

The Jesus **Lectures-4**

HOW TO
BEST EXPRESS
GODLY LOVE

Daniel B. Lyle, Ph.D.

LylePublishing
Sulphur, Oklahoma

The Jesus Lectures-4

HOW TO BEST EXPRESS GODLY LOVE

Copyright © 2009, 2022 by Daniel Basil Lyle

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without written permission from the author, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial or educational uses permitted by copyright law. For permission requests, or any other questions, e-mail the author at Dan-Lyle@LylePublishing.com.

ISBN 979-8-9855900-1-2

Published by LylePublishing
505 W. 12th Street, Sulphur, OK 73086
(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.

LCED04072022

First ebook edition 2009
Second ebook edition and paperback 2022

DISCLAIMER and PREFACE

This book is the fourth 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?”

This book, the fourth lecture, specifically asks: “*What would he say about how they are expressing Godly Love?*” Although this series is closely based on the authorized teachings of Jesus in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, the actual words are imagined. Therefore, you are welcome to take from this book that which is helpful, discarding the rest.

In this book, Jesus is depicted describing events of his life which explain how to **OPERATIONALLY DEFINE GODLY LOVE**. Jesus shows how this determines one’s place in the Kingdom of God. These key events are only briefly excerpted within the pages of the Holy Scriptures. In this lecture, Jesus gives details of his interactions with people, background to the Biblical situations, and additional historical information. His lecture complements the short accounts found in the New Testament.

Much of the extra information I imagine Jesus telling us is derived from sometimes-conflicting authoritative Bible commentaries, plus different translations of the original languages found 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 on critical events that occurred in Jesus’ life.

You may discover some new, intriguing insights for **BEST DEALING WITH UNLOVABLE PEOPLE**: making you better able to appropriately respond to the teachings of Jesus. Any possible changes in your life provoked by Lecture #4, however, should be carefully considered before implementation—since they may have dramatic ramifications both now and in eternity!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface by the Author iii

THE JESUS LECTURES-4,
How to Best Express Godly Love

SECTIONS:

1. A Priest, Levite, Samaritan, and Lawyer	1
2. The Foundation of Reality	32
3. A Loud Beggar	83
4. Raising the Dead	90
5. Riding on a Donkey	104
6. Glorification by Defeat	118
7. A Fine Pair of Sandals	122
8. Summation	154

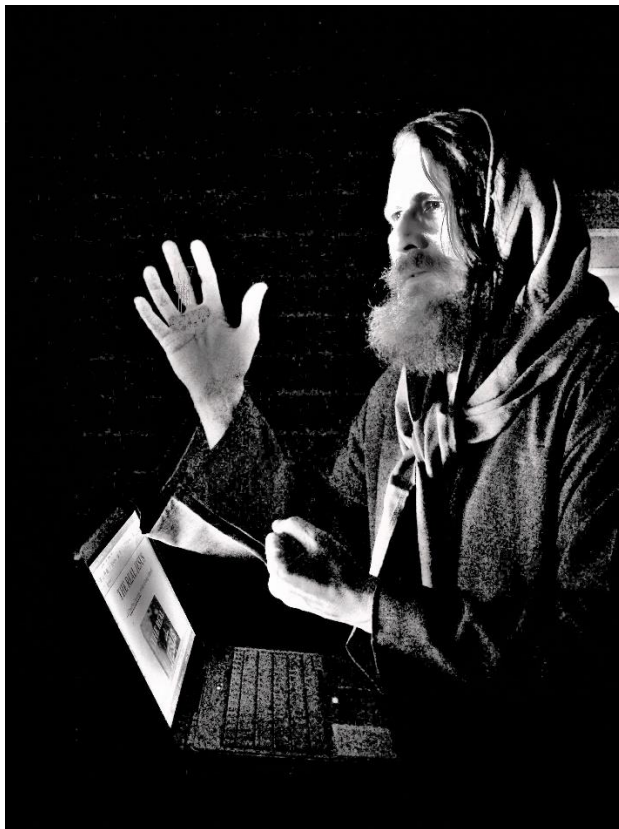
Conclusion by the Author 157

Reference materials 158

About the Author 160

Section 1:
**A PRIEST, LEVITE,
SAMARITAN, AND LAWYER**

(See Luke 10:25-37)



It is with great pleasure that I, Jesus of Nazareth, speak to you today! This is my fourth lecture on my overall theme of MOVING CLOSER TO GOD. Today I'm focusing on "*How to best express Godly Love.*"

In my last lecture in **Book #3, “Dealing with Difficult People,”** I described how the *necessary permeability of our hearts* is revealed by the ways that we relate to and treat other people. To remain within the Kingdom of God, each person must carefully maintain the “God-permeability” of one’s heart.

In today’s fourth lecture, contained in this present **Book #4, “How to Best Express Godly Love,”** I help you discover “operational definitions” of Godly Love. Furthermore, I show by powerful stories how it’s critical for *evaluating your actions toward others*. Why? Because how you define Godly Love in your life determines what ACTIONS you will take toward other people. In short, all my followers must change “Godly Love” from a vague emotion into carefully considered, edifying outcomes.

If your Godly Love does not have tangible positive outcomes, you will not remain in the Kingdom of God. Why? Because if you don’t truly love your fellow humans then you don’t truly love God. Thus, you must “operationally define” *Godly Love* in your life to prove God is in your heart and that you are in God’s Kingdom.

Those who are “greatest” in the Kingdom of God are *servants*. Voluntary servitude, however, is extremely difficult for anyone to do... unless it’s accomplished from a profoundly deep love. But human beings by nature are ornery, irritating, annoying, hurtful ingrates—*very* unlovable! Sure, it’s not so hard for you to love *me*. After all, I’m the one who promises you peace, supernatural help, and eternal salvation. I give that in exchange for you just doing that which is good for you. What a great guy I am! But your fellow men and women regularly hurt your feelings, demand huge things from you without giving anything in return, and who are, in some cases, actual enemies seeking to destroy you. To love *them* is a very difficult proposition!

How can you possibly love—to *sincerely* have “good feelings” toward—even those who are actively trying to hurt you? Well, there are several “secrets” to accomplishing this daunting task. I’ll reveal these enabling “tricks” in conversations I had with my own disciples back in the first century. They had

just as hard a time, if not more, in loving their own fellow men and women!

Yes, it's tough to love your fellow humans, especially irritatingly close friends and relatives, not-to-mention your actual, sworn enemies! But if you can master these techniques, the entire world opens up to you. You will have incredible power, which you never before dreamed possible. Plus, you can easily acquire the Godly Humility that opens up the doors of God's Kingdom, then keeps you safely within its borders!

Let us now get into some of the *most difficult lessons of all* which I taught during the short time I physically spent here on planet Earth. Let's start with **a Priest, a Levite, a Samaritan, and a Lawyer...**

I was in the village of Bethany, through which passes the road from Jerusalem to the town of Jericho. Jericho is about eighteen miles from Jerusalem. Bethany is only about two miles from Jerusalem. A lot of travelers would stop over in at Bethany before journeying onward. The next stop along the barren mountain pass leading to Jericho was just one solitary Inn about halfway.

So, Bethany was a very nice place close to Jerusalem but out of the crush of the big city. It wasn't a little village isolated, off somewhere in the countryside. Its proximity to Jerusalem meant that many dignitaries, intellectuals, and high officials would visit. It was, therefore, a charmingly quaint but still cosmopolitan village. I was in a small courtyard of a house of some dear friends there in Bethany. I was speaking and leading discussions on many topics, along with some of my disciples. Around us was a packed crowd of interested townsfolk.

I had just invited anyone with a question on their mind to go ahead and ask me it. This was one of the main teaching tools I used for quickly getting to wherever an individual was "at." I knew that since all things are connected, it doesn't matter where I start with a person. There's a straight path to God from any point, position, issue, or concern. So why not start with a person on the subject, topic, or problem most

concerning to them? In that way, I could immediately grab their full attention by addressing their particular concerns.

Of course, to utilize this powerful teaching method one must have several skills. First of all, one must be a master of the subject at hand. Second, the discussion leader must be able to immediately grasp even the most difficult of topics. Plus, one needs the ability to instantly skew the discussion to be most helpful to the needs of the particular student *and* the wider audience present. It's very demanding, but also tremendous fun!

Sure, I could have lectured them for hours without batting an eye, on numerous topics of my own choosing. I could have gone on and on telling them what *I* thought they should know. But by allowing individuals to "set the agenda," it directly involved them personally in the discussion. Also, there was often no problem with "buy in" to the conclusion: if the *participants* are allowed to become part of arriving at that good insight. Plus, it was very exciting and fascinating to other people in the audience, never knowing what was coming next, from what angle!

I was having a great time. The townspeople were asking me all sorts of both simplistic and difficult questions.

Then, in response to my invitation, a *Lawyer* of Moses' Teachings arose from the audience. It was apparent that this was no ordinary lawyer, though. Indeed, his clothing identified him as a Rabbi. Possibly he was a leader of the local church. He stood upright, proud of his own expertise, yet also genuinely involved and excited by our group-discussion. He asked me a question that was simultaneously obvious, profound, and confrontational—yet remarkably naïve for a man of his stature!

Of course, you must also realize that despite his experience, knowledge, and status, he was a product of the prevailing "system." Many of his assumptions were societal, historical, or traditionally generated. Like many people in whatever period of human history, his unconscious biases were so ingrained that he himself wasn't even aware of them.

I'd just been exhorting all who recognized themselves as *sinner*s to fully open up their hearts to God. I wanted them to

let the *Light of God* permeate to every dark corner in their minds. This would shatter internal roadblocks to God's dynamic revelations, allowing them to welcome the fast-arriving Kingdom of God.

"Teacher!" the Lawyer respectfully queried. "What must *I* do to inherit everlasting life—to partake of eternal salvation within the Messiah's coming Kingdom?"

I looked at him for a long moment in silence, taking stock of both him and his question.

He was middle-aged. Thus, he was not old enough to be totally set in his ways, yet not young enough to be stupidly arrogant. He'd already acquired enough life-experience to know he could be wrong about things. Also, he had a real measure of wisdom, earned by dealing with local people battling their immediate problems there in his town of Bethany.

Why was he asking this particular question?

Well, first of all I knew that this question was indeed a "hot" topic of the time. Everyone was aware that change was in the wind. The times were turbulent and uncertain. Something big was about to happen. And it was obvious to most that *I*, Jesus of Nazareth, was right there at the center of the storm!

The people weren't sure if I was the prophesied Messiah. But most agreed that I, at the very least, was a modern-day Prophet moving us closer to the day that the Messiah would re-establish the Jewish Kingdom here on Earth. Thus, they knew I would cause, in one way or another, dramatic change!

But what would be the new standards? Who would be accepted and who rejected? What would be the new power structure? Would a new hierarchy of the church be put into place? Who would stay in a position of power? And who would be demoted when God's Kingdom was established on Earth?

So, at least partially, this experienced church leader was looking for real answers. But I also knew that he was quite deliberately "putting me to the test!"

After all, he'd been around for a while. He'd seen many other itinerate preachers come strolling through Bethany with their little, committed band of followers. Sitting so close to

Jerusalem, the center of the Jewish world, many “campaigns” like mine had visited Bethany, only to fizzle out. Yes, there’d often been excellent, charismatic speakers similar to me. But when *put to the test*—pressed hard on difficult issues—they quickly crumbled.

I also noted that the Lawyer had deliberately “personalized” the issue. Instead of asking “what must *a person* do to inherit eternal life in the Kingdom of the Messiah” (putting it into the general case) he asked “what must *I* do.” Thus, he made this a direct challenge between him and me. Though politely phrased, he was angling to put me in my place.

Did I *dare* to try and sit in judgment upon *him*? Even to start to answer such a question would immediately put me in opposition to him. Doing so would signify that I assumed I was somehow greater than him. Was I, a relatively young man, smarter than an experienced, middle-aged Rabbi?

He knew that my apparent arrogance would give him the advantage. It would allow him to justify his *outrage* in front of the packed audience. He’d be able to attack me in the harshest of terms! “Hah! This young *upstart* is now trying to dictate to *me* how *I* should live *my* life?” Clearly this Lawyer-Rabbi was very well experienced in *eviscerating* upstart, young, would-be “Messiahs.”

I knew that the other visiting preachers had rarely *asked* him for *his* input. As a local, minor official he’d had to throw his weight around to be heard above their speechifying. And, certainly, there’d been none before that replied by putting *him* to the test!

So, in answer to his aggressive but important question, instead of trying to show how “smart” *I* was by giving him some longwinded lecture (as had all the other previous religious campaigners), I politely and sincerely ASKED HIM A QUESTION RIGHT BACK! Yes, I turned the tables on him. I put *him* “to the test” by being respectful and deferential.

Sorry again to shout, but it’s a key point...

So, I mildly and politely said: “Why ask me something that you know perfectly well, Sir? You are obviously an expert in the Law of Moses. What does the Law tell us? How do *you* read the Law on this critically important issue?”

This definitely threw him off his game. He was expecting me to make some longwinded reply in which he could catch me saying something stupid, or heretical, or controversial. Then he could easily strike back, throwing me into stuttering confusion. Thusly, he'd reveal me as yet another ignorant pretender.

Suddenly he realized was facing something he'd never before encountered!

His eyes narrowed as he replied very carefully.

"Well..." he hesitantly began, knowing that all eyes of the packed crowd were now centered upon him, "—the revered Holy Scriptures are very clear on what are the two Top Priorities, those upon which everything else hinges. Above all is to *love God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind...* and a close second is to *love one's neighbor as oneself!*"

Ah... he was truly astute, not a superficial windbag like many of his colleagues. He wasn't tied to just he Mosaic books but to the entire revealed Word of God in the Holy Scriptures. He'd given a fine answer to my query.

"Well said!" I congratulated him. "I agree wholeheartedly with your conclusion, Sir. Now, for *you* to obtain eternal salvation—to answer your original question—my humble advice is to *do* what you yourself have just stated. In this fashion, you will enjoy active, blessed, and endless life in the Kingdom of God."

The expression of the townsfolk had subtly changed. Before, they'd been deferential and respectful of the Lawyer. Now, they were a bit... sullen. After all, they'd lived around this gentleman for years. They knew his behavior. They knew how he treated *them*. They knew that his actions did not always totally agree with his lofty words!

"Are you suggesting that my conduct isn't already proper and righteous?" he coldly asked, sensing he had an opening for attacking me.

"Indeed not, Sir," I said. "What you just told us applies to us all, does it not? An expert of the Holy Scriptures of your stature certainly knows that words are cheap. Giving a speech is easy. It's the 'doing' that's difficult. Believing the right things are a necessary start, for sure. But without the 'doing,'

they are just theoretical thoughts. This applies to me, the good townsfolk here, and I'm sure you'd readily agree... for you too?"

Knowing he was on the defensive again, the Lawyer tried to retake the initiative by throwing a "qualifying" question back at me—*by which he might be able to justify his own less-than-the-best past behaviors.*

"Well... of c-course..." he stammered, trying to figure out a snappy answer but finding none. Then, firming up his resolve, he strongly retorted: "But Teacher... just *who* is my 'neighbor'?"

I knew that the Lawyers, Scribes, and Pharisees defined "neighbor" very narrowly. In this way, they could "justify" their disdain, neglect, mistreatment, and even hateful actions toward anyone they wished. How could they be nasty to a particular person while still supposedly being one of God's beloved children following the Law of Moses? They could behave badly toward a person *if* the target of their ire was *not* a "neighbor" who the religious Law required them to love!

"Indeed, that *is* a central issue, isn't it?" I nodded. "I think, Sir, that you've correctly identified the key question upon which rests all of one's eternal salvation. This is very perceptive of you, Sir."

He looked around anxiously. He sensed that *I* was the one putting *him* into a trap, rather than him doing so to me!

"Well, let's consider this, shall we?" I continued, maintaining a respectful tone. "Is a 'neighbor' the person who by chance lives in a house next to you, with all others being but unlovable strangers? Or is a 'neighbor' a fellow Jewish follower of the true God, while heretics and Gentiles are condemned wretches? Are our Jewish brethren who we deem friends our neighbors, while those who behave coldly toward us are misfits? Are the members of our own particular religious sect 'neighbors,' while those of other sects are lost? Or, are only our close relatives 'neighbors,' while non-relatives are abominations? What say you, Sir?"

He slowly swallowed, glancing furtively about as if looking for the exit, yet kept silent. He knew that however he drew the

line between “neighbor” and “others” he’d open himself up to criticism...

“Well, perhaps a story will clarify the situation for us,” I smiled in a friendly way.

This really perked-up the audience. If they weren’t already on pins and needles, they were fully engaged by this unexpected turn of events!

Often, the best way to get almost any point across as a speaker is to *tell a story*. Stories are very powerful because they are specific. They’re about people. You can easily see yourself in a key role. It’s interesting. It’s likely something you haven’t already heard. It grabs your attention. You don’t know the end of the story, so it may have a big impact when it comes. Also, it’s easy to remember.

This is in marked contrast to what a lot of religious speakers like to do:

- **talk at great length** [about something most of the audience already knows perfectly well];
- **add little or nothing new** [not increasing the knowledge of the people];
- **talk mostly in vague generalities** [having little impact]; and
- **telling the people what you think something means rather than challenging the audience** [not leading them to figure out “the lesson” for themselves, thus not “burning-in” the lesson into their brains!]

Anyway, I knew that this Lawyer would be just as engaged in the story as would be the rest of the audience. He, after all, was a human like all the rest. Doubtless, he would rather that I’d launched into a vague philosophical discussion, quoting many verses in the Holy Scriptures. That would give him familiar fodder for debating me on esoteric fine points of interpretation. But still, a story was a story, particularly a new story! And it again threw him off his game, without me having

to directly challenge him. And again, I put it back into his hands to figure out “the lesson.”

So, here’s the story I told him and the audience...

“As you know full well, Sir,” I began, “living as you and the townsfolk here do on the start of the road between Jerusalem and Jericho—that road is very dangerous!”

Several in the audience nodded ruefully or sadly. They’d been accosted themselves or had loved ones or friends *killed* on that dangerous road. It was infamous for thieves and muggers.

So, I was telling them a story that wasn’t just about some theoretical situation which happened elsewhere. I was **DIRECTLY RELATING MY CENTRAL LESSON TO THINGS HAPPENING IN THEIR OWN LIVES!**

Sorry to shout, but that needed to be emphasized...

Yes, this was another powerful technique I often used in my teachings. Why talk about something that happened to someone long ago in the past or in a place far away—when you could place the story into the context of the audience’s real, immediate life? For instance, if I tell you a story about your actual workplace that illustrates Godly Principles, you can easily apply those teachings. It will be much more helpful than a story about something you know nothing about or with which you have no direct interaction.

Again, though, it takes a Master Teacher to do this. It requires great command of both the subject matter and people’s lives in one’s audience. But if one can do this, the instruction is a *thousand times more effective* than just giving a general lecture.

“Many people travel down the road from Jerusalem to Jericho,” I continued. “They often stop here in Bethany to visit, get a bite to eat, or take shelter for the night. You know these visitors well. I’m sure you wish them all the best in their dangerous journey, right?”

“Yes, we do...” the Lawyer grudgingly admitted, afraid of where I was going with this story. “But we’ve no control over what happens to them once they leave our village.”

“Of course!” I readily agreed. “And I’m sure you wish them ‘God-speed’ as it were, as they descend some 3,000 feet

through desolate mountain ravines. We know that lurking therein are many thieves, highway men, thugs, and robbers. Those evildoers love to prey upon the weak and unprotected between here and Jericho.”

“My cousin had both his legs broken by those monsters!” a lady spontaneously called-out from the packed crowd.

“My sympathies,” I sadly acknowledged her pain at what happened to her beloved relative. “Yet that, unfortunately, happens all too often. Which is why if you have to travel through that descending mountain pass, you often go in armed groups, right?”

“Only a fool would go by himself—without a fast animal to carry him, or an official uniform, or tough friends to scare people off!” a young boy “harrumphed” in reply, shaking his head at such craziness.

“Yes, wealthy travelers can afford armed guards,” I agreed. “But we of modest means are often left with just a sword and likewise-scared friends.”

The audience, mostly poor villagers, agreed with sighs and nods.

“Ain’t that the truth?” an old woman laughed.

“But what if we’re poor, don’t know anyone to travel with, and have a pressing appointment we must meet down the road?” I asked. “What then?”

“Uh, oh...” the young boy gulped. “That *don’t* sound good to me...”

“That’s right!” I validated his opinion. “There was, indeed, a fellow Jew of modest means who was doing his best to get to a wedding of some friends in Jericho. His wife was already down there, waiting for him to arrive. He’d been delayed by bad weather in Jerusalem. Now he had to travel as fast as he could, with no time to find a safe group of people to travel with him down the road to Jericho!”

“I got a bad feeling about this...” the young boy winced.

“And, yes, vile human predators spied him jogging down the mountain pass. There was no one else in sight. He was all by himself, ripe for the plucking!” I exclaimed.

“Oh, dear God!” a young lady gasped.

“It was horrible...” I softly said, my face twisted in pain. “They descended on him like a pack of wolves. They taunted him, shoving him back and forth on the trail. Then, as he begged for his life, they methodically beat him within an inch of his life. To finish him off, they fell upon him with knives, slashing and stabbing him, leaving him half-conscious and bleeding profusely.”

“It’s a terrible world out there...” an old man sobbed in sympathy.

“But that wasn’t all!” I continued in a loud voice. “When they found out that he had but little money, they stripped him of all his clothes—including his shoes and under-garments—so they’d at least have something to sell for their troubles. They left him there totally *naked*, grievously *wounded*, *bleeding* profusely, and *dying* at the side of the road!”

People were actually crying in the audience. They remembered many times when this happened to friends and relatives on that terrible road that ran through their village.

“Does this story have a point?” the Lawyer impatiently asked, standing rigidly in the midst of the audience.

He was obviously not too sympathetic to the sobs and groans of the crowd, frowning at me.

“I’m getting to the point,” I replied respectfully. “Perhaps all was not lost. There might be a happy ending to this tragic event. For—through the red haze of his own blood dribbling down over his eyes—the dying man spied another traveler coming up the road below him. And it wasn’t just any random person. By the robes of the oncoming person, the dying man recognized that it was a *priest!*”

“Hallelujah! ... Praise God! ... He’s saved!” the audience members cheered!

“And the wounded, bleeding man lifted up his head and managed to groan: ‘Help me!’... ‘For the love of God, please help me!’,” I said, making my voice raspy, low, and trembling.

“All he could do was call out for help?” the old man sobbed, shaking his head in sorrow.

“He must have been close to death at that moment,” another person ventured.

I sat silent for a moment, looking at the Lawyer, smiling at him.

“So, what happened?” he impatiently asked me, shrugging in pretended disinterest.

“Let’s see what our friends here today say,” I nodded to the crowd. “They are well acquainted with the road and those that regularly travel upon it. They know many of the Priests and Levites that work at the Temple in Jerusalem but have their main homes down in Jericho. What do you good folks think happened next?”

The young boy piped up immediately: “That Godly Priest *saved* his fellow Jew from dying! He ran over to him, picked him up, and *carried* him all the way up to Jerusalem!”

“No!” another insisted. “That poor wounded fellow was clearly dying. So, the Priest went over to him, took him by the hand, and prayed over him so that he could die in peace!”

“I don’t think so,” the young woman who’d answered earlier said. “Priests are very practical people. I think he would stand guard over the man until some other traveler came along. Then he’d send that person onward to bring back medical help and police!”

I deeply sighed.

“Oh, I wish that what you so kindly guessed had occurred,” I sadly replied. “Here’s what really happened: the Priest upon spying the bloody, naked body lying there moaning and weakly calling for help on the side of the road...”

I paused, pursing my lips, as if calming myself before proceeding...

“Yes, yes?” the old woman urged me on.

I again sighed deeply.

“The Priest, upon seeing the naked, bleeding man moaning for help,” I repeated, “immediately moved to the *opposite* side of the road furthest away from the man. Then he quickly walked on past—pretending that he didn’t see him at all!”

There was a stunned silence...

I looked at the Lawyer.

He looked back at me.

“Well...” he tentatively ventured, “—that sounds like a very dangerous section of the road. The Priest, according to your

story, was there all alone just like that wounded man. I'd think the Priest probably felt that the evil thugs who'd robbed the man were probably still lurking nearby. That Priest likely thought the robbers left the man alive at the side of the road as bait. As soon as the Priest stopped to give aid—making himself a stationary target—the ruffians would overcome their hesitation at attacking a Holy Man. They'd surround him, pouncing upon him as well. If the wounded man was dying anyway, why allow the thieving bandits to take two lives instead of just one? That's what *I* think."

I raised my eyebrows thoughtfully, nodding slowly...

"Or!" the young boy grinned. "Maybe the Priest was needed at the Temple for some very important stuff! He wanted to help the poor man, but his duties to God kept him from doing it!"

I was glad to see even young people in the crowded courtyard speaking up. Normally in the presence of such an intimidating, older person like the Lawyer, they wouldn't dare say a word!

"Well..." I blinked several times, looking up at the sky, "—that *could* be...?"

"Or, that *damned* priest just didn't want to get blood on his fancy robes!" the old man snapped. "I've seen lots of them like that. They preach big long sermons about love, sayin' all the right words—but can't be bothered to lift a finger to stoop down and help us that's sittin' in the dirt!"

"Oh... those are harsh words my friend... harsh words!" I clucked in mock disapproval.

The gnarled old man "*harrummpphed*" in reply.

"I seen it too often!" he snapped back at me, defiantly.

"But there was still hope!" I interjected suddenly, rising from my seat to look all around me, intensely engaging each and every person. "The suffering, naked, bleeding man spied through the red haze *yet another traveler* coming up from Jericho... trudging steadily along. This time the clothing of the person showed that he was a Levite!"

"Ah ... A Levite! ... At last! ... The man is definitely saved now!" people in the audience nodded approvingly.

“Yes!” I agreed. “It was indeed a high-ranking church official! He was probably on the way to Jerusalem to do his duty there in the Temple. Levites are servants to the Priests. They are people that know how to do the ‘down-and-dirty’ daily work of making religion more than just preaching vague generalities. Plus, they have a big part in teaching, in ministering, and in meeting-out justice. No one would be more suited to help a poor, moaning, fellow Jew than this man. The dying man knows he’s going to be saved!”

“*Hallelujah!*” the old woman called-out, startling everyone.

I laughed, nodding at her in appreciation.

“Yes, my good woman,” I exulted, throwing up my arms in celebration. “Hallelujah indeed!”

The Lawyer just glared at me...

“So, what happened then?” the old woman eagerly asked.

“Well,” I continued, “the bleeding man lifted a trembling arm to his approaching benefactor, managing to gasp out ‘Dear... fellow countryman... *please* help me!’ And the Levite strode right up to him, stopped, and looked down at him!”

I took a deep breath in, let it slowly out, lowered my arms, and sat back down. I looking sadly at the packed audience.

“All right,” the Lawyer shrugged, still resolutely standing rigidly in the middle of the mostly seated audience. “So, what happened?”

“The Levite took careful stock of the situation,” I continued, my voice slow and low. “Then he—like the Priest before him—deliberately moved over to the *far* side of the road, set his gaze towards Jerusalem, and walked *onward!*”

Again, my audience was stunned.

“What? ... But how could he... That’s not possible!” people muttered, aghast.

I looked at the Lawyer.

He looked back at me.

Then he reluctantly answered: “Well, that was unfortunate for the poor traveler. But I can see it from the Levite’s viewpoint. Since he stopped and made a careful survey of the situation, it was probably obvious to him that the man’s wounds were so grievous he was beyond saving. Likely there was

nothing anyone other than a team of trained medical personnel could do for that man. Probably the Levite was also thinking that if he could just proceed fast enough up the road, he'd soon get here to Bethany and could alert the local police to send back help. Being a practical man, he was probably doing the very best thing possible for the wounded man, even though it may have seemed crass or hardhearted at the time."

"Or..." the old woman cackled thoughtfully. "Perhaps the gentleman Levite was retired and old, like me! He wouldn't have the strength to even move that helpless victim there on that mountain road, let alone carry him up the slope toward us here? What more could he do than to keep going and send back help as soon as he could? I agree with our esteemed Lawyer!"

"Hah!" the argumentative old man snorted. "He probably had an 'elder's meeting' at the synagogue and didn't want to be delayed by some poor nobody, fellow Jew or not! I've seen the type. They think the highest duty of anyone to God is just attendin' the synagogue meetings, going through the rituals, keepin' one's mouth shut, and not makin' trouble! Here's this beat-up, bleedin' guy makin' all *sorts* of trouble for him. How *dare* that worthless bum cause all this trouble to such a nice, prim and proper Levite! Hah!"

I heard murmurs of agreement... I chuckled. What a great audience!

"Well, for whatever reasons," I continued, "Both a Priest and a Levite saw fit *not* to assist the beat-up, fellow Jewish man lying there bleeding and naked at the side of the road. But through his dwindling field of vision, the pain-wracked man saw something else coming toward him. This time the figure was above him on the road, coming from the direction of Jerusalem. But it didn't seem to be a man! Instead, it was some kind of *animal*..."

"Most likely an approaching caravan!" another person excitedly broke into my account. "That will save him! They can put him into a cart and carry him away to safety."

"Or, it's a pack of wolves," grunted the old man. "They're smellin' his blood and coming to pick at his carcass!"

“Those are good guesses,” I smiled. “But that’s not what the man saw in front his eyes. Rather, he saw the ‘clomping’ feet of a *donkey!*”

“Then he’s saved!” a young lady gasped in great relief. “The rider can just sling him over the neck of the animal and carry him away to safety. Thank God!”

“Well...” I paused, considering. “Perhaps not. For, you see, the rider wasn’t who the dying man hoped to see.”

“Huh?” the old man winced. “What do ya mean, Teacher?”

“As the bleeding man struggled to stay conscious,” I continued, “he lifted up a trembling hand, grasping onto one of the sturdy legs of the animal. He was sinking into an ocean of pain, looking up through a haze of blood. He managed to gasp-out: ‘Please... help me... I’m a fellow Jew... have pity!’ And then he heard an answer!”

“At least this traveler’s talkin’ to him!” the old man grunted.

Continuing my story, I said: “And the answer he heard was this: ‘Why should I help *you?* I’m a *Samaritan.*’”

“Oh, my God! ... He’s *doomed!* ... It’s all over for him! ... That poor Jewish brother is *dead!*” came cries of sorrow from the crowd.

“Blinking his eyes rapidly to clear the blood,” I continued, “the poor wounded Jew could see that the Samaritan had a *knife* in his hands—and was holding it to his *throat!*” I added, putting my hand to my neck in illustration.

“Nothing could be worse! ... It’s all over! ... He’s going to be killed for sure!” the crowd reacted in horror and outrage.

“YES!” I loudly asserted, standing up again to emphasize the point. “Standing over him, holding a knife to his throat--- was the mortal enemy of us Jews! It was a hated, despised *Samaritan!* It was a descendent of one of the many foreigners that were brought in to occupy our cities in Samaria after the Children of Israel were carried away into captivity, seven hundred years ago...”

The crowd “*hissed*” and “*booed*”!

I thrust a clenched fist straight up into the air in emphasis to my words.

“—*the very same strangers that tried to worship the one true God while still hanging on to the many idols and false gods of their former lands...*” I shouted.

“Idolaters! ... Heathens! ... Blasphemers!” was yelled back at me as many in the crowd rose also to their feet, shaking their own fists.

“—*the very same idolaters that thought they were holier than us and fought against our own ancestors...*” I continued, speaking loudly to the people.

“Barbarians! ... Usurpers! ... Dogs!” was enthusiastically yelled back.

“—THE VERY SAME INGRATES THAT FOUR HUNDRED YEARS AGO PRESUMED TO BUILD THEIR OWN TEMPLE ON MOUNT GERIZIM TO COMPETE WITH THE TRUE TEMPLE OF GOD IN JERUSALEM...” I shouted at the top of my lungs.

Now all the audience was standing up alongside the Lawyer, stomping their feet, waving their fists in the air, “*hissing*” and “*booing*” loudly!

The Lawyer looked bewildered, glancing furtively around at his countrymen in confusion, having no idea at all where I was going with this story. Clearly, I wasn’t just another itinerate, would-be Messiah!

“—*the very same pretenders that today claim to be the TRUE children of God, who accept only the five books of Moses as authoritative while rejecting all of our other Holy Scriptures...*” I continued revving up the crowd’s outrage.

I thrust up five fingers of one hand while clenching my other fist tightly, vividly illustrating rejection of God’s complete Word.

“Apostates! Unbelievers! Heretics!” the Lawyer now joined in, leading the crowd in chants against the hated Samaritans.

Yes, I’d drawn him into my story by detailing the Samaritan’s rejection of his precious, complete Law.

“—they who claim to be of our blood lineage since turncoats and betrayers of our Law have periodically interbred with them,” I continued, thoroughly damning the Samaritans. “But today they live in impoverished settlements, their so-

called Temple long destroyed. Their main cities were conquered and ground into dust time after time!" I paused, catching my breath. Then I continued, more softly: "And yet they *still* try to claim our status as God's true Jewish People, while being but stubborn, belligerent, *losers!*"

"*Bastards!*" the Lawyer enthusiastically exclaimed. "That's what they are! They want to be in the family of God, yet God is not their Father. *Satan* is their true father! They are worse than heathens. They claim to follow God yet reject the true Law of God. As such, they are wild dogs fit only to be on slain on sight. Running them through with swords is too good a death for them!"

"Yes! ... That's right! ... It should be that Samaritan lying bleeding and dying on the side of the road, not our good Jewish brother!" others replied with absolute certainty.

"Yes..." I sighed, sitting stiffly back down.

The others, weary from their great exertions demonstrating their fierce hatred of the Samaritans, began settling back down also.

Only the Lawyer remained standing, still defiant.

"And the worst thing of all..." I said, again sighing and shaking my head in mock sorrow, "is that the Samaritans are just as convinced that it's *we* who are the apostates who have strayed from the strict Mosaic Law. And so, they hate us as much as we hate them!"

The Lawyer snorted in disgust. "Satan is deceptively persuasive," he sneered knowingly. "The Evil One can make any weak-minded fool think that what they erroneously believe is the absolute truth!"

"Ah... well said, Sir," I complimented him, nodding my head in agreement. "Very well said, Sir, indeed!"

He blinked in confusion at my compliment, now totally nonplussed by my statements. What was I up to? What was the point of my dramatic story? What did it have to do with rightly defining one's "neighbor"?

"But what about the poor Jewish victim of those bad robbers?" the young boy earnestly queried, eager to know the end of the story.

“Yes, the story...” I nodded. “Well, here’s what happened! Listen close now. Picture this in your mind. Here’s the situation. The dying, good Jew looked up from the blood-soaked ground upon which he lay—up into the eyes of his most-hated enemy—and gasped-out: ‘I’m at... your mercy. I just... ask you... to end my suffering quickly!’”

My audience sobbed in sympathy.

“And our fellow Jewish victim continued his last plea,” I said, my voice dripping with pathos, ‘...and please tell my wife... if you would have pity on me for this last request... who awaits me at a Marriage feast in Jericho... tell her... that... I... loved her... to the end...’ Then he collapsed back down, awaiting the final knife-thrust from his Samaritan enemy.”

“Maybe the robbers will come and kill the Samaritan too!” the young boy interjected with great emotion.

“It’s better than he deserves! ... He should be torn apart by wolves! ... He should be burned at the stake!” others cried-out, seething with anger at the evil, vile Samaritan.

“But then a strange thing happened!” I exclaimed, startling them.

“What? What happened?” the old woman yelled out.

“Well...” I marveled, shaking my head from side to side in apparent disbelief, “the knife retreated from the sight of the bleeding man. And in its place came a jug of wine—and a jar of olive oil.”

“Huh?” the young boy blinked his stretched-wide eyes. “What’s happening?”

A hush of anticipation fell over the packed people around me.

“Well, believe it or not, the Samaritan *took pity* on the naked, beat-up, helpless Jew—and was helping him!” I exclaimed in mock amazement. “Indeed, the Samaritan was pouring wine into the man’s knife wounds as a *cleanser*, gently removing caked-in dirt and mud. Then he was pouring oil onto the cleansed wounds as a *soother*, to calm the terrible pain!”

The crowd was stunned into an uncomprehending silence.

“You mean after the Samaritan dog slit that good Jewish man’s throat, he fixed up the body to look like it hadn’t been murdered?” the young boy gulped.

“No!” I flatly stated. “In fact, the Samaritan was comforting the victim, telling him to hang on, to be strong for his wife! He was moved by the poor fellow’s last wish of communicating love to his wife—and thereby found *even for his hated enemy*, pity, sympathy, and compassion. Indeed, he was moved enough to render kindly assistance.”

The Lawyer was squinting at me now, his mouth hanging half-opened in disbelief.

“And, having bound the gaping wounds with strips of linen torn from his own robe,” I matter-of-factly continued, “the Samaritan got the man up upon his donkey. He loosely tied the Jewish man’s hands together under the throat of the donkey so he’d not fall off. Then the Samaritan walked in front of the beast, leading it onward. He did this even though it slowed him down, making him a target for additional attacks. He glimpsed the evil robbers hiding up in the rocks of the pass. But the Samaritan was a strong, burly man. He hoped the robbers would be afraid of him even though he was only slowly trudging along. He carefully led the donkey and the slumped-over man for miles until they came to an Inn...”

“—and dumped him there on the doorstep of the inn!” the young boy snorted in derision.

“No,” I kindly stated. “The traveler did just the opposite. He rented a room for the wounded man, who was still at death’s door. He put the barely alive, deliriously mumbling Jew into a bed. He rebandaged the wounds. He watched over the feverish, moaning man until he’d fallen into a troubled sleep, sitting watchfully at his side. And then the next day—when he finally knew that the victim of the evil robbers was going to survive—he continued on his way. He left to take care of his own urgent business matters, leaving the Jewish man there in the inn recuperating.”

“But without any money!” the young boy yelled loudly, thinking he’d figured out the Samaritan’s evil plan. “That Samaritan knew the wounded Jew would be thrown out into the

wastelands by the inn keeper. He'd still get his revenge on our fellow brother while soothing his own conscience!"

"Yes," I agreed. "Since the Jewish man was robbed, everything taken from him, and left naked and helpless—that's probably what the inn keeper *would* have done after a day or so. But, anticipating this, the Samaritan gave the innkeeper all the money he had with him. It was merely two silver coins, just two day's wages. But the Samaritan promised that when he returned in a few days, he'd pay anything extra it would take for the innkeeper to nurse the wounded man back to his health."

Hearing this, even the young boy was left with no further insult to hurl at the Samaritan.

"So," I continued, looking the Lawyer not-unkindly in his eyes. "Who do you think in my story was a true 'neighbor' to the Jewish brother so abused by the evil highwaymen?"

The Lawyer narrowed his eyes, realizing what I'd done.

"But... Teacher... what does that matter to my question?" he visibly squirmed, trying to get out of my righteous trap. "I asked you not who might be a neighbor to someone in desperate need—but who is *my* neighbor!"

"Ah, indeed you did, good Sir," I politely replied. "But, are not 'neighbors' defined in the general-case thusly: as people who are right next to each other? And, by that commonly agreed-upon standard, if I find who *you* are a neighbor to, will that not simultaneously define who a neighbor is to you?"

He reluctantly nodded.

"Then I ask you again, good Sir," I placidly continued, as everyone in the audience all fixed their eyes intently back on the Lawyer. After all, this man claimed superior knowledge and expertise for leading them in understanding the religious Law. He'd surely give them the right answer. "*Who*, then, was a neighbor to that Jewish brother who fell among thieves?" I firmly concluded.

The Lawyer looked all around himself, but found no exit. He was trapped by his own logic. The crowd was dead silent, eagerly awaiting his reply.

"I... suppose..." he gulped, speaking in a barely audible voice, "—it was the... the... the 'person' that gave mercy?"

“—*then go and do likewise!*” I replied in an intense whisper.

The crowd around us collectively “gasped”...

He hung his head in a mixture of shame, confusion, and bewilderment. At that moment I had great hopes that he would acknowledge the revelation that had just spread throughout the courtyard. The people simultaneously realized that the “doing” was even *more* important than just believing or proclaiming the right things. It was a profound lesson they’d arrived at on their own (needing only my vivid story to prompt them with).

But then the Lawyer firmed up his jaw, squared his shoulders, and *glared* at me.

“That story, Teacher,” he stated firmly, “is ridiculous! A heretic and bastard could never be more righteous than a Temple-attending Priest or Levite! You made that story up out of thin air. It’s just not true!”

“Are you calling me a liar?” I mildly asked.

“Liar?” he smirked, feeling he’d regained the initiative for putting me in my place. “Of course not, ‘Teacher.’”

“What are you calling him, then?” the old lady defiantly spoke up, defending me.

“It’s widely known that these entertaining but unorthodox traveling preachers love to say things that shock their audiences,” he snidely replied to the lady, tilting his nose upward in disdain. “They readily make-up ‘parables’ that have no basis in actual fact.”

“I made-up this story?” I calmly asked him.

“Obviously!” he snorted. “Your fanciful account of the supposedly vile Priest and uncaring Levite and ‘noble’ heretic sound very much to me like a made-up, fictional, untrue parable!”

I shrugged.

“I suppose if what you say is true, it would make the conclusions drawn from the story less credible, huh?” I agreed.

“Quite a bit!” he grinned, looking around at the audience for support.

The other people were squinting and frowning, coming down from the emotional rollercoaster ride I’d just put them

through. Perhaps... maybe... (they were thinking, agreeing with their “wise” religious leader who was giving them a way out of an ethical dilemma)—it was a *theoretical* situation that could never, ever really happen?

“But you do agree,” I politely pointed out, “that this is indeed Bethany, through which the road runs from Jerusalem to Jericho, about halfway being an actual Inn? Plus, is it not a fact that many travelers go through this very dangerous mountain pass—particularly Priests and Levites, who in large numbers own homes in Jericho?”

“Well, yes, that’s what makes your story *superficially* believable,” the Lawyer reluctantly admitted. “It’s the *characters* you’ve imagined that have no basis in fact! It’s simply impossible for those... *vile heretics*... to behave in any way superior to God’s true Priests and upstanding Levites!”

“So, are you saying that an *eyewitness* to the events I mentioned would have to be found before you, as a good Lawyer, would give it any credence?” I stated.

“Certainly!” he exclaimed. “In a court of law, your fanciful story would be thrown out for lack of any tangible evidence. Otherwise, it’s merely a misleading fantasy!”

“Then Jeremiah,” I asked, pointing to a man who had been sitting silently, his back against the stone wall of the courtyard behind the packed crowd, “would you like to say something?”

He slowly and stiffly rose, a grim expression on his face.

Looking behind themselves at him, everyone gasped. He had a livid scar running from the top of his right forehead down across his cheek, down over his nostril (which was sliced off on the right side of his face), across his lips, and ending on his lower left chin.

“Everything the Teacher just said is true,” he replied in a raspy voice. “Earlier today he was talking about the nature of true Godly Love with a small group... and I shared my story with him and them.”

The crowd gasped, stunned by this revelation.

The Lawyer looked at him suspiciously.

“Who are you?” the Lawyer asked. “I’ve not seen you around here before. Are you a disciple of this preacher?”

Right, throw doubt on this man! Make the unexpected witness seem like my stooge. Well, that wouldn't happen. He was very credible...

"I travel here on business about once a year, usually tagging along with whatever large group I can find that's traveling through the dangerous mountain pass," he softly replied. "I was always a devout believer, regularly attending synagogue, upholding all the rituals and traditions, thinking that we are God's true people..."

Some in the crowd pointed to him and nodded, knowing him from past trips.

"Rightly enough," the Lawyer agreed. "But being a disciple of this preacher disqualifies you to..."

"I'd heard of Jesus of Nazareth, who hasn't?" He continued. "But I thought he was just another cult leader. I didn't pay any attention to excited reports I'd heard about his strange teachings. I continued putting my trust in the established synagogue leaders. That is... until I nearly *died* on that road last year, set upon by thieves, just as the Preacher told you."

"You were...?" the Lawyer gasped.

"Yes," he nodded. "And I saw with my own eyes just what our teachings meant to some of our religious leaders. My eyes were opened! Everything I thought I knew was turned upside down. Since then, I've been very confused at the pious sermons and lawyerly lectures given by our religious leaders. So, when I heard that Jesus of Nazareth was here—who many have told me sees God clearly—I had to come and ask him about my near-brush with death."

The crowd was stunned. Some stood up and grasped his hand, or put a comforting arm around his shoulders.

"So... it's true?" the Lawyer gasped in disbelief.

"What, that a good Samaritan saved my life?" he gulped, reaching up absently to rub at the ragged scar slicing across his face. "Yes! Without his gifts to me—pity, mercy, and money—I'd be dead right now."

A short, pudgy lady sitting at his side rose up also, taking his hand. "And I'd be a widow!" she solemnly stated. "I'm

eternally grateful to the good Samaritan who saved my husband's life!"

There was a long silence.

Though some were obviously moved by the man and his wife's testimony, others looked deeply troubled or skeptical. It would take a lot more than a true story of one bizarre incidence on the road to Jericho to change hatred hardened over centuries into respect.

"Time for a break!" I cheerfully called-out, rising up stiffly and stretching. "We can resume after we've had a bit of refreshments. Please go ahead and take care of nature's demands, or talk amongst yourselves. We'll reconvene later."

The crowd started to get up and trickle out of the courtyard. They were talking loudly, animatedly gesturing and arguing over the story. Many believed the first-hand certification they'd just heard. But some were angry and unconvinced, rejecting the confrontation. Others were uncertain, but not nearly as enthusiastic over my teachings as they'd been at the start. It was a hard lesson on *how to best express Godly Love...*

Certainly, the Lawyer was one of the latter.

I stepped up to him and laid a friendly hand on his elegantly robed shoulder.

"God's Love transcends our feeble mentalities and limitations, my friend," I softly said to him. "We each must totally open up our hearts to God—even to that which at the moment may seem unthinkable!"

He refused to meet my eyes, pulling away from me. Turning his back, he filed out with the others.

"You weren't really telling the Lawyer that he had to act like a hated Samaritan, were you, Master?" John, my most faithful disciple, asked quietly at my elbow.

"What do *you* think I was telling him?"

"I think you were telling him he had to *become* a Samaritan," John thoughtfully answered.

"Oh, how so?" I asked, pleased with his answer.

"Our despised enemies fully realize their own status in our religious society," John continued. "Yet in their own way they

are trying to do good, be Godly—even though they are looked down upon by everyone else.”

“Can Godly Love reach even them?” I prodded his thinking.

“Well, we Jews see them as ignorant heretics,” John continued. “The heathens see them as laughable, ‘pretend’-Jews. Once they had a claim to territory and some prestige. Now they’re poverty-stricken bands of ‘has-beens’ clinging pathetically to their past glory. Religiously, they are the lowest of the lowest. They are objects of pity, ridiculed and reviled by all us regular Jews.”

I nodded.

“So, you’re saying that perhaps that very awareness of their own lowly estate allowed that good Samaritan to empathize with the helpless Jew, *his* sworn enemy?” I mused, raising my eyebrows in speculation.

“You know full-well the real situation, Master,” John grinned. “You’re just allowing me to come to my own conclusion, the better for me to learn. But what about the Lawyer that tried to best you? Do you think his encounter with you today will change any of his beliefs... or actions?”

I shrugged.

“One can only plant good seed,” I softly replied. “Then one hopes they will find fertile soil, be watered, sprout, be tenderly cared for, and become the basis for a whole new reality flowering inside people’s minds.”

“So... not likely?” John answered sadly.

“Unfortunately,” I sighed, “rigid *Law*—so loved by our religious Lawyers—has a seductive appeal that can pervert its entire purpose and meaning.”

“Even the Law of Moses?” John gasped, astonished at what I’d just said.

“*Especially* the Law of Moses!” I replied empathically.

“But are we not mandated to *bind* God’s Laws upon our foreheads, *wear* them upon our arms?” John asked, genuinely perplexed. “It is, after all, the Word of God! Are they not our only guide to spiritual salvation?”

“Sure,” I agreed, “—*yet* not an end unto themselves!”

“Do you mean...?” John frowned, standing there with me waiting for the crowd to slowly clear out of the courtyard, “that the Lawyer loved the Law more than he loved God?”

I gripped his arm so tight that he winced.

“John,” I grinned at him, “there’s a definite reason that you’re my favorite disciple. No one else ‘gets’ what I say as quickly or precisely as you.”

He lowered his head modestly.

“But how is the Law of Moses ‘seductive,’ Master?”

I replied quietly, so that the others might not hear and be offended. Indeed, this was a very sophisticated teaching that the others were neither prepared for nor yet capable of hearing.

“The Holy Scriptures are so luxurious, so deep, so amazing—that a person can easily get lost trying to fathom their depths,” I explained, “while totally forgetting their obvious meanings!”

“How so, Master?” John asked again, genuinely curious.

“That exchange between the Lawyer and me, just now, is a good example,” I explained. “He wanted to engage me in debate on the precise meaning of ‘neighbor’—*not* to discover to whom it really pertains. By seeking increasingly narrow, self-serving definitions rather than *operational* definitions, anyone can justify their actions *NO MATTER HOW FOUL OR HOW ANTAGONISTIC TO THE CLEAR MEANING OF THE WORDS their very behavior may be!*”

John drew back, startled at my yelling. Some of the others leaving the courtyard looked back at us. But I turned my back on them, addressing only my dearest apostle...

“So, rather than seeking to move closer to God, Master, he was demonstrating by his actions the *antithesis* of Godly Love?” he softly stated.

“It’s a subtle trap for both weak and astute minds!” I nodded, pleased with John’s summation. “They delight in trying to show how ‘smart’ they are, how ‘clever’ they are, how ‘superior’ they are over all the rest of us. The Law becomes, for them, a way to stroke their own egos. Getting into a verbal fight that might alienate their entire congregation does not matter in the least to them as long as they win the argument.

Their objective is no longer to help other people, but to dominate them. It's perverse!"

"Yet..." John mused, "they claim to be helping us understand God's Will?"

"Yes, my friend," I sighed deeply. "And they may even believe their own deceptive language. Yet that Lawyer today did not pose his questions to me to help the audience comprehend Great Truths—merely to show that he was more knowledgeable than this fresh, upstart 'Messiah.' Even those of good conscience can quickly and unconsciously slip into this perverse mindset!"

"Ah," John nodded. "Is this, then, what you often condemn as 'legalistic'?"

"No!" I promptly answered, annoyed at his glib answer. "You too, John, are slipping into this mindset, right at this very instant!"

He was stricken by my accusation.

"Master, what do you mean?" he asked, shocked and concerned.

"It's much too easy to 'label' something and thereby think you understand it!" I intensely answered. "If someone gives you too hard a time on some issue, or presses an interpretation too deeply, or insists on a 'right' or 'wrong' way to do something carrying out a scriptural Principle, or comes up with a reasonable counter-counter-argument to your own counter-argument that you'd thought settled the matter... well, just call that person a 'legalist' and you can simply discard what they're saying without having to struggle with new ideas!"

I don't usually speak in run-on, lengthy sentences. But in that case, I made an exception...

"But, wasn't that Lawyer *behaving* legalistically?" John asked, sincerely confused.

"John," I patiently counseled him. "The man was asking me tough questions. Yes, he was trying to justify his own limited actions. Yes, he was trying to trap me and 'out' me as a pretender. Yes, he was disrespectful to my heavenly Authority and Knowledge. But a part of him—maybe only a small part, but still very much present—was genuinely looking for a better

understanding. He'll puzzle over what happened here today, perhaps for years! And, finally, the 'light' may 'turn on' and he'll see the error in his thinking. Because of what we've done here today, many may be saved who today are angrily rejecting us."

"If they could but understand your compassion for them..." John sighed, pausing thoughtfully, "—they might not be so angry."

"That, indeed, is our task," I replied. "When we show people true *Love of God* rather than automatic animal reactions... well, that's when we really begin to guide people into the Light. Sure, the words in the Holy Scriptures are critically important. After all, they are our starting point. But if we limit ourselves to their superficial definitions without understanding the profound lessons those very same words are trying to teach—then we shortchange even ourselves!"

"So 'love' is opening our minds up to the complete Will of God—by whatever means that God might use to reveal such to us?" John asked.

"God doesn't speak directly to many," I replied. "But he's always talking indirectly to everyone. After all, wasn't it a hated Samaritan that today fractured even the false interpretations of a highly respected, experienced Lawyer?"

John nodded.

"The challenge for us, then," I continued, "is not just to achieve superficial intellectual understanding using clever or tortuous logic."

The roadblock of the departing crowd having moved out of the way, I began to wearily walk out of the courtyard, John still at my side.

"What then is our main challenge?" John asked eagerly.

He didn't just want to mull over my words, but come to a conclusion then and there!

I smiled. I could let him puzzle it out. Or, since he was a true "seeker," perhaps I could, for a change, give him a straight answer.

"Sure, John, I'll tell you the 'secret' to our success," I laughed. "It's for us to be humble enough to ask others and ourselves the key question: '*Where's the love in that?*' And

then we must be willing to be an example doing it. We must accept this challenge even if it requires growth and change. That's *truly* being humble in the sight of God."

"So, they work together, then?" he quickly asked, wanting to get to the heart of the matter while I was being so unusually frank.

"Your thinking is progressing nicely," I answered, yawning. The adrenalin was draining from my body, leaving me exhausted and weak. "True Godly Righteousness is not a linear path in which you do one thing, then another, and then another. All Godly Principles work *together*, synergistically reinforcing and building upon each other."

"Synergistically?"

"Yes, John," I explained: "They *combine* to become more than the sum of their individual impacts. Thus, compassion facilitates humility which augments true Godly Love. It's a 'virtuous circle.' The same thing is true in opening up our minds to God's full Will. Mentally removing the hard rocks and conflicts that kill Godliness—especially those poisons we love so dearly—opens our minds to God's Light. Then, we can better recognize and see the rocks in the first place! Removing those beloved rocks helps the Light to penetrate, allowing us to recognize and then remove the rocks all the better. Godly Principles all work together—and we must work on them all at once. That's the 'secret'! Satisfied?"

I grinned at him.

"No, Master," John truthfully replied. "But I'm learning!"

"And that satisfies me," I happily answered, waving absently "later" as I wondered off to find a secluded place to grab a much-needed nap.

I knew what I was doing. I was *shattering* their preconceptions. I was "rocking" the foundations of their reality. And it was as cataclysmic to me as it was to them...

Section 2:

THE FOUNDATION OF REALITY

(See *Matthew 22:23-46*
& *Mark 12:28-37*)

Let's pause and consider what is “reality.” Most people consider this to be whatever is “really out there.” There are three ways to evaluate what’s really out there: 1) *personal experience* [mental], 2) collectively studying the *characteristics of Nature* [science], and 3) time-honored *Holy Scriptures* [revelation]. Indeed, these are the three main ways God reveals Himself to us. They are distinct from each other while being equally valid and informative.

As such, these are our mechanisms for understand Godly Love. Each of the three modes complements and augments the other. Even though they may at times appear contradictory, at the level of Godly Love they agree. Overemphasizing one mode, however, will leave our minds out-of-balance. All three modes must work together to fully understand *how best to express Godly Love*.

Yes, I know this is confusing. On God’s inconceivably higher level, there is no confusion. But with your tiny brains, trapped as they are in ephemeral bodies, it’s often difficult to reconcile your immediate experience with collective analysis with historical revelation. In other words, it’s hard to believe God loves you; and even harder to pass on that Godly Love to others. So, I offer you **four Examples** to help you better understand the Foundation of reality: 1) the *Pillars of Religion*; 2) the *Failure of the Sadducees*; 3) the *Failure of the Pharisees*; and 4) *Recognizing the Messiah*.

HOW TO BUILD RELIGIONS

As you know, I prefer to teach by telling interesting stories. However, for this next topic I hope you will forgive me reverting to a “sermon” mode. There are key concepts I need to explain. Please bear with me. We’ll soon return to my first-century adventures...

The *foundation* upon which religions or religious practices are built can be many things, including:

- **HATE** [a powerful mandate to persist, coalesce, and fight-back against one’s perceived deadly enemies];
- **TRIBAL-IDENTITY** [a stamp of special distinction making one’s group “better” than other groups];
- **PRIDE** [claiming personal awareness and insight better than others];
- **TERRITORY** [supposed divine authority to take and keep land or other physical possessions originally belonging to others];
- **IGNORANCE** [explaining troubling “gaps” in our knowledge by evoking supernatural powers];
- **DEATH** [seeking an “out” to the fear and hopelessness of impending physical termination; plus, a way to reconnect with loved ones who’ve already died];
- **TRADITION** [honoring the practices of parents and forefathers while legitimizing present societal enhancements];
- **DOMINANCE** [a way to gain authority and power for controlling other people whether friends, enemies, or strangers];
- **SIGNIFICANCE** [bringing meaning and purpose to an otherwise chaotic, brutal existence]; or
- **FELLOWSHIP** [seeking family beyond one’s flesh and blood kin].

Those may or may not be legitimate foundations upon which to build religions or religious practices. But I claim that they are *all* limited and impoverished. So, I bring you a **new**

foundation, related to but distinct from the above main ten previous foundations... and far superior! Shifting your focus from the above inferior reasons for religion will greatly enhance your connection with God. Yet it's not as new as one might think. Indeed, it was the *original* "foundation"—existing from the very beginning of this physical, earthly reality.

In the beginning God created our reality. I was with God when this happened. This, of course, was on a level far above your present earthly one. You are not capable of fully understanding what I just said, let alone comprehending its detail and glory. Your minds are just too tiny. I apologize if that offends, but it's true. So, I must tell you about it in terms of things you can grasp.

So, please bear with me here...

It's rather like you trying to explain to an ant the mathematics behind the construction of the exquisitely shaped Parthenon in Athens. Placed upon the surface of one of the elegant columns of the Parthenon, the ant might be able to vaguely perceive subtly curved lines comprising that heathen temple's marvelous marble structure. But the complex mathematics which underlies their construction is something that the ant could not even conceive exists, let alone be able to understand!

In like manner, my Father has chosen throughout the history of humanity's emergent self-and-God awareness to communicate Reality's "beginning" in ways you can grasp. What's mostly been communicated to you in Holy Scripture is not stark facts, but glimmers of Reality's grandeur. The full glory of Reality is far greater than you can think, far larger than you can conceive, and far more mindboggling than you can ever be aware. Even from the advanced perspective of your modern-day scientific methods, you only sketch the outline of Reality.

So, let me tell you what you *are* capable of grasping: that *it all began as an act of supremely creative love!*

God is the Ultimate Artist—invested with a delightful exuberance for the act of Creation. Nothing pleases Him more than making, where before there was nothing... *something* of transcendent beauty! Plus, God's Creativity is not static. The

product of His Handiwork is itself dynamic, fluid, developing, evolving, and changing in ways that are themselves astonishing and intriguing to any of us intelligent observers! Also, it's not just any old thing that's put upon a "blank slate" that fills God with divine satisfaction. *Godly Creativity* conforms to **five fundamental Godly Principles**.

Here are the 5 Godly Principles that mark the boundaries of Godly Creativity:

- **REASON** [there's an underlying logic that most intelligent observers can appreciate];
- **UTILITY** [there's a purpose being achieved which helps serve affected "customers" in ways that they agree are useful];
- **RESPECT** [it is NOT done in isolation out of purely selfish desires, but takes into account the needs, desires, and existence of everything else to which it connects];
- **BEAUTY** [it inspires, motivates, and compels other intelligent creatures to similar acts of creation]; and
- **HONOR** [it is something of which the creator can be justifiably proud].

Violating any one of these underlying requirements perverts, twists, corrupts, and destroys Godly Creativity—making it fit only to be thrown away or burned! We, as intelligent self-and-God-aware products of God's Creativity, have the great honor, duty, and pleasure of partaking directly in the Creativity of God. Indeed, the highest AIM any human can aspire to—and that which pleases the Lord the most—is to do the following: "EXPRESS THE CREATIVITY OF GOD!"

The many talents, capabilities, and abilities that God has blessed each person with are our Potential to attempt Godly Creativity. Making this effort delights our Heavenly Father. *Godly Creativity*, then, is the same as *Godly Love*. It's also the same as *Godly Righteousness*. It's also the same thing as *Godly Responsibility*. It's also the same thing as *Godly Faith*. To **best express Godly Love** is to abide by the same

enabling boundaries (Principles) which God established when creating us.

Our Heavenly Father, then, does *not* delight in us bowing down in unison, going through the same rituals over and over, interminably listening to the same speeches, or endlessly repeating the same songs. No, He is most pleased when we attempt to move ever closer to him by *learning* better, *doing* better, and *making* better things that glorify His Name. Our Godly Creativity, then, is a supreme act of love directed back to our Heavenly Father. The implicit challenge is do our best to have everything that we think, say, and do conform to the Five Godly Principles.

These are the FIVE PILLARS of our success in pleasing God in the best way possible. Indeed, together they comprise the “operational definition” of *Godly Love, Godly Righteousness, Godly Responsibility, Godly Faith, and Godly Creativity*: as such, the Foundations of our Reality.

Yes, it would be much easier to just interminably repeat rituals, traditions, and ceremonies. *Best expressing Godly Love by building on the five Godly Pillars* is tough. This is tremendously demanding. This isn’t something others can mandate upon you. This isn’t some “cookbook” recipe of “do this” and “don’t do that.” This requires you to search your soul, expose the darkest recesses of your heart, and lay open your mind both to your fellow humans and God Himself.

Nobody can make these Godly Righteous decisions for you. There are too many! A massive maze of choices bombards you each and every moment. Most of us fall back on reacting instinctively, on the basis of our animal instincts. We follow our gut: do we selfishly “like” or “don’t like” something? In most situations, we can’t go to a Holy Book to find the answer. No book is specific enough or large enough to cover all the situations that confront us. Neither can we go to some Holy Person to get the answer on what to think, say, or do. No one is that wise, knowledgeable, or empowered!

Our Heavenly Father has placed responsibility for *your* thoughts, words, and actions squarely on YOU. Exercising your own Godly Creativity is your own individual challenge and responsibility. But it’s also an *opportunity* for making

yourself even better than you are now. IF YOU, HOWEVER, BURY YOUR TALENTS IN THE SAND, PRETENDING THEY DON'T EXIST, THIS IS AN ACT OF DISRESPECT TO YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER.

Sorry to shout, but this is yet another critical point...

As the Bible rightly states, “sin” can be both active and passive. Just because you don’t do bad things doesn’t automatically make you a good person. “Saving Faith” is belief that’s strong enough to compel you to take action. But don’t think of either Faith or Works as being some irksome duty. That you have such an awesome ability—to express the Creativity of God Himself—is not a painful task. Instead, it’s a tremendous honor and blessing. At the same time that you can bring (in your own little way) great joy to your Heavenly Father, you *also* partake in that very same cosmic delight!

What an amazing gift! You are not just an object that God created, but you **SHARE IN THAT CREATIVITY YOURSELF**. God has given you this mindboggling capacity via His Great Love. And when you fully surrender to God’s Love by passing it on to others (via your own sincere acts of Godly Creativity), you conform to all five of the Fundamental Principles. Yes, it’s another “virtuous” cycle!

So, it’s not just going to church, sitting in a pew, saying the right things, and doing the “correct” things. No, it’s **HOW YOU CHOOSE TO USE ALL THE TREMENDOUS POTENTIAL GOD HAS BLESSED YOU WITH—in each thought, each word, each action!**

Yes, it is a huge responsibility to live up to the five Godly Principles. It’s be much easier to just follow a list of rules. But it’s also a tremendous Joy! After all, doing the same things over and over ritualistically—let’s be honest here—can be incredibly boring. Where are you going? Is your “destination” to just go back to where you started, with no advancements? What are you achieving? Is it the same things over and over, nothing new?

Although it’s certainly good to remind ourselves of what we already know (lest we forget important items), to make that one’s main focus in life is simply a *waste* of your precious time! Sure, teach beginners what they need to know from the

Holy Scriptures, which, after all, are our inspired “instruction manual.” But the Operational Manual is not an end unto itself. It’s meant to be taken and APPLIED. *Application* is the goal! The specific words are there merely to help you get out and DO the “meaning” behind them. And there’s PLENTY to *reasonably, usefully, respectfully, beautifully, and honorably* occupy the majority of your overtly religious “church” time.

Indeed, the Great Lord of Reality has stretched out for you a vast *canvas* upon which you have the privilege to “paint.” Your reality is so wide that you could never travel from one end to the other. This is true even though it started out as a tiny dot so small you could not even see it at its moment of its conception! Upon that canvas are opportunities and sub-realities so amazing, so stunning, so beyond your present knowledge that you would think me totally insane if I tried to describe them.

As your species matures, you reach out more and more. But what you manage to touch is just “the hem of the garment” of God’s Creative Canvas. The full beauty and texture of God’s Creation will remain tantalizingly forever beyond your grasp. Yet upon the little speck of canvas upon which you now reside, is a wealth of potentials, challenges, and opportunities. That potential was deliberately put there by the Lord for you: so that you could exercise and express your own Godly Creativity. And this incredible gift was lovingly endowed upon you by your Heavenly Father!

Are you getting what I’m saying? It’s wonderful! It’s glorious! It’s amazing! And *YOU ARE A CENTRAL PART OF IT ALL! Hallelujah! Praise God!*

Yes, God birthed it all in a supreme act of procreation. In a very real sense, it is his “baby.” You are part of this wondrous creation, one of his favorite items. You are a twinkle in God’s eye, His celestial child, a pleasing melody in the cacophonous “music of the spheres.” As such, you bring joy, curiosity, and secondary creativity where otherwise would be but blazing lights and crashing cymbals. You are the rhythm and harmony that changes irksome noise into a rock concert.

God loves you with a passion continuing from the very Beginning. This Cosmic Love powers the stars, upholding the

fabric of space and time. And you cannot fail but to feel that Great Emotion because it substantiates and radiates from the material of which your very own bodies are formed! It is everywhere inside you. Every spark of energy, every point of matter, every stretch of space, every unit of time each carries with them God's Love. It informs the brilliance, the depth, and the cohesiveness of Reality. It made you, maintains you, and invigorates you. It's in your bones!

But even though it is all around you and within you, you still have the option to ignore or reject it. Indeed, caught up within the immediate survival imperatives of the moment, the overpowering programming of your animal natures, and your own selfish desires... many choose to reject their own heritage. In this way, various manifestations of organized religion—supposedly honoring the Lord of Reality—become but putrid platforms of complacency. Instead of being blazing lights for God, some religious groups become cesspools of selfishness. Their products are conquest, dominance, thievery, ignorance, brutality, intolerance, and hate—all in the name of God!

That is not right. I don't get mad at many things, but this makes me, Jesus of Nazareth, *furious!* I'm especially incensed when these groups claim they are following me! That is *not* Godly Creativity! That is *not* Godly Responsibility! That is *not* Godly Righteousness! That is *not* Godly Faith! And that is *not* Godly Love... *Shame* on them!

Those that seek to follow God from those perspectives are *wrong*. Those that follow teachers proclaiming such are *misled*. Those that try to substantiate evil actions by saying "God wills it!" are *abominations* in God's sight. Those who claim that Holy Scriptures give them a license for skewing their doctrines in directions that do not conform to the Five Godly Pillars are sadly *mistaken*. Those that substitute rigid traditions for my first-century teachings are *damned!*

Sorry to be so stern... but I know what I'm talking about! I am *God's Incarnate Message* to remind the spiritually maturing human race of its obligations. You've now arrived at a pivotal point in your evolution on this planet. You dominate and control your physical world. Will you continue heedlessly forward fulfilling your lowest animal programming? Or will you

surrender to the higher urgings within you, *manifesting* God's transcendent Love? Ask yourself: "Is what my church, society, and species doing built upon God's Five Pillars?"

I am here to prove to you three critical truths: 1) that God loves you; 2) that you can trust what's trying to shine out of your own hearts; and 3) that you can be part of a true religion based on better things than hate, fear, and "certified" selfishness. My proof to you culminated in my allowing supposedly religious people to destroy me. They claimed to be following God, yet based their actions on weak foundations and false principles. Such perverse underpinnings destroy one's own character! We'll see this vividly played-out in the next two topics: the "failure of the Sadducees" and the "failure of the Pharisees."

God loves you so much that he gave you—as a token of His overwhelming Love—his only-begotten Son. This was a one-time cosmic sacrifice atoning for *your* sins. In this way, you are *shamed*. You realize the awful extent of your own guilt. You confront your own wanton and deliberate violations of the Five Fundamental Principles. Knowing that you are utterly and irrevocably condemned by your own thoughts, words, and actions... is sobering! Knowing that nothing you can do will atone or save you from the magnitude of your own cosmic crimes, you are compelled to throw yourself upon the mercy of your Loving Father.

But be of good cheer! Your Heavenly Father loves you even though you previously turned your back on him. By giving-in to your animal instincts, you squandered your spiritual inheritance. You chose to take God's magnificent Gifts of Intelligence and Creativity and used them to do great evil. You wasted His magnificent blessings on that which is *unreasonable, useless, disrespectful, ugly, and dishonorable*—causing your Heavenly Father great pain. But you're still God's children, a product of his Creativity, a part of Him. Consequently, *He wants you to see the error of your ways and return home!*

He awaits you with opened arms. He gives you every chance to return home. That which blossomed from His Heart to encompass your entire Universe (and beyond) draws you back into its origin. Either you will happily ride that wave

of creative exuberance, or be crushed and discarded into the black Void. Will you be but a bitter disappointment, utterly rejected? If so, it is by your *own* actions, not your Creator's neglect.

But just what is this thing called "God's Love"? First of all, God's Love is not just the shallow emotion of feeling good toward someone or something. It is the very Heart of God made Flesh, come to dwell amongst you. It is made in a form you can recognize. With it you can empathize, interact, and directly relate to—me! As such, it is utterly SINCERE throughout. It is without doubt, unmistakable, and unshakable. It is CONVICTION made manifest in the most extreme actions imaginable.

To embrace this Foundation of Reality will compel you not only to fall on your knees before your Welcoming Father... but return by your own Godly-Loving-Acts-of-Creativity the same KIND EMBRACE to your irritating fellow men and women. They, after all, are like you—made from and in God's Image! If you cannot express Godly Love to your fellow creatures walking next to you on this planet, then you are only fooling yourselves that you possess such toward your Heavenly Father.

How do you know if you're succeeding? Again, it's a constant individual struggle to "operationalize" God's Love. We do this through striving to have each of our thoughts, words, and actions conform to the Five Fundamental Principles—the *Five Pillars*: trying our best to be REASONABLE, USEFUL, RESPECTFUL, BEAUTIFUL, and HONORABLE.

Is that clear enough?

Again, God's Love is not just some vague emotion. It's a motivating FACT with tangible consequences. It's as significant to your continued existence as your brain, your heart, your arms, or your legs. As certainly as blood pumps throughout your body, so also does God's Love. You must recognize its reality in you and around you—permeating everything that you see. You must *let it have its way with you!*

Yes, I love that old hymn from 1898: "Let Him Have His Way with Thee." Thank you, Cyrus S. Nusbaum...

God's Love is, indeed, the **enabling foundation** upon which the Kingdom of God is built. There is no other legitimate foundation than this. To enter then remain within the Kingdom of God you must stand upon the foundation that God laid at the very start of our Reality. There is no other foundation that will endure. This foundation existed in the Beginning and will remain until the End. It is the ROCK that will not be shattered, worn-down, or buried. It is the true "firm foundation" set in place by God Himself. It is exemplified by my own God-ordained actions toward you! Do *not* build your religious life upon selfish ambition, or on conservative or liberal politics, or on deceptive traditions. Instead, embrace and exhibit GODLY LOVE.

It's that simple.

God's Love is that which enables you to helpfully engage with your grubby, irritating, failing, faltering, and repulsive fellow human beings—even when they deliberately hurt you! How? Because God's Love *convince*s you that *they* are *you*! In them you see yourself, not in theory but in actuality. If, after all, the Supreme Creator still loves you after all *your* many failures and sins towards Him... then you are fully empowered to extend the same connected-compassion to those folks around you who are in similar sad circumstances.

Building your religion on anything else than God's Love will be a colossal waste of your time, money, and energy. If the main foundation for your religious practices is anything else than God's Love, then you might as well just go revel in your evil lusts. Enjoy the short time that you're here in this physical world, because you not enjoy what comes after. At least you will have a tiny amount of wanton pleasure to remember in your *eternity of searing pain* cut-off from God's Presence—all alone, discarded and cast-adrift in the black Void!

Yes, there are consequences. I wish it were not so. But you cannot reject your own fabric without ripping yourself into shreds. Not only is it unwise, it is stupid. How can you not see that which is plainly inside your own body, mind, and spirit?

Do you *want* to be stupid?

Yes, some people are born mentally handicapped, without the normal amount or usual functions of human intelligence. That's a challenge which God allows, amongst many other challenges placed here to test your devotion to Him. Plus, in trying to solve them, these terrible things provoke your collective Godly Creativity. God truly helps those who help themselves! Foggy thinking is one of the many obstacles that keep you from exercising your God-given Creativity. But that's not what I'm talking about when I say "stupid." I'm talking about *willful rejection of something that is only there for your own good*. That, my friends, is stupid!

Would you deliberately hurt yourself? Would you take a spoon and gouge out your own eye? Would you drive a stake into your own heart? Would you crush your own foot with a hammer? Would you laugh at your legs, claiming they don't exist, then sawing them off for persisting? Anyone who'd do something like that is profoundly sick in their mind.

Opening yourself up completely to the reality of God's Love merges yourself with all the other humans around you. It ties you irrevocably into the welfare of your entire planet. It abjectly humbles you before the wondrous Power of the Great Creator. Plus, it launches you into the eternal Kingdom of God—providing a future that is neither limited, nor clouded, nor uncertain.

So why not just "do it"? Cast off those lesser rationales for religion and embrace the best! Don't let others deceive you. Do what *you* see is best. Well, that's all easy for me to say—but often not so easy for you to do. To fully embrace and express God's Love takes a lifetime of practice. It takes expert knowledge. It takes careful, deliberate, progressive application. It takes painful denial of conflicting temptations. It involves difficult self-control. And... it's often dangerous!

How so?

Well, the danger in embracing God's Love is well-illustrated by a situation that occurred during my first-century teachings here on Earth. Again, it concerned an expert in the Law of Moses, in this case a sincere seeker of Truth.

Let me tell you what happened...

THE FAILURE OF THE SADDUCEES

I'd just finished arguing the Sadducees into silence. They had nothing further to retort and were stymied in their attack upon me. The "big doctrine" of their sect was that the dead would not be brought back to life because—other than God—spirits did not exist! I broke their #1 argument in half, using their own cherished Holy Scriptures.

Amongst Jewish brethren, the Sadducees held a minority viewpoint concerning the afterlife. Plus, they acknowledged full scriptural authority only to the five books of Moses, not writings from the subsequent prophets. This was a viewpoint that was similar to, but not as extreme as, the Samaritans.

The Sadducees claimed that Moses did not teach an after-life, or spirits, or the resurrection of the dead. They insisted that if you excluded most of the subsequent teachings by the various Prophets, "true religion" pertains to being a Godly person right here and now. Their goal was living righteously in the moment, being rewarded or punished for our deeds right now. When you died you were gone, nothing left!

Yes, I know that sounds rather foolish from our perspective today. After all, you today have the paradigm-shattering evidence of my own resurrection from the dead. I undeniably, publicly died. My body irrevocably deteriorated, in death, for three days in the grave. Yet **BY THE POWER OF GOD**, I returned to life! For there to be the final state of my resurrection, there had to be an "in-between."

In the interim, then—between my death and physical resurrection—my spirit indeed existed. That was when I paid the full price for all your many transgressions. I languished for eons in the black Void outside of Earth's time, cut off totally from my Father. I drifted all alone in agony, separated from the Source of all Joy. I suffered immeasurably. But I was indeed alive, existing as a thinking, discrete spirit.

When my unimaginable suffering finally righted the Cosmic Scales of Justice for the Self-and-God-aware life-forms on Earth, my spirit was then reinvested into my reconstituted

body. This was at the moment God reversed its corruption, restoring it to full functionality.

Death is not the end of your existence. Don't be thinking you've an "easy way out" from the pains, horrors, and consequences of your evil actions here in this life. If you think it's bad here, wait until you're cast to drift—all alone—for an eternity in the black Void. You'll wish you'd devoted every ounce of your strength to truly loving God in the few short years you walked here on planet Earth.

Trust me, my friends. I know what I'm talking about...

So why, you may be thinking, did the Sadducees get away with such an outrageous doctrine? Simple. They were the sophisticated "cream" of the Jewish people. Though small in numbers, they were members of the families of High Priests, Judges, and Rulers. They thought they were so very clever to have figured out the "truth." And they had such high societal status that none could tell them "Shut up" or "Get your act together!"

Plus, they were "contrarians." They delighted in being the "devil's advocates." If someone said something, no matter how innocent, they just had to jump in with the opposite viewpoint. They did this not to help the people in that situation, nor to expand the discussion, or even to try to find deeper truth... but just to prove how "smart" they supposedly were!

So, the "all-so-righteous" Pharisees hated their guts! As much as the Jewish people as a whole hated the upstart Samaritans, the Pharisees hated Sadducees even more. The Sadducees were an ever-present, irritating, unimpressed, socially aloof, "thorn in the side" of the Pharisees.

So how did I totally silence the Sadducees, such that the crowd was amazed and stunned by my arguments? It was simple. I simply revealed *three pitiful facts of their own religious practice*: 1) their lack of faith in God; 2) their arrogance to ignore the teachings of their own acknowledged Holy Scriptures; and 3) their cold and *loveless* hearts.

When did this happen? Well, it was when I was in the temple, swarmed by adoring crowds, in the days following my triumphal entry into Jerusalem. My greatest victory to that point of my ministry was indeed the celebration and jubilation

of the people as I entered into Jerusalem sitting on the back of a colt of a donkey. Their presumed King was demonstrating true humility as a lowly man of the people. Of course, they expected me to then jump off the back of the donkey, take over the place, and lead them all in a great revolution. Their new King would throw out the hated Roman occupiers and restore world power and prestige to the Children of Israel!

But my mission was not to lead them to political dominance, rather to inspire them to true Godly humility. As a concluding “exclamation point” to my teaching, I proceeded to publicly shame, confound, and humble each of the major sects of the Jewish People.

In this instance, it was the Sadducees’ turn. Would you like to hear how I humbled them? Ok, then, hang on for the ride...

A group of them came up to me, challenging me to disprove their pet doctrine that there was neither a spiritual afterlife nor resurrection of the dead. As I mentioned before, their main “brilliant revelation” was this: *once you’re dead you’re gone!* Their focus for religion was living totally in the moment. According to them, any reward or punishment was only what you received in this life, here and now.

So, they trotted-out their favorite argument to confront me with. Their goal was to prove how “smart” they were. Their accusation was that my teachings were based on the entirety of the widely accepted Holy Scriptures. This included both the five books of Moses and the books by the subsequent Prophets. They wanted to tar me with the same brush they used against the Pharisees.

Yes, now that I’d achieved great acclaim by the people there in the Center of Judaism—the Holy City of Jerusalem—I’d finally become “important” enough for the “high-and-mighty” Sadducees to spend their “valuable” time attacking me. So, one of them confronted me. He was a distinguished-looking, well-dressed, middle-aged fellow sporting a nicely-trimmed short goatee on his chin.

“Teacher,” he shrilly said to me, “Moses said to us that if a man dies leaving no children, to maintain his lineage and the

proper inheritance patterns, his unmarried brother should take her as his wife and raise up a family for his brother. Are you familiar with this requirement?”

I nodded, quite aware of this teaching, though it was only rarely invoked. Rather than replying, though, I just stared at him. I allowed him to lay his own feeble foundation for his own undoing...

“Now amongst our numbers,” the spokesman continued, “there happened to be *seven* brothers. The first one married and died, leaving no children. Thus, his brother took her as his wife. But he also died without children. So, the third brother took the wife, with the same thing happening on down to the seventh. Then, last of all, the woman also died. Do you understand the situation?”

I politely nodded.

“Now, Teacher,” he proceeded, obviously eager to “trap” me, “can you tell us in this ‘resurrection’ of yours, to which of the seven will she be wife? *They all had the woman here in this life as their wife!* Should it be the first brother, or the last brother, or the one that was with her the longest—or will God somehow split her amongst all of them?”

The audience chuckled at the absurdity of the situation the Sadducee painted. This was just as he wished them to do. Several of the Sadducees were grinning behind discretely raised hands. They figured they’d caught me just as they’d done numbers of times the Pharisees, stumping them with this “catch-22” unsolvable argument.

Yes, the superior-seeming Sadducees were pleased with the statements of their spokesman. Indeed, their sect had not interacted much with me previously. They considered me an uneducated, peasant “nobody” unfit to associate with them, since they were so “noble” and “refined”! Now they were going to prove to everyone how truly unworthy I was to be in their “lofty” presence...

Also, this was their main “clincher” argument against the Pharisees. The Pharisees *did* believe—supported by the teaching of the Prophets—that people have spirits which pass on into an afterlife. In addition, the Pharisees believed that the spirits would be reincarnated by God with new bodies at the

final resurrection. But in response to this clever debating point, the acknowledged experts in the Law of Moses—the Pharisees—had found no good answer. So, the Sadducees figured I'd likewise be thrown for a loop.

"You are wrong," I succinctly replied.

The chortling of the audience stopped. The aristocratic simpering of the Sadducees behind their Spokesman ceased.

"Wrong?" another of them, a chubby baldheaded man, coldly replied. "What do you mean? We asked you to tell us, Teacher, how your doctrine of 'spiritual afterlife' conforms to this clear Biblical command—*not* if we were 'right' or 'wrong'!"

"You're still wrong," I patiently replied.

Now they just stared angrily back at me.

"Ok, then," I smiled. "I'll explain..."

"Please do!" the Spokesman snapped.

"The whole basis of your question is wrong," I insisted. "The assumptions that you make are wrong. The situation you describe is wrong. I'm sorry if it offends you, Sir—but you are just plain *wrong!*"

At this, the large crowd sitting and standing all around us who'd been laughing and whispering back-and-forth quieted. A growing tension spread throughout the crowded courtyard where I sat. No one had ever been so blunt and dismissive of the aristocratic Sadducees before. Even the Pharisees treated them with caution. These were, after all, some of the highest-placed, most-powerful Jews in Jerusalem!

"Upon what basis or authority do you question our scenario?" the Spokesman coldly demanded.

"I denounce your scenario on the basis of the Holy Scriptures and the reality that God exists!" I shot back at them all.

"But that's...?"

"Truth?" I cut him off. "You, on the other hand, know neither the scriptures nor God's power. That is why you make such glaring errors of logic, judgment, and doctrine. If you *did* know what Moses taught—which you rightly claim to be the main revelation of God for mankind to-date—then you would not have said to me what you just did! Also, if you truly believed in God's Divine Power, then you would not hold to such a stunted, twisted, and feeble doctrine."

They were stunned by my denouncement. For a moment, they were uncharacteristically speechless. Their mouths were hanging open in disbelief!

Then they became *outraged!* They were beside themselves with indignation. A couple of them grabbed their own refined, beautiful robes—the best and finest that money could buy—and ripped them apart in anger! If hateful stares were daggers, I'd have been stabbed to death right then and there!

“*How* are we ‘wrong’?” the baldheaded man demanded, his voice trembling with anger, his ample belly bouncing in agitation under his robe. “Let’s *hear* it, Teacher! Can you back up your stupid accusation of our integrity with any sort of reasonable logic?”

I did not rise to his attack upon my own character. I just smiled gently back at him.

“At the time of the final great Resurrection, when God will take stock of each self-and-God-aware human that ever lived on the face of Earth,” I gently began my explanation, “it will not be as you know it now. In your arrogance, you assume that our present earthly state is the only reality. You think that this flesh-and-blood form in which your spirits currently dwell is the only possibility. In the resurrected state, however, men will not marry. Women, likewise, will not be given in marriage. Their new state of existence will be like unto that of the angels in heaven. So, your argument is *mute*.”

The gathered crowd was shocked at my assertion. This was not just a parsing of some ancient verse written hundreds of years ago by a long-dead Prophet. This was a new teaching altogether! I was speaking not as someone proclaiming the authority of others, but as having authority in my own right. They were stunned and amazed!

The Sadducees looked at each other in bewilderment. This was indeed a brand-new idea that they'd never heard before. And yet, it was obvious to the Sadducees that the crowd saw the logic and power of my argument. Many were nodding and marveling at its simplicity and credibility.

“How... do... you... know... this?” the Sadducee that'd originally confronted me grated through tightly clenched teeth. “*This is certainly not from Moses!* Your fanciful delusion has

no basis in revealed facts. Only the Holy Writings of Moses should guide us!”

“Ah...” I mildly replied. “You want Moses, do you?” I queried them. “Alright then—I’ll *give* you Moses!”

The Sadducees looked at me suspiciously.

“As to the resurrection of the dead,” I continued, “have you never read what was given to you by God in the book of Exodus?”

They looked at once insulted and apprehensive.

“In the Book of Exodus,” I continued, “Moses recounts how that God Himself spoke to him out of a burning bush not consumed by the fire.”

I paused for emphasis.

“Do you recall what God said to Moses from the burning bush?” I seemingly politely asked them.

They just stared coldly at me. They were clearly indignant that I’d question their knowledge of such a famous scripture.”

“Well,” I smiled at them, “the bush spoke, saying: *‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob!’*”

I waited for their response...

“So?” their spokesman answered, nonplussed.

“***GOD IS NOT THE GOD OF THE DEAD BUT OF THE LIVING!***” I suddenly shouted at them, standing up to face the group of Sadducees head-on. “Long after Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob died—long after their bodies were buried, their bones crumbled into dust—**GOD HIMSELF TO MOSES PROCLAIMED THAT THEY STILL EXISTED!**”

“I... but... w-we... that’s n-not... well...?” the spokesman stammered.

His goatee was shaking as if hit by a strong wind. He’d never before heard this argument. He looked around for support from the other Sadducees. But they were melting away into the crowd behind us, knowing that they dared not engage me in debate any further. They had no desire for their pretense at superior knowledge to be totally evaporated!

All around us the packed people in the courtyard were stunned, shaking their heads in amazement. They’d never seen the Sadducees reduced to wordless withdrawal. Before,

the Sadducees always had some sort of superior-sounding counterattack. Now... nothing!

A spontaneous applause sounded here and there, then merged into a great roaring *CLAPPING* that filled the stone courtyard. The sound rolled like thunder on into the Temple proper. The crowd was aware that something extraordinary had just happened, something amazing!

In front of me, only the lone spokesman of the Sadducees was left, his innermost convictions shaken. I moved forward a step, laying a hand on his trembling shoulder.

“My friend,” I smiled at him as the applause and shouting continued all around us. “It’s not about who is the cleverest, the smartest, or the best debater. The true test of Godly Truth is being continually willing to open yourself up to learning more and better—*deeper, wider, higher, and more-substantial*—from *all* the Holy Scriptures and beyond. You can never have all the answers. Finding one solution just opens up ten more, even-deeper problems. God’s Truth is endless!”

He looked like I was speaking nonsense, garbled words that made no sense!

“Even the best of you is still not smart enough!” I relentlessly continued. “Don’t lock yourself into circular, self-fulfilling logic boxes. No matter how sophisticated, clever, or intoxicating your logic may seem, stay open to Godly revelations. Above all, don’t try to limit God! Don’t you know that *all* things are possible with God?”

He grudgingly nodded...

“Isn’t this the ‘message’ of the burning bush to Moses?” I instructed him. “Moses thought he had everything figured out, but God confounded him! Moses was content and happy in his newly acquired, peaceful life as a lowly shepherd. But God had greater plans for him! Is that not so?”

Again, he almost unperceptively nodded...

“Moses tried to make excuses about how he wasn’t fit to do impossible-sounding, grand things for God,” I gently explained. “But God took him by the hand, giving Moses the power to lead his entire people out of captivity! And that was just the beginning of Moses’ incredible achievements. From thence onward, Moses established the great Jewish Nation

that continues even to this day! And it all started with a *miracle*... a burning bush that was not consumed. *You* can be that burning bush, today!”

I could see I was starting to reach him. Tears glistened in his eyes...

“Do you want to tell God that the only existence possible for us little humans is the grubby life that we lead here, day-by-day?” I persisted. “Do you want to limit your possibilities to just eating, drinking, and sleeping? Surely God has more than that planned for you, my friend. Why do you want to just live a few short years then die? **WON’T YOU EMBRACE ALL THAT GOD HAS STORED UP FOR YOU?**” I finished.

I spoke loudly so that everyone could hear my new challenge to him.

He opened his mouth... shut it... stretching his eyes wide. It looked for a moment like he would fall at my feet and shout “hallelujah!”

But then he took a deep breath, hardened his gaze, and drew away. In that moment he was lost to me, retreating back into the crowd to rejoin his friends. Cherished Doctrine won out over Godly Creativity...

“This is a waste of time,” he muttered. “I’m leaving! Who’s with me?”

The crowd was standing up, stretching, and either following the Sadducees out of the courtyard or going to get some refreshments. The debate was terminated. I’d won, but I’d lost a possible new disciple.

I was bitterly disappointed. I sighed, grimacing. But Peter was at my side, ready to encourage me.

“I wouldn’t worry about such a person as that, Master!” his gruff voice cheerfully stated. “They ‘know’ what they believe and don’t need you—or even God—to tell them anything different. The fools! *Hah!*” he snorted in disgust.

“It is how they derive their self-esteem,” I again sighed. “For all their social, business, and political success—they’re just little kids beating on their doctrinal ‘drum’ to get attention. It’s so very sad...”

“How is it that they have failed so badly?” John, standing behind Peter, cautiously asked. “Where did they go wrong? Who do they have such *enthusiasm* for their false doctrines?”

“They erred in five fundamental ways,” I answered, wearily sitting back down.

I was ready to resume my discourse with the people in the courtyard, once they’d quieted down enough to hear me again.

“What are those five ways that they went wrong?” John asked.

John was always eager to know more, understand better, and use those insights to improve his own spiritual life. It was one of the reasons he was my favorite apostle.

“First and foremost, they decided in their hearts to be mightier than God Himself,” I said.

“That’s... a *colossal* arrogance!” John gasped.

“Yes, though many others do the same.”

“What?” John gasped, horrified.

“Sure, many religious people do the same thing,” I croaked, my throat raw from my shouting, “though they don’t flaunt it as arrogantly as do the Sadducees.”

I motioned for Peter to go bring one of our jugs of water from which I could take a few sips.

“It is the greatest temptation humans fight against,” I continued, “—wanting to *be* God! After all, they are made in the spiritual image of God. Our Heavenly Father gave them the knowledge of good and evil, plus an insatiable *curiosity*. They want to comprehend and understand *everything* around themselves. Knowing that they only understand in part, however, they feel continually frustrated.”

“I feel that way myself,” John admitted.

“Which by itself is fine,” I comforted him. “They sense within themselves the Godly Perspective, that which sees beyond the immediate boundaries of their known existence. Searching is a godly trait. But where they go wrong is when there are not yet accepted boundaries. They intuitively feel they can impose their own previous knowledge to make it so!”

“Can’t they just accept their own ignorance?” Peter said, handing me the jug of water. “Surely, they see that their present knowledge is limited?”

“Uncertainty breeds fear,” I smiled gratefully at him, upending the jug to take a long drink. “They crave safety in *certainty*, to the point they’ll make up something to get to a ‘final’ answer.”

“Sounds stupid to me,” Peter huffed, sitting down heavily next to me.

“Stupid or stubborn, my friend,” I agreed with a wry smile. Peter himself was prone to such leaps of ignorance, as he well knew. “Unfortunately, their knowledge is so finite that they jump to *silly* conclusions. Then, rather than keep it just as a tentative framework malleable to further input, they set their present conclusions into stone! It becomes their established doctrine, which their group must believe whether or not it makes any sense or conforms to God’s Reality. So, their own willful nature decides to rebel against God. It’s a grand and deadly mental disease of humans.”

Another of my disciples, one of the women, spoke up at John’s elbow.

“And as such, then, is it a particularly *male* affliction, Master?” she asked, laughing quietly.

“HmMMM...” I pretended to muse upon her suggestion. “A *male* affliction—where we of the male persuasion tend to dominate, control, and dictate events to our own satisfaction? Now where did you get such an idea?” I said in mock-astonishment.

She lightly punched me on my shoulder, with affection.

“Ouch!” I grinned back, rubbing at the spot, pretending pain.

“But Master...?” John continued, ignoring the kidding.

He looked irritated at the brief levity. John was a very focused individual, rarely laughing with us. Although he was my most devout disciple, a trusted apostle, he had little patience for jokes which I and the other disciples enjoyed from time-to-time. He was especially irritated when a joke was aimed at my “oh, so serious” teachings. But everything, all the time, does *not* have to be dead serious to be effective!

“Yes, John?” I grinned at him, laughing.

He ignored my momentary joviality, pressing me for a full answer...

“That, however, was but *one* of the Sadducees’ five failings,” he rightly summarized. “What are the other four?”

More seriously, I again sighed. Back to the topic at hand!

“Secondly,” I continued, “they determined in their hearts to *not* believe in the true God.”

This time, Peter was visible shaken.

“Lord! How can that be?” he gruffly gasped. “I know they hold strange beliefs not accepted by most others—but however misguided, do they not do so to God’s glory?”

I took another drink from the water jug before answering. I handed the jug back to Peter before continuing.

“Do you think God needs our praise?” I laughed, enjoying this discussion. “The Great God of Reality who created the sun, the stars, the moon, Earth, and all the wondrous forms of life that abound here... needs for us to believe in Him? Amongst the infinite cosmic collective, we need our Heavenly Father to believe in *us!*”

“Uh... ‘cosmic collective’...?” John frowned.

“Sorry, I got ahead of myself.”

But Peter soberly nodded, agreeing with me whether or not he understood my every strange word.

“And could not such an unimaginable POWER also create an afterlife?” I continued. “Could not such a Supreme Being also give us incorruptible spirits that continue after the death of the physical flesh? Indeed, since even the Sadducees acknowledge that God is Spirit, what’s so difficult to believe about Him endowing a tiny Spark of Himself into each self-and-God-aware baby born into this life?”

“Makes sense to me!” Peter grinned.

I smiled back.

“Yes, my friend, you’re an easy fellow to persuade... about *some* things,” I acknowledged his enthusiastic and trusting nature. “But if a person does not truly believe in an all-powerful God—indeed were subconsciously putting oneself in the very stead of God—would you not tend to limit and constrain that overarching Force?”

“Constrain?” John asked, puzzled.

“Put your ‘god’ in a box,” I explained, “lest it endanger your own conclusions?”

“Uh...” Peter shrugged again. “I guess so...”

“And that is exactly what the Sadducees have done!” I sighed again, deeply disturbed. “They arrogate themselves into God’s stead. Then they assign to God the limitations of a lowly human. In this way, they assure their own place of absolute ascendancy! It’s a subtle but perverse arrogance.”

Peter and John were silent, contemplating. My other disciples were also sobered.

“Master, from such a state... is salvation even possible?” another of my female disciples meekly asked.

She was ashen-faced at the possibility of willful self-damnation of highly placed, supposed religious leaders.

“Indeed not,” I replied, nodding in appreciation of her astute observation. “Those of such persuasion erect the walls of their own prison. They won’t be saved because they refuse to accept the full power of God. For such, there actually is no ‘life after death.’ They’ve built a logic-proof box from which there is no escape. They have only the *second* death to look forward to.”

“A *second* death?” Peter gasped.

“Yes,” I nodded wearily yet again. “It is the black Void, a grave far deeper than any man could dig, into which their spirits will be discarded as useless trash. In this horrific pit—the second and greatest death—their minds will burn with a final acknowledgement of the extent of their own foolishness. Their continuing loss will be a fire hotter than any flame conceivable in this present, physical world. It will burn without ceasing, a constant agony of regret. They will find exactly what they preached in this life: a Godless Void of nothingness. By rejecting the Power of God, they are *themselves* rejected by *God!*”

“Surely they could receive mercy?” one of the women sobbed-out in pity.

“I do not limit God, my friend,” I gently replied. “You ask if they can still be saved. All things are possible with God. That is why I engaged their Spokesman in reasonable conversation. If they could never ‘see the light,’ then why waste my time on him? But it is not for others to decide. Each person’s

fate is between that person and the Almighty, whether here or in the Afterlife.”

“Ah,” Thomas interjected, “they try to force their strange doctrines upon others—whether the other people want them or not! They don’t tolerate healthy skepticism. They’re idiots!”

Thomas was not a “yes” man. I valued that in him. He questioned everything, reigning in my wilder ideas. He was a healthy brake on my doing something stupid, giving-in to the human side of my ambitions. Satan constantly tempted me to destroy my own mission...

“Yes,” I thoughtfully nodded. “That, indeed, is the *third* great failure of the Sadducees, including many other evangelistically religious folks. They presume that they can decide the final destination of *other* people, sneering at those who don’t accept their ignorant judgments. *It is not the place of man to judge his or her peers.* Only God can pronounce Final Judgment!”

“I understand...” she acknowledged, wiping away tears of compassion.

John put an arm over her shoulders to comfort her. Indeed, it was my own dear mother who spoke. I was glad that John was stepping up to help with some of my duties. The hour of my departure was at hand. She and the other good women of our group would need male protection and strong support to survive the storm that was fast-descending upon them.

As much as the male body made the minds imbedded therein overly aggressive and headstrong, it also provided a strong and loving shield. Godly men would defend women from the ways of evil men who were bent on dominating and controlling. Godly husbands would protect their women, particularly when caught-up in their vulnerable childbearing and childrearing duties.

Mutual support against the temptations of Satan was what God willed for both males and females, together. The Lord of Reality created human bodies to form family units. In this fashion, spirit would be perpetuated by satisfying the valid needs of the flesh.

My disciples were growing more and more into a spiritual family. In this healthy union, each person—male or female—saw their greatest duty as supporting and nourishing true Godly Righteousness in each other. My dear disciples would need every bit of that *mutual loving submission*. Each of them must consciously relegate their own selfish desires, in *advance* of any perceived conflicts! Such a loving, mutual submission was necessary for them to bravely face the many trials ahead.

“And the *fourth* failure of the Sadducees?” John persisted. I snorted in disgust...

“They refuse to read their own Bible,” I said. “The key teachings are right there in front of their noses. But they *willfully exclude* that which doesn’t agree with their own preconceptions, while finding ‘agreement’ elsewhere that’s not even the intent of the writer!”

“But... I thought that the Holy Scriptures... are clear and perfect?” John gasped, amazed yet again at my paradigm-shattering revelations.

“The Lord has deliberately made His Teachings a challenging text,” I matter-of-factly answered John. “As such, it takes a pure and open heart to see what’s really there. Sure, any human can misunderstand or twist what’s been inspired by God. This happens particularly when trying to dimly see through their own childish societal and traditional presumptions. But the true student of God is ever-probing and questioning *HIS OR HER OWN CONCLUSIONS!*”

I saw that the intensely listening people around us were *startled* by my outburst.

“Yes!” Thomas likewise exclaimed. “I know I irritate you guys a lot by not automatically going along with whatever you come up with... but I apply that logic to myself as well. I don’t fully trust my own brain!”

“Well, said, Thomas,” I congratulated him. “That should be all of our attitudes, even myself.”

“We can’t trust our own conclusions?” another of my female disciples gasped. “Are you telling us to question even *you?*”

“Exactly!” I nodded firmly. “If we’re not careful, we can easily *fool ourselves* into believing something that’s false. Being acutely aware of one’s own severe limitations is the start of wisdom. We must be focused upon our best AIM: that of *pleasing God over self, striving to move ever close to Him*. From this enlightened perspective, the Godly Seeker is always looking to understand clearer, *learning more and better*. That, unfortunately, is *not* the attitude of our otherwise-aggressively ‘studious’ Sadducees. Their hearts are *hard!*”

“Ah, they’ve lost the permeability of their minds,” my Mother sighed, “—about which you’ve taught us so well.”

Yes, “permeability” was another of my “strange” words. I was pleased that my dear disciples, even my own mother, were learning to speak a new spiritual language...

It was a great conversation amongst us. But the crowd was returning, settling back down. I prepared myself to quickly take control again. I would dominate their thinking with Godly Power, seeking only their own enlightenment and inspiration. I prepared my mind to continue my lessons...

John, seeing my focus returning, hurriedly asked the final question: “Lord! What about the *fifth* point? What is the final failure of the Sadducees?”

I reached over and took his hand in mine, pressing it firmly.

He winced, but kept quiet.

“*Learn this lesson well from what has happened today, my friend!*” I insisted, still squeezing his hand in my own fierce grip.

“Yes, Lord,” he gulped. “Of course!”

“They actively *exclude* from their hearts the *Love of God*,” I spoke through clenched teeth. “Not only do they refuse to let it enter, what pieces they already possess they actively expel! Consequently, their words have nothing to do with helping those around them. They think nothing of advancing the cause of the Temple, of God’s People, or their local synagogue. They have no consideration for weak people being put-off when they insist that they know all the Truth. *Even if they were right in their strange doctrines, they are still wrong!*”

“How so, Lord?” John whispered back.

I was pleased he was readily receiving the most sophisticated and powerful teachings I'd yet uttered.

"Without true Godly Love..." I continued, the intensity of my words bringing sweat now to my face, bathing my beard in salty brim, furrowing my brow in pain, "*—YOU HAVE NOTHING!*"

"Nothing at all?" Judas angrily broke-in. "Do we all have to be 'bleeding hearts' like John and the women? I don't see how...?"

"You can preach the *most powerful* sermons, Judas," I coldly replied, more forcefully such that all my disciples got the message. "You can give *the most impressive* lectures. You can elucidate the *most complex* spiritual issues. You can proclaim the *most comprehensive* new doctrines. You can rise to the *highest levels* of religious governance. You can draw the *largest crowds* of enthusiastic participants. You can head-up a *mighty new religious movement*. But without true Godly Love, *IT ALL MEANS NOTHING!* As that Spokesman of the Sadducees so wrongly stated toward others: 'You're just wasting your time!'"

I released John's hand, which was now white from having its blood flow cut-off. John absently flexed it, trying to restore its circulation.

"And this is the *greatest* arrogance of the Sadducees?" he grimaced.

"Ouch!" Peter exclaimed, seeing what I'd done to John's hand.

"Again, I say: *ask yourself just one question in the future!*" I spoke with savage intensity to John, ignoring Peter for the moment.

"Yes, Lord, whatever you wish," he sincerely replied.

"Ask yourself: 'WHERE IS GOD'S LOVE IN THAT?'" I said slowly but forcefully, distinctly emphasizing each word.

John's eyes widened in appreciation of the curt, clear direction. I'd taught this previously, but in the crisis of the moment it was so easy to forget...

Judas rolled his eyes in disgust.

"Love again..." Judas scoffingly mumbled.

"What was that, my friend?" I coolly asked him.

He looked like he wasn't going to answer me. But then he stared me straight in my eyes. His eyes were defiant, even hateful!

"Our enemies just *laugh* at our proffered love," he accused me. "I think we talk too much about love rather than..."

"Hey, I love *you*, Judas!" I brightly smiled at him.

He looked away.

"*Whether you like it or not, whether the recipient responds positively to you or not—ASK THIS KEY QUESTION!*" I barked at them all. "Then you will do what is right. You will make the same decisions that *I* would if I were with you. You will not fall into the deadly traps of the Sadducees. It's not just about them spouting silly doctrines, but them *legitimizing* their loveless actions by their own reprobate attitudes."

"Where... is... *God's Love*... in that?" John whispered, musing over the words.

"Yes!" I encouraged him. "The Sadducees' *worst* crime is not just in their covert rejection of our Heavenly Father, but by *making converts who do likewise*... while discouraging those that otherwise might have seen the true Light of God."

"May the Lord have mercy on their souls!" my own dear Mother gasped.

I gently reached over and took her hand. It was worn and wrinkled from a lifetime of hard physical work. It was like taking a leather glove into my own grip. It was a hand of ceaseless, demonstrated, tangible *love!*

I smiled at her, looking into her warm, soft eyes. I marveled at her righteousness. Truly, I learned Godly Love growing up in her family, as her well-loved baby.

"Because of you," I congratulated her, "all things are possible in God!"

Then I gathered my strength, stood up, climbed onto the low stone bench, and instantly took control of the entire crowd.

"THERE'S MUCH MORE FOR US TO TALK ABOUT TOGETHER, MY FRIENDS," I exclaimed loudly, "AND LITTLE TIME TO DO SO! *Let us continue...*"

Many others in the audience had sincere, meaningful questions. Hands shot up all over the courtyard, eager to hear what I thought on matters that they'd never before dared ask of any other religious leader.

Yes, they knew from my words and actions that I wasn't like most of the rest of their religious leaders. I was not set in my ways, focused on giving long lectures, allowing few if any questions in return, arrogant in one's own perceived knowledge of all details of "truth," and expecting only blind obedience in return. That wasn't me!

Indeed, they'd never before had a Teacher who allowed *them* to set the agenda by simply asking for *their* questions. They'd never seen an instructor using all the "teaching" time addressing the situations most important to *them*. They'd never had a religious Bible study class starting at whatever place *they* were at! It was a breath of fresh air in a closed classroom where everyone was slowly suffocating—to which they flocked in amazed appreciation!

I was determined to answer all the questions asked by my audience. I was at the very end of my ministry. I had to leave as large an impact as possible on their limited perspectives and twisted religious doctrines.

But in my embrace of *their* creativity, pent-up forces were released that would soon culminate in my own destruction. Yet from that personal disaster would blossom a far greater good—making all my sacrifice enduring!

THE FAILURE OF THE PHARISEES

So, after I'd shut up the Sadducees, the Pharisees decided it was time to take yet another crack at me...

This following Example further illustrates the dangers implicit in going outside the accepted norms, flouting the established doctrine, and opening one's mind to the minds of others. Yes, your own "friends" may turn on you and try to destroy you!

Although it is dangerous to turn love into more than just a fuzzy emotion, it is essential to remaining in the Kingdom of God. How you "operationalize" Godly Love reveals the permeability of your heart. If underneath all the fancy words and Holy-looking exterior there is a hard heart—then no matter your public status in the church, you are drifting out or already gone from the Kingdom!

Godly Love is more than just one amongst many other necessary characteristics of a citizen of God's Kingdom. It is the single most important characteristic of them all. If you "operationalize" Godly Love by turning it into tangible actions that are REASONABLE, USEFUL, RESPECTFUL, BEAUTIFUL, and HONORABLE—then you've gone beyond mere words. You show that God's Love is truly down deep in your heart!

But back to this present example, the Pharisees were happy I'd silenced their hated adversaries. Even more, they figured I'd been "softened up" by the Sadducees, ready for them to give the "knock-out" debate blow! So, they encouraged one of their numbers to step forward. I saw he was a young man of impeccable character, a talented debater. The Pharisees thought I might take it easy on him due to his youth and relative inexperience. But I had no more time to play games with them. Here, at the time of my greatest popularity, celebrity, and notoriety—all the religious pretenders had to be publicly and totally shamed!

The incomplete and partial nature of the Law of Moses had to be revealed. Only then could God's People on this planet continue to mature spiritually. The many ceremonies and

strict instructions of the Mosaic Law had fulfilled their purpose. They'd led mankind for many years like a child tutored by strict and authoritative teachers. Now was the time for each individual person to accept spiritual maturity. Mankind had risen to the level of taking on not just collective, but *personal* spiritual responsibility. Each godly person would now have the blessed opportunity of independently exercising one's unique talents for to the glory of God.

The time for meekly and blindly obeying one's religious superiors, without question or real understanding, was over! Yes, it was time for *Godly Righteousness, Godly Responsibility, Godly Creativity, Godly Faith, and Godly Love* to all fully blossom-forth. Mankind must recognize them as embedded within, revealed by, and made manifest via applying together the Five God-mandated Principles: the **FIVE PILLARS** of *REASON, UTILITY, RESPECT, BEAUTY, and HONOR*. Furthermore, mankind must learn them not as rituals, but as overlapping priorities. Indeed, they must be applied to difficult, daily decisions for which no easy answers are apparent. True Religion can no longer be rote obedience to a set of rituals and doctrines. *Each* person must individually *struggle* with specific spiritual challenges.

I admit I didn't say these things to the people of the first century as explicitly as I tell you now. But I alluded to all these sophisticated insights in everything I said and did. After all, I was not there just to push a few refinements to the "Old Law," or correct a few injustices, or tweak a few skewed doctrines. I was there to put mankind's spiritual nature into a completely new container: ME! Indeed, I was showing the people—by my own actions—how they *also* should behave in best honoring God.

Make yourselves into me... and you likewise will rise above the limitations of your temporary, animal-programmed flesh! That's scary, isn't it? "You should be me!" So, I guess that raises that critical question:

Who am "I"?

In the first century I was these things:

- **Driven** [compelled to perform a difficult and dangerous mission];
- **Sacrificing** [giving up home, family, and security to the greater glory of my Heavenly Father];
- **Homeless** [without a place to lay my head but in the houses of others and random inns along the way];
- **Self-employed** [working hard at a physically demanding profession; largely paying for my own mission out of my own pocket, while still finding many hours to use my talents in religious pursuits];
- **Committed** [putting not just my “comfort-zone” but my life on the line speaking truth to power];
- **Blunt** [not limited by the niceties of diplomacy];
- **Challenging** [denouncing evil behavior wherever I found it];
- **Proactive** [not just sitting safely and comfortably in the local church building, but going to where the people gathered, opening myself up to their problems and aspirations];
- **Engaged** [empowering the dispossessed, the least-desirable members of society, the outcasts, and even overt sinners];
- **Fearless** [willing to face personal danger];
- **Outspoken** [standing up for the subjugated and enslaved];
- **Confronting** [attacking societal ills and injustice];
- **Respectfully evangelistic** [taking the Good News to everyone, not just those who were my societal peers];
- **Religiously radical** [teaching seemingly radical doctrines that didn’t fit with the conclusions of the present crop of religious leaders];
- **Clarifying priorities** [distaining meaningless traditions];
- **Constantly evaluating** [looking to whether or not what we’re doing religiously is getting us to our desired destination—in other words, producing the intended

results—rather than just achieving some sort of symbolic “victory”];

- **Looking to move forward** [valuing progressive tangible action over endlessly repeated rituals];
- **Teaching effectively** [using every good means to produce results rather than just “preach”];
- **Sympathetic** [recognizing unavoidable ignorance];
- **Impatient** [not suffering foolish arrogance];
- **Totally intolerant of hypocrites** [distaining willful spiritual blindness];
- **Focused** [working at pleasing God rather than petitioning Him to make me happy].

I was all that and more—and so could you!

Do you want to be me?

You might be thinking that you’re not as supremely talented as I, nor blessed like me with supernatural powers. You might be thinking that you’re not God’s Son set upon a stellar mission. You might be thinking that you’re not as smart as me. You might be thinking that since I suffered and died for the entire world once-and-for-all, you need not repeat it.

Yes, you’re correct in all those assumptions. But just as God blessed me with a unique set of talents, capabilities, and resources—so has He you! Maybe you can’t turn water into wine miraculously. But by using earthly tools you can indeed express your God-given Creativity in similar ways! For instance, using a few simple kitchen utilities and supplies, sandwiches might be made for the hungry homeless. That’s just an example, though. Your talents may suite you for working a myriad of other helpful “miracles.”

This is what pleases our Heavenly Father the most: your struggles to advance and fulfill your highest potential, whether successful or not. Sticking your head in the sand, saying you’re of little worth to God, disowning the talents God has given you, and focusing on living a comfortable life... well, that’s a one-way ticket to the black Void. If you’re of no worth to God, then you will be discarded.

Don't think you are so unique that God will take you into His direct Presence no matter what. On Earth there are *billions* of others very similar to you! Our Heavenly Father is not some free piggybank to be casually smashed whenever you need some extra pennies. He isn't your "supreme life-insurance policy" in case the "bad thing" actually happens. You can't just make a few grudging payments of boring church service, then expect to earn a big pay-off at the end. You can't just give him lip service and expect great dividends from easy pay-deductions. God is not stupid!

You must give *everything* you have back to God and then ask: "Lord, what would You have me to do with Your bounty to be most pleasing to You?" That is exactly what I did for my Heavenly Father, which you must do also. It's everything or nothing! You can't hold anything back. God isn't so soppily "loving" that He'll just take you into his eternal Kingdom when you do nothing or very little for Him in return. **YOU MUST LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH YOUR ENTIRE BEING, YOUR ENTIRE LIFE, AND YOUR ENTIRE POSSESIONS!**

I know that sounds radical. It sounds extreme because it *is* extreme. That **#1 duty** is not just a slogan. It's a **REALITY** that deserves to be *shouted* from the rooftops, preached from every pulpit, and mightily struggled for, making it a *fact* in your life! Plus, our **#1 duty** does not diminish God's Love. Truthfully, it *expands* and *invigorates* Godly Love... both in your life and in those around you!

Sure, it's impossible for you on your own to earn, be worthy of, or deserve God's Love. You could never do enough to buy God's eternal blessings. It's simply not within your sphere of potential to merit God's incredible gifts. But through *my* mediation, you can *become* worthy—if you will do your best to "*become*" me!

This is the real purpose I came to your planet. I came to give you an **EXAMPLE**. I came to show you how you can transition from being a mere smart animal into a truly Godly person. In order to make this excruciatingly clear, I entered your physical world as a baby in a womb. Growing up, I experienced every joy and horror that you do. I faced the same obstacles that confront and confound you. I even faced death...

just as do you! I wasn't just an ethereal supernatural power, far above you. I *became* you so that *you* could become me!

Yes, it's back to that again. You must become me! You must *enter into my death* to be born with me into a new heavenly life. This is the purpose of my baptism. It's not just a fresh start but a *continual* renewal of your entire character. Each day you become more like me—and by this continuing transformation you are able to stand justified, pure, and worthy in God's Presence.

Do you understand?

Back in the first century, I wasn't casual or cavalier about following God. It wasn't one thing amongst many other aspects of living life here on Earth. It was the *one main overriding priority* that took precedence over everything else!

Once again: **YOU MUST LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR BODY, MIND, SOUL, AND PHYSICAL POSSESSIONS!** This is your #1 duty. *Get this straight before you attempt any other spiritual duty!*

Sure, you have many Godly duties to maintain other than doing overt "church-work." I'm not saying that you have to go become a monk living in a cave on a hilltop in order to best honor God. It is just as much a Godly duty to care for your own physical and mental health, care for your family, and work at your job as it is to do things for your local congregation of believers. But **ALL ASPECTS OF YOUR LIFE** must be subsumed and aligned with *best pleasing your Heavenly Father* when you truly "become" me!

I saw a lot of me in that young Pharisee who stepped forward to ask me a question from the packed audience in the courtyard—which gives this Example extra significance!

He was a very talented young man. In addition to being a Pharisee, he was also a Scribe. Thusly he had depth of knowledge on the Mosaic Law in the first five books of the Holy Scriptures. This was his obsession and compulsion. Of course, he knew the other books of the Prophets, but they were at best secondary sources. As a young enthusiast for God's Word, though, he was caught-up in the prevailing doctrines. But he *was* sincerely looking for Truth, an outlook rare

amongst the Pharisees. He was intelligent, knowledgeable, and focused on trying to be the best Godly person possible.

The crowd hushed, sensing another tension-packed, dramatic confrontation. I would disappoint them in one regard, while rewarding them in another...

“Teacher,” he respectfully began, “you admirably answered the convoluted and misleading question poised to you by the Sadducees. Would you be so kind as to address a far more critical question that has troubled us experts in the Law for many centuries? Indeed, it has divided us into rival, squabbling camps. Do you, perhaps, have a wise answer for us?”

I politely nodded in the affirmative, admiring his candor.

“Ask your question, my friend,” I encouraged him.

Yes, I knew what he was about to say. I could have gone ahead and dealt with it. But I wanted the audience to be enticed by the interplay between us.

“As you know, Master,” he politely continued, “there has been a great debate for many years amongst us scholars as to *which* of the commandments in the Law is the *most important*. Since there are 613 directives given by Moses—248 things to ‘do’ and 365 things to ‘not do’—keeping up with them all is an angel’s work, beyond the ability of any person!”

I nodded in agreement, encouraging him to continued.

“So,” he summarized, “we have agreed on which are the ‘major’ ones requiring the most attention. Also, which are the ‘minor’ ones, safely delayed or, if necessary, ignored. But amongst the major or ‘heavy’ directives of the Mosaic Law, none is singled out in the scriptures as being the *single* most important. So, there is confusion on what we must fulfill completely, in every detail, before all the rest! Which do *you* say, Teacher, is the *most important* commandment of them all?”

“What do you see as being the main choices?” I asked him, allowing the young Pharisee to publicly demonstrate his mastery of the issues.

“Well...” he paused, thinking carefully. The crowd listened intently to his every word, sure that he was about to “hang himself” with the words I was seemingly kindly allowing him to utter. “Some scholars say the most important directive for

God's people from Moses is the requirement for making *proper sacrifices* to the Lord. After all, without those, we have no way to remove our sins and thus will stand condemned in God's sight! Others say it is the requirement for males to be *circumcised*, which signifies our status as one of God's select People. Still others put the rules concerning *purification and ritual washings* as being of highest priority, continually keeping us from being defiled and made unclean in God's Sight."

"Hmmm..." I mused, frowning and stroking my beard thoughtfully. "So, those are all my choices?"

"Well, no Teacher," he answered, looking around at the hundreds of people intensely watching him. "There are also other requirements of Moses' Law that are considered—by some—as being the most important."

"Like what?" I mildly asked.

"Oh, well..." he frowned, mentally recalling the minor camps of his battling colleagues. "Like the guidelines concerning *phylacteries*: keeping the Word of God always on one's forehead and/or arm. Without that, we would quickly err and go astray. We must always return to God's Word as delivered by Moses rather than just following our own vague ideas. That is why my fellow Scribes and Pharisees are so critical for helping the people. We keep them—many of whom are illiterate—strongly anchored to what's right and proper. And, of course, there are many other critical commands that could be argued as being the most important."

"But those are the main ones which fervent advocates insist are 'number-one' versus other camps with different opinions?" I asked in a friendly way.

"Yes, Teacher," he replied, folding his robed arms together. "I highly value your view of this matter, as it causes great consternation and discord amongst my colleagues—including myself! I want to make sure to do that which pleases our Mighty God the best."

I was touched by his devotion, amused by his jumbled priorities, and appalled at his ignorance.

"And what is *your* conclusion, then, in this matter?" I asked him.

The crowd rustled eagerly, now on pins and needles to hear what he'd say.

"As I said... I am... confused?" he gulped, clearly uncomfortable admitting that he did not possess all the answers. Yet he was honest, willing to do say he didn't know the answer. That was another point to his credit.

"I need your help, Teacher," he sincerely continued. "Your words have great wisdom. Can you put to rest this irksome controversy that distracts us from getting about the true work of God?"

I smiled in appreciation of his insight.

"Upon what *premise* is this question based?" I prodded him, refusing to answer outright.

I wasn't trying to humiliate him. I wasn't being evasive. I wanted him to come to a self-realization of *why* the question existed in the first place.

All eyes in the courtyard focused back on him.

"Premise?" he squinted, rocking back on his heels. "I... don't really know?"

Once again, I was impressed with his honesty.

"I'll give you a clue," I responded. "Think again about *why* it seems we must divide Moses' commandments into 'major' and 'minor' ones? This premise underpins why you now request to know which of the 'major' ones are *most* major!"

"Scholars have agreed for many centuries," he immediately reacted to my clue, "that it would take an angel to keep every one of the directives we find in Moses' writings... impossible for us mere mortals to do! So, we must decide which to concentrate our scarce resources upon."

I patiently smiled at him, again absently nodding.

For a minute, there was absolute silence as nobody spoke, including me. I was allowing the young man to think about the words that he himself had just spoken!

"So... you're saying...?" he finally gulped in shocked realization, "—that the Law of Moses, sent to us by God Himself--demands the impossible of us?"

I narrowed my eyes and sternly frowned at him.

"Are you telling *me* that it's deemed acceptable to disobey *any* of God's commands?" I coldly replied.

“But... I m-mean... of course not... b-but...?” he stammered in confusion.

He realized that here was a seeming *paradox*. If all God’s Commands must be obeyed, yet God gives too many commands to be all obeyed... what the hell was going on?

“Relax, my friend,” I reassured him. “I see that you are not here to try to trick me, but to actually learn something. And it seems you’ve already learned two very confounding and conflicting things: 1) that it’s ridiculous to think that we can set aside ANY command given to us by God, no matter how ‘weighty’ or ‘light’ we might deem it to be; and 2) it is quite impossible due to the limited ability of humans to live a perfect life to uphold all God’s many commands given to us by Moses. No matter how noble, learned, or righteous you might think yourself to be, one must still struggle with prioritizing the Laws.”

“But... that means... that our own Holy Scriptures...!” the man gasped in horror.

“—rightly *condemn* you to hell,” I nodded in the affirmative. “Yes, from the perspective that you and your colleagues view the Law of Moses, *none* of you can ever hope to attain unto the Kingdom of God. Likewise, none can avoid the black Void of final rejection from the presence of the Lord.”

“Then... how... can any... can *we*... be saved?” the young Lawyer/Scribe groaned.

“You must change your perspective,” I kindly replied. “By altering what underpins your thinking, *everything* will change for you. The impossible will be possible. The old questions will become mute. Your priorities will radically change. This is what I recommended just now to the Sadducees, remember?”

“Just... by seeing... things *differently*?” he slowly restated my reply, the disbelief in his voice moderated by a sincere desire to understand.

“What is the *focus* of you and your colleagues right now? I asked him

“Focus?”

“Is it not on *rote obedience*?” I asked. “Do you not assume that God’s greatest pleasure is in seeing millions of humans all

lined up, together doing exactly the same things? Is not the *theme* of your Pharisee's sect everyone dancing in lockstep to the beat of Moses' unalterable drum?"

"What?" he gasped, totally confused.

Many in the audience gasped as well, struck by the utter truth of my statement!

"Again, I ask you," I patiently repeated myself. "Do you think this is what God wants most from us little humans? Did God create us in this earthly place so that we can all wash our hands correctly, clip the foreskins of our male babies on cue, place the right scriptures on our foreheads, kill the right animals at the right times—and *ritualistically abide by hundreds of other lesser actions or restrictions?*"

"But... but... Teacher!" he grated, looking like he was about to have a heart attack. "Those... are our religious Laws... handed down to us from Moses... which he received from God Himself!"

Indeed, I was shaking his worldview, his "paradigm," to its very core!

"I'm not telling you to throw away the Holy Scriptures," I laughed, allowing myself a moment of amusement at his expense. "I'm just telling you what I told the Sadducees. You were here, weren't you? Can you repeat for me—and this fine audience—what I told the Sadducees to do?"

He thought for a moment, focusing his mind on what he'd heard before.

"Open their eyes to what was plainly present in the scriptures?" he tentatively replied.

"Yes!" I enthusiastically exclaimed, jumping up to my feet. "And I say the same to you! I present to you what is clearly right before your eyes in the Holy Scriptures. I direct your attention to two commands not even on the 'short' list for being the greatest of all commandments—yet they are right there, as plain as day! They are located in the book of Deuteronomy and in the book of Leviticus."

"Not... one of... the Ten Commandments that Moses brought down from the mountain... penned by the very hand of God Himself?" the man asked in wonderment.

He'd expected me to take the side of one of the warring camps. And if not that, then at least to fall back upon the starting commands of Moses to the Israelites. I was telling him something radically different...

"These two commands," I continued, "embody all the Decalogue. Upon these two *all* the teachings of Moses hang. Indeed, they are the *most* important commands, encompassing all the rest, subsuming them!"

"Tell me, Master... what are they?" he eagerly asked.

I raised my arms for emphasis, including the whole crowd in my exhortation.

"HEAR, OH ISRAEL," I shouted. "THE LORD GOD IS ONE LORD!"

"*The Lord God is One Lord!*" they all responded in unison.

This was a treasured slogan, one of the many ritual responses the people were used to repeating in the Synagogue. The slogan derived from the first of the "ten commandments": "You shall have no other gods before me." It got them "in the mindset" to accept what I was going to tell them next...

"*The first, the greatest, the most important, and the principal command which God demands must be obeyed before all else,*" I said forcefully, projecting for all the audience to hear, "—and that is this: 'LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, SOUL, STRENGTH, AND MIND.' *This command is inscribed in the Holy Scriptures in the book of Deuteronomy...*"

"Ah!" the young man nodded, his eyes opening wide in recognition. "You are correct, Teacher! That one Command *does* indeed embody all the first four commands of the Decalogue. That's *brilliant!*"

"—and the second is like unto the first, indeed stemming from the first," I continued. "It substantiates and proves we understand the first. The two are integrated so closely together that without the second we cannot truly do the first..."

I paused again for emphasis.

"*What is the second one that enables the first, Lord?*" someone in the crowd shouted out, unable to contain herself.

I smiled, waving a hand at her, recognizing the lady. She, her husband, and her young son had attended and often spoken out at my previous public meetings.

“Namely,” I continued, “the second greatest command—tied tightly to the first, such that neither can be divorced from the other—is this: ‘AND TO LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS IF THAT PERSON WERE ACTUALLY YOU!’ This is inscribed in the Holy Scriptures in the book of Leviticus.”

The scribe gasped in awe at my words.

“Teacher, that succinctly summarizes the last six commands of the Decalogue!” he grinned widely. “In one stroke, you’ve cut to the heart of the Law of Moses, the *meaning* that is *behind* the directives. It is not just the superficial actions, but the MEANING that Moses intended for us to grasp and do!”

“Yes, it is indeed a brilliant revelation,” I agreed, without any pretense at false humility. “Those two commands sum up, contain, and support all the many other edicts of both the Mosaic Law and the Prophets. Fulfill both of those commands completely and you will indeed stand righteous in the sight of God. *There is no other commandment that is greater than those two joined inseparably together!*”

The crowd erupted in enthusiastic applause, expecting the Scribe to go slinking away in defeat. The petty squabbling between him and his comrades was revealed as being completely off target! But he just stood there shaking his head from side to side in amazement, *joining* the crowd in their thunderous applause...

When they’d all quieted back down, he continued excitedly talking with me.

“That was fitly and admirably answered, Teacher!” he enthused. “Truly you say that God is One and there is no other but Him. That should instantly remind us that the goal is pleasing *God*, not pleasing either me or any other so-called religious authority. Rituals and directives should be *tools* helping us to achieve our main objective, not ends unto themselves. How clear you make everything. No wonder the people flock to hear your discussions!”

I smiled at him. Rarely had any of the religious elite sincerely complimented me. It startled and amazed our immediate audience.

“So, you understand now?” I asked.

“Yes, the *true objective* of godly people is not to obsess on checking off an impossibly long list of ‘do’s’ and ‘don’ts,’” he continued, marveling. “Our true objective should be to get our hearts right with God, first and foremost. That means having Godly Love inside of us! From that perspective, we will gladly do all we can to please Him by spreading His love to all those around us. To give our hearts, minds, and strength completely over to God by loving one’s neighbor as oneself... is *much* greater than burnt offerings and sacrifices!”

I was very impressed with this man’s willingness to change his perspective. He showed an uncommon intelligence, flexibility of understanding, and discernment.

“Truly,” I said to him, “you are not far from the Kingdom of God.”

He bowed to me in grateful acknowledgement of my compliment. I politely bowed back to him.

As he left to rejoin his fellow Pharisees, I could see the crowd around us was disappointed. They were puzzled that I’d not trashed him like I’d done to the other Pharisees who challenged me in the past. Also, it was obvious that his own colleagues were *furious* with him!

They clustered around him, arguing fiercely, throwing their hands up in the air, and knotting their fists as he tried to defend his performance. They were particularly angry at him because he’d had a great opportunity to attack me. No matter what “side” or “camp” I agreed with, they could easily shift their argument to an opposing camp! They’d had the perfect opportunity to make me look stupid. But this young “pup” in his respectful, balanced discussion had missed it! Even worse, after that reasoned, respectful discourse, they dared not reinitiate the same attack on me without themselves looking foolish. So, they and the other antagonistic groups present *dared not ask me any more questions*, lest I shame them!

But the young Scribe was still arguing on my behalf in their midst. His protestations of logic, respect, and reason, however, were not having a soothing effect. Indeed, quite the opposite. His “friends” were getting more and more agitated. They started *slapping* him in his face, then *hitting* him on his arms! In fact, it looked like they were about to *tear him limb from limb* in outrage at his failure to best me!

“You just don’t understand...” he tried again to reason with them.

That was the last straw. His “friends” began viciously kicking and beating him, knocking him to the ground. Then they started *stomping* on his hands and legs as he “yelped” in shock and horror! Indeed, it was obvious that the young man would not have an easy path to walk in the future. Both his “friends” and detractors were on the attack against him! Opening his mind up to God’s Love endangered his social standing, his safe position in the established church, and his own mental/physical health.

But—assuming he survived the vicious attack upon him—he would witness world-shaking events soon to follow in Jerusalem. I had no doubt that I had won a future disciple that might do great things for both me and my Father. But I wasn’t finished with his hateful colleagues. They were NOT immune from *my* attack! And if it would help the young fellow to escape, survive, and flourish, I would *not* hesitate to put myself back into their “line of fire!”

RECOGNIZING THE MESSIAH

I hopped back upon the stone bench, towering above the crowd.

“YOU THERE!” I called out, startling the rampaging Pharisees while instantly galvanizing the crowd’s attention.

The audience had been disappointed with how I’d dealt with the young enthusiast. But they’d be thrilled with how I handled his older, set-in-their-ways colleagues!

I pointed directly at the cluster of furious Pharisees who were beating-up their younger colleague. They froze in place, their heads snapping around to look at me in surprise. They’d almost forgotten I was there, continuing to “hold court” as it were!

“You Pharisees delight in beating up anyone who disagrees with you, even of your own number!” I accused them.

“That’s not...” one of them tried to defend their actions.

“You love to lecture other people,” I continued without pausing. “You ensnare seekers of God in your own complex, manmade doctrines. You try to make your adversaries look stupid. You attack anyone that doesn’t instantly agree with you. But *I’m* not just another peasant preacher who you can easily trick, dominate, and crush! If you’re really as smart, clever, and knowledgeable of the Law as you want everyone here to believe—then how about answering a question of MINE?”

Oh, this got their goat. Their fury at the “poor” performance of their up-and-coming young colleague was instantly transferred to me! Also, having failed in their first attack on me, they were now eager for an invitation from me allowing them to rejoin the battle.

I was happy to see my young friend crawling out from being trapped inside their group. He escaped their clutches, staggering to his feet. Instead of leaving, however, he bravely lingered at the back of the packed crowd, though bloodied and bruised. He seemed eager to see how his less-than-respectful colleagues would fare at my hands.

Suspicious, realizing the precarious position I'd put them in, the Pharisees attempted to quickly regain their composure. They realized that their attack on their young comrade had dirtied their veneer of haughty superiority. So, they hurriedly straightened their rumpled robes, disheveled by their vicious assault on their colleague. They spit on their hands to quickly slick down their tossed hair and beards.

"We're not afraid of some ignorant, upstart, uneducated preacher such as you!" one of them yelled back. He was an elderly, dignified man whose hair and beard were totally white. "Go ahead and ask *your* question. Unlike the ignorant Sadducees, you'll not silence *us* by some clever but erroneous interpretation of the Holy Scriptures!"

"Thank you," I seemingly politely replied. I shallowly bowed from my high perch standing there on the stone bench. Again, I deliberately soothed their offended egos. I provided mock respect for their supposedly "greater" wisdom. "It's so good to know that I have access to your accumulated centuries of study of the Holy Scriptures! Surely you—the 'cream of the crop' of our esteemed religious leaders, you respected Pharisees—have the Answers to *any* questions!"

Suspiciously, they nodded in agreement.

"The supposed questioning by your young colleague to me I'm sure was just a test—both of his as-yet incomplete knowledge and of myself," I graciously gave them an "out" for the previous failure. "Certainly, you Wise Men knew all along that loving God and your-neighbor-as-yourself are the greatest commandments in the scriptures. And in honor of that position, I'm certain that you will favor us, your admiring 'people,' with your further loving instructions. We are all certain that your words come directly from the Holy Scriptures, out of the mouth of God Himself!"

They were confused by my effusive flattery. On the one hand, it seemed I'd already acknowledged their coming victory over me. But, on the other hand, this put them on the "hot plate" to come up with clear answers. Yet how could they deny my supposed praise?

"It's true that we are all that you say," the white-haired man responded impatiently, but with ill-concealed pride. "It

is well that you seek our advice and direction. We will be happy to correct the errors of your enthusiastic but flawed teachings. Ask your question!”

I had them right where I wanted them...

“Thank you,” I again politely bowed to them.

All the attention by the packed crowd of hundreds was riveted upon them. Their answer, or lack thereof, would be talked about throughout the city for months to come (and, little did they know, for millennia on into the far distant future).

“SO THEN, ASK YOUR QUESTION!” the white-haired man yelled, readily taking the bait I’d thrown to his group. He’d allowed my “hook” of appealing to his human pride to pierce him, sinking deep into his unwary flesh. “WE WILL INSTRUCT YOU PERFECTLY IN THE WAYS OF TRUE GODLINESS!”

“Oh, thank you so very much!” I politely answered, allowing only a hint of cynicism into my voice.

I still stood there, towering over the crowd, straight and tall, high upon my stone bench.

“This is *such* an important question,” I stated, spreading the “butter” even more thickly over my rhetorical bait. I allowed the dramatic tension to build and build. Then I continued: “This is a Question that I’m sure only you Pharisees, possessed of such vast knowledge and understanding of the Holy Scriptures, could possibly answer. Indeed, this is the Greatest Question of them all, on the single most important and most pressing Issue of our age. This is the obsession of our people. This is the *Hope* of *all* the Ages. This is the Salvation of God’s People. This is the very Foundation of the coming Kingdom of God. This is...”

“—so, ask your question, already!” the Pharisee snapped at me, cutting me off.

He was eager to show I was an ignorant peasant versus his own surpassingly wise, noble self. His colleagues around him, though, were becoming increasingly agitated and fearful. They realized they were but a small cluster inside a hostile crowd that was cheering my every statement. *Was their elderly colleague ready for me?* There can be an arrogance of age that no longer recognizes the pitfalls looming underfoot...

This old Pharisee had that hubris in full, sucked-in by my glowing praise and dramatic framing of the Question. The colleagues of the old Pharisee, however, knew I was going to ask them some incredibly difficult question that would make *them* the object of derision of the increasingly emboldened crowd. Perhaps *they'd* be the ones who in just a few moments would be beaten to bloody pulps! So, his wiser colleagues began edging away from their older colleague, leaving him standing all by himself.

He, though, was unaware of their defection behind him. He continued his stare-down with me, refusing to blink. He was totally convinced that his vast knowledge, seasoned doctrine, and tight logic-boxes were absolutely *perfect!* He was convinced in his own mind that I couldn't ask anything which he couldn't answer.

"Alright, then," I politely bowed again to him, still keeping my unblinking eyes locked with his. "Here is the Question!"

"At long last..." he muttered to scattered laughter from the crowd.

"We are all longing, wishing, and looking for the arrival of the promised *Messiah,*" I calmly stated, ignoring the levity. "We fervently long for the One who will save the Children of Israel, restoring our Nation to its deserved world status. He will reestablish the grand *Throne of David!*"

I paused dramatically.

"Yes?" the Old Pharisee shrugged.

"*Of whose son* will the Messiah be?" I queried him. "If we know this for sure, then we will recognize him when he is born. We will honor him as he is raised up. We will follow him to Victory when he is an adult. There will be no confusion or debate. We will recognize and support our Great Commander sent from God, as he leads us to ultimate Victory!"

The crowd was *astonished* at my question. Many of them considered *me* to be the Messiah. They didn't state it openly, knowing the occupying Romans would grab them for questioning. Likewise, I myself did not claim such in order to prevent the Romans from prematurely stopping our movement. Yet here I was seemingly daring this Pharisee to name or deny me being such! The audience collectively sucked in their

breath in anticipation of the elderly Pharisee's answer. For a moment, the courtyard was again utterly silent!

"I must consult with my colleagues," he coldly answered. "I'll return shortly."

He walked away, motioning angrily for his already-re-treated colleagues to follow. They did so, except for the younger Scribe. He painfully hobbled up to me as I stepped down from the stone bench. Though bleeding from several gashes, he didn't look mortally wounded.

"I... want to know... more!" he gulped before collapsing into my arms.

"And so you shall," I whispered in his ear.

My other disciples rushed up, supporting him and tending to his needs. Others cleaned the blood he'd left on my tarnished white robes.

Such is Godly Love.

Sensing a break in our marathon discussion session, kind-hearted ladies were bringing out piled-high platters of bread, fruit, and baked fish. They also brought jugs of wine and water. It all looked delicious. I was famished!

But waiting for the old Pharisee and his colleagues to return, I had a chance to muse on related, recent events...

Section 3:

A LOUD BEGGAR

(See *Mark 10:46-52*)

Only a short two days before, I was coming up to Jerusalem from Jericho. I was walking through that long, dangerous maintain pass. I had a number of my disciples with me, so we didn't fear being set-upon by bandits. But it was an isolated, rocky stretch, allowing me time to think as we wearily plodded upward.

I knew with absolute certainty that in a week I would be dead. My blood would drain from my mutilated body, hanging there lifeless, nailed to a cruel Roman cross. The adoring crowds who'd soon greet me, loudly chanting my praise, thinking me to be their long-promised Messiah, would have their hopes dashed. I, their disgraced leader—seemingly deserted and abandoned by Jehovah God—would suffer a gruesome ending.

I dreaded the coming ordeal, not so much because of the physical agony and torture—though that by itself would be excruciating—but in appearing to let down my disciples, my followers, and my family. They all believed in me! Some were previous strangers who'd left everything behind to faithfully follow me. Some were there for the entire three years of my ministry. Others, such as my dear Mother, devoted their entire lives to me. They'd set aside their own ambitions, given up family and jobs, and dedicated everything to my Cause.

I'd tried to warn them of the coming events, but it was outside their reckoning. They'd seen me do many miracles, working mighty wonders. For God to allow me to be brutally executed by my enemies... was simply unthinkable! So, I steeled myself for the coming wild ride: both the exhilaration and the horror. Plodding up the mountain pass, I took each step forward with grim determination. For the last week of a person's

life on Earth, mine would be truly exceptional. Plus, this last long walk to my own execution was the culmination of my life. So much had happened in such a short period of time. It was almost too much to believe, even for me.

For instance...

Shortly before, as we were departing from Jericho to begin the long walk through the dangerous mountain pass—many people were lined up along the road, cheering us on. I heard someone SHOUTING out for me, over and over. That person was trying to get my attention above the noise and bustle of the crowd. My disciples informed me that it was a blind beggar named Bartimaeus. He was sitting beside the road as was his custom, trying to get a few coins from the passing travelers. He was a peculiar man, dressed only in rags, with no sandals on his feet, happily wiggling his dirty toes at everyone who came near! His eyes never ceased moving in random circles, as if searching for something and never finding it—though both of his blind eyes were *dead white*.

When he heard that I, Jesus of Nazareth, was coming down the road he stopped begging for money. Instead, he began to shout over and over again: “*Son of David! Have mercy on me! Son of David! Look at me! Son of David! Hear my cry!*”

The title “Son of David” was reserved for the coming Messiah. To loudly name me as such might alert the ever-present Roman troops to my presence, prompting them to prematurely arrest me as an insurrectionist. So those around Bartimaeus tried to shut him up. But he wouldn’t. Instead, he yelled out all the louder!

This really irritated those close to him. After warning him verbally with no response, they began kicking and hitting him. But he persisted, shouting all the louder! But—out of the many hundreds who were sick and mutilated who I didn’t have the time to stop and heal—his persistence in naming me as the Messiah caught my attention. Also, I was impressed by his willingness to suffer abuse while giving me the most exalted religious Jewish title of the day.

I was touched by his courage in my name! So, I stopped the procession and told my disciples to stop his neighbors from hitting him, then bring him to us. My disciples quickly

did as I directed. The irritated people around Bartimaeus stopped trying to “shush” him, moving off a short distance. His remaining street friends helped him up to his feet.

“Take courage, Bartimaeus,” they said, “the Teacher is calling for you to come to him!”

Eagerly, he tossed away the outer robe he’d been huddled beneath and leapt to his feet. He stumbled and groped his way forward through the press of the crowd, totally blind. His dull, lifeless eyes saw nothing but darkness. I felt great compassion for him as he staggered up to us. Both beside and behind him were a few of his street-friends.

He was determined to come to me. Sure, a large part of his motivation was selfish, but what of it? In his blindness he knew I was his only hope! In his blindness he recognized me as his personal Savior, which so many other sighted people had not. For that, I loved him!

As my disciples steadied him in front of me, I put my hand on his rag-covered, filthy shoulder.

“What do you want, Bartimaeus?” I kindly asked him.

“Master!” he exclaimed. His head weaved back and forth before zeroing-in on my voice. “Before I passed away, my one wish has always been to witness the arrival of the only-begotten Son of God, the Son of David, our long-desired Messiah. And now... I’ve done so! It’s YOU! I feel your strong hand on my shoulder. I need nothing more, Master. I can now die happy!”

He could have asked me to heal him, which I’d have done. But he had an extraordinary faith, knowing from his long experience that physical sight was illusionary. I knew that he wanted to see *behind* the illusion of the physical earthly world—to that which lay beyond!

Though he was but a poor beggar sitting on the street living off the pity of others, he had great perception. Near the lowest rung of society, he had a Vision unencumbered by the many requirements and temptations of physical possessions.

I took his head firmly into my hands. My hands glowed with an unearthly light! The many witnesses in the crowd “gasped”—marveling at *new colors* swirling from my fingertips!

A wide grin spread over the beggar's face. His lifeless, dulled eyes stretched wide. Though they were still sightless, dulled and white, it seemed they perceived *something*?

And then...

"I see, Lord, I *see!*" he gasped in awe.

The crowd all around us fell silent, intrigued. Yes, they'd seen me heal many others in the past, but never like this! I'd previously caused the blind to see. But why were the poor beggar's eyes still dead-white? Had I really healed him?

"*What* do you see?" I gently asked him, wanting him to pass on his revelation to those surrounding us.

"I see you, the Son of God, *hanging from a tree!*" he gasped, grimacing at the sight. "You're... badly bleeding!" he groaned.

Shocked by his disrespectful and disturbing vision, his friends tried to pull Bartimaeus away from me...

"Leave him!" I commanded his well-meaning but misguided friends. "Continue, Bartimaeus—tell everyone what you see."

"Oh, Lord!" he gasped, continuing in a loud, quavering voice. "I see a *great river of blood* gushing from your head, your back, your hands, your side, and your feet... pooling beneath you—and spreading out covering the entire world! All of those who thought they don't need you, who cared not that you were nailed to the tree... they're now floundering, sinking, and drowning! It's awful! Your blood is *killing* them!"

He sobbed at the horror he was witnessing: a vast population drowning in a sea of churning, bubbling, hot blood.

"Go on, Bartimaeus," I encouraged him. "Tell us the rest of your Vision!"

A beatific smile now spread across his face.

"But all the others..." he suddenly laughed. "Your blood is reaching everyone! To the others it's like a soothing red blanket, wrapping them up, protecting them. And they don't have to be lucky like me, sitting here as you happened to pass by on the road. Everyone can reach you now! All of those that are sick, disabled, hopeless, spat-upon by the rest of the world, laughed at, or ignored—YOUR BLOOD IS ALL AROUND THEM, LIFTING THEM UP!"

Those around us were shocked by his shouts, thinking he'd gone mad...

"They're *not* sinking into your ocean of blood, but *floating* on it!" he grinned, looking up at the clouds. "And it's lifting them higher and higher into the sky! Oh God, it's *glorious!*"

His friends looked at each other in fear. Was he really perceiving a Vision of the future, or just a glee-generated hallucination?

"Blessed are you, Bartimaeus," I congratulated him, "for speaking the truth that many others don't wish to see. In your blindness you perceive more than most. You have no need for physical sight. But so that those present here today may know you are not crazy, rather an instrument of God's Grace—*RECEIVE YOUR PHYSICAL SIGHT!*"

His head snapped back from me.

Then—slowly blinking in wonderment—he straightened up his head and *looked me straight in my eyes!*

"I... *see*... You!" he grinned widely.

The milky-white orbs listlessly rolling in his head were gone. Now, they were restored to their full functionality—but one blue and the other brown. Hah! I'd taken away his negative distinction and given him a beautiful new one in return.

Who says I don't have a sense of humor?

"HALLELUJAH!" he shouted, dancing around in a tight circle. "I can see! I can see! I can see! The Master touched my face and healed me! Praise be to the Son of David! Praise God! I can *see!*"

Yes, I'd always cautioned my disciples, the crowds, and individuals not to name me as the *Son of David*, a well-known title of the Messiah. But I was beginning my last "passion week" here on Earth. Now it was finally time to throw off all pretense and obfuscations. It didn't matter anymore that I might be identified as the Messiah. Indeed, it was my destiny, soon to be fulfilled...

The crowd was stunned at this turn of events, arguing and debating amongst themselves as to whether it added or detracted from my status. Here was an obvious miracle from God. But, somehow, it concerned rivers and oceans of blood? It was about me, their triumphant leader—but "nailed to a

tree”? What did it that mean? Well, it certainly meant that the restored Bartimaeus—jumping up and down in joy, waving his hands up in the air; then careening away from me through the crowd expertly charting his own path—was no longer a mere beggar.

Indeed, now Bartimaeus was *famous!* He could expect to enjoy a full and bountiful life in Jericho in the future. Many in the crowd that’d before distained and spat upon him were now fighting to get near enough to hug and kiss him. Yes, they wanted some of the “magic” I’d given him, rubbing off on them as well. Doubtless he would now be invited to reside in the homes of the rich and well-to-do. He no longer needed to live on the mean, ugly streets. He could, if he wished, finally have a life of luxury and plenty!

But he stopped his prancing and ran back to me, falling at my feet and hugging my robed legs...

“THANK YOU, LORD!” he loudly called-out, his “begging voice” in full play so that everyone could hear. “Thank you, thank you, *thank* you! Please don’t go any further. You don’t have to do this thing. God does not force you. I don’t want to see you in actuality up there on that terrible tree. We’re not worthy of your awful sacrifice, Lord. Stay with us *here*. Please stay!”

I reached down and gently drew him up to his feet, again facing him. This time I spoke sternly, my strong hands now firmly gripping both of his thin shoulders...

“Your faith has healed you,” I stated. “Go your way in peace. I must do my Father’s will. And, yes, you *are* worthy of my sacrifice. I *make* you worthy of my sacrifice because... I love you. Thank you for your testimony on my behalf.”

“I love you too!” he sobbed.

I gently pushed him away. Then I turned, motioning to my disciples to restart our march. I intended to leave Bartimaeus and the other townsfolk of Jericho behind. But he would not have it! Without a parting word to his street-friends or the other town-folks, he fell into line right behind me, *joining our group!*

I smiled to myself. He indeed had the obsessive “Faith that saves.” His devotion to me was engendered not by fear or intimidation, but from *eternally grateful, Godly Love!*

However, that very same Godly Love had cost him a life of predictability, giving up his successful begging spot and subsequent fame. Indeed, he was walking on bare, calloused feet. It was tough on him, following the rocky, dirty path of our long, difficult, upward climb—*stepping in my very own footsteps!*

My followers believed I was not just a traveling preacher but the actual Messiah. They believed this not just because of my stunning rhetoric, but because of my deeds. I proved my faith in God *by* my actions. I was down there on the dirty roads, walking with the oppressed, healing the sick, comforting the grieving. Both spiritually and even physically—I was even *raising the dead...*

Section 4:

RAISING THE DEAD

(See *John 11:1-53*)

So, we continued walking upward, onward through the long mountain pass, mile after mile. Finally, about two miles from Jerusalem, we wearily trudged into the small village of Bethany. Walking to my own final confrontation with outraged enemies, my mind drifted back to the last time I'd been in the village...

It was there that I'd paid my respects at the closed tomb of a rotting, four-day-old corpse. It was the dead body of my young friend Lazarus. He'd been well liked in life, prayed for fervently in his unexpected illness, then mourned by many at his untimely death.

Indeed, there'd been many who wondered why I refused to come and heal my dear friend when sent for by his two sisters. I'd healed many other sick people of far worse afflictions, yet failed to go to him when word was sent to me of his perilous condition. Even my own close disciples had questioned my decision to stay away.

So, when I did finally show up—four days after they'd laid his ritually wrapped, dead body into the tomb—they were amazed when I broke down and cried. I grieved with Mary and Martha, his two sisters. But if I truly cared so much, why wasn't I concerned enough to rush to his side while he was still alive?

The family of Mary, Martha, and their younger brother Lazarus was fairly well-to-do. They owned a large house in Bethany and were very hospitable to everyone. They often took in weary, poor travelers struggling up the dangerous road from Jericho. They were loved and respected for the many good works that they did. Lazarus, still a young man, was

especially beloved by the townsfolk because of his happy nature. He showed loving kindness to all, having a boyish enthusiasm in everything that he did.

So, the illness that overtook and consumed Lazarus was widely known throughout that area of the country. Many came to visit and give their good wishes, hoping for his recovery. Many directly witnessed his relentless decline then tragic death. Many came to pay their respects to his laid-out, dead body. A number of people in the community assisted in preparing his body for burial. Great crowds from Bethany and the surrounding areas came and attended his funeral. Several of the local dignitaries helped roll in the huge gravestone sealing-shut his tomb. Even then, four days after his death, there were still many visitors coming from Jerusalem, among them highly respected Jewish leaders. They came to the house of Mary and Martha to console them at their terrible loss.

And so, as I walked to the tomb to pay my own respects, many of the townsfolk came along—including several of the high-ranking Jews from Jerusalem. They were all still grief-stricken. They sobbed loudly, joining Mary, Martha, and myself weeping for dear, dead Lazarus.

Then, before the gathered crowd of mourners, Martha directly confronted me...

“Master, if you had been here, my brother would not have died,” she bluntly stated.

I heard mumbled assent from the others. Many of them were prior admirers of my campaign. Some had even contributed money to my quest. That I’d not come to heal the well-beloved young man was a bitter blow, shaking their faith in me. That I’d come too late to save him was just inconceivable. Some hoped I was the prophesized Messiah. Now... they weren’t so sure.

I ignored the other grumblers, taking Martha by the hand as we all walked slowly toward the mountainside where the cave-like tomb of Lazarus was located.

“Yes,” I admitted. “That’s true.”

“Even now, though,” Martha continued, “I know that God will grant you whatever you ask. You can do anything that you wish.”

“Your brother is at peace, in a far better place,” I replied. “But for the sake of the salvation of the world, he is willing to forego the present bliss he enjoys. I assure you, Martha, your brother will rise again.”

“Yes, I know he will be there at the grand resurrection, when God calls all of us to Final Judgment,” Martha firmly stated. “I *will* see my brother again, Master. Don’t worry about me or my sister. We trust God—and you—completely.”

The gathered witnesses were silent, not sharing her unconditional faith in me. How could I truly love them as I claimed, if I didn’t bother to come heal Lazarus?

I squeezed her hand gratefully.

“I *myself*, Martha, am what you seek,” I spoke to her slowly and authoritatively, “I *am* the Resurrection and the Life. Whoever trusts in me—such as you and your family—though he or she dies, yet they will live again!”

“I believe it,” Martha answered through her tears. “But the empty space where once my little brother stood is a gaping wound in my heart. It will never be healed.”

I heard agreement from the crowd that surrounded us, bitterly acknowledging their loss. Their accusation against me was firming up. I had the power to heal the sick and injured, given to me by God! *Why* had I not been there for Lazarus? Did I only care for my public preaching events, my own advancement? Were my present tears faked?

I ignored the others, speaking only to Martha and Mary. But those nearby could hear what I said...

“And that is why I grieve with you, my dear friends,” I continued. “The loss and sacrifice of those left behind are overwhelming. *But even death will not subvert the will of the Almighty,*” I continued. I spoke loudly now such that all those walking with us could easily hear. “Whoever continues to trust me completely will *actually* never die! Do you believe this?” I again queried her.

“Yes, Lord,” she answered, her voice hardening with complete confidence. “I believe that you are the Christ, the promised Messiah, the One anointed by God, the only begotten Son of God. I know you’ve come into this world to save all of us from the fear of death. It is *your* arrival that the world has

longed for, with great anticipation, for lo these many centuries. And now you are here with us. You will lead us all to the final, ultimate Victory!”

“Thank you for that great confession of faith, Martha,” I said. “But there are some here today who do not share your certainty,” I spoke even louder, turning my head in all directions to survey the surrounding crowd.

At Martha’s confession of faith, some looked confused. Others shook their heads in denial. Others averted their eyes, particularly the visiting Jews from Jerusalem. Others didn’t know how to respond. They kept their eyes firmly set forward in the direction of Lazarus’ tomb, still angry at me for refusing to come and save Lazarus from dying. If I was *really* the all-powerful Messiah, allowing the beloved young man to die was a terrible betrayal of my friends!

Rounding a bend in the narrow path, we arrived at the tomb. It was set into the face of a craggy, rock-strewn cliff. A huge bolder protruded from an opening. The giant rock was sealed all along its edges with a waxy substance, making it airtight.

We fanned out in a large half-circle. Some dropped to their knees in prayer. Others respectfully bowed their heads. I was in the center of the half-circle, still holding Martha’s hand. On her other side was her sister. Mary was particularly grief-stricken, tears pouring from her eyes as she wept copiously.

Martha had always been the practical sister, relentlessly focusing-down on “what’s next?” She was the one that was the “trouble-shooter.” Instead of moaning and groaning at some tough situation, she immediately pulled up her sleeves and worked to make things better. She’d overseen the funeral arrangements, making sure everything was proper. Now, she was the one organizing my official visitation.

Mary was the emotional sister, who readily empathized with each person’s troubles. It was Mary that had the most interest in my teachings. Mary sat at my feet alongside my disciples. She happily discussed esoteric fine-points of heavenly wisdom and Holy Scripture, while Martha tolled away in the kitchen preparing food. It was Mary who upon my arrival at their house on my last visit had cleaned and soothed my

aching feet. She did it not with water but with a very large amount of extremely expensive perfume. Then she wiped my soaked feet clean with the long, luxurious hair that hung from her own head.

I loved Mary as if she were my own sister. She had sensed my growing inner turmoil as my execution drew ever nearer, seeking to comfort me as best she could. Martha I also loved as my own sister. I loved her particularly for her practical, “no-nonsense” nature. She was not swayed by the emotion of the moment. She was the “show me” sister who demanded results. A good speech by itself meant nothing to her, no matter how impressive the words. She would not let pretenders slide past playing on people’s emotions with rousing but self-serving speeches. She demanded results! Yet, although each had great virtues, both she and her sister were incomplete without each other.

In like manner, *I* needed to impress upon the gathered crowd of distinguished witnesses that I had strong outward accomplishments *and* inner conviction. Without such, they’d never certify my claim to be the long-awaited Messiah.

“Do you believe that *God’s Love* is in me?” I asked Martha.

All those around us quieted down, ceasing their wailing and crying. They wondered what I would do now that I stood there in front of Lazarus’ tomb. My very presence at the place tacitly acknowledged my complete failure at coming to my friend’s aid. Why was I there?

Martha seemed perplexed by my question. She pulled her left hand back from mine, half-turning to look me directly in my eyes. She squinted at me, not sure how to answer...

“Any ruler with a willing army can exert power, making momentous things happen,” I gently explained. “But without true Godly Love, the mightiest deeds are meaningless.”

“Love?” she asked, shaking her head slightly from side-to-side. “But isn’t Faith and Obedience what God most wants from us? The most important thing demanded of God’s children is to ‘trust and obey’—isn’t it?”

“You should pay more attention to your sister,” I cautioned her.

I took her right hand and placed it firmly into Mary's tightly clenched left fist. Mary was again overcome with emotion, sobbing loudly.

"As much as I value your acts of hospitality to me and my disciples in your house, her act of love toward me at our last visit was the most appreciated," I kindly explained. "By hanging on my words then anointing me for *my* burial, Mary addressed the most pressing need. Faith and obedience *are* necessary, Martha. You are absolutely correct. But even *greater* than both of those is Godly Love."

"I... but... I didn't...?" she gulped, stricken by my seemingly harsh words, unable to respond.

"Go ahead and say what's on your heart," I encouraged her.

There was absolute silence as she gathered herself to respond. Even her sister stopped her sobbing to listen intently.

"My brother..." she gulped again, looking away from me to stare at the cold, lifeless boulder sealing Lazarus' tomb, "*suffered... greatly... to be struck down so young... when I could do nothing to help him... and despite all of our many prayers... God did nothing also...*" her voice trailed off.

"Yes, death is seldom pretty or ennobling," I agreed. "It is the ultimate failure of our physical lives. Despite our very best efforts to stay healthy, fully-engaged in the works of God, and helpful to all around... time quickly destroys our flesh. Our minds degrade as Satan laughs at our agony. It is a *horrible* end that we all face... including me."

The crowd of well-dressed, healthy visitors look chastened, uneasy, confronted with their own mortality there at Lazarus' tomb.

"But, Master," Martha asked, her drawn face reflecting her internal conflict. "If God loves us as much as you say—how can He allow us to come to such awful ends? I don't ask this just for myself. I can endure all things for God, no matter what suffering comes upon me. But I suffer the most when those I care for suffer agony I can't ease!"

"Sister, are you saying you don't believe in God?" Mary gasped in horror.

"I certainly believe in God!" Martha indignantly affirmed. "I believe in you, Jesus! But *WHY WOULD GOD AND YOU*

WITHHOLD YOUR POWER WHEN IT WOULD MEAN NOTHING TO YOU TO REACH OUT AND HEAL THOSE THAT ARE YOUR MOST-LOYAL AND MOST-FAITHFUL SERVANTS?” she shouted, startling everyone.

Mary lowered her head and shut her eyes.

“*How is THAT an act of Godly Love, Jesus?*” Martha screamed at me, uncharacteristically shaken. “Does God really Love us as much as you say He does? If so, I just don’t see it...”

She trailed off listlessly, letting her head fall forward, staring down at the rocky soil in defeat.

“You think what you endure here is some sort of a sick, cosmic joke?” I calmly asked. “Is our Heavenly Father just toying with us, torturing us for His own pleasure?”

“No, of course not, Master,” she gasped in denial. “I just... don’t understand?” she weakly finished, suddenly looking old and tired.

All around us, people were aghast at this line of discussion. The high-status Jews, in particular, were appalled. How could I let some *woman*—indeed *lead* her to the subject—*question the Will of God?*

Lazarus was dead! Surely, he somehow deserved his fate to be cut down at such a young age! Probably he had secret sin causing God to punish him by so much suffering. *YOU DID NOT QUESTION GOD—just silently accepted whatever terrible fate He dealt you!*

I stepped forward from the large half-circle, walking resolutely forward to stand right in front of the towering boulder, reaching up to touch its cold, hard surface.

“I WANT TO SEE HIS BODY!” I called-out, seemingly changing the topic. “*Unseal the stone and roll it away from the entrance!*” I commanded.

“Master?” Martha gasped again. From behind me, her voice cracked, shocked at my words. “But... it’s been four days now,” she protested. “His flesh is... *decaying!* Despite the seals, you can smell it even now!”

Indeed, the stink of *rotting flesh* permeated the air around us.

“Did I not promise you, Martha,” I insisted, still with my hands on the rounded stone in front of me, “that if you would but believe in me, you would see the glory of God?”

“But Master, the grave is *unclean!*” she gasped.

She was rightly horrified, as were all the rest in the large audience save for Mary. Mary just stood there silently as all the rest of the crowd shouted in outrage and anger at my apparent disrespect for the dead!

“*DO AS I SAY!*” I forcefully commanded them yet again.

I turned my head to sternly look back over my shoulder at Martha. My widened eyes glittering with an internal, demanding fire!

The large crowd fell silent also, horrified but also fascinated by my bizarre actions.

Dismayed but obedient, Martha motioned with a trembling hand for several servants to go up to the tomb.

I stepped back as a group of seven strong men hastily scraped away the seals, grabbed the protruding edges of the very large boulder, and slowly edged it upward from out of its sink-drop at the entrance. Then they rolled it to the side with a loud “*CRUNCH.*”

The servants staggered backward, gagging. The full force of *sickly-sweet decay* gushed out of the opened tomb and into their faces. Groaning and retching, many of the large audience around us also pulled back, clutching cloths or edges of their garments up over their noses and mouths.

Even though I was also choking on the thick, foul stench—I stepped forward again... until the darkness within the tomb filled my sight.

I was right at the entrance, staring into the blackness.

I then raised my hands up high above my head in supplication. I tilted my head far backward to gaze in wonderment at the intensely blue sky above the looming stone cliff.

“Mary!” I called out. “Tell us now, in the presence of the Almighty and all of these many gathered witnesses—*is your brother truly dead?*”

Behind me I heard her soft, loving voice quickly reply...

“Without a doubt, Master, my brother is *not* dead,” she confidently affirmed. “He is alive in God. The suffering he

endured at the last was as nothing to the joy he now receives in the presence of the Lord. *Death cannot take what God has deemed His own!*"

"THEN TOGETHER I WANT YOU ALL TO PRAY WITH ME TO OUR HEAVENLY FATHER!" I yelled out again, seemingly shaking the rocks around me with the force of my words.

The crowd of people was agitated. The people witnessing my actions was afraid, pulling back. They looked ready to turn around and bolt away!

"Lift up your hands to God!" I commanded them all. "Lift up your voices to God! Open up your hearts to God's Love! Look up into God's celestial heaven! Stand strong in the Presence of our loving Heavenly Father! Speak with me now! Repeat what I say!"

They stopped where they were, terrified. But they did as I ordered them. I heard rustling and shuffling as many behind me did as I'd instructed. They lifted their gaze up from the festering tomb to the clean, glorious vault of the heavens above! All their arms were up in the air, petitioning God...

"Whatever you want us to do, Master," Martha replied for them all. "We obey!"

"FATHER, I THANK YOU THAT YOU HEAR US WHEN WE PRAY TO YOU!" I loudly prayed, looking up intently at white fluffy clouds floating across a deep blue sky above the cliffs.

"*Father... I thank You that You hear us when we pray to You,*" echoed back from a few of the people behind me.

"WE DON'T ALWAYS UNDERSTAND WHY EVERYTHING HAPPENS, BUT WE TRUST YOU COMPLETELY!" I continued, speaking directly and sincerely to my Heavenly Father.

"*We don't always understand why everything happens to us... but we trust you completely,*" more voices now joined the first few, a chorus of sincere petitioning.

"IN YOU IS THE ONLY TRUE SAFETY AVAILABLE IN THIS UNCERTAIN AND DANGEROUS PLACE!" I forcefully projected my voice.

"*In You is the only true safety available in this uncertain, dangerous place!*" all the entire crowd now joined together in

repeating my words, spoken with enthusiasm as they “got into” what I was doing.

“YOU ARE OUR ONLY HOPE, OUR ONLY STRENGTH, OUR ONLY SALVATION!” I continued.

“You are our only hope, our only strength, our only salvation!” their many voices now rumbled like an ocean wave smashing up against the uncaring cliff in front of us.

“WHEN EVERYTHING ELSE FAILS US, YOU REMAIN STEADFAST AT OUR SIDES!” I spoke with great relief and gratitude.

“When everything else fails us, You remain steadfast at our sides!” the chorus behind me sang-out.

“WE THANK YOU FOR YOUR GREAT AND ABIDING LOVE FOR US, YOUR FAITHFUL CHILDREN!”

“We thank You for Your great and abiding love for us, your faithful children!”

“YOU WHO FROM GREAT CONCERN FOR MANKIND SENT TO EARTH YOUR MESSENGER, JESUS OF NAZARETH, TO DO YOUR BIDDING!” I described myself and my mission.

“You who from great concern for mankind sent to Earth Your messenger, Jesus of Nazareth, to do Your bidding!” echoed back behind me.

“TO BRING YOUR WANDERING CHILDREN BACK INTO YOUR HEART!”

“To bring Your wandering children back into Your heart!”

“TO INSPIRE US TO GODLY RESPONSIBILITY THAT TRANSCENDS OUR IMMEDIATE PERSONAL SELFISHNESS!”

“To inspire us to Godly Responsibility that transcends our immediate personal selfishness!”

“TO ENCOURAGE US TO WANT TO PLEASE YOU IN ALL THAT WE THINK, SAY, AND DO!”

“To encourage us to WANT to please You in all that we think, say, and do!”

“TO SUSPEND OUR DISBELIEF AND DOUBTS; THAT WE MAY GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR POWER BEYOND ANYTHING WE CAN EVER UNDERSTAND!”

“To suspend our disbelief and doubts; that we may gratefully acknowledge Your Power beyond anything we can ever understand!”

“AND ASK FOR YOUR MERCY!”

“And ask for Your mercy!”

“AND ASK FOR YOUR BLESSINGS!”

“And ask for Your blessings!”

“AND DEDICATE OURSELVES TO FOLLOW THE PATH YOU WANT US TO WALK!”

“And dedicate ourselves to follow the path You want us to walk!”

“WHETHER OR NOT IT IS WHAT WOULD SELFISHLY PLEASE EACH OF US THE MOST!”

“Whether or not it is what would selfishly please each of us the most!”

“KNOWING THAT YOUR ULTIMATE REWARD IS FAR GREATER THAN ANYTHING WE MIGHT LOSE HERE ON EARTH!”

“Knowing that Your ultimate reward is far greater than anything we might lose here on Earth!”

“AND SO, WE FREELY PLACE EVERYTHING WE ARE, HAVE, AND DESIRE INTO YOUR MIGHTY HANDS!”

“And so, we freely place everything we are, have, and desire into Your mighty Hands!”

“TO DO WITH AS YOU WILL!”

“To do with as You will!”

“BECAUSE WE KNOW THAT YOU LOVE US!”

“Because we know that You love us!”

“AND OUT OF YOUR GREAT COMPASSION YOU WILL DO FOR US WHAT ULTIMATELY IS BEST!”

“And out of Your great compassion You will do for us what ultimately is best!”

“AMEN!”

“Amen!”

I stopped, allowing everyone to get their breath back from our collective, impassioned prayer to the Lord. There was another period of rustling and coughing as people lowered their arms, looked around at each other, and shuffled where they stood.

Then I slowly backed up three steps, keeping my arms still raised high up in the air, while lowering my gaze to stare at that black, stinking abyss in front of me. I felt I was looking into the near future, when I myself would suffer physical death. The dark recess was sucking me in! Because of the ocean of vile sin laid upon me, I would be **TOSSED BY GOD INTO THE BLACK VOID**—*there to suffer for unimaginable eons of eons apart from God, drifting alone, in agony!*

I was looking at my own worst nightmare... wanting to turn and run away! But I stayed, sucking in my breath. I grimaced at the vile taste on my lips, there from the wafting sickly-stink...

—then lowering my arms and spreading my hands to reach out toward the tomb beseechingly...

I stood poised for *God's Power* to once again be made manifest!

Behind me, there wasn't even a rustle as the crowd stood transfixed, intent on what would happen next...

A *white light* burst from my outspread hands, piercing into the blackness of the tomb. It grew brighter and brighter. The crowd of people stumbled backward, shielding their eyes. At seemed like the **SUN** had suddenly descended from the sky, exploding out of my hands!

And then it was gone, leaving everyone blinking and rubbing their eyes...

"**LAZARUS!**" I yelled in my deepest, most resonant voice: "**COME FORTH!**"

For a minute, nothing happened.

The crowd behind me was absolutely silent...

Then, an intermittent "shuffling" and "clunking" noise came from within the again-black depths of the tomb.

Emerging into the sunlight, a wrapped hand reached out, shaking violently...

A collective "gasp" went up from the crowd...

I rushed forward, grabbed the hand, and pulled the trembling, stumbling, shrouded body out of the grave. His arms and legs were bound up in strips of white linen. A burial cloth covered his face. Behind me, there were cries of disbelief and

astonishment. There were “thumps” as some fainted, dropping to the ground.

“I... w-where am I... why am I all t-tied up?” came a crackling, gurgling voice from beneath the wrappings.

“*Come and loose his burial garments!*” I yelled out, a wave of sheer exhaustion sweeping over me.

Mary ran forward to be at my side. She took one of Lazarus’ arms while working frantically to free him from the foul-smelling, stained bandages and coverings.

Others eagerly joined her.

The stinking, swollen linens fell to the ground revealing...

—he that was dead, whose body was decayed and rotting...
now alive!

His revealed skin was as pink and soft as a baby’s, fresh and clean!

Others rushed up to aid him, marveling at his *resurrection* from the dead; as I stumbled away to the side, sitting down on a small boulder under an olive tree, gasping for breath. I felt utterly drained of energy, shaken to my core, deeply troubled at having glimpsed the black Void I’d soon enter...

“*Master! You did it! You did it!*” Martha spoke through gushing tears, falling down at my feet and hugging my robed legs.

Absently, I patted her on the top of her head.

All around, the crowd was ablaze with amazement and delight—realizing they’d just viewed the Power of God come down on Earth, in their very presence!

They were shouting “Hallelujah” and “Hosanna to God!” and singing songs of praise. They were dancing around, hugging each other! And they were hesitantly coming up to Lazarus, fearfully reaching out to touch his firm flesh, marveling at the utter lack of any hint of illness; nay his radiant health!

“No, Martha,” I managed to gasp back to her in a weak voice. “God’s Love did it. Do you understand now?”

“No,” she truthfully admitted. “But I see clearer than before. *You* are God’s incarnate Love, whether we fully understand it or not—*particularly* when we don’t understand! Seeing you, I know how to be myself. That is enough.”

Her faith sustained me, giving me strength.

After the many Jews returned to Jerusalem, a number of them reported what I'd done to the High Priest and to the officials in the Temple. Instead of praising God for the miracle done in their vicinity, however, those high officials determined that *Lazarus had to die, yet again!*

It seems that too many people had witnessed his prolonged decline, death, burial, and then resurrection. He and his entire family were now enemies of the leaders of the Temple. By this unofficial decree, Mary's family's social standing, financial dealings, business, and religious status were all put in peril—including their lives!

Again—by embracing the Love of God that I brought down from heaven to them—Mary and Martha had put their entire family in grave danger. However, they knew that the positives far outweighed the negatives. The JOY they received and continued to daily experience was the greatest “equalizer” of all.

Lazarus—their dear brother who died in abject misery—was with them once more!

And they had not the slightest doubt that I was the true, prophesized Messiah. Now, to convince the rest of the Jewish nation, I just had to *take a ride on a donkey...*

Section 5:

RIDING ON A DONKEY

(See *Matthew 21:1-11*)

I myself dared not remain in the vicinity any longer. Caiaphas, the High Priest for that year, declared that I, like Lazarus had already done, must die! This was my “reward” for bringing to Earth the life-transforming Love of God!

The Temple was on full-alert. Too many people were converting to my cause, particularly after the resurrection of Lazarus. The entire power base of the Temple was threatened by my ministry. An official arrest-warrant had been issued. The authorities were looking for any excuse, plus a convenient situation, to grab me and toss me into prison.

So, to not be prematurely taken into custody, I and my disciples retreated into the wilderness. We relocated our base of operations from Bethany to a village in the desert. The small village’s name was “Ephraim.” This was an appropriate location, since the village was named after the second son of Joseph by his wife Asenath. Ephraim gained ascendancy over his elder brother. His descendants eventually become synonymous with the kingdom of Israel. Now, from that site would emerge *the new King of Israel... me!*

Soon it was the Jewish yearly holiday time of Passover. All was in readiness for me to return to Jerusalem and complete my mission. Massive numbers of pilgrims were arriving from all over the known world, gathering to celebrate in the Holy City. The focus of the Jewish world—indeed of the secular world as well—was on Jerusalem.

It was time to depart Ephraim and complete my mission.

And there I was! I was yet again walking up from Jericho, to put my *own* dead corpse into God’s hands. I recalled the extreme devotion of Martha and Mary. It stiffened my resolve. It was especially for them that I was willing to die.

But I was also giving my physical life to save the *disbelievers* in the crowd at Lazarus' tomb who required a visible miracle to fully surrender to God. Well, they'd get it from me. I would publicly be tortured, mutilated, then killed. And I was doing this even for my *enemies* who were actively plotting my arrest and execution. For my *torturers* I was allowing my body to be nailed to a cross. Indeed, it was even for all *selfish humans* fixated on their own petty daily concerns that I would be lifted up onto that terrible cross.

It was also for all the *shortsighted people* of all Earth that I would spill my blood from on high. That red torrent would force them to look beyond their immediate problems. There they'd see a bloody, red cross... and behind it the deep blue heavens of their God!

Hundreds of people—including Martha, Mary, and Lazarus—were pouring out of Bethany, joyfully greeting me. They happily joined us in my triumphant march on Jerusalem, singing and celebrating as we walked along. Many of them ran on ahead, excitedly proclaiming my return to the city! Being the time of Passover, when many far-flung Jews journeyed to Jerusalem to partake in Holy Rituals, the city was overflowing with visitors. Indeed, it was not unusual for two or three *million* Jews to gather together at Jerusalem during the time of the Passover!

The accompanying townspeople from Bethany were eagerly describing me to the visiting pilgrims. Thus, many learned of my miracles. Particularly boisterous were the accounts of eyewitnesses to the death, burial, and resurrection of Lazarus. The curiosity of the people in the city, particularly visitors who'd never heard of me before, was enflamed!

Again, my mind drifted, remembering both backward and forward...

I felt feverish as I valiantly smiled and waved to the crowd. Was I coming down with something, or was it just the extreme stress? Whatever, I found myself mentally retreating into pleasant memories. During my ministry, I periodically took short breaks going off by myself into empty desert regions.

There were no crowds in the empty desert. In the desert I could be alone with my Father. There, I was unencumbered by the many pains, demands, and needs of audiences, disciples, and close family. My prayers off in the desert were the one time in all my travels on Earth that I felt safe, rested, and tranquil. Here, it was a *circus* and I was the *star attraction*...

Bethany, the town out of which we were walking, was on the east slope of the low mountain outside Jerusalem called the Mount of Olives. It wasn't really a mountain, but a high hill about seven hundred feet at its tallest. It was only about a mile wide, with three peaks or summits. Many olive trees grew on the mountain, thus its name. It was the "central park" of Jerusalem, the one place not filled with houses and structures.

Indeed, just on the west side of the mountain, across from where we were, was where I'd be at in the near future: *the Garden of Gethsemane*. There I'd leave behind the crowds, separate from my disciples, and once again be alone with God... but this time not in blissful peace, but horrendous stress and turmoil. There it would be that God would begin turning His back on me.

Praying at night in the garden I would be nearly alone, isolated. It'd be easy for my enemies to capture me, away from the protection of my devoted crowds. In just a few days I would be praying there, agonizing over what I was about to endure. That's when Judas would lead Roman troops to me, betraying me with a kiss.

As we trudged along, nearing the Mount of Olives, *thousands more* came surging out of the city and immediate areas. They wanted to see me! A vast number of people were now flocking around me as I walked along. It was getting difficult for most of them to even know where I was in the crush, let alone hear my voice or see me at all.

So, I called over two disciples and said to them: "Go into the little village of Bethphage, right across from us. There you will find a donkey and her colt tied up on the street. The colt has never been ridden. Untie them and bring them to me. When asked why you're taking them, say that the Lord has

need of them and will return them straightway. The owners will gladly allow you to borrow them. Now go, quickly!”

Again, my mind drifted away... thinking of my childhood. Almost as soon as I could consciously recognize my surroundings, I knew I was different. Deep in my heart there was a *raging fire*, hotter than the sun. It threatened to consume and destroy me. It was something my friends and family did not possess. It was, indeed, more than just the spark of God which all humans possess—rather, *His very Essence!*

As I matured, I learned to mold that fire. Instead of burning me up, I used it to *drive* me. I credit much of my control of that FIRE to the loving, patient guidance of my Mother. Such an incredible POWER was not intended for human flesh. It compelled me to do and say things which were impossible for the ordinary human. It made me keenly aware of the weakness and frailty of human flesh. Surging outward, it could alter physical reality. It could turn one substance into another, mend damaged bodies, or even raise the dead!

Above all, it was my direct connection to my Heavenly Father. Though Joseph, the husband to my dear Mother, was very kind and supportive, he was never truly my father. From a baby onward, I knew that my real Father was the Almighty, the great “I Am.” Only in communion with Him could I be at peace. Carrying Divinity within my Humanity I was at constant war with myself. But when the FIRE within connected with the Almighty—through prayer and thoughtful meditation—then everything became crystal clear.

It was this all-encompassing, illogical PEACE that I fought to bring to all humanity. I wanted them to have what I had. I wanted them to rise above being just smart animals. I wanted them to stop their selfish squabbling and fighting. I wanted them to reconcile with each other, with nature, with reality, and with God. I wanted them to fully appreciate the great gift *they'd* been given of self-and-God awareness!

Only then might they finally begin to please God in the best possible way. Only then could they *fully exercise their heavenly gift of Godly Creativity!* Then they could have the incredible enjoyment making this the top priority of their religion, personal conduct, and societal thinking. This *they'd* do

embracing the FIVE PILLARS implicit to all of my teachings, *fully expressing the Love of God!*

I was jarred from my musings by my disciples returning with the animals.

“It was just as you said,” one of the men breathlessly stated. He was panting heavily from his exertions at running with the animals, having quickly returned to us. “Their owner gladly released them to us!”

A squat, strong she-donkey stood in front of me—and to her side a smaller animal, her colt. Neither of them had saddles. So, some of my disciples hastily took off their outer robes, laying them on the backs of the two animals. The cloth wouldn’t do much to cushion the jarring jolts of their plodding, but those “saddles” would be better than nothing.

I stroked the head of the colt, who “snorted” a pleased acknowledgment. In all my travels during my ministry, I’d distained chariots or riding on the back of animals. By walking everywhere, I put myself directly on the level of the ordinary person. I could readily interact with the lowest strata of society. They saw me as one of themselves, walking from place to place as did they. Yes, I was using the fundamental power of our own mutually God-given feet.

Also, it helped keep my body strong, having endless stamina, preparing me for my marathon execution. Also, my personal strength contributed to my dominating “presence.” Unlike the fat, rich, haughty men and women with their soft bodies riding about in style, I was continually exercising my body. I stayed hard and firm. My lifelong career as a carpenter had given me a body of rippling muscle, without a hint of fat. I was deeply tanned from baking in the sun, spending many hours trudging down country roads. My body was lithe and powerful from walking many miles with my devoted disciples.

Only the best of the Roman soldiers would dare try to intimidate me. I was the equal to the toughest warriors of our time. So, I hesitated to mount an animal, even for the valid purpose of letting everyone around view me in our triumphal entry. Yet I was celebrating Passover with God’s People in the Holy City of Jerusalem. It was a time of high ceremony, pompous parades, and spectacles!

Also, I was arriving at the peak of my fame during Passover. The entire Jewish People were focused on REMEMBERED THE WRATH OF GOD “PASSING OVER” THEIR HOUSES IN EGYPT. THE HOMES OF THE FAITHFUL WERE PROTECTED BY THEIR SACRIFICES. THE BLOOD FROM PURE, INNOCENT LAMBS WAS SPREAD UPON THE FRONT POSTS OF THEIR HOUSES!

I shouted that at you to prepare you for the triumphal final lag of my march. I was a conquering King! But, in like manner to the protection of the Israelites in Egypt, I too would be a “sacrificial lamb” protecting my people. I would shield them from utter and complete destruction, diverting the *wrath of God* to focus on evildoers!

So, I needed to be seen as such! I needed to put aside my “macho” hesitation at riding when I should be walking—and quickly mount up upon one of the animals. But which should I ride? Certainly, my disciples left that choice to me, putting their makeshift “saddles” upon both animals. They expected me to get up on the stronger, taller donkey. I’d be carried more securely, more visible to the vast crowd.

Instead, however, I had my disciples help me up upon the sturdy back of the small colt. His mother would lead him and he would passively follow. Though no one had ever ridden him before, he happily grunted at my scratching his ears. Indeed, he seemed *pleased* to have me weighing him down.

So, I was to enter into Jerusalem surrounded by thousands of cheering people... *riding on the colt of a donkey!*

Of course, I knew full-well the significance of what I was doing. All throughout the history of the Jewish people, the horse had been a symbol of war while the donkey was one of peace. Kings and princes commonly rode on donkeys in times of peace. It was not at all a symbol of poverty or low social status. Indeed, King David’s mule was used in the coronation of his son, Solomon. When Solomon was inaugurated, he regally rode upon that mule. The Prophets considered riding mules as a sign of rank and dignity. This was recorded in the Holy Scripture’s books of Judges and Samuel. It was the custom of the Judges of Israel to ride upon white donkeys, with their sons riding upon the colts of donkeys. As recorded in the

book of Kings, the lowly donkey was the royal animal of Jewish Monarchs. And only the animals that had *never before been ridden* were considered fit for *sacred* duties...

But, on the other hand, I did not enter Jerusalem in my triumphal march heralded with blaring trumpets. There was no armed guard protecting me. There were no ornate chariots of state in my parade. I wasn't adorned in fine robes, surrounded by galloping horses. Nor was I accompanied by a retinue of high-ranking dignitaries. No, I was still entering the Holy City humbly, as a man of the people—sweaty and dirty, without official pomp or ceremony—but still riding on the colt of a donkey! Great symbolic significance...

Since God had given all power over into my hands, I did not have to show this side of myself to the people. I could have entered the city sitting on my donkey surrounded by legions of *angels with flaming swords* poised to destroy my enemies! But how would that show the people that I *loved* them? “Where’s the love in that?” It would only show the people that I was yet another dictator, a scourge, a tyrant no different than every other King taking power in the history of Earth!

In contrast, I was a man of the people, a worker, who knew the tough day-to-day chores of life. The donkey was symbolic of not just sacred nobility, but of hard work. It was a poor man’s means of carrying heavy loads. Indeed, this is what the word “donkey” means. It was a sturdy beast of burden. It was a rock-solid asset to life. It was an everyday necessity to many. It denoted the tough struggle to keep going, putting one step in front of the other. All this I knew all too well, demonstrated by my down-to-earth behavior.

Again, it was a powerful signal to the people that I was one of them. Mine was a “people’s” movement. I wasn’t imposed upon them by the religious rulers. I came *from* the common people’s own ranks. I was born in a stable, worked with my own hands as a carpenter, and grew up in lowly Nazareth to gain my present moment of triumph. I did it all as a regular person.

But—most important and glaringly obvious to everyone present—was my fulfillment of the prophesy written long ago by the Prophet Zechariah: “*Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of*

Zion! Shout, O Daughter of Jerusalem! Look! Your King comes to you, bringing justice and salvation! He is triumphant and victorious! He is patient, meek, and lowly—riding on a donkey, upon a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

All the Jewish people recognized this as a key prophecy concerning the coming, promised Messiah. Seeing me arrive in Jerusalem in just this exact manner, surrounded by thousands praising my name and excitedly recounting my miracles from God—was an unmistakable signal that I, indeed, was the long-awaited Savior of the Nation: **POISED TO INAUGURATE THE KINGDOM OF GOD UPON THE EARTH!**

Not only would this act of mine galvanize the people to support me, it would simultaneously force the ruling religious officials to act. No longer could our religious leaders just ignore, marginalize, or write unenforceable warrants for my arrest. With so many of the common Jewish people now fervently behind me—especially those that would go back to their homes throughout the known world, they who’d come to Jerusalem for the Passover feast—my fame would explode! There would be no stopping me if my movement were allowed to continue...

After my donkey ride into Jerusalem, the religious leaders would have no choice but to respond. In their eyes, after this regal demonstration, I had to be *stopped*... now!

In this manner the Will of God would be manifest. I would be taken by those that claimed to be God’s best... and viciously murdered. Their guilt would be unmistakable. Their culpability would be known to all. Their elaborate system of manmade rituals built up over centuries would crumble. The way would be clear for the *Kingdom of God* to be firmly set-into the hearts of the people of Earth! The Old Way would be summarily truncated. The New Way would be dramatically initiated. All because of a young, cooperative son of a female donkey!

As we “clomped” along, the sharp back of the unsaddled colt was hard on my rear end. Yes, my butt hurt! However, it was small price to pay as we trudged up the stony path to the top of the Mount of Olives—as all the thousands crowding and dancing around me began together *singing!* They all shouted

together in chanted sing-song, their united voices rolling in waves across the mountain and on into the city proper...

It was awesome to hear and to be at its center.

“HOSANNA TO THE SON OF DAVID!” the people uproariously chanted. *“HOSANNA IN THE HIGHEST! ... BLESSED BE THE KINGDOM OF OUR FATHER DAVID THAT COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD! ... PEACE IN HEAVEN AND GLORY IN THE HIGHEST! ... HOSANNA TO THE SON OF DAVID!”*

I waved in a subdued fashion to the crowds, soberly. As much as I wanted to savor the moment of my greatest triumph to-date, this was *not* an occasion of great joy for me. I knew what was coming. Many of this cheering crowd would join in subsequent chanting for me to be *crucified!* The bright, cheery sky preceded a gathering, dark storm...

There were some Pharisees that had come out with the crowds from Jerusalem to see what was happening. Upon hearing the crowds naming me as “the Son of David” who was going to usher in “the Kingdom of our Father David,” they were appalled! Surely, if this got to the Romans, there would be dire consequences.

“Reprove your disciples, Jesus!” they shouted up at me, fighting through the crowd to get close. “Calm them down! Make them stop saying those inflammatory things!”

I laughed, throwing up my hands in mock despair at having any control over the thronging, chanting thousands!

“If I were to somehow get them to shut up,” I shouted back down to the small group of angry Pharisees, *“THE VERY STONES IN THE PATH AND THE MOUNTAIN ITSELF WOULD CRY OUT THE VERY SAME WORDS!”*

I looked down in mock intentness at the rocks under the feet of my little donkey, as if expecting them to break out in song at any moment!

Insulted and indignant, the Pharisees turned away from me, fighting to make their way out of the joyfully shouting and singing crowds, to report back to the Chief Priest and other rulers of the Temple.

Clearly, in their eyes, events were moving far too fast. My impact was spreading without bounds. The danger provoked by my triumphant entry loomed way too close!

Action had to be taken against me...

Despite the crowd's excited chants of "Hosanna"—meaning to "help and save now"—my fate was sealed. And so was theirs...

"Look at what they are doing, Lord!" Peter, walking at my side gushed in awe. "Isn't it *glorious*?"

I lifted my eyes back upward, looking forward...

Spontaneously, the surrounding crowds accompanying us—plus those meeting us from the front—were throwing down their outer robes upon the ground in our path. Others were cutting down wide frond leaves from palm trees and spreading them also in front of us. I found their act of adoration both touching and sad. They were making a *carpet of honor* for me and my donkey to ride upon!

This was the way in which conquerors and princes were often honored. It was a way of indicating joy and triumph at the return of a victorious warrior. The fronds of palm trees were a symbol of joy and victory. Yet they were also used by both the Romans and Jews as a symbol of peace.

The poor, deluded crowd thought I was bringing victory... when in truth I was bringing them *defeat*. They thought I would ensure peace, when indeed my death would bring *war*. They thought I brought judgment upon their enemies, when in fact I brought *vengeance* by our enemies upon us!

And so, as we crested the middle summit of the Mount of Olives—poised two hundred feet above the highest point of the great Temple below us; with all of Jerusalem spread out before us—I began to weep. I sobbed loudly, such that my disciples became concerned.

"Master, are you unwell?" John spoke from beside me.

He had an arm at my back, helping me stay planted upon the trudging, swaying donkey.

"I see the future, John," I sobbed. Tears were trickling copiously down over my cheeks. "And it's *not* pretty..."

I could see down below us many additional thousands pouring out of the city proper, eagerly coming up to meet our

huge crowd plodding over the summit. The whole city below was filled with expectation and curiosity at my boisterous and grand arrival.

From my other side, steadying me on the colt along with John, *Judas* looked up at me adoringly—uncharacteristically grinning from ear to ear!

“*The future is magnificent, Master!*” *Judas* exulted, eager to cheer me up. The singing and chanting had risen to such a loud crescendo that he had to shout for me to hear him, though he was but inches away. “After this, no one will dare stand in our way. We’ve succeeded beyond our wildest dreams!”

“Have we, *Judas*?” I said to him, flicking teardrops off my mustache and beard.

What he didn’t see was my *dark vision*. I saw the Holy City as it would be not too many years off into the future. In my eyes the grand vista down below us—a vibrant center of the Jewish society and religion—lay in *smoking ruins*. This would be done by the Romans: a savage revenge for daring to rebel against their iron-fisted rule.

I clearly saw below me *not one stone left upon the other!* Where my supposed insurrection against the Romans would supposedly be cut-short by my execution, others would follow. Unlike me, they would stubbornly try to throw off the occupiers by force. They would use violence attempting to take back what they thought was theirs!

But all those who live by the sword will die by the sword. A brutal and savage retaliation by the vast legions of Rome would crush the armed rebellion. Yet the utter destruction of the Holy City of Jerusalem would fling the remnants of the Jewish people into far-off exile. That diaspora would take my teachings across the world. Sadly, though, the ancient, grand Temple that stood so proudly before us would be smashed, burned, and ground into the dust!

Those who survived the war would be broken, maimed, their fighting spirits *crushed*. But that very same continuing, cruel oppression by the Romans would be fertile ground in which my empowering seeds would sprout. My far-flung

teachings would flourish, spread by my apostles, other disciples, and future believers.

Driven underground, my “minor sect of the Jews” would spread like wildfire across the entire world. It would no longer be seen as an unimportant offshoot of the Jewish religion. Instead, it would acquire a force and presence of its own, quickly becoming a major religion in its own right. *It would proclaim to the entire world the Love of God in a way that the world could no longer ignore!* Out of the ashes of Jerusalem’s destruction would arise a truly new creature, sanctioned by the Almighty, advancing spiritual thought and practice here on planet Earth.

But, yes, there would be a terrible price to pay. Man’s vanity, greed, and hate would have to run rampant before Godly Love could flourish. Godly Responsibility, Godly Faith, and Godly Creativity would grow from the devastation of brutal, stupid wars.

“Rejoice, Lord, *rejoice!*” Judas exclaimed to me.

Up ahead, Peter, leading the mother donkey in front of me, looked back in surprise at Judas’ strange words. Normally, Judas was dour and uncommunicative. Now he was exuberant, and boisterous. Why?

Time to burst his bubble...

“You are blind, Judas, *blind!*” I angrily shouted back. “You are just like that beautiful city down below us. Would that you and it had known personally—even in this time of *your* greatest joy and supposed triumph—the things that make for peace. But now they are hidden from your eyes!”

He grimaced, frowning.

“But, Master...?”

“A *terrible* day is coming upon you, dear Jerusalem and daring-Judas,” I continued, wiping tears from my eyes. “It will arrive swifter than you can imagine. Your enemies will throw up a bank of pointed stakes around you, surrounding you, shutting you up on every side. You will find no escape! You will be dashed down to the ground, your guts spilled out into the dirt. Your lineage will be cut off. Not one stone to your glory will be left upon the other! Your honor will be gone. You will be utterly devastated by your enemies. And all because

you did not recognize your true time of testing. All because you did not see God when he came down to visit you, graciously offering salvation. No, you chose to love your pleasures and hate your enemies. And because of that, both you and your precious city will be destroyed!”

Judas now looked at me in shock. How could I say such things to him, when all around us swirled exultation and triumph? What had happened to me? Why was I speaking of utter defeat when the whole adoring city lay spread out at our feet?

“Master, what’s wrong with you?” he gasped.

“He’s feverish,” John defended me, reaching up to put a hand on my drooping brow. “He’s burning up!”

“I’m fine...” I groaned. “I’m filled to the brim with God’s fire!”

“Should we leave the procession, find a doctor?” Peter anxiously asked.

“Stay the course,” I muttered, swaying in my “saddle.” “We’re almost there...”

I lowered my gaze again, holding dejectedly onto the neck of the small donkey, trying to sit upright. The exuberant crowds needed a proud King! But I was tired to the bone, feverishly slumping...

Still, the vast crowds around us chanted and sang yet louder!

“HOSANNA TO THE SON OF DAVID!” they shouted together, a thundering noise: “HOSANNA IN THE HIGHEST! ... BLESSED BE THE KINGDOM OF OUR FATHER DAVID THAT COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD! ... PEACE IN HEAVEN AND GLORY IN THE HIGHEST! ... HOSANNA TO THE SON OF DAVID!”

Coming down off the mountain—the thousands of people surrounding us still singing, shouting, and chanting—the city proper was filled with curious spectators. The residents and visitors to the city were trembling with excitement! As my joyful mobs dispersed upon entering the city streets, they were asked what was going on?

“*Who was that amazing man up on the mountain you were accompanying into the city?*” they asked in awe.

The answer was always the same: “He is Jesus of Nazareth, a Prophet of God!”

Hah... what a change a few city streets made! No one, with Roman troops attentively patrolling the main routes, now dared to openly name me *the Son of David*, the Jewish *Messiah*. I found it amusing that their vast enthusiasm for me was so quickly tempered by fear. Yes, I’d given them a good show. But now the stage doors were closing. The curtain was descending...

It was time for them to move on to whatever “circus act” amused them the most. Well, let them take a break. My final act would ROCK THE FOUNDATIONS OF THEIR LITTLE WORLD...

Section 6:
GLORIFICATION
BY DEFEAT

(See *Psalms 16:8-11*)

As I dismounted, I was glad to get my aching rear-end off of that unsaddled, bouncing, hard surface. But I patted my steady animal friend affectionately on its snout before handing it back to my disciples. They'd return it with its mother to its owner.

Right then my disciples brought up to me a group of Jews who'd come down from Greece to worship at the Passover feast.

"Master," Andrew and Philip addressed me, "these pilgrims from Greece would very much like to speak to you. Are you well enough to receive them?"

"Sure..." I agreed. "But I don't think they'll like what I'll tell them. However, bring them forward."

I sat down wearily on a bench. The crowds were still swirling all around us, though no longer focused on my presence. It was as if I'd suddenly become invisible, irrelevant, or uninteresting.

"It is such a great pleasure to make your acquaintance!" one of the Greek Jews politely bowed to me. "We hope to hear some of your great wisdom, which your disciples speak of so highly. We understand that you actually raised a man from the dead. That's astonishing! How is it that God has blessed you to be able to raise the dead?"

I sighed, my entire body aching. I was bone-weary, sick, and exhausted.

"Do you *really* want to hear my Message?" I asked. "Do you *really* want to know my importance to the advancement

of God's Will? Do you *really* want to know why I'll be long remembered? Do you *really* want to take this knowledge back to your countrymen?"

"Yes, of course!" they eagerly replied.

"Then here it is," I grimly replied. "The time has come for the Son of Man to be glorified and greatly exalted. But I assure you pilgrims, most solemnly, that *unless a grain of wheat falls to the earth and is buried—it remains just one solitary grain*. But if it 'dies' and is buried, it *then* produces many other seeds, yielding rich harvests on into the far future."

The Greek pilgrims looked at each other furtively. Clearly this was not what they expected to hear from me after the magnificent procession they'd just witnessed. My coming down off the mountain into Jerusalem, surrounded by thousands of celebrating followers, was spectacular! They expected something more from me than confusing parables.

But I continued relentlessly: "*If you love your life, you will lose it!* But anyone who *hates* his life in this present time and place will save it for all eternity. If anyone wants to be my true disciple, he or she must follow me in everything. But the Example you will shortly witness... few will want to emulate. Yet only by partaking with me in my worst *defeat* and *failure* will they gain the ultimate Victory. Where I am, there must my servant be also. *Do you understand?*"

I willed my exhausted body unsteadily to its feet. I wobbled forward a couple steps to grab the closest Greek by his robe. Then I yanked him close, my head inches from his shocked face.

"Uhm... T-Teacher... I d-don't know... I...?" he stammered before I, in disgust, let him go.

"The Love of God causes you to lose your life!" I spat at them. "It's a great danger of getting too close to God. God's *FIRE* will burn and destroy everything you hold dear in this life! By accepting God's Love, you must accept your most terrible *failure*. DO YOU UNDERSTAND?" I now *yelled* at them in angry frustration.

Of course, they did not understand. Clearly, they had no idea how to answer this Teacher who now seemed *not* a sage Master—but a raving madman!

Turning my back on them I laid my fevered forehead against the cool rock of the solid wall behind us. I knew that in a brief historical moment that wall would be gone... broken and crumbled upon the ground... just like me!

“Those that stand by me in my darkest hour will gain the greatest honor from my Father,” I spoke, my voice trembling. “Not many will gain this honor. My soul is troubled and in distress. But what shall I say? Shall I ask my Father to *save me from this hour of trial and agony, the purpose of my entire life?* How can I possibly say such words? It was for this very purpose that I have arrived here!”

The Greeks were now backing off from me. Andrew and Phillip tried to reassure them, stopping them from giving me the ultimate disrespect of turning and running away...

“NO!” I shouted, spinning around to face them all. “NO! I WILL NOT FLINCH IN THE FACE OF MY DUTY! I WILL NOT ALLOW MY ANIMAL INSTINCTS TO RULE MY SPIRIT! I WILL REMEMBER WHO AND WHAT I AM. I WILL NOT ALLOW HATE TO DRIVE ME. I WILL NOT TAKE UP THE POWER DUE TO ME WHICH COULD DESTROY ALL MY ENEMIES. I AM BETTER THAN THAT! AND SO ALSO MUST YOU BE! YOU MUST FIND YOUR ULTIMATE VICTORY IN FAILURE!”

The Greek pilgrims and my own disciples were looking at me as if I’d gone completely insane...

“No,” I finished softly, tears again starting to leak from my eyes, “I will instead say to my Heavenly Father: *‘I will do whatever it takes to glorify, honor, and lift up Your Holy Name. Take me and use me as You see fit. Even if it’s not what I selfishly wish, I will do it. Glorify your Holy Name, even by my failure and defeat!’*”

From somewhere above us, a deep, booming VOICE suddenly rang out. It sliced through our brains, vibrating our very bones, buckling the pavements below us, and shaking the stone walls, proclaiming: “I HAVE GLORIFIED IT AND WILL DO SO AGAIN!”

The Greeks fell to their knees, hiding their heads under trembling arms.

“That was an angel!” one of them gasped. “An angel spoke to the Teacher!”

Many of the other bystanders were also struck with awe. It was unmistakably a voice from heaven. There was no denying its authenticity. It resonated with an all-consuming, supernatural, thunderous POWER.

“*Or... was that God Himself?*” they whispered to each other, looking at me with new respect, even fear!

I felt comforted. A loving hand had come down from on high, patting me on my little human head—just as I’d comforted the colt after carrying my heavy load. The immense burden of God was full upon me, a load no human could bear. Yet I must shoulder His responsibilities and demands. I was God’s willing donkey...

Yes, that “grand-finale” endorsement coming from on high galvanized everyone. It was a spectacular miracle witnessed and heard by many. Now they were all talking and debating—the entire city of Jerusalem—as to whether or not I was sent from God! Was I truly the Messiah, from the lineage of David, who would restore David’s Kingdom? And this time would God rule not just Jerusalem... but the entire Earth?

The answer was tightly woven into *a fine pair of sandals...*

Section 7:

A FINE PAIR OF SANDALS

(See *Psalms* 22:1-18; 40:1-3;

& *Isaiah* 2:1-5; 9:1-7;

11:1-10; 40:1-11; 42:1-10; 52:6-8;

53:1-12; 61:1; 62:2)

And here I was in essence “putting the question” directly to one of my greatest enemies!

Yes, my wandering mind was back to the present moment. I was PUTTING ON THE SPOT THE ELDERLY PHARISEE IN THE TEMPLE. He’d just returned from his “consultation” with his colleagues. Refreshed by the break we’d taken—comfortably stuffed with fruit, bread, and cheeses—I was ready for him.

It was time for him to answer the key question: “Of whose son will be the Messiah?”

Indeed, it was now HIM on the “witness” stand! I’d just praised his integrity and knowledge. He was surrounded by his peers, standing in a prominent part of the Holy Temple of God. And he certainly knew what the Prophets, writing centuries ago, had predicted about the coming Messiah.

He knew—and the audience gathered there intently listening to him knew that he knew—from words of many of the Prophets that the Messiah was rightly named as a “Son” or descendant of *King David*. Also, he’d heard the many stories swirling around about how I’d worked countless miracles, instantly healed thousands of their afflictions, raised the dead, and entered in triumph into Jerusalem riding on a donkey’s colt!

Yes, I qualified to be the Messiah. But I wasn't what he wanted. He wanted a Messiah that would legitimize *his* doctrine, *his* position, *his* authority—and miraculously, by God's Power, instantly grant *him* a high position in the Kingdom of God! Yes, everyone wanted to be the GREATEST in the Kingdom of God, yet didn't want to do what it required...

He didn't want a Messiah that would *question* his assumptions, his doctrines, his conclusions, his position, his authority, or his accumulated wealth. He certainly did not want a Messiah that would directly *threaten* his comfortable doctrines, his position, or his well-being. Yet if he were to pointblank deny my claim as Messiah, he might be torn apart by my adoring crowd, right there in the courtyard of the Temple. On the other hand, if he legitimized my claim, then his fellow Pharisees and the Temple Rulers would likely take away his status and privileges. He'd be finished!

Swallowing hard before speaking, he ventured a careful and noncontroversial reply, one spoken at most every church service, the "standard" answer...

"THE TRUE MESSIAH WILL BE THE SON OF DAVID!" he loudly proclaimed, as if he'd invented the term.

His chin was defiantly stuck up high in the air. He knew he couldn't be attacked on that well-established biblical fact...

"Oh?" I replied, my voice well-controlled and calm. "If that's true, then how is it that David himself, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, calls the Messiah 'LORD'? Did not David in the Holy Scriptures say: '*God said to my Lord, Sit at My right hand until I put Your enemies under Your feet*'?"

"Uh...w-what?" he stammered, confused.

"We all agree that David in this passage was speaking of the Messiah," I relentlessly continued, now *shouting* back at him: "IF THEN DAVID THUS CALLS THE MESSIAH HIS CONTEMPORARY, LIVING LORD—*HOW CAN THE MESSIAH BE HIS DESCENDANT, HIS 'SON'?*"

The whitehaired man visibly withered as he stood there. He *deflated* both in my sight and the esteem of the crowd. Before, he'd been proud, completely sure of himself. He'd been in full command of the situation, standing ramrod straight, fists clenched at his side, and transparently arrogant. Now,

however, he slumped forward, his head tilting to the side, his trembling hands grasping convulsively at his stringy beard.

He opened his mouth... closed it... opened it yet again... thought better of it... then closed it once more. He looked frightened, as if he'd completely lost his sense of direction!

The crowd was stunned that I'd so easily bested him. Surely this highly respected, elder Pharisee was just stringing me along? Surely, he'd respond with some cutting, profound statement any second now? Any... second... now?

"I'll give you a clue, my friend," I gently spoke into the stunned silence at his lack of response. "You expect the Messiah to be a conquering hero similar to the Warrior Kings of our past history. You expect him to raise powerful armies as did King David. You expect him to exemplify the principle upon which the Jewish Kingdom thrived in past times: '*An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth!*' Haw! You even expect more in revenge. Knock out one of our teeth and the Messiah will *slice off* the offending enemy's entire *head!* A head for a tooth!"

His eyes were glazed-over, twitching.

"**YOUR MESSIAH IS TO EXCEL IN HATRED, SLAUGHTER, REVENGE, AND GREED—ACQUIRING THE EVIL SPOILS OF WAR!**" I shouted at him and the gathered crowd. "Is that not so?"

He struggled to regain his footing, managing to croak out: "Of course... God will put... his enemies... *our* enemies... under his feet... totally helpless... so harmless they serve as cushions for his feet... or so says the scriptures... that you just quoted."

"**ARE THERE NOT MANY DIFFERENT WAYS FOR YOU TO ACHIEVE SUCH AN END?**" I shouted back at him, "IS IT BEYOND THE POWER OF GOD THAT ONE'S ENEMIES BECOME NOT THREATS BUT HELPFUL FRIENDS?"

"W-w-what are you... *friends?*" he gasped, shaking his head back and forth, now even more confused and uncertain. "But God w-wouldn't...?"

"So, you're dictating to God what He will or will not do?"

He was visibly aghast at his debating error...

"And are you not thinking merely as a *vengeful, hateful, selfish politician who uses religion as an excuse to do evil*

things?” I accused him. “In fact, are you no better than our present occupiers, the Romans? Don’t they seek to subjugate, control, and tax both us and their many other conquered lands for their own selfish benefit and pleasures?”

“It’s... the way it’s... always been,” he grated, trying desperately to regain his rhetorical footing.

“Yes, in our history as God’s People in this world, we’ve hardly behaved any better, that’s true,” I agreed. “But you and all those who agree with your view of the Messiah do not merely have an error in judgment. No, your mistake is not just in forming a superficially logical but wrong interpretation of the scriptures. It’s a failure of *imagination!*”

“But... all our scholars agree... that what you say... is heresy!” he gasped, trying to change the topic to something, anything, upon which he could regain some debating traction.

“YOU ARE LIMITING GOD’S POWER TO ONLY THAT OF YOUR OWN EXPERIENCE!” I roared, again shocking all those in attendance.

“That’s.... not... so!” he grated

“It is a terrible and debilitating sin!” I relentlessly continued. “You and your fellow scholars of the Law—the scribes and Lawyers—are putting God into your own narrow, hateful, twisted ‘box!’”

“Box?” he gasped. “What nonsense is...?”

“You want to have a conveniently defined God!” I shouted at him. “And if He dares to do something you’ve not agreed is an authorized interpretation of some arbitrary group of scriptures, then He’s *not* God!”

“But we d-don’t...?” he tried to protest.

“How dare you put limits on God!” I accused him. “God can do whatever He wishes! He doesn’t need to ask your permission. He does not need to reconcile with your interpretations of His Holy Scriptures. And if His Divine Actions extend, deepen, and advance our understanding of the Holy Scriptures then *so be it!*”

“But... y-you can’t... I mean... that’s not... h-how can you...?” he stammered, wilting even further under my fierce gaze.

“It’s a sad truth that for God’s People to survive, they’ve had to act like other earthly nations. Because of how the world’s societies worked, our forefathers had to cling together, put their own tribe first, carve out their own territory, defend it with armies, commit atrocities, and live by the force of weapons,” I bluntly stated. “BUT A NEW DAY IS DAWNING!”

He just stared at me. He was breathing hard, like he’d just run a marathon. If looks could kill, I’d have dropped dead on the spot. He *hated* me for publicly revealing his *heart*...

“Come on, cheer up!” I grinned at him, infuriating him all the more. “God’s people no longer need to be just another tribe of squabbling, fighting, killing, plundering, self-centered humans battling like-minded but ‘heathen’ tribes! We can choose to rise above our own animal nature. And the Messiah will show us how to do this. Isn’t it *glorious*?”

Many of the returned, packed crowd in the courtyard had come to see a rhetorical battle. They were getting their money’s worth! But my words also had a chilling effect. The crowd was yearning for their Messiah. But most shared the old Pharisee’s definition: a *conquering King* come to lead them to Victory! I saw that many of them were frowning at me, unable to shed their preconceptions. Even though I was winning the debate, I was fast losing the heart of my “followers.” Well, so be it...

“In that way we will eventually *change our enemies into ourselves!*” I exclaimed in triumph.

The crowd gasped, shocked. This was an entirely new concept, one that they didn’t particularly like!

“They, indeed, will *merge* with us into the true Children of God,” I now softly stated, so those at the end of the courtyard had to strain to hear me. “And it won’t be because we forced them into it, converting them at the point of a sword. Neither will it be because we outlawed their old, heathen ways. No, it will be because we offered them a *better* way! It will be because we demonstrated *by our own sacrifices* true Godly Love. This is the love that helps, not hurts, both them and their children. And, again, the true Messiah will be the Example for this new way of thinking.”

At the word “sacrifice” I saw many in the crowd grimacing. This wasn’t at all what they wanted to hear. They were sympathizing with the rigid views of the old Pharisee. They were turning against me. My disciples looked worried, clustering around me...

“*I... don’t... know... what... you... are... saying, Jesus of Nazareth!*” the elderly Pharisee moaned, his words staggered.

Slobber ran over his slack lower lip as his head swayed from one side to the other. It was as if he were plagued by a relentlessly building, debilitating, splitting headache!

“*Ignorance, my friend...*” I said, not unkindly, folding my arms over my chest as I yet again stood on my stone bench. I towered up above the hushed crowd, “—is not an offense. Our Heavenly Father knows our finite capabilities and does not punish us for our inherent limitations. But *willful* ignorance is an *abomination* to Him!”

It was as if I’d slapped him in the face. He looked equally stunned and ferocious!

“Willful ignorance is the twisted mirrored image of disobedience,” I explained to the nervous crowd, “and in its way just as bad! They both exhibit that *you think you are greater than God*. Are you?”

I paused, letting that horrific observation sink in...

“All you who claim to be the supreme arbitrators of God’s Will upon Earth should know better concerning the true characteristics of the Messiah!” I sternly lectured him. “You are fully knowledgeable of the writings of the Prophet Isaiah—and yet choose to discount or ignore them! That, Sir, is your greatest failure!”

Now he was on firmer footing...

“You accuse me of not knowing the true meaning of the scriptures?” he seethed at me, white froth bubbling on his thin lips. “*That’s the worst insult possible against God’s discerners of Truth!*”

“And doubly damning,” I mildly agreed.

The crowd was with me again. They hated the arrogant Pharisees. I’d turned my attack from my general audience, again skewering the ruling religious elite.

“OUT OF YOUR HATRED YOU CHOOSE TO SET ASIDE THE KEY IDENTIFIER STATED BY THE HOLY SCRIPTURE FOR RECOGNIZING OUR LONGED-FOR MESSIAH,” I again shouted at the top of my voice. “YOU WILLFULLY IGNORE THAT WHICH WILL LEAD GOD’S PEOPLE INTO A NEW WAY OF THINKING, A NOVEL WORLD-VIEW, AND SIGNIFICANT ADVANCEMENT OF OUR COLLECTIVE SPIRITUAL CHARACTER!”

Despite his anger, I’d reached him. On an intellectual level, my challenge was intriguing. He and his ilk loved to see what “lay behind the curtain.” Their big failure was discarding that which they didn’t like for their own prejudices and traditions, not in seeking for the “truth.” But his scholarly mind knew no limits.

“What... s-sort of... ‘identifier’... do we... ‘not see’?” he asked, sincerely bewildered but still curious.

“I speak of that which *balances and explains* the many references in the Holy Scriptures to the Messiah being a military leader who will grind his enemies under his feet!” I snapped.

“But that description of the Messiah is entirely accurate,” he panted, now straightening, thinking that he’d finally regained his composure and solid scriptural debating platform. “For instance...”

“—yes, the actual writings of King David in his book of Psalms!” I cut him off again, “describing to us a very different side of the Messiah, which you ignore! *Such as the following...*”

I then launched into a paraphrased, intensely emotional recitation of parts of the Holy Scriptures taken from the Prophet David’s writings in the book of Psalms:

**“THEY LIKE A PACK OF DOGS
HAVE SURROUNDED ME:
EVILDOERS ENCIRCLE ME,
PIERCING MY HANDS AND FEET;
YET ALL MY BONES ARE INTACT
AS MY ENEMIES GAZE HAUGHTILY,
—GAMBLING FOR MY CLOTHES.**

CONSIDERING ME BUT A WORM
AND NO MAN,
I AM THE OBJECT OF SCORN
AND DERISION,
CONTEMPTIBLE MOCKING
RIPS THROUGH ME:
*'HE CLAIMED TO TRUST IN GOD!
LET US SEE IF GOD
WILL SAVE HIM NOW,
—SINCE HE CLAIMS
GOD DELIGHTS IN HIM!'*

AND FROM THE DEPTHS
OF MY AGONY, I CRY OUT:
*'MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY
HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?
WHY HAVE YOU WITHDRAWN
SO FAR AWAY?
WHY ARE YOU NOT HELPING
ME ANYMORE?
WHY DOES MY SUFFERING
NOT MOVE YOU?
—DOES ALL MY GROANING
MEAN NOTHING?'*

BUT I SHALL NOT BE
MOVED IN MY FAITH,
SINCE THE LORD IS
CONTINUALLY MY FOCUS.
I'VE MADE HIM MY PERMANENT
RIGHT HAND
—AND THEREFORE,
I SHALL NOT BE MOVED.

SO, EVEN IN MY CONFUSION
AND FEAR
MY HEART IS GLAD
AND AT PEACE.
MY INNER SELF IS

GLORIFIED AND REJOICES.
MY BODY SHALL REST
IN CONFIDENCE
—OF ULTIMATE SAFETY
AND SALVATION.

FOR MY SPIRIT
WILL NOT BE ABANDONED,
LEFT FOREVER IN THE PLACE
OF THE DEAD;
NEITHER MY BODY
ALLOWED TO DECAY,
BUT KEPT ON THE PATH OF LIFE,
RETURNED TO GOD'S
GLORIOUS PRESENCE,
IN THE FULLNESS
OF JOY AND PLEASURE,
—SET FOREVER
AT HIS RIGHT HAND.

AND SO, I WAITED
PATIENTLY FOR THE LORD;
AND HE TURNED TO ME
AND HEARD MY CRY,
DRAWING ME BACK UP
OUT OF THE HORRIBLE PIT,
A PLACE OF CHAOS AND DESTRUCTION,
UP OUT OF THE DARKNESS
OF FROTH AND SLIME,
TO SET MY FEET BACK
UPON SOLID ROCK,
STEADYING MY STEPS,
ESTABLISHING MY GOINGS;
PLACING A NEW SONG IN MY MOUTH:
—OF PRAISE TO OUR MERCIFUL GOD.

AND MANY WILL SEE
BOTH MY TURMOIL
AND MY RESCUE BY THE LORD,

INSPIRING FEAR, REVERENCE,
 AND WORSHIP,
 THAT THEY TOO MAY GIVE
 THEIR FULL TRUST,
 IN SPITE OF THE MOST TERRIBLE
 OF ORDEALS,
 —TRUSTING IN
THE WISDOM OF GOD.”

The crowd was hushed at my powerful recitation, entranced by the beauty of both the words and the startling images it evoked in their minds.

“What does that prove?” the elderly Pharisee demanded, straightening back up with renewed confidence. I was back in his familiar territory, quoting scriptures. “What are you saying to us, Jesus of Nazareth? Do you have a new interpretation of King David’s verses that merely describe *himself*?”

“Only that which you lack the willingness to acknowledge,” I answered sadly. “The message that is embedded within the tribal mindset of our Prophets is there to be recognized if you wish. Yes, it describes their present situations *while also predicting their far future*: a far better place than their immediate dire circumstance. But you don’t want to see it. Even from the hand of King David, of whose lineage the Messiah descends, you fail to connect the proper scriptures! David was not speaking just of himself, but...”

“*I don’t know what you are talking about!*” the Pharisee broke in. He was gathering strength, trying to mount a comeback against me. “Your rambling recitation is just confusing the people! You’re making up some story where none exists! Yours is a subtle but insidious form of heresy, Jesus of Nazareth. You speak to your own benefit, as much as you claim that I and my colleagues speak to ours. You say that we ignore or overemphasize certain scriptures? It is *you* that *mangles* them!”

“Oh?” I said, still standing high upon the bench with my robed arms folded. I looked down at him imperiously but sadly. “Then do you also not accept the teachings of the Prophet Isaiah?”

“Of course, I accept the teachings of *ALL* the Prophets!” he spat back at me. “Are you accusing me of being one of the liberal Sadducees? It’s not the skill to recite verses scattered through the Holy Scriptures that you lack, but the proper understanding of them! You twist and distort the scriptures! It’s *you* that takes only what you want and puts aside the rest. No wonder you choose to lecture with cute contemporary stories laced with clever but misleading ideas. You don’t understand the Holy Scriptures at all. When you speak from them, you talk nonsense!”

“Nonsense?” I said, dryly repeating his words... “Only working to achieve my own benefit? In your estimation—even *attempting to falsely put myself into the SANDALS of the true Messiah?* If so, then I certainly am working to achieve something quite different, more humbling, and much more terrible than you envision! Have you not heard these words from the great Prophet Isaiah...?”

And I proceeded immediately to paraphrase a number of passages from the book of Isaiah:

**“THIS IS THE WORD WHICH ISAIAH,
THE SON OF AMOZ, HEARD:
A REVELATION FROM GOD
CONCERNING JERUSALEM;
IN WHICH IT SHALL COME TO PASS
AT A FUTURE TIME THAT
THE MOUNTAIN OF THE LORD’S HOUSE
SHALL BE FIRMLY ESTABLISHED
AS THE HIGHEST OF ALL MOUNTAINS
—EXALTED ABOVE ALL; TO WHICH
ALL NATIONS SHALL FLOW.**

**AND MANY PEOPLE WILL COME TO IT
AND SAY: ‘COME, LET US GO UP
TO THE TOP OF GOD’S MOUNTAIN,
TO THE HOUSE OF THE GOD OF JACOB,
THAT HE MIGHT TEACH US ALL HIS WAYS
—AND WE MAY WALK IN HIS PATHS.’**

FOR OUT OF ZION WILL GO
INSTRUCTION IN THE LAW
AND THE WORD OF THE LORD
FROM JERUSALEM;
AND GOD WILL JUDGE
BETWEEN THE NATIONS
AND SETTLE THE DISPUTES
OF MANY PEOPLES.
AND THEY WILL BEAT THEIR SWORDS
INTO PLOWSHARES
AND THEIR SPEARS INTO
PRUNING HOOKS.
NATION SHALL NOT LIFT UP
SWORD AGAINST NATION.
NEITHER SHALL THEY OBSESS
ON WAR ANYMORE.
OH, HOUSE OF JACOB,
COME, LET US WALK
—IN THE FULL LIGHT OF THE LORD!

FOR THE LORD SAYS
HE'S MADE ALL THINGS,
BY HIS OWN HANDS
EVERYTHING CAME INTO BEING.
BUT THE MAN TO WHOM
HE WILL GIVE SPECIAL PRESTIGE
IS THE ONE THAT IS HUMBLE, BROKEN,
WITH A WOUNDED SPIRIT
—WHO TREMBLES AT GOD'S WORDS,
REVERING HIS COMMANDS.

THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD GOD
IS ON HIS MESSIAH,
ANOINTING AND QUALIFYING HIM
TO PREACH THE GOSPEL,
GOOD TIDINGS FOR THE MEEK,
THE POOR, AND THE AFFLICTED.
GOD HAS SENT HIS MESSENGER
TO BIND UP THE INJURED,

TO HEAL THE BROKENHEARTED,
 TO PROCLAIM LIBERTY
 FREEING THE PHYSICAL
 AND SPIRITUAL CAPTIVES,
 OPENING UP THE PRISONS
 OF MANKIND'S OWN MAKING,
 —REMOVING THE BLINDFOLDS
 OF THOSE WHO DON'T SEE.

'THEREFORE,' SAYS THE MESSIAH,
 'MY PEOPLE SHALL KNOW ME,
 REVERING MY NAME AND
 WHAT IT MEANS FOR THEM,
 FINALLY RECOGNIZING THAT
 HE WHO SPEAKS IS *I AM!*
 WITH BEAUTIFUL FEET
 THAT WALK THE ROCKY ROADS,
 BRINGING GOOD TIDINGS,
 PEACE, AND SALVATION,
 SAYING TO ZION: *YOUR GOD REIGNS!*
LIFT YOUR VOICES!
WITH THE WATCHMEN
SING TOGETHER FOR JOY!
FOR YOU SHALL WITNESS
WITH YOUR OWN EYES
 —*THE RETURN OF THE LORD TO ZION.'*

AND GOD SAYS: 'BEHOLD
MY SERVANT WHOM I UPHOLD,
MY ELECT IN WHOM MY SOUL
CONTINUALLY DELIGHTS!
I HAVE PUT MY SPIRIT UPON HIM
TO BRING JUSTICE
AND RIGHTEOUSNESS:
REVEALING TRUTH TO THE NATIONS.
HE WILL NOT CRY NOR SHOUT-ALoud
NOR COMPLAIN.
HE WILL BE GENTLE,
NOT EVEN BRUISING REEDS

*AT THE RIVER,
 NOR QUENCHING DIMLY BURNING,
 FAINT CANDLES.
 YET HE WILL POWERFULLY
 BRING FORTH JUSTICE IN TRUTH,
 NOT FAILING, BECOMING WEAK,
 OR BEING DISCOURAGED
 UNTIL HE'S COMPLETES HIS MISSION
 BRINGING JUSTICE.
 —ALL ENDS OF THE EARTH WILL AWAIT
 HIS DIRECTION.'*

THUS SAYS THE LORD GOD,
 HE WHO CREATED THE HEAVENS,
 WHO STRETCHED FORTH THE STARS
 ACROSS THE SKY,
 WHO ESTABLISHED THE EARTH
 AND ALL THAT ABIDES ON IT,
 WHO GAVE BREATH AND SPIRIT
 TO HIS LITTLE CHILDREN:
*'I THE LORD HAVE CALLED YOU
 THE MESSIAH, FOR A RIGHTEOUS PURPOSE,
 BEARING FULL RESPONSIBILITY.
 I WILL TAKE YOU BY THE HAND
 AND KEEP YOU SECURE.
 I WILL GIVE YOU A NEW COVENANT
 FOR THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL.
 I WILL MAKE YOU A LIGHT
 TO THE NATIONS OF GENTILES.
 I WILL EMPOWER YOU TO OPEN
 THE EYES OF THE BLIND,
 TO BRING THE PRISONERS OUT
 OF THEIR DUNGEONS,
 —TO GIVE LIGHT TO THOSE
 WHO SIT IN DARK PRISONS.'*

***'I AM THE LORD! THAT IS MY NAME!
 THIS TRANSCENDENT GLORY
 I WILL NOT GIVE TO ANOTHER.***

MY PRAISE MAY NOT BE TRANSFERRED
 TO MAN'S IDOLS!
 I WILL CHANGE THE WORLD
 DRAMATICALLY, I TELL YOU NOW
 OF THE NEW WORLD TO COME.
 SING TO ME THUS A NEW SONG,
 IN PRAISE OF MY MERCY!
 TAKE THIS SONG
 TO ALL ENDS OF THE EARTH.
 GIVE IT TO ALL THE INHABITANTS
 OF ALL THE WORLD.
 SING WITH THEM THIS SONG
 OF TREMENDOUS JOY
 —LIKE NOTHING THEY'VE
 EVER HEARD BEFORE!

'COMFORT MY PEOPLE
 WITH THIS SONG,' SAYS YOUR GOD.
 'SPEAK TENDERLY TO THE HEART
 OF JERUSALEM, CRYING TO HER
 THAT HER TIME OF SERVICE IS ENDED;
 HER TIME OF WARFARE HAS CEASED;
 HER PUNISHMENT ACCEPTED;
 —HER INIQUITY IS PARDONED;
 ALL HER SINS PAID FOR IN DOUBLE.'

'HEAR THE VOICE CRYING
 OUT IN THE WILDERNESS:
 PREPARE YE THE WAY OF THE LORD,
 CLEAR AWAY ALL OBSTACLES,
 MAKING STRAIGHT AND SMOOTH
 THE PATH, FORGING A HIGHWAY
 FOR YOUR GOD!
 FILLING UP EVERY VALLEY,
 LOWERING EVERY MOUNTAIN AND HILL,
 STRAIGHTENING EVERY PLACE
 CROOKED OR UNEVEN,
 —SMOOTHING OUT EVERY PLACE
 THAT IS ROUGH.'

***'AND THE GLORY AND SPLENDOR
 OF GOD WILL BE REVEALED.
 ALL FLESH SHALL SEE IT TOGETHER,
 FOR GOD HAS SPOKEN IT.
 AND THE VOICE IN THE WILDERNESS
 SAYS: PROPHECY!
 AND YOU, MY MESSIAH,
 SHALL PROCLAIM TO THE PEOPLE:
 ALL FLESH IS AS FRAIL
 AS THE GRASS OF THE FIELD.
 ALL THAT MAKES MEADOWS BEAUTIFUL
 IS TRANSITORY.
 THE GRASS AND FLOWER FADES,
 WITHERING AT GOD'S BREATH.
 SURELY ALL THE PEOPLE
 ARE LIKE THE GRASS OF THE FIELD.
 EVERYTHING FADES AND DIES
 EXCEPT FOR THE WILL OF GOD.
 —GOD'S WORDS TO US SHALL STAND
 FOREVER AND IMPERVIOUS.'***

***'O YOU THAT BRINGS GOOD TIDINGS
 TO ZION, GET UP UPON THE HIGH MOUNTAIN
 SO THAT ALL CAN HEAR.
 O YOU THAT BRING GOOD TIDINGS
 TO JERUSALEM, LIFT UP YOUR VOICE
 WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH!
 SPEAK LOUDLY, WITHOUT FEAR,
 PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL!
 SAY TO THE CITIES OF JUDAH:
 BEHOLD YOUR GOD! BEHOLD THE LORD
 GOD COMES WITH ALL HIS MIGHT!
 HIS ARM WILL RULE,
 HIS REWARD IS WITH HIM.
 HE WILL REPAY YOU
 MANY TIMES OVER FOR YOUR WORK!
 HE WILL FEED HIS FLOCK
 AS DOES A SHEPHERD.'***

*HE WILL GATHER UP
THE LITTLE LAMBS INTO HIS ARM.
HE WILL CARRY THEM
CRADLED AT HIS CHEST.
—HE WILL PERSONALLY LEAD
THOSE THAT HAVE YOUNG BABIES.’*

**AND THERE WILL COME FORTH
A SEEDLING GROWTH
OUT OF THE STOCK OF
KING DAVID’S FATHER, JESSE,
BRANCHING OUT OF HIS ROOTS
TO GROW AND BEAR FRUIT.
AND THE SPIRIT OF GOD
WILL REST UPON HIM,
ENDOWING HIM WITH WISDOM,
UNDERSTANDING, COUNSEL,
MIGHT, KNOWLEDGE, REVERENCE,
AND FEAR OF THE LORD;
MAKING HIM QUICK TO UNDERSTAND;
DELIGHTING IN GOD;
FORMING DECISIONS
BASED NOT ON EARTHLY SENSES,
NEITHER BY WHAT HE IMMEDIATELY
SEES OR HEARS,
BUT WITH SUPERNATURAL
RIGHTEOUSNESS AND JUSTICE
BRINGING TO HIMSELF THE POOR,
THE MEEK, THE ABUSED;
CRUSHING THE EARTH
AND THE OPPRESSORS
NOT WITH THE SWORD, THE SPEAR,
OR EVEN THE BATTLEAXE,
BUT WITH THE ROD OF HIS MOUTH,
BREATH OF HIS LIPS,
—LAYING LOW AND KILLING
THE PLANS OF THE WICKED.**

AND THE BELT AT HIS WAIST
WILL BE RIGHTEOUSNESS.
AND THE PANTS HE WEARS
WILL BE FAITHFULNESS.
AND THE WOLF WILL LIVE
IN HARMONY WITH THE LAMB.
AND THE LEOPARD WILL GO
TO SLEEP WITH THE GOAT.
AND THE LION, CALF, AND LIVESTOCK
WILL LIVE TOGETHER.
AND A LITTLE CHILD SHALL LEAD
THEM ALL ABOUT.
AND THE BEAR SHALL EAT
ALONGSIDE THE COW.
AND THEIR YOUNG SHALL ALL PLAY
TOGETHER IN PEACE.
AND THE CARNIVOROUS BEASTS
WILL EAT PLANTS.
AND THE HUMAN BABY WILL REST
ON TOP OF A SNAKE'S DEN.
—AND THE YOUNG CHILD WILL PLAY
WITH POISONOUS VIPERS.

NONE OF THESE SHALL HURT
OR DESTROY EACH OTHER
FOR THEY ARE ALL TOGETHER
THERE IN THE HOLY MOUNTAIN,
WHERE GOD'S TEACHINGS
PERMEATE EVERYTHING,
THE ROOT OF JESSE STANDING
AS A SIGNAL FOR ALL PEOPLES,
A FOCUS TO WHOM ALL THE NATIONS
SHALL INQUIRE
SEEKING FROM HIM
THE HEAVENLY WISDOM ABOVE ALL ELSE;
FINDING PEACE OF GOD
THAT PASSES ALL UNDERSTANDING,
—DWELLING ETERNALLY
IN GLORIOUS REST.

FOR IN THE MIDST OF JUDGMENT
IS THE PROMISE OF GOD:
THERE IS CERTAINTY
OF DELIVERANCE WAITING FOR YOU.
FOR THOSE THAT LIVE IN ANGUISH,
HOPE DISPELS THE GLOOM.
THOSE LANDS THAT BEFORE
LIVED IN FEAR AND HOPELESSNESS
NOW THEY WILL HAVE ACCESS
TO GLORY ATTAINABLE BY ALL.
THE PEOPLE WHO WALKED IN DARKNESS
WILL SEE A GREAT LIGHT,
—ITS BRILLIANCE EVEN ERASING
THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

YOU, O LORD, HAVE EXPANDED
THE NATION IN INCREASING JOY.
THEY REJOICE BEFORE YOU
GLEEFUL AS AT A BOUNTIFUL HARVEST.
THEY EXALT LIKE CONQUERORS
DIVIDING THE LOOT OF BATTLE.
FOR THEIR BURDENS ARE LIFTED;
STINGING WHIPS STOPPED.
THE WAR BOOTS, ARMOR,
AND UNIFORMS OF THE OPPRESSORS
—SHALL BE PILED UP AND USED
AS WARMING FUEL, CONSUMED IN FLAMES.

FOR TO US A SWEET CHILD IS BORN,
A DARLING SON IS GIVEN.
THE WHOLE GOVERNING OF OUR LIVES
WILL BE UPON HIS SHOULDERS.
HIS NAME SHALL BE CALLED
'WONDERFUL COUNSELOR,'
'MIGHTY GOD,' 'EVERLASTING FATHER,'
AND 'PRINCE OF PEACE.'
THE INCREASE OF HIS GOVERNMENT
SHALL FLOURISH IN PEACE.

IT SHALL NOT END,
SET UPON THE THRONE OF DAVID.
IT WILL BE THE HOLY KINGDOM OF GOD,
ETERNALLY FLOURISHING,
ESTABLISHED AND UPHELD
BY JUSTICE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS.
—THE ZEAL OF ALMIGHTY GOD
WILL ACCOMPLISH THIS.

SO, WHO HAS BELIEVED, CLUNG TO,
AND CHERISHED THIS VISION?
THIS MESSAGE WAS REVEALED
TO US MIRACULOUSLY!
THE STRONG ARM OF THE LORD
HAS BEEN MADE MANIFEST!
FOR THE SERVANT OF GOD
GREW UP LIKE A TENDER PLANT,
WATERED AND NURTURED
BY A HEAVENLY SOURCE,
FLOURISHING WHERE THERE WAS
ONLY DRY GROUND.
MANY SAY THAT HE HAS
NO KINGLY POMP, NO ROYALTY!
MANY OTHERS SAY THERE'S
NOTHING SPECIAL ABOUT HIM!
IN FACT, HE WAS DESPISED, REJECTED,
AND FORSAKEN BY MEN!
HE WAS ASSOCIATED WITH PAIN,
SORROW, AND GRIEF!
HIS GOODLINESS WAS DEEMED
A REPULSIVE SICKNESS!
AND LIKE A DEFORMED BEGGAR
PEOPLE TURNED AWAY FROM HIM.
—WE ALSO DID NOT APPRECIATE
HIS WORTH, OR ESTEEM HIS WORDS.

SURELY, HE CARRIED UPON HIMSELF
OUR OWN GRIEF,
SICKNESSES, WEAKNESS, FAULTS,

AND DISTRESS!
 HE TOOK UPON HIMSELF THE PENALTY
 OF OUR OWN CRIMES.
 AND YET IN OUR IGNORANCE
 WE DEEMED HIM REJECTED BY GOD.
 WE CONSIDERED HIM A SPIRITUAL LEPER
 WORTHY ONLY OF CONTEMPT.
 BUT HE WAS WOUNDED
 FOR OUR OWN TRANSGRESSIONS.
 HE WAS BRUISED
 FOR OUR GUILT AND INIQUITIES.
 THE TORTURE RIGHTLY DUE US
 WAS HEAPED UPON HIM.
 AND WITH HIS FLOGGING AND WOUNDS
 WE ARE HEALED.
 —HIS UNDESERVED, TERRIBLE SACRIFICE
 MAKING US WHOLE!

ALL WE LIKE SHEEP HAVE GONE ASTRAY.
 WE'VE EACH TURNED TO OUR OWN WAYS.
 WE ALL DESERVE TO BE
 REJECTED FROM GOD'S PRESENCE.
 —YET GOD HAS PUT UPON HIM
 THE GUILT AND INIQUITY OF US ALL.

HE WAS OPPRESSED AND AFFLICTED,
 YET DID NOT COMPLAIN.
 IN TOTAL SUBMISSION
 HE OPENED NOT HIS MOUTH.
 LIKE A LAMB BEING LED
 TO THE SLAUGHTER, HE WAS SILENT.
 AS A SHEEP BEING TAKEN
 TO BE SHORN, HE WAS DUMB.
 —HE MEEKLY ACCEPTED
 THE AWFUL TASK ASSIGNED TO HIM.

OPPRESSED, JUDGED, AND EXECUTED,
 IN HIS PRIME, HE WAS TAKEN
 OUT OF HIS GENERATION.

HE WAS CUT AWAY
FROM THE LAND OF THE LIVING.
THINKING THEY WERE SAVING GOD'S PEOPLE,
HE WAS KILLED.
AND THOUGH THEY ASSIGNED HIM A GRAVE
WITH THE WICKED, AND WITH A RICH MAN
IN HIS DEATH, HE'D DONE NO VIOLENCE.
—NEITHER WAS THERE ANY DECEIT
IN THE WORDS OF HIS MOUTH.

YET IT WAS THE WILL OF GOD
HIMSELF TO BRUISE HIM.
GOD ASSIGNED HIM GRIEF,
MAKING HIM THE SICKEST OF ALL.
TOGETHER, GOD AND THE MESSIAH
OFFERED HIS LIFE
AS AN ATONEMENT FOR ALL THE SINS
OF ALL THE WORLD;
YET HIS DAYS DO NOT END
IN THE HUMILIATION OF THE TOMB.
HE IS YET TO PROSPER
AT THE WILL AND PLEASURE OF GOD.
THE COSMIC TORTURE OF HIS SOUL
WILL SUFFICE AS PAYMENT
—AND THE SCALES OF JUSTICE BALANCED,
THE PENALTY GONE.

DEATH WILL NOT BE VICTORIOUS
OVER OUR SAVIOR.
NO, BY HIS RESURRECTION
NEW LIFE IS BROUGHT TO ALL.
HIS CLEARANCE OF THE PATH TO GOD
MAKES ALL POSSIBLE.
—HIS KNOWLEDGE OF GODLY
RIGHTEOUSNESS IS OURS.

BECAUSE THE MESSIAH Poured OUT
HIS LIFE INTO DEATH
AND LET HIMSELF BE REGARDED

AS A COMMON CRIMINAL
AND BE NUMBERED AMONGST
THE TRANSGRESSORS,
TAKING UPON HIMSELF
THE SINS OF ALL OF MANKIND;
AND MAKING INTERCESSION
FOR THOSE THAT REBELLED
THINKING THAT THEY WERE GREATER
THAN GOD, THE LORD HAS GIVEN HIM
THE GREATEST OF ALL REWARDS,
—*CROWNING HIM THE KING OF ALL KINGS.*”

I finished, panting. I sucked in several deep breaths. I unfolded my arms from across my chest, letting them hang down to my sides. I stood in silence upon the stone bench in the packed courtyard, calmly looking down at the people

Everything was peaceful and quiet, the people drinking in my message of prophesied, detailed, glorious HOPE. Several small birds flew down, alighting on a stone column. They began to twitter happily.

“So, what say you to these words of the Prophets?” I challenged the whitehaired Pharisee who was still standing defiantly below me.

He swallowed hard, gathering his wits. Then he very carefully answered my question.

“It was an impassioned oration without any clear meaning, Jesus of Nazareth,” he huffed, clearly unimpressed by my quotes from the book of Isaiah. “The passages you spoke were loosely phrased and arbitrarily selected. Supposedly you’re attempting to paint the Messiah as some sort of ‘suffering savior.’ But many other passages attest to the military might of the Messiah. Our victory as a nation will only be achieved through God giving us a *great warrior*. Our enemies are too powerful to be overcome with anything else than overwhelming force. Only a Warrior King can sweep away our foes, restoring the Throne of David! Everything else is just misdirection, distortion, or misunderstanding.”

I again folded my robed arms over my chest.

“You’re a hard man to convince, my friend,” I replied, tilting my head to the side. “But do you not—at least—see in the scriptures I paraphrased the answer to my original question?”

“What question was that?” he shrugged, pretending it was so trivial he’d forgotten. “Your faulty logic and silly suppositions *bore* me. I’m *leaving!*”

He turned his back to me and began to work his way out of the crowd...

“Not so fast!” I sternly challenged him, forcing him to stop and reengage with the subject of our debate. “The people here want to hear your answer—*don’t you all?*”

“YES... YES... YES!” they all chanted together in reply, shaking their fists enthusiastically at him, putting him on the spot.

Knowing he couldn’t just leave without being branded a coward, the Pharisee relented. He reluctantly turned back around, facing me.

“Tell me the question again!” he demanded.

“Do you now, at last,” I stated firmly, “recognize the *ONE KEY IDENTIFIER OF THE MESSIAH THAT IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN ALL THE REST...* and which you’ve thus far *ignored?*”

Suddenly the crowd all jumped to their feet, cheering me on. Here was the conflict! Here was the drama! Here was the “moment of truth”!

The old man looked at me in disgust, sneering at those around him. They were bumping and jostling him as they danced up and down with joy. He cringed back from them...

“Bah!” he spat at me, rejecting my question out-of-hand. “You’re without excuse! There’s no sense in trying to reason with you further!”

With that he angrily shoved those around him aside, quickly exiting the hostile courtyard. Now he didn’t care if he was branded a loser. He just wanted to escape.

Seeing that I’d bested him, the crowd broke out into spontaneous applause. The noise of their clapping *rocked* the courtyard and beyond! Indeed, word of what I’d done filtered out rapidly. My debating victories were firing a growing

amazement throughout the city. I'd bested both the Pharisees and the Sadducees!

Yes, the elderly Pharisee had escaped by "turning tail" and running. But I would not let *the audience off their* "hook" so easily...

"Listen to me! Quiet! Let me tell you the conclusion of the matter, that which the Pharisee was afraid to admit," I grimly asserted, regaining control of the packed audience.

As they settled back down, eager for the show to continue, I stepped off the stone bench and sat upon it. Now I was on-level with the crowd, again one of them.

I loudly projected my voice so all could hear...

"DON'T YOU NOW SEE THAT THE MESSIAH IS NOT MERELY A MORTAL MAN COMMISSIONED BY GOD TO RE-ESTABLISH A NEW AND BETTER THRONE OF OUR FOREFATHER KING DAVID?" I thundered forcefully out over the packed courtyard.

Many were nodding thoughtfully...

"The Messiah and our Heavenly Father are joined together!" I proclaimed. "The Messiah is both Man and God. A piece of the Almighty is inside the Messiah! This is where your feeble minds stumble. This is something so wondrous that it is beyond your capability to know or understand. *The Messiah, indeed, was spiritually WITH God when He talked with King David all those centuries in the past!* And the Messiah is also physically descended from David. The Holy Scriptures do not contradict themselves! No, they merely give you a glimpse of realities far beyond your present state of physical and spiritual comprehension."

Now the audience and even my disciples looked perplexed. They didn't connect to what I was saying. It wasn't just an exciting verbal duel anymore between me and my foes. My words were no longer penetrating...

So, my audience started grumbling and complaining. Some shouted to me to stop with the strange ideas and quote more of the stirring scriptures! This teaching was far too advanced for them. But still, they needed to hear it. Later—weeks, months, or years into the future—they would remember... and it would finally make sense to them.

A few in the audience were even starting to “boo” me. Hah! The elderly Pharisee should have stayed. He would have enjoyed this turn of events...

“OPEN UP YOUR MINDS TO NOT KNOWING ALL THE ANSWERS!” I shouted at them, jumping up again to stand imperiously on the stone bench above them.

“We’re not stupid!” someone shouted back.

“*GOD IS GREAT!*” I shouted back. “Do you not chant this often at your religious services and festivals? But it isn’t *complete*. You *should* say this: ‘God is greater than *us!*’ When you acknowledge that wondrous fact, you become truly wise!”

“How so, Master?” Peter called up to me, helping keep the dialogue positive.

Frustrated by their fickle affections, I again shouted: “*HUMBLE YOURSELVES BEFORE THE MIGHTY HAND OF GOD AND HE WILL LIFT YOU UP!*”

Many were frowning, looking like I’d insulted them, which I had. They didn’t like being put-down. They’d had enough of that with the brutal occupation by the Roman Empire. They wanted more talk of the “eternal Kingdom of God” which they’d soon inherit!

And sure, it was ok for me to cut-down the arrogant Pharisees and the preening Sadducees... but to give *them* the same treatment? After all, hadn’t they been applauding and cheering me most of the time, in regard to my discourse with the religious elite? Why, then, was I being so “mean” to them, my supporters?

Even I—standing up there hearing their grumblings— was again stricken by grave doubts...

Why *was* I doing all of this? Why was I going through all this irksome bother and extreme sacrifice? I was about to voluntarily submit to enduring all the deserved penalties of all the damned of this entire planet, both from the past and the future... an unimaginable agony! But for what? Was it *all just to save a bunch of dull-minded, stupid, ungrateful, complaining, shortsighted, bleating sheep?*

But then I caught myself. They weren’t sheep. They were spiritual *children*. In fact, they were *little* children, only just beginning to mature. And I was their Big Brother, helping

them take their first few stumbling, tentative, knocking-things-over, falling-on-their-faces “baby-steps.”

I’d totally silenced the Pharisees. From that point to the very end, none of them dared question me. They’d been revealed publicly as deeply flawed leaders, inadequate, and *lacking the one fundamental requisite that matters more than anything!*

Yes, *that*—the very same thing as with the Sadducees—was actually their greatest failing!

In spite of all their great knowledge of the Holy Scriptures... and their great status in the official church... and their many lofty speeches and lectures... and their wealth and political power... and their high social acclaim... and their studious obedience to all of the prevailing rituals, traditions, and rites... *many of them utterly lacked GOD’S LOVE!*

It was a fatal flaw that destroyed everything else, no matter how noble, worthy, or weighty. Their focus was on the suppression, eradication, and elimination of “sin”—meaning anything that contradicted their own conclusions. If it meant that the entire world, including their own people, must be destroyed to stroke their own twisted vanities, then so be it!

My obsession, however, was quite different. My focus was on *liberating the full potential of all mankind to attempt great things to the Glory of God!* By filling up people’s lives with Godly Righteousness fully exercising their own God-given Creativity—the evil of their own sordid animal natures would be pushed out, automatically!

I made one more attempt to penetrate the thick, selfish, present-moment-centered minds of the crowd; and even the same in some of my close disciples...

“*LISTEN TO ME!*” I shouted loudly. “I ASK YOU THE SAME QUESTION I ASKED THAT PHARISEE! BASED ON KEY PROPHECIES OF KING DAVID AND OF THE PROPHET ISAIAH WHICH I JUST RECITED IN YOUR PRESENCE—CAN YOU TELL ME THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MESSIAH THAT SO MANY MISS? IN THEIR OBSESSION TO HAVE HIM BE A VENGEFUL WARRIOR EXERCISING THE POWER OF GOD TO SLAUGHTER OUR ENEMIES, WHAT DO THEY FORGET?”

Oh, this was definitely unfair... or, so thought many in the audience. Yes, I saw a lot of the people, including some of my own disciples, squirming and deliberately not meeting my withering gaze!

But I waited, looking about impatiently, pointing expectantly at people here and there; letting them know this was not a rhetorical question used as an excuse to launch into some long lecture. I wanted them to *think, discover* for themselves, and then *grow!*

Finally, Peter stuck his big hand up high in the air.

“Peter! My most exuberant disciple! Stand up here with me so everyone can hear you,” I invited him.

He obediently climbed up on the stone bench to stand beside me.

“Can you tell the people here what sort of Messiah those ancient prophecies actually described?” I continued, putting my hands on my hips and looking at him with an expression of exaggerated expectation.

The crowd’s attention was again fixated on me. They’d been put on the spot themselves, as I’d done to the elderly Pharisee—with no more clue to the answer than him! So, they were eager to hear what Peter had to say.

“Well... I think...” he mused, frowning, “that... uh... the Messiah would be very concerned and tender to his people?”

“Bravo!” I called out to the crowd, raising my hands up to clap loudly in praise of Peter’s answer.

Peter beamed, relieved that I’d not skewered him with an embarrassing retort, as was my habit of doing...

“—but not the *best* answer!” I concluded, dashing poor Peter’s hopes of getting off fairly easily.

“Who else wants to take a crack at this?” I called-out, motioning with my left hand for Peter to step down while waving my right hand grandly over the entire crowd, inviting anyone else to come up and take his place.

“Come on now!” I invited them. “Don’t be shy! I won’t bite you! I appreciate your good ideas. Remember all the magnificent words I just paraphrased to you out of the Holy Scriptures? Think back to just a few moments ago. What sort of FEELING did you get from them? They stirred your HEART,

did they not? They touched you in your soul in a way you've never before felt, right? You were seeing an aspect of the Messiah you never heard or knew about before, correct? What was it? What was that Vision you dimly perceived? Can you describe it?"

Nobody dared speak...

But I was determined to move them forward. Before I died, I wanted *someone* to articulate publicly the Mission I was attempting to accomplish. I wanted them to see the Messiah not just as a traditional warrior caricature—a pale shadow of His real nature—but in the fullness of His God-given Magnificence!

"Speak up!" I encouraged them again. "Do you need an incentive? Do you want me to give you a prize?"

Their ears perked up at my mentioning a reward. Everybody loved to get something for free. Especially good was money! The people were used to religious elites gouging *them* for their money. I was clearly different. Would I hand to some lucky respondent a pile of silver coins from our treasury bag that Judas carried? But that wasn't possible... Unfortunately, as often in our travels, we were flat broke! I couldn't give the winner money, even if I wanted.

"I don't have many worldly possessions, but perhaps I can find something to give you... *here!*" I exclaimed, bending down.

I quickly unlaced my sandals, stepped out of them, and lifted them high in the air over my head.

"I'll give you my fine pair of leather sandals!" I exclaimed.

I held them both by their leather straps and started swirling them in circles over and around my head!

"They're not worth much!" I continued while still whirling the sandals. "I've almost worn through the soles! But they've been on my feet throughout my entire ministry, almost three years now. I don't need them any longer! God is going to give me *new* sandals, the like of which you've never even imagined! And these old ones will be great souvenirs for some lucky person here today. In a few days you'll be able to sell these for a considerable sum! Yes, you can get a lot of MONEY for Jesus

of Nazareth's own sandals! Just answer my question and they are yours! Any takers?"

Still, no one spoke. They were embarrassed by my antics. Here I was claiming to be a great religious leader, supplanting the lofty Pharisees and noble Sadducees. And what was I doing? I was swinging my old, smelly, worn out, thinned sandals by their long leather straps in circles about my head!

Then an old lady yelled out bravely...

"Like yer man there spoke, Master!" she laughed. "I got the feelin' thet the Messiah had real feelin's fur *me!* Little old me! Hee, hee!"

The crowd applauded her boldness, since she was quite uncomely. She was short and stubby. She was nearly bald from old age plus long exposure to the sun out working in the fields. She was wrinkled like a prune, sporting a big wart growing out of her left nostril. And her grin revealed three lonely, yellowed, crooked teeth.

"Yep, I'm as ugly as a buzzard!" she added, cackling gleefully. "But thet Messiah from David seemed like he could love even me!"

"Well said, good lady," I called back to her. "But you're *not* ugly. In God's sight you are beautiful! In fact, I today find you the *most* appealing person in this entire audience. I *love* you, my dear lady!"

I let my whirling dirty sandals drop back into my hands.

She giggled shyly, covering her twisted face with wrinkled, stained hands.

"Yes, you and Peter are correct!" I congratulated her. "But, I'm sorry, you don't get the prize. What you said concerning the Messiah is only part of the answer. Extend your thinking! Expand your horizon! Look beyond the end of your nose! Think more widely! Use what you know to take a leap of Faith! Now, *what do you see?*" I implored them all.

Bartimaeus was still loyally following me everywhere I went. He padded-along at my side clad in his rags, like a faithful pet dog. He never once complained about walking on all the stony paths I walked. This was even though he still walked with bare feet. He remained in my group from the moment I

cured his blindness in the town of Bethany. He was now sitting off to the side, intently watching...

Suddenly he broke out *laughing!*

The whole crowd was startled at his cackling. His wild laughter drew all eyes to him.

He jumped to his bare feet and bolted forward, zipping through the crowd. He expertly darted this way and that, to leap up on the stone bench and *hug me!*

I barely managed not to fall.

Stepping back, Bartimaeus yelled out to me and to the entire crowd: "THE SON OF DAVID DOESN'T HAVE 'GOOD FEELIN'S' JUST FOR US GOOD JEWS! HE'S GOT REAL COMPASSION FOR *GENTILES*, FOR *HEATHENS*, FOR *SINNERS*, AND EVEN FOR HIS *ENEMIES!* HE WANTS THE BEST EVEN FOR *THE ROMAN TROOPS*, FOR *PILATE*, FOR *KING HEROD*, EVEN FOR THE *EMPEROR!* THE PROPHE-SIZED SAVIOR WANTS TO SAVE THE *CHIEF PRIEST*, THOSE HIGH-STEPPING *SADDUCEES*, AND EVEN THOSE NASTY *PHARISEES!* THE MESSIAH LOVES *EVERYONE!* *Yippee!*"

The crowd was totally shocked by Bartimaeus' boisterous claims—that *the Messiah would love even the hated enemies of God's People!*

"How can you say such a thing, Bartimaeus?" I pretended to echo the dismissive murmurings of the crowd. I now let my sandals dangle by their leather straps down to my sides. "Isn't the Messiah supposed to *kill* all those unbelievers, sinners, and outright enemies?"

"NO!" Bartimaeus yelled again at the top of his voice. He bounced up and down with delight at his revelation, now looking like a pet monkey! "He's going to suffer and die *for* them!"

He jumped down from the bench to stand right in front of me, dancing a little "jig" of joy!

"What?" I gasped in mock disbelief. "*Why?*"

"TO SAVE THEM FROM THEMSELVES!" he exclaimed, grinning so wide it looked like his face was about to split in half.

I frowned, turning half-away from him, pursing my lips together as if seriously considering his answer.

Then I swung back to look down at him, theatrically raising my worn-out sandals high up in the air...

“*YOU WIN!*” my deep voice reverberated through the courtyard, as I bent down and handed him my sandals.

“Oh... I... *thank you*, Master!” he gasped.

He grabbed them excitedly, tying the long straps around his ankles. Gleefully he looked down at my old sandals now firmly in place upon his own previously bare feet.

“Walk well, my friend!” I congratulated him as he began prancing up and down.

Bartimaeus took off running and skipping through the crowd showing-off his “new” shoes, hugging and kissing everyone within his reach!

The crowd of hundreds was visibly touched by his enthusiasm, cheering him on—then turning to each other and hugging and kissing their own nearby neighbors as well! They weren’t exactly sure why they were so moved, but it was a real, spontaneous demonstration of mutual affection.

“WE WIN! WE WIN! WE WIN! *ALL OF US WIN TOGETHER!*” Bartimaeus chortled with delight, now overcome with emotion.

He sank down in a heap at the other end of the courtyard. He grabbed his feet, yanking them up to his mouth. He kissed the smelly, thin sandals over and over and over!

Yes, they’d gotten themselves quite a show today!

It was a vivid demonstration on *how to best express Godly Love...*

Section 8: SUMMATION



Godly Love was the Redeeming Grace which allowed me, Jesus of Nazareth, to proceed in the face of my *own* human fear. It was what allowed me to overcome my own human frailty. It was what empowered me to rise above my own human disappointment when encountering painful stupidity

in fellow humans. It was what motivated me to forgive even betrayal coming from my closest supporters.

Furthermore, Godly Love was what allowed me to quell my internal, animal instincts. Every cell in my body screamed-out the imperative of selfish, self-preservation. But God's Love filled me up to the brim, shoving away all those other annoying distractions. For all their faults, the fickle crowds I'd often fought with or coddle back in the first century were *my people!* "Bottom line": I LOVED GOD AND MY FELLOW HUMANS TOO MUCH TO LET THEM DOWN!

Sorry to shout. I get overly excited. But it was that simple... The stage was set for my Ultimate Sacrifice, on behalf of all humanity. Godly Love compelled me to martyrdom for the good of others. *And that heavy price will also be required of you, should you choose to walk in my sandals!* Yes, this is a test of your own HEART... one that you must pass in order to remain in the Kingdom of God.

But you may rightly protest that you do not have my abilities. Thus, you are incapable of the extreme unselfish acts I accomplished. That's true. You can't do what I did. But you have the capacity to do *similar*. Yet if it was difficult for me, how can I expect you to even simulate my devotion toward your fellow humans? Sadly, many of them are just as mean, hateful, and disagreeable as I faced back in the first century.

Even more difficult, I agree, is my command to *love even your enemies*. But to allow God full access to our hearts we must change "love" from being just another vague generality into tangible outcomes. We must *express* our Godly Love in the *best possible way!* Therefore, that sincere conviction must extend beyond just you liking liable people. Don't even heathens love those who love them? And, most importantly, speaking now to you who aspire to be religious leaders, don't only lecture people on what you say *they* must do. Rather, *help* them to figure out the best answer for themselves. And in your everyday dealings, whether a leader or not, rather than "tell" of your love to others, *show* it by respectful actions!

After all, it's *not* about them. Whether they deserve or respond to your acts of kindness is irrelevant. It's about demonstrating the *character of your own heart*. Your actions show

who *you* are. It's also not about dictating to or controlling others, no matter how right you may be! The pursuit of religious Law has a seductive appeal that can pervert its entire purpose. The "Word of God" is not an end unto itself, but a *foundational platform*—upon which you *build*. Your actions *fulfill* Biblical principles.

Our motivations determine how God views our actions toward others. Do we strive to help others as *they* would agree is useful, or do we use them as vehicles for our own selfish motivations? Again, what's the *best* way to assure you express Godly Love as a true follower of mine? Strive to deal with others according to the five fundamental Godly Principles and you will not go astray. Behave toward others *reasonably, usefully, respectfully, beautifully, and honorably*—and they will see your Godly Love.

Again, *Godly Love* is the same as *Godly Creativity*, which is the same as *Godly Righteousness*, which is the same as *Godly Responsibility*, which is the same as *Godly Faith*. Don't get distracted by seductive terminology. Rather than vague good "feelings," your concern for others should manifest as tangible, positive outcomes. Although one's ego is stroked winning arguments about "the Truth," God would rather that you help those of weak faith come to Him.

The greatest Command of all—of more importance than any other religious duty or directive—is to *demonstrate* your love of God by how you treat *all* your fellow human beings. If you do this, you will be more than conqueror, even should you suffer worldly defeat! *Humble yourself before the Mighty Hand of God and He will lift you up*. Godly Love compels you to sacrifice for your fellow men and women, who in turn will be inspired to sacrifice themselves for you. Only in this *Profound Connection* will you find the best outcomes. So, exactly *how* do we go about developing such a critically necessary and profound Love for other people, even for people we don't even like?

I will tell you more about that in my next talk in this series, "LECTURE #5: *Mastering True Compassion.*"

See you then!

Conclusion by the Author:

Dear reader,

I hope you enjoyed reading *The Jesus Lectures-4: How to Best Express Godly Love*. 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. 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

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:

Amplified Bible®. Copyright © 1954, 1958, 1962, 1964, 1965, 1987 by The Lockman Foundation, La Habra, CA 90631 All rights reserved. www.Lockman.org. Database © 2004 WORDsearch Corp.

Darby's Translation: Holy Scriptures, A New Translation from the Original Languages Database © 2007 WORDsearch Corp.

God's Word WITH INTRODUCTION. GOD'S WORD is a copyrighted work of God's Word to the Nations Bible Society, © 1995. All rights reserved. Database © 2003 WORDsearch Corp.

King James Version Database © 2006 WORDsearch Corp.

New International Version Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, International Bible Society. Database © 2007 WORDsearch Corp.

Second Edition Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004 by Tyndale Charitable Trust. All rights reserved. Database © 2005 WORDsearch Corp

New Revised Standard Version Copyright © 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Database © 2007 WORDsearch Corp.

WEYMOUTH NEW TESTAMENT From the Weymouth New Testament in Modern Speech by Richard Francis Weymouth, Third Edition 1913. The printed edition used in creating this e-text was the Kregal reprint of the Ernest Hampden-Cook (1912) Third Edition, of the edition first published in 1909 by J. Clarke, London. Database © 2004 WORDsearch Corp.

Young's Literal Translation Database © 2006 WORDsearch Corp.

Barnes' Notes on The New Testament By ALBERT BARNES Database © 2004 WORDsearch Corp.

The Bible Exposition Commentary New Testament, Volume 1 by Warren W. Wiersbe—Bible Exposition Commentary - New Testament © 2001 by Warren W. Wiersbe. Database © 2007 WORDsearch Corp.

Commentary on Matthew and Mark By J. W. McGarvey Database © 2007 WORDsearch Corp.

THE FOUR-FOLD GOSPEL OR A Harmony of the Gospels by President J. W. McGARVEY, LL. D. and PHILIP Y. PENDLETON, A. B. CINCINNATI The Standard Publishing Company Publishers of Christian Literature COPYRIGHT 1914. THE STANDARD PUBLISHING CO. CINCINNATI, O. Database © 2004 WORDsearch Corp.

Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary -- Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible (1871) By Rev. Robert Jamieson, D.D. Rev. A.R. Fausset, A.M & Rev. David Brown, D.D. Database © 2005 WORDsearch Corp.

Matthew Henry Concise and Matthew Henry Unabridged, WORDsearch Corp.

Commentary on the Holy Bible by Matthew Poole Database © 2007 WORDsearch Corp.

THE PEOPLE'S NEW TESTAMENT THE COMMON AND REVISED VERSIONS, WITH REFERENCES. WITH EXPLANATORY NOTES BY B. W. JOHNSON, CHRISTIAN BOARD OF PUBLICATIONS, ST. LOUIS 3, MO. COPYRIGHTED BY CHRISTIAN PUBLISHING COMPANY, 1891. Database © 2004 WORDsearch Corp.

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, Creative-Theology.com. and Amazon.com.
