'll honor me, and soon. My little children, I have such a brief time to be with you. When I'm gone you'll go looking for me but, as I told the crowd the other day, you can't go with me. I have a new commandment for you. It is this: love each other as I've loved you. Your love for each other will set you apart as my followers."

He looked around at them. "You will all betray me tonight," he said. "It has been written, you know, I'll strike down the shepherd and the sheep will scatter. Regardless, when I rise from the grave I'll go on ahead of you to Galilee."

"Everyone else may let you down," Peter said. "I won't."

"Simon, Simon," he said. "Satan wanted you. He wanted to sift you as wheat is sifted, but I've prayed for you, prayed that your faith doesn't run out. When you do get straightened out, Simon, strengthen the others."

"Tell us where you're going, Teacher," Peter said.

"It doesn't matter. You can't follow me - although you shall later."

"But why can't I? I'm ready to die for you."

"The truth is, Simon, that before the cock crows the dawn you'll have denied that you even know me . . . three times."

"No, Teacher! Even if it means prison. Even if I have to die by your side, I'll never let you down."

All the disciples echoed his words.

"When I sent you out without a wallet or a knapsack, without even an extra pair of sandals," Jesus said, "did you lack anything?"

"No."

"Now I'm telling you that if you have a knapsack or a wallet, take it along. And if you don't own a sword, sell your cloak and buy one. The scripture reads, He was classed as a criminal, and everything that has been predicted about me must happen."

"We have two swords here."

"That's enough," he said.

As they were eating he picked up a piece of bread , gave thanks for it, broken it into pieces and gave it to the apostles.

"Eat this," he said. "It's my body, offered up for you. In eating it, remember me."

When they had finished dinner he picked up a cup of wine, gave thanks for it, and passed it around the table. "This is to seal the new covenant - my blood, shed for you and for many others. Drinks it all. I won't drink wine again until we drink it together in the kingdom.

"Now, now," he said, "don't despair. Believe in me as you believe in God. Where my father lives there are any number of homes, and I'm

about to go there to prepare yours. Would I say it if it weren't true? When everything is ready I'll come back for you so that we may be there together. You know where I'm going . . . you know the way."

"But we don't," Thomas said. "We don't even know where you're going, so how could we know the way?"

"I am myself the way," he said. "I am the truth. I am life. The only way to God is through me. If you had recognized who I am you would have known who my Father is. But from now on you'll know him because you've seen him."

"If you'd let us see the Father," Philip said, "we'd be convinced."

"Have we been together all this time, Philip, and you still don't realize who I am? How can you say, 'Let us see the Father,' when to see me is to see the Father? Don't you believe that he and I are one? When I speak, you're not only hearing me, you're also hearing the Father carrying out his work through me. If you find it impossible to believe in my oneness with him, then believe on the basis of what you've seen me do. The fact is that if you believe in me you'll be able to do not only what you've seen me do but more, because I'll be with the Father. Ask for anything - ask for it on my authority and ask for it so that God may be honored - and I'll do it. Understand me now; ask for anything and I'll do it.

"If you really love me you'll live by what I've taught you. I'm going to ask the Father to give you someone in my place, someone to counsel and encourage you and to stay with you forever. Who? The Spirit of Truth. The world won't welcome him because it hasn't the capability to recognize or comprehend who he is. You'll know him though, because he's with you now and, in the future will live in your hearts. I'm not abandoning you; I'll be back. Very soon now the public won't see me any more, but you will. My being alive is the guarantee that you will live.

You'll realize when the time comes that my oneness with the Father is the same as my oneness with you. Prove your love for me by your obedience. Show your love for God and me and I'll return your love and reveal myself to you."

"Sir," said the other Judas (not Iscariot), "you said you were going to reveal yourself to us but not to the world. Would you explain that?"

"It stems from your love for me," he answered. "Your obedience will bring you the Father's love and mine. We'll both share your daily life. And, as I said, the evidence of your love is your obedience. That's not only what I say; it's what the Father says. I've taught you a great many things in the time we've been together, but when I'm gone the Father will send you in my stead that Counselor of whom I spoke a moment ago - the Holy Spirit. He'll be your teacher. He'll remind you of what I've taught you.

"My legacy to you is peace - my peace - a very different thing from what the world calls peace. Don't be worried, don't be frightened. I told you a moment ago that I was going to leave you but that I'd return. If you really loved me you'd be happy for me because I am going home to my Father. He's greater than I. The reason I tell you this in advance is so that when it happens your faith won't falter.

"There is not much more time to talk now: the unseen ruler of the world draws near. It's not that he has any authority over me, but simply that I am being obedient to the Father so that the world may see my love for him.

"Let me explain our relationship with an analogy. Think of me as an actual vine, of yourselves as branches, and of the Father as a gardener. If a branch doesn't bear fruit he cuts it away. Fruitful branches he prunes to improve their yield - as you have already been pruned through my teaching. Remain attached to me, as I shall to you, because just as in

nature a branch can't bear unless it's attached to the vine, so you can't bear fruit apart from me. If we remain together you'll be exceeding fruitful; apart from me you won't be able to produce a thing. More than that, you'll be thrown away as a broken branch is thrown away, to wither and to be gathered and burned. Live each day attached to me and my teaching will thrive in you. Then you may ask for anything and have it granted. When you are fruitful you bring honor to my Father and demonstrate that you're my disciples. I have loved you in the same way that the Father has loved me. Keep on living in my love. How? By being obedient to my Father's commandments just as I, having been obedient to my Father's commandments, keep on living in his love. I'm telling you all this so that you may give me reason to rejoice and so that your happiness may be complete.

"Here's what I require of you: that you love each other as I've loved you - and who can love more than someone willing to die for his friends? You are my friends if you follow my teaching. I shan't refer to you any longer as servants because a servant doesn't share his master's confidence. That you are my friends is shown in the fact that I've let you in on everything the Father has told me. You didn't choose to be joined to me; it was I who choose you and determined that you should be fruitful and that your fruit should endure. The commandment is: love each other.

"Now, although you are to give love to each other, don't be surprised if you are hated by the world - they hated me first. They'd love you if were like them, but because you aren't and because you're joined to me, they'll hate you. I told you that the servant isn't greater than his master, remember? Well, my persecutors will be you persecutors just as those who heeded me will heed you. The things they will do to you because of me will be done because they don't realize who sent me here. It's because I've been sent by God and they've heard me that they stand guilty. Otherwise they wouldn't be guilty, but now they're left without

excuse, having chosen to live in their sins. Hating me, they are guilty hating the Father. They stand guilty because they've seen me do what no man in history has done. Despite that, they still hate me and the Father. Actually, it's the fulfillment of that prophecy: They hated me without cause.

"When the Holy Spirit comes from the Father - he who is the very essence of truth and who will be counselor and strength to you - he'll tell you about me. Your job will be to tell others. And who could do it better? You've been with me from the beginning.

"I tell you all this so that you'll hold steady. You're going to be excommunicated - indeed, the time is coming when the man who kills you will believe he's doing God's will! They'll do what they do because they've never understood the Father or me. I tell you this so that it will be in your mind when they have their day. I didn't say these things earlier because we were together, but the time has now come for me to leave."

He paused. "None of you has asked me where I'm going? It's because the things I've been saying have made you very sad. Realize that it's to your advantage that I leave. If I don't the Counselor won't come. He'll come only if I tell him to. When he comes, he'll make clear to the world what sin is, what goodness is, and what the judgment is about. He'll show them that sin is to reject me, that goodness stems from my departure to be forever with God, and that judgment is to be seen in the sentencing of the invisible ruler of this world.

"There is still so much to tell you it would be too much for you right now. When the Spirit of Truth comes, he'll lead you to the whole of truth. He won't be speaking on his own, but will only be passing on what he's been told. He will show you what lies ahead. He'll honor me by passing on to you what he's drawn from me and - since everything of the Father's is mine- he'll be telling you what I received from God.

"I must leave soon," he said, " but I'll be back soon."

"The apostles talked among themselves. "what does he mean by soon? How soon? And what precisely does he mean when he talks about going to the Father?"

"You're puzzled," he said. "You don't understand when I say that I must leave you soon and that I'll be back soon. The fact is that you will mourn and be in tears at the very time the world is rejoicing. Then your tears will become tears of joy. For instance, when a woman is in labor she is in anguish, but her anguish is forgotten and replaced by happiness when her baby is born. In the same way, you are going through a time of sorrow now, but that will change to supreme happiness when you see me again - a happiness that nothing can remove. When that time comes you won't have any questions. In the meantime, I repeat, ask the Father for anything you want, ask him in my name, and he'll give it to you. You haven't done that before; do it now, and you'll get what you ask and your happiness will be complete.

"I've been using figures of speech. The time has now arrived to speak about the Father in straightforward language. When you approach the Father in my name, understand that there will be no necessity for me to intervene on your behalf. He Loves you himself. First, because you love me and, second, because you now accept the fact I am here at his bidding and am about to return to him."

"That makes more sense," they said, "Now we understand. We now know that there is nothing you do not understand and that there is no need for further questions from us. We're convinced that you have come from God."

"You believe now, do you?" he said. "I fear that the hour is coming - indeed, it's here - when this little band is going to be scattered, each of you to his home, leaving me alone. No, not alone, the Father will be

with me. All that I've told you has had one purpose; to bring you peace. There are times of great testing ahead in this world, but cheer up, men, I've already conquered the world."

Now he addressed himself to God. "Father," he prayed, "the hour has come. Honor me so that I may honor you. You gave me authority over all mankind, the authority to give eternal life to each of those you gave me, the knowledge that you are the only true God and that I am the Messiah you sent to the world. I have honored you by doing what you gave me to do. Now, Father, restore me to the state I had with you before the world began.

"These men you gave me: I've told them of you. They've been obedient. They now realize that everything I have comes from you. I've passed your world on to them. They accept it as yours and accept the fact that I have in truth been sent here by you. I pray for these men - not for the world but for these men. They're yours - as everything of mine is yours, as everything of yours is mine - and they've brought honor to me. I'm about to leave this world to rejoin you, but they must stay here. I ask you, holy Father, to sustain them. Give them that same oneness that we have. Here on earth I have kept them in your name, kept all of them, other than that child of hell, and he was the fulfillment of scripture. I've explained what's ahead for me so that they may glimpse the happiness I feel. I've given them your commandments and it has led to their being hated by the world because they're different, different in the same way that I am unlike the world. I'm not asking you to take them out of the world but only to protect them from the evil one. They don't belong to the world any more than I do. Purify them through the truth, the truth of your word. In the same way that you sent me into the world, I've sent them. I hereby consecrate myself for their sake so that they, too, may be consecrated by the truth.

"But it is not only for these men that I pray, I pray also for those who will

come to believe because of them. My prayer is that they may all be one with us as we are one, so that the world may be convinced that you sent me. You honored me and I've passed the honor on to them so that they may be one as we are - I with them and you with me - as a proof to the world that you sent me and that you love them as you love me. Father, I want these men with me. I want them to see how, out of your love for me, you honored me before the earth was created. Oh righteous Father, the world doesn't know you as I do, but these men know I came from you. I've made you known to them and will continue to do so, so that your love for me be in their hearts even as I shall be."

Then Jesus said, "Get up, men. Let us go." And they sang a hymn and went out.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

### ***Prayer in Gethsemane - the arrest - Peter's denial - Jesus is questioned by Annas - Jesus before the high priest.***

Jesus and the apostles crossed the Ravine of Cedars, climbed the Mount of Olives, and walked to a place Jesus knew well: a garden known as Gethsemane.

"Wait here," he told the apostles. "I'm going over there to pray. Simon, James, John - you come with me."

As the three of them went with him, Jesus was suddenly almost overwhelmed with grief.

"Oh my soul!" he cried out. "The agony! I don't know whether I can stand it! Stay here and keep a lookout."

He continued on a stone's-throw and collapsed.

"Oh my Father," he prayed, "You can do anything; if it is possible, let me draw back from this agony. But let it be as you want, not I."

An angel came and strengthened him.

He continued to pray in an agony of spirit, the perspiration running down his face like blood, and dropping to the ground.

After a time he got to his feet and went back to where the apostles were. Exhausted by their grief - and because it was now early morning - they had fallen asleep. He shook Peter awake.

"You're sleeping, Simon?" he said. "Couldn't you stand watch for even an hour? Stay awake, and pray that you may escape the testing ahead. I know you want to stay awake, but the body's a weak thing."

He left them and went off to pray.

"Oh, my Father," he groaned. "If there is no other way, your will be done."

When he returned to the apostles, some time later, he found that they had fallen asleep again. He went back to the garden to pray again and then returned to where they lay.

"Go ahead, have you sleep now," he said, "But no. Look! I'm about to be betrayed. Get up men. The traitor is here."

The council had assigned a band of temple-guards to Judas. Even as Jesus was speaking, they marched toward him, their lanterns and torches lighting the darkness. Judas - who knew where Jesus was because he'd been there often - was walking ahead of the guards. Knowing what was about to happen, Jesus stepped out of the darkness and walked toward them.

"Who are you looking for?" he asked.

"For Jesus of Nazareth."

"I'm Jesus of Nazareth."

The front rank stepped back and some of the guards fell to the ground. He spoke to them again.

"Who do you want?"

"Jesus of Nazareth."

"I am Jesus of Nazareth as I told you. So if it's me you're after let these others go." (He was concerned that the prophecy be fulfilled : I have lost none of those you gave me.)

They had assigned to Judas a cohort under the command of a tribune and some men of the temple-guard. Judas has established a pre-arranged plan. "The signal will be a kiss," he had told them, "and the man I will kiss is Jesus. Arrest him and take him away safely."

He walked up to Jesus.

"Hello, Teacher," he said, and kissed him affectionately.

"Judas," Jesus said, "do you betray me with a kiss?" Then he said, "Do what you've come to do, friend."

The apostles realized what was happening. "Shall we fight, Teacher?" they whispered.

Peter didn't wait. He drew his sword and with a swipe cut off the right ear of the high priest's servant, a man by the name of Malchus.

"No more of that, Simon," Jesus said. "Put your sword away. Live by violence and you'll die by violence. Do you not want me to obey God? Surely you realize that even now I could ask him to send legions of angels to rescue me. But if I were to do that how would the scriptures be

fulfilled?" He walked over to Malchus, touched his ear and healed it.

They put him under arrest, bound his hands, and prepared to lead him away.

"Why these swords and clubs?" Jesus said to the officer in charge. "You'd think I was a brigand. I've been teaching in the temple every day; why didn't you arrest me then? But no matter, this is your hour, a time for the fulfillment of scripture and a time when darkness has its way."

The apostles turned and ran.

As the soldiers marched Jesus away, a young man dressed only in a linen robe, followed. One of the soldiers seized him but he struggled free and ran off naked, leaving his robe in their hands.

The guard marched Jesus to the home of Annas, the father-in-law of the high priest. Annas interrogated him about his disciples and his teaching.

Peter and one of the other disciples followed at a distance. The other apostle was known to the high priest so, while Peter waited outside by the gate, he went in to the courtyard and got permission for Peter to enter.

As they were passed through the gate, a girl, one of the housemaids, studied Peter's face. The night was cold and the officers of the guard and some of the household servants had built a fire in the center of the enclosure. Peter stood outside the circle for awhile and then edged his way in and sat down among the group to warm himself. The housemaid had continued to watch him. She spoke up.

"Aren't you one of the that fellow's followers?" she said. "That fellow from Galilee - Jesus?"

"What are you talking about, woman?" Peter said. "I don't even know the man."

He got up and went out on the porch . Another housemaid saw him there and whispered to some of the men standing about," That man there . . . he was with Jesus. I saw him."

"You're one of them, aren't you?" one of the men called out.

"What do you mean?" Peter said. "I don't know him. I swear I don't."

An hour passed. One of the servants who had been standing out in the courtyard - a relative of Malchus - walked up to him.

"Didn't I see you with him in the Garden?"

"You most certainly did not!"

"But I did. You're one of his people. You're a Galilean. Your accent's a dead giveaway."

Peter began to curse and swear. "You're talking absolute nonsense," he shouted. "I tell you I do not know the man!"

Nearby, a rooster crowed. Jesus turned and looked at Peter. And he, remembering, went out, his body heaving with bitter sobs.

Within the house Annas had been plying Jesus with questions.

"I have spoken quite openly," Jesus told him. "I've taught frequently where the people gather; in the synagogues and in the temple. There have been no secret meetings. But why ask me about my teaching? Ask the people who've been listening to me. They'll tell you what I've been saying."

A soldier leaned across and slapped his face.

"What do you mean, talking to the high priest like that?" he said.

"If I've answered wrongly," Jesus said, "tell me in what way. But if I haven't, why have you struck me?"

Annas had him taken to Caiaphas' house, still bound and under guard. The council had been assembled there to hear potential witnesses. They were hoping to find someone whose testimony would provide them with the grounds on which to seek the death penalty. A number of men presented themselves. One man was willing to swear that he had heard Jesus say, "I'm going to tear down this manmade temple and build another untouched by human hands," but they could find no one to substantiate his story. Finally, two men came before them whose testimony agreed.

"This fellow said he could destroy God's temple and rebuild it in three days," they testified.

Caiaphas rose to his feet and turned to Jesus .

"How do you respond to these charges?" he said. "Have you nothing to say?"

Jesus did not speak.

"Are you the Christ?" Caiaphas asked. "If you are, say so."

"If I did," he replied, "you wouldn't believe me, and if I were to put question to you, you wouldn't answer them."

"I call upon you, in the presence of the living God," Caiaphas thundered, "to tell us if you are the Christ, God's son."

"I am. And I'll tell you more. You, Caiaphas, are going to see the son of man seated at God's right hand and coming from heaven on the clouds in the sky."

Caiaphas ripped his robe ceremonially.

"Blasphemy ! You heard it - blasphemy! What do we need witnesses for? You yourselves heard him blaspheme." He turned to the council. "What

is your verdict?"

"Guilty!" they said. "He deserves to die."

The soldiers who were guarding him began to slap him and to spit in his face. One of them took a blindfold and covered his eyes and then struck him.

"Come on there, prophet," he said. "Come on, Messiah, tell us who hit you?"

There was more of the same. The guards were ordered to take him away. As they led him out they continued to pummel him.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

***Jesus on trial before pilate - he is send to Herod - the choice: Jesus or Barabbas - the sentence of crucifixion - Judas remorse and suicide.***

Dawn. Caiaphas reconvened the meeting and discussed with the chief priests, the scribes, and other members of the council what steps they should take to have Jesus executed. When the meeting concluded, it was early morning on the day of the Preparation for the Passover. They had Jesus brought to them, adjourned, and marched him to the praetorium. They would not go in because they wanted to eat the Passover meal later and did not want to be ceremonially defiled. Pilate came out to them.

"What crime is he charged with?" Pilate asked.

"If he weren't a criminal we wouldn't have brought him before you," they replied. "He's been corrupting our people. He has told them not to pay taxes to Caesar and he claims to be a king."

"Go judge him by your own laws," Pilate said.

"But we do not have the authority to pronounce the death sentence," they said - which fulfilled a prediction Jesus had made about the way he would be executed.

Pilate went into the courthouse and had Jesus brought before him.

"Are you the king of the Jews?" he asked

"Is that your own question," Jesus said, "or did others suggest you ask me that?"

"What do you take me for?" Pilate said. "Am I a Jew? You've been brought before me by your own people and by their chief priests. Why? What's your crime?"

"If I were the king of some country," Jesus said, "my servants would have fought to keep me from being arrested. But I'm not - my kingdom is elsewhere."

"You are a king then?"

"Exactly as you say; I am. That's why I was born. That's why I came to the world - to be a witness for truth. And everyone on the side of truth heeds what I say."

"Truth!" Pilate said. "What's truth?"

The governor went outside to where the crowd was waiting.

"I don't find him guilty of any crime," he said.

They were insistent. "He's been stirring up the people." they shouted. "Everywhere in Judea and all the way to Galilee, he's made nothing but trouble with his teaching."

Pilate turned to Jesus. "Don't You hear these charges? Have you nothing to say?" Jesus remained silent and Pilate, who had been

studying him, was puzzled.

He had heard the reference to Galilee though, and he asked whether Jesus was a Galilean and therefore under Herod's jurisdiction. Learning that he was, he sent him to Herod who happened to be in Jerusalem at the time.

Herod was delighted. He had heard about Jesus and for some time had wanted very much to meet him, hoping to see him perform a miracle. He questioned him at length but - although the chief priests and the scribes stood off to one side shouting accusations - got no response. Finally Herod and his soldiers began to ridicule him and to make sport of him and, after dressing him in a fancy robe, sent him back to Pilate. And Herod and Pilate, who had been enemies, became friends that day.

Each year during the Passover it was the governor's custom to declare an amnesty and to release any prisoner chosen by the people. It was now clear to Pilate that the chief priests had brought Jesus before him out of envy. He was concerned further because, earlier, when he had been seated on the Seat of Judgment, his wife had send a note to him. It read: "Don't get involved with this man. He's innocent. I had a frightening dream about him this morning."

Pilate summoned the chief priests, the rulers, and the people.

"You brought this man Jesus before me," he said, "charging him with corrupting the people. I have examined him in your presence and have found no grounds for your accusations. Nor has Herod, for he has sent him back to me. Now, as you know, we have a custom. Every year at this time I release a prisoner to you. I shall therefore have Jesus flogged and released."

There was in prison at that time a notorious criminal, a brigand by the name of Barabbas. With a number of confederates, he had been found

guilty of murder during an insurrection. The chief priests and the elders had been busy inciting the crowd to demand Barabbas' release and Jesus' death.

"Shall I release the king of the Jews?" Pilate asked the crowd.

"Release Barabbas, not Jesus," they shouted. "Let Barabbas go."

"Then what shall I do with Jesus?" he said.

"Crucify him!"

"But why? For what crime? I find him guilty of nothing deserving the death penalty."

The roar of the crowd grew louder. "Crucify him!"

It was clear to Pilate that he was getting nowhere and that the mob was ready to riot. He took a basin of water and publicly washed his hands.

"I accept none of the responsibility for this innocent man's death," he said.

"His blood be on us and on our children," they shouted.

Their shouts carried the day. Pilate ordered Barabbas released and sentenced Jesus to be flogged and turned over to the soldiers for crucifixion.

The soldiers marched him off to the courtyard and gathered the regiment. They stripped off his clothes, flogged him, and cast a purple robe around his shoulders. They twisted the branches of a thorn bush into the form of a crown and jammed it on his head. They shoved a stick into his right hand as a mock sceptre and began to make fun of him, kneeling in front of him and chanting "Hail! King of the Jews!" Then they struck him on the head with the stick, slapped his face, and spat on him.

Pilate went out before the people again.

"Look," he said, "I bring this man before you once more so that it may clearly be understood that I don't find him guilty."

Out came Jesus with the crown of thorns on his head and wearing the purple robe.

"Look at him," Pilate said.

"Crucify him!" they shouted.

"Crucify him yourselves. As far as I can judge, he's innocent."

"But he's made himself out to be God's son and our law says for that he must die."

Pilate's uneasiness deepened. He led Jesus back into the courthouse.

"Where are you from?" he asked.

Jesus didn't answer.

"You refuse to answer me? Don't you realize that I have the power to execute you or to pardon you?"

"You wouldn't have any power over me if it hadn't been given to you from above. That's why your guilt is less than his who handed me over to you."

All of this made Pilate even more anxious to let him go.

But the people would have none of it. "Let him go and you're no friend of Caesar's," they shouted. "Anyone who sets himself up as a king is Caesar's rival."

It was now about noon. Pilate sat down on the judgment seat in the place known as "The Pavement" and had Jesus brought out.

"I present your king," he said.

"To the cross with him! Crucify him!"

"Crucify your king?"

"Caesar's our king. We have no other king."

Pilate handed him over to be crucified. The soldiers made sport of him, took off the purple robe, dressed him in his own clothes, and marched him out to be crucified.

When Judas saw that Jesus had been condemned to die, he had a change of heart. He took the thirty silver coins and went to the chief priest and the elders.

"I have sinned," he said. "I've betrayed an innocent man!"

"What's that to us?" they said. "That's your problem."

He went to the temple and threw the coins to the floor. Then he went to some property he had planned to buy with the money and committed suicide.

The chief priests now had the money and held a meeting to decide what to do with it.

"Put it in the treasury," someone suggested.

"We can't. It wouldn't be legal. It's blood-money."

They decided to take the money and buy a field owned by a potter and to use the area as a burial ground for those who died without relatives. The place became famous in Jerusalem and is known to this day as "The Field of Blood."

All of this fulfilled a prediction by the prophet Jeremiah:

They took the thirty silver coins,  
The price of him on whom a price had been set  
By some of Israel's sons,  
And they paid it out for potter's field  
As God commanded we do.

## **CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE**

### **The Passion of Christ & Crucifixion**

**Simon of Cyrene carries the cross - Jesus is crucified - the repentant thief - Jesus dies - the burial in Joseph of Arimathea's tomb - the resurrection - the angels instruct Mary - Peter and John go to the tomb - Mary meets the resurrected Christ - the walk to Emmaus - Jesus appears to the disciples - the miraculous catch of fish - the great commission - ascension.**

Jesus, carrying his cross, was led from Caiaphas' house. A man was passing by who had just come in from the country. His name was Simon, he was from Cyrene and he was the father of Rufus and Alexander. The soldiers commandeered him to carry Jesus' cross and to follow them. Condemned to die with Jesus were two other men, criminals, and they became part of the procession winding its way through the streets. A large crowd followed. As they went, some women in the crowd lining the street filled the air with their wailing and crying. Jesus spoke to them.

"Don't spend your tears, women," he said. "Save them for yourselves and for your children. In the days ahead the childless woman will be considered lucky. When the endtime comes men and women will be calling on mountains and the hills to cover them. If they do this when the tree is green, what will they not do when it is dry?"

They arrived at a place called in the Hebrew, Golgotha, "The place of

the skull." The soldiers offered him a drink - a drug mixed with wine. Jesus tasted it and shook his head. They crucified him with the two brigands, one at his right and other at his left. It was about nine in the morning.

"Forgive them, Father," Jesus said. "They don't realize what they're doing."

At the foot of the cross the soldiers began to rip up his robes, drawing lots for first choice of the pieces. When they came to his tunic, which had been woven without a seam, one of them suggested, "Let's not tear this up. Let's draw lots for all of it." Thus, they unwittingly fulfilled the scripture, *They divided my clothes among them and cast lots for my robe.*

Before elevating the cross, the soldiers fastened a sign to the upright above his head and wrote on it the specifications of his crime. It read:

THIS IS  
JESUS OF NAZARETH  
THE KING OF  
THE JEWS.

The wording was in three languages - Hebrew, Latin, and Greek. Inasmuch as Golgotha was close to the city, the sign was clearly visible to passers-by on the road.

The chief priests went to Pilate.

"Change the wording on the sign," they asked. "It reads 'The King of the Jews.' It should read, This fellow said, I am the King of the Jews."

"What I've written stands," Pilate said.

At Golgotha, the soldiers sat on the ground to wait for him to die. A crowd of hangers-on stood about, watching. Off in the distance were his

friends. Some of the passer-by jeered at him as they walked along the road.

"Ah!" they said, shaking their heads in mock solicitude, "That's the fellow who was going to tear down the temple and build it again in record time."

"Hey there, son of God." another shouted, "Let's see you prove who you are by coming down off that cross."

The chief priests, the scribes, and the elders joined in.

"Look," they said, "the great savior of others can't save himself."

"Let this self-styled King of Israel come on down. Then we'll believe in him."

"He said he was God's son, didn't he? All right, let's see his Father get him out of this. If he'll have him."

The soldiers joined in the sport. One passed up some sour wine to him.

"Hey there, King of the Jews," he said. "Why don't you save yourself?"

Even one of the crucified brigands joined in. "If you're the Christ," he said, "don't just save yourself; save us too while you're at it."

The other thief rebuked him. "Don't you even know what it is to fear God?" he said. "All three of us are dying here. We had it coming, but this fellow's no criminal." He turned toward Jesus. "When you get your kingdom," he said, "don't forget me."

"You'll be in Paradise with me today," Jesus said.

Off to one side stood a group of women: Jesus' mother, her sister, Cleopas' wife Mary, and Mary Magdalene. Jesus saw them and, standing with them, the apostle for whom he had a special affection.

Jesus spoke to his mother, "There's your son," he said. Then he said to the apostle, "There's your mother." (From that time on, Mary lived in the apostle's home.)

At noon it grew dark and remained dark until about three in the afternoon.

Suddenly, Jesus shouted: "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani." ("My God! My God! Why have you deserted me?")

"Listen," a man said, "He's calling for Elijah."

"Let's stay and see if Elijah helps him down," someone laughed.

Jesus knew that his task had now been completed and that all the prophecies concerning him had been fulfilled. He spoke to the men at the foot of the cross.

"I'm thirsty," he said.

There was bottle of soured wine on the ground. A man ran and got it, sopped some up in a sponge, put it on the end of a stick, and lifted it to Jesus' lips.

Jesus let out a groan of anguish. "Father," he cried, "I commit my spirit to your hands," and his head fell forward.

"It is finished," he said, and died.

At the moment of his death the curtain at the entrance to the Holy of Holies in the temple tore from top to bottom. The earth quaked and fissures appeared in the rock. Some tombs opened and a number of godly men and women emerged. (After Jesus was himself resurrected, they went to Jerusalem where they were seen by many of his followers.)

When the Centurion who was standing guard with his company at the foot of the cross saw the way in which Jesus died and the events that

followed his death, he was touched with fear.

"Surely that good man was a son of God," he said.

The crowd that had been standing about went away beating their chests with their fists.

It was the day of Preparation for the Passover - a high holiday - and the temple officials were concerned that the bodies not remain on the crosses over the sabbath. They sent a delegation to Pilate to request that the legs of the condemned men be broken in order to hasten their death and that the bodies then be removed. The soldiers were ordered to Golgotha. They broke the legs of the two thieves but when they came to Jesus they saw he was already dead and there was no need to break his legs. One of the soldiers raised his spear and thrust it into Jesus' side and blood and water gushed out.

(One who was there and saw it all happen is reporting it accurately so that you may believe. The things recounted above happened so that certain scriptures might be fulfilled, namely: *None of his bones shall be broken, and They shall see the man they have pierced.*)

It was now evening. A wealthy and influential man, known as Joseph of Arimathea, went to Pilate and asked quite boldly for permission to take down Jesus' body and bury it. Joseph was a member of the council who had not concurred in the decision to have Jesus executed. He had been looking for the advent of the kingdom and had been a secret follower of Jesus, keeping his discipleship secret for fear of the authorities.

Pilate was surprised to learn that Jesus was already dead and summoned the Centurion in charge. The Centurion confirmed it and Pilate granted permission.

Joseph and another member of the council, Nicodemus - the man who had gone to visit Jesus early in his ministry - went to Golgotha and took

the body down. They had purchased a linen winding-cloth and about one hundred pounds of crushed myrrh and aloes. They wrapped the body with the spices in the manner customarily followed by the Jews in preparing a body for burial. Joseph had recently had a tomb hewn from the rock in a garden near Golgotha. It was close to sundown and the passover was almost upon them. The tomb was close by so they placed the body in it, rolled a huge stone to close off the entrance, and left.

As they carried the body to the tomb they had been followed by Mary Magdalene and "the other Mary," the mother of James and Joseph. When they saw where the body has been placed, the women returned to where they were lodging to prepare some spices and ointments. As was required in the Law, they stayed at home on the sabbath.

At dusk, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate.

"Sir," their spokesman said, "we recall that when the deceiver was alive he said he would rise from the grave three days after he died. We are here, therefore, request that you issue an order that the tomb in which he has been buried be secured until three days have passed. We're concerned that his followers may spirit his body away and then claim he has risen from the dead. In which case, the final fraud would be worse than the original."

"You have your own temple-guards," Pilate said "Make it as secure as you think necessary."

The guards were dispatched to place seals on the stone and to stand watch.

During the night there was an earthquake. An angel came, rolled away the stone, and sat on it; his face radiant with light and his clothing glistening as snow in the sunlight. The guards collapsed to the ground, overcome with terror.

Early Sunday morning, just before dawn, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome set out for the tomb, taking with them the spices they had prepared and with which they planned to embalm the body. As they walked they discussed what they could do to get the stone - a very large one - rolled away. When they arrived they saw that it had already been moved to one side. They went into the tomb and did not find the body. What they took to be a young man dressed in a dazzlingly white robe was sitting to the right side, with another nearby. The women were frightened and lowered their heads. Immediately, it seemed, the two angels were standing beside them. Terrified, the women averted their eyes.

"Don't be frightened," one of the angels said. "And there's no need to be surprised. You're here looking for Jesus, but why do you look for the living in a tomb? He's not here, he's alive! Do you not remember that, back in Galilee, he told you he would be arrested and crucified and rise from the grave on the third day? Come, have a look at the place where he lay dead."

Then the angel said, "Hurry now. Go tell the disciples and Peter that Jesus has gone on ahead to Galilee and that they'll find him there just as he said they would."

Suddenly it all came back to them. They ran from the garden, trembling and torn with a mixture of fear and happiness. They wondered at first whether they dared say anything to anyone but, their fear giving way to a mounting sense of joy, they ran to where the disciples were to tell them what had happened.

Mary spoke privately to Peter and John.

"They've taken his body from the tomb," she whispered. "But where it is, I've no idea."

Some of the disciples dismissed their report as incredible, but Peter and John headed for the crypt on the dead run. John got there first. He bent over and peered inside. He could see the linen winding-cloths on the ground but not much else. He was afraid to go in alone.

Peter came running up and went in immediately. John followed. They saw the cloths on the ground and the napkin that had been used to cover Jesus' face rolled up neatly and lying by itself. The tomb was empty. To that point they hadn't actually believed the scripture that he would be resurrected.

They left the tomb and returned to the city, deeply puzzled.

In the meantime, Mary Magdalene had returned and stood outside the tomb crying. After a while she stood down and looked in through the opening. She saw the two angels sitting at the head and foot of the stone slab.

"Why are you crying, woman?"

"Because they have taken away my Lord's body," she sobbed, "and I have no idea where it is."

She turned and saw a man standing in the shadows. It was Jesus, but she took him to be the gardener.

"Why are you crying?" he said. "Are you looking for someone?"

"Sir," she said, "if you've moved his body somewhere, please tell me where and I'll have it taken away."

He spoke one word: "Mary."

"Dear Teacher!"

"Don't cling to me, Mary," he said, "I haven't returned to my Father yet. Go find my disciples and tell them that I'm on the way to my Father and

my God and to your Father and your God."

Mary ran to the disciples and told them, "I have seen the Lord and he gave me this message for you."

In the city a meeting was in progress between the guards who had been posted at the tomb and the chief priests. The guards had reported what had happened, and the chief priests had met with the elders to discuss what action to take. They agreed to pay a large sum of money to the guards to keep the story quiet.

"Here's what you're to do," they told them. "You're to say that, during the night while you were asleep, the disciples came and stole the body. If the governor happens to hear about this, don't worry, we'll explain it all to him."

The guards took the money and repeated the story as instructed. It spread quickly through the city and is still believed at this writing.

That same day, two of the disciples left Jerusalem to return home to the village of Emmaus, some seven miles distant. As they walked they talked over the events of the past few days. Jesus drew abreast and fell in stride with them - although they were not aware that it was he.

"What were you talking about?" he asked.

They halted and stood looking at him for a moment, the expression on their faces a mixture of sadness and incredulity. One of the men, Cleopas, answered.

"What were we talking about? You must surely be the only visitor in the city who doesn't know what's been going on."

"Well, what has been going on?"

"You don't know about Jesus of Nazareth? He was a prophet who did astounding things. As a matter of fact we were hoping he was the man

who was going to free Israel. But the chief priests and the temple officials arrested him and turned him over to the Romans, and they crucified him. It's now the third day. Some of the women in our group came to us yesterday with an incredible tale about going early in the morning to the tomb where he'd been buried and not finding his body. More than that, they say some angels told them he was alive. Some of our group went to the tomb and found things as the women had said. At any rate they didn't see him."

"You are such foolish men," he said, "so slow to accept the prediction of prophets. Surely you realize that, before he could be glorified, the Messiah must go through that kind of suffering."

As they walked on toward Emmaus, he quoted a series of scriptures to them -from Moses on through the prophets - relating the relevance of each of the passages to himself. When finally they reached the outskirts of Emmaus he made as though he were going on.

"No, no," they said. "Stay in town with us. It's already late. You must stay." He went home with them.

While they were at dinner, he picked up a piece of bread, gave thanks, broke it in pieces and gave each some. In a flash they realized who he was. But even as it dawned on them he was gone.

They looked at each other. "So that's why our hearts were so warmed by his explanation of the scriptures."

They got up from the table and hurried back to Jerusalem, arriving there that same evening. They went to the room in which the apostles and some others were hiding behind locked doors. Before they could break their news, they were greeted with the excited cries of the disciples.

"Jesus - he's risen!" they were told. "He's out of the grave! He really is, Peter saw him!"

As soon as they could, they related their own experience. They were in the midst of the story, explaining the things that had happened on their way home and how Jesus had made himself known during supper, when, suddenly, he was there in the room, standing among them. They were startled, certain they were seeing a ghost.

"There's nothing to be frightened of," Jesus reassured them. "Peace. Why do you doubt?"

He stretched out his hands toward them and pulled his robe aside so they could see the wound in his side.

"Look," he said. "Look at my hands and my feet. You can be sure it's me. Ghosts aren't flesh and blood, are they? Obviously I am."

The disciples were in a delirium of happiness, but not quite able to credit what was happening.

"Do you have any food?" he said. "I'm hungry."

They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and as they stood there watching him, he ate it.

"You'll remember," he said, "that when we were together earlier I impressed on you that every prophecy about me in the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms would have to be fulfilled. Let me review it with you." He went back over it all and then said "You have seen it all happen. Now you understand why it was necessary for me to suffer and be resurrected."

"Now," he said, "just as the Father sent me out, I'm going to send you out." He breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Forgive any men's sins and they're forgiven; withhold your forgiveness and they remain sinners. I'm going to send you the one my Father promised, so don't leave Jerusalem until you've been clothed with the power of

heaven."

Jesus left. Later Thomas joined them - he hadn't been there earlier - and they told him excitedly what had happened.

"We've seen the Lord!" they said.

Thomas remained unconvinced. "Sorry," he said, "I just can't believe it. Unless I myself see the scars on his hands and touch them, and touch the wound on his side. Sorry."

Jesus made no further appearance for the next eight days. Then, when the disciples were again meeting behind locked doors, Thomas being there this time, he was suddenly with them.

"Peace," he said.

He turned to Thomas. "Come here, Thomas," he said. "Here . . . put your finger here. See my hands? Now touch me here on the side. Don't doubt, believe."

"My lord and my God," Thomas said.

"You believe because you see," he said. "Happy those who trust without proof."

Later, Jesus revealed himself to a group of the apostles at Lake Galilee. Here's what happened:

Peter, Thomas, Nathaniel, and the brothers James and John had been sitting around talking. Peter got to his feet.

"I'm going fishing," he said.

"Wait," they said "We'll all go."

They fished through the night with no luck. Dawn was just breaking when they saw someone standing on the beach. It was Jesus, but they

didn't recognize him at this point.

"Have you any fish, lads?" he called out.

"Not a one," they shouted back.

"Cast your nets off to the right. There are some there."

They did, and such was the catch they weren't able to haul it aboard.

John looked at Peter. "It's the Lord!"

Peter was stripped down for work. He quickly put on his cloak, leaped into the water, and waded ashore. (They were only about one hundred yards offshore.) The others followed in the boat, dragging the net filled with fish.

When they had beached the boat, they saw a charcoal fire burning with some fish being broiled over it, and some bread.

"Go and get some of the fish you just caught," Jesus said.

Peter went aboard the boat, and managed to haul the net up on the shore. It was filled with good-sized fish, one hundred and fifty-three of them. Despite the catch, the net had not ripped.

"Come and have breakfast," Jesus said.

The disciples knew who he was by this time but were afraid to say anything. He served them the bread and fish and they ate in silence. When they had finished, he turned to Peter.

"Simon," he said, "do you love me more than others?"

"Yes, Lord. You know I love you."

"Then feed my lambs."

"Do you love me, Simon?" Jesus asked.

"You know I do."

"Then tend my sheep."

He asked the question again. "Do you love me, Simon?"

Peter's feelings were hurt. "Lord," he said, "you know everything; surely you know that I do."

"Then feed my sheep."

"The truth is, Simon," he went on, "that as a young man you are able to take care of yourself, be your own master. But you'll grow old and have to stretch out your hands. You'll need help to dress and you'll be taken places you won't want to go." Jesus was telling him obliquely how he would end his days and how in his death he would honor God.

"What I want you to do now," Jesus said, "is to follow me."

He left the others and walked away with Peter. Peter, turning his head, noticed that John was following. "What about his future?" he asked.

"Simon," Jesus said. "if my decision is that he's to live until I return that is no concern of yours. What you must do is to follow me."

(It should be noted that Jesus' words here have been misunderstood. It was commonly believed by his followers that he had said that John would not die. He hadn't said that; he had simply told Peter that John's future was no concern of his.)

The apostles went to a rendezvous on a mountain in Galilee, Jesus met them there. When they saw him they fell down and worshiped him - although some still had doubts.

Jesus approached them.

"All authority here and in heaven has been given to me," he said. "I now

command you to go to every part of the world. Tell everyone the good news of the kingdom. Make disciples in every nation. Baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to be obedient to every command I have given you. And remember," he said, "I'll be with you, right to the end of the age."

He led the apostles to the outskirts of Bethany. As they stood there together, he raised his hands and blessed them. Then, as they watched, he rose into the air, disappeared into a cloud, and was lost to sight and sat down in heaven at God's right hand.

Bursting with happiness, they went back into the city and were constantly to be seen in the temple worshipping god.

Jesus did many things other than those recounted here. If all of it were to be written and bound in books it is doubtful that the world could encompass all the volumes that would be required. He gave the disciples many proofs of his identity that have not been recorded anywhere. What is written here has been inscribed for one purpose: that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, God's son, and believing this may, on his authority, have Life.

## POSTSCRIPT

### **Chapter one and two of the Acts of the Apostles**

You have read a detailed report on all of Jesus' life and teaching to the time when he ascended. Before that, through the Holy Spirit, he had instructed the apostles he had chosen. During a period of forty days after his agony he showed himself to them many times, obviously alive, and talked to them about the kingdom.

On one occasion, while they were eating, he gave them specific

instructions not to leave Jerusalem but to wait in the city until the Father's promise had been kept: "The promise you received through me," he said. "John baptized with water but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

On another occasion when they were together, the apostles questioned him.

"Lord," they said, "do you intend to restore Israel as a kingdom at this time?"

"You are not going to be told when or under what circumstances that will happen," he told them. "That has been decided by the Father on his own authority. But when the Holy Spirit comes he will give you the power you need to be witnesses for me in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria and beyond, to the most distant part of the world."

Then as they watched he rose in the air, disappeared in a cloud, and was lost to sight. They were still looking upward when they realized they had been joined by two men dressed in white.

"Why do you stand gazing into the sky, Galileans?" one of them asked. "He'll be back, and when he returns it will be very much as you have seen him leave."

From the Mount of Olives they walked approximately half a mile back to Jerusalem and went to an upstairs room where they were staying. Present at the time were the following: the apostles Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James (Alphaeus' son), Simon the Zealot, and Judas (James' son). Also present were Jesus' brothers and a number of women including Jesus' mother, Mary. Together, they gave themselves to prayer.

One day Peter rose and addressed the group - there were about 120 present at the time.

"Brothers," he said "the scriptures had to be fulfilled. Long ago, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, King David made a prediction. It concerned Judas who, as you know, acted as a guide to those who arrested Jesus. Judas was one of us and had been given a share in this ministry of ours." (With the money paid him for his treachery he bought a field. Falling headlong, his stomach was ruptured and his intestines spilled out. The place became known in Jerusalem as "The field of blood.") "You may read David's prediction in the book of Psalms:

Let the place where he lives  
Become a desolate place  
Let no one live there  
And let another take his office

Consequently, we must add a man to our group, a man who has been with us through the entire time we were with the Lord - from the time he was baptized by John through to the ascension - a man who will add his testimony to ours concerning the resurrection."

Two names were proposed: Joseph Justus (Known as Barsabbas) and Matthias.

The assembly prayed: "Lord, you know all that is in the hearts of men. Show us which of these two you have chosen to replace Judas in this apostolic ministry - Judas having gone astray to where he belongs.'

They cast lots. Matthias was chosen and was enrolled with the eleven apostles.

On the day of Pentecost<sup>11</sup> the group was together. Suddenly, there was sound from above like the roar of a hurricane. It flooded the house in which they were seated, and they saw what appeared to be tongues of flame come to rest on each of them. The Holy Spirit filled each of them and they began to speak in other languages, the words being given to

them by the Holy Spirit.

There were in Jerusalem at the time a number of pious Jews from all parts of the world. When they heard the sound, a crowd gathered, bewildered because each heard the apostles speaking in his native tongue.

"Aren't all these people Galileans?" they said in astonishment. "Then how is that each of us hears them in his own language? We're Parthians, Medes, and Elamites. Some of us are from Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, and Asia. There are men here from Phrygia and Pamphilia, from Egypt and from those parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene. There are even visitors here from Rome - Jews and converts to Judaism - as well as from Crete and Arabia. Yet we all hear them talking about God's might in our own language!"

They looked at each other, puzzled. "What does this mean?" they asked.

"We'll tell you what it means," others said scornfully.

"They're drunk."

Peter stood up in the midst of the apostles.

"Judeans, people of Jerusalem," he said. "Give me your attention and let me explain. These men are not, as you may think, drunk - it is only nine in the morning. What's happening here is what was predicated by the prophet Joel:

Thus says God:

" I will pour out my spirit in the final days,  
pour it out on all mankind.

Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy.

Your young men shall see visions.

Your Old men shall dream dreams.

On my servants, men and maidens,

I shall pour out my Spirit in those days  
And they too shall prophesy.  
I will show marvels in the sky  
And sings on the earth . . .  
Blood, fire, and smoking mist.  
The sun shall grow dark,  
The moon will turn to blood  
Before the Day of the Lord comes . . .  
That great and notable Days of the Lord.  
Then shall it be  
That he who calls on the name of the Lord  
Shall be saved."

"Hear me now, men of Israel," Peter continued. " I speak of Jesus of Nazareth, a man commended to you by God through the many great deeds God enables him to perform. He did many wonders and made many signs among you, as you well know. And, despite the fact that he was delivered up according to God's specific plan and with his foreknowledge, it was you who crucified him, you who killed him through men who do not live by our Law. But God has raised him! God has set him free of the painful bonds of death, it being impossible for death to hold him. Here's what David says of him:

There, within my sight,  
Always before my eyes . . .  
The Lord.  
Here, at my right hand . . .  
The Lord.  
That I may not be shaken.  
So my heart was glad  
And my tongue rejoiced.  
And more; my body lives in hope.  
For you will not abandon my soul to Hades.

Nor let decay touch the Holy One.  
you have shown me the ways of life  
And I shall be filled with gladness  
In your presence.

Brothers, I say this to you in absolute confidence: The patriarch David is dead and buried and his tomb is still with us. But David was a prophet to whom God had sworn an oath, an oath that he would some day set one of David's descendants on David's throne. David foresaw and predicted the resurrection of Christ. He foresaw that he would not be abandoned to Hades. He foresaw that his body would not suffer decay. And now God has done it! He has raised this Jesus and we are all witnesses to that fact. And Jesus - having been elevated to God's right hand having received from the Father, as was promised, the Holy Spirit - has poured out what you see here. David did not himself ascend to heaven. Indeed, as he says:

The Lord said to my Lord,  
Sit here at my right  
Until I make of your enemies  
A footstool.

"Therefore, let every member of House of Israel know beyond and shadow of doubt that God has made this Jesus you crucified both Lord and Christ!"

His sermon had thrust to the hearts of his listeners. They turned to Peter and the other apostles. "Brothers," they said, "tell us what to do."

"Repent," Peter said. "Let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven, and You'll be given the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promised Holy Spirit is for you, too, and for your children and for other far away. Indeed, the promise is for anyone called

by the Lord our God."

Peter continued to speak to them at length. "Save yourselves from this twisted generation," he urged.

Some three thousand men and women heeded his plea and were baptized and added to the group. They devoted themselves constantly to the apostles' instructions and fellowship, to the observance of the Lord's supper, and to prayer. They all lived with a sense of awe. The apostles did many extraordinary and miraculous things. There was a unity to the group. They shared what they had. They sold what valuables they owned and helped any of their number who were in need. They went to the temple together day by day and observed the Lord's supper in their homes. Happily they ate and generously they shared. They praised God and the people praised them.

And the Lord increased their number daily as others were saved.

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(11) Fifty day after the Passover.

## APPENDIX

Here is the genealogy<sup>12</sup> of Jesus Christ from Abraham through King David:

Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, Judah the father of Perez and Zerah (their mother being Tamar), Perez the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram, Ram the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon, Salmon the father of Boaz (his mother being Rahab), Boaz the father of Obed, (whose mother was

Ruth), Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David the king.

David was the father of Solomon, (by the wife of Uriah), Solomon the father of Rehoboam, Rehoboam the father of Abijah, Abijah the father of Asa, Asa the father of Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, Joram the father of Uzziah, Uzziah the father of Jotham, Jotham the father of Ahaz, Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, Manasseh the father of Amos, Amos the father of Josiah, Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the enforced exile to Babylon.

After the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel, Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, Abiud the father of Eliakim, Eliakim the father of Azor, Azor the Father of Zadok, Zadok the father of Achim, Achim the father of Eliud, Eliud the father of Eleazar, Eleazar the father of Matthan, Matthan the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary the mother of Jesus who is called Christ.

The generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, from David to the deportation to Babylon were fourteen generations and the deportation to Babylon to the Christ, fourteen generations.

Jesus began his ministry at about the age of thirty, being - it was supposed - the son of Joseph who was the son of Heli, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Melchi, the son of Jannai, the son of Joseph, the son of Mattathias, the son of Amos, the son of Nahum, the son of Esli, the son of Naggai, the son of Maath, the son of Mattathias, the son of Semein, the son of Josech, the son of Joda, the son of Joanan, the son of Rhesa, the son of Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, the son of Neri, the son of Melchi, the son of Addi, the son of Cosam, the son of Elmadam, the son of Er, the son of Joshua, the son of Eliezer, the son of Jorim, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Simeon, the son of Judah, the son of Joseph, the son of Jonam, the son of

Eliakim, the son of Melea, the son of Menna, the son of Mattatha, the son of Nathan, the son of David, the son of Jesse, the son of Obed, the son of Boaz, the son of Sala, the son of Nahshon, the son of Amminadab, the son of Admin, the son of Arni, the son of Hezron, the son of Perez, the son of Judah, the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, the son of Terah, the son of Nahor, the son of Serug, the son of Reu, the son of Peleg, the son of Eber, the son of Shelah, the son of Cainan, the son of Arphaxad, the son of Shem, the son of Noah, the son of Lamech, the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch. the son of Jared, the son of Mahalaleel, the son of Cainan, the son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.

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(12)The two genealogies above are from the gospels of Mathew and Luke. see [note in the Preface](#).