

# **The Jesus** **Lectures-3**

## ***DEALING WITH*** ***DIFFICULT*** ***PEOPLE***

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**LylePublishing**  
Sulphur, Oklahoma

# **The Jesus Lectures-3**

## *DEALING WITH DIFFICULT PEOPLE*

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ISBN 979-8-9855900-0-5

Published by LylePublishing  
505 W. 12<sup>th</sup> Street, Sulphur, OK 73086  
([www.LylePublishing.com](http://www.LylePublishing.com))

Printed by CreateSpace, An Amazon.com company. Available from Amazon.com and other retail outlets. Also available as an ebook on Kindle and other devices.

LCED02112022

First ebook edition 2009  
Second ebook edition and paperback 2022

## DISCLAIMER and PREFACE

This book is the third in a series of ten. This series is an attempt to answer the following question: “*If Jesus were to briefly visit earth today to give his followers an interim evaluation on how they are collectively doing—what would he say?*”

Although this book is closely based on the authorized teachings of Jesus found in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, the actual words are imagined. Therefore, you are welcome to take from this book that which is helpful while discarding the rest.

In this book, Jesus is depicted describing in detail events of his life relating to DEALING WITH DIFFICULT PEOPLE. Jesus shows how doing this difficult task determines one’s place in the *Kingdom of God*. These accounts are only briefly excerpted within the pages of the Holy Scriptures. Jesus talks about his interactions with people, gives the background to situations, and provides historical information that complements the short accounts found in the New Testament.

Much of the additional information I imagine Jesus telling us is derived from sometimes-conflicting authoritative Bible commentaries, plus different translations of the original languages in the Bible, plus other historical writings (see Reference Materials). As such, reading this book could give you a fresh and deeper perspective on the brief accounts written in the Holy Bible of critical events that occurred in Jesus’ life.

You may discover new, intriguing insights for interacting with IRRITATING OR DANGEROUS individuals: making you better able to appropriately respond to the teachings of Jesus. Any possible changes in your life provoked by Lecture #3, however, should be carefully considered before implementation—since they may have dramatic ramifications!

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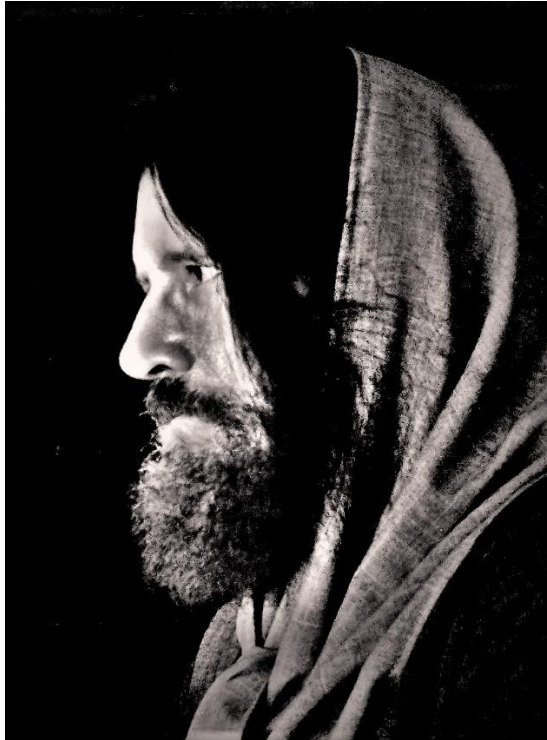
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**Section 1:**  
**THE GREATEST IN**  
**THE KINGDOM OF GOD**

*(See Matthew 18:1-10,*  
*Mark 9:31-50)*



*It is with great pleasure* that I, Jesus of Nazareth, speak to you today! This is my third lecture on my overall topic of MOVING CLOSER TO GOD, today focusing on “*Dealing with Difficult People.*”

How you relate to and deal with other people, particularly difficult people, reveals the PERMEABILITY of your heart. If you do not have a heart that is fully open to godliness, you will not remain in the Kingdom of God. If you cannot deal appropriately with your fellow humans, how can you do so with God who is so much greater than they? Thus, how you deal with your fellow men and women reveals the true state of your heart toward God.

The best way, of course, to relate to both your fellow humans and to God is to *again become a little child*. I've talked about this in my previous two lectures. But *how* do you keep yourself like a little child? How do you maintain that "youthful innocence": staying totally open, loving every moment of the Godly adventure? Well, the first thing you've got to do is *throw off* the proud, arrogant, spiteful rigidity of the Pharisees, Mosaic Lawyers, and Scribes. Yes, their haughty strictness will quickly kill the joy of a "spiritual child"!

So, despite your natural desire to nail down all the specific "answers"—you must accept the fact that *you don't know as much as you think you do!* Human beings at their very best only have "ant"-like brains that are aware of but a tiny fraction of what's really out there. At your smartest, you're not near as clever as you think. In mankind's colossal arrogance, however, people just assume that if something is "knowable" they can eventually understand all of its details.

Hah! Such an assumed capability is laughable. Even for that which the limited human mind is aware and comprehends, each individual person inevitably has many "blind-spots," shortfalls, and faulty logic. Yes, the Holy Scriptures truly state that *man cannot find his way alone!* So, you must let go of your "I'm so great" delusion—and acknowledge your own human fallibility.

The fact is, even the smartest of you can be completely *wrong* in something that you feel is completely right! Plus, God does not want you to have all the answers. Otherwise, He'd have just given you some lengthy "check-off" list of "do's and don'ts" covering every situation imaginable.

True, a lot of the Law of Moses was of that nature: saying "do this" and "don't do that." But that was to prove to you the

impossibility of your keeping even an easy “checklist.” And not being satisfied with just the “big” things being listed, the Scribes, Lawyers, and Pharisees sought to “codify” *all* of our specific actions. From a conservative mindset, that would be great! But their goal was not to better please God. Instead, it was to control you: forcing you to do as *they* thought best.

First of all, coming up with a list of how to behave in every situation is not possible. Why? Society and its demands constantly change. Your life is unpredictable. Everyone has their own unique capabilities, resources, problems, and opportunities. Only an interlocking set of overriding, general *Principles*—designed to guide individuals struggling to apply them *all at once* to new situations—can truly cover all circumstances.

But still, it’s a great temptation—yet again—to feel that we’ve “figured it all out.” Can we dot each “i” and cross each “t”? Nope. If we truly could do such, then there’d be no need to struggle, search, weigh different options, or listen to the opinions of others. We would always know “the” answer and just do it. It would be a lot safer than fighting through uncertain territory. Our innate “survival instinct,” embedded deep in our genetic makeup, WANTS TO KNOW “THE” ANSWER! In uncertainty is danger. In certainty is safety.

Sorry to shout, but this is a critical point I want you to remember...

Yet there’s an even greater lure to our wanting to figure out all the precise Answers than just being smugly comfortable. What is it? Here it is: having POWER over other people! After all, from the arrogance of knowing all the Answers, it’s just a step to requiring everyone else to do exactly what we say, since we’ve got all the Truth! Yes, the temptation to “figure it out all” has an insidious hidden lust: to *control other people*, particularly irritating “difficult” humans!

Indeed, it’s a very short distance from “God wills it!”—to the overt agenda of: “*If you reject what I say then you’re not just rejecting ME, but God Himself! So, you must accept that I’M THE ONE IN CONTROL! And if you do reject me, then since you’re rejecting God Himself, that rejection of God justifies me in doing anything to you to force you to comply with*

*what I want for you to do!*” But if it were possible for you to do that, then you’d be the Ultimate Judge Himself—which you are not. Right?

The arrogant person in essence is saying: “*I know God’s complete Will. I know how He wants me and you to do everything. So, you’d best completely cooperate with me or you’re damned!*” However, the truly humble person says: “I wish you the best. I hope you will move ever closer to God. If you need help to do so, or in figuring out some confusing religious matter, I’d love to help you. I’m here to help you if *you* wish. However, I leave the details of your individual devotion and offerings to God where they belong: between you and God.” Isn’t this what you’d like others do to you? So, why not do it to others?

Our Heavenly Father does not want for you to religiously-dominate, take control, or dictate godliness to another person—even irritating people who seem to defy God! Instead, He wants you to focus on **SEARCHING** and **STRUGGLING** and **CAREFULLY EXPERIMENTING** to *find the answers for your own life*. You have your own unique opportunities and problems best upholding and conforming to all the Godly Principles. That isn’t easy. It’s a real challenge. It’s tough. What’s much easier is to stand (supposedly) above others and criticize what *they* do. Ripping up other people is much easier than trying to deal with your *own* shortcomings, failings, problems, and challenges!

“Lording” it over others, however, is fun and self-flattering. But acknowledging that your own life is screwed-up, imperfect, needs fixing, and is incomplete... well, that’s sobering, humiliating, and often regarded as an admission of weakness. Plus, it’s a real puzzle. It “strains our brain.” The “answers” are not clear. Rarely is there a signpost saying: “This is the best way!” or, conversely, “That way is a mistake, don’t go there!”

And it’s not some trivial game that has little or no consequences. Your entire life—both in this world and the higher existence to which we aspire—depends on what you decide at each turning-point. Sure, it’d be nice if some super-smart human came along and handed you all the specific Answers to



every Problem and Opportunity. But that isn't going to happen. There are no humans that smart—even those who you presently hold in the highest religious esteem!

Yes, you look to me, to the Prophets, and to other Holy Teachers for guidance, as well you should. Yes, you study the Holy Scriptures expecting to find enlightenment. That's all to the good. But in the end, you must be willing to *never get to the point where you think that you've got it all figured out*—because you don't and you can't! That path only leads to “hubris”: engendering disrespect to others plus a terrible fall to yourself.

But the best path—that of TRUE GODLY HUMILITY—is where the *fun* actually comes in! That's when the Godly Adventure takes you onward to higher and higher levels of enlightenment and activities. You're always moving forward and upward! You never reach a boring plateau where there's nothing more to learn. You never have to fear just “going through the motions.” You don't have to repeat over and over again the same, boring things. Life never has to get tedious, where the only things you hear are reminders of what you already know perfectly well! Yes, I'm talking about unimaginative, traditional preachers...

Instead, you're always learning more! You're always finding some new insight, acquiring fresh perspectives, developing your talents, moving into new unexplored territory, and experiencing spirituality as a fascinating and interesting adventure. You're always having new triumphs, continually making yourself a better Offering to your appreciative Heavenly Father! God applauds *not* you dutifully snoring on a church pew but facing exciting spiritual challenges!

Your advancement never stops because in this present life you will never “perfect” your imperfect brains. So, don't get obsessed with nailing-down a “legalistic” approach to God. You don't have to live your life chained to an increasingly detailed checklist. Sure, you want to please God in all that you do. However, He's most pleased *not* with rote obedience to arbitrary rules, but by your *thoughtful, continued, evidential, personal spiritual growth*. And it's so much more fun! Plus,

you'll always have something to learn from every person you encounter in this life, even the difficult ones!

God puts those puzzling people there for *your* good. Even the grouchy, mean, irritating people will cause you to grow in godliness. Indeed, often you will learn a lot more from difficult people than from the nice, helpful, agreeable ones! Embrace the pain of this life for TEACHING you the most important lessons...

So, get *humble*. And don't let it be just a false-front of pseudo-religiosity. *Teach* your own hearts to respect and appreciate everything and everyone around you. And that's best done by giving them the same lofty status you rightly desire yourself. Why? Because it's not false humility where you cut yourself down or minimize your own excellent talents, skills, and achievements. Rather, true godly humility is all about *lifting other people up* to your own level!

True humility comes by doing the following three things:

- 1) *Appreciating* and nurturing others' talents;
- 2) *Facilitating* the development of their skills; and
- 3) Sincerely *applauding, mentoring, and sharing* in the satisfaction of their good achievements!

After all, *their* godly success—that you had a real hand in helping nurture—becomes YOUR success. So, you need not value yourself any less highly than you ought. Indeed, we are *all* beautiful and spectacular just as we are now. *All* of us have our own unique characters and particular mix of talents. *All* of us are valuable and important in God's eyes. But to enter into and stay in God's Kingdom, you must accept this reality. You must esteem the other person and their ideas—even those you find disagreeable—to be as important and valuable as yourself. That's true godly humility. And it's the only way we can *fully* transform our inward hearts: by letting in the difficult people around us!

Only then do you have a chance of becoming the GREAT-EST IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD. Let me give you an Example from my ministry in the first century...

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We were traveling along a road toward the town of Capernaum. As we went, I was gently instructing my disciples on the events that would soon overtake us all. I told them that soon the Son of Man would be delivered into the hands of his enemies, be tortured, and then killed. But three days after that terrible event, God would raise him up from the dead!

I was preparing them for what was to come. But on that peaceful road, walking leisurely along, basking in the gentle warmth of the sun, fanned by a cool breeze coming from the ocean—what I was telling them seemed to their ears just another one of my confusing parables, or something that happened long ago to someone else in olden times, or an imagined problem that might never actually happen.

None of my disciples asked me what I meant. So, I just shut up for a while. I would let my words knock-about in their brains for a bit. It was clear they did not understand what I was telling them. But they were afraid to admit their confusion. Like anyone, they didn't want to admit ignorance. But there was a deeper problem behind why they were hesitant to engage me in conversation...

Indeed, a number of them lingered behind me, arguing strongly in hushed tones. I often let them have their space, such that they could discuss matters without my sometimes-explosive presence. Although I tried to be kind to them, my replies and interruptions were often cryptic or caustic. I did not hesitate, when necessary, to “cut-to-the-bone” in my comments, slashing-open their hearts to reveal inner motivations!

As you might guess, having your Master throw in seemingly unrelated, intense comments at unexpected times could be quite intimidating. But even though they thought they were far enough behind me, speaking in low voices for me not to hear them, I knew what they were saying. *They were having a heated debate about which of them would be my righthand man when we supposedly established the Kingdom of God here upon Earth!* In fact, their arguing was getting downright nasty, with them hurling insults and accusations at each other.

As their ongoing debate would cool down a bit, some of those walking up ahead with me would drop back to join the trailing group, re-ignite the debate. Others, their faces red with anger, would speed up and leave behind the others. Striding rapidly, they'd come up and proudly "take point" at my side. In another time, earlier in my ministry, I might have laughed at their foolishness. But now, with the end drawing near, it was just sad.

After the many hands-on discussions which I'd had with them, the powerful lectures I'd given for thousands of people, and the miracles I'd caused to happen right before their eyes... they still refused to rise above their selfish, hateful, battling animal instincts! They weren't listening to me. Why? Because they were still mired in their pride, hurt feelings, and clashing egos.

Talk of my death and destruction was completely opposite to their present mindsets. They were looking for a *shouted* GLORY, DOMINANCE, and SELF-ADVANCEMENT! And yet my present words were what to them seemed utter nonsense: the complete failure of our mission! I was telling them to expect an overwhelming disaster. How could that be?

Surely, they thought, I didn't really mean what I was saying...

So, I let them stew in their own petty juices, biting and tearing at each other. As they squabbled, they sunk deeper into the slimy grip of my great adversary, Satan. He was the Lord of all those who deny their hearts to God. Even the most righteous and holy religious leaders are subject to his subtle attack. My "lay-person" disciples were ripe targets for his slick lies.

When we arrived at Capernaum, we went into the designated host home. There, we cleaned up from our long, hot walk. Finally, just me and my select, male "twelve apostles" were relaxing together in a comfortable room. Servants of the household were plying us with welcomed refreshments. We were famished from the long trek. But the atmosphere was tense...

It was obvious my Apostles were sorely unhappy with each other. Hardly a one would even look at the others. Here and

there, two or three would whisper together—but then break apart angrily. It was obvious that my lofty teachings of “love,” “empathy,” and “selflessness” were being rapidly thrown out of the window. So, I decided to surface their problems with a pointed question...

“My friends!” I suddenly exclaimed, looking from one to the other, “What was it you argued about so heatedly, there behind me, as we traveled up the road?”

Well, that got their attention. They all perked up, opened their mouths as if to make their individual arguments to me directly, realized that to do so would cast each in a selfish light, thought better of it, gulped, and shut their mouths.

No one dared answer me.

“Oh, come on, now!” I spoke sternly to them. “The tension in this room is so thick that one of our helpful servants might as well go get me a knife so I can slice through it! Am I not your Master? If you have a problem, then I will help you figure it out. So, tell me what’s causing you to be so mad at each other. What is this ‘Big Question’ that’s threatening our hard-won unity?”

I, of course, knew exactly what was causing so much bitter infighting: *which of them was “the greatest.”* But I wanted them to admit it directly to me.

“Peter!” I commanded.

“Yes, Lord...” he gulped.

“You’re never at a loss for words,” I coldly observed. “So, tell me the central issue that’s causing you all so much frustration?”

“Yes, Master,” he dutifully answered. “In your coming Kingdom, *which* of us will you choose to be your top official? We acknowledge that you will take whoever amongst us is the greatest. So, which of us is the greatest in your eyes?”

I nodded thoughtfully...

I waited a minute before answering, seeing they were each intensely interested in what I would say—since their future power, wealth, and prestige all hung in the balance!

Finally, they were focused on listening to what I had to say...

“All right, then!” I cheerfully exclaimed, “—very well stated and summarized, Peter.”

He grinned, swelling up with pride.

“But I won’t just *tell* you which of you is “The Greatest,” I continued, slowly standing up and putting my hands behind my back, “—after all, it’s a really big deal, don’t you think? We’re talking about who truly deserves to *rule* the Kingdom of God at my side. Who will be my Chief Vicar, or my Prime Minister, or my First Prince of the Kingdom, or my Overseer, or whatever other title pleases your ears as being the Mightiest? It is a monumental honor to be appointed the *Most Powerful, Most Respected, Number One* member of the Kingdom, other than me... don’t you think?” I smiled benignly.

Then all nodded in agreement, eager for my answer.

“Therefore,” I continued, “this should indeed not be some hasty or ill-considered decision, don’t you agree?”

I tilted my head to the side thoughtfully, reaching up with a hand to thoughtfully stroke my beard.

“Yes, Master... That’s certainly true... We respect your careful deliberations... Take your time and consider each of our qualifications!” they answered, each happy for me to not precipitously choose someone else.

“Well...” I hesitated, walking slowly from one to the other, “I suppose it is time that we got our relative rankings figured out. If I’m occupied or absent, you should, I suppose, know who I’ve authorized to order the others about, don’t you think?”

They paused at that, concerned that someone other than me would now be able to tell the rest of them what to do or not do...

“But, again,” I continued, “I don’t think that just naming someone is appropriate. I’ll have the person who’s to be the *BOSS of all of you under my authority...*” I paused dramatically, “to stand up in your midst. In this manner, you can start to get used to having that person ‘oversee’ you. Yes, that will work!”

My closest disciples were definitely getting more and more uneasy. Now they were picturing someone else that would

loom above each of them, outside of my mostly patient, kindhearted self.

“Yes, this will be a nice demonstration!” I exclaimed. “We’ll actually SEE who’s got what it takes to rule everyone else—who literally stands head and shoulders above the rest. Then we’ll know, indeed, who amongst you is truly the *GREATEST!*” I barked-out, over-emphasizing the last word to my revered Apostles.

They all winced while simultaneously leaning forward. They knew that my “demonstrations” could be unexpected and challenging. Yet each eagerly anticipated *themselves* being pulled to their feet and anointed as “The Greatest,” up in front of everyone!

I stopped my pacing back and forth to stand in front of Peter, who was now grinning ear to ear. Clearly, he expected me to yank him up to his rightful prominence above all the rest! Physically he was the biggest and strongest of us. He had no doubt that he should be my righthand man.

“Ah, Peter...” I mused, looking down at him. “Didn’t I just the other day give you the ‘keys to the Kingdom?’”

“Yes, Master!” he enthusiastically answered, bobbing his big head up and down in emphasis.

But then, quickly realizing that he was at the center of attention, he reached over to grasp a filled glass at his side. He chugged down the wine, giving him courage to continue!

“Surely I’d not give such a grave responsibility to someone of low stature?” I asked.

“No, Master!” he agreed, smiling broadly from ear to ear.

His crooked teeth were stained yellow. He looked like a big bear about to chomp on some poor fish...

“And do you remember the occasion whereby I gave you that blessing?” I gently queried.

“Yes, Master!” he happily replied. “It was when I recognized you as *The Christ, The Son of God, The Messiah*—when all else did not!”

“That was very perceptive of you, my friend,” I congratulated him. And then, without allowing him time to bask in my approval, I continued... “And just what are these ‘keys’ that you are to wield so authoritatively?”

The smile slowly faded from his face. He looked down at his big hands in confusion.

“I, I... uh... d-don’t k-know,” he stammered, red-faced now with embarrassment.

“Don’t fret,” I encouraged him, patting him gently on his broad shoulders. “When the time comes to publicly let everyone know how to enter into the Kingdom, you will be ready.”

He gulped, confused.

“But it does seem rather inappropriate for someone that does not even know what his duties are to be, for that person to be elevated to the top post in my Kingdom?” I mused, stroking my beard as I walked a couple steps to stand in front of another of my apostles.

“Ah, James,” I smiled. “We’re kin! Shouldn’t blood relationships trump just about everything else? Isn’t it common for the rulers of earthly states and countries to appoint one’s closest relatives to positions of power? Surely *you* should be the one singled out as The Greatest?”

He swelled with visible pride.

“I stand with you to the end!” he exclaimed.

“Of course you do,” I placidly acknowledged. “Nepotism is indeed a time-honored route to positions of high authority. But then again, perhaps I should hold God’s Kingdom to an even *higher* standard?”

I walked past him to then stand in front of *Judas*.

“Ah, my dependable disciple Judas,” I said, narrowing my eyes slightly as I steadily looked down at him.

True to form, Judas chose to not meet my gaze, but looked—supposedly with deep humility—down at the floor instead.

“Judas... Judas,” I mused, “—he who is so trusted by his Master, indeed by all of us, to guard and handle our finances!” I exclaimed with apparent sincerity. “You carry the ‘bag’ that contains all of our money, don’t you?”

“Yes, Master?” he cautiously acknowledged my presence looming over him.

“You all should consider my faithful, true friend, Judas!” I continued, gesturing grandly down at him. “He *already* holds a position of honor and grave responsibility amongst us.



What more important duty is there than to look after our money? If we trust him with our livelihood, our very survival—surely, he can be trusted with the Kingdom’s affairs?”

He nodded, agreeing with my assessment...

“Certainly,” I continued, placing a hand on his head, “Judas is the one amongst us who most ardently urges us to fight the forces of evil. He argues that we should react to terrible deeds with fierce determination. He’s a warrior as well as an accountant. Quite impressive credentials! Perhaps we’ve found our man, the Greatest of us all? Well, Judas, what say you?”

A glimmer of greed and anticipation rushed over his normally expressionless, stony face.

“I would be greatly honored to serve in whatever capacity that you...” he began to reply...

“—but then again,” I cut him off, removing my hand as I turned away, “perhaps the duties of public trust, loyalty to the King, and selfless service are different from that of a warrior or accountant. We need not be too hasty in making our choice. After all, the Greatest must be of impeccable loyalty, character, and godliness, wouldn’t you say?”

Each reluctantly nodded in the affirmative, muttering their agreement while doubtlessly thinking of their own failings...

I began again slowly pacing about the room, looking from one to the other of the seated men.

And then I stopped in front of *John*.

“Ah, my dear disciple John,” I smiled. “Are you not often rumored to be my favorite disciple? Aren’t you the ultimate ‘yes’ man that always backs me up? Don’t you studiously pursue my teachings, grasping the essence as well as the essentials? Don’t we all see you striving relentlessly to apply my Ideals in practical action?”

“What you teach is revolutionary, Master,” he softly replied. “Any person with an open mind sees it comes straight from God.”

“Well said!” I grinned. “And what better person would there be to implement the King’s edicts than a ‘true believer’? My righthand man needs to communicate to all the people my

Laws and Rulings. Sadly, there are so many people—even sitting here in this very room—who take my teachings lightly. Many others warp my teachings to their own ends. They take what they want and discard the rest.”

John listened intently, as did all the others in the household.

“Others believe but not with deep conviction,” I continued. “They require a kindhearted ‘enforcer’ to compel them to abide by their duties in the Kingdom. You, ruling from love rather than force, might indeed diplomatically direct and control those unruly citizens, hmmm? Perhaps we’ve found the Greatest of us all! What say you, my beloved disciple John?”

“I am zealous for you, Master,” he humbly replied. “I live but to serve your needs.”

“Ah!” I grinned widely. “I’ll take that as a ‘yes’!”

I stooped over, gripping him firmly by his shoulders as if to pull him up to his feet. His eyes flared up with an eager passion to be put in charge of the other apostles. I knew that despite his humble words he would relish being in charge of my unruly group, in “getting their acts together.”

“But then again...” I thoughtfully mused, pausing.

I let go of him, straightening back up.

“We have all these *other* excellent apostles,” I acknowledged the rest, “beyond whom I’ve already talked about. Each of you eight remaining men... I also personally selected you to go on this amazing adventure with me!” I grinned widely, grandly gesturing now at the other men sitting about the room. “True, they didn’t go up with me onto the Mount of Transfiguration to personally view my Glory as did *Peter, James, and John*—but I think no less of them, just because they weren’t selected for that particular trip!”

The rest looked up eagerly, encouraged by my words. Yes, the trip by a select group to the *Mount of Transfiguration* had been part of their rancorous debate they’d conducted out of my hearing. The giving of the *Keys of the Kingdom*, the carrying of the *Treasury*, and my *favoritism* had all carried great weight in the arguments.

I was telling the rest of them that they’d not been overlooked or forgotten.

“So... let’s consider each of these others,” I continued, raising my eyebrows in honest inquiry.

I then went from one to the other, describing each person’s true merits while ending on valid questions. Finally, I’d finished standing above each and every one of my seated twelve apostles. To a man, each had waited breathlessly for me to pull him to his feet and appoint him the Chief Apostle. They all coveted the position. They all wanted to be in charge over the rest. They all saw themselves as my heir apparent, anointed as my righthand man in the coming Kingdom of God!

“Well, now...” I mused, putting my hands behind my back and pacing theatrically back and forth. “Who shall it be? Who shall I appoint, here and now—in the presence of all, without any doubt or future speculation—to be the actual, true, and final GREATEST disciple?” I barked-out. “Who will be officially designated—both *right now* and in the near future—as the GREATEST citizen of the Kingdom of God? Who will *rule* at my right hand?”

It wasn’t just my apostles who were hanging on my every word. In the adjoining rooms, peering in, my other male disciples, my female disciples, the servants, my host, his family, and the slaves of that household were all eagerly awaiting my decree—fascinated by what was happening!

In one fell stroke, I was going to cut through all the jealousy, infighting, and turmoil of my followers. I would establish order, appointing my “heir apparent”!

“*You* there!” I called out, pointing to a doorway.

“Me?” a little boy hiccupped, putting his hand to his mouth in embarrassment.

“I need you!” I smiled.

I dashed over to grab him under his armpits and hoist him up into the air.

“Wheeeeeee!” he called out in a thin, piping voice.

I plopped him down on his feet right smack in the middle of the room. Then I backed off a couple paces, leaving him uncertainly wobbling there.

He must have been no more than three years of age... a chubby, grinning little rascal with red cheeks.

“THERE!” I shouted in triumph. “BEHOLD THE *GREATEST* IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD!”

There was a stunned silence...

Suddenly aware that all eyes were upon him, the child’s face screwed up with fear, tears welling in his eyes.

“No! No!” I laughed, sitting down on a bench and holding my arms out to him. “You’re not in trouble! Come to me!”

He ran on unsteady, short legs across the floor and hopped up onto my lap.

“What’s your name?” I asked him warmly.

“S-S-Samuel...” he stammered around his tears.

I hugged him tightly, quieting his fears. Then I turned him about, positioning him safe and secure on my robed knee. He faced the circled, bewildered men.

“Well, Samuel,” I said to him, “you’re now in command of all of these big grownups! What do you think of that?”

He laughed and clapped his hands together!

“Samuel indeed is my ‘number one’ choice!” I happily continued, bouncing the giggling child up and down. “I say to you truly that *this* person is the greatest of you—in fact, the *Greatest in the Kingdom of God!*”

My apostles looked at each in confusion...

“Uhhh... Master?” Judas cautiously ventured, clearly annoyed with my antics. “That’s a nice joke, but I don’t see how it really...?”

“*Joke?*” I shot back at him. “You think I’m joking about such a serious matter, Judas? I assure you, I’m dead serious! I tell you most sincerely that *this* boy is indeed the greatest of *all of you* right now. He *will* sit on my right hand in the Kingdom of God!”

My apostles looked at each other in total bewilderment. Outside the room, my female disciples were outright laughing. Chiming in with them were the household servants. The other children present also giggled, delighted with my putdown of the normally commanding, superior-minded twelve apostles.

“But Master...?” Peter grunted, accepting me at my word but perplexed as to what conclusion I’d arrived. “How can that young boy, no matter how clever, understand complicated

affairs of state, know how to give orders, or have the knowledge to carry out your directions?”

Peter shakily motioned for a servant to come fill up his now-empty wine glass.

“—or to deal with great amounts of taxes and revenues, as does Judas?” another asked.

“—or to negotiate with factions, other kingdoms, or your own citizens, as John does so well?” another asked.

“—or to...” another started before I cut him off in mid-sentence.

“NONE OF THOSE THINGS ARE IMPORTANT!” I yelled, hugging the child again to soothe him from the loud noises I was making. “If any of you desire to be ‘first’—standing above all others in the Kingdom in a position of ultimate authority—THEN YOU MUST MAKE YOURSELF *LAST* OF ALL AND A *SERVANT* TO EVERYONE ELSE!”

The entire household of people was now frightened by my shouts...

“*Don’t you remember how often I’ve said this to you?*” I seethed. I stood up, still hugging the boy, turning slowly in a circle. “Do you forget my words so quickly? Did you think that they applied only to the lowly ‘rabble’ of the crowds, not to you?”

“Well... of course, Lord,” Judas carefully answered. “That’s a fine, idealistic goal of all of us, spiritually speaking, I suppose. But here in this private home, I thought you were addressing the practical business of advancing your Kingdom? That’s obviously not the plaything of children!”

“I AM ADDRESSING THE REAL BUSINESS OF ADVANCING MY KINGDOM, JUDAS!” I roared at him, causing him to cringe backward. “And unless you and all the rest of my so-called ‘apostles’ completely *change your mindsets*, then you won’t have to worry about which of you will be my Chief Minister in the Kingdom of God! That’s because *none of you will be in the Kingdom to start with!*”

“What... Master... But I thought... You can’t really mean... We’ve been your most faithful followers!” gasps of astonishment and denial rang out through the room.

“I’M NOT JOKING WITH YOU!” I yelled again, lifting up the little boy above my head. I showed him off yet again to all the rest of the men in the room. “Unless you repent of your wicked viewpoints and *CHANGE YOURSELVES COMPLETELY TO A NEW WAY OF THINKING... none* of you here will even enter into the Kingdom! And if anyone is in the Kingdom now yet fails to maintain this new way of viewing the world, then *they will be kicked out!* Is that clear enough for you?”

They sat in bewildered silence as I carried the giggling young lad back to his mother, depositing him safely in her arms.

When I got back to my place, I sat down again. John respectfully put his hand up in the air, asking for my attention.

I nodded for him to speak.

“Master!” he sincerely asked me, “Are you speaking of a child’s capacity to give and receive unconditional love?”

I shrugged.

“What do *you* think?” I asked him back.

“Well...” he gulped, looking about him at the other apostles. “Surely our love for each other has been sorely tested these last few days... even mine? I admit I’ve been thinking harsh thoughts against those that I should be counting as my dearest friends. It’s easy to love *you*, Master. But in regards to *ordinary, irritating, insulting* fellow men and women... it’s not so easy...” he trailed off.

“What else have you people learned?” I demanded, looking at the others.

Judas spoke up coldly: “I assume, Master, you’re *not* telling us that we should take on a young child’s ignorance, weakness, selfishness, unruliness, crying, or helplessness?”

I shrugged.

“Who else has an idea?” I encouraged them.

Peter spoke up enthusiastically: “Well, Samuel’s a great kid, for sure! His mom and dad often let me carry him on my back when we’re walking along. He’s funny, happy, loving, eats like a camel, grows like a weed, runs to help others, and is always excited to learn new things!”

“That’s right!” another apostle chimed in. “Samuel trusts us completely, doesn’t think he’s better than anyone else, and forgives and forgets on a moment’s notice. He’s always living in the moment, trying to do good things. I think he even listens to your lectures, Lord. I often see him with his thumb in his mouth staring at you, entranced when you make your speeches!”

“Well, at least *someone* listens to me!” I laughed.

The others in the room and adjoining rooms chuckled.

“Well, then...” I nodded, having broken the tension. “Maybe you people are beginning to get the idea of this ‘new way of thinking’... but you’ve still got a long way to go. It’s not just *being* the positive attributes of a little child—but also how you *regard* those around you with that mindset.”

“Master?” John asked, frowning.

“Oh yes,” I continued. “We often like to think of ourselves as being all-so-Holy... but then as a matter of course regard as *less* than us—avoiding, or even distaining—those who are attempting to practice such. Those of ‘low’ estate, we view as ranking *below* us on the social, racial, economic, age, or academic ladders. This is a seductively evil practice. By cutting others down, we elevate ourselves by default!”

They were hanging on my every word, except for Judas, who maintained a stony indifference.

“My dear friends, please hear these words,” I continued, filling up my lungs to *roar* loudly: “AS LONG AS YOU ELEVATE YOURSELF ABOVE YOUR FELLOW BRETHREN, THINKING YOURSELF BETTER THAN THEY, EITHER OVERTLY OR COVERTLY—YOU ARE GUARANTEEING YOURSELF A ONE-WAY TICKET *OUT* OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD!”

They were taken-aback at my vehemence, all except for one...

“Are we then to deny you the best of our abilities?” Judas shot back at me. “Clearly, we each *are* better or superior to the others in some ways!”

“Ah, my faithful *devil’s advocate* Judas,” I sighed, but not angrily. “You fulfill an important function here with us. You, along with my ‘doubting’ Thomas, keep us grounded in reality.

Truthfully my rhetoric can seem to others but fanciful dreams. To be valid, they must, indeed, be functional in the real world. So, in answer to your ‘helpful’ and specific criticism...”

I paused dramatically.

“YOU ARE NOT TO THINK OF YOURSELVES AS BEING LESS THAN YOU TRULY ARE!” I again roared, my voice filling up every crevice of the house. “*HOWEVER*, YOU MUST REMEMBER ALWAYS THAT WHERE YOU ARE WEAK, OTHERS ARE STRONG. WHERE YOU ARE LIMITED, OTHERS PROCEED EASILY. WHERE YOU LACK A TALENT, OTHERS ARE BLESSED. AND THOUGH THE JOB THAT YOU DO FOR ME AND GOD IS CRITICALLY IMPORTANT, EVERY OTHER JOB DONE BY EVERY OTHER OF MY FOLLOWERS IN THE NAME OF GOD IS *EQUALLY* IMPORTANT. *Do you understand what I’m telling you?*”

Judas looked down at the floor, avoiding my gaze, refusing to answer.

Peter, however, gushed enthusiastically: “Yes, Lord! I see what you’re saying. The floor-sweeper is doing a job just as important as the Chief Priest. Without a clean, nice environment, Pilgrims to the Temple would likely lose faith. The servant cooking our meals is as important as our good host. Without the delicious food, we’d lose strength and fall by the wayside. So, since we’re all doing equally important jobs—especially those done for you, Master, on behalf of our Great God—then there’s no way that any one of us can think ourselves greater than the others. Instead of one person ‘Lording’ it over the others, thinking he’s the ‘greatest,’ we’re all working *together* to the glory of God!”

John grinned broadly.

“Peter,” John spontaneously blurted out. “That was brilliant!”

Peter ducked his head, embarrassed but appreciative of the unexpected praise.

“Ah, now your thinking is turning to what I want,” I congratulated them both, clapping my hands together in approval.

Judas just shook his head in denial, a wry grimace on his face.



“Let me make it even more personal and immediate for you,” I continued. “When in my name and for my sake you accept, receive, and welcome any of my other followers who are of low estate—whether simple-in-mind, or limited behavior, or of humble means—you accept and welcome *me*. And if you are receiving and welcoming me, then you are likewise welcoming my Father who sent me!”

Normally cheerful and positive, John now had a deep frown on his face.

He hesitantly spoke up: “Master, when we were walking at a distance behind you on the road today, we saw a man who is not of our number. Yet he was driving out demons who’d possessed deranged people, doing it all in your name! He was *not* from one of our groups. We’d never seen him before. Clearly, he was not an official disciple of yours. And yet he claimed to be! So, we ordered him to stop what he was doing. Were we correct to exercise authority over someone pretending to follow you?”

“That’s a very perceptive question, my friend,” I answered. I looked around at the rest of the apostles who’d clearly been instigators causing that incident to play out as John described. “That happened so that you all could learn a powerful lesson, here at this time!”

Peter frowned.

“A lesson, Lord?” he puzzled. “But, Master—surely we did what you wanted? That man was *lying* to the people, operating outside your authority. He was just *pretending* to be one of us. He deserved far worse than he got!”

Judas chimed in: “That’s right, Peter. By rights we should have *beaten up* the man! We should have taught *him* a lesson he’d never forget. We should have made him an example to all others who presumed to follow Jesus without officially being one of us. Master, your disciples must be appointed by *you* to do and teach exactly as *you* wish!”

I again shrugged.

“So...” I sighed deeply, “you all think my purpose in this world is to *control* people?”

I slumped dejectedly at my seat. I put my face in my hands, speaking so softly the people in the other rooms had to strain to hear me...

"Is that it?" I groaned. "You see me the same as the Pharisees, Scribes, and Lawyers? Yet I condemn them! Except for being nicer, more interesting, and perhaps more charismatic... I'm the same as them? *Really?*"

John looked at me with a steady gaze while the others looked away. His eyes were wide. He was slowly nodding, "getting" what I was saying...

"You are right to bring this matter to my attention, John," I nodded, lifting my head. "Let me be perfectly clear. I'm *not* here to cause people to correctly bow to me. I'm *not* here to demand the 'proper' ritual, doctrine, or official approval. No, I'm here to *help people move closer to God!*"

"But, Master..." Peter tried to protest.

"But *nothing!*" I shot back at him. "If they choose to do their good works officially in my name, then I am pleased and honored. But if they 'unofficially' do mighty deeds for God, that's what I want! They can choose to do everything exactly as I've instructed you, even applying for an officially recognized status with us... or go off on their own!"

"No... No... *No!*" Judas almost inaudibly muttered.

"THE POINT IS *NOT* TO LORD IT OVER OTHER PEOPLE—EVEN IF THE ONE LORDING IT OVER OTHERS IS *ME!*" I again shouted loudly. "THE POINT IS TO HELP OTHER PEOPLE MOVE CLOSER TO GOD! *Do you understand?*"

"Frankly, *no!*" Judas defiantly retorted. "Surely you can't allow people to just go and do whatever they want in your name? There must be order! There must be an accepted process to certify who's with you and who's against you. Would you have your enemies go and build up their own band of followers in your name? That would set the stage for destroying your movement! Before you knew it, there'd be dozens of people all teaching and doing different things claiming to be your true followers! Split into so many little competing groups, your teachings would become meaningless!"

“Judas, I’m giving you an order,” I said, a bit frustrated with his continued lack of understanding. “Plus, it’s not just an order to you, but to everyone else in this room and house: IF PEOPLE ARE DOING GOOD THINGS IN MY NAME—REGARDLESS OF WHETHER OR NOT THEY’VE BEEN OFFICIALLY APPROVED TO DO SO—DO NOT STOP THEM, DO NOT DISCOURAGE THEM, AND DO NOT HOLD THEM BACK!”

Judas bit his lower lip, restraining himself from launching an angry rebuttal to my direct order.

“Listen, Judas,” I said to him, more softly. “If you try to force everyone to think, say, and do exactly the same as you—where do you think this ‘movement’ will end up?”

He squinted his eyes, clearly confused.

“I...well...” he gulped, now not so sure of himself.

“Our wonderful mass-movement toward God—which is fast gathering momentum—will be *stopped dead in its tracks!*” I intensely explained. “Why?—because you’ll be left only with an ‘army’ of *one*: yourself! All others will be cast off. Why?—because no two people will ever believe and do exactly the same! And neither do we want them to be! If that’s the case, then their personal talents, particular capabilities, and uniquely endowed Godly Creativity will be stifled.”

John nodded his head in agreement, answering for Judas: “Yes, Lord! Again, it would be just the Pharisees, Scribes, and Lawyers all over again. We’d just replace them in trying to control other people. We’d be as bad as them, trying to make everyone into exact copies of ourselves... complete with copying our own faults, shortcomings, and blind spots!”

“Yes, John,” I replied approvingly. “It’s the fallacy, limitation, and downfall of all tyrants. In trusting themselves instead of God to have the final authority, they institutionalize their own faults. Worse yet, they destroy the creative power of their people to advance the common cause. It may soothe and serve their warped egos. But it doesn’t serve the cause of God!”

“But that preacher on the road today was not your friend, Lord,” Peter insisted, siding with Judas. “By his own

showmanship he was drawing people away from being with us and listening to you, the true Messiah! How can that be good?”

I appreciated his concern, but wanted to show him the flaw in his thinking: “Peter, my friend, I applaud your loyalty. But even if that person was an out-and-out enemy of mine, after claiming to be one of my followers how could he then speak evil of me? By saying he follows me, he cuts off his own arguments against me. Even if it were true what you said—that he was actually against me—people that before had no idea that I existed at least are aware of my name, curious to learn more of my true teachings!”

“So, you do not care that people follow you correctly?” James ventured, shaking his head in bewilderment. “We’ve come all this way together just so that people can go off and do whatever they want in your name?”

“Of course I care that people follow my teachings!” I shot back at him. “You know better than that, James. Do I tell people to just ‘be nice’... or do I challenge them with the most difficult of all Godly Principles?”

My apostles glumly nodded, feeling challenged themselves right at that moment...

“If they even acknowledge my name then they’re starting down the proper, higher path,” I firmly stated. “Who knows how far they’ll get? Maybe not far. They may just fall of the path. But at least they’ve started in right direction.”

“Are you saying that any movement at all is acceptable?” Judas carefully queried.

“My friend,” I answered, “it’s not about making the steps in the proper manner under your watchful ‘drill-sergeant’ mentality. Neither is it about executing the ‘marching’ steps all in perfect unity and precision. What’s critical IS *moving in the right direction!*”

I again shouted, my voice “booming” throughout the house: “IF THEY WILL SINCERELY STRUGGLE WITH ALL MY CHALLENGING PRINCIPLES, THEN THEY WILL DISCOVER ON THEIR OWN THE STEPS THAT ARE BEST!”

“So...” John laughed loudly in happy revelation. “Movement is not a grim military parade... rather a *joyful dance!*”

“YES!” I exclaimed, rocking back in my seat and clapping my hands together. “Those that seek to restrict, restrain, and stop the *joyful leaping of one’s spirit* toward its heavenly Father, they are the enemy! By not requiring everything and everyone to be in ‘lock-step’ to me—doing everything precisely exactly the same—I’m enlisting all those of good faith to my cause!”

“Even heathens?” Judas snorted. “Even disbelievers? Even sinners? Next, you’ll have us embracing those hateful, supposed-Jewish *heretics*, the Samaritans!”

I saw looks of disgust on the other apostles’ faces...

“I WELCOME ALL THOSE OF GOOD FAITH TO THE GODLY DANCE!” I roared loudly. “GODLY RIGHTEOUSNESS IS NOT LIMITED TO ONLY ONE PARTICULAR STEP! THERE’S ROOM FOR ALL OF US TO SINCERELY EXERCISE OUR GOD-GIVEN CREATIVITY IN HONOR OF OUR HEAVENLY FATHER, EVEN SAMARITANS!”

“Uhhnghh...” Judas groaned. “You’re making my head hurt, Master!” he complained.

He reached up to clutch his forehead with both hands.

“Don’t be so unhappy!” I sharply admonished him. “If someone is not actively against us, Judas—then he, or she, is *for* us! It’s that simple.”

“It’s a hell of a way to win a war,” he groaned again.

“No, Judas,” I carefully explained again, *barking* at him loudly: “It’s a BEAUTIFUL way to RESPECTFULLY deal with other people that produces excellent RESULTS very REASONABLY and HONORABLY!”

“*It’s much easier just to tell people what they have to do, then punish them if they refuse to comply!*” he spat in extreme frustration.

Judas bent forward, covering his head with his arms.

“Yes!” I relentlessly admonished him. “If I wanted an army, I’d do like you say. But I didn’t come here to make our lives easy, Judas. I came here to *challenge* all of you with the hardest task you’ll ever face: figuring out how to help ‘difficult’ people move closer to God... *IN WAYS THAT ARE EFFECTIVE*—ways that *they* agree are Reasonable, Useful, Respectful, Beautiful, and Honorable!”

I spat-out each of my capitalized words.

They were all silent a minute, trying to absorb the astonishing truths I'd just delivered to them.

"Look at it another way," I gently comforted them. "Let's say you are exhausted, tired, and thirsty. Someone offers you a welcomed, delicious, cool glass of water. They say they're doing it because they hear that you belong to and bear the name of me, the Christ, the Messiah. Will you turn their kind offer away if you hear they are not doing everything else exactly correctly?"

Peter admitted what they were all thinking: "I suppose I would accept the welcomed gift, with gratitude!"

"Yes!" I grinned. "You would! So would all of you. If you were dying of thirst, you wouldn't debate whether or not the one helping you honors me. It would not matter if that person is an official, fellow-disciple or conversely an apparent heathen! In your desperate need you'd accept the good they bring to you."

"So?" Judas shrugged.

"I tell you the truth," I continued, "*my Father in Heaven will not reject their sincere movement in His direction, either!* His Holy Principles are what count the most, not whether or not they obey *your* earthly orders. All those who sincerely strive to honor my teachings, whether or not they are doing everything exactly 'correctly,' will be rewarded!"

"But people need direction," Judas argued. He defiantly lifted his head again, placing his arms back rigidly to his sides. "What you say about respecting people as being equal to yourself is fine for those that deserve and want such a thing. But most people know when someone else is superior in knowledge, wisdom, experience, or talent! Rather than having to struggle to figure things out for themselves, they're happy to just be told what to do. In fact, there are many people of low estate who have no wish to be elevated higher. They eagerly seek out those of us with the ability to take them by the hand and lead them. 'Looking down' on those of lower estate is not 'Lording it over them.' It's just doing what you must do to be helpful them, as they *want* to be helped!"

“Hmmm...” I considered, again stroking my beard thoughtfully. “Another persuasive argument, Judas! You indeed are a fine ‘sounding-board,’ unafraid to question my conclusions. So, what say the rest of you?”

John quickly answered: “Most people I know who ‘enjoy’ being ordered around either have no choice or have been indoctrinated from their youth that this is the way it has to be. Or, they are beaten into submission mentally, emotionally, or physically. I don’t know of anyone that fits the description Judas just gave.”

“But he’s right there is a *religious* duty to be good followers, faithful servants, and even obedient slaves,” another apostle strongly protested. “The Master often lectures us on being good servants, not rebellious discontents! And is that not what Jesus is telling us here today, in this very room?”

“But how can we ever advance if we don’t at times choose to follow God rather than men?” another interjected in a low, rumbling voice. “If all we are to be is good little soldiers following orders without question, should we not all return to our respective synagogues? There we can all bow down to the reigning Priests, apologize to the Scribes and Pharisees for questioning their integrity, then *denounce* the Master’s ‘disrespectful’ tirades against them. Finally, we can dutifully retake our places to sit silently listening to long sermons on things we already know perfectly well. If our religious duty is to submit to authority, no matter which authority, then should we not disband this group and go back to our separate homes?”

“If I hear yet another uninspired retelling of the story of Abraham or Moses... I think I’ll throw up!” someone else sighed in sympathy. “I’m here largely because the Master elevates us beyond the accepted rhetoric. He tells us amazing things we’ve never heard before. I’m not giving that up just to go back to being yet another warm body sitting motionless in a pew!”

“Yes!” Peter interjected, excitedly. “We’re here on a Mission that threatens all the accepted authority figures. That’s why they’re so angry with us! They want us to be their glassy-eyed, unquestioning slaves. It’s they, indeed, that throw us out of the synagogues as trouble-makers. They can’t tolerate

us asking them probing, hard questions outside of accepted dogma!”

John spoke to the group again: “The Master lashes us with his tongue from time to time, but it’s to elevate our thinking, not suppress us! He even tolerates and encourages *Judas*. If it was me, I’d have thrown our ‘devil’s advocate’ out a long time ago!”

Judas “*harrumpped*” in protest.

“So, I think that we’re saying that *WE* are these ‘little ones’ that Jesus speaks of so tenderly,” James grinned widely.

He was clearly amazed at the revelation he’d gotten from the debate I’d freely allowed. James was a good disciple, always open to learning more and better...

“What do you mean?” Peter asked, reaching over for yet another glass of wine, swallowing it down in one big gulp.

“Even Samuel at times will kick, scream, be naughty, and fight against what he’s been told,” James wryly observed.

“Ah, just like us!” Peter laughed, slurring his words a bit. “It’s true that the establishment hates us! We’re surely kicking against their iron grip, aren’t we?”

“And instead of returning love for our fitfulness,” John continued, “—they seek to crush us! There’s zero tolerance. There’s no motherly compassion comforting us. There’s no fatherly protection working to mature us over time from our weaknesses. There’s no understanding of our legitimate needs. There’s no nurturing of our strengths. It’s just a fearful, angry, *intolerance* that has only *their* good in mind, not ours. Yes, to them we’re ‘difficult’ brethren they’d happily toss out of the Jewish family!”

I grimly rejoined the conversation...

“And for that they shall pay a terrible price,” I seriously stated. “It would be better for them that someone took them out on a boat on the ocean, tied heavy millstones around their necks, and tossed them into the sea. For anyone to look down on my little ones, my ‘bothersome’ babies—including all humble folks who look to others for help—to mislead them by actions, words, or attitudes... Well, God will punish those bullies without mercy!”



“Should they not stand up for themselves, Master?” Judas sourly added. “Why must we defend them when they’re just pitiful weaklings? Despite them being angry troublemakers, they should know better already! Their guilty of their sins!”

I glared at him: “I did not come here to congratulate the already strong. I came here to help the weak. And there are many such ‘little-ones’ of otherwise low estate who would gladly believe in me, acknowledge the truth of my teachings, and hold tighter to Godly Righteousness. For those potential followers of mine to be caused to stumble in their upward, holy path by arrogant, self-righteous authority figures—that otherwise should be helping them to proceed onward—is a crime against God Himself! And if you, Judas, don’t accept this commission, you *likewise* will regret it.”

Judas shook his head in denial. Yet he had no response.

“But, Master,” John quietly replied. “Are we not beset by selfish, boring authority figures? Not only are they within the congregation of believers, but all around us? Plus, not only do they *passively* discourage us from the Golden Path of Godly Righteousness, but actively *tempt* us to do that which is in direct opposition to your teachings? Are we, in contrast, to be perfect in our dealings with such difficult leaders? How is this possible?”

“That’s a truly incisive and astute question, John,” I encouraged him. “Those who deliberately do such evil deeds, misleading my little ones, are without excuse. It doesn’t matter if they are inside the fellowship of believers or not. And, yes, we ourselves are greatly influenced by our materialistic, self-centered, and brutal society. The temptation to do evil toward difficult people surrounding us—particularly those of low estate—is unavoidable.”

“See?” Judas interjected.

“Yes, indeed,” I agreed. “This is the *main hurdle* against which we struggle for growing spiritually! Without this barrier to overcome, we would stagnate, grow weak, and die. But that’s no excuse! We who claim to be following God must not just be recognize inevitable temptations, but be *angry* at them—demanding better of ourselves! We inside God’s family must be *ruthless* toward *ourselves!*”

“What do you mean, Master?” Judas sighed, standing up and conspicuously stretching. “Are you now *condoning* our arguing as to who is the greatest amongst us?”

“WE KNOW BETTER!” I projected loudly for all to hear.

The vehemence of my words verbally knocked the startled Judas back down into his seat.

“Yes... I often do that which I know I shouldn’t, Master,” Peter sighed, shaking his big head in disgust.

“I’m not talking about giving in to momentary temptations,” I carefully explained to them all, “—nor in falling prey to your own limitations, lack of particular talents, or blind-spots. I’m talking about where there’s something you *clearly know to be hurtful* to others, which is within your own power to stop, yet you continue. That’s the insidious ‘temptation’ I’m talking about!”

Peter paused in yet again refilling his wine glass. “Uh...” he gulped, putting the glass shakily back down. “Do you mean like... uh... me pouring myself too much wine and getting drunk... then yelling at people or getting in fights... which sort of discourages those that want to follow you, Master, by seeing one of your main apostles behaving like a jerk?”

I smiled at him, reaching over to pat him on his withdrawn arm.

“That’s right!” I congratulated him. “I tell you truthfully, Peter—it’s better for you to CUT YOUR OWN ARM OFF to rid you of that temptation, rather than offend my little ones! Such subtle hypocrisies are what cause people to wind up in the burning flames of Hell.”

“My arm?” he gulped, aghast at the idea of cutting off his own limb.

“Yes!” I exclaimed, standing up in emphasis. I thrust out both of my own arms, wiggling the fingers on my hands, opening my eyes widely. “*In your life if there is something so important to you* that it is the equivalent of your precious EYES you navigate by... or the HANDS by which you accomplish your work... or your FEET which allows you to be mobile—you will profit more by entering eternity seemingly lame, or blind, or handicapped than to be rejected by God for that piece of your life causing my little ones to stumble! *That’s how serious*

*this matter is of you wanting to elevate yourself over your ‘difficult’ church brothers and sisters!”*

“But...” John queried, “you’re not telling us to literally maim ourselves, are you Master?”

“Of course not!” I exclaimed, dancing around in a quick circle. I wagged all my limbs, hands, and eyes by way of demonstration. “You need all your existing faculties to do the best for God in this physical existence. But the things that people cling to, make part of their lives, and think are so necessary—that no matter what evil they foster can’t be done without—NEED TO BE RUTHLESSLY CUT OUT OF ONE’S LIFE! No matter how precious and irreplaceable they may seem, like Peter’s obvious love for wine, be willing to get rid of it!”

“What could motivate a person that strongly, to give up something so precious, which seems to be a critical part of one’s existence?” James wondered. “Surely if we preach such in your name, Master, it will only drive people away. It’s too hard of a teaching!”

“Too hard?” I sighed. “Would you rather enter into the Kingdom of God lacking something you’d thought was irreplaceable and precious—rather than be denied, be kicked out with your seemingly necessary evil appendage intact... *for all eternity into what feels like a burning, fiery pit?*”

“Uh...” an apostle began, thought better of it, then stopped.

“Yes!” I continued. “It’s not only a place of burning fire that never gets put out, but where *worms* feeding on *corpses* gnaw at you *continually!*”

“Do you mean to say, *real* worms?” Peter gasped in horror.

“I mean to say what I said,” I affirmed. “It’s the certain knowledge that you put yourself in that terrible place because of what *you* freely chose to do and keep!”

“It seems so... horrific,” Peter gasped.

“I *mean* to say this to all those who shun ‘difficult’ people,” I relentlessly continued. “The many times they derived pleasure from stepping on my ‘irritating’ little ones was what doomed them.”

“Most don’t even give it a thought...” another apostle whispered.

“Yes!” I agreed. “That’s so true. I *mean* to say... knowing that your eternal destruction was caused by wounds inflicted upon yourself is an inescapable agony.”

“How so, Master?” John asked.

“I *mean* to say,” I addressed Judas in particular, staring unblinkingly at him, “you will realize without any doubt that those guilty pleasures which you thought you could not live without were what dragged you down into that abysmal, black hell! YOU PUT YOURSELF THERE!”

My shouts echoed loudly.

“But some ‘fire’ is good for a person, Master,” Judas insisted, refusing to budge from his position. “How are we to burn away the excess if we do not expose ourselves to fire?”

“Yes,” I nodded. “That’s a good point, Judas. To preserve ourselves from eternally searing flames, we must indeed put up with the pain of self-denial. There is temporary pain from severing out of our lives a guilty pursuit. Likewise, an attitude, or behavior that derives pleasure from hurting the innocent *or* the guilty. The pain is very real!”

“But the pleasure of purifying out lives will be greater?” John ventured. “It will counter the guilty pleasures?”

“Indeed,” I replied. “Such tyrannical behavior, in many people, is a powerful compulsion coming from within their own hearts. To deny that compulsion, ridding ourselves of it, in many cases is exactly like taking one’s own arm and cutting it off. It’s like hacking off a hand or scooping out one’s own eye! But that small ‘fire’ of self-surgery will work for us a much greater and eternal pleasure of eternity with God!”

“But the main point is...?” James asked.

“Yes, my friend,” I answered. “We must recognize the great personal gain acquired by *not hurting those of low estate here in this world!* The small pain of getting rid of that bad behavior will preserve, or ‘salt’ our souls!”

“Your words are very powerful, Jesus,” James sighed. “I do admit a guilty pleasure to being in your inner circle, to whom others defer. I’m proud to be a blood relative of yours. And, too often, I let that put me above other people. Consciously or unconsciously, I look down on them. I’ve been so blessed to be part of your grand adventure! It’s amazing that the wrong

attitude—invisible in many instances—can doom even myself to eternal hell!”

“Very astutely said, my dear friend,” I congratulated him. “Even the best lot of salt of highest purity can be adulterated, contaminated, and misused—losing its ‘saltiness.’ And if one of *you* should lose your ‘saltiness’ preserving your own soul and that of many others... how then could it be restored?”

“It’s a strange thing to think of myself as a batch of salt,” another apostle interjected. “Master, you have a way of saying things that burns them into our brains!”

“Thank you,” I smiled. “Never forget that you should be filled with *salt*. Don’t allow that salt to lose its preserving power. Have potent salt within yourselves by humility: being at peace, living in harmony with each other, looking out for those around you, disregarding perceived status in society or the church! In addition to correcting problems and advancing, we must also *preserve* that which is holy and good.”

Peter was obviously perplexed, frowning.

“Not clear enough for you, my friend?” I asked him.

“Master...” he slowly replied. “I certainly see the wisdom that you teach us. Your Vision is surely enough to me, but *not* for most others.”

“How so?” I politely asked, drawing him out.

“Well, they need something immediate to motivate them,” he thoughtfully continued. “It’s just like Judas keeps saying. Thoughts of ‘pie in the sky’ after they’re dead have little impact on most people. Your philosophical debating carries great weight with us. On the street, though, your arguments would be laughed at—assuming people would even hold still long enough for you to make such! Of course, you have great oratory power and can hold thousands entranced by your words. But how can we who are far less talented than you, do the same?”

“Well said, Peter,” I congratulated him. “Most people *do* need immediate motivation to help them do what’s right and godly. Heaven is a long distance away from irritations, temptations, and inbred survival compulsion. People’s immediate fears often force them to dominate and control. So, *we must now return to what I’ve already shown you!*”

I gestured to the people out in the packed hallway that were hanging on every word of our heated, loud debate.

“Josephine and Isaiah!” I called out. “Bring in Samuel!”

Shyly, a younger woman came into the room, carrying her child, accompanied by her husband. They were some of our servants, who loyally did our bidding.

Samuel was gurgling and clapping his hands together, gleeful at again being the center of attention!

“Tell, us, my good woman, what you would be willing to do for the welfare of your little Samuel?” I asked.

She pursed her lips, considering.

“Anything...” she shrugged. “I would do any good thing in my power to help little Sam grow up healthy, strong, and smart—to become your dedicated disciple!”

I nodded in approval, reaching out to “tweak” Samuel’s nose. He giggled.

“And *you*, Sir,” I addressed her husband, Isaiah. “What would you do for the welfare of your child?”

He answered without hesitation: “I would defend him to the death against all attackers!” he spoke firmly, glaring pointedly at Judas, who looked away.

“Thank you,” I said, giving Isaiah and Josephine a quick hug before escorting them back out of the high-level, “apostolic” gathering.

“Well?” I asked, looking from one to the other of my twelve apostles. These were my chief emissaries to the world, who would take my Message to the world after my death. These were the “founding fathers” of the new Kingdom of God!

Peter sighed deeply and said: “I’ll never drinking wine again, Master. From now on the only liquids to touch my lips will be clean water, fruit juice, or milk.”

I laughed in appreciation of his spontaneous, fierce, and unexpected determination.

“Ok... and why not drink wine?” I probed, wanting to make this point perfectly clear to everyone present. “We’ve all been drinking weak wine—that which cleanses our dirty water sources—since we’ve been babies?”

“Well,” Peter gulped, seemingly embarrassed by his outburst. “It’s been several times now that little Samuel has

turned from his milk to my brimming wine glass. He sees me guzzling it with gusto. I've even let him sip from my cup two or three times..." his voice trailed off.

"It's clear he has great respect for you, my friend," I softly stated, "holding your example in high regard. What you do for him today, the sacrifice that you make, may reap tremendous good in the future. And it's not just for Samuel but for many others! Yes, I'm glad that you are the one to open up the doors to my Kingdom. Those you tell how to enter will have no excuse. None will be able to deny your sincerity and conviction!"

Judas snorted loudly: "Once again, Lord, it's a pretty lesson that you bring to us. But there are many who care not—nor even recognize the possibility—that they might wrongly influence some *baby!* They require much more powerful motivation. They need a *mandate* promising them what they want the most!"

"Oh?" I mildly replied. "And what is it that my audiences want the most?"

"It's unsaid yet obvious," he snorted again. "What the people want is to be rid of the occupying Romans! The crowds want their Jewish nation restored to its previous position of world power! If you're to succeed not just in fuzzy theological discussions but in real politics, then you've got to find much better motivation than a crying little brat!"

Isaiah and Josephine glared at him.

"The wrath of God isn't mandate enough?" I mildly replied.

"If it's on behalf of the interests of the people, then it's welcome," Judas emphatically replied. "Master, just loose the legions of Heaven! Let the people see God's awesome, vengeful Power. Surely this isn't difficult for you? Haven't you often told us that the Holy Father has given you all power on Earth? The Holy Scriptures relate many occasions where God rained down fire from heaven, worked mighty miracles on behalf of our conquering armies, and crushed our enemies! Give this to the people and they will follow you completely, forever, and without hesitation... as will I!"

An uneasy silence spread throughout the room. These were things we didn't say aloud. Yes, we might *think* of

insurrection, but never dare speak the word. The occupying Roman troops were infamous for torturing seditious “trouble-makers.”

“Judas, listen closely,” I said. I slowly walked over to him and put a hand on his robed shoulder. “The angels in heaven don’t care about you being powerful. That’s not where God is directing His people at this point in their spiritual maturation. Yes, in days gone by, our primitive societies needed to be motivated by awesome power, as you say. But today, God is helping us move beyond just one tribe fighting to the death against another tribe!”

“But...” he began to protest.

“Yes!” I stopped him. “True *Godly Righteousness* is poised to envelop the entire world! But it won’t happen by imposing a set of preferred rituals and doctrines upon unbelievers. No, they must be led to God by *us* behaving in inexplicable, counterintuitive, illogical ways—which baffle and amaze them! If we just preach war against our enemies, we prove ourselves to be only another of many arrogantly squabbling tribes.”

“Like making ourselves into *babies*?” Judas derisively laughed.

“Yes,” I seriously replied, taking my hand from his shoulder then backing away, “—PLUS US TREATING *OTHERS* LIKE BABIES,” I barked at him, “*in the very same fashion that Josephine and Isaiah treat their little Samuel!*”

He cringed from my “booming” shouts, looking downward.

“And if we can’t humble ourselves in such a fashion?” James queried, clearly troubled by the demands I was placing on him and the others.

“I tell you frankly,” I flatly stated, looking around at them all, “these little ones that others look down upon, treat scornfully, think little of, give no consideration, despise, and even abuse—THESE ‘LITTLE ONES’ ARE SO PRECIOUS TO GOD THAT ANGELS IN HEAVEN REPORT DIRECTLY TO HIM ON THEIR CONDITION!”

The men gathered around me in the room looked suitably impressed.



“As you treat them, so God will treat you!” I exclaimed, pushing home my point. “It is a personal affront to the All-Mighty Lord of Reality when you blithely ignore, misuse, and think yourselves greater than the weak and lowly. In regards to the many *difficult people* of this world, humble yourselves... and God will lift both you and them up!”

Another apostle spoke up in wonderment: “But Lord, I was always taught that God favored the strong, the decisive, and the powerful!”

“I tell you the truth,” I told them all, “Many will be startled when they make it into Heaven to find the ABSENCE of many presently religious leaders of high stature. Yes, no one doubts that these ‘high, holy’ individuals will be there! But in their stead will be... little old ladies, country farmers, and helpful folks that never tried to push their own agendas. Plus, there will be many young children who, sadly, die of childhood diseases.”

“Sounds like a bunch of unimpressive pacifists to me,” Judas retorted. “I don’t know if I’d want to be in such a crowd of weaklings!”

John spoke in irritation at Judas’ harsh words: “Don’t you understand what the Master is saying, Judas? Haven’t you been listening to him?”

“I’ve been listening all too well!” he snarled back at John. “It’s clear to me who amongst *us* is, indeed, the greatest! If the Master chooses to acknowledge reality, all to the good. But if he doesn’t, if he stays lost in his fantasies, then he’s allowing this group—which had so much potential—to slide into oblivion! Instead of *making* history, we’ll be *lost* to history.”

I raised a hand to stop those who were about to jump to my defense.

“Let me make it perfectly clear concerning who should be the ‘greatest’ amongst you,” I patiently summarized, squarely facing Judas. “By NOT choosing to lord it over another—even *when you deserve to do so*,” I said, pointedly looking him straight in the eye, “—then you are truly embracing me, your mission, the Kingdom, and God!”

“But how are we to have any order?” Judas kept complaining. He threw his hands up into the air in disgust. “Any

functional organization, army, or state must have a clear line of accepted authority, a ‘chain of command’! It’s all well and good for you to say that you are the ‘head’ and we comprise the ‘body,’ Master. But the head must transmit its orders to the neck, then the spine, then out to the arms, and finally to the fingers for anything to get done. I just don’t see how you expect your Kingdom to function if you don’t establish clear...”

“—that’s correct, Judas!” I snapped at him, stopping him in midsentence. “You’ve hit the nail on the head! I *don’t* expect what *you* expect. Can I be any clearer? Your expectations are far *different* from my expectations!”

“That’s obvious...” he muttered, barely audibly.

“There’s a great lesson here,” I continued, ignoring his defiance. “All of you, listen closely to me! Judas is thinking as a worldly person who *whips* a crew of servants or slaves to *push* a load of bricks up a slope, building a *fortress* on the top of a defensible mountain. I am thinking as the Son of God looking to *inspire* people to throw away the bricks and *run* up the slope together to make *themselves* into the *living* Crystal Cathedral of God!”

Judas frowned, clearly confused. The rest of my male apostles were smiling, seeing what I was saying.

“Yours is the classical, hierarchical, patriarchal ‘command-and-control’ mentality,” I instructed Judas. “Mine is managing by empowerment, facilitation, inspiration, and a common, compelling purpose. What you are proposing is nothing different or any better than that which we already have with the Priests, Scribes, Lawyers, and Pharisees. You just want to replace them with us. *I* on the other hand, look to put God back into people’s hearts!”

He looked up at me, squinting. Was I reaching him? At that moment I hoped for nothing more than to soften his hard heart, appeal to his higher ideals, and bring him back from the disastrous course he was pursuing.

“But...?” he began...

“Look at it another way,” I again cut him off. “*You* want to create order via your *own* interpretation of the existing religious rituals, rites, ceremonies, procedures, rules, regulations,

prohibitions, and impositions! I, on the other hand, seek to let loose within each person their own God-given Creativity!”

His eyes widened.

Yes! I was getting through to him...

“*You* seek to destroy or control your enemies, a time-honored worldly strategy,” I explained. “I’m preaching a new strategy! I seek to *liberate* everyone, including misguided evil people!”

“*Liberate* even *evil* people?” Judas gasped.

The rest of my apostles were likewise horrified.

“How many difficult people do you label ‘evil’ just because they don’t do or think as you want?” I mildly asked.

“But... even so... how would you *control* them?” Judas asked, bewildered.

I grinned widely, gleefully throwing my hands up into the air for emphasis.

“I’m *not* seeking to control the difficult people,” I now laughed. “I’m looking to *save* them from themselves! I’m looking to save *you*. I’m looking to save everyone!”

“But they lack the discipline to...?”

“For those who are internally motivated to accomplish a worthy task, there is no need to give orders, Judas,” I instructed him and the other apostles. “Such people only need get from you these things: useful information, helpful training, necessary resources, removal of roadblocks, encouragement, good tools to work together smoothly, and validation of their own creative good efforts. Sure, it’s a lot harder than just giving orders. But it’s much more fulfilling. I know you can do this!”

His face fell and he retreated into his stubbornness.

“*I... don’t... know... what... you’re... talking... about... Master!*” Judas spat out each word. His voice seethed with anger, resentment, and continuing confusion.

“It is indeed a strange concept, isn’t it my dear friend?” I mildly replied. I wasn’t willing to give up on converting him to a new way of thinking. “I’m not talking about a slight adjustment to the present system or a shift in power from one group to another group. I’m offering you a Vision of a completely new thing!”

“But is it *better*?” he muttered, shaking his head in denial.

“Yes!” I happily exclaimed. “For instance, in the new *Kingdom of God* there will be no more difference between male and female, old and young, privileged racial background versus despised, healthy versus supposedly afflicted, slave or free, servant or master, husband or wife! We will *all* be *equal* in God’s *and each other’s* sight! It won’t be just some abstract spiritual leavening that eventually occurs in heaven but not on the Earth. No, we will think, talk, and act as *truly equal citizens* in God’s Kingdom, right now!”

“That’s... *blasphemy!*” Judas gasped, visibly shaken by my words.

In the other room I heard an excited buzz of astonishment from my “lesser” disciples, particularly the women. Equally astonished were the younger people, plus servants, and even my host’s slaves! The other apostles were as shocked by my words as was Judas, hardly able even to conceive of a place so radically different from their present society.

“Is it really ‘blasphemy,’ Judas?” I mildly replied, raising one eyebrow. “Is it blasphemy to suppose that God does *not* want ANYONE ‘lording’ it over another? Is it blasphemy to imagine that God would be pleased with a Kingdom where all people—regardless of their marriage, racial, age, economic, or social status—voluntarily made themselves into *little children* who gladly help each other, with no pretense or arrogance?”

“But Master!” another of my apostles spoke up, uncharacteristically in defense of Judas. He was shaken by my vision, agreeing with Judas’ conservatism. “Is there not a natural order to things, ratified by the Law of Moses? Women are beneath men. Servants are beneath their masters. Slaves are beneath their owners. Gentiles are beneath us Jews. Wives are beneath their husbands. Children are beneath adults. Regular church members are beneath the Priests. Illiterate people are beneath the Scribes and Lawyers. Ordinary Jews are beneath the Pharisees. Peasants are beneath Kings. Citizens are beneath soldiers. For us to try to change any of that would *crumble* the fabric of society, creating chaos! It would turn religion upside down!”

“And would that be so bad?” I sharply retorted. “Think about it, my friend. What is it about this oppressive, dictatorial, suppressive, antagonistic, brutal, soul-withering present religion order that you find so desirable?”

“Order! Security! Predictability!” Judas snapped back at me. “It’s how we know with certainty what’s right or wrong. It’s how we recognize and impose righteousness!”

“Yes, it’s how religion *has* been done,” I began, “And, indeed, the history of our Jewish nation has been to exclude all others or impose our religious rules on them. But...”

But now Judas interrupted *me*: “Our venerated religious hierarchy is where sin is *expunged* and our *God of Wrath* is glorified! It’s *not* in everyone running about doing whatever they want, whenever they want, however they want... with no direction or control!”

I smiled. This was getting to be a good discussion. Their hearts and minds were now intimately joined together, fired-up, and fully engaged! But though I was cracking through the prejudices of the rest of the apostles, I saw I was losing Judas...

“Judas, my friend,” I quietly spoke, calming them all by my compassionate tone. “Control and Creativity need not be mutually exclusive. There can still be agreed-on structure, leadership, good decision-making, helpful boundaries, over-riding Principles, and assigned responsibilities. In the fully-functional new *Kingdom of God*, however, such structures will be ‘enlightened’! Enlightened leadership will **MAKE A SPACE** for facilitated, empowered, fully engaged Creativity!”

“What... dreaming up new things that may or may not work?” John frowned, even his loyalty shaken by this Vision. “Isn’t that privilege reserved for the accepted leaders? They lead and the others follow, right?”

“Wrong!” I exclaimed. “That ‘creative space’ will be there for **EVERYONE!** In that joyful, highly productive space, as I said before: there will be no Jew or Greek, no male or female, no husband or wife, no slave or free, no boss or underling, no greater or lesser. It’s a *beautiful* vision! And, yes, it’s a completely different way of thinking from just handing down orders that others blindly pass on or obey.”

“I... don’t understand,” Judas said, grimacing in confusion.

“You’re not alone,” I nodded compassionately. “Many changes in society must occur until this Grand Vision will be fully implemented in my church. The *Kingdom of God* won’t be manifest in all its final glory instantly. It will take time! But the goal I just articulated provides the facilitating framework by which you can continually advance towards God... *if you wish!*”

“But,” Peter enthusiastically jumped in, “what must we do *now* to work towards this wonderful Godly Brotherhood? It sounds great! I can’t wait for it to happen sometime off in the far distant future. I want it *now!*”

“You’ve always been a gregarious, impatient sort, Peter,” I complimented him. “There’s hardly anyone that doesn’t like you or easily get along with you.”

“Uh... thank you, Master?” he replied, embarrassed. “If I’m not to be the Greatest—nor is anyone else here either—then please tell me what I *should* do. I still don’t fully understand. But I trust you!”

“Fair enough,” I agreed. “Here is your immediate task for eventually achieving the Grand Vision: *do to all your fellow believers in the future as I have done for you!*”

My apostles looked puzzled, still confused.

James again spoke up: “Then... *this* is the structure you wish... that we have here, now, in this very room—for the coming Kingdom of God?”

“We’re a family, aren’t we?” I gently smiled.

“A family?” another apostle re-stated, shaking his head in bewilderment.

“All right, then,” I said matter-of-factly and with firm authority. “So, you want not just an Example, but explicit orders, is that it? You’re still stuck in the ‘military’ mindset, waiting to be told exactly what you must do?”

“It would make things so much simpler...” Judas grated, clearly frustrated with how I was dealing with this difficult subject.

“Then should we end this session with a question?” I laughed, shaking my own head sadly. “If you want to be the

person in charge, the one giving the orders, the one commanding the others, the ‘Greatest’ in the Kingdom—then you should try your level best to be like... who?”

They sat musing, frowning, looking down at their hands or glancing furtively at each other.

Peter broke the silence: “Like... Samuel?”

Off in the other room, Samuel squealed with excitement at hearing his name!

“You’ve got it,” I curtly answered, getting up and starting to leave the room.

I needed a break.

But Judas would not let me end on a high note.

“Master!” he called-out to me, stopping me at the door with my back turned to them. “Are you saying that God’s People should become servants to *heathen unbelievers*?”

Peter lashed-out at Judas: “What the hell are you talking about, Judas? The Master’s not saying that at all!”

“Oh, but I am,” I sighed, not turning to look at them. “Judas is correct. If you want to follow me completely, then you must—just as I do—dedicate yourself to seeking and saving the lost!”

“Not statue-worshiping heathens!” Judas indignantly protested.

“The ‘heathen unbelievers,’ as you describe them,” I spoke softly but intensely, “are *difficult* fellow humans. In actuality they are desperate, lost, and frightened *children of God*. Our Heavenly Father wants you to help them find good ways for returning to God. In essence, *you must seek to fulfill as a humble servant even their highest and noblest needs*—not just your fellow Jewish brethren!”

Judas grunted, stood up, put his hands on his hips, and grinned in triumph behind me.

“Then you *do* speak blasphemy, Master,” he concluded, looking from one to the other of the apostles in triumph at having bested me in our long debate. “It is the end of the Law of Moses! You speak against the Prophets themselves. How can we continue to follow you?”

The others were stunned at this defiance of my authority, suddenly uncertain of *me!*

“But you c-came here from G-God, Master... and we’ve f-followed you f-faithfully,” another apostle stammered, his voice trembling with heavy emotion. “And it was all w-with the goal of *improving* the Law of Moses, n-not ending it! Are we not God’s chosen People, d-destined to rule the world under God’s Mighty Hand—*not* to become s-servants to *filthy heathens*?”

“So, *you* say,” I replied, stoically folding my arms together over my chest.

I looked up at the ceiling, continuing to stand in the doorway with my back to my apostles. My other disciples, servants, hosts, and children in the next room saw a peaceful expression on my face. My face was *glowing* with a golden, heavenly light! In awe, they realized I was communing directly with God...

“Master,” Peter gulped, looking at my back with deep concern. “I love your amazing teachings. But if you push them too far, the people will rebel! You’ll get nothing at all accomplished if you insist that people must go against everything they believe! You can’t defy everything they were raised to accept as Truth, everything that holds our society and religion together. Or... can you?” he hopefully ended.

Now the golden light was spreading from my face onto my robes, perceptible by my apostles behind me. They gasped, stunned by my spreading *transfiguration*...

“Have I not often told you and the thronging crowds that *I* am the Truth, the Way, and the Light of God?” I mildly replied, putting my arms out to each side to tightly grasp the upper stones on each side of the doorway.

I was a *burning flame*, caught-up in the Glory of God, barely able to keep standing...

The people all around me were bowing to the floor, hiding their eyes. I was blazing like a supernova!

“I am here to open the eyes of the blind,” I whispered. “I am here to show the lost how to move forward where otherwise they are hopelessly mired in their own sins. I am here to give everyone something more to believe in than mind-numbing rituals and boring speeches. Would you, my closest disciples, have me water that all down? Should I just proved eye-



salve for soothing the pain of blindness? Need I draw better roadmaps of where we've already been? Should I craft convenient sticks to tap out one's dark path a bit better?"

Now the fire within me was dimming, the golden light surrounding me fading... Was it just a trick of the light? Was it a shaft of sunlight briefly falling through a crack in the roof? Ever-eager to find a rational explanation, many in the household began doubting what they'd just seen.

"Master, if you try to change the fabric of society," John gasped, now apparently agreeing with the "reasonable" arguments of Peter, Judas, and the others, "it will create huge disruptions and conflicts! We may descend into chaos as your few true believers battle against those who hold onto their upbringing and tradition! Surely change toward your Ideal Society can be made gradually, not precipitously?"

I turned around, glaring at them. My skin had turned black. Charred soot fell from my face and hands, revealing beneath the pink skin of a newborn baby...

As one, they cowered back from me.

"*We are in a time of great change,*" I coldly answered, my voice vibrant and piercing. "*This is exactly the right time and place for God to send me into the world—not to expand the existing religious system, but to fundamentally change it into something far better!*"

They all saw the intensity in my eyes. I appeared to have dramatically changed. My eyes were sunken black pits...

"The Prophets that we read in the Holy Scriptures foretold of this time!" I *seethed* at them. "Now the crumbling clay feet of the glorious statues commemorating the so-called 'mighty' civilizations and kingdoms of men will implode! The towering edifices of men will fall! Death and destruction will envelop the entire world! Great chaos will erupt all around you! Brother will turn against brother! Fathers will turn against sons! The rivers will run red with blood! The sky will go dark!"

"You can't be serious?" James gasped. "When we began this journey, I never expected us to preach an apocalypse! Surely, Jesus, you're not saying that the Pharisees are correct in accusing you of insurrection against the Temple?"

“*The veil of the Temple guarding the Holy of Holies will be split down the middle, allowing the common man to finally enter into the very Presence of God Himself!*” I scolded James.

I grabbed his arm in an iron grip. He winced!

“Is it the end of times?” Peter gasped.

“*God will descend upon Earth, taking terrible vengeance on all those that reject His Holy Name!*” I raged, releasing James. “Beware lest you be incinerated by the flaming swords of His Mighty Angels! Terror and heartache will reign! God’s enemies will be destroyed! And from the ashes of the destruction of man’s petty dreams will arise a whole new way of life...” my voice trailed off in exhaustion

“The Kingdom of God?” James hopefully asked.

“In that vast, roiling funeral pyre of hate, selfishness, domination, and fighting will spring up a strong plant,” I went on, sinking back down upon a seat. I spoke more gently, smiling, looking off a long distance... “You will see. A seedling will flourish in the fires of wanton carnage. And, yes, it will grow into the mighty and all-powerful *Kingdom of God* which will spread over the entire world. It will never be destroyed. It will *reign forever!*”

“*Now you’re talking, Master!*” Judas exclaimed, delighted with my change of tone. He jumped up, running over to hug me tightly. “I *knew* that milk-drinking, love-spouting, pacifist wasn’t really you!”

Sadly, I gently patted the now-sobbing Judas on his back. Then I put my arms around him and hugged him tightly.

“If nothing else, Judas,” I wryly whispered in his ear, “you’re consistent.”

As a torrent of arguing, shouting, and continued debate erupted behind me I extricated myself from Judas’ strong grasp. I wearily got back to my feet, turned away, and left to find a secluded room to collapse upon a bed.

I was drained.

Surely it would be many years until the *Kingdom of God* would finally flourish in people’s hearts, in all its simple glory upon this wicked Earth. People cherish their adulthood, having no interest in again being a baby. But it was only in the

open, innocent minds of young children that the true Kingdom of God could blossom.

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**Section 2:**  
**HELPING TO ENCOURAGE**  
**LITTLE CHILDREN**

*(See Mark 10:1,13-16,  
Luke 18:15-17)*

*The next day I and my band of disciples* left Capernaum and traveled to the region of Judea, east of the Jordan. All along the way, news of our arrival preceded us. From small villages and larger towns poured out many thousands of people. They walked with us, asking me and my disciples many questions.

Our band broke up into several small groups traveling along in a roughly parallel path. Each of my apostles was at the center of a large traveling revival meeting, all within earshot of the central speaker, me. When my group tired and stopped to rest, the other groups behind us would come trailing in. Eventually, a large, loose, spread-out crowd of thousands were assembled, all excitedly talking and debating.

It was a great time! We were out with the people, directly helping them.

Many blessings were given by me and my apostles. Many prayers were prayed. The illnesses of many were lifted. Hope was given to thousands. Nagging questions that the people never dared ask in the synagogue were excitedly aired. Debates swirled all around us. The common people saw themselves as worthy and full of potential to do great things for God, as facilitated by my helpful apostles.

Yes, my closest disciples had seemingly learned the lesson I'd taught them with Samuel. They humbly and readily did their best to help even the lowliest peasant, the most diseased

beggar, the most feeble-minded simpleton, and the most ignorant illiterate. I was delighted!

But then a very disturbing thing happened that sent me into a rage!

Judas, good politician that he was, insisted on bringing to me the local powerbrokers. He introduced various dignitaries, officials, key businesspeople, nobles, and even Roman officers. So instead of interacting with the regular people, as I wished, I was spending my time greeting people who often cared little for me and my message. Most of them met me just to show how important *they* were.

Nevertheless, I politely greeted them, shaking their hands, and exchanging meaningless pleasantries... until I noticed a commotion in the surrounding crowd. Some woman, carrying her baby in her arms, was being firmly pushed away by my disciples. Yet she was loudly pleading to see me!

“Hey!” I yelled. “What’s going on there?”

Judas, pretending that nothing of importance was happening, tried to physically maneuver me back to the receiving line for the dignitaries. I shoved him hard in his chest and he went sprawling with a “yelp” onto his rear end!

Striding over to the struggling knot of people I immediately saw what was happening. After all the intense arguing, debating, and my admonitions of the evening before... my disciples were confronting a group of women and their husbands. I was shocked to see that my apostles were stopping people from bringing me little children and babies! All the parents wanted was for me to touch their kids and give my blessing.

“I said...” I grated: “*what the hell is going on here?*”

My shout startled the disciples who’d been screening me off from the families.

Shocked by my language, one of my female disciples turned to face me, flustered.

“Uh... M-Master...” she stammered. “We saw you were busy with all those important people... and Judas said you weren’t to be disturbed... so we were just...?”

“Is this what you think?” I asked them all, “—that I regard those ‘big-shots’ as being more important than my little ones? That’s ridiculous! Those babies are at least equal in

importance to the major of a town, a rich farmer, or a local head of a synagogue. I am available on a first-come, first-serve basis to *everyone!*”

Judas quickly strode up to me, dusting off the seat of his robes where he'd fallen hard onto the ground.

“Master!” he urged me. “There will be plenty of time later to deal with the common people. These others are very busy dignitaries who have kindly made time in their crowded schedules to come down and...”

“Tell them they’ll have to wait if they want an audience with me!” I curtly dismissed him.

“*This is not a good decision!*” Judas hissed, refusing to be put-off. He grabbed me by my shoulder and whispered angrily into my ear. “Jesus, we will need all these community leaders on our side when the Conflict begins! You can’t afford to make them angry at you and...”

“—DO NOT FORBID, PREVENT, OR HINDER THE LITTLE CHILDREN COMING TO ME!” I yelled, again bodily shoving Judas away from me. “TRULY I TELL YOU, WHOEVER DOES NOT RECEIVE, ACCEPT, AND WELCOME THE KINGDOM OF GOD AS A LITTLE CHILD SHALL NOT ENTER INTO IT AT ALL!”

Everyone within earshot had stopped speaking in mid-sentence and was looking at me fearfully. Was I not the wise, entertaining preacher they’d expected? Instead, was I just a lunatic spouting loud nonsense?

Yes, I knew I was quite a sight. I was in full maniac-mode. I was quivering with rage, my face set in a fierce expression. My hands were clenched tightly into fists, my muscles knotted!

“GET YOUR PRIORITIES STRAIGHT, PEOPLE!” I yelled again. “I’M GETTING REALLY TIRED HAVING TO REPEAT THIS! THE KINGDOM OF GOD BELONGS TO *LITTLE CHILDREN*, NOT TO THE COMMUNITY LEADERS TO WHOM YOU PRESENTLY DEFER!”

A number of those in Judas’ receiving line angrily turned away and departed. But I was pleased that most of them decided to stay and wait their turn.

It would be a long wait...

I walked over to a fallen tree trunk and sat on it. I angrily motioned for my disciples to start bringing over the parents. A line formed, hoping just to have me briefly touch their child. I would give them far more...

As each couple came up, I graciously smiled, took each baby or small child in my arms, and gave them each a friendly hug. Then I put them on my knee, or placed one hand on his or her little head, or bowed my own head while delivering a sincere blessing:

“Ah, my little friend,” I greeted each child. I spoke his or her name, even without being prompted by the hovering parent. Though scared and unsure as to what was going on, each child felt my radiating heavenly warmth and quieted. They looked up at me with both fascination and joy. *“May our Great Father keep you safe, healthy, and productive in all good things! Take my spirit with you. Enjoy the journey that awaits you. Amen!”*

And if anything was wrong with each child—a cough, a deformity, a blemish—when I handed the child back to its parents the problem was fixed.

Many parents came to me that day. Finally, much later, I sent off the last with a friendly wave. Over to the side, still glaring at me, was Judas.

Off to his side was what remained of the line of officials. Amazingly, most were still there!

Stiffly I got up and walked over to them.

“It is a real pleasure to meet you... Thank you for coming... Happy to make your acquaintance...” I started down the line, shaking each hand or putting an arm over their shoulders, graciously pausing to visit when they wished.

Finally, we moved on, as evening began to gather about us...

“You left a powerful impression today,” John ventured as he walked along at my side.

We were both exhausted from the spontaneous long event, hungry and tired. But we were also exhilarated. It had been a wonderful “meet-great-and-teach” on many levels.

“It’s easy to lose sight of God,” I sighed, doggedly trudging along, thinking of the politicians and the children.

“We are all wrapped up in the priorities of the moment,” John agreed. “Even the politicians have their many pressing duties. They’re trying to do their best, juggling conflicting priorities from different interest groups. I see how they have a tough time of it. I was never tempted to become one of them.”

I sighed deeply. My legs were heavy, moving sluggishly.

“Yes, everyone struggles with putting one foot in front of the other, just making it to the next day,” I agreed. “But that doesn’t excuse people from forgetting about what really matters: *moving ever closer to God!*”

“You don’t have to convince me, Jesus,” John smiled at me. “I and your other apostles have left everything to follow you. We’ve put our regular lives on hold, embracing your revolutionary teachings instead of working regular jobs.”

“Do you have regrets?” I spoke softly, touched by his devotion.

“Well... sometimes,” he admitted. “But those thoughts are fleeting.”

“When do they bedevil you the worst?” I asked, genuinely curious.

“When I get tired of traveling from town to town,” he shrugged, “I get discouraged. It’s particularly bad when we’ve had an intense confrontation with our religious leaders. I get really scared. What’s going to happen to us, Master? Judas thinks you’ll call down an angelic army from heaven to kick out the Romans, reinvigorating the Temple. But if that doesn’t happen...?”

“—then by conventional thinking our movement is finished,” I completed his sentence. “But that ‘win-or-lose’ attitude is giving-in to Satan’s subtle nudges: ‘fight or be killed.’ Indeed, there’s another and better way...”

“And what is that, Master?” Peter asked, having come up beside us.

“Trust in God,” I whispered, looking up at the sky.

“We are certain that God will lead us to Victory!” Peter laughed joyfully.

“But...” John frowned, “—isn’t that back to what you just told me, Jesus?”



“I am so glad I have at least one disciple who listens to me,” I deeply sighed. “Just as with some of the town’s leaders at our last stop, it’s easy to lose our godly righteousness to the fears of the moment.”

We still had a long way to go to get to our next hospitality house. We were going to have to walk through most of the cold night. We probably shouldn’t have paused to talk with all the parents at our last stop. But it had been a true joy. Thinking back to the events of the day, I now felt like I was floating in the clouds...

“Not if we keep our eyes on *you!*” Peter laughed cheerfully. He stomped along as if he were a soldier in a marching army. “You really told-off those big-shots—putting *babies* in front of them! Hah!”

“Babies go in front of us all,” I wearily answered. “*As if we were all parents... working at a tough job!*”

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## Section 3:

# A TAX COLLECTOR AND A PHARISEE

(See *Luke 18:9-14*)

*So just what is this true child-like humility, the kind that will open our entire hearts to the Almighty, allowing us to enter and remain in the Kingdom of God?*

Well, let me give you another Example.

I and my band of closest disciples had been walking down yet another road for a number of hours. We were hot and tired when we arrived at a small town. Our intention was to go into the town, find an inn, buy some food, and perhaps stay over for the night before pushing onward.

However, word of our approach had gone ahead of us. There, right at the edge of the town, waiting to meet us, was a group of local officials.

“Ah, a welcoming party!” Peter exclaimed, looking forward to a nice, friendly visit with them.

Likely my good-hearted apostle expected them to give us the “keys to the town.” I, of course, knew better. We’d have no rest from our journey in that town. But, still, a powerful lesson would be taught by our encounter with the town officials...

As we walked up to the group, it was obvious they weren’t too pleased to see us. I didn’t fault them for that since our walk had been arduous and the sun was quite hot. We weren’t a very reputable looking group of characters! I myself was disheveled, sweating like a pig, my hair tangled and dirty, my robe dusty and sweat-stained, my feet and sandals covered with dirt. And then, as if to make sure our first impression

upon the town officials would be totally negative, a big fly came and settled down on the tip of my nose!

Deliberately, I let it stay.

I certainly didn't look much like a Great Prophet, or the Son of God, or the Conquering Messiah!—there sweating like a pig, smelling ripe as week-old garbage, and with a fly sitting happily on the end of my nose!

“Good afternoon!” I widely grinned as we stopped a few feet from the prim and proper officials.

“We don't want any trouble here,” a stern-faced, heavy-set younger man curtly replied, folding chubby arms across his ample chest.

“And we mean no trouble to you good people or to your fine town,” I answered politely. “We're only looking for a bit of rest and some food. We have money and will be good guests.”

“We've heard a lot about you,” another man suspiciously asked. “Are you indeed this ‘Jesus of Nazareth’ that's been stirring up the countryside, attracting thousands of spectators, claiming power from God to heal people of their afflictions?”

I nodded, finally gently brushing the fly off of my nose. I watched it buzz away...

“Yes, that is me,” I smiled at them.

“Then we want no part of you, your radical teachings, or your magic tricks!” an elderly man with a high-pitched voice spoke firmly. “We've a peaceful, orderly town here. Everybody knows their place, does their work, and *don't make trouble*. Our people are content with the Law of Moses, which they follow to the letter.”

“I am happy to hear of your devotion to God,” I dryly replied. “Rest assured that we will make no trouble. Quite the contrary, we may be able to help some of your people with chronic illness and...”

“Our people expect no miracle from God to instantly heal their illnesses!” the official brusksly interrupted me. “They understand that God has afflicted them because of their sins. Our priests help them work on their sins. So, we don't need you here. You'd best go elsewhere—someplace that wants

your heretic ideas, enjoys the show you put on, and are desperate for magic cures.”

I saw Peter ready to angrily jump to my defense. With an upheld hand I stopped him. I had no need of other people defending my honor...

“I only speak the words of God and do His works,” I mildly replied. “We’re weary and ask only for a bit of hospitality. I’ll not be doing anything to your people they don’t first request, good Sir!”

“Will you and your disciples agree not to do any teaching here?” the younger, chubby man asked. “We don’t need your radical ideas!”

“I’m afraid I can’t make that promise,” I shrugged. “We won’t hold a meeting, if that’s what you’re concerned about. But we can’t deny God’s Will to those who might ask us a question. Nor can we deny the healing power of God to those who request our help.”

“Then you’d best be moving on or we’ll call out our local police!” the man with the high-pitched voice insisted, making “shooing” motions with his hands.

It seems we weren’t wanted. But we were very weary, very hungry, and needed a rest. I had one other card to play...

“If you insist on withholding *religiously mandated courtesy* to tired travelers,” I answered back in a friendly tone of voice, while highlighting our Jewish duty, “then we’ll be moving on.”

That gave them pause. We Jewish people were well known for our hospitality. To turn away a traveler was almost unheard of. Often, we would even take strangers into our homes, giving them a place to sleep and a meal. We regarded it as a high religious duty!

Instead of being chastened, though, they were even angrier at me for bringing up the “religious” card. I saw that we’d have to move on... but not before teaching them a powerful lesson!

“Well, I don’t want to be any bother to you good people,” I hurriedly insisted. “So... if you give me just a moment of your time to tell you a useful story, we’ll keep right on walking straight through to the next town. Deal?”

This caused them even more unease. Yes, they didn't want to be accused of being inhospitable. That was a sin. So, if we voluntarily moved on, that'd ease their conscience. But to have to listen to my teachings was an equally tough thing for them to endure.

Why?

I knew I was speaking with a group of people who *wanted everything to stay exactly the same as it was at that time!* These were dyed-in-the-wool conservatives who feared anything "different." They didn't want to hear anything that might "rock the boat" or spark new thinking. In other words, they were afraid of me!

And the root reason that they didn't want to learn anything from me was because, obviously, *they thought they already knew everything!* The group was mostly composed of some self-righteous local church officials who had complete confidence in *themselves*.

Yes, instead of trusting in God they trusted in themselves!

Although they claimed to be the most righteous and Godly of all men, including leaders of the local synagogue, to them our Heavenly Father was merely a means of achieving their own aggrandizement. If they'd not gone into religion, they'd have been big business owners, oblivious high politicians, or mob bosses.

But they weren't hypocrites! No, they were totally convinced in their own minds that they *were* doing everything right. They had no doubt that God loved them above anyone else! Furthermore, they felt that the Almighty had given them a *mandate* to rule God's people with an iron fist. They felt their dictates were God's exact Will passed down to through the ages to mankind. Indeed, in their minds God was pleased to make *their* acquaintance!

Concerning other people, they were scornful and contemptuous. No one lived up to their standards. Everyone else was perpetually falling short of God's Glory. In their eyes, the only chance anyone else had of salvation was to listen to *their* lectures, doing exactly as *they* decreed. Other than as potential converts blindly obeying *them*, everyone else was *nothing*, including myself!

I actually found this group of mainly local church officials amusing. They lived in a *self-contained, circular-logic world* where everything they said to themselves and others made perfect sense. There were no loose ends left to tie up! All questions were resolved. Logic outside of their own self-contained arguments did not matter. External input was totally unnecessary. Anyone claiming to bring different information was automatically either a heretic or a deceiver.

Yes, they existed in a philosophical bubble that excluded the rest of the universe. The only thing that they could recognize inside this wonderfully pinched-off part of reality was their own smug reflections staring back at them, reflected from the inside surface of their little private bubble! Theirs was a world of perfect harmony, total assurance, and complete security—that is, unless someone outside were to choose to “pop” their town with a devastating, undeniable pinprick!

I decided to do so.

“Teacher,” one of them condescendingly replied, “*why* must you tell us some story so that you and your... uhm... followers...” he sniffed at my gaggle of rough, shabbily dressed disciples, “to swiftly depart our region?”

Struggling not to laugh at their absurd self-pretensions, I replied: “Oh, we can’t let it be known that we visited with such important, high officials as you—but gave them no gift for the honor of having made their acquaintance!”

“Oh?” the man coldly answered. “And what makes you think that we will regard this ‘story’ as a desirable gift?”

“Well, my good Sir, it will give you a *powerful weapon* to discourage people like me from bothering you again in the future!” I generously offered.

“Well...” they quickly whispered amongst themselves. They were curious as to what I might have that could be of potential use to them in the future for keeping grubby, itinerant preachers like me from entering their territory. “Then we will hear this story of yours, as long as it’s not too lengthy. Proceed!”

“Oh, it’s quite short!” I reassured them. “Thank you for your kind permission,” I graciously answered, smiling benignly.

Off to the side I saw my disciples snickering and whispering amongst themselves. They knew from past experiences that I was about to *skewer* these self-righteous, would-be religious dictators!

“Please keep yourselves quiet so that our illustrious hosts can hear the story,” I sternly commanded my surrounding disciples.

They were struggling mightily to not fall down on the ground roaring with laughter at my statements.

“Yes, Master,” John managed to gasp-out

“Thank you!” I nodded at the stifled silence that ensued.

I, seemingly humbly, turned back to the group of well-dressed, impressively groomed, suspicious men.

“Two men went into a Temple enclosure to pray,” I began. “One was a well-respected, learned *Pharisee*—the other a despised collaborator of the Romans, a *tax-collector!*”

Upon hearing of the Pharisee, the men nodded agreeably. Upon hearing of the tax-collector, even my own disciples groaned in disgust (though one of my very own apostles was a reformed tax collector himself!)

“They were in an outer court of the Temple that sits so nobly high upon a hill in Jerusalem, where many seekers of God regularly go to pray,” I continued. “The Pharisee went up the slope of the courtyard to stand close to the Temple-proper. He stood as far away as he could from the other people that were scattered about the courtyard, while still being on the highest slope. He lifted up his arms to heaven. He stared up into the sky to directly petition God Himself. And then he spoke in a very loud voice so that everyone in the courtyard could easily hear his words...”

I lifted up my arms, looked at the sky, and unexpectedly shouted, startling the town officials: “GOD, I AM SO GRATEFUL I AM NOT LIKE ALL THESE OTHER WRETCHED SINNERS! THEY ARE BUT PETTY THIEVES, EXPERTS AT THE VILE ART OF EXTORTION, SWINDLERS, AND UN-RIGHTEOUS ADULTERERS—MUCH LIKE THAT FILTHY *TAX COLLECTOR* CROUCHED OVER THERE IN THE LOWER CORNER OF THE COURTYARD!”

The assembled group of high officials nodded approvingly upon hearing the Pharisee's opening lines to his prayer. Clearly, they identified with his boasts and the contrasts he drew between himself and the rest of humanity.

"Quite a commendable gentleman," one of the officials muttered.

"Very powerful words!" I agreed. Then I kept on with the story: "And the Pharisee continued his loud prayer thusly: 'I, UNLIKE THESE OTHER UNGODLY WRETCHES, DO GREAT THINGS FOR YOU LORD! EVEN THOUGH THE LAW OF MOSES REQUIRES US JEWISH PEOPLE TO FAST BUT ONCE PER YEAR ON THE DAY OF ATONEMENT, I MYSELF REGULARLY FAST *TWICE PER WEEK*. AND EVEN THOUGH THE LAW OF MOSES REQUIRES A TENTH OF ONLY CERTAIN THINGS TO BE DONATED TO THE TEMPLE, I GIVE A TENTH OF *EVERYTHING* I POSSESS. I AM TRULY A HOLY PERSON, A GREAT SERVANT OF YOURS. OTHER PEOPLE HOLD ME IN HIGH REGARD, ATTEMPTING TO EMULATE ME! THANK YOU SO MUCH, GOD, FOR MAKING ME TO BE *ME!*'"

The attending officials spontaneously clapped in approval!

"A very impressive prayer!" one of them exclaimed.

"Yes, an example to us all," another official nodded, almost breaking from his habitual frown into a grin.

"But that's not the end of the story!" I cautioned them. "That tax collector who the Pharisee seemed to know so well *also* prayed there in that same courtyard. However, unlike the Pharisee, the tax collector went to the lowest level of the courtyard furthest away from the Temple proper. He didn't even dare to look up at the sky. Instead, he kept his head bowed, looking down at his own feet. Rather than lift his arms up to the sky, he used them to beat savagely upon his own chest—bruising and hurting his own body—as if to expunge from his very beating heart *poisons* he knew to be lurking therein!"

"As well he should..." an official muttered.

"Yes!" I agreed, continuing, "And rather than speaking in a resounding, reverberating voice, as did the Pharisee, his words came out as an agonized, harsh *whisper*. His prayer was barely audible to anyone else. But he spoke with such



*intensity* of emotion that even the Pharisee could make out his anguished words from across the courtyard.”

I paused, letting the situation gel in their minds.

“So, what did that traitor say?” one of them asked dismissively, eager for us to finish and move on.

“Just that!” I replied. “You hit the nail on the head, Sir! The tax collector, crying tears of shame, said this: *‘I am a wretched sinner, Lord! I daily do terrible things against others. My tax-collecting job for our Roman oppressors shames me and my whole household. But I have to support my family by working some job and this is the only thing I know. I am a weak man, Lord. I am not worthy to stand within this magnificent Temple, nor in the presence of your Holy Servants. I certainly don’t compare to that righteous Pharisee over there at the other side of the courtyard.’*”

“At least he was honest,” another official laughed.

“Indeed,” I agreed, continuing... “And he cried aloud: *‘I AM A SINNER, AND ONE OF THE WORST! Neither have I any great, magnificent deeds of Holy Duty to bring before you as I heard from that noble Pharisee. I make too little money to donate much to the Temple. I’m barely able to fast just one day per year. There is no goodliness in me at all, Lord. I am a weak vessel, bereft of any merit to boast of my own deeds!’*”

“At least that unclean evildoer knew enough to confess his sins,” an official smugly remarked to the others, “though I don’t know about that part of being poor? Tax collectors in our town are quite wealthy!”

“Well, it turns out his heart wasn’t in his job,” I explained. “Instead of charging huge rates to anyone in business and then skimming off the top, he charged them a reasonable amount. He took nothing from those who couldn’t afford it. He even made up the difference for those on the brink of default, paying out of what he should have taken for his own family. Thus, he barely made any profit at all. Instead of seeking to control and rape his own people for his own pleasure, he was the rare tax collector that behaved honestly, in a godly fashion.”

That gave the town officials some pause. They vaguely sensed that, somehow, I was impugning *them* by my praise of the honest tax-collector!

“And, yes, he was indeed a sinner,” I hastily continued, reassuring them that the tax-collector was the unrighteous “villain” of the story. “And then the man fell upon his knees on the hard stones of the courtyard floor,” I continued. “His robe was torn from the force of his collapse. Blood gushed out onto the slabs of rock from cut flesh. But he didn’t even notice his wounds because he was so convulsed with shame. However, he managed to continue his prayer. It was anguished and searing...”

I paused for dramatic effect, knowing that everyone within earshot was hanging on my every word, particularly the town officials.

Again, I looked up at the blue sky, acting the part of the tax-collector: “And he said to God: *‘Oh, dear Lord God of Reality. I know that I don’t deserve it. But, still, I beg for Your mercy. I know that I am fully guilty and well deserve the wrath of Heaven to fall upon me. But I beg You to take pity on my wretched estate.’*”

“Ah, to forgive his sins, no doubt,” an official nodded knowingly.

“Not really,” I continued my story. “He said this: *‘Help me do Your Will, whatever that may be. Take me in the way that You would have for me to go, even if it’s not what I want. Help me to somehow do my part. Help me have the courage to change my life for the better. Use me as You wish. I am Yours!’*”

The officials looked confused. This was not what they expected...

“This was his plea,” I continued, softening my voice so the people had to strain to hear me. “And his prayer continued thusly: *‘I know I’m not worth much. But everything that I am and have is Yours to do with as You want. Let me have the great honor, dear Lord (sob)... after having done so much evil which I know disgusts and repels You... that in some small way I now might please You and make You happy... Amen,’* he gasped as he struggled to his feet and staggered

away out of the courtyard. Even after he was gone, the others in the courtyard could still hear him loudly sobbing and beating his chest.”

There was a moment of silence as the officials looked at each other, growing more and more confused.

“In a way, he was brave to admit his unworthiness so publicly,” one of them finally shrugged. “So, what of it?” he irritably asked me.

“Well, I should tell you that the Pharisee was still on the other side of the courtyard, signing autographs to his adoring fans. He *laughed* as the tax collector stumbled away,” I continued.

I paused again, looking at the officials expectantly. “Have you any pity for the sinner in this story?” I mildly queried. “He certainly confessed his sins!”

“Too little, too late,” another official sadly concluded, shaking his head in dismissal.

“These sinners can indeed be passionate,” another official sighed. “If only they would fulfill their Godly duties, they might actually atone a bit for their failings. That tax collector should have given up his job, done penance, and dedicated himself to the work of the Temple or local synagogue. Only then could he have found a measure of redemption.”

Yet another official—one of the oldest with gleaming white hair—now spoke for the first time: “Passionate words are just that, hot air! Nothing more! A condemned man being led away to his execution always speaks with passionate regret of his crimes. Likewise, this man in your story lamented his fate, but did nothing to atone for his sins. It is by our outward actions that God judges us, not the ephemeral emotions of the heart!”

My disciples looked at each other knowing. They’d heard me many times wax eloquently on the “permeability” of our hearts...

“Hmmm...” I thoughtfully mused, considering their answers. “Well, perhaps I should now tell you the *end* of the story?”

“There’s more?” one of the officials asked impatiently, eager to return to his “more important” duties. He clearly

thought that running off some wandering beggar preacher and his band of smelly outcasts was a waste of his precious time.

“Only a bit more!” I assured them. “Here then is the conclusion of the story: GOD LOOKED DOWN UPON BOTH OF THE TWO PRAYERS AND PRONOUNCED ONLY *ONE* OF THEM JUSTIFIED!” I yelled in their faces.

Startled, they looked like they were about to run away from me and my now-threatening group of ruffians!

“Well, of course!” the older high official answered. “That wonderful Pharisee was accepted into God’s inner court, while the filthy sinner was cast out. How is this something to marvel at? This isn’t an interesting story at all. It’s quite predictable and mundane!”

Disappointed that I’d given them nothing of value, they turned to leave, excepting us to do likewise...

“Wait!” I called out to them. “That’s *not* what happened at all. In fact, you have it entirely backward!”

They stopped, turned back, and coldly confronted me.

As high officials, they definitely had the authority to call in the local police, or even request Roman troops to put down troublemakers! I saw they were getting ready to send a servant to bring in enforcers to eject or arrest us for insulting them in such an obvious manner...

“Please hear the interesting, useful, and *final* conclusion!” I smiled at them, soothing them. “It was the *tax collector* who was justified while the Pharisee was *not!* That’s the end of my story. Do you see the point?”

They glared at me, refusing to answer.

Then the old man with the white hair could not contain his anger any longer.

“How *dare* you insult our intelligence and religious authority in this way?” he barked at me. “God does not justify sinners, let alone one that hurts God’s people as a collaborator to the Roman occupiers. Your story is outrageous!”

“Or... is it?” another of the officials mused, stroking a long goatee that hung imperiously from his thin chin.

“What are you saying, Elias?” another asked sharply, momentarily perplexed.

“I also see what the preacher is saying,” another suddenly agreed, grinning despite his normally dour outlook.

“He’s insane!” another spoke up. “He’s speaking heresy! God has no part of sin. Only a sinless, pure, obedient servant such as that impressive Pharisee can stand justified in God’s sight!”

“Certainly!” another answered. “And that’s the ‘trick’ to the preacher’s story. Hah!”

“But I don’t understand,” the first speaker “huffed” in confusion.

“Don’t you see?” the other explained. “That righteous Pharisee had no need of justification because he was *already* completely justified and pure in God’s sight! God did not ‘pardon’ the wicked tax collector. The meaning of ‘justification’ is forgiving all sins, welcoming into your presence, and granting salvation. God ‘justified’ the *statements* made by the tax collector concerning *himself*. God agreed that the man *was indeed* a filthy, condemned sinner!”

“Ah!” the other nodded. “I see our point. You’re saying that this story actually condemns the sinner by drawing a stark contrast to the Holy Pharisee? God did not take pity on the obnoxious, whining pretender?”

“Yes!” the other man joyfully nodded. “In like manner, any of these phony, bothersome preachers that might wander into our town in the future, will see themselves in that miserable sinner and slink away in embarrassment. While we would be careful not to overtly offend them, there’s no need to make a big fuss or trouble ourselves calling in the police or outside soldiers... all by telling them this clever story!”

I politely bowed to their collective “wisdom.”

“You religious authorities are obviously worthy and noble,” I lavished praise on them. “I’m just happy I could do something that would make your true status ‘crystal clear’ to all those strangers who may encounter you in the future!”

They gratefully strode forwards and actually shook my hand!

“Just remember, though,” I cautioned them, “you must tell the story exactly as I’ve given it to you. If you change anything, the people trying to bother you—upsetting your thinking,

community, and connection to God—will suspect you are trying to fool them. But if you relate to them exactly what I've told you, then they will get the message clearly. They will understand what's going on here in your town, without any confusion at all!"

"Yes, we will!" they promised as I and my group turned to leave. "We will tell the story exactly as you've told it to us. Thank you for not bothering us further and for giving us a good means to stop others like you from bothering us in the future!"

As we walked out of earshot, I expected my disciples to break down and roar with laughter. But they were uncharacteristically subdued...

As we continued to wearily struggle along the path past that town, our aching muscles complained at having to continue onward. It was another long walk to reach the next town. On an empty stomach, our rations having run out, we were in for a long trudge.

James turned to me, sadly: "Jesus, are they doomed?"

I answered him: "Everyone that tries to make of themselves more than they really are will be humbled by God. But everyone that is honest before God, recognizing the full extent of his or her own unworthiness—no matter how many times they've failed God—will be raised *up* by God."

"So, God will exalt the humble," James summarized, "and *crush* the proud!"

"Of course!" I answered, firmly but grimly. "The proud, after all—*particularly* those that seek to be such from a position of religious authority—attempt to make *themselves* God! It is beyond heresy. It's just a sad, sick joke. It's like a tiny ant pretending to be a human."

"So, nothing we do—either good or bad—matters?" John said, walking at my side, clearly confused.

I replied in a calm and resolute voice: "What we do in this life, John—whether to deny evil impulses or to do Godly deeds—stems directly from the *state of our hearts*. If our hearts are wide-open to God, then we cannot help but deny evil and do that which is worthy and good. That noble compulsion comes from hearts that are motivated and exulted by

God's Light. But if our heart is closed to God, even partially, then we could live the purest life, do mighty deeds in God's name, and even give our living bodies to be burned upon the altar as offerings to God... and it would all mean *nothing!* Do you see what I am saying?"

"I do, Master," he answered. "You are telling us that true humility is *not* how we outwardly appear to our fellow *men*, but how we respond to God. No matter what 'great' things we achieve by our own strength, they pale into insignificance next to the Power of God. Our only hope lies in the mercy of the Lord."

"Yes!" I congratulated him. "You are so right! We could offer THE ENTIRE WORLD as a burnt offering to God... and that wouldn't even be visible in the context of the Lord's magnificent Creation! We *think* we're so mighty. Yet, in reality, we are but ants hopping up and down in triumph upon our little anthill. In contrast to us, God is a mighty giant obliviously striding past us... or, in pity, bending down to lift us up to impossible heights!"

Peter, walking behind me, chimed in: "So... true humility is realizing that at our very best we're but squalling infants in God's loving arms?"

"There's hope for you yet, Peter," I joked, smiling back at him.

I felt great satisfaction at his insightful comment. I looked around in appreciation at all my bone-weary but determinedly trudging disciples. They'd deliberately chosen to change their minds from derisive laughter to pursuing serious insights.

"There's hope for all of you!" I happily concluded. "I may yet make you into *real servants*, willing to mutually help each other however is needed."

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## Section 4:

# WASHING EACH OTHER'S STINKY FEET

(See *John 13:1-38*)

*How, then, does this* “Godly Humility”—so well exhibited by the Tax Collector—come into one’s heart?

First of all, it’s not easy. It’s contrary to your human nature. It takes work. It requires specific, deliberate action. And it is most spectacularly revealed during the most irksome of circumstances. Indeed, how you deal with “difficult” people reveals your true character.

Let me give you another Example...

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A couple days after my final public speech at the Temple, I was gathered with my main male disciples in a secluded location to have the Passover supper. It was a small, gloomy, upper room... safely cloistered away from spying eyes. Only a small, high window let in some outer light. No one on the street below suspected that I and my twelve apostles were there. A tier of candles lit the room with a flickering, yellow light.

It was a very solemn affair.

Not only was it a High Holy Ceremony... it was a parting of the ways. I knew all too well that later that very evening, in the Garden of Gethsemane, I would be captured by Roman soldiers. The next day I would be viciously and bloodily whipped within an inch of my life. Following that torture, I’d be nailed to a cross, hung up between heaven and earth, writhing in agony until I died.

Yet that relatively brief physical torture would be only the start of my incredible suffering. Following my physical death,



I would then take upon myself the cosmic punishment for all the conscious sins of humanity over all its many years of existence. I would stand in front of my Father burdened with every sin ever committed by humans. On my shoulders would be every evil, past and future, done by every person that had or would ever live. My soul would be saturated with the worst MURDERS, RAPES, DECEIT, CHILD-ABUSE, WIFE-BEATINGS, ROBBERIES, WARS, CRUELITIES, LUSTS, ARROGANCE, HURTFUL PRIDE, GOD-HATING ARROGANCE, SATAN-LOVING DEBAUCHERY, SELF-CONSUMING ADDICTIONS... and *everything else that generated pleasure from hurting others!*

And then I would be rejected from God's Presence. I'd be thrown into that black, empty, eternal Abyss. I'd be a castaway where no Light penetrates, no Warmth permeates, no Hope lingers...

So, sitting there at that table, food spread out around us, with my disciples methodically chewing, drinking, and nervously mumbling to each other—I knew it was the last day of my life.

Tomorrow, I would be dead.

Of course, my disciples did not know this.

Indeed, *some* of them were excited and expectant, thinking that the mounting tension in Jerusalem meant that the *Kingdom of God* was about to arrive! In response to my direct confrontation with the Jewish Religious Leaders at the Temple—stirring up the people up to a feverish pitch—my apostles were convinced that God would surely intervene, restoring the Kingdom to Israel!

Then, according to their anticipatory imaginings, I'd be crowned their triumphant earthly King. They'd, of course, be my Chief Administrators. Our new religious and secular elite would replace the corrupt old ones. My twelve Apostles would help me rule the people in power and magnificence. Then they would reap God-endowed security and wealth!

But most of my disciples, however, felt in their bones that something *terrible* was about to happen...

They weren't blind. They'd seen the intense hatred of the Priests, Scribes, and Pharisees focused onto me at the Temple.

They'd heard the explicit calls for my death. They felt the growing tension throughout the city.

The threats against me were not idle. They were very real. Plots were afoot. Roman troops were being called in from the countryside. They were being positioned throughout the city, apparently to preempt anticipated riots.

It was a dangerous situation.

And vile, stinking *venom* was spreading through the throngs of common people within the city. Even those individuals who just a few days before happily sung "Hosannas!" in my name—as I humbly rode into Jerusalem sitting on the back of the colt of a donkey—were now silenced. They were scared, hiding in their homes. They were afraid to venture out least they be identified as my followers. Others were visibly angry at us, denouncing my close disciples, calling them "troublemakers" and worse.

In addition, my final message to the crowds in the Temple resonated with many in the city. Word of my last decrees had spread like wildfire. No longer was I widely considered the long-awaited Jewish Messiah—but, by many, as a *pretender* intent on bringing ruin and misery upon them all!

Yes, many of those who'd rejoiced at my new teachings now saw me as a Destroyer, dragging the Jewish people against their will to a terrible fate! Sure, they'd like to see the haughty Pharisees and Scribes knocked down a notch. They'd love to have the Romans tossed out on their rear ends. Most of all, they would rejoice at the Jewish Kingdom being restored, imposing Mosaic Law on the rest of the world!"

Yes, they thought that all these things would bring personal prosperity throughout Jerusalem. But they had no thought of changing their own habits, denouncing the compromises they'd made with the secular world, or putting at risk their own personal comfort. No, it would all come with no cost at all...?

Hah! The Roman troops filling Jerusalem said otherwise...

Many of the people who had chanted joyfully in support of me during my mass-rallies, would now be happy just to be rid of me! Everyone could see the gathering storm. No one

wanted to be caught in its onrushing path of destruction. Few would cry if I were killed...

Plus, there were the radicals that could not see reason or reality. They latched upon me as their symbol of resistance. They were happy to use me as an excuse to torch the city, regardless of the consequences! Though small in numbers, they were agitating throughout Jerusalem. They were using the “Kingdom of God” as an excuse to recruit for mass rebellion against the occupying Romans!

And yet others of the people were peacefully marching, gathering at the Temple, praying together, crowding the courtyards in support of my liberating Presence and Message. Yes, they were the *enlightened few* who, even yet, truly loved me. They saw the transcendent Truth in my teachings and actions—sincerely wanting to transform their lives for the better!

But they were the most vulnerable of all, who in response to my pleading had opened their hearts fully to God. I was determined to protect them at all costs. I was not going to allow my capture to be an excuse by the Roman soldiers to “teach the city a lesson.” My surrender would have to be done quietly, away from public events. And my secluded humiliation loomed right in front of me. In just a few hours, my final ordeal would begin...

So, I was at that moment fully determined, totally prepared, and completely committed—yet also *trembling with fear!* Yes, I admit I was afraid. After all, I was still fully human. What lay before me was so hideous and horrible that any sane person would tremble. I knew what I would have to endure. It loomed in front of me. Seething within my body, mind, and spirit were every human emotion you would experience knowing the next day you’d be brutally executed. My mind was in severe turmoil. The “hour” I’d repeatedly warned my disciples about was here—and I dreaded facing it!

I must have seemed like a *ghost* to my disciples as we all reclined there around the small table in that secluded upper room. Yes, I was physically present, but it was obvious to all that I was also elsewhere. Uncharacteristically, I said nothing,

responding to no queries, taking no food or drink. I just sat there, staring wide-eyed into the distance.

Certainly, I knew without a doubt that, eventually, on the other side of my unimaginably horrendous ordeal was Glory with my Heavenly Father. But in order to gain that exalted joy, I'd have to endure such physical, mental, and spiritual PAIN—for such a vast stretch of space and time—it was *more than any human being could even imagine!*

As bad as the torture and brutal execution on the Cross would be... that would pale in comparison to what I would subsequently endure in the black Abyss. No, I'd not linger there for just a few earthly days. To fully pay the cosmic price for all of mankind's sins I'd be there—suspended outside of Earth's space and time—for an *eon of eons!* How I'd be able to endure that vast ocean of burning isolation and separation from the Lord... I had no idea.

So, my visage was one of carefully controlled calm containing a raging, apocalyptic *hurricane!*

My twelve apostles and I were sitting in an upper room, huddled together around a cramped table, leaning on low couches, our feet splayed out away from the table in the custom of the times.

“We should leave Jerusalem,” one of my disciples at the table muttered, to himself. He dipped some bread in a dish of gravy. He spoke just loud enough for the rest of us to hear. “We should sneak out of town... at least until everything settles down.”

“Where are the servants?” another one complained, slamming a fist suddenly into the surface of the table, startling everyone!

It was Peter. He wanted his wine glass refilled. In the stress of the moment, he'd forgotten his previous vow of abstinence. But even the servants had left us to ourselves, afraid to be near us.

“Stop complaining!” another spat at him, uncharacteristically angry. “We're lucky to be safe and secure!”

“Oh, shut up...” Peter groaned, looking down bleakly at his plate.

It'd been a very hectic and terrifying day. We'd had to move quickly from one safe-house to another until we found the secluded room in which we now safely sat. Troops were searching house-to-house, looking to arrest us. The city was in an uproar!

Mobs were marching through the streets, threatening to riot. We could hear their chanting through the high window. Some wanted to help the Romans catch us. Some wanted to defend us to the death. Others were calling for everyone to take up arms and begin the "Righteous Revolution" in the name of the Messiah: "*Jesus the Christ, the Son of God!*"

Everyone was looking for me... either to make me General of the Rebellion Army or to kill me. And there I sat, stone-faced, reclining at the table in the small room with my closest followers. We were all bone-weary and exhausted. Our host at a previous house had allowed us to use his facilities. We'd been able to wash up before the Passover ceremony, as is required. But in hastily moving from that house to our present location—upon word of an approaching search party of Roman soldiers—we hastily scampered through the mud and the dirt of several back-alleys.

In our new safehouse there'd been no time to wash up before the Passover feast. Yes, we'd taken off our sandals to sit down to eat at the long table in the secluded room. But our bare feet were still filthy, itching, and nasty.

Everyone at the table was in a prickly, extremely agitated mood. And not only were their behavior and words jarring, I COULD HEAR EACH OF THEIR THOUGHTS. Though outwardly they gave me loving devotion, inwardly their chaotic accusations tortured me...

*"I'm way down at the end of the table! Sure, yet again I'm the furthest from the Master. When will I ever be recognized for my loyalty?"*

*"Will I be the Chief of Staff in the new Kingdom of God? I deserve it. The Master should choose me..."*

*"These others are worthless cowards. They've no strength at all. The Master must see that I'm the one true Defender of the Faith!"*

*“Why don’t those lazy servants come to serve us? If not them, then at least one of the lesser disciples should refill my glass! Is that too much to ask?”*

*“Next time I’ll get the seat next to the Master! I’ll push aside John. That John is just too nice for his own good. Nice people finish last!”*

*“Soon the Romans will grovel at our feet. Hah! They’ll be the ones running like scared goats through the mountainside, stepping on feces, not us!”*

*“The Master has come to the end of his rope. He’s gone too far. There’s no hope for the Revolution. It’s finished. The best I can do now is to cut my losses...”*

*“This is all getting to be too much. It was fun at first, even exhilarating! But now I’m just scared. How can I get out of this mess?”*

*“If this is the end, then God’s Will be done. I will stand with the Master no matter what.”*

Except for that sweet devotion at the end, everything else I was hearing made me sick to my stomach.

“QUIET!” I suddenly screamed-out, burying my head in my arms.

They all stopped what they were doing and looked at me with concern. They were shocked, abruptly ceasing their conversations. But their true THOUGHTS were all the louder...

To certify my sacrifice as being totally voluntary, my Father had put all worldly power into my hands. As I sat there, listening to the mental griping and petty complaints of my closest disciples—despite my prior teachings, yet again whining over who would be greater than the other—I knew I could cause anything to happen that I wanted. All I had to do was think of what I wanted, no matter how great or small, and it would occur.

I was sorely tempted to *vaporize* them all on the spot!

Indeed, that ever-present Tempter, Satan Himself, stood unseen by the others at my shoulder. He WHISPERED TANTALIZINGLY INTO MY EAR: *“Jesus, why do you put up with these fools? They’ll never learn! You’re wasting your time on them! Look at all you’ve done to teach them, trying to get*

*them to rise above their animal instincts. Yet they still wallow in their petty selfishness!”*

“They’re only human...” I muttered to myself. “They can’t learn if I don’t teach. Learning takes time...”

*“Why bother?” Satan laughed evilly. “They only see you as a means to move ahead in their own little spheres of influence. Even those few that have genuine affection for you have it because you’re so easy on them. Slap them down a few times for their insolence and that so-called ‘love’ will pop like a bubble!”*

“Love is the most difficult lesson to learn...” I protested quietly.

*“But your teachings from the Great Father fall on deaf ears!” Satan slyly protested. “Even for these your so-called ‘twelve apostles’ the ‘take-home message’ of your teachings is just a superficial glaze. Scratch their veneer of Godly Love and beneath it they’re just snapping dogs, biting and devouring each other!”*

“That’s not true. They’re just scared...”

*“Not true?” Satan laughed. “One of your so-called ‘beloved’ apostles tonight will throw you to your enemies for a mere handful of coins! You’ve failed, Jesus. Admit it! There’s no need anymore. You don’t have to sacrifice on their behalf. You NEED NOT GO to the cross for these worthless, feeble, ingrates! In fact, THEY should be punished, not you!”*

“I want to save them from themselves,” I whispered, my head still buried in my trembling arms.

*“No one faults you, Jesus,” Satan cunningly argued. “You’ve done your best to help them rise up above their own limitations. But they’ve rejected you. You should reject them! All Power is in your hands, is it not? Bring this pitiful little world to an end! Cause its sun to flare up! Incinerate this little sad place! This world of self-centered humans who ceaselessly bite and devour each other is a blight on the face of the Universe! They’re not worth saving!”*

“They have a spark of God in them,” I groaned. “I must help it grow and...”

*“—a noble sentiment!” Satan comforted me while cutting me off. “But there are many other worlds that would gladly*

*welcome you, eagerly accepting your noble teachings. Go there and preach to those other intelligent, receptive creatures. You don't have to suffer for these worthless worms oozing-about this tabletop. Our great Father's given you the choice to toss them in the junk-heap of the Universe if you wish! There are many other developing intelligences in the Universe who need you far more than these ingrates. Go where you're wanted!"*

"I'm not there, I'm here..." I weakly protested.

"True, our Lord did give you control of these particular creatures—but to do with as YOU decide best," Satan cleverly tempted me. "You don't have to let them nail you to their little sticks. You don't have to take upon yourself their awful punishment. You don't have to face the black Abyss. There's still time for you to just walk away, leaving them to their much-deserved fate. They don't deserve your help!"

"Despite their faults—they are my friends," I whispered. "I can't abandon my friends..."

"They will abandon you!" Satan rightly argued. "If you keep on your present path, before the night is over, they will ALL run away, leaving you to be tortured alone!"

"It's necessary," I groaned. "They have the potential for spiritual greatness and..."

"Do THEY want to do what's necessary to be truly 'great'?" Satan growled. "Or do they just want to USE you to make them painlessly 'great'? In their infinitesimal statures they consume themselves with schemes of all manner of evil. And it's just to be slightly higher one over the other by cutting down all others! Well then, let them discover how tiny and insignificant they truly are in the vast scheme of things. If anyone must suffer and die tomorrow, let it be them! Let this filthy city implode! Use your God-given power over all things here to put them in their place. DESTROY them utterly—or just walk away from their preening, pitiful pride!"

"Master?" John asked. He was sitting next to me at the table. He tried to rally me out of my funk. He touched me lightly on my trembling shoulder. "Are you alright? You're not eating anything and you look very pale and..."



Startled, I lifted my head and abruptly rose to my feet. I cut him off in mid-sentence with a dismissive wave of my hand, not allowing him to finish.

Satan sighed deeply as he faded away from my sight...

“One of you will *betray* me, turning me over to our enemies!” I shakily exclaimed. “But, in turn, I must give that person every chance to see the light. It’s not too late for him to change his mind, repent, and avoid his terrible fate!”

My twelve apostles looked at each other in confusion, thinking that the gathering tension of great events in motion had caused me to lose my grip on reality!

“Betray? ... But Lord! ... Not I! ... Nor I! ... How could that be? ... Never! ... We are your strongest defenders and friends! ... I would never!” they began babbling in denial to my assertion.

They were startled by my accusation, puzzled as to my meaning. They were used to my cryptic and startling teachings. They were thinking that perhaps there was a hidden lesson behind my apparently blunt accusation. Did I not really mean what I seemed to be saying? This had happened between us many times before, with my apparent words teaching an opposite meaning. Was this what was happening?

Peter was motioning frantically to John. John usually sat closest to me, to whom I usually was the most forgiving and lenient in regards to questions. Peter wanted John to ask me straight-out who it was that would betray me.

So, John spoke up: “Master, please tell us who you mean!”

I stood silently in place for a moment, thinking...

Then I answered: “It is the one who eats bread with me after I’ve dipped it in the broth.”

We’d all done this many times at common meals. So, my cryptic answer was factual, but not clear enough for them to take preemptive action to stop what likely would occur.

Then I inexplicably untied my belt, took off my outer robe, folded up the garment a neat bundle, then lay it to the side. The disciples at the table stopped eating or talking. They looked at me expectantly, not knowing what bizarre thing I was going to do next!

I walked over to the corner of the room where the servants had left some items. I took a large towel and wrapped it around my waist, tying it at the side of my hip. I lifted up a bucket of water, pouring some into a portable washbasin. Then I grabbed some small washcloths, soap, and a small brush, moving back over to the dinner table.

There I sat on the floor, next to the first of my disciples reclining at the low table. His bare feet were splayed out away from the table. Our gritty sandals weren't worn inside houses, so I didn't have to remove any.

Tenderly, I took one of his feet in my lap and began to wash and clean it. It was calloused, bruised, and mud-caked. We'd done a lot of walking during our short ministry, not just in the dash to our present safehouse. His foot was in terrible condition. I gently brushed it free of loose dirt, carefully washed it with water and soap, swabbing it thoroughly with my washcloths, and finally drying it with the towel wrapped around my waist. I paid particular attention to the grime caked beneath his toenails. I gently applied healing ointment to red cracks in his flesh. Then I moved to his next foot...

During this process, he and the rest of the apostles looked at me like I'd gone completely crazy. This was not even the job of a Jewish servant. It was such a menial, lowly task that only Gentile servants or the lowest servant in the household or even slaves would be told to do it. Occasionally—as an honorific—the host or hostess of a house would do it perfunctorily for a supremely important guest. But that was a rare event, more ceremony than an actually thorough, careful cleaning.

And here I was, going from one disciple to the next, taking the time to carefully and thoroughly wash each of their feet. Although none of them dared speak, the event was so startling and unexpected, **THEIR THOUGHTS WERE IN TURMOIL**, *pounding* into my mind!

I heard their bewildered thoughts inside my head: *“What is the Master doing? ... Has he snapped? Is this it? Has he gone completely mad? ... What does this have to do with one of us supposedly betraying him? ... Has he retreated from his fears and responsibilities by becoming a servant commanded and directed by others? ... Is this the end? Is he*

*preparing us for our death and burial after being murdered by the searching Roman guards? ... How can I get out of here? I can no longer follow someone that has so little regard for his own status! ... Surely this is not the Messiah, the King of Israel, that we imagined him to be! ... Oh, my dear Lord, what are you doing?"*

And then I got to Peter's feet.

He withdrew his stinking feet back under his body, hiding them.

"Your *feet*, Peter!" I commanded him, motioning weakly for him to stick them out.

"What, for *you* to wash them?" he queried, his voice breaking in disbelief. "Are YOU to wash MY feet?" he barked in horror.

"Yes!" I curtly replied.

I wearily motioned yet again for him to stick out his feet, this time more impatiently. He still refused to comply!

Then, more gently, I explained: "You don't know now what I'm doing, Peter. But later on, you will understand. So, give me your feet!"

"NEVER!" he thundered, shaking his big head vigorously back and forth in denial. "If anyone should wash anyone's feet here tonight, Master, it is *I* who should wash YOUR feet. As long as the world endures, you will *never* wash my feet!"

I paused, looking him dead in his eyes with a cold, steady gaze.

"Peter," I said softly, such that the other disciples had to strain to hear me. "*If you do not allow me to wash your feet right now, then you must leave this room immediately because you will no longer be my disciple!*"

Everyone sat in stunned silence at my ultimatum.

Suddenly Peter jerked his legs out from under him, bowing his big hairy head. He stuck out his hands to me, palms up and spread.

"*Then not just my feet, Lord!*" he thundered loudly, startling everyone, "*—but my hands and my head as well!*"

I wearily laughed.

“Your smelly feet are quite enough, Peter,” I laughed, taking one of his big muddy feet into my lap. “Thanks for the humor. I needed that. I knew I kept you around for something!”

“I am unclean and unworthy,” he muttered with fierce sincerity.

“Don’t be so hard on yourself,” I sighed, trying to get my brush bristles under his long, yellowed toenails. “After taking a good bath, as we all did earlier at the other safe house in preparation for the Passover Ceremony, you are certainly clean enough. It’s just these pesky feet that keep tramping on the earth, collecting dirt everywhere! You know what I’m talking about, right?”

Peter nodded his head emphatically in the affirmative. Then he gulped... and admitted in a small voice: “No, Master?”

“Go ahead and finish your meal, all of you,” I commanded both him and the rest. “I’ve still a lot of feet to go, including one of you that despite our baths earlier is yet filthy from head to toe.”

At that, a tear leaked out of one of my eyes and ran down my cheek. It was hard to lose one to whom you’d tried to give your best—only to have him betray you in the worst possible way... But it was necessary.

The momentary lift to my mood provided by Peter’s antics was gone. In its place returned deep melancholy, a fatalistic fear, a gnawing determination to just get my terrible terminal sequence started. I was coming down the “home stretch” of my Mission—and it would *break* me into tiny, bloody, eternally screaming pieces!

My disciples looked at each other in confusion, but began to eat again as I’d directed, trying not to pay too much attention to my continuing, bizarre behavior.

Finally, having carefully cleaned and dried all the feet of my disciples, I returned the muddy washbasin to its place. I also put the stained washcloths and the soiled towel on their stand in the corner of the small room. Putting my clean outer garment back on, tightening my belt, I returned to my place at the table.

“So...” I slowly said, looking from one to the other of my twelve apostles. “Do you now understand what I have done for you?”

Having finished their meal, they sat staring back at me silently, perplexed.

Some servants crept furtively into the room, quickly clearing away the dirty plates, food dishes, and emptied jugs of wine.

“Well... *now* they show up,” Judas muttered half to himself.

“What’s that, Judas?” I stated sharply, pretending I hadn’t heard what he’d said.

“Nothing... Master,” he said softly, looking down at the table instead of at me.

“Come, now, my friend,” I gently encouraged him. I wanted him to reveal his true feelings for me. “Speak what you are thinking! We’re all friends here, aren’t we?”

He looked up from the table, his face drawn and tense.

His eyes were black pools of anger as he spat-out: “I agree with Peter’s initial reaction. The *lowest* of the servants should have washed our feet... While... the *Messiah*... should *not* be... washing people’s... stinking feet!” he grated, between tightly clenched teeth.

“Oh?” I calmly replied, tilting my chin upward a bit. I continued to stare unblinkingly into the depths of his dark eyes. “What would be a more acceptable behavior by ‘the Messiah’?” I asked.

Judas glanced around at the others, apparently trying to find support. But he only saw concerned puzzlement both at my continuing inexplicable behavior and his apparent defiance of my authority.

“Well...” he shrugged, the seething anger in his voice contained but still evident. “The *Messiah* would be... respected by all... sitting on the Throne of David... commanding great armies... with many obeying his wise orders... waited-on and served by many thousands of loyal followers... meeting out the *Wrath of God* on his enemies!”

“—but *not* washing the dirty, sore feet of his friends?” I concluded for him, raising my eyebrows in query.

He reluctantly nodded an assent.

“So, Judas says that I’ve just demonstrated to you what ‘The Messiah’ will *not* do when he leads his God-empowered people to bloody revolution, savage war, and brutal conquest!” I sighed to them all.

I was fighting to find enough internal energy to continue this necessary but deeply disappointing discussion. I was drained, not just by my impending ordeal but by everything we’d done in my three-year ministry. All my body wanted was to go to a bedroom and sleep. But my time had run out. There’d be no more rest for me until my cold, dead body was laid in its tomb...

The others were quiet, waiting for me to continue.

“So, according to Judas,” I relentlessly nailed-down his words, “what I gave you just now was a demonstration of *humiliation, subjugation, and failure*—that you are certainly *not* to follow! Does anyone disagree with the conclusion that Judas has set out before us so eloquently and clearly?”

I could see that most of them, indeed, *did* see the logic to the demeaning words of Judas. If not vocally, then mentally they agreed that I’d just made a complete fool of myself!

“*What about you, Peter?*” I called-out sharply, putting him on the spot. “You’re the one that tried to stop me from doing what I did! Do *you* now understand what I did for you?”

He gulped, scratching at his hairy head with a big paw of a hand. “Uh... you made my itching feet feel much better?” he guessed.

Peter looked down at his totally clean, almost-shining feet. He wriggled his stubby toes. His yellowed, long toenails flopped like little knives. Where before they’d been outlined with black grime, however—particularly embedded beneath each of them—now there was only white and pink!

“In fact,” he admitted, raising his bushy eyebrows in amazement, “they’ve never before been so clean!”

Again, I allowed myself a small smile.

“So,” I softly stated, “our noble friend Peter says that if I fail at the job of ‘Messiah’—then I’ve a promising career as a foot-cleaning slave?”

Peter gulped in consternation, tried to speak, thought better of it, and then joined Judas in looking steadfastly down at the top of the low table in front of him.

“*Does nobody here have the faintest idea of what I just did for you?*” I snapped in great exasperation, the lower lip of my mouth quivering with emotion.

The silence stretched on for a long time as I just sat and waited. I looking from one to the other. My gaze went completely around the table—falling on one, then the other, then another, so on and so on...

It was getting very tense and embarrassing.

Then John—thus far sitting quietly at my side during the present conversation—spoke up.

“Master...” he ventured kindly, “—you *demonstrated your love* for us!”

I reached out a hand to touch him gently on his cheek.

“Truly, my friend,” I answered, “you shall be the only one of my male disciples to go with me the last mile of the way. You will have a full earthly life, finally culminating in concluding my written testimony to the world. Thank you!”

Judas sat glowering straight ahead. He was imperceptibly shaking his head to each side in stubborn *rejection* of John’s words.

I put both my hands flat on the surface of the table and pushed myself to my feet, towering over all of them.

“*ARE YOU GREATER THAN ME?*” I thundered in my most-resonant, deeply projected, “speaking-to-thousands” oratory voice!

My powerful words *exploded* throughout the small room like new wine bursting from an old wineskin!

All around the table, my twelve apostles acted like I’d just slapped them in their faces. They winced, cowering from my harsh challenge! Some looked frightened, thinking that my loud words might be heard out on the street, alerting the searching Roman squads to our presence within!

“*Well?*” I insisted, leaning forward and putting the palms of my hands flat onto the tabletop.

I stared unblinkingly, with great intensity, into the eyes of each one of my closest male disciples.

“No Lord... Of course not... Not at all... You are the Master... We’re nothing compared to you!”

But Judas did not answer. That wasn’t surprising. But neither Peter nor John?

“Well, Judas,” I stated in a low, ominous voice, “What say you?”

He still sat in stubborn silence.

I stood up straight, slowly walking the few steps over to loom right behind him. I leaned forward, placing my strong hands on his shoulders. I tightened my grip until he winced.

“*Are you greater than me?*” I whispered into his ear.

Sweat sprang from his brow as he struggled to keep from crying out from pain.

“No... *no*, Master!” he lied, pulling away from me.

“Your words are accurate, Judas,” I grated between clenched teeth, releasing my iron grip on his shoulders.

“I see how things are...” he whispered.

“Then know this...” I icily predicted, “as your Master will fare on the morrow, so shall you. As I am raised up into the air and suspended—left there to hang between heaven and earth—so shall you.”

He said nothing, frowning. Sadly, I could feel his heart hardening. It was like an ocean freezing into an iceberg.

“As I become a thing of shame and derision, so shall you!” I continued with my terrible predictions. “As I am flung into the black Abyss, so also shall you be irrevocably judged! You think you can escape the coming conflagration, but you will be consumed along with me. And as my Father will reward me, so shall *yours*...”

Briefly, I saw Satan appear once again, only visible to me. This time he was beside Judas, patting him lightly on his head with a clawed paw...

Judas still didn’t respond.

“But remember that my utter abasement will be saved by *love*,” I now softly predicted. “Your arrogance, on the other hand, will be damned by *hate*. But there’s still time for you to let God enter into all the dark corners of your heart, my friend. Only then could you truly find what you seek: the *best* wealth



and lasting riches. *My reward is far greater than a mere thirty pieces of silver!*"

"Whatever you say, Master," he grimaced, clearly rejecting my sincere entreaty.

I saw that Judas' heart had turned to solid ice. It was no longer permeable. He was beyond my reach. Satan's seeds had indeed blossomed fully: producing an unalterable conviction that *he* knew what was best!

Judas was lost to me.

Sadly, I turned from him back to Peter.

"So, my outspoken friend," I softly asked, moving over to stand right behind him. I gently placed a friendly hand on his big, hairy head. "Are *you* greater than me?"

He flung both his large hands up to grab onto my hand there poised upon his head, holding it firmly in place.

"I am not worthy to even reply," he sobbed, tears streaming from his eyes. "I am but a worm in the presence of a raging forest fire! I am but an ant caught in the brilliant rays of the blazing Sun! I am..."

"—*enough beating yourself up!*" I firmly admonished him, stopping him in mid-sentence. I pulled my hands out from under his grasp and give him a playful slap on the side of his head. "Come, now, Peter—won't you please just answer my question?"

"**NO!**" he yelled as loud as I'd asked the original question. "I AM NOT GREATER THAN YOU, MY MASTER!"

Again, the others winced, looking about uneasily, as if trying to find a convenient escape route. Surely our loud conversations would be heard by the people out on the street? Spies were everywhere. The Roman guards could be here in seconds!

But most of my apostles mumbled added their accent to Peter, verbally certifying that they were not greater than me.

"Hhhhhmmmm..." I pondered, walking away from him. My hands were now clenched behind my back, mainly to hide their trembling. I was buffeted by intense emotions, including weakness and fear. "There seems, so far, to be unanimity in your verbal answers to my question, my friends. But we've not yet heard from everyone, have we?"

I walked a few steps over to stand right behind my apostle John. He was the final person who'd not yet answered my general demand...

He twisted his head, craning his neck backward to look up at me as I stood behind him.

"So," I spoke softly, looking down straight into his eyes. "Are you greater than me, John?"

He spoke with complete assurance and confidence: "I am neither more nor less than you, my Master."

I nodded in appreciation of his answer. I gained strength from John's astute grasp of my three years of complex teachings.

"Explain," I invited him.

"You lift me up to your exalted level, Master," he stated simply. "I *become* you... as *you* kindly debase yourself to become me!"

Wearily, but with greater inner peace, I returned to my place at the table. I slumping forward in exhaustion.

My hands that just a minute before had been grasping, slapping, and gesturing with precision were now clutched in cramped spasms. I put my hands down below the level of the table so the others might not see evidence of my physical deterioration. Truly, my ordeal had already begun...

"Let me tell you this plainly," I spoke distinctly and slowly. "You call me Master, as well you should—for indeed I am. If I then, your Master, wash your dirty, stinking feet... *is it not your duty and obligation to do the same to each other?*"

"Why?" Judas shrugged.

"*Why?*" I asked, amazed that even he didn't understand. "Because I've done it as an EXAMPLE to you: *for you in turn to do as I have done!*"

He abruptly rose to his feet, knocking the table a bit forward.

"*I'll never wash Peter's filthy feet!*" Judas snapped, thought better of it, then tried to apologize... "—that is, I'll be glad to call the appropriate *slave* to help him out... of course..." he trailed off lamely.

"*And I the same will never do such to Judas!*" Peter exclaimed in return, also lurching to his feet, his fists clenched.

“He doesn’t deserve for me to wash his feet! He’s so stingy with the coin purse we’d starve if we didn’t keep after him all the time to buy provisions. In fact, I suspect he actually *steals* from the purse! He...”

“I’LL NOT BE ACCUSED OF BEING A THIEF!” Judas yelled, putting up his own fists and advancing on Peter... “I AM THE ONLY ONE HERE WHO PAYS FOR WHAT’S REALLY NEEDED TO KEEP US ALL ALIVE! WITHOUT THE *BRIBES* I’VE PAID OUT TO THE ROMANS AND OFFICIALS, UNBEKNOWNST TO THE REST OF YOU, WE’D ALL HAVE BEEN KILLED LONG AGO! I DO WHAT’S NECESSARY AND...”

“—*SIT DOWN, BOTH OF YOU!*” I ordered, jumping up to quickly slam both of them back down into their places with superhuman strength!

Startled by my muscular display, they both sullenly glared at each other.

“...in fact,” Peter petulantly continued, “neither do any of the others here deserve for me to abase myself to the status of a lowly slave to serve them!”

“*You* should be *our* slave, Peter, you bumbling oaf...” Judas began.

“—and in that, you are absolutely correct, *both* of you!” I agreed, stopping them from speaking further. “Just as none of you, *particularly* you and Judas, ‘deserve’ what I did for *you*... certainly none of the others here merit *your* voluntary abasement! Yet both of you—for your insolence, arrogance, and disobedience—*should* be demoted to the humiliating status of slaves! This is what you both ‘deserve,’ to have no freedom of personal expression at all, living only to serve the will of others!”

That definitely shut them both up.

“I assure you all, most solemnly,” I continued, looking intently from person to person around the table, “that a servant is *not* greater than his Master. The ‘messenger’ is *not* superior to the one that sent the message. The student is *not* greater than his or her teacher. And thus, if *I* have stooped so low as to act as your slave, then you *must* do the same—whether you like it or not!”

There was a sullen silence. From long experience they knew not to debate vigorously against me. They'd lose any polarized argument. But they were still not convinced...

"Master?" John respectfully asked, raising his hand tentatively for attention.

"Speak, John," I allowed him.

"Are you instructing us now literally?" he politely queried. "Are you ordering us to institute a new ceremony? Should we periodically and ritualistically, in your honor, actually wash each other's feet?"

I grimly nodded at his insightful desire to clarify my wishes.

"Indeed, this will be a continuing controversy into the far distant future, John," I wearily sighed. "Yet you know best of all what I've taught these last three years concerning the dangers of rituals and ceremonies. Do you recall?"

"Certainly, Master," he replied. "You've warned us of their dangers. You've spoken fervently how the 'form' of rituals can quickly overtake their true Purpose. In this way, engrained patterns can kill true godliness. Thinking we've done our duty by going through the motions, we may then forget to put purpose into our hearts for subsequent actions. Do I understand correctly, Lord?"

"Quite so," I congratulated him. "And how else may religious rituals subvert their purpose?"

I, of course, knew the answers. But for my fickle apostles to hear them from own number had extra weight.

"Well, Master," John continued softly, "a new religious ritual may become an empty exercise with little benefit."

"What else?" I urged him.

"Also, rituals and ceremonies take up precious time when we might otherwise be working together to accomplish actual creative work for God," he continued. "Our scarce time for overt religion may be taken up entirely merely doing the same things over and over. Instead of progressing, we stagnate, or worse, go backward!"

"Quite true," I agreed. "What else?"

He paused for a moment thinking, before continuing: "The zeal of discovery, exercising our God-given talents, of helping

those in need, and the pride of good achievement—may all be lost to repetition and increased fascination with less and less meaningful minutiae.”

“*That’s all crap!*” Judas snorted in derision.

Although he’d been up to this time one of my more carefully spoken disciples, it looked like now, at the very end, he was “letting it all hang out.” Yes, this was what I’d invited him to do. There was no time left for pretending...

“Say your piece, Judas,” I mildly responded.

“God does not want us prancing about doing whatever we happen to feel like at the moment!” he barked at us all. “The great God of our Fathers is the *God of Order*, unquestioning *Obedience*, and fierce *Vengeance*. We dare not take one step outside of His Commands! When the *true* Messiah comes, we will follow His explicit orders to glorious *Conquest and Victory!*”

“—and with *you* as one of his Chief Generals?” Peter laughed at him. “You can’t even add up the coins in our collective treasury accurately! The pot is always missing what should be in it. And I don’t buy that excuse you just made of nobly paying out needed bribes. If you can’t even handle the responsibility of dealing honorably with our small monies, upon which we barely survive—how is it you think you could command an army?”

“The first thing I’d do is have *clowns* like you *executed* on the spot!” Judas snapped back.

Then, visibly controlling his anger, he retreated back into his regular, muted, suspicious, paranoid self. He continued, making an effort to sound more reasonable...

“I’m not trying to be cruel, Peter,” he semi-apologized. “I’m just being realistic! We are not going to change the world by being pacifists “attacking” sworn enemies with antics, lofty words, and protestations of undying love. They’ll just laugh at us as they put us to the torch!”

“The Master says that love...” Peter tried to debate him...

“*Love* gets us tossed to the lions, skewered with swords, or nailed to crosses!” Judas passionately claimed. “Anything other than *overwhelming force* by massive people-power is just idealistic, foolish, dangerous *nonsense!*”

“*It’s what the Master has taught us!*” John retorted, unable to keep quiet.

“Then perhaps our ‘dear’ Master should reconsider his positions?” Judas snidely retorted.

He narrowed his eyes as he turned to confront me directly.

I calmly met his ferocious grimace, looking unblinkingly back into his eyes. Finally, he pulled his gaze away. He glared again down at the surface of the table, retreating into his seething resentment.

“So, do you think my future followers should literally and regularly wash each other’s feet, John?” I politely asked him, pointedly ignoring both Judas’ and Peter’s tirades.

Before the point was lost to my twelve apostles, I wanted John to say what he really thought, not just parrot back my teachings.

“Yes, I think they should,” he nodded in affirmation.

With admirable compassion, he likewise chose to ignore the outburst by Judas and Peter. Instead of engaging the others, he astutely and respectfully spoke his comments in rebuttal of their angry words directly to me.

“Oh?” I encouraged him to speak further.

“What greater way would we have to remind ourselves of your amazing example, Master?” John thoughtfully continued. “I have no doubt that you could, should you wish, right now cause anything to happen that you desire. I suspect that God has given to you, His only begotten Son, power over all things! While you could just as easily direct us to conquer and rule the world—dictating to everybody where, when, and how to do everything—you instead nurture and stimulate us to teach ourselves. Bowing down to wash the feet of others is an astonishingly profound lesson. I, for one, would be happy to wash all the feet of all my fellow apostles, on a regular basis!”

Judas squinted at him in disbelief.

“What, to demonstrate that you are the *least* of us?” he asked in sincere astonishment and disdain.

I answered for John: “So, you just don’t ‘get it,’ do you, Judas? Have you been so long with me and yet not have the faintest idea of who I am or what I’ve done?”

A flicker of baffled puzzlement shot over his face before his stony mask settled solidly back in place. Again, he chose to look back down at the tablet in front of him, saying nothing.

“Lord!” Peter spoke up firmly. “If that’s what you want me to do, then I shall do it. But I *won’t* like it!”

“Yes, yes, Peter,” I nodded, allowing a faint grin to flash across my sunken-cheeked, now-pallid face. “I know you are faithful to me, as best you presently can be. I know that you will try to do with all enthusiasm whatever I tell you. But still, you’d *complain* and *grumble* and *moan* and *groan* at the indignity of it all! The poor person that had to have you washing his or her feet would go away *limping*. That person would have more bruised muscles, twisted tendons, and rubbed-raw flesh than before you started your task! But at least you now begin to bend your own selfish will a bit more toward God.”

He bowed his head, in full submission.

“And you, my dear friend John,” I said, turning back to him. “Will you now spend all your time doing nothing but washing the stinky feet of the crowds at your presentations—imitating my Example?”

He smiled back at me, with calm assurance.

“Certainly not, Master,” he softly answered. “I’ll also be helping your followers with their family problems, providing a nonjudgmental shoulder to cry on, restraining myself from taking deserved revenge on hurtful people, putting up with their many irritatingly ignorant acts, and carrying their burdens however *they* might deem truly useful. I will follow in your example, Lord, making myself into their loving *servant!* This is how I will deal with all these difficult, demanding people.”

“Again, I ask ‘why?’” I said, wanting everyone present to hear his answer.

“—*because you commanded it!*” Peter interrupted, pounding a big fist into the tablet several times in emphasis.

I lifted a trembling hand to motion for him to be silent. I could no longer control the shaking of my limbs.

“Well, John?” I asked again.

Tears welled up in his eyes. As he spoke, his voice quavered with emotion: “Because your Example wasn’t about

dirty feet at all, Lord. It was about how much you *loved* us! And if you, the only begotten Son of the Living God, would love us worthless creatures that much—then we should love each other in the same way. You haven't loved us with just lofty words... but with tangible, unmistakable actions. And those acts of love have been so *vivid* that nothing can deny their true motivation!"

"Yes, John," I replied, greatly pleased. "The beautiful teachings in the Holy Scriptures are the basis for learning. My and your words, stemming from the Mind of God, are compelling. But the only way the best Godly blessings will come to you as my followers, is when you actually put those teachings and words into tangible, 'customer-pleasing,' collective action. Otherwise, my friends, you will continually feel frustrated. Dealing harshly with difficult people will rebound upon you. In the back of your minds, you'll know that something's missing. Your walk with God will be sour and unhappy."

Judas looked like I'd just thrust a dagger into his chest. I'd accurately described his state of mind. But his resolve was not shaken. He would do as *he* felt best...

"Do you want to be blessed, happy, and envied by others?" I spoke loudly to all those throughout the safehouse, "*then do as I did to you... unto others!* I say this to you all, *don't* be like our resident sourpuss 'Devil's Advocate' Judas!"

Again, I turned my head to look directly at Judas as he resolutely continued to stare down at the surface of the table. Yet again, he refused to answer my direct accusation.

The rest looked like they wanted to beat him up. But I couldn't let that happen...

"I love you, Judas," I factually stated. "You need not fear opening yourself up to my love. If you will let others into the empty places in your heart, then your life will be much less lonely. Sure, it's dangerous. All humans are inherently imperfect, fault-ridden, and hurtful—much like our overly enthusiastic, bungling friend Peter. At one time or other, we're *all* 'difficult' people who irritate others. But God will help you to endure their faults, as they, in turn, put up with yours!"



I saw tears glistening in his narrowed eyes. Was I finally reaching him?

I continued, my voice gentle and reassuring: “Quite paradoxically, only *then*, Judas, can you find the *best* security and joy—by letting down your guard and engaging with their dirty little stinking problems! And it need not be a disappointing, dutiful, ‘mission’-driven drudgery. Instead, it can be an *explosion of productive excitement*. You fully exercise your particular God-given talents not by giving orders, but when you help others do the same! Serving others isn’t just about washing their dirty feet. There are thousands of other ways that would provoke delighted ‘thanks!’ This is what you get by exercising your own, fascinating, Godly Creativity—not just for your own selfish benefit, but helping others to do the same!”

Judas looked incredibly conflicted, as if a terrible war were being waged in his skull. Those closest to him at the table cringed back, fearing his *head was about to explode* all over the table in front of us! His feverish eyes were literally bulging out of their sockets. But he firmly closed his eyes, took a deep breath, then looked up—again rigidly controlled, stone-faced, and unresponsive.

“*Ahhh...!*” another disciple down the table suddenly exclaimed, wonderment in his voice. “Master, I ‘get it’! It’s like a mother changing the loaded diaper of her little, bawling baby!”

“Yes, yes!” another spoke up enthusiastically. “And seeing the good it does for the baby—how peaceful it gets when it’s cleaned, the baby thriving, the returned love from the little child—makes that good woman who was so tender toward her crying, kicking baby... happy! She is indeed greatly blessed. Others look at her with envy at her loving relation with her beautiful, happy child!”

“Very well said,” I answered in appreciation to them both. “Someone else, however, might take that squalling, irritating, totally selfish, poop-maker and just *toss it out into the street*—but *not* its mother...Why?”

Yet another apostle that had not before replied said: “Because she knows that the baby is part of her. They are one! It came out of her. It *is* her. They are the *same* flesh and blood!”

“And so are *you*,” I said, pausing to take a deep, steadying breath. “I want you all to listen to me now *very carefully*.”

I paused, wearily smiling at each of them in turn.

“I’m about to leave you,” I stated matter-of-factly.

“No... Never... You can’t...” shocked responses spontaneously burst-out around the table.

I held up a hand, stopping their protests.

“You will be frightened, confused, fragmented, and scattered,” I softly continued, my voice trembling. “But you can survive the storm... *if you cling tightly to each other*. In order for you to maintain your connection to each other in your storm of terrible confusion—especially when you see the person next to you behaving at his worst—you must see *yourself* in that person!”

“What are saying, Master?” Peter asked, tears now pouring from his eyes.

“You must have a love for the irritating, misbehaving person next to you that goes beyond even that of a mother for her baby!” I smiled kindly at him. “Yes, Peter, I’m saying that you must regard *even Judas* as your misbehaving but beloved child. Then *I* will cause *irrational* love to blossom in your hearts. I shall do so—as John stated—by *lifting you up, infusing myself into all of you, and making all of you into me!* And in this way, we will all become ONE!”

My final word rang throughout the safehouse.

They were shaken to their cores, all except one...

“So... Master...?” Judas spoke in a low and carefully controlled voice, “—am I to correctly conclude that you would have us all become suckling babies or diaper-changing mothers?”

“Would that be so bad?” I kindly replied.

“Surely at this perilous but opportune moment—when all the religious world is gathered in Jerusalem, when the people are on fire with your teachings, when the corrupt religious leaders are on the defensive,” he answered carefully, glancing furtively at the others there at the table, “—we need dedicated fighters, skilled politicians, effective organizers, and strong leaders... *NOT* weak, crying *babies* or family preoccupied, nursing *women!*” he spat in disgust.

I could see that despite my previous impassioned speech, some were now leaning toward agreeing with the measured, harshly critical words of Judas. There were nods and whispers of assent around the table. Truly, fear and lust for power can easily overcome fuzzy notions of “love.”

“People need direction, Master!” Judas fervently continued, sensing his advantage. He leaned forward and spread his hands out on the table. “My companions here are much less sophisticated than you think. You entertain them with intriguing questions... for which they neither have answers nor the desire to consider! Most here in this household are uneducated, simple folk. They are willing to have the Priests, Scribes, Pharisees, or even you tell them what to do!”

“They are not stupid, Judas...” I coldly replied.

“Maybe not!” he shot-back at me. “But they yearn for a strong leader to follow, Master! In these dangerous times they yearn for the prophesied *Messiah!* They don’t want a ‘crying savior’ preaching complicated abstractions. *They want someone to organize them, drill them, point them where to attack, and lead them to Victory!*”

Several more of my disciples seemed intrigued, even swayed by Judas’ arguments. Yes, this was the unspoken dark undercurrent to my mission, motivating my most rabid followers. But now, at the last, Judas dared to bring it into the open...

Why was this so hard? I recalled Satan’s recent insidious arguments to me. Was the Great Deceiver correct? Should I just leave this evil, selfish world? But no, my Heavenly Father had given me a task. I would accomplish it...

“I hear what you are saying, Judas,” I shrugged. “But that’s the past. You attack and kill your enemies. You dominate the ‘lesser’ people. You take power, dethroning those who came before. And to make all the blood, mutilation, thievery, destruction, and evil acceptable—you say ‘God wills it!’ But that *isn’t* our Heavenly Father and indeed never was! Moses operated within a tribal mindset. *I* am something completely new and different. God sent me to move you savage, selfish humans away from your animal instincts—into a new way of thinking!”

Judas straightened up, folding his arms together.

“Different is not always better...” he muttered, seething with indignity at my words.

A partially eaten loaf of bread was still on the table, not yet removed by the servants, which I’d gestured to be left behind. I reached over and took it in my hands, tearing it in half. Then I contemplatively held one hunk in each of my hands.

I reached over and dipped each piece into a remaining filled dish of savory broth.

“Would you eat with me, my friend?” I invited Judas, holding out a piece of bread to him.

Suspiciously, he silently reached over and took the offered piece.

Together we started chewing our pieces of bread.

*It was absolutely delicious!*

I’d not eaten anything for quite a while. I’d been fasting. What with the intensity of my constant teaching I’d allowed my physical strength to ebb. I’d been obsessed at reaching everyone possible with my message before the end. Plus, our furtive movements to stay one step ahead of the searching Roman troops. Plus, the crushing knowledge of my impending execution. And most terribly, the knowledge of the subsequent cosmic penalty I’d have to pay in full... Weighted down by all this, I’d neglected my own health.

So, I drew great strength from that substantial piece of warm, nutritious, chewy, broth-flavored bread!

“Ummmm...” I sighed happily, greedily swallowing down the last of it.

I looked over at Judas, who was obediently nibbling on the edges of his piece of bread. He’d just previously finished eating a large amount of food at our group supper. Obviously, he had no need to *savor* the hunk of bread, as did I. But he, definitely, was consuming some of it.

“Do you not now feel closer to me, Judas, having eaten from the very same loaf?” I tenderly asked.

I wanted with all my heart for him to see the error of his own convictions. It was still not too late!

“What... do you mean... Master?” he said softly, his eyes narrowing even further than his normally suspicious squint.

“We are eating, communing, and talking *together*,” I patiently explained. “We are gathered here around this wonderful table celebrating the salvation of our Israelite ancestors from *slavery*. We are putting into our minds, bodies, and spirits the very same nourishing substance. And by eating not just the same meal but even the very same loaf of bread, we are doing *more* than just sharing a meal. You and I are drawing closer to each other by incorporating into our bodies the very same substance. It’s becoming a part of your and my bodies. In this way we physically draw closer and closer to each other. We are building our living bodies out of the same material. We are ‘breaking bread’ together. Can’t you see this? You’re doing it right now!”

Judas stopped his chewing, swallowing hard. He opened his hand. Pointedly, he *dropped* the remaining hunk of bread onto the table.

It fell with a faint “thud.”

I could not hold back a sob of regret.

Without another word to me or anyone else, he rose from the table, turned his back to us, and walked toward the exit of the small room.

“*Judas!*” I called out to him, my voice breaking with emotion.

Struck by the grief in my voice, he paused in mid-step, hesitating. He slumped forward, but did not turn back...

“What you do, do quickly!” I ordered him, my voice now hard and resolute.

He shuddered briefly, as if I’d struck him on his head with a thrown stone. Then he straightened fully upright, his back to us, and walked rapidly out of the room.

Immediately, it was night. The fading light from the high small window vanished. We were left in gloom. Perhaps it *was* time to institute a new ritual: one that could unite even my most difficult followers!

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**Section 5:**  
**EATING RAW FLESH**  
**AND DRINKING BOOD**

(See *Matthew 26:19-29*)

*We were left in the* flickering, yellow light of our few lit candles. It was as if Judas' abrupt departure had blown out the sun, leaving the world in gathering darkness.

The remaining apostles looked at each other in bewilderment. What was going on? They didn't know. Some thought I'd sent Judas to buy more supplies for the continuing series of religious celebrations, since he was the person who held our common money in his purse. Others thought I'd sent him to give coins to the poor and hungry on the streets. Indeed, many beggars wandered the streets right outside the house in which we hid from the Roman troops.

But whatever the reason of Judas' abrupt departure, everyone was shaken by his rudeness. It was a sign that things were going to pieces. Our precious *unity* was fragmenting before their eyes. His and the others' *difficult* behaviors were tearing us apart! The only thing that could stitch us back together was *common, overriding purpose* agreed to by all.

"You see by Judas' behavior, my friends," I said with sad resolution, "how much we need to be ONE in the eyes of God! True, everyone may not choose to partake. But you must continually remind yourselves of the need for unity of spirit! Sure, at times it's hard, even seemingly impossible to achieve. But you need not be concerned, for I will give you MEANS to do it. And that won't be someday far off in the future, but now!"

"How, Master, will you accomplish this marvelous thing?" Peter innocently asked.

The household servants had just returned, placing at the table all the final elements of the Passover ceremonial “feast.” This wasn’t the regular meal we’d just eaten. This was the formal commemoration of the Angel of Death having “passed by” the doors of Israelites still in slavery in Egypt. Then, as now, the Gift of Life came because the lives of the Israelites were protected by their doors painted with sacrificial *blood*.

“So, you want ceremony, do you?” I spoke firmly, my voice strong and cold.

I addressed myself to everyone, answering Peter’s question. The others at the table seemed startled by my transformation. Where before they’d seen me slumped-down and weak... now I sat upright, strong, and resolute!

“Yes, Lord,” John answered for them all. “We need *some* ceremony and ritual. There is value to knowledgeable, purposeful, inspiring ceremony,” he admitted, nodding thoughtfully. “There’s a time and place for everything, as you’ve often told us, Master. Some things need to be repeatedly drilled into our feeble minds for truth to endure, for us to remember, and for our spirits to stay focused.”

“Then ‘ceremony,’ it is!” I grimly agreed.

I reached out and took a large piece of the ceremonial, unleavened, flat bread that the servants had brought to us. It was dry and hard, charred black around its edges. I lifted it up in front of me, about to give the ritual blessing.

I closed my eyes and bowed my head. My apostles did the same.

“*Our Great and All-Powerful Father in Heaven,*” I prayed, my voice vibrating with sincerity, “we give thanks to You for this our salvation. When we were lost and alone You found us and brought us together. When we were sick and dying, You healed us and give us strength. When we didn’t know what to do next, You gave us Direction and Purpose. When we were discouraged and defeated—captured by sinful men—You gave us Courage and Determination. You brought our forefathers out of slavery, poverty, affliction, and aimless wanderings. And You will do the same for us today!”

I heard a rumbling “Amen!” repeated around the table.

“At this the appointed hour of great sacrifice, pain, and apparent failure,” I continued praying, “for poverty you will bring WEALTH unimaginable! For loss you will give us GAIN, surpassing anything the world has to offer. In our defeat you will give us VICTORY, even over death itself!”

I heard muffled confusion around the table. Poverty? Loss? Defeat? Death? This was certainly not the traditional Passover blessing...

“Dear Father of All, please give us the strength to do Your Will,” I continued. “Help us to do our part in being pleasing to You, whatever that may be. Supersede our selfish desires. Lead us in the way You would have us to go, that we might make You, our Dear Father, happy with us. Not our will be done, but Yours! And from this ceremonial flatbread, let our spirits find delicious nourishment, righteous strength, and UNITY!” I loudly barked, “punching” the word. “Amen!”

“Amen!” my apostles together shouted.

I opened my eyes and looked around. Yes, my apostles were not ready for the looming terrible defeat. But in the dark times to come, they would remember. They would think back to this moment. They would know that God truly was with us. They would know that no matter how dismal and awful the circumstance in the future, it would never be enough to stop them from truly succeeding!

“*I give you a new ceremony!*” I cried-out, ripping the words straight from my heart. “Based upon our venerated Passover Supper—I now give you this unleavened bread. Pass it around amongst yourselves. Each of you, break off a piece. We will eat it together, the same spiritual nourishment, keeping you alive even when the world is starving and dying!”

I gave the unleavened bread to John. He broke off a piece, passing it on to the next person in line, and so-on until everyone had a piece of the dry, flat bread in their hands. Coming back to me, I held the remaining portion back up in the air yet again, looking at it with fierce determination.

“THIS IS MY *FLESH!*” I loudly proclaimed.

There were “gasps” of astonishment, even revulsion around the table.



“I GIVE MY BODY AS A SACRIFICIAL OFFERING TO GOD!” I shouted, still holding up the remaining portion. “I GIVE EVERYTHING TO GOD, INCLUDING MY LIFE. BY MY VERY OWN FLESH, YOU MY FOLLOWERS WILL LIVE AND THRIVE! MY BODY IS BURNT UPON THE ALTAR FOR YOU. THAT WHICH REMAINS IS WHAT YOU MUST CONSUME. AND AS YOU EAT MY BURNT FLESH, I WILL PUT MYSELF INTO YOU. BY THIS SACRIFICE I GIVE MY YOU MY STRENGTH... INFUSE YOU WITH MY VITALITY... FEED YOUR SPIRITS AND KEEP THEM GROWING STRONG... GIVING YOU *SUPERNATURAL FUEL* TO STAY ALIVE, DEFEATING EVEN SATAN HIMSELF!”

Exhausted, I stopped speaking. None replied. A certain finality hovered over us. Everyone felt it. Everyone was somber, reflective.

“Thank you, Master,” John whispered at my side.

“*Eat it!*” I commanded.

They all put their pieces of charred bread into their mouths, quietly chewing, swallowing.

After a moment of quiet reflection, I reached out again and firmly grasped a cup. I filled it to the brim from a jug of red wine the servants had placed before us. Lifting it high up into the air I again bowed my head in prayer. All the rest at the table solemnly joined me, bowing their heads as well.

“DEAR GOD IN HEAVEN,” I again spoke fiercely and loudly. “WE THANK YOU FOR THE TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS YOU ALLOW US TO FACE BRINGING HONOR TO YOUR GLORIOUS NAME! WE UNDERSTAND THAT WITHOUT THE PAIN THERE CANNOT BE LASTING PLEASURE. WE KNOW THAT WITHOUT THE OBSTACLES WE WILL NOT RISE TO HIGHER GLORY. WE KNOW THAT THE MOST POWERFUL LESSONS WE MUST LEARN—IN ORDER TO COME INTO THY PRESENCE—COME ONLY THROUGH GREAT SACRIFICE.”

The room was growing cold. We had no fireplace to burn wood. But my fierce passion enflamed us all...

“WE KNOW WE MUST LEARN PERSISTENCE IN THE FACE OF UNCERTAINTY,” I continued my prayer, “STRUGGLING AGAINST MANY DIFFICULT SITUATIONS AND

DIFFICULT PEOPLE. WE KNOW THAT OUR APPRECIATION FOR YOUR MAJESTY IS FIRED BY THE TORTUROUS CERTAINTY OF AWFUL PHYSICAL DEATH. WITHOUT THE TEMPTATIONS, TORTURE, AND FAILURES OF THIS LIFE WE WOULD BE FOREVER DAMNED FROM YOUR MAGNIFICENT PRESENCE. HELP US TO FACE OUR TRIALS WITH FORTITUDE AND GRATITUDE!”

But it wasn't all just suffering and death. I had a much better final lesson to impart to my followers...

“HELP US TO THIRST FOR *TRANSCENDENCE*, NOT JUST MERE SURVIVAL!” I smiled, my tone abruptly changing from grief to joy.

“HELP US OVERCOME OUR ANIMAL INSTINCTS OF SELFISHNESS, COMFORT, AND DOMINANCE!” I rattled the walls with the intensity of my shouts. “HELP US TO LOOK BEYOND THE IMMEDIATE PHYSICAL TO THE AWESOME VISTA OF ETERNITY IN YOUR PRESENCE! GIVE US THE *VISION*, THE *AIM*, AND THE *MISSION* BURNED DEEP INTO OUR HEARTS—ONE OF FULLY EXPRESSING YOUR GLORIOUS CREATIVITY! LET US BE AN *INSPIRATION* AND *EXAMPLE* TO ALL. HELP US DEMONSTRATE BY OUR ACTIONS YOUR INCOMPREHENSIBLY VAST LOVE. *AMEN!*”

“Amen!” the men around me echoed.

Throughout the other rooms, I heard “Amen!” repeated enthusiastically.

“When I give this cup to you, I want for you to pass it from person to person,” I said, breathing heavily from my intense emotional exertions. “Each of you will drink from it, *all* of you! *You must each put the red fruit of the vine into your bodies because I TELL YOU THE TRUTH—it is not just grape juice... it is MY BLOOD!*”

Again, my apostles at the table gasped, horrified at my words! Yet I handed the cup to the person next to me, sternly indicating the he should drink of it before passing it onward.

“As often as you drink of this fruit of the vine, representing my blood,” I grimly repeated, as the cup was slowly passed around the table, each person respectfully and reverently taking a sip from it, “you will *remember* what I've done for you!

I not only lay my body upon the altar to be burned as sacrifice for you—I also allow my *blood* to be drained as the ultimate atonement for all your sins!”

It was a high-holy moment, a confession of my ultimate goal: making a way for imperfect, sinful humans to stand pure and whole before their God!

“Yes, I am taking upon *myself* the penalty that *you* so richly deserve,” I continued, my voice wavering. “For the terrible things you’ve done, the evil you’ve embrace, the animal selfishness you’ve allowed to cause so many terrible things happen... you are *damned!* In order to get selfish pleasure, you’ve hurt yourselves, harmed your fellow humans, and despoiled the beautiful world God has given to you. For all the petty wrongs, the terrible deeds, and the suffering you’ve caused—you deserve *death!* But *I* will pay the ultimate penalty for your sins, taking your place at your heavenly trial. I will die and be damned... for you!”

They didn’t understand. They couldn’t understand. They still thought I was speaking figuratively, not literally. But in that moment, they knew something immense was about to happen. That was enough...

“But don’t be sad!” I encouraged them. “Instead, be happy! I pour out my blood to pay the penalty for all your sins, in order to give you a *fresh start!* And I will *keep* you clean, such that when your time comes to stand in the very Presence of God Himself you will be clean—not just your feet but your soul. You can know this without a doubt because of the awful physical price you will soon observe. And beyond that physical demonstration will be another Cosmic Price so terrible it is beyond your comprehension! So, stand assured that my sacrifice on your behalf is not in vain. Honor it by this new ceremony. Do it as often as you gather for this yearly Passover Feast of our people.”

I paused, letting my words sink in.

“But... we’ve evaded the Roman troops,” Peter protested, frowning. “We can rally the crowds and...?”

“No, my friend,” I stopped him. “Here’s what you should do instead. By your resultant full commitment to God, make me happy giving this ultimate sacrifice. Don’t be obsessed

with my atoning for your sins. Rather, I want you to exult in your hard-won freedom. You're no longer under the restraining 'yoke' of the Old Mosaic Law. It was humiliating, brutal, and conflict-oriented. Now it's a brand-new day! You no longer need to yearly bleed rivers of blood from innocent animals, atoning for your past year of accumulated sins. I will pay the price, once and for all! My blood will fill up the entire world..."

James was distraught at my words. "But we're *winning*, Jesus. Your encounter with the Priests at the Temple was spectacular! Why do you talk like this? Why must we symbolically drink your blood? That's horrific!"

"True," I slowly replied. "But it need not be a horror. My blood will pour out of me like an ocean of love. All who need it can be immersed into it! None will be left out, entering my death through baptismal faith. My blood will be there for everyone, for all time present and future. It will wash you each day, keeping you clean from the many sins you daily commit."

"But your baptism already is for the forgiveness of sin and...?" another apostle began.

"*This* is what will fuel our baptism," I explained, cutting him off. "This is what provides that faithful act its continuing power. Then you will only need to acknowledge, regret, and ask help from God to daily rise above your own evil deeds. So, you need no longer fear being struck down by God for making some momentary mistake. You will be free to experiment with your own talents in good ways, embracing opportunities, attacking your own problems. You will be free from the penalties of honest mistakes. In this way you can innovate and improve, moving ever forward and upward. By my blood you can *improve* at bringing Glory to your Heavenly Father, moving ever closer to Him!"

"But..." another disciple gagged as the cup was passed into his hands. He looked at the deep red liquid in horror... "You say, Master, that we must *drink* your *blood*?"

The reality had just hit him.

"—and be *washed* in it!" I insisted. "Yes! You must eat my flesh and drink my blood! Don't you remember me on many occasions saying this very same thing to the crowds? I wasn't

kidding! I wasn't exaggerating! To enter into me you must go through the waters of baptism, being symbolically washed in my *blood*."

"This is a *merging*, isn't it?" John quietly added.

"Indeed!" I congratulated him for his insight. "All who want to be my disciple MUST BECOME ME!" I again shouted, startling everyone listening throughout the household. "I MUST BECOME YOU! AND YOU MUST ALLOW ME TO LIFT YOU UP! YOU MUST JOIN WITH ME NOT ONLY IN MY JOYS BUT ALSO IN MY SACRIFICE. YOU MUST BE WITH ME EVEN TO THE VERY END OF MY MISSION—whether right now, or in the days to come..."

I paused, trying to catch my breath, panting.

"But don't fear, my friends," I continued more softly. "I know that this is too much for you at this time to fully absorb. Today is only the start of a great worldwide movement, a *reawakening* of humanity's God-given spirit, a *new* way of thinking!"

Everyone looked at the cup of wine I was yet again holding high in the air. From it they'd all just drunk. They were astonished at the power and magnificence contained therein—just an ordinary cup!

"But Lord," another disciple sobbed. "What if we're not worthy? What if we let you down? I don't think I have the courage or strength to do what you seem to be asking of us!"

I laughed, bitterly. "Yes, few of you will continue with me now. Most of you, indeed, will fall away and..."

"*I won't let you down, Lord!*" Peter vehemently insisted, banging his big fist down on the tabletop. "You can count of me! Even if all the rest of these cowards desert you, I will never leave your side. If you must die, then I will die with you!"

"Will you, Peter?" I asked, softly. "I tell you truly, that before the rooster crows tomorrow morning you will completely disown me—denying that you ever knew me—not once, but *three* times... this very night!"

"Master!" he gasped, incredulous...

"But do not fear, my dear friends," I continued, as I solemnly set the cup back down upon the table before me, "My

blood is the seal of the *New Covenant* between man and God. My blood is shed for many for the remission of sins. My blood pays the price for all your humiliating failures. I'm even paying for your spiritual failure that's to happen in the next few hours. Yes, that includes even you, my dear friend Peter. So, be of good cheer. My cleansing blood brings you into a new, exalted state of being, in the Presence of the Almighty!"

"A new state of being?" a disciple queried, confused.

"Yes, my friends," I continued, now with increased energy as I looked to the future. Mentally, I leapfrogged over the awful cost onward to the great gain that humanity on planet Earth would accrue thereby. "No longer will you be mere lowly students being ordered about by arrogant teachers. No longer will you be children corralled by hovering parents!"

"But, Master, you just told us we must become children to be the greatest in...?" Peter frowned.

"There is a time for all things!" I exclaimed. "There's a time for childlike innocence and a time to put away childish things! In the coming Kingdom of God, you will finally be *mature!* You will be *grown up!* You will be *responsible* for your *own* lives. You will not need Priests to intercede for you, nor Scribes and Pharisees to lead you by the hand—for you will *each* be priests!"

"Us? But the Priesthood is a hereditary...?"

"No more!" I exclaimed, throwing my arms out wide. "You will each take your learning into your own hands and will instruct yourselves. You will make your own decisions. You will individually struggle with overriding Godly Principles applying the specifics of Godly Righteousness. You will know the full weight and joy of Godly Responsibility. You will each be directly accountable to God for your own thoughts, words, and actions. And, most wonderful of all, each one of you—whether male or female, young or old, or of whatever racial background or lineage, or of whatever social status, rich or poor, slave or free—*all will be fully empowered by the Lord of Reality to fully express your own Godly Creativity!*"

"Even me?" Peter gulped. He appeared to be suddenly scared by the implications of his loose tongue, precipitous actions, bungling movements, and predicted disastrous failure...

“Yes, Peter,” I smiled again, “—even you! I have faith in you, my impetuous friend. And I’m not leaving you alone. My Spirit will be in you. You will be *me!* And I will be *you!* I will lift you up to heights you would never have reached on your own. Even when the situation looks to you impossible, I will be there helping you find a way forward. Victory is yours! It may not be what you want right now. It may not seem like your enemies are defeated. But God will be pleased with your efforts to fully express His glorious Creativity, no matter what the immediate outcome.”

He frowned, confused but clearly wanting to believe my grand language.

“Are you not partaking of the wine, Master?” John gently queried.

He looked pointedly at the cup sitting on the tabletop in front of me. It had been passed around the table, all the remaining apostles sipping from it. But I’d not yet drunk from it...

“I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until I drink it with you anew—and of superior quality—in the Kingdom of God,” I said, pushing the cup away. “Poor Judas wants the Kingdom *now*, according to his *own* conditions, fitting neatly into his *own* limited understanding. His is not a failure of strength, determination, or dedication. No, his is a failure of *imagination*. The Promise laid out to us by our Lord God is beyond physical comprehension. A true *Faith in God* leads us into that which we cannot prove, cannot fully understand, and cannot truly appreciate here on this lowly plain of present earthly existence. *True Faith* is, indeed, a willingness to let God lead us where He will, even when we don’t comprehend the actual destination.”

Tears welled up in my eyes.

“And so...” I choked, my voice quavering, “—I must leave you, my friends. I don’t want to go. I don’t want to do what has to be done. But I will. You are not able to follow me now. But later you shall follow me...”

“Why *can’t* we go with you now, Master?” Peter insisted, tears also springing up in his own eyes. “Where are you going that we can’t follow you now? I want to be with you! I want

to follow you right now! I *will* lay down my life for you! I *love* you, Master!”

“Yes, and I love you too, Peter,” I softly replied. “I love all of you!” I said, smiling, looking around from one to the other.

Then I allowed my face to become serious, hard, and stern. My tears dried up. I drew upon the great Authority that my Father gave me when he sent me into this world: now tapping-into Power over all things. This was given by my Father for me to use, if I wished, during my last hours of physical life. I transcended the physical and became partially Spirit!

*My face glowed in the dim yellow light of the candles, shining with an unearthly metallic-silver veneer. My flesh alternatively hardened into rock then ran like water. My hair lifted up at the sides of my head and drifted in the air like strands of pure gold caught in the blast of a fiery furnace.*

At that moment I was transfigured... part of this world and part of the next. The apostles, upon seeing my physical transformation, were struck silent with awe.

“Listen to me, my friends and dear followers,” I ordered, my voice ringing like it was a golden bell struck with a diamond hammer: “Now the Son of Man is glorified! Now God is glorified in and through his Son! You shall all see the bloody conclusion of this Triumph of God’s Spirit. Do not be dismayed! Trust in God and you will be fine, no matter what happens upon this earthly plane...”

Several bowed their heads, unable to look at me directly.

The air about me crackled with pent-up energy—sparks and small bolts of lightning flashing between me and the ceiling!

“My dear little children,” I continued, my voice endowed with otherworldly resonance, “I will be with you for but a few hours more. You will look for me and not find me, for I’ll be gone. As I told our Jewish religious leaders, I also inform you now: that as much as you want to remain with me—you are not able at the present time to go with me.”

John choked-back a sob, burying his head in his arms.

“But do not despair!” I ordered them. Then—my voice ringing again like a golden bell—I cried-out: “I GIVE YOU A



NEW COMMANDMENT FOR KEEPING YOU ALIVE, CHEERFUL, AND PRODUCTIVE IN MY ABSENCE!”

I paused dramatically. I needed them to remember this last thing. It was my main “take-home message” to them: the most important thing from all my many teachings!

“What is it, Master?” John whispered into the stunned silence.

“Simply this: *that you should love one another!*” I spoke now in an otherworldly voice. “Just as I have loved even you difficult people—in the same ways that I’ve given you many Examples of how to do so—you should also pass on that same love to each other. Is this too much for me to ask of you? Is it?”

“No, Master... We will Master... As you command, Master... We will try our best!” came back the whispered replies.

A *brilliant white light* blasted through the ceiling above at an angle, intensely illuminating my transformed body in shades of stark white flesh and deep black shadows.

The disciples shielded their eyes, gasping in awe.

“*This is how the world will know that you are my true disciples,*” I fiercely continued, enunciating each word with great intensity, attempting to drill it into their tiny little animal-brains: “—if you *keep on showing love amongst yourselves!* By this simple but profound act—putting-up-with and supporting even *the most difficult amongst you*—you will be known as my followers! The Great Deceiver will try to sow discord and war amongst your numbers. He will even strive to fragment our movement into hundreds of conflicting groups. But *in spite* of your natural jealousy, envy, selfishness, pride, and hurt feelings... you must behave toward the other person—no matter how difficult he or she behaves—as if he or she is *you*, and *both* of you are *me!* DO YOU UNDERSTAND ME?” I shouted at them.

My voice *BOOMED* throughout the house like thunder!

“Yes, Master... We’ll do our best Master... We will try Master!” their urgent replies echoed-about the small room.

Their replies were barely audible above the “crackling” and “snapping” of huge energies now roiling over my head!

“I know it’s hard,” I ruefully stated, my laughter tinkling like small bells struck against each other. “In fact, it’s the hardest thing you will ever face. It’s tough even for me. But IF WE TRULY ARE ALL ONE AND THE SAME... then think of that squalling, stinking, kicking, selfish little brat in front of you as *yourself!* Once upon a time, all of us were in that state, weren’t we? What if our mothers had grown tired of our crying, neediness, and stupidity? Where would we all be now?”

“We’d not be here,” someone laughed.

“Yes!” I drove-home the point. “But instead of tossing us into the nearest garbage pit, they instead persisted. Our mothers served us selflessly out of a compulsive love... SO DO THE SAME THING TO EACH OTHER!” I yelled at them.

They mutely nodded in assent, frozen in their seats not just by my powerful words but the vast, crackling energies still swirling above me.

“Remember!” I sternly warned them. “Some of the biggest ‘babies’ are those that outwardly seem to be the most mature. Put up with each other! Cut each other some slack. Don’t insist on holding others to the strictest standards. Serve each other out of a genuine love of God, of me, and for yourselves!”

At those last words, my transformation slowly faded. The dazzling white light dimmed. The sparks above grew infrequent. My hair settled back down around my head. My swarthy flesh returned to normal. Yes, I was once again fully human: *bone-weary, sunken-cheeked, pale, feverish, weak, and trembling* from fear and physical illness...

But I wasn’t quite finished.

There was still time before we had to make the short trek to the Garden of Gethsemane. There was yet more I needed to tell my apostles in our final, secluded gathering. This was my last chance to directly instruct my apostles before my imminent capture, torture, and crucifixion.

“Now listen closely to me, my dear friends,” I continued, my voice raspy and harsh. “I have more to say to you before we depart from this room...”

And so, I laid out the basis to them for a new *giant leap forward* in humanity’s spiritual growth. Although my apostles sitting so “bravely” with me there at the table would soon

abandon me, I knew that they would forever remember my words!

Together, they would sweep across the known occupied lands of Earth. They would carrying my new Message. They would spur cascading growth of followers. They would begin a worldwide movement eventually overtaking and transforming even many of my present bitterest enemies. And the beginning of it all was their learning a profound Humility—by deliberately bowing their knees not to me, but to their *grouchy neighbor* in productive, helpful servitude.

This simple act open's up one's heart to many profound insights, new vistas, and accelerated spiritual growth. And it *keeps one in the Kingdom of God...* when otherwise one might walk away in a huff, angry that everyone else didn't do as we dictated, thinking that we knew best!

There's a key question to ask yourself when confronted with difficult people. It's a tough question, which demands a lot from us...

“How may I best serve you?” is the key question—when sincerely spoken from Godly Love.

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## Section 6:

# SUMMATION



*Pride, arrogance, and spiteful rigidity* destroy the innocence of the child. I, Jesus of Nazareth, urge you to recognize that you don't know as much as you think. God is in control, not you. When you think you have the authority to dictate to others how they should live their lives, you presume to be God. Attaining the true humility of an innocent child is when you start having fun as a Christian, continually learning and growing!

So, here's a new thing... When you see yourself as inexorably connected to others by the Spark of God that you both possess, *the success of others becomes your own success*. When you forgive them their stupidities, it affirms your godly

character. And when they thrive, you thrive! If you lift up others, you lift up yourself. By this “enlightened self-interest” you become the *greatest* of all humans: a little child. Help people to struggle with Godly Principles in their own life, finding their own powerfully significant answers, and you grow your own spirit. Treat everyone with the respect and the consideration you’d like shown to you. Make yourself into a servant and you will gain the Kingdom of God!

But this isn’t just a one-way interaction. It’s not you giving everything to difficult people who give nothing back. If you open your mind to *learn* from every person and situation that you encounter, it will happen! Do not fear new information or different ideas. Don’t be afraid to admit to yourself and others that you are an ignorant sinner falling far short of the glory of God... but who’s trying to do better! Help the other person spiritually move forward so that you yourself will likewise be lifted up.

In conflicts, strive to be the spiritual “adult” who is looking to help immature, misbehaving children. Rather than just punishing them for their wrongs, help them learn to do and be better. Be willing to take on the lowest jobs, figuratively changing dirty diapers, if by so doing you demonstrate your genuine concern for your fellow humans. Be willing to endure unjust attacks on your character, even insults and lies—if by so doing you will help them see God’s love. When we all truly love God, we all prosper!

Sure, your inner animal “survival instinct” warns you to deal cautiously with other people. This is a necessary instinct. You need not allow evil people to hurt or kill either you or your loved ones. When necessary, you can defend yourself from overt evil! But if you are only driven by your genetic programming, you will accept those who are good to you while rejecting those who offend. How is this any different from any other person on Earth, whether godly or not? But you don’t have to regard all strangers or “others” with guarded suspicion. Hating difficult people is the basis for life plagued by anger, jumping to conclusions, and counterproductive revenge. In other words, it’s normal human behavior: worshipping and delighting in *fear*!

From irrational FEAR comes the many wars, atrocities, crimes, and evils that the human race is so infamous for committing. God calls you, however—from a restructured spiritual heart—to behave toward *all other people* with compassion, concern, forgiveness, and Godly Love. When you treat their ‘sorry asses’ as if they were your own, you finally can find real JOY! In other words, you sincerely wish all other humans “the best.” Furthermore, you are willing to help them get it, demonstrating your intent by tangible actions. In the short term you avoid many headaches and problems. In the long run you gain much more than you lose!

That’s all nice to say... but just how do you actually do it? In other words, how can you *really* “love” even your sworn *enemies*? Well, that’s the subject of my next lecture: exactly *how* to best “evaluate our actions towards others.” I will explain this in detail in **LECTURE #4: “How to Best Express Godly Love.”**

See you then!

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## Conclusion by the Author:

*Dear reader,*

I hope you enjoyed reading *The Jesus Lectures-3: Dealing with Difficult People*. Once again, I remind you it is a fictional account of what I feel Jesus would say to his present-day followers, should He return for a short inspection tour. Consequently, feel free to take from it what's useful to you while discarding the rest.

But this book is not just my random thoughts about Jesus. The accounts and dialogues derive from in-depth study of authoritative Bible commentaries, different Bible translations of the original languages, and established history. Hopefully my format provides a feeling of reality: where we sit listening to Jesus give an in-person lecture. I hope you found my fictional depiction interesting, thought-provoking, and exceptional. For me, writing this series of ten books on Jesus was a true religious adventure, which *continues* challenging my own worldviews!

Finally, ***I need to ask you for a big favor***. If you enjoyed this book and would like to help others do so as well, **a review written by you** on the Amazon page for this book would be greatly appreciated. It's hard to get reviews nowadays and your support will be very important both for me and other readers. If you'd like to do this, I sincerely thank you in advance for your time and effort. It can be as long or short as you wish.

Thanks again for reading my unique books and going on this wild, exhilarating ride with me!

Sincerely,

*Dan Lyle*

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## **REFERENCE MATERIALS:**

Some of the concepts and events contained in this book are based on commentary and historical information contained in the following reference materials:

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## **About the Author:**

Daniel Lyle holds a Ph.D. in Biology, is a lifelong amateur herpetologist, taught medical immunology and microbiology at a University, completed a career in cell biology medical & regulatory research, and has a strong interest in all aspects of cosmology and physics. From a small kid he was fascinated with dinosaurs. As such, he has always lived with exotic creatures, including harmless snakes, all housed in his own homemade beautiful habitats. Some of his tame pet pythons and anacondas ranged up to twelve feet in length. He is the author of over thirty books. They deal with diverse topics such as quality management, religion, science fiction, and graphics art. His writings go beyond the ordinary, exposing deeper aspects of life. His books are meant to be fun, conversational, practical, and helpful. His various works are available at [LylePublishing.com](http://LylePublishing.com), [Creative-Theology.com](http://Creative-Theology.com). and [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com).

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