

I Peter

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Preface

“I Peter” is a biography of the life of Saint Peter, the leader of the twelve Apostles and the head of the early Christian church. Specifically, it is a description of his life, that of a typical Jewish boy and young man, before he met Jesus and then, his thoughts, words and actions as he participated in the roll-out of the good news of salvation by Jesus and the Holy Spirit, these being recorded in the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles as translated in the Jerusalem Bible.

This book is the fourth in a quintet of books inspired by the Bible. They have been written in a novel way, pun intended, to encourage us all to read through the Bible as one would read a novel, to develop the full context from which the quotations and short passages we are familiar with are drawn, and add to their richness.

The quintet is:

I Adam: The Old Testament told through the eyes of its major players, those who could stay faithful to God as Adam could not but whom Adam in Limbo wished he could be. “So the first man, as Scripture says, became a living soul,” (Corinthians 15:45)

I Mary: The New Testament told through the eyes of Mary, the Mother of Jesus.

I Paul: The Acts of the Apostles dealing with the life of Paul, interspersed with his Letters in their chronological order.

I Peter: A biography of the life of Peter - his early life, his life as a follower of Jesus, his life and death as the first head of the Christian Church, his letters.

I Joseph: A biography of Joseph, the husband of Mary and foster father of Jesus.

My Upbringing

I must learn to control my temper, I thought to myself, but mostly I wanted to attack the Roman cavalryman who was ordering me around. I was 15 years old, almost a man, strong enough to take care of this piece of trash.

“Back off, Simon,” cried Andrew. “Let me carry his goods a mile. If you hit this pig we will all be killed.” Andrew spoke in Aramaic, our native tongue. The soldier looked at him suspiciously but Andrew smiled back and picked up the soldier’s goods and marched off ahead of him.

My father, John, arrived on the scene. He ordered me back to my job, mending the nets and washing our fishing boat. He did not look at the soldier, nor at eight other soldiers who suddenly came galloping up from behind a hill nearby. “Leave the boy,” commanded their leader, “We have orders to find the murderer Barabbas and his rebel group, not a cheeky brat.” They galloped away, snatching the goods back from Andrew and sending him sprawling in the dust.

“I liked it better when we lived in Bethsaida where I was born,” I said to my father. “We were further away from Jerusalem and these Romans, it was prettier there too, with the Jordan flowing into our lake of Galilee.” “Well the fishing is better here,” replied my father, “and the Rabbi in our synagogue is more to my liking, the Rabbi in Bethsaida was too liberal for me. Besides we are closer to the big market and our catch sells more quickly, well before the hot sun spoils it.”

Andrew picked himself up and limped to our side. He sat himself down and began to mend the nets. “So, tell me how all this happened,” said our father. “How did you get your little brother into trouble this time?”

I knew how to divert my father’s attention away from more trouble for me. “Tell us, Aba, will there be an end to the Roman occupation? When will the Messiah come and restore the kingdom of Israel? When will God fulfil the promise he made to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob that all of Canaan would be ours?”

My father answered, “As Job said, my boys, it is not for us to know the mind of God. As Judith said: ‘He will help us in His time, not in ours.’ Deliverance from the Romans will come when He chooses. But, Simon, you have not succeeded in distracting me. It was your brother’s turn, but now you go and fetch the water from the well for your mother and sisters.”

I loved our Rabbi and going to his school next to our synagogue. He taught us boys the commandments God gave to Moses on Mount Sinai. He taught us the Law of Moses, the hundreds of prescriptions for achieving holiness in God’s sight. He read biblical passages to us and explained their meaning. He taught us to read and write, copying the bible passages. I know I was his brightest student – because he told me so.

Like every Jewish boy, I know I was circumcised eight days after my birth as God commanded Abraham - the sign of the covenant between Him and the Jewish race. I know my parents made a sacrifice of two turtle doves in the Temple in Jerusalem to satisfy the right of purification every Jewish mother undergoes. I know my father is a strict orthodox Jew. When we pray as a family he wears a phylactery, a small leather box containing biblical texts on vellum. I will soon have one as well.

Every morning and every evening my father leads us in the reading of the Shema. He says,

Cover your eyes with your right hand and say:

Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One.

Blessed be the name of the glory of His kingdom forever and ever...

We live in the seaside town of Capernaum. My father is a fisherman and ever since I was five years old I often, always after I turned 12, accompanied him on his boat as we searched for fish in the fresh waters of Lake Tiberias, the Sea of Galilee, lowering our nets when we saw their signs, hauling them in when the catch strained

our nets. On shore we gut them, pack them in cool water, load our wagon and let our donkey pull it to the market in the town square. We unload and help our mother and sisters set out the fresh fish on trays and they begin to sell them. We return to the boat and ready our nets for the next day.

While we are fishing we eat our first meal of the day – flat bread, olives and cheese. When the sun sets, we have our dinner meal, often fish, but sometimes vegetable stew, bread, fruit, eggs or cheese. On special occasions we have specially prepared red meat. Everybody drinks wine and the vineyard is a very important component of our village.

We are not wealthy but, with money from selling fish, certainly not poor. Like all the other families in our village our house is a mixture of stone and mud heated in winter by a fire burning grass, thorn bushes and animal dung. For more warmth, our animals live in our house on a floor of beaten earth. We live on a raised platform in the other half of the room, with curtained off bedrooms. We dry fruits and grain on the roof of our home and in the hot days of summer we sleep up there. Our beds are mattresses full of wool and straw, our blankets are made from goats' hair. When we eat, we sit on stools around a simple wooden table.

I am now too old to join in but I watch over my younger brother and sisters as all the children play games on the street before dinner, drawing squares with a stick and jumping from one to another. The boys have a ball of tightly bound grass to kick around, whistles and spinning tops and the girls have hoops and skipping ropes. There is a lot of laughter and singing. Now and again, someone will draw a picture on the street with a stick but a passing adult will soon stop that, saying the Law forbids “graven images” as an affront to God. I agree with this, I will always abide by the strict Judaic Law.

Maybe I am not too old. Every now and again we older boys choose sides, take over the balls of bound grass and kick them around, not too many rules in these competitions!

On the Sabbath we all go to our synagogue. The girls and our mothers sit apart from us boys and men. The Rabbi, our teacher, chooses a passage from the Bible and explains it to us, adding in laws and regulations from the Talmud. The Talmud is full of laws about every detail of our lives. I like the opening words of the Shema, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might,” but I want to strictly obey every one of the Laws. I am a Jew and I am very proud of being one of the Chosen Race, specifically chosen for what I am not so sure, but my faith is unwavering, the Messiah will come! God help these Romans on that day!

After the service we go home for a meal cooked the day before. We spend the Sabbath day resting, no-one is allowed to work, not even to walk more than a mile. I spend the day reading the biblical passages I have written that week in the classes our Rabbi conducts and praying psalms to my God.

Jerusalem

I have been to Jerusalem more than fifteen times already. We go as a family every Passover, travelling in a caravan with all our cousins’ families as well as many of our friends from Capernaum. Robbers, rebels and arrogant Roman soldiers are a threat to any small group of travelers. The journey takes most of four days, each evening we camp in the open, light fires, say the Shema, eat, sing songs, sleep under the stars. The caravan moves at a steady but slow pace each day. We boys move around, play games and keep to ourselves, rejoining our family only when the caravan halts for the night.

There is always a huge crowd in Jerusalem. We rent the same rooms every year, close by the Temple in the middle of all the action. There is lots of noise, the streets are filled with people, all on their annual pilgrimage to the Temple.

Each year I stand in awe in the outer courtyard of the Temple. I feel my God's presence as never before. I am uneasy about the stalls around the walls, the raucous crowds, the yelling and haggling, the merchants and money-changers urging their goods and services on anyone nearby. My temper flares now I am older but I do nothing. God deserves much more respect than this.

I meet head on the first threat to my faith. My Rabbi, my hero, is a Pharisee. All my knowledge of God is from him and my parents, who think as he does. But there is another set of teachings?

Pharisees and Sadducees

My parents had told me there is another religious party in Israel besides the Pharisees. I was confused by this, believing there is just one true God. I thought we should all worship Him in the same way and abide by His commandments and teachings set out in the Bible. My parents explained that all human beings do not have the same beliefs about serving God. We, followers of the Pharisees, believe in strict adherence to a whole lot of laws and prohibitions, many about the tiny details of life, how to get dressed, what to wear, what to eat. I am very proud of our strict beliefs and standing in Jewish society.

My father told me the other religious party in Israel is the Sadducees. He said they have the political power in Israel and they control the Temple and the worship and sacrifices held there. He told me the Sadducees are very different to the Pharisees. They are the priestly aristocracy, led by the Chief High Priest. To them religious duties are firmly centered on Temple worship. They accept only the written Law of Moses – the first five Bible books: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy - as authoritative, and reject the other books as well as the detailed

prescriptions for living the Jewish life. As a result, the Sadducees deny many of the doctrines held by the Pharisees including the resurrection of the dead, the existence of angels and spirits, and the meting out of rewards and punishment after death.

He said the Pharisees, on the other hand, are a lay group more representative of the common man. They control the many synagogues where they teach the Law, as our Rabbi does in Capernaum. In addition to the written Law of Moses, the Pharisees accept as authoritative the rest of the books of the Bible, as well as the "tradition of the elders" set out in the Talmud.

Sanhedrin

My father explained that these two religious parties are the core of the Jewish court system called the Sanhedrin, an institution created by Moses. The Great Sanhedrin of Jerusalem is the supreme religious body in Israel, an assembly of 71 sages who meet in the Chamber of Hewn Stones in the Temple in Jerusalem. The sages comprise Sadducees, Pharisees, lawyers, scribes and wealthy men. There are lesser sanhedrins in all larger towns.

My father explained to me that the Great Sanhedrin deals with religious matters, criminal matters, trials of adulterous wives, tithes, preparation of Torah Scrolls for the Temple, drawing up the calendar and the solving of difficulties relating to ritual law. By our time the Great Sanhedrin had lost its authority to inflict capital punishment which is reserved to the Roman governor.

He said the Sanhedrin requires a minimum of two witnesses to convict a suspect. There are no attorneys. Instead, the accusing witnesses state the offense in the presence of the accused and the accused can call witnesses on his own behalf. The court questions the accused, the accusers and the defense witnesses. I hope I will never be brought before them.

Coming of Age

Does every boy escaping from the embarrassments and challenges of puberty begin to have doubts, does every boy in a sense reject the faith of his parents and teachers, does every boy let himself swim loose and begin to choose for himself what he will believe in and what rules he will live his life by? Does every boy keep to himself all these “heretical” thoughts? Does every boy expect God to have a mission for him – a mission his parents cannot be expected to comprehend? A life of his own to live.

I just know the Messiah will come and in my time. I will search for Him until I find Him. I know He will be like a Prophet and that like dozens of prophets before Him, He will be rejected – rejected by most but not by me. In the meantime, I will be a strict Jew and observe all the religious holidays, Passover the most important.

Passover

The Passover, I know, is a meal celebrating the time when the Jewish people, enslaved in Egypt by Pharaoh, fled across the Red Sea, miraculously opened up for them by Moses’ staff. Pharaoh’s army was delayed in its pursuit by the shock of the 10th plague God inflicted on the Egyptians, the death of every first born child in every Egyptian household. The Jewish first born were spared by the angels of death, their homes protected by the blood of lambs sprinkled on their doorways. Before they fled north the Israelites ate a final meal centered on the lambs they had killed for their saving blood.

When Pharaoh had recovered from the shock of the death of his own first born he sent his soldiers after the Israelites, sent them into the trench dividing the Red Sea, sent them to their deaths as the watery sides came tumbling down. We reenact this saving event each year at the first full moon after the Spring Equinox.

We ate the Passover meal as a family the day before the Sabbath. But each day we males visited the Temple and stood in the People’s Court as the priests entered

the Holy of Holies and made sacrifices of animals, birds and produce to God on the altar erected over the very rock on which Abraham secured his son Isaac and brought down his sword towards that fragile neck, obeying God's command but prevented from the final act by an angel, his obedience and faith earning him the covenant with God and the legacy of countless descendants, foremost the Chosen People.

So, each year I went with my family to Jerusalem at this time and on several other occasions as well.

Marriage

The years passed, I grew into a strong young man, a deeply devoted one but a man with a driving passion, a compelling need to search for the Messiah.

First my mother died, and was buried with weeping and wailing in our family tomb. My sisters reached the age of 14 and were all soon married. By tradition I could not marry until I was more than 20 years old. My father grew sick and also died, being entombed beside his wife. Andrew and I were left the legacy of his fishing boat and fishermen we remained.

I first saw Tabitha when she was 14 years old and, I must admit, I was besotted by her. But I wanted love not just obedience. I began visiting her father, I was an orphan, I sought his guidance on many matters. I asked her brother to broker my relationship with Tabitha. Forewarned about my intentions, she told him:

"I know Simon from his visits to our home to speak with our father and I like him, finding him to be handsome, joyful and sincere in nature and a devout Jew. I know I will have no say in whom my father chooses to be my husband but I am happy with this choice and I know I will come to love Simon from whom I already feel security and affection."

I was delighted. I asked for her hand in marriage, signed the ketubbah contract with her father and we were betrothed. I paid over the dowry from my own resources. Our marriage was set for a year hence when Tabitha would be 15 years of age.

Everybody knows the central requirement of the Jewish marriage is that the bride be a virgin and be publicly proved to be so. A future husband can refuse to conclude the marriage if his bride is found not to be a virgin and I would certainly have done that. Since our betrothal lasted for over a year, during which we absolutely did not have sexual relations, finding out my betrothed was not a virgin would cause me great embarrassment and, sword in hand, make me ask the question: “Who is the father of her child, who has done this wrongful deed to me?”

On the set date we consummated the marriage at Tabitha’s home. She waited with her maiden friends for the arrival of myself and my companions. We two entered the chuppah room and consummated the marriage while our companions waited and celebrated outside. She was everything I hoped for in a bride. She handed the bloodied "proof of virginity cloth" to the witnesses chosen by her father, who nodded approval to me and gave it back to her for safekeeping. After the consummation, our wedding party walked to my house in a procession for a wedding feast. At the conclusion of the wedding feast, we were married.

The years passed by quickly. Andrew also married and moved into his own home. Tabitha gave birth to a son, then three daughters. Joyful times and happy family gatherings were only interrupted by the death of Tabitha’s father. Her mother was left alone, her children all married and departed, we asked her to come and live with us, she accepted and our children were delighted to have a grandmother so much a part of their lives.

Messiah? He says not.

News travels slowly in Israel and its meaning grows dimmer as the voices telling it get further away from its source. Our boys were old enough by now, they had learned the fishing trade from us, we could be spared for a while. Andrew and I and our wives left Capernaum to investigate a very big story – had the Messiah come?

They called him John the Baptist, John his name, teaching and baptizing people in the Jordan his occupation. I knew the prophecies. If not the Messiah, the Christ, was he the messenger saying the Messiah was coming?

The voice of one crying in the wilderness

Prepare ye the way of the Lord

Make straight His paths.

I met more and more people who had been to the Jordan to hear John talk and to be baptized by him in the Jordan. They said that when people asked what should they do to prepare, John replied, if you have two coats, give one to a person who has none; like-wise with meat and food. He was telling the publicans who collected taxes for the Romans to exact no more than they should; to the soldiers of Herod and the Romans, to not do violence to any man or accuse anyone falsely and to be content with their wages. He had a message for all.

The passersby told me many people were wondering if John was the Messiah, the Christ. But they said John always replied vehemently, *"I am not He. I only baptize you with water, but one mightier than I is coming, I am not worthy to tie his sandals, He will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire."* But maybe he was the Messiah, I needed to see him for myself.

On the last day of our journey south I hurried to Bethany, to the Jordan bank where he was. Sometimes I was a mile in front of my family, I had waited all my life for the moment when I would see Israel's savior.

I pushed my way through the crowd. I heard John say words which were both deflating and exhilarating. A group of priests and Levites stood in front of a man dressed in animal skins, his hair long and unkempt, a staff in his hand, sandals on his feet. "Who are you?," they asked him. I waited with bated breath for his answer. *"I am not the Christ, the Messiah,"* he answered. Devastated and disappointed with the brevity of his reply, I was ready to walk away, but the crowd held me back. The

questioners kept asking him who he was but he just gave the same answer. They switched tactics. “If you are not the Christ, why are you baptizing people in the Jordan?” He answered with words that filled me with enormous hope, *“I baptize with water, but there stands among you, unknown to you, the One who is coming after me, and I am not worthy to undo his sandal strap.”*

I joined the line of people wanting to be baptized by John in the Jordan. A man I later knew as Jesus was in the line ahead of me. He lowered his head to be baptized but John said to him, *‘It is I who need baptism from you, and yet you come to me!’* The man replied, *‘Leave it like this for the time being; it is fitting that we should, in this way, do all that uprightness demands.’* Then John gave in to him. But when this man came up from the water, I saw what I thought was a dove coming down on him and a voice from the clouds said,

This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.

I heard John cry out,

This is he of whom I said: He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me. I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, ‘The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.’ I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God.”

I had to wait my turn to be baptized, I put him out of my mind, I confessed my sinfulness, John baptized me, I hurried out of the water, I searched the crowd but he was gone. I was dejected, I could not find him in this huge crowd, I was ready to go home.

Andrew had more faith than me. He was with John the next day and heard him say to his followers, “Look, there is the lamb of God,” so Andrew and another disciple took off after him. The man turned around and said, *“What do you want?”*

They answered, “Rabbi, where do you live?” He said, “*Come and see.*” Once Andrew found where he was staying, he immediately went off to find me and shouted exuberantly, “Simon, we have found the Messiah.” So, we all ran to meet the man called Jesus. He seemed really pleased to see me and immediately named me Peter, the Rock. I was his from that day on.

The next morning we set off as a group, we brothers and our wives, Jesus and his mother, called Mary. We were going back to Galilee but first we saw Phillip who came from the same town as Andrew and me and Jesus immediately recruited him, saying, “*Follow me.*” Then Phillip detoured and recruited Nathaniel. I heard Jesus tell him he knew he had been found resting under a fig tree. Nathaniel was amazed and said, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God, you are the king of Israel.” Jesus told him he would experience many things much greater than being told about the fig tree.

Phillip and Nathaniel, also called Bartholomew, lived in Capernaum also. They told me they had heard about John, they wanted to follow the Messiah, they heard John say the Messiah was coming and they wanted to follow whoever that turned out to be. Together with Jesus, his mother Mary, my Tabitha and Andrew’s wife, there were eight of us on the journey back to Galilee.

We went back to our fishing and Jesus to his life as a carpenter. We met with him many times, both in Capernaum and also in Nazareth but he seemed reluctant to take our relationship any further. As for me, I was confused, this was not the warrior Messiah I had imagined, indeed desired.

The Beginning

Jesus’ mother, Mary, was helping with the feast accompanying the wedding of a friend’s son in the village of Cana. Jesus went everywhere with his mother when she ventured out of their home. The four of us, Andrew, Phillip, Nathaniel and myself were invited to the wedding feast as well. There was a huge crowd there. We heard Mary say to her son, “They are running out of wine!” Now that would be very

embarrassing and bring a quick end to the festivities. We heard Jesus say, *“Nothing to do with me. I can’t help them.”* But Mary ignored his answer and told a group of servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”

A change seemed to come over Jesus. He told them to fill six 20-gallon pots with water and take them to the head steward. I thought to myself, “Really!” I watched with disbelief as the chief steward tasted the liquid, called the bridegroom over and complained, “We always serve the good wine first and later the cheaper stuff. You have kept the good wine until last! Why?” The young man was as bewildered as the rest of us. The crisis was over, I took another drink, it was really good! But I thought to myself, “What kind of man can do something like this?”

Invitation to Apostleship

We heard Jesus went back to Nazareth and started teaching in some of the synagogues in the region. Soon small crowds started to follow him. We heard he started preaching on the Sabbath in the synagogue in Nazareth but the people threw him out since they knew he was their carpenter’s son and doubted he had any right to preach to them. So we found him again since Jesus came to stay in Capernaum, he had a half brother there, the son of his father Joseph by his first marriage.

The next day we saw Jesus walking by the shore. The four of us, Andrew and I and our partners, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, had been out on the water since dawn but had caught nothing, we were ready to bring our boats back to land.

There was a crowd following him and he could scarcely be heard as he preached to them, so he asked me if he could speak to them from my boat. He spoke for an hour or so, his powerful voice easily carrying over the water, I was enthralled, his message of salvation meant he was a different sort of Messiah.

But I was hungry and annoyed with the lack of fish. He told us to put our two boats out into the deep and lower our nets. I complained, “We have been fishing for hours, there’s nothing there today,” not saying, “We are the fishermen, we know this

better than you surely.” But, remembering Cana, I told the others, “OK, lower the nets.” Immediately they were filled with fish and we could scarcely pull them in. We reached the shore, our boys were ready to takeover. I fell on my knees in awe and cried out, “Leave me, Lord, I am a sinful man.” Jesus said to me, “*Do not be afraid, from now on it is people you will be catching.*” This was no ordinary man, we left everything and followed him. And then the miracles started.

Anger for his Father

We went at first to Jerusalem. I watched in awe as Jesus made a whip and drove the money lenders and other merchants out of the temple, I was too scared to help him, the Sanhedrin police had a fearsome reputation. I watched from nearby as Nicodemus came to meet with Jesus that night. He was a Pharisee, indeed a member of the Sanhedrin, but he also was scared of the police, he needed to come in secrecy.

I heard him say to Jesus, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.” Jesus replied, “*Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.*”

“How can someone be born when they are old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother’s womb to be born again!” Jesus answered, “*Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’*”

“How can this be?” Nicodemus asked. “*You are Israel’s teacher,*” said Jesus, “*and do you not understand these things? Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?*”

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."

Nicodemus left us then but I could see he was pondering over what Jesus had said and that he would be support us if he could, it would be good to have a friend in our enemies' camp since already we could feel the jealousy of the scribes and Pharisees, a jealousy that would ripen into anger and hatred. As for me, I pondered over the claim that Jesus was the Son of God!

We walked further east to Bethany on the Jordan and Jesus urged us to baptize people as John was doing and to use the same message. He himself did not join us in baptizing the crowds and I did not ask him why not, I felt I did not yet have that right. But soon we were drawing bigger crowds than John and drawing a lot of attention to ourselves. Jesus told us this was too much for now and we set off back to Galilee.

Death of John the Baptist

We heard John continued to preach his message. But a few months later he publicly reprimanded King Herod for taking his brother's wife, Herodias, to be his mistress, as well as for all the many other wicked things which Herod had done. Herod became angry and he had John locked up in prison for months.

We found out that a year later, on Herod's birthday, Herodias's daughter, Salome, danced before the king and his guests. Her dancing pleased Herod so much that in his drunkenness he promised to give her anything she desired, up to half of his kingdom. When the daughter asked her mother what she should request, Herodias, still seething from John's public exposure of her infidelity and adultery, told Salome

to ask for the head of John the Baptist on a platter. Although Herod was appalled by the request, he reluctantly agreed and had John executed. When this news reached us, we could see Jesus was devastated. He went off by himself for a while. We learned from his mother, Mary, that John was actually his cousin.

Samaritan Woman

The road back to Galilee took us by the town of Samaria. We, men and women, went into the town to buy food. Jesus stayed sitting by a well. When we returned, we were surprised to see him talking with a young woman. Our reception in the town had been very cool, we clearly were not wanted, Jews and Samaritans hated one another. Yet here I saw the unmarried Jesus talking to an unaccompanied young woman, a Jew to a Samaritan, this picture seemed wrong on every level. But we watched with great surprise as the young woman ran off back to the town and soon small crowds of people came out to the well to meet Jesus. What had he told the young woman we wondered. When she also returned we heard her story and the responses of Jesus to a much married sinful girl. The crowds came to hear for themselves and we actually stayed two days there – Jews made welcome in a Samaritan town!

Miracle of Loaves and Fishes

Jesus now began teaching in earnest both in Capernaum and in the villages nearby. Growing crowds came seeking him out. I heard Jesus say to Phillip, *“Where can we buy some food for these people to eat?”* Phillip responded, “We don’t have enough money to buy this much food.” Andrew went searching and brought a young boy to Jesus, saying, “This boy has five barley loaves and two fish, but that won’t help much.” Jesus told us to have the people sit down on the grass, all 5,000 men and also women and children. It was Cana again, Jesus gave thanks for the food and asked us to distribute it. We were skeptical, none more so than me, but every time I put my hand into my basket, there was another roll and some more fish. When everyone had

eaten, we picked up all the left overs, they filled twelve large baskets! The people were amazed, Jesus was indeed a prophet, much more than that I was thinking to myself, but exactly who he was, I had no idea.

Raising my Mother-in-Law to Life

My son came running to me. I told Jesus his message. Tabitha's mother was desperately ill, her fever raging. I headed home but Jesus came with me. I entered the room where she lay and put one arm around my wife. Jesus came in also, took her mother's hand and lifted his eyes to the heavens. The fever instantly left my mother-in-law, she got up and began to serve us. My wife was deeply moved, she could now much better understand my commitment to Jesus. As for me, I was more and more convinced that Jesus was more than just a man, but exactly who he was still remained a mystery to me.

Miracles

Jesus slept the night in my house but the next morning he was gone. We searched for him and when we found him I said, "Where did you go? Everybody is looking for you." Jesus replied, *"Let us go elsewhere, to the neighboring country towns, so I can preach there too, because that is why I came."* So off we went, all around Galilee, Jesus preaching in their synagogues, curing their sick and casting out devils.

I was walking with him one day when he suddenly stopped and complained to me, *"Who was it that touched me?"* The people around us all denied it so I tried to smooth it over, saying, "Master, it's just the crowds around us, pushing forward." But Jesus responded, *"Somebody touched me, I felt power going out of me. Who was it?"* At that, a woman came forward and confessed it was her, saying she had suffered from a hemorrhage for the past twelve years and no one could cure it so she hoped Jesus could. Jesus smiled and said, *"My daughter, your faith has saved you, go in peace."* And we heard later that her hemorrhage was gone from that moment.

A much bigger event was to occur. Jairus, the president of our synagogue, fell at Jesus' feet and pleaded with him to come to his house, he had a 12 year old daughter and she was dying. I could tell Jesus was happy to get away from the crowd that was stifling him. But then Jairus' servant came up and, with tears in his eyes, told Jairus, "Your daughter has died, do not trouble the Master any further." But Jesus ignored that, I pushed forward to clear a path for him, he entered the house telling James and John and me to follow him in and keep everyone else out. Only the girl's parents were in the house and they ridiculed Jesus when he *said, "Stop crying, she is not dead but asleep."* Then he took her hand and commanded, *"Child, get up."* She instantly sat up in bed and the parents were stunned into silence. Jesus left, saying, *"Give her something to eat. And tell no one what happened."* We three disciples were astonished, again I asked myself: who is he really?

Then we saw him cure a leper, next a paralytic, then many more as the word spread and the crowds brought him all their sick and infirm.

The Twelve Apostles

We were near Capernaum, we lost the crowds as the evening approached and went to our houses, Jesus, myself, Andrew, James and John, Phillip and Bartholomew. The following day we followed Jesus as he invited six more young men to join him. All came instantly, Thomas, Matthew the tax collector, James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddeus, Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot. I knew them all already, having grown up with them and knowing their zeal to find the Messiah. Little did I know Judas would betray his new Master, I still had my sword, it would be unsheathed for now. I was yet to learn about forgiveness.

The Sermon on the Mount

The next day Jesus went up a hillside above a flat plain and thousands of people sat down and waited for him to speak. When he was seated I and the other disciples

came and sat by him. Then he began to speak. This is what he taught us. I vowed to live my life by this preaching. He said,

Beatitudes

Blessed are the poor in spirit: the kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

Blessed are the gentle: they shall have the earth as inheritance.

Blessed are those who mourn: they shall be comforted.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for uprightness: they shall have their fill.

Blessed are the merciful: they shall have mercy shown them.

Blessed are the pure in heart: they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers: they shall be recognized as children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted in the cause of uprightness: the kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

Blessed are you when people abuse you and persecute you and speak all kinds of calumny against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven; this is how they persecuted the prophets before you.

Our mission

You are salt for the earth. But if salt loses its taste, what can make it salty again? It is good for nothing, and can only be thrown out to be trampled under people's feet. You are light for the world. A city built on a hill-top cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp to put it under a tub; they put it on the lamp-stand where it shines for everyone in the house. In the same way your light must shine in people's sight, so that, seeing your good works, they may give praise to your Father in heaven.

The Mosaic Law

Do not imagine that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete them. In truth I tell you, till heaven and earth disappear, not one dot, not one little stroke, is to disappear from the Law until all its purpose is achieved. Therefore, anyone who infringes even one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be considered the least in the kingdom of Heaven; but the person who keeps them and teaches them will be considered great in the kingdom of Heaven. For I tell you, if your uprightness does not surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never get into the kingdom of Heaven.

Forgiveness and Reconciliation

You have heard how it was said to our ancestors, You shall not kill; and if anyone does kill he must answer for it before the court. But I say this to you, anyone who is angry with a brother will answer for it before the court; anyone who calls a brother "Fool" will answer for it before the Sanhedrin; and anyone who calls him "Traitor" will answer for it in hell fire.

So then, if you are bringing your offering to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, go and be reconciled with your brother first, and then come back and present your offering. Come to terms with your opponent in good time while you are still on the way to the court with him, or he may hand you over to the judge and the judge to the officer, and you will be thrown into prison. In truth I tell you, you will not get out till you have paid the last penny.

Purity

You have heard how it was said, You shall not commit adultery. But I say this to you, if a man looks at a woman lustfully, he has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye should be your downfall, tear it out and throw it away; for it will do you less harm to lose one part of yourself than to have your whole body thrown into hell. And if your right hand should be your downfall, cut it off and throw it away; for it will do you less harm to lose one part of yourself than to have your whole body go to hell.

Divorce

It has also been said, anyone who divorces his wife must give her a writ of dismissal. But I say this to you, everyone who divorces his wife, except for the case of an illicit marriage, makes her an adulteress; and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Taking oaths

Again, you have heard how it was said to our ancestors, You must not break your oath, but must fulfil your oaths to the Lord. But I say this to you, do not swear at all, either by heaven, since that is God's throne; or by earth, since that is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, since that is the city of the great King. Do not swear by your own head either, since you cannot turn a single hair white or black. All you need say is "Yes" if you mean yes, "No" if you mean no; anything more than this comes from the Evil One.

Revenge

You have heard how it was said: Eye for eye and tooth for tooth. But I say this to you: offer no resistance to the wicked. On the contrary, if anyone hits you on the right cheek, offer him the other as well; if someone wishes to go to law with you

to get your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone requires you to go one mile, go two miles with him. Give to anyone who asks you, and if anyone wants to borrow, do not turn away.

Love your enemies

You have heard how it was said, You will love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say this to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you; so that you may be children of your Father in heaven, for he causes his sun to rise on the bad as well as the good, and sends down rain to fall on the upright and the wicked alike. For if you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Do not even the tax collectors do as much? And if you save your greetings for your brothers, are you doing anything exceptional? Do not even the gentiles do as much? You must therefore be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Boasting in alms giving

Be careful not to parade your uprightness in public to attract attention; otherwise you will lose all reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give alms, do not have it trumpeted before you; this is what the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets to win human admiration. In truth I tell you, they have had their reward. But when you give alms, your left hand must not know what your right is doing; your almsgiving must be secret, and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you.

Boasting in prayer

And when you pray, do not imitate the hypocrites: they love to say their prayers standing up in the synagogues and at the street corners for people to see them. In truth I tell you, they have had their reward. But when you pray, go to your private room, shut yourself in, and so pray to your Father who is in

that secret place, and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you. In your prayers do not babble as the gentiles do, for they think that by using many words they will make themselves heard. Do not be like them; your Father knows what you need before you ask him. So you should pray like this:

Our Father

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

Yes, if you forgive others their failings, your heavenly Father will forgive you yours; but if you do not forgive others, your Father will not forgive your failings either.

Boasting in fasting

When you are fasting, do not put on a gloomy look as the hypocrites do: they go about looking unsightly to let people know they are fasting. In truth I tell you, they have had their reward. But when you fast, put scent on your head and wash your face, so that no one will know you are fasting except your Father who sees all that is done in secret; and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you.

Treasures

Do not store up treasures for yourselves on earth, where moth and woodworm destroy them and thieves can break in and steal. But store up treasures for yourselves in heaven, where neither moth nor woodworm destroys them and thieves cannot break in and steal. For wherever your treasure is, there will your heart be too.

The Eye

The lamp of the body is the eye. It follows that if your eye is clear, your whole body will be filled with light. But if your eye is diseased, your whole body will be darkness. If then, the light inside you is darkened, what darkness that will be!

The Master

No one can be the slave of two masters: he will either hate the first and love the second, or be attached to the first and despise the second. You cannot be the slave both of God and of money. That is why I am telling you not to worry about your life and what you are to eat, nor about your body and what you are to wear. Surely life is more than food, and the body more than clothing! Look at the birds in the sky. They do not sow or reap or gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they are? Can any of you, however much you worry, add one single cubit to your span of life? And why worry about clothing? Think of the flowers growing in the fields; they never have to work or spin; yet I assure you that not even Solomon in all his royal robes was clothed like one of these.

Worry

Now if that is how God clothes the wild flowers growing in the field which are there today and thrown into the furnace tomorrow, will he not much more look after you, you who have so little faith? So do not worry; do not say, "What are we to eat? What are we to drink? What are we to wear?" It is the gentiles who set their hearts on all these things. Your heavenly Father knows you need them all. Set your hearts on his kingdom first, and on God's saving justice, and all these other things will be given you as well. So do not worry about tomorrow: tomorrow will take care of itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Judging others

Do not judge, and you will not be judged; because the judgements you give are the judgements you will get, and the standard you use will be the standard used for you. Why do you observe the splinter in your brother's eye and never notice the great log in your own? And how dare you say to your brother, "Let me take that splinter out of your eye," when, look, there is a great log in your own? Hypocrite! Take the log out of your own eye first, and then you will see clearly enough to take the splinter out of your brother's eye.

Ask and you shall receive

Do not give dogs what is holy; and do not throw your pearls in front of pigs, or they may trample them and then turn on you and tear you to pieces. Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you. Everyone who asks receives; everyone who searches finds; everyone who knocks will have the door opened. Is there anyone among you who would hand his son a stone when he asked for bread? Or would hand him a snake when he asked for a fish? If you, then, evil as you are, know how to give your children what is good, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him! So always treat others as you would like them to treat you; that is the Law and the Prophets.

Choose the Road to Life

Enter by the narrow gate, since the road that leads to destruction is wide and spacious, and many take it; but it is a narrow gate and a hard road that leads to life, and only a few find it. Beware of false prophets who come to you disguised as sheep but underneath are ravenous wolves. You will be able to tell them by their fruits. Can people pick grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles? In the same way, a

sound tree produces good fruit but a rotten tree bad fruit. A sound tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor a rotten tree bear good fruit. Any tree that does not produce good fruit is cut down and thrown on the fire. I repeat, you will be able to tell them by their fruits.

Actions not words

It is not anyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," who will enter the kingdom of Heaven, but the person who does the will of my Father in heaven. When the day comes many will say to me, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, drive out demons in your name, work many miracles in your name?" Then I shall tell them to their faces: I have never known you; away from me, all evil doers!

Listen

Therefore, everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a sensible man who built his house on rock. Rain came down, floods rose, gales blew and hurled themselves against that house, and it did not fall: it was founded on rock. But everyone who listens to these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a stupid man who built his house on sand. Rain came down, floods rose, gales blew and struck that house, and it fell; and what a fall it had!

Jesus had now finished what he wanted to say, and his teaching made a deep impression on me. I heard many say he teaches with authority, unlike the scribes and Pharisees. As for me, I knew I had a rich treasure house of teachings I could use when I became a teacher of the good news of salvation, a role I knew would be mine I thought soon enough.

Threats from Pharisees

But the scribes and Pharisees were becoming more of a problem. I could see their mean visages and hear their muttered threats. They looked for ways to trip Jesus up.

As we walked with Jesus we took handfuls of corn from the fields and ate them. They criticized this since it was the Sabbath and harvesting was work. Jesus scorned them for enforcing such tiny matters and leaving the big faults unspoken. They accused Jesus of casting out devils in the name of Satan but Jesus ridiculed them, saying, *"Would Satan cast out Satan?"* Jesus was often invited to eat with what I thought were dubious characters but I held my tongue. Not so the Scribes and Pharisees who criticized him loudly for eating with sinners. Jesus simply ignored them.

Propheying his death

Taking the Twelve of us aside he said to us, *'Look, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of man is to come true. For he will be handed over to the gentiles and will be mocked, maltreated and spat on, and when they have scourged him they will put him to death; and on the third day he will rise again.'* I could make nothing of this; what he said was quite obscure to me, I did not understand what he was telling us, maybe I didn't want to even think in these terms.

Sending out the 12

The next day Jesus sat us down around him and gave us power to drive out demons and cure all kinds of diseases and illnesses. He sent us out to bring the good news to all the towns and villages around. We were to avoid gentile territory and Samaritan towns, going only to who he called the lost sheep of Israel, proclaiming the message that the kingdom of heaven is close at hand. He gave us detailed instructions, instructions that would guide me for the rest of my life:

Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who are suffering from virulent skin diseases, drive out devils.

Provide yourselves with no gold or silver, not even coppers for your purses with no haversack for the journey or spare tunic or footwear or a staff, for the laborer deserves his keep.

Whatever town or village you go into, seek someone worthy and stay with him until you leave. As you enter his house, salute it and if the house deserves it, may your peace come upon it; if it does not, may your peace come back to you.

And if anyone does not welcome you or listen to what you have to say, as you walk out of the house or town shake the dust from your feet. In truth I tell you, on the Day of Judgement it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town.

Look, I am sending you out like sheep among wolves; so be cunning as snakes and yet innocent as doves. Do not be afraid of them. Everything now covered up will be uncovered, and everything now hidden will be made clear. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the daylight; what you hear in whispers, proclaim from the housetops.

Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth: it is not peace I have come to bring, but a sword. For I have come to set son against father, daughter against mother, daughter-in-law against mother-in-law; a person's enemies will be the members of his own household.

No one who prefers father or mother to me is worthy of me. No one who prefers son or daughter to me is worthy of me. Anyone who does not take his cross and follow in my footsteps is not worthy of me.

Anyone who finds his life will lose it; anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it. Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me; and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.

Anyone who welcomes a prophet because he is a prophet will have a prophet's reward; and anyone who welcomes an upright person because he is upright will have the reward of an upright person.

If anyone gives so much as a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is a disciple, then in truth I tell you, he will most certainly not go without his reward.

I set off in haste, eager to use the powers given me and to spread the news that the Messiah had come, bringing salvation to all who had faith in him. In two towns and five villages I went to their synagogues and preached the good news of salvation. And yes, I cured their sick and drove out demons and crowds followed me. Twice I was rejected and could find no one willing to give me a night's rest and food for my journey. So twice I shook the dust from my feet and left those villages and sought one willing, indeed eager, to minister to my needs. Always I told those who would listen to me that the Messiah, the Christ, would himself soon be visiting them and that his message was redemption and salvation.

I returned to Capernaum, the other disciples also, returned to Jesus surrounded by a huge crowd. I was tired, very tired, but I could see Jesus was exhausted. But again the evening was coming and the crowd hungry, and again we fed several thousand with just two loaves and a few fish, and again there were baskets of food remaining.

Walking on water

We needed to get away, to recuperate, the boats were nearby so we disciples set off across the sea, heading for Bethsaida, leaving Jesus to disperse the crowd. But a huge squall hit us, the sails were useless, we took to the oars but were getting nowhere. We would soon be swamped and drowned.

Then we saw a figure walking on the water towards us, a ghost I thought as I shivered even more. But then came the voice we recognized, "*Courage, do not be*

afraid, it is I.” I wasn’t fully convinced, again thinking, no one can do this, so I said, “Lord, if it is you, bid me come to you on the water.” “*Come,*” he said. So I gingerly put one foot over the side and it stopped on the surface of the water. OK, I thought, here we go. So I put the other foot over the side and stood up on the water. But then a big wave came at me, I panicked, “Help me, Lord,” I cried. “*O ye of little faith,*” he called and stretched out his hand to hold me up. I had so quickly forgotten all the miracles I did in his name so very recently, my faith was very fragile. Totally ashamed I sat silently as he calmed the waters and we raised our sails and came easily to the shore at Genneserat. We all knelt before him and said, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

The Bread of Life

Little did I know that my faith was about to be tested in a much stranger way. When we came ashore on the other side of the lake, the crowd was waiting, they had hurried around the shore. Jesus quickly picked the reason for their haste,

*You are not looking for me because you have seen the signs,
but because you had all the bread you wanted to eat.*

Jesus told them, and us, to work instead for food that would last, for food that endures to eternal life, so, of course, they asked how they could get such bread. Then came the bombshell.

*I am the bread of life
He who comes to me will never be hungry
He who believes in me will never thirst*

*I am the living bread which has come down from heaven,
Anyone who eats this bread will live forever
And the bread that I will give*

*Is my flesh, for the light of the world.
I tell you most solemnly,
If you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man
And drink his blood,
You shall not have life in you.*

*My flesh is real food
And my blood is real drink
He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood
Lives in me
And I in him.*

I was very sad but helpless as I watched the fragile faith of not just the crowd, but many of his close followers, shatter. They muttered among themselves, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”, and many drifted away, never to return.

Jesus did not back off, he was demanding absolute faith.

Does this upset you?

What if you should see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before?

Jesus, dejected and sad, turned to us and asked us whether we too would go away. I was bewildered but firm in my belief. I said to him,

Lord who shall we go to,
You have the message of eternal life,
and we believe,
We know that you are the holy one of God.

He smiled at my answer, I was finally getting it! Jesus said to me, “*Simon, son of John, you are a blessed man! Because it was no human agency that revealed this to you, but my father in heaven. So now I say to you: You are Peter and on this rock I*

will build my community. And the gates of hell can never overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of Heaven: whatever you shall bind on earth will be bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

Then he gave us disciples strict orders not to say to anyone that he was the Christ. I was OK with that but deeply disturbed by his talking of being put to death by the Sanhedrin.

The Son of God

Despite Jesus' message about the bread of life, we were not left alone for long, the people still recognized Jesus as a miracle maker and brought all their sick to be cured, just touching his cloak to be saved. We went back around all the towns and villages the twelve of us had visited. Huge crowds everywhere. Jesus asked us, "*Who do people say I am?*" The others answered, "Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, others again one of the prophets." Jesus said, "*But you, who do you say I am?*" I was fully convinced by now, saying, "You are the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God." Again, I could tell Jesus was pleased with my faith, fragile or not. He again instructed us to tell no one who he really was.

But Jesus was clearly not happy that his message was being ignored by so many in Galilee, despite the excess attention he was giving them. Most of his miracles had been worked in their towns yet they still did not repent in large numbers. He shouted,

Anyone who has ears should listen! What comparison can I find for this generation? It is like children shouting to each other as they sit in the market place: We played the pipes for you, and you wouldn't dance; we sang dirges, and you wouldn't be mourners.

For John came, neither eating nor drinking, and they say, "He is possessed." The Son of man came, eating and drinking, and they say, "Look, a glutton and a

drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners." Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds."

Then he began to reproach the towns in which most of his miracles had been worked, because they refused to repent:

Alas for you Chorazin, Alas for you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. Still, I tell you that it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on Judgement Day than for you.

And as for you, Capernaum, did you want to be raised as high as heaven? You shall be flung down to hell. For if the miracles done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have been standing yet. Still, I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on Judgement Day than for you.

I was delighted with his condemnation of those who would not listen, of those who accepted the miracles he performed but who showed no real gratitude, let alone faith.

Predicts his death again

But then it all started to go wrong again. Jesus started to teach us several times more that he, the Son of Man, was destined to suffer grievously and to be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be put to death and after three days to rise again. I took Jesus aside and categorically rejected this kind of talk, I would defend him to the death. But Jesus rebuked me, saying, *"Get behind me, Satan, you are thinking not as God thinks but as human beings do!"* I lowered my head in shame, when would I learn to think first and open my mouth later? When would my faith be strong?

So I was silent when he told the crowd, *“If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him take up his cross and follow me. Anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake and the sake of the gospel, will save it.”*

He went on to say, *“What goes into the mouth does not make anyone unclean, it is what comes out of the mouth that makes someone unclean.”*

I let the others tell Jesus, “Do you know the Pharisees were shocked when they heard what you said?” He answered them, *“Leave them alone, they are blind leaders of the blind.”*

I was confused, I asked Jesus, “Can you explain this parable to us?” Jesus answered me, *“Even you! Don’t you yet understand? Can’t you see that whatever goes into the mouth passes through the stomach and is discharged into the sewer? But whatever comes out of the mouth comes from the heart and it is this that make someone unclean. For from the heart comes evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, perjury, slander. These are the things that makes someone unclean, but eating with unwashed hands does not make anyone unclean.”*

I thought of all the times I had been instructed to adhere to all the prescriptions of the Law taught by our Rabbis. Were they wrong? Jesus told us, *“Be on your guard against the yeast of the Sadducees and Pharisees.”* OK, I was beginning to understand, he meant we were to be on our guard against the examples set by the Sadducees and Pharisees, not what they taught us.

The Transfiguration

Six days later Jesus took James and John and me up a high mountain. His clothes became brilliantly white and Moses and Elijah appeared and were talking with him. Scared, not knowing what to do, I burst out, “Rabbi, it is wonderful for us to be here, shall we build three shelters, one for you, one for Moses, one for Elijah?” But then a cloud covered us and a voice called out, “This is my beloved son, listen to him.” I

was terrified, we all fell on our knees and covered our eyes, then the cloud disappeared and we were again alone with Jesus. I could not stop shaking.

On the way down, Jesus instructed us to tell no one what we had seen until after his rising from the dead. I kept his secret, truly he was the Son of God, only wondering with James and John, “What does his ‘rising from the dead mean’?”

Oh ye of little faith

Then I had my first failure to cure. A man brought us disciples his son who was possessed by a demon, often falling into fire and also deep water. We all tried to expel the demon but to no avail. Exasperated, the man pushed past us and went to Jesus with his problem. Jesus was angry with us. *“Faithless and perverse generation! How much longer must I put up with you? Bring the boy here to me.”* Jesus cast the devil out of the boy with a single command. “Why couldn’t we do that?” we asked. He answered, *“Because you have so little faith. In truth I tell you, if your faith were even the size of a mustard seed you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible to you.”* I kept quiet, I thought my faith in Jesus was strong, evidently not.

Paying taxes

Then the tax collectors came to me and said, “Does your master not pay the half-shekel?” Before I could say “Yes,” Jesus asked me, *“Simon, what is your opinion? From whom do earthly kings take toll or tribute? From their sons or from foreigners?”* I answered, “From foreigners.” Jesus replied, *“Well then, the sons are exempt.”* He paused, I thought we might have a confrontation any second. But Jesus continued, *“However, so that we may not be the downfall of others, go to the lake and cast a hook; take the first fish that takes the bait, open its mouth and there you will find a shekel; take it and give it to them for me and for yourself.”* And so I did

and was not at all surprised when it happened as he said, events like this were becoming commonplace.

Danger of riches

Many other young men and many women sought to become followers of Jesus but not all survived the first interview. One man fell at Jesus' feet saying, "Master what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus answered him, *"You know the commandments: You shall not kill; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall give false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother."* The man answered, "Master, I have kept all these all my life." I could see Jesus was moved by his answer and was filled with love for him. *"One more thing you must do. Go and sell what you have and give the money to the poor and come follow me. Your treasure will be in heaven."* The man's face fell, he shambled away sad for he was a man of great wealth.

Jesus looked around, watched the man leave, his face also sad. Then he said to us, *"How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of heaven. It is easier for a camel to pass through the Eye of the Needle than it is for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God."* We started asking one another, "In that case, who can be saved?" Jesus looked at us fondly and said, *"By human resources it is impossible, but not for God, because for God everything is possible."*

Our reward

I blurted out, "We have left everything and followed you..." Jesus broke in, *"In truth I tell you, when everything is made new again and the Son of Man is seated on his throne of glory, you yourselves will sit on twelve thrones to judge the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses, brothers, sisters, father, mother, children or land for the sake of my name will receive a hundred times as much, and inherit eternal life."*

We all smiled but Jesus was not finished. *“For your part, you must have these words constantly in mind: The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the power of men.”* We quietened down, saying nothing, we were afraid to ask him what he meant. But, OK, we would sit on twelve thrones and judge all of Israel. Wow!

I joined in as we all started to boast and argue who among us was the greatest healer, the best orator. Again Jesus brought us back to earth, he sat on a rock, had a little child brought forward to sit on his knee, saying to us, *“In truth I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you shall not enter the kingdom of Heaven. And so, the one who makes himself as little as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven. But anyone who is the downfall of one of these little ones who have faith in me would be better drowned in the depths of the sea with a millstone tied around his neck.”*

The next day he was again surrounded by a crowd. I organized the other disciples to form a guard around him and not let the crowds smother him. A man shouted out, “Your mother and brothers are standing over there and want to speak to you.” Jesus replied to him, *‘Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?’* And he stretched out his hand towards me and the other disciples and said, *“Here are my mother and my brothers. Anyone who does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”* I blushed with pride.

Forgiveness

I know don’t forgive wrongs too easily, I asked Jesus, “Lord, how often must I forgive my brother if he wrongs me? As often as seven times?” Jesus looked at me, smiled and answered this hot head, *“Not seven, I tell you, but seventy-seven times.”* I gulped.

Jesus often taught through parables. He had more to say to us about forgiveness.

“The kingdom of Heaven may be compared to a king who decided to settle his accounts with his servants. When the reckoning began they brought to him a man who owed ten thousand talents; he had no means of paying so the king gave orders he should be sold together with his wife and children and all his possessions to meet the debt. At this the servant threw himself down at the king’s feet with the words, ‘Be patient with me and I will pay the whole sum.’” The king felt sorry for him so he let him go and cancelled the debt.

Now as this servant went out he happened to meet a fellow servant who owed him one hundred denarii; and he seized him by the throat and began to throttle him saying, ‘Pay what you owe me.’ His fellow servant fell at his feet and said, ‘Be patient with me and I will pay you.’ But the other would not agree and on the contrary had him thrown into prison until he should pay the debt.

His fellow servants were deeply distressed when they saw what had happened and they went to the king and reported the whole affair to him. Then the master sent for him and said, ‘You wicked servant, I cancelled that debt of yours when you appealed to me. Were you not bound then to have pity on your fellow servant just as I had pity on you?’ And in his anger the king handed him over to the torturers until he had repaid all his debt.”

Jesus concluded, “And that is how your heavenly father will deal with each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.”

So now I knew what seventy-seven times meant.

Jesus told many other parables, it was his main way of teaching about the coming of the kingdom of God. The sower, the weeds, the lamp, the growing seed, the mustard seed, the yeast, the net cast into the sea, all these spoke of the sorting into those who would inherit the kingdom and those who would be cast aside. The hidden

treasure, the pearl spoke of the kingdom itself. Gradually I came to understand his mission and his message. All are invited but not all shall enter the kingdom.

Be prepared

We listened as Jesus told us a parable.

“There was once a rich man who having a good harvest from his land, thought to himself, ‘What am I to do? I have not enough room to store my crops.’ Then he said, ‘This is what I will do. I will pull down my barns and build bigger ones and store all my grain and my goods in them, and I will say to my soul: My soul you have plenty of good things laid by for many years to come; take things easy, eat, drink have a good time.’

But God said to him, ‘Fool, this very night the demand will be made for your soul; and this hoard of yours, whose will it be then?’”

Jesus concluded, *“So it is when someone stores up treasure for himself instead of becoming rich in the eyes of God.”*

We were quiet for a while, then, as I had a habit of doing, I asked Jesus, “Lord, do you mean this parable for us or for everyone?” He answered me indirectly, *“Who then is the wise and trustworthy steward whom the master will place over his household to give them at the proper time their allowance of food? Blessed that steward if his master’s arrival finds him doing exactly that. But if the steward says to himself, ‘My master is taking his time coming,’ and sets about beating the menservants and the servant-girls, and eating and drinking and getting drunk, then his master will come on a day he does not expect and at an hour he does not know. The master will cut him off and send him to the same fate as the unfaithful. As for the servant who knows what his master wants but has got nothing ready and done*

nothing in accord with those wishes, he will be given a great many strokes of the lash."

The Courage of the Christ

The next time we went to Jerusalem was for the feast of the Tabernacles. But this time Jesus kept a low profile, certainly not clearing the Temple Court of the moneylenders and the noisy crowd. I could easily tell the people were on the look-out for him. I heard several say, 'Where is he?' I grew concerned, there was a great deal of talk about him in the crowds. I heard some say, 'He is a good man'; but I also heard others say, 'No, he is leading the people astray.' But all spoke in hushed tones for fear of the Jewish leaders.

But when the festival was half over, Jesus went to the Temple and began to teach. I listened to a conversation, 'How did he learn to read? He has not been educated.'

Jesus also overheard them and answered, *"My teaching is not from myself: it comes from the one who sent me; anyone who is prepared to do his will, will know whether my teaching is from God or whether I speak on my own account.*

When someone speaks on his own account, he is seeking honor for himself; but when he is seeking the honor of the person who sent him, then he is true and altogether without dishonesty. Did not Moses give you the Law? And yet not one of you keeps the Law! 'Why do you want to kill me?'"

The crowd replied, 'You are mad! Who wants to kill you?'

Jesus answered, *"One work I did, and you are all amazed at it. Moses ordered you to practice circumcision -- not that it began with him, it goes back to the patriarchs -- and you circumcise on the Sabbath. Now if someone can be circumcised on the Sabbath so that the Law of Moses is not broken, why are you angry with me for making someone completely healthy on a Sabbath? Do not keep judging according to appearances; let your judgement be according to what is right."*

Meanwhile I overheard some people saying, 'Isn't this the man they want to kill? And here he is, speaking openly, and they have nothing to say to him! Can it be true the authorities have recognized that he is the Christ? Yet we all know where he comes from, but when the Christ appears no one will know where he comes from.'

Then, as Jesus was teaching in the Temple, I heard him cry out: *"You know me and you know where I came from. Yet I have not come of my own accord: but he who sent me is true; You do not know him, but I know him because I have my being from him and it was he who sent me."*

I saw the Sanhedrin police put their hands on their swords, clearly they wanted to arrest him then, but because his hour had not yet come no one laid a hand on him. There were many people in the crowds, however, who believed in him; they were saying, 'When the Christ comes, will he give more signs than this man has?'

Then Jesus said: *"For a short time I am with you still; then I shall go back to the one who sent me. You will look for me and will not find me; where I am you cannot come."*

I heard the Jews said to one another, 'Where is he intending to go that we shall not be able to find him? Is he intending to go abroad to the people who are dispersed among the Greeks and to teach the Greeks? What does he mean when he says: "You will look for me and will not find me; where I am, you cannot come?"'

On the last day, the great day of the festival, Jesus stood and cried out: *"Let anyone who is thirsty come to me! Let anyone who believes in me come and drink! As scripture says, "From his heart shall flow streams of living water."*

I knew he was speaking of the Spirit which those who believed in him were to receive. Some of the crowd who had been listening said, 'He is indeed the prophet,' and some said, 'He is the Christ,' but others said, 'Would the Christ come from Galilee? Does not scripture say that the Christ must be descended from David and

come from Bethlehem, the village where David was?' So the people could not agree about him. I saw his mother, Mary, smile at these references to scripture but she held her peace.

The Sanhedrin Plots

The Sanhedrin wanted to arrest him, but no one actually laid a hand on him. Nicodemus— our only friend among the Pharisees -- later told us the guards went back to the chief priests and Pharisees who said to them, 'Why haven't you brought him?' The guards replied, 'No one has ever spoken like this man.' 'So,' the Pharisees answered, 'you, too, have been led astray? Have any of the authorities come to believe in him? Any of the Pharisees? This rabble knows nothing about the Law -- they are damned.'

I argued with them, said Nicodemus, "But surely our Law does not allow us to pass judgement on anyone without first giving him a hearing and discovering what he is doing?" He told us their answer was, 'Are you a Galilean too? Go into the matter, and see for yourself: prophets do not arise in Galilee.'

Tricking Jesus?

The next day they thought up another way to get Jesus. They brought to us a young woman and made her stand before Jesus. They said she had just been taken in the very act of adultery. By our Law, they said, she should be stoned to death, what do you say, they asked Jesus. Well he said nothing, they waited, he bent down and started doodling in the sand with his finger. They grew uneasy, then Jesus said, "*OK, whoever is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone,*" and kept on doodling. They went very quiet, I could easily read their minds, maybe he is writing down our sins, they thought, he seems to know so much about everyone, so they quietly slipped away, not wanting to be embarrassed.

I saw Jesus left alone with the poor girl. He looked up and said to her, *“Where did they go, has no one condemned you?”* She was shivering with fear but said, “No one, sir.” He looked at her for a while, then said, *“Neither do I condemn you, go away and sin no more.”* I saw her several times after that day, following us, listening to his words. But I also saw the anger and hatred of the Pharisees growing stronger each day, I was terrified for him – and for me!

Jesus’ warning

Jesus was going up to Jerusalem from Bethany where we stayed each night and on the road he took the Twelve of us aside by ourselves and said to us, *“Look, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of man is about to be handed over to the chief priests and scribes. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the gentiles to be mocked and scourged and crucified; and on the third day he will be raised up again.”* I kept quiet this time but I was determined this would not happen.

The Temerity of the Sons of Zebedee

Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came with her sons to make a request of him, and bowed low; and he said to her, *“What is it you want?”* She said to him, 'Promise that these two sons of mine may sit one at your right hand and the other at your left in your kingdom.' Jesus answered, *“You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink?”* They replied, 'We can.' He said to them, *“Very well; you shall drink my cup, but as for seats at my right hand and my left, these are not mine to grant; they belong to those to whom they have been allotted by my Father.”*

When I heard this I was ready to explode, the others also, we were all very indignant with the two brothers. But Jesus called us to him and said, *“You know that among the gentiles the rulers lord it over them, and great men make their authority*

felt. Among you this is not to happen. No; anyone who wants to become great among you must be your servant, and anyone who wants to be first among you must be your slave, just as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Jesus takes the initiative

The next time we went back to Jerusalem, Jesus picked his fight with them. He saw by the Temple door a beggar, a man born blind. I asked Jesus whether he was blind because of his own sin or was it his parent's sin that made him blind. Jesus replied neither, and seized his chance to display the work of God in him. He took some soil, spat on it, made a paste and put it on the man's eyes, telling him to go and wash it off in the nearby pool. We kept walking. Off he went and came back ecstatic to the Temple doors, shouting and yelling – his sight was restored. Those who knew him vaguely as a blind beggar asked him to explain, so he told them what Jesus did. So they brought him to the Pharisees, it was the Sabbath day, they thought they could get Jesus for this!

But they had not counted on the beggar. While they argued among themselves, saying Jesus could not be from God if he did not observe the Sabbath, the beggar said, "Really, I think he is a prophet". Well, they could deal with this trash. They made his parents come and tell them what had happened, but they did not have their son's faith, they were scared of the Pharisees and said their son was old enough to speak for himself, yes, he was blind from birth, they had no idea how his blindness had been cured. When they kept up their relentless questioning of the beggar, he was emboldened to ask, "Why so many questions, do you want to become his disciples too?" That did it, they threw him out of the Temple.

We heard what had happened to him and Jesus was delighted with his faith and courage. We went and found the beggar, and Jesus asked him, *"Do you believe in*

the Son of Man?" and the beggar said, "Tell me who he is so that I may believe in him." Jesus said, *"I am he."* The man fell down and worshipped Jesus, we had another disciple!

Underestimated

Because we were from Galilee they thought we were dumb, ignorant, uneducated. But the network of synagogues in Galilee was the best in all of Israel. We Galileans knew the scriptures, could read and write Aramaic and could hold our own in any debate. I smirked as one of the smart lawyers outwitted himself. He was from the Sadducees camp, the group that did not believe in life after death. To disconcert Jesus, he stood up and mockingly asked: "Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" I saw this was an easy one for my Master, he left it to the lawyer and got an answer he wanted everyone to know, the greatest commandment of them all. *"What does it say in the Law?"*, he asked. The lawyer was forced to reply,

You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul,
with all your strength and with all your mind,
and you must love your neighbor as yourself.

"Correct", said Jesus, "Do this and eternal life is yours."

Prudence

An admirer of Jesus who was one of the political inner circle had come to me seeking an audience with Jesus. I brought him to the Master and he told Jesus that there was a plot being hatched against him, not by the Sanhedrin this time but by Herod, the Roman appointed king. Jesus showed no fear but clearly he wanted to take his mission much further, so we left Jerusalem quietly, or so we thought since as usual a crowd would follow us.

Samaria matters?

But the crowd scattered when 10 lepers came sidling up, seeking to be cured. I was ready to shoo them away but Jesus admired their faith, sent them off to wash in a pool. Later one of them returned to tell Jesus they were all cured. But only he came back to say thank you and praise God, and he was a Samaritan!

I was perplexed, evidently Jesus admired something about the Samaritans, first the woman at the well in Samaria and now this leper. More to come, we all, including the scribes and Pharisees who constantly harassed us, listened as Jesus told another parable, in answer to a critic's question about the greatest commandment, "But who is my neighbor?"

"A man travelling through the hill country from Jericho to Jerusalem was beset upon by robbers who took everything he had and left him bloody, bruised and close to death. A priest passing by ignored him, as did a Levite of the priestly tribe. But a Samaritan passing by stopped, bound up his wounds, quenched his thirst, put him on his donkey and took him to an Inn, saying to the innkeeper, take care of him until he is well, here is some money now and I will pay whatever else is owing when I return." Jesus asked us who was the neighbor to the man - obviously not their kind, the priestly harassers slunk away, their heads low.

Warnings against Pharisees

We left Jerusalem quietly but the people soon gathered in their thousands so that they were treading on one another. And Jesus began to speak, first of all to us disciples:

"Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees -- their hypocrisy. Everything now covered up will be uncovered, and everything now hidden will be made clear. For this reason, whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the

daylight, and what you have whispered in hidden places will be proclaimed from the housetops.

To you my friends I say: Do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. I will tell you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has the power to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, he is the one to fear. Can you not buy five sparrows for two pennies? And yet not one is forgotten in God's sight. Why, every hair on your head has been counted. There is no need to be afraid: you are worth more than many sparrows.

I tell you, if anyone openly declares himself for me in the presence of human beings, the Son of man will declare himself for him in the presence of God's angels. But anyone who disowns me in the presence of human beings will be disowned in the presence of God's angels. Everyone who says a word against the Son of man will be forgiven, but no one who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will be forgiven. When they take you before synagogues and magistrates and authorities, do not worry about how to defend yourselves or what to say, because when the time comes, the Holy Spirit will teach you what you should say.”

God will provide

A man in the crowd said to him, 'Master, tell my brother to give me a share of our inheritance.' He said to him, “My friend, who appointed me your judge, or the arbitrator of your claims?” Then he said to them, 'Watch, and be on your guard against avarice of any kind, for life does not consist in possessions, even when someone has more than he needs.'

Stay Awake

See that you have your belts done up and your lamps lit. Be like people waiting for their master to return from the wedding feast, ready to open the door as soon

as he comes and knocks. Blessed those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. In truth I tell you, he will do up his belt, sit them down at table and wait on them. It may be in the second watch that he comes, or in the third, but blessed are those servants if he finds them ready.

You may be quite sure of this, that if the householder had known at what time the burglar would come, he would not have let anyone break through the wall of his house. You too must stand ready, because the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”

I said again, as I had several times before, 'Lord, do you mean this parable for us, or for everyone?' Jesus replied, “‘Who, then, is the wise and trustworthy steward whom the master will place over his household to give them at the proper time their allowance of food? Blessed that servant if his master's arrival finds him doing exactly that. I tell you truly, he will put him in charge of everything that he owns. The servant who knows what his master wants, but has got nothing ready and done nothing in accord with those wishes, will be given a great many strokes of the lash. The one who did not know, but has acted in such a way that he deserves a beating, will be given fewer strokes. When someone is given a great deal, a great deal will be demanded of that person; when someone is entrusted with a great deal, of that person even more will be expected.

Take Sides

I have come to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were blazing already! There is a baptism I must still receive, and what constraint I am under until it is completed! Do you suppose that I am here to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. For from now on, a household of five will be divided: three against two and two against three; father opposed to son, son to father, mother to

daughter, daughter to mother, mother-in-law to daughter-in-law, daughter-in-law to mother-in-law."

Pharisee attacks

Again, Jesus cured a crippled woman on the Sabbath and again the scribes and Pharisees criticized his disrespect for the Mosai Law. I began to understand why Jesus kept telling us to stay away from the yeast of the religious leaders – they demanded exhausting trivia from us Jews but ignored the disgusting example they gave us on the big issues, like usury and depriving widows of their inheritance.

This guy was a slow learner! The president of the synagogue was indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, and he addressed all those present saying, "There are six days when work is to be done. Come and be healed on one of those days and not on the Sabbath."

But my Lord answered him and said, *"Hypocrites! Is there one of you who does not untie his ox or his donkey from the manger on the Sabbath and take it out for watering? And this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan has held bound these eighteen years -- was it not right to untie this bond on the Sabbath day?"*

When he said this, I smirked because all his adversaries were covered with confusion, and I could see all the people were overjoyed at all the wonders he worked.

He went on to say, *"What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it with? It is like a mustard seed which a man took and threw into his garden: it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air sheltered in its branches."* Again he said, *"What shall I compare the kingdom of God with? It is like the yeast a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour till it was leavened all through."*

I knew that our community on earth would grow, and he had made me its leader.

Jesus responds

Through towns and villages Jesus went teaching, making his way to Jerusalem, with us disciples and the women in tow. On a Sabbath day he had gone to share a meal in the house of one of the leading Pharisees; and I could see they watched him closely. In front of him was a man with dropsy, and Jesus addressed the lawyers and Pharisees with the words, *"Is it against the law to cure someone on the Sabbath, or not?"* But they remained silent, so he took the man and cured him and sent him away. Then he said to them, *"Which of you here, if his son falls into a well, or his ox, will not pull him out on a Sabbath day without any hesitation?"* And to this they could find no answer but I could see they could hardly hold their anger and jealousy in check.

He counselled the guests, because he had noticed how they picked the places of honor. He said this, *"When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take your seat in the place of honor. A more distinguished person than you may have been invited, and the person who invited you both may come and say, 'Give up your place to this man.' And then, to your embarrassment, you will have to go and take the lowest place. No; when you are a guest, make your way to the lowest place and sit there, so that, when your host comes, he may say, 'My friend, move up higher.' Then, everyone with you at the table will see you honored. For everyone who raises himself up will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be raised up."*

Then he said to his host, *"When you give a lunch or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relations or rich neighbors, in case they invite you back and so repay you. No; when you have a party, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind; then you will be blessed, for they have no means to repay you and so you will be repaid when the upright rise again."*

Accept the invitation or suffer

On hearing this, I listened as one of those gathered round the table said to him, 'Blessed is anyone who will share the meal in the kingdom of God!' But he said to him, *"There was a man who gave a great banquet, and he invited a large number of people. When the time for the banquet came, he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, 'Come along: everything is ready now.' But all alike started to make excuses. The first said, 'I have bought a piece of land and must go and see it. Please accept my apologies.' Another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen and am on my way to try them out. Please accept my apologies.' Yet another said, 'I have just got married and so am unable to come.' The servant returned and reported this to his master.*

Then the householder, in a rage, said to his servant, "Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in here the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame." "Sir," said the servant, "your orders have been carried out and there is still room." Then the master said to his servant, "Go to the open roads and the hedgerows and press people to come in, to make sure my house is full; because, I tell you, not one of those who were invited shall have a taste of my banquet."

I could see the guests squirming in their seats because they understood very well that none of them would have a taste of that banquet.

Jesus wants commitment

Great crowds still accompanied us on our way and Jesus turned and spoke to them. *"Anyone who comes to me without hating father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, yes and his own life too, cannot be my disciple. No one who does not carry his cross and come after me can be my disciple."*

I listened as Jesus told them that their commitment to him needed to be firm, they could not begin and not follow through to the end. He said,

"And indeed, which of you here, intending to build a tower, would not first sit down and work out the cost to see if he had enough to complete it? Otherwise, if he laid the foundation and then found himself unable to finish the work, anyone who saw it would start making fun of him and saying, "Here is someone who started to build and was unable to finish."

Or again, what king marching to war against another king would not first sit down and consider whether with ten thousand men he could stand up to the other who was advancing against him with twenty thousand? If not, then while the other king was still a long way off, he would send envoys to sue for peace. So in the same way, none of you can be my disciple without giving up all that he owns."

Infinite mercy of God

I could more easily understand the parables Jesus told to teach about the infinite mercy and forgiveness of God. Not all will be saved but God will never give up on anyone. Jesus told of the man with one hundred sheep who left the ninety nine to find the one lost sheep; he told of the woman who lost one of her ten drachma coins and searched the house by lamplight until she found it; of the father whose son demanded the share of his inheritance, squandered it on a life of debauchery and came crawling back, not to a scolding but to a welcome party. On the other hand, I learned that anyone who persists in gaining the favor of God will receive it, as did the persistent widow who finally had the judge give her justice.

Jesus attacks the scribes and Pharisees

Jesus told us the people of this world who will never gain the kingdom of God are much wiser than the faithful. They are like the untrustworthy steward who knew his master was going to find him out so he called in all his master's debtors and rewrote all their IOUs at a big discounted amount so that when his master did dismiss him,

he could go to them and be rewarded. The Pharisees and scribes knew he was referring to them.

But the Pharisees would not leave us alone. Jesus chose parables to attack them. He told the story of the Pharisee and the Publican, the tax collector.

Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'

I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

I could see the rage on the Pharisees faces as the listeners smirked at them. But there was more to come, the Pharisees loved money more than all else. Jesus continued:

There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate lay a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side.

So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.'

But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and

you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.'

He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'

Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.'
'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' He said to him, *'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'*

The rage on the faces of the Pharisees filled me with joy but also fear.

Mary Magdalen

I was always a little confused about Mary Magdalen. She was eventually one of the women who accompanied us, journeyed with us to help provide our needs, buying food, cooking, cleaning, finding places to sleep. We were surprised to be also joined by Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward. She told us she had witnessed Herod's treatment of John the Baptist and had become disillusioned with both Herod and her husband's support of him. There were also some women who had been healed by Jesus of evil spirits and sicknesses and many others who were contributing to our support out of their private means.

I and the other apostles witnessed Jesus casting seven devils out of Mary Magdalen, literally lifting her out of the gutter and giving her instant rehabilitation from drugs and alcohol and replacing a sinful existence with a purity of life. She proved to be the prodigal sibling to a sister Martha and a brother Lazarus. Once bathed and better clothed she was a beautiful young girl.

One of the Pharisees named Simon invited Jesus to a meal. I waited outside while Jesus took his place at table, then suddenly a young woman came in, whom all present knew had a bad name in the town. She knelt behind Jesus at his feet, weeping, and her tears fell on his feet, and she wiped them away with her hair; then she covered his feet with kisses and anointed them with the ointment.

Then the Pharisee who had invited him said to his friends, 'If this man were a prophet, he would know who this woman is and what sort of person it is who is touching him and what a bad name she has.' Then Jesus took him up and said, *'Simon, I have something to say to you.'* He replied, 'Say on, Master.' *'There was once a creditor who had two men in his debt; one owed him five hundred denarii, the other fifty. They were unable to pay, so he let them both off. Which of them will love him more?'* Simon answered, 'The one who was let off more, I suppose.' Jesus said, *'You are right.'*

Then Jesus turned to Mary Magdalen, for that is who she was, and said to Simon, *'You see this woman? I came into your house, and you poured no water over my feet, but she has poured out her tears over my feet and wiped them away with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but she has been covering my feet with kisses ever since I came in. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. For this reason I tell you that her sins, many as they are, have been forgiven her, because she has shown such great love. It is someone who is forgiven little who shows little love.'* Then he said to her, *'Your sins are forgiven.'* I could see Simon and his guests were shocked by this.

Then Jesus left the house where he was clearly unwelcome. Mary Magdalen had waited outside and she escorted us to her home where we met her sister Martha and her brother Lazarus, a sickly young man. Our women companions began to help Martha prepare a meal but I noticed Mary Magdalen went and sat by Jesus' feet

again and listened to him as he answered her questions. Martha had clearly had a lot to put up with from her young sister over the years and said to Jesus, “Lord, please have Mary come and help me.” But Jesus answered her, *“Martha, you worry about too many things, Mary has chosen the better place and it will not be taken away from her.”* After that day Mary joined our women’s support group and was never far from Jesus, clearly she loved him as only a woman can love a man. I could see that Jesus loved her too. I became more confused, could a Son of God be also a man?

Lazarus

We were happy to be well away from Jerusalem, it was clear that the ruling classes were out to kill Jesus. Indeed he predicted his death several times over the last few weeks. But then a messenger came to Mary Magdalen and she hurried away. Jesus first told us that Lazarus was sick, but we didn’t think that a good enough reason to go to Bethany, so near to Jerusalem. But then Jesus told us that Lazarus had died. Off we went to Bethany, the crowds following.

I could see Martha was very unhappy with Jesus, clearly he could have worked a miracle on her sick brother. She was a little bitter, saying her brother was four days in the tomb, but adding, “If you had been here, he would not have died.” But as I listened, I wished my faith could be as strong as that of this woman. The interplay from Jesus to Martha to Jesus to Martha went like this,

Your brother will rise again.

I know he will rise again at the resurrection on the last day.

I am the resurrection,

If anyone believes in me, even though he die, he shall live,

And whoever lives and believes in me will never die.

Do you believe this?

Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God,
the one who has come into this world.

Then Martha left us to fetch her sister, Jesus wanted to talk to her. Mary came running, threw herself at his feet, weeping and saying as did her sister, “Lord, if you had been here, he would not have died.”

I could see Jesus was deeply moved. Her faith and her love were too much for him to bear. He prayed to his Father, then called out in a loud voice,

Lazarus, come here! Come out!

And to the amazement of us all, including the many inhabitants of Jerusalem who had come to pay their respects to Martha and Mary, Lazarus walked out of the tomb into his sisters’ arms.

The Chief Priests join the Pharisees

Nicodemus told me later of the effect of this well-publicized raising from the dead. He reported that many of the Jews who had come to visit Martha and Mary, and had seen what he did, believed in him, but some of them went to the Pharisees to tell them what Jesus had done. Then the chief priests and Pharisees called a meeting. 'Here is this man working all these signs,' they said, 'and what action are we taking? If we let him go on in this way everybody will believe in him, and the Romans will come and suppress the Holy Place and our nation.'

One of them, Caiaphas, the high priest that year, said, 'You do not seem to have grasped the situation at all; you fail to see that it is to your advantage that one man should die for the people, rather than that the whole nation should perish.' From that day onwards, Nicodemus said, they were determined to kill him.

We knew this, we were frightened, we were happy that Jesus no longer went about openly among the Jews; we all left the district for a town called Ephraim, in the country bordering on the desert, and stayed there.

The Jewish Passover was drawing near, and we heard that many of the country people who had gone up to Jerusalem before the Passover to purify themselves were looking out for Jesus, saying to one another as they stood about in the Temple, 'What do you think? Will he come to the festival or not?'

Forgiveness and Reconciliation

We entered Jericho and were going through the town when suddenly a man whose name was Zacchaeus made his appearance; he was one of the senior tax collectors and a wealthy man. He kept trying to see which of us Jesus was, but he was too short and could not see him for the crowd; so he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to catch a glimpse of Jesus who was to pass that way. When Jesus reached the tree he looked up and spoke to him, *'Zacchaeus, come down. Hurry, because I am to stay at your house today.'* And he hurried down and welcomed him joyfully.

Our harassers all complained to us when they saw what was happening. 'He has gone to stay at a sinner's house,' they said. But Zacchaeus stood his ground and said to Jesus: 'Look, sir, I am going to give half my property to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody I will pay him back four times the amount.' And Jesus said to him, *'Today salvation has come to this house, because this man too is a son of Abraham; for the Son of man has come to seek out and save what was lost.'*

The King

We stayed each night in these stressful days in the home of Martha, Mary and Lazarus in Bethany, an hour's walk from Jerusalem. The next day Jesus went on ahead of us, going up to Jerusalem. When he was near the Mount of Olives as it is called, he sent Andrew and me saying, *'Go to the village opposite, and as you enter*

it you will find a tethered colt that no one has ever yet ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, "Why are you untying it?" you are to say this, "The Master needs it." We went off and found everything just as he had told us. As we were untying the colt, its owners said, 'Why are you untying it?' and we answered, 'The Master needs it.' They let us be.

So we took the colt to Jesus and, throwing our cloaks on its back, we lifted Jesus on to it. As he moved off, all of us disciples spread our cloaks on the road, and now, as he was approaching the downward slope of the Mount of Olives, our whole group of disciples joyfully began to praise God at the top of our voices for all the miracles we had seen. We cried out: Blessed is he who is coming as King in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heavens!

Some Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus: 'Master, reprove your disciples,' but he answered, *'I tell you, if these keep silence, the stones will cry out.'* As he drew near and came in sight of the city he shed tears over it and said, *'If you too had only recognized on this day the way to peace! But in fact it is hidden from your eyes! Yes, a time is coming when your enemies will raise fortifications all round you, when they will encircle you and hem you in on every side; they will dash you and the children inside your walls to the ground; they will leave not one stone standing on another within you, because you did not recognize the moment of your visitation.'*

I was amazed, then exhilarated. Great crowds of people spread their cloaks on the road, while others were cutting branches from the trees and spreading them in his path. The crowds who went in front of him and those who followed were all shouting: Hosanna to the son of David! Blessed is he who is coming in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heavens! And when he entered Jerusalem, the

whole city was in turmoil as people asked, 'Who is this?' and the crowds answered, 'This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.'

We went with Jesus into the Temple and he drove out all those who were selling and buying there; he upset the tables of the money-changers and the seats of the dove-sellers. He said to them, *'According to scripture, my house will be called a house of prayer; but you are turning it into a bandits' den.'*

In his teaching he said, *'Beware of the scribes and Pharisees who like to walk about in long robes, to be greeted respectfully in the market squares, to take the front seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets; these are the men who devour the property of widows and for show offer long prayers. The more severe will be the sentence they receive.'*

Jesus sat down opposite the treasury and we watched the people putting money into the treasury, and many of the rich put in a great deal. A poor widow came and put in two small coins, the equivalent of a penny. Then he called us disciples and said to us, *'In truth I tell you, this poor widow has put more in than all who have contributed to the treasury; for they have all put in money they could spare, but she in her poverty has put in everything she possessed, all she had to live on.'*

There were also blind and lame people who came to him in the Temple, and he cured them. At the sight of the wonderful things he did and of the children shouting, 'Hosanna to the son of David' in the Temple, the chief priests and the scribes were indignant and said to him, 'Do you hear what they are saying?' Jesus answered, 'Yes. *Have you never read this: By the mouths of children, babes in arms, you have made sure of praise?*' With that he left them and we went out of the city to Bethany, where we spent the night.

Parable of the Fig Tree

Next day as we were leaving Bethany, he felt hungry. Seeing a fig tree in leaf some distance away, he went to see if he could find any fruit on it, but when he came up to it he found nothing but leaves; for it was not the season for figs. And he addressed the fig tree, *'May no one ever eat fruit from you again.'* I heard him say this.

So we reached Jerusalem and Jesus went into the Temple and again began driving out the men selling and buying there; he upset the tables of the money changers and the seats of the dove sellers. Nor, with us backing him up, would he allow anyone to carry anything through the Temple. And he taught the crowd and said, *'Does not scripture say: My house will be called a house of prayer for all peoples? But you have turned it into a bandits' den.'* This came to the ears of the chief priests and the scribes, and they tried to find some way of doing away with him; it was obvious they were afraid of him because the people were carried away by his teaching. And when evening came we again went out of the city back to Bethany.

Next morning, as we passed by, we saw the fig tree withered to the roots. I remembered. 'Look, Rabbi,' I said to Jesus, 'the fig tree that you cursed has withered away.' Jesus answered, *'Have faith in God. In truth I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, "Be pulled up and thrown into the sea," with no doubt in his heart, but believing that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. I tell you, therefore, everything you ask and pray for, believe that you have it already, and it will be yours. And when you stand in prayer, forgive whatever you have against anybody, so your Father in heaven may forgive your failings too.'*

Chief Priests Confront Jesus

Jesus had gone into the Temple and was teaching, when the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him and said, 'What authority have you for acting like

this? And who gave you this authority?' In reply Jesus said to them, *'And I will ask you a question, just one; if you tell me the answer to it, then I will tell you my authority for acting like this. John's baptism: what was its origin, heavenly or human?'*

I smiled as I listened to them argue this way among themselves, 'If we say heavenly, he will retort to us, "Then why did you refuse to believe him?"; but if we say human, we have the people to fear, for they all hold that John was a prophet, they may stone us.' So their reply to Jesus was, 'We do not know.' And he retorted to them, *'Nor will I tell you my authority for acting like this.'*

I was delighted that Jesus was able to turn the tables on them and embarrass them in front of the bystanders. Never before had anyone seen the chief priests defeated in argument by another person. But Jesus was not finished with them, saying,

'What is your opinion? A man had two sons. He went and said to the first, "My boy, go and work in the vineyard today." He answered, "I will not go," but afterwards thought better of it and went. The man then went and said the same thing to the second who answered, "Certainly, sir," but did not go. Which of the two did the father's will?' They said, 'The first.' Jesus said to them, *'In truth I tell you, tax collectors and prostitutes are making their way into the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you, showing the way of uprightness, but you did not believe him, and yet the tax collectors and prostitutes did. Even after seeing that, you refused to think better of it and believe in him.'*

'Listen to another parable. There was a man, a landowner, who planted a vineyard; he fenced it round, dug a winepress in it and built a tower; then he leased it to tenants and went abroad. When vintage time drew near he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his produce. But the tenants seized his servants, thrashed

one, killed another and stoned a third. Next he sent some more servants, this time a larger number, and they dealt with them in the same way.

Finally he sent his son to them thinking, "They will respect my son." But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, "This is the heir. Come on, let us kill him and take over his inheritance." So they seized him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?'

They answered, 'He will bring those wretches to a wretched end and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will deliver the produce to him at the proper time.' Jesus said to them, *'Have you never read in the scriptures: The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this is the Lord's doing and we marvel at it? I tell you, then, that the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.'*

When they heard his parables, I could see the chief priests and the scribes realized he was speaking about them, saying they would never enter the kingdom of heaven. Though they would have liked to arrest him they were afraid of the crowds, who looked on him as a prophet. So far we had the advantage!

Pharisees Confront Jesus

Then the Pharisees went away to work out between them how to trap Jesus in what he said. I watched their huddle separate and they sent their disciples to him, together with some Herodians, to say, 'Master, we know that you are an honest man and teach the way of God in all honesty, and that you are not afraid of anyone, because human rank means nothing to you. Give us your opinion, then. Is it permissible to pay taxes to Caesar or not?' But Jesus was aware of their malice and replied, *'You hypocrites! Why are you putting me to the test? Show me the money you pay the tax with.'* They handed him a denarius, and he said, *'Whose portrait is*

this? Whose title?' They replied, 'Caesar's.' Then he said to them, 'Very well, pay Caesar what belongs to Caesar -- and God what belongs to God.' When they heard this they were amazed; they left him alone and went away. We still had the advantage!

Sadducees Confront Jesus

That day some Sadducees -- who deny that there is a resurrection -- approached him and they put this question to him, 'Master, Moses said that if a man dies childless, his brother is to marry the widow, his sister-in-law, to raise children for his brother. Now we had a case involving seven brothers; the first married and then died without children, leaving his wife to his brother; the same thing happened with the second and third and so on to the seventh, and then last of all the woman herself died. Now at the resurrection, whose wife among the seven will she be, since she had been married to them all?'

Jesus answered them, *'You are wrong, because you understand neither the scriptures nor the power of God. For at the resurrection men and women do not marry; no, they are like the angels in heaven. And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you never read what God himself said to you: I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob? He is God, not of the dead, but of the living.'*

And his teaching made a deep impression on the people who heard it.

Pharisees try again

But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees they got together again as I watched, and, to put him to the test, one of them put a further question, 'Master, which is the greatest commandment of the Law?' Jesus said to him, *'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second*

resembles it: You must love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang the whole Law, and the Prophets too.'

While the Pharisees were gathered round, Jesus put to them this question, '*What is your opinion about the Christ? Whose son is he?*' They told him, 'David's.' He said to them, '*Then how is it that David, moved by the Spirit, calls him Lord, where he says: The Lord declared to my Lord, take your seat at my right hand, till I have made your enemies your footstool? 'If David calls him Lord, how then can he be his son?*' No one could think of anything to say in reply, and from that day no one dared to ask him any further questions. We disciples were delighted with our Master.

The End of the World

Jesus now left the Temple, and as we were going away we disciples drew his attention to the magnificence of the Temple buildings. He said to us in reply, '*You see all these? In truth I tell you, not a single stone here will be left on another: everything will be pulled down.*' While he was sitting on the Mount of Olives and we were by ourselves, we disciples came and asked him, 'Tell us, when is this going to happen, and what sign will there be of your coming and of the end of the world?'

And Jesus answered us, '*Take care that no one deceives you, because many will come using my name and saying, "I am the Christ," and they will deceive many. You will hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not alarmed, for this is something that must happen, but the end will not be yet. For nation will fight against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All this is only the beginning of the birth pangs. 'Then you will be handed over to be tortured and put to death; and you will be hated by all nations on account of my name. And then many will fall away; people will betray one another and hate one another.*

Many false prophets will arise; they will deceive many, and with the increase of lawlessness, love in most people will grow cold; but anyone who stands firm to the end will be saved.

'If anyone says to you then, "Look, here is the Christ," or "Over here," do not believe it; for false Christs and false prophets will arise and provide great signs and portents, enough to deceive even the elect, if that were possible. Look! I have given you warning. 'If, then, they say to you, "Look, he is in the desert," do not go there; "Look, he is in some hiding place," do not believe it; because the coming of the Son of man will be like lightning striking in the east and flashing far into the west. Wherever the corpse is, that is where the vultures will gather.

Again, Be Prepared

Jesus told us another parable to illustrate the need to be ready for the coming.

Then the kingdom of Heaven will be like this: Ten wedding attendants took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were sensible: the foolish ones, though they took their lamps, took no oil with them, whereas the sensible ones took flasks of oil as well as their lamps. The bridegroom was late, and they all grew drowsy and fell asleep.

But at midnight there was a cry, "Look! The bridegroom! Go out and meet him." Then all those wedding attendants woke up and trimmed their lamps, and the foolish ones said to the sensible ones, "Give us some of your oil: our lamps are going out." But they replied, "There may not be enough for us and for you; you had better go to those who sell it and buy some for yourselves." They had gone off to buy it when the bridegroom arrived. Those who were ready went in with him to the wedding hall and the door was closed. The other attendants arrived later. "Lord,

Lord," they said, "open the door for us." But he replied, "In truth I tell you, I do not know you." So stay awake, because you do not know either the day or the hour.

Final Judgment

Jesus told us of the final judgment day, saying,

'When the Son of man comes in his glory, escorted by all the angels, then he will take his seat on his throne of glory. All nations will be assembled before him and he will separate people one from another as the shepherd separates sheep from goats. He will place the sheep on his right hand and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right hand, "Come, you whom my Father has blessed, take as your heritage the kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you made me welcome, lacking clothes and you clothed me, sick and you visited me, in prison and you came to see me."

Then the upright will say to him in reply, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and make you welcome, lacking clothes and clothe you? When did we find you sick or in prison and go to see you?" And the King will answer, "In truth I tell you, in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me."

Then he will say to those on his left hand, "Go away from me, with your curse upon you, to the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you never gave me food, I was thirsty and you never gave me anything to drink, I was a stranger and you never made me welcome, lacking clothes and you never clothed me, sick and in prison and you never visited me." Then it will be their turn to ask, "Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty, a stranger or lacking clothes, sick or in prison, and did not come to your help?" Then he will answer, "In truth I tell

you, in so far as you neglected to do this to one of the least of these, you neglected to do it to me." And they will go away to eternal punishment, and the upright to eternal life.'

Judas Iscariot shows his true colors

Six days before the Passover, Jesus and us disciples went to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom he had raised from the dead. They gave a dinner for us there; Martha waited on us and Lazarus was among those at table. For the second time, Mary brought in a pound of very costly ointment, pure nard, and with it anointed the feet of Jesus, wiping them with her hair; the house was filled with the scent of the ointment. Then Judas Iscariot -- one of our disciples said, 'Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?' I was to come to know he said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he was in charge of the common fund and used to help himself to the contents. Jesus quietly said, *'Leave her alone; let her keep it for the day of my burial. You have the poor with you always, you will not always have me.'*

Threats and Adoration

Meanwhile a large number of Jews heard that he was there and came not only on account of Jesus but also to see Lazarus whom he had raised from the dead. Nicodemus warned us the chief priests decided to kill Lazarus as well, since it was on his account that many of the Jews were leaving them and believing in Jesus. I was terrified we were on their list!

The next day the great crowd of people who had come up for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. They again took branches of palm and went out to receive him, shouting: 'Hosanna! Blessed is he who is coming in the name of the Lord, the king of Israel.' Jesus again found a young donkey and mounted it -

as scripture says: Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion; look, your king is approaching, riding on the foal of a donkey.

At first we disciples did not understand this, but later, after Jesus had been glorified, we remembered that this had been written about him and that this was what had happened to him. The crowd who had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead kept bearing witness to it; this was another reason why the crowd came out to receive him: they had heard that he had given this sign. Then I heard the Pharisees say to one another, 'You see, you are making no progress; look, the whole world has gone after him!'

Jesus replied to them: *Now the hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified. In all truth I tell you, unless a wheat grain falls into the earth and dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies it yields a rich harvest. Anyone who loves his life loses it; anyone who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me, must follow me, and my servant will be with me wherever I am. If anyone serves me, my Father will honor him. Now my soul is troubled. What shall I say: Father, save me from this hour? But it is for this very reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name!*

A voice came from heaven, *'I have glorified it, and I will again glorify it.'* The crowd standing by, who heard this, said it was a clap of thunder; others said, 'It was an angel speaking to him.' But I knew whose voice it was, I had heard it on the mountain months before. Jesus answered, *'It was not for my sake that this voice came, but for yours. 'Now sentence is being passed on this world; now the prince of this world is to be driven out. And when I am lifted up from the earth, I shall draw all people to myself.'*

I shuddered, by these words he indicated the kind of death he would die. The crowd answered, 'The Law has taught us that the Christ will remain forever. So how

can you say, "The Son of man must be lifted up"? Who is this Son of man?" Jesus then said: *'The light will be with you only a little longer now. Go on your way while you have the light, or darkness will overtake you, and nobody who walks in the dark knows where he is going. While you still have the light, believe in the light so that you may become children of light.'*

Unbelief

Having said this, Jesus left them and was hidden from their sight, only we and the women could still see him. Though they had been present when he gave so many signs, the crowd did not believe in him; this was to fulfil the words of the prophet Isaiah which I knew too well: He has blinded their eyes, he has hardened their heart, to prevent them from using their eyes to see, using their heart to understand, changing their ways and being healed by me. And yet I knew there were many who did believe in him, even among the leading men, but, like Nicodemus, they did not admit it publicly because of the Chief Priests and the scribes and Pharisees, for fear of being banned from the Temple and the Synagogue. I was saddened that they put human safety before reliance on God.

A while later, Jesus declared publicly: *Whoever believes in me believes not in me but in the one who sent me, and whoever sees me, sees the one who sent me. I have come into the world as light, to prevent anyone who believes in me from staying in the dark any more. If anyone hears my words and does not keep them faithfully, it is not I who shall judge such a person, since I have come not to judge the world, but to save the world: anyone who rejects me and refuses my words has his judge already: the word itself that I have spoken will be his judge on the last day.*

Final Passover

The time was coming for the feast of the Passover. Jesus told John and me to go into the city and look for a man carrying a pitcher of water. We were to follow him

into the house he entered. So we did and the man was expecting us, I don't know how, and he showed us a large upper room in his house. "Make your preparations here," he said and left us. I later found out his name was Joseph and he was a member of the Sanhedrin. We set about preparing the room and the meal with the assistance of the group of women who followed Jesus everywhere he went.

That evening Jesus took his place at the table and once we apostles were also seated Jesus said to us, *"I have ardently longed to eat this Passover with you before I suffer."* I held my tongue, there would be no suffering if I could help it. Then Jesus took a loaf of bread and gave thanks for it and said, *"This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me."* Then he lifted up a cup of wine and said, *"This cup is the new covenant in my blood, poured out for you."* I wondered what was the importance of this ceremony, it would become clear later.

Then came a bombshell. Jesus said, *"Look, here with me at the table is the hand of the man who is betraying me. The Son of man is indeed on the path which was decreed, but alas for that man by whom he is betrayed."* I turned to Andrew and asked him if he knew anything about this, but he was as confused as me, as were all the others as they asked the same question. I did not see Jesus turn his eyes on Judas Iscariot, I would certainly have never suspected him nor any of the other ten of my companions who had followed Jesus for three years and given up everything for him.

We reverted to our usual debate, who among us was the greatest? But Jesus got up from the table, removed his outer garments and taking a towel, wrapped it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash our feet and dry them with the towel.

When he came to me I said, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered me, *"Yes, at the moment you do not know why I am doing this, but later you will understand."* Impetuous little me as always, "Never!," I cried out, "You

shall never wash my feet.” But Jesus hit back hard, *“If I do not wash your feet, then you can have no part of me!”* That did it, “Well then Lord,” I said, “not only my feet but my head and hands as well.” But Jesus responded, *“No one who has had a bath needs washing. Such a person is clean all over. You too are clean, though not all of you,”* again looking at Judas but I missed that once again.

Now came our lesson. When Jesus had washed our feet and put on his outer garment, he asked, *“Do you understand what I have done to you?”* We had no idea. He continued, *“You call me Master and Lord, and rightly since so I am. If I then, the Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you must wash each other’s feet. I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done to you. In all truth I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, no messenger is greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know this, blessed are you if you behave accordingly.”* That settled the issue of who of us is the greatest. I restrained myself from taking another bowl and towel and washing my fellow disciples’ feet again, but I determined to do exactly that in the future.

We saw Jesus grow terribly sad. He said again, *“One of you is going to betray me.”* I signed to John who was reclining next to Jesus, “Ask him who it is.” John leaned close to Jesus and whispered, “Who is it, Lord?” Jesus answered, *“It is the one to whom I give the piece of bread that I dip into the dish.”* I watched as he gave the piece of bread to Judas, son of Simon Iscariot. I was flabbergasted. But Judas quickly left the room, too quickly for me to question him. The others just thought Jesus had asked Judas to fetch something, he held the common purse for us.

Leaving Us: Final Blessing and Warning

Jesus asked for quiet and said these words to us.

‘You are the men who have stood by me faithfully in my trials; and now I confer a kingdom on you, just as my Father conferred one on me: you will eat and drink at

my table in my kingdom, and you will sit on thrones to judge the twelve tribes of Israel.

'Simon, Simon! Look, Satan has got his wish to sift you all like wheat; but I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail, and once you have recovered, you in your turn must strengthen your brothers.' 'Lord,' I answered, 'I would be ready to go to prison with you, and to death.' Jesus replied, *'I tell you, Peter, by the time the cock crows today you will have denied three times that you know me.'*

I was shocked and held my silence, vowing this would never happen. Jesus continued, *"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You trust in God, trust also in me. In my Father's house there are many places to live in; otherwise I would have told you. I am going now to prepare a place for you, and after I have gone and prepared you a place, I shall return to take you to myself, so that you may be with me where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going."*

Thomas said, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going, so how can we know the way?' Jesus said: *I am the Way; I am Truth and Life. No one can come to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father too. From this moment you know him and have seen him.*

Philip said, 'Lord, show us the Father and then we shall be satisfied.' Jesus said to him, *'Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? 'Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father, so how can you say, "Show us the Father?" Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? What I say to you I do not speak of my own accord: it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his works. You must believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe it on the evidence of these works.*

I shall ask the Father, and he will give you another Paraclete to be with you forever, the Spirit of truth whom the world can never accept since it neither sees nor knows him; but you know him, because he is with you, he is in you. I shall not leave you orphans; I shall come to you. In a short time the world will no longer see me; but you will see that I live and you also will live.'

Judas -- not Judas Iscariot -- said to him, 'Lord, what has happened, that you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?' Jesus replied: *Anyone who loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we shall come to him and make a home in him. Anyone who does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not my own: it is the word of the Father who sent me.*

I have said these things to you while still with you; but the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all I have said to you. Peace I bequeath to you, my own peace I give you, a peace which the world cannot give, this is my gift to you.

The Vine and Branches

I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that bears no fruit he cuts away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes to make it bear even more. You are clean already, by means of the word that I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I in you. As a branch cannot bear fruit all by itself, unless it remains part of the vine, neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for whatever you please and you will get it. It is to the glory of my Father that you should bear much fruit and be my disciples.

I have loved you just as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love.

You did not choose me, no, I chose you; and I commissioned you to go out and to bear fruit, fruit that will last; so that the Father will give you anything you ask him in my name. My command to you is to love one another. If the world hates you, you must realize that it hated me before it hated you. If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you do not belong to the world, because my choice of you has drawn you out of the world, that is why the world hates you.

I have told you all this so that you may not fall away. They will expel you from the synagogues, and indeed the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is doing a holy service to God. They will do these things because they have never known either the Father or me. But I have told you all this, so that when the time for it comes you may remember that I told you. I did not tell you this from the beginning, because I was with you; but now I am going to the one who sent me. Not one of you asks, 'Where are you going?' Yet you are sad at heart because I have told you this.

The Promise of the Holy Spirit

Still, I am telling you the truth: it is for your own good that I am going, because unless I go, the Paraclete will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will show the world how wrong it was, about sin, and about who was in the right, and about judgement: about sin: in that they refuse to believe in me; about who was in the right: in that I am going to the Father and you will see me no more; about judgement: in that the prince of this world is already condemned.

I still have many things to say to you but they would be too much for you to bear now. However, when the Spirit of truth comes he will lead you to the complete truth, since he will not be speaking of his own accord, but will say only what he has been told; and he will reveal to you the things to come.

Then I said to some of the other disciples, 'What does he mean, "In a short time you will no longer see me, and then a short time later you will see me again," and, "I am going to the Father"? What is this "short time"? We don't know what he means.' Jesus knew that we wanted to question him, so he said, '*You are asking one another what I meant by saying, "In a short time you will no longer see me, and then a short time later you will see me again." In all truth I tell you, you will be weeping and wailing while the world will rejoice; you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn to joy.*

You are sad now, but I shall see you again, and your hearts will be full of joy, and that joy no one shall take from you. When that day comes, you will not ask me any questions. In all truth I tell you, anything you ask from the Father he will grant in my name. Until now you have not asked anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and so your joy will be complete.

One of the other disciples said, 'Now you are speaking plainly and not using veiled language. Now we see that you know everything and need not wait for questions to be put into words; because of this we believe that you came from God.' Jesus answered all of us: *Do you believe at last? Listen; the time will come -- indeed it has come already -- when you are going to be scattered, each going his own way and leaving me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me. I have told you all this so that you may find peace in me. In the world you will have hardship, but be courageous, I have conquered the world.*

Jesus Prays to His Father

After saying this, Jesus raised his eyes to heaven and said: *Father, the hour has come: glorify your Son so that your Son may glorify you; so that, just as you have given him power over all humanity, he may give eternal life to all those you have entrusted to him.*

I have revealed your name to those whom you took from the world to give me. They were yours and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now at last they have recognized that all you have given me comes from you for I have given them the teaching you gave to me, and they have indeed accepted it and know for certain that I came from you, and have believed that it was you who sent me. It is for them that I pray. I am not praying for the world but for those you have given me, because they belong to you.

Holy Father, keep those you have given me true to your name, so that they may be one like us. While I was with them, I kept those you had given me true to your name. I have watched over them and not one is lost except one who was destined to be lost, and this was to fulfil the scriptures.

Prediction of my Infidelity

After the closing psalms had been sung we left for the Mount of Olives. There Jesus said to us, *'You will all fall away from me tonight, for the scripture says: I shall strike the shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered, but after my resurrection I shall go ahead of you to Galilee.'*

At this, I said to him, *'Even if all fall away from you, I will never fall away.'* Jesus answered me with the words, *'In truth I tell you again, this very night, before the cock crows, you will have disowned me three times.'* I shouted out to him, *'Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.'* Jesus just gave me a sad smile.

Preparation for His Passion and Death – My Lack of Support

When Jesus reached a plot of land called Gethsemane he said to us disciples, *'Stay here while I go over there to pray.'* He took me and the two sons of Zebedee with him. And he began to feel sadness and anguish. Then he said to us, *'My soul is sorrowful to the point of death. Wait here and stay awake with me.'* And going on a little further he fell on his face and prayed. *'My Father,'* he said, *'if it is possible, let this cup pass me by. Nevertheless, let it be as you, not I, would have it.'* He came back to us and found us sleeping, and he said to me, *'So you had not the strength to stay awake with me for one hour? Stay awake, and pray not to be put to the test. The spirit is willing enough, but human nature is weak.'*

I was deeply ashamed but overcome by sleepiness, I could barely notice that a second time, Jesus went away and prayed: *'My Father,'* he said, *'if this cup cannot pass by, but I must drink it, your will be done!'* And he came back again and found us sleeping again, our eyes were so heavy. Leaving us, he went away again and prayed for the third time, repeating the same words. Then he came back to us and said, *'You can sleep on now and have your rest. Look, the hour has come when the Son of man is to be betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up! Let us go! Look, my betrayer is not far away.'*

Arrest and First Sanhedrin Trial

And suddenly while he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, appeared, and with him a large number of men armed with swords and clubs, sent by the chief priests and elders of the people. Now, since it was dark and there were twelve of us, the traitor had evidently arranged a sign with them saying, *'The one I kiss, he is the man. Arrest him.'* Judas went up to Jesus at once and said, *'Greetings, Rabbi,'* and kissed him. Jesus said to him, *'My friend, do what you are here for.'* Then they came forward, seized Jesus and arrested him.

Enraged, I unsheathed my sword and struck Malchus, the high priest's servant, and cut off his ear. Jesus said to me, *'Enough, put your sword back, for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. Or do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, who would promptly send more than twelve legions of angels to my defense? But then, how would the scriptures be fulfilled that say this is the way it must be?'* Then he touched Malchus' ear and it was instantly healed.

Jesus said to his captors, *'Am I a bandit, that you had to set out to capture me with swords and clubs? I sat teaching in the Temple day after day and you never laid a hand on me.'* All the other disciples deserted Jesus and, fearful for their lives, ran away. I did also but only out of the light. I watched as the men who had arrested Jesus led him off to the house of Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled.

I followed him at a distance right to the high priest's palace, and went in and sat down with the attendants to see what the end would be. I listened in horror, the chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for evidence against Jesus, however false, on which they might have him executed. But I knew they would not find any, though several lying witnesses came forward. Eventually two more liars came forward and made a statement, "This man said, "I have power to destroy the Temple of God and in three days build it up." The high priest then rose and said to Jesus, 'Have you no answer to that? What is this evidence these men are bringing against you?' But Jesus was silent.

And the high priest said to him, 'I put you on oath by the living God to tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.' Jesus answered him, *'It is you who say it. But, I tell you that from this time onward you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of the Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.'* Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, 'He has blasphemed. What need of witnesses

have we now? There! You have just heard the blasphemy. What is your opinion?' They answered, 'He deserves to die.' Then they spat in his face and hit him with their fists; others said as they struck him, 'Prophecy to us, Christ! Who hit you then?'

The Worst Night of My Life

Appalled but frightened, I was sitting outside in the courtyard, and a servant-girl came up to me saying, 'You, too, were with Jesus the Galilean.' I was terrified, I denied it in front of them all. 'I do not know what you are talking about,' I said. When I went out to the gateway to escape their scrutiny, another servant-girl said to the people there, 'This man was with Jesus the Nazarene.' And again, with an oath, I denied it swearing, 'I do not know the man.' There was no way out of this, I shook with fear. A little later the bystanders came up and said to me, 'You are certainly one of them too! Why, your accent gives you away.' Then I started shouting and cursing and swearing, 'I do not know the man.' And at once the cock crowed. I could see Jesus turn his head towards me and I remembered what he had said, 'Before the cock crows you will have disowned me three times.' And I went outside and wept bitterly, not for Jesus but for my disgusting cowardice.

Second Sanhedrin Trial

I did not go back into the court yard, I was too scared. But John accompanied the women including Jesus' mother and Mary Magdalen as they watched Jesus and stayed as close to him as they could, right up to the end.

John told me the men who guarded Jesus were mocking and beating him. They blindfolded him and questioned him, saying, 'Prophecy! Who hit you then?' And they heaped many other insults on him.

John was there when day broke and there was a second meeting of the elders of the people, the chief priests and scribes. Jesus was brought before their council, and they said to him, 'If you are the Christ, tell us.' He replied, *'If I tell you, you will not believe, and if I question you, you will not answer. But from now on, the Son*

of man will be seated at the right hand of the Power of God.' They all said, 'So you are the Son of God then?' He answered, '*It is you who say I am.*' Then they said, 'Why do we need any evidence? We have heard it for ourselves from his own lips.' They had him bound and led him away to hand him over to Pilate, the governor.

First Trial Before Pilate

Pilate put to him this question, 'Are you the king of the Jews?' Jesus replied, '*It is you who say it.*' And the chief priests brought many accusations against him. They began their accusation by saying, 'We found this man inciting our people to revolt, opposing payment of the tribute to Caesar, and claiming to be Christ, a king.' Pilate questioned him again, 'Have you no reply at all? See how many accusations they are bringing against you!' But, to Pilate's surprise, Jesus made no further reply.

Pilate then said to the chief priests and the crowd, 'I find no case against this man.' But they persisted, 'He is inflaming the people with his teaching all over Judaea and all the way from Galilee, where he started, down to here.' When Pilate heard this, he asked if the man were a Galilean; and finding that he came under Herod's jurisdiction, he passed him over to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time.

Trial Before Herod

I followed as Jesus was led to Herod's palace and into the courtyard. I could see Herod was delighted to see Jesus; he had obviously heard about him and had been wanting for a long time to set eyes on him; moreover, he was hoping to see some miracle worked by him. So he questioned him at some length, but without getting any reply. Meanwhile the chief priests and the scribes were there, vigorously pressing their accusations. Then Herod, together with his guards, treated him with contempt and made fun of him; they put a rich cloak on him and sent him back to Pilate.

Second Trial Before Pilate

When we returned to the Governor's palace, Pilate summoned the chief priests and the leading men and the people. He said to them, 'You brought this man before me as a popular agitator. Now I have gone into the matter myself in your presence and found no grounds in the man for any of the charges you bring against him. Nor has Herod either, since he has sent him back to us. As you can see, the man has done nothing that deserves death, so I shall have him flogged and then let him go.' But as one man they howled, 'Away with him! Give us Barabbas!'

At festival time Pilate used to release a prisoner for them, any one they asked for. Now a man called Barabbas was then in prison with the rebels who had committed murder during the uprising. When the crowd went up and began to ask Pilate the customary favor, Pilate answered them, 'Do you want me to release for you the king of the Jews?' For he realized it was out of jealousy that the chief priests had handed Jesus over.

The chief priests, however, had incited the crowd to demand that he should release Barabbas for them instead. I was aghast to hear them cry out: "Barabbas!" Then Pilate spoke again, 'But in that case, what am I to do with the man you call king of the Jews?' They shouted back, 'Crucify him!' Pilate asked them, 'What harm has he done?' But they shouted all the louder, 'Crucify him!' So Pilate, anxious to placate the crowd, released Barabbas for them and, after having Jesus scourged, he handed him over to be crucified.

Torture and Crucifixion

From outside I could see John and Jesus' mother together with several other women watch as the soldiers led him away to the inner part of the palace, that is, the Praetorium, and called the whole cohort together. I crept closer and saw as they dressed him up in purple, twisted some thorns into a crown and put it on him. And they began saluting him, 'Hail, king of the Jews!' They struck his head with a reed

and spat on him; and they went down on their knees to do him homage. And when they had finished making fun of him, they took off the purple and dressed him in his own clothes. They led him out to crucify him.

I was close by when they enlisted a passer-by, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross. Why didn't I volunteer I thought to myself, but deep down I knew the answer, I was not ready to die for my Lord. My cloak over my head I joined the large numbers of men who followed him, women too who mourned and lamented for him.

But Jesus turned to the women and said, *'Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep rather for yourselves and for your children. For look, the days are surely coming when people will say, "Blessed are those who are barren, the wombs that have never borne children, the breasts that have never suckled!" Then they will begin to say to the mountains, "Fall on us!"; to the hills, "Cover us!" For if this is what is done to green wood, what will be done when the wood is dry?'*

I watched, still hidden in the crowd, as the soldiers brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha, which means the place of the skull. They offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he refused it. Then they crucified him, hammering a long nail through each of his wrists and another through his crossed over ankles. Then they shared out his clothing, casting lots to decide what each should get. It was the third hour when they crucified him. Jesus said words I could not have said, *'Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing.'* I wept bitterly, did I know what I was doing?

Nicodemus told me that the inscription on the cross giving the charge against him read, 'The King of the Jews'. So the Jewish chief priests said to Pilate, 'You should not write "King of the Jews", but that the man said, "I am King of the Jews"'. 'Pilate

answered, 'What I have written, I have written,' his sarcasm was small revenge for them having made him look weak.

I watched as the soldiers also crucified two bandits with Jesus, one on his right and one on his left.

I cringed as the passers-by jeered at him; they shook their heads and said, 'Aha! So you would destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days! Then save yourself; come down from the cross!' The chief priests and the scribes mocked him among themselves in the same way with the words, 'He saved others, he cannot save himself. Let the Christ, the king of Israel, come down from the cross now, for us to see it and believe.'

From afar I could see that near the cross of Jesus stood John together with Jesus' mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalen. John told me Jesus said to his mother, '*Woman, this is your son.*' Then to me, John, he said, '*This is your mother.*' And from that hour I John took her into my household and cared for her. I Peter could not stand by my Lord in his need but he was strong enough to make sure his mother would be looked after.

In a loud voice we could all hear, one of the criminals hanging there abused him: 'Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us as well.' But I heard the other speak up and rebuke him, saying, 'Have you no fear of God at all? You got the same sentence as he did, but in our case we deserved it: we are paying for what we did. But this man has done nothing wrong.' Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' Jesus answered him, '*In truth I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.*'

When the sixth hour came there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. Most of the crowd left, I stayed out of sight. At the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, '*Eloi, eloi, lama sabachthani?*' which means, 'My God, my God, why

have you forsaken me?' Some of those who stood by said, 'Listen, he is calling on Elijah.' Someone ran and soaked a sponge in vinegar and, putting it on a reed, gave it to him to drink saying, 'Wait! And see if Elijah will come to take him down.' But Jesus cried out in a loud voice saying, '*Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.*' With these words he breathed his last. I fell to my knees and wept.

Burial

Later, Nicodemus told us that since it was the Day of Preparation, and to avoid the bodies' remaining on the crosses during the Sabbath, the Chief Priests had asked Pilate to have their legs broken and the bodies taken away. I watched as the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with him and then of the other. When they came to Jesus, we could all see he was already dead, and so instead of breaking his legs one of the soldiers pierced his side with a lance; and immediately there came out blood and water. I could barely stay standing, all of my strength dissipated.

And then, as I found out later, the veil of the Sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom. What did that mean? The Spirit would soon tell me that the Father's sacrifice of His own Son has made all the Temple sacrifices needless and meaningless.

The centurion, who was standing in front of Jesus, had seen how he had died, and I heard him say, 'In truth this man was the Son of God.' And when all the rest of the crowds who had gathered for the spectacle saw what had happened, they went home beating their breasts. I, and now some of the other disciples, stood at a distance, John and the women who had accompanied us from Galilee saw all this happen as they stood beneath his cross.

And now a member of the Council arrived, a man named Joseph whom we all knew well, indeed his was the large upper room where we had celebrated the Passover the previous day. He had not consented to what the others had planned and carried out. He came from Arimathaea, a Jewish town, and I knew he lived in the hope of seeing

the kingdom of God. Joseph went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Joseph told us Pilate was astonished that he should have died so soon, and summoned the centurion and enquired if he had been dead for some time. Having been assured of this by the centurion, he granted the corpse to Joseph. Nicodemus came as well, and he brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds.

I watched as they and John then took his body down, wrapped it in a shroud and put it in a tomb which was hewn in stone and which had never held a body. They anointed the body of Jesus with spices and bound it in linen cloths, following the Jewish burial custom. They rolled a large stone into the entrance to the tomb.

It was Preparation day and the Sabbath was beginning soon. The women who had been standing by the cross – his mother, Mary of Magdala, Mary who was the mother of James the younger and Joseph and Salome – the women who used to follow us and look after us when we were in Galilee, they took note of the tomb and how the body had been laid. Then they returned to the city and prepared more spices and ointments. On the Sabbath day they rested, as the Law required. I watched as they left, then hugged the shadows as I crept my way back to Joseph's upper room.

Preventing the Resurrection?

Joseph and Nicodemus told us that next day chief priests and the Pharisees went in a body to Pilate and said to him, 'Your Excellency, we recall that this impostor said, while he was still alive, "After three days I shall rise again," therefore give the order to have the sepulcher kept secure until the third day, for fear his disciples come and steal him away and tell the people, "He has risen from the dead." This last piece of fraud would be worse than what went before.' Pilate said to them, 'You may have your guard; go and make all as secure as you know how.' So they went and made the sepulcher secure, putting seals on the stone and mounting a guard.

He has risen!

Mary Magdalen told the next part of the story: After the Sabbath, and towards dawn on the first day of the week, several of the women went to visit the sepulcher, wondering as they walked about the stone blocking the entrance. And suddenly there was a violent earthquake, an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled away the stone and sat on it. His face was like lightning, his robe white as snow. The guards were so shaken by fear of him that they were like dead men.

But the angel spoke and said to the women, "There is no need for you to be afraid. I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said he would. Come and see the place where he lay, then go quickly and tell his disciples, "He has risen from the dead and now he is going ahead of you to Galilee; that is where you will see him." Look! I have told you.'

Filled with awe and great joy the women came quickly away from the tomb and ran to tell us disciples who were all gathered in Joseph's upper room, but this story of theirs seemed pure nonsense, and we did not believe them.

Coverup

Nicodemus vouched for this coverup. While the women were on their way, some of the guards went off into the city to tell the chief priests all that had happened. These held a meeting with the elders and, after some discussion, handed a considerable sum of money to the soldiers with these instructions, "This is what you must say, "His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep." And should the governor come to hear of this, we undertake to put things right with him ourselves and to see that you do not get into trouble.' So they took the money and carried out their instructions, and to this day that is the story among the Jews.

Appearing to Mary Magdalen

The women had left Mary Magdalen standing outside near the tomb, weeping. She stayed there a long night, the whole sabbath and well into the following night,

till dawn in fact. Later she told us that as she wept in the breaking dawn, she stooped to look inside, and saw two angels in white sitting where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head, the other at the feet. They said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' 'They have taken my Lord away,' she replied, 'and I don't know where they have put him.'

As she said this she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, though she did not realize that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, *'Woman, why are you weeping? Who are you looking for?'* Supposing him to be the gardener, she said, 'Sir, if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and remove him.' Jesus said, *'Mary!'* She turned round then and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbuni!', which means Master, and fell at his feet. Jesus said to her, *'Do not cling to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to the brothers, and tell them: I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'* So she hurried to the Upper Room and told us disciples, 'I have seen the Lord,' and that he had said these things to her.

Convincing myself

This was too much, John and I set out to go to the tomb. We ran together, but John, running faster than me, reached the tomb first; he bent down and saw the linen cloths lying on the ground, but did not go in. Following him, I also came up, went into the tomb, saw the linen cloths lying on the ground and also the cloth that had been over his head; this was not with the linen cloths but rolled up in a place by itself. Now I believed, this was wonderful, till this moment neither John nor I had understood the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. We went joyfully back to the Upper Room and waited.

First Appearance to Disciples

In the evening of that same day, the first day of the week, the doors were locked in the room where the we disciples were, for fear of the Jews. Jesus came and stood among us. He said to us, *'Peace be with you,'* and, after saying this, he showed us his hands and his side. We disciples and our companions were filled with joy at seeing the Lord, and he said to us again, *'Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so am I sending you.'* After saying this he breathed on us and said: *Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven; if you retain anyone's sins, they are retained.*

The Road to Emmaus

We were to hear another story. That very same day, two of our disciples were on their way to a village called Emmaus, seven miles from Jerusalem, and they were talking together about all that had happened. And it happened that as they were talking together and discussing it, Jesus himself came up and walked by their side; but their eyes were prevented from recognizing him. He said to them, *'What are all these things that you are discussing as you walk along?'* They stopped, their faces downcast. Then one of them, called Cleopas, answered him, 'You must be the only person staying in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have been happening there these last few days.' He asked, *'What things?'* They answered, 'All about Jesus of Nazareth, who showed himself a prophet powerful in action and speech before God and the whole people; and how our chief priests and our leaders handed him over to be sentenced to death, and had him crucified. Our own hope had been that he would be the one to set Israel free.'

And this is not all, two whole days have now gone by since it all happened; and some women from our group have astounded us: they went to the tomb in the early morning, and when they could not find the body, they came back to tell us they had seen a vision of angels who declared he was alive. Some of our friends went to

the tomb and found everything exactly as the women had reported, but of him they saw nothing.'

Then he said to them, *'You foolish men! So slow to believe all that the prophets have said! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer before entering into his glory?'* Then, starting with Moses and going through all the prophets, he explained to them the passages throughout the scriptures that were about himself.

When they drew near to the village to which they were going, he made as if to go on; but they pressed him to stay with them saying, 'It is nearly evening, and the day is almost over.' So he went in to stay with them. Now while he was with them at table, he took the bread and said the blessing; then he broke it and handed it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized him; but he had vanished from their sight. Then they said to each other, 'Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road and explained the scriptures to us?'

They set out that instant and returned to Jerusalem. There they found us assembled together with our companions, and I said to them, 'The Lord has indeed risen and has appeared to some of us.' Then they told their story of what had happened on the road and how they had recognized him at the breaking of bread.

Second Appearance to Disciples

We were still talking about all this when Jesus himself stood among us and said to them, *'Peace be with you!'* In a state of alarm and fright, many of us still thought they were seeing a ghost. But he said to us, *'Why are you so agitated, and why are these doubts stirring in your hearts? See by my hands and my feet that it is I myself. Touch me and see for yourselves; a ghost has no flesh and bones as you can see I have.'* And as he said this, he showed us his hands and his feet. Our joy was so great that we still could barely believe it, many of us were still dumbfounded; so he said to us, *'Have you anything here to eat?'* And I offered him a piece of grilled

fish, which he took and ate before our eyes. Then he left though the doors remained locked.

Thomas was off by himself grieving. When he came in we said to him, “We have seen the Lord.” Thomas scoffed at us and said, “Unless I see the holes that the nails made in his hands and can put my finger into the holes they made, and unless I can put my hand into his side, I refuse to believe your nonsense.”

Third Appearance to Disciples

It was eight days later, we were all in the Upper Room again and Thomas was with us. The doors were always locked for fear of the Sanhedrin police but Jesus came in and stood among us. *“Peace be with you,”* he said. Then he spoke to Thomas whose face was white with the shock of seeing him, *“Put your finger here, look, here are my hands. Give me your hand, put it into my side. Do not be unbelieving any more, but be believing.”* At that, Thomas fell down at his feet exclaiming, “My Lord and my God.” Jesus said to him, *“You believe because you can see me. Blessed are those who have not seen, yet believe.”*

I did not condemn Thomas, Jesus’ rebuke was mild compared to what I deserved for my three times denial of He whom I knew to be the Son of God. I wondered how I could ask forgiveness, would it be given?

Then he told us, *‘This is what I meant when I said, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses, in the Prophets and in the Psalms, was destined to be fulfilled.’* And he said to us, *‘Go out to the whole world; proclaim the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned. These are the signs that will be associated with believers: in my name they will cast out devils; they will have the gift of tongues; they will pick up snakes in their hands and be unharmed should they drink deadly poison; they will lay their hands on the sick, who will recover.’*

He then opened our minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to us, *'So it is written that the Christ would suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that, in his name, repentance for the forgiveness of sins would be preached to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses to this. '*

Fourth Appearance to Disciples

I and the other ten disciples led our followers as we set out for Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had arranged to meet us. When we saw him we fell down before him, though some still hesitated, not me! Jesus came up and spoke to us. He said, *'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations; baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you. And look, I am with you always; yes, to the end of time.'*

Fifth Appearance to Disciples

A day later Jesus revealed himself to several of us by the sea of Tiberias. I had gone there with Thomas, Nathaniel, James and John and two more of the Twelve, now Eleven. I said to the others, “I am going fishing.” They all replied, “We are going with you.” We went out in the two boats but caught nothing all night, when it was light we saw a man standing on the shore, a stranger we thought. He called out to my boat, *“Haven’t you caught anything, friends?”* We called back, “No.” He called back, *“Throw your nets out to starboard and you’ll find something.”* I was too tired to argue so we threw the net out and then, amazingly, we could not haul it in because of the quantity of fish. John had better eyesight than me, maybe better faith also. He said to me, “It is the Lord.” I immediately tied my cloak around me and jumped into the water, this time I had no fear. I struggled ashore and fell down by him, he raised me up and smiled. My companions came on in the boat, towing the

net with the fish, they were only about a hundred yards from the shore. The other boat came to join them, all of the crew whooping with delight.

As soon as they came ashore we all saw there was some bread there and a charcoal fire with fish cooking on it. Jesus said to me, *"Bring me some of the fish you have caught."* I went aboard and dragged the net ashore, full of big fish, one hundred and fifty three of them; and I was surprised the net had not broken.

Jesus said to us, *"Come and have breakfast."* I knew he was the Lord, had spoken with him before the others arrived, but no one else was bold enough to ask, "Who are you?" We all knew quite well it was our Master. Jesus waited on us, we were too well schooled by now to object. He took the bread and gave it to us, the same with the fish.

Jesus forgives me

When we had eaten, my turn had come. Jesus said to me, *"Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these others do?"* I answered quietly, "Yes Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said to me, *"Feed my lambs."* A second time Jesus said to me, *"Simon, son of John, do you love me?"* I replied loudly, "Yes Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said to me, *"Feed my sheep."* I was overjoyed, I was being forgiven for my three times denial. For the third time Jesus said to me, *"Simon, son of John, do you love me."* With tears in my eyes, with my shame and guilt blowing away, I replied strongly, "Lord you know everything, you know that I love you." Jesus again said to me, *"Feed my sheep."*

And so I was forgiven. But Jesus was not finished. *"In all truth I tell you Simon, when you were young you put on your own belt and walked where you liked; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands and somebody else will put a belt round you and take you where you would rather not go."* I knew Jesus was talking

of my death, I would welcome it, hoping to make up for the cowardly way I had not supported him in his torture and death.

Jesus continued, *"And now I am sending upon you what the Father has promised. Go back to the city, then, until you are clothed with the power from on high."* We returned to Jerusalem and were soon joined by over five hundred of his disciples, both men and women.

Ascension

So, Jesus showed himself alive to us after his Passion by many appearances. For forty days he had continued to appear to us and tell us about the kingdom of God. While at table with us, he had told us to return to Jerusalem and to wait there for what the Father had promised. *'It is',* he had said, *'what you have heard me speak about: John baptized with water but, not many days from now, you are going to be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'*

Now having met together on a hill by Bethany, we asked him, 'Lord, has the time come for you to restore the kingdom to Israel?' He replied, *'It is not for you to know times or dates that the Father has decided by his own authority, but you will receive the power of the Holy Spirit which will come on you, and then you will be my witnesses not only in Jerusalem but throughout Judaea and Samaria, and indeed to earth's remotest end.'*

As he said this he was lifted up while we looked on, and a cloud took him from our sight. We were still staring into the sky as he went, when suddenly two men in white were standing beside us, and they said, 'Why are you Galileans standing here looking into the sky? This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will come back in the same way as you have seen him go to heaven.'

So from the Mount of Olives, as it is called, we went back to Jerusalem, a short distance away, no more than a Sabbath walk; and when we reached the city we went

to the upper room where we were staying; together with me there were John, his brother James and my brother Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James. son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Jude son of James. With one heart all of us joined constantly in prayer, together with some women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.

The Twelve Restored

We needed to address the traitor issue. I stood up to speak to the brothers -- there were about a hundred and twenty people in the congregation, 'Brothers,' I said, 'the passage of scripture had to be fulfilled in which the Holy Spirit, speaking through David, foretells the fate of Judas, who acted as guide to the men who arrested Jesus after being one of our number and sharing our ministry. As you know, he bought a plot of land with the money he was paid for his crime. He fell headlong and burst open, and all his entrails poured out. Everybody in Jerusalem heard about it and the plot came to be called "Bloody Acre", in our language Hakeldama.

Now in the Book of Psalms it says: 'Reduce his encampment to ruin and leave his tent unoccupied.' And again: 'Let someone else take over his office.' Out of the men who have been with us the whole time that the Lord Jesus was living with us, from the time when John was baptizing until the day when he was taken up from us, one must be appointed to serve with us as a witness to his resurrection.'

I called for nominations and we settled on two candidates, Joseph known as Barsabbas, whose surname was Justus, and Matthias. I led the prayer, 'Lord, you can read everyone's heart; show us therefore which of these two you have chosen to take over this ministry and apostolate, which Judas abandoned to go to his proper place.' We then drew lots for them, and as the lot fell to Matthias, he was listed as one of the twelve apostles.

Pentecost

Jesus had promised us the coming of a Spirit, I knew it would be soon.

When Pentecost day came round, we had all met together, when suddenly there came from heaven a sound as of a violent wind which filled the entire house in which we were sitting; and there appeared to us as tongues as of fire; these separated and came to rest on the head of each of us. We were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak different languages as the Spirit gave us the power to express ourselves.

Now there were devout men living in Jerusalem from every nation under heaven, and at this sound they all assembled, and each one was bewildered to hear one of us speaking his own language. They were amazed and astonished. 'Surely,' they said, 'all these men speaking are Galileans? How does it happen that each of us hears them in his own native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; people from Mesopotamia, Judaea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya round Cyrene; residents of Rome - Jews and proselytes alike -- Cretans and Arabs, we hear them preaching in our own language about the marvels of God.' Everyone was amazed and perplexed; they asked one another what it all meant. Some, however, laughed it off. 'They have been drinking too much new wine,' they said.

Then I stood up with the Eleven and addressed them in a loud voice: 'Men of Judaea, and all you who live in Jerusalem, make no mistake about this, but listen carefully to what I say. These men are not drunk, as you imagine; why, it is only the third hour of the day. On the contrary, this is what the prophet was saying: In the last days, the Lord declares, I shall pour out my Spirit on all humanity. Your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your young people shall see visions, your old people dream dreams. Even on the slaves, men and women, shall I pour out my Spirit. I will show portents in the sky above and signs on the earth below. The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before the day of

the Lord comes, that great and terrible Day. And all who call on the name of the Lord will be saved.

'Men of Israel, listen to what I am going to say: Jesus the Nazarene was a man commended to you by God by the miracles and portents and signs that God worked through him when he was among you, as you know. This man, who was put into your power by the deliberate intention and foreknowledge of God, you took and had crucified and killed by men outside the Law.

But God raised him to life, freeing him from the pangs of Hades; for it was impossible for him to be held in its power since, as David says of him: "I kept the Lord before my sight always, for with him at my right hand nothing can shake me. So my heart rejoiced my tongue delighted; my body, too, will rest secure, for you will not abandon me to Hades or allow your holy one to see corruption. You have taught me the way of life, you will fill me with joy in your presence."

Brothers, no one can deny that the patriarch David himself is dead and buried, his tomb is still with us. But since he was a prophet, and knew that God had sworn him an oath to make one of his descendants succeed him on the throne, he spoke with foreknowledge about the resurrection of the Christ: "He is the one who was not abandoned to Hades, and whose body did not see corruption." God raised this man Jesus to life and of that we are all witnesses. Now raised to the heights by God's right hand, he has received from the Father the Holy Spirit, who was promised, and what you see and hear is the outpouring of that Spirit. For David himself never went up to heaven, but yet he said: "The Lord declared to my Lord, take your seat at my right hand, till I have made your enemies your footstool." For this reason the whole House of Israel can be certain that the Lord and Christ whom God has made is this Jesus whom you crucified.

Hearing this, they were cut to the heart and said to me and the other apostles, 'What are we to do, brothers?' 'You must repent,' I answered, 'and every one of you

must be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise that was made is for you and your children, and for all those who are far away, for all those whom the Lord our God is calling to himself.'

I spoke to them for a long time using many other arguments, and I urged them, 'Save yourselves from this perverse generation.' Many accepted what I said and were baptized. That very day about three thousand were added to our number. These remained faithful to the teaching of we apostles, to the brotherhood, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers. And everyone was filled with awe as I and the other apostles worked many signs and miracles. Finally my faith was invincible, yet it was not I speaking and working miracles, no it was the Holy Spirit sent by Jesus who spoke and acted through me and the others.

Early Christian Community

As our community life matured, I and all who shared the faith owned everything in common; we sold our goods and possessions and distributed the proceeds among ourselves according to what each one needed. Each day, with one heart, we regularly went to the Temple but also met in our houses for the breaking of bread; we shared our food gladly and generously; we praised God and were looked up to by everyone. We were both orthodox Jews and followers of Jesus, a heavy burden. But day by day the Lord added to our community those destined to be saved.

Miracle Workers in the Name of Jesus

Once, when John and I were going up to the Temple for the prayers at the ninth hour, it happened that there was a man being carried along. He was a cripple from birth; and they used to put him down every day near the Temple entrance called the Beautiful Gate so that he could beg from the people going in. When this man saw John and me on our way into the Temple he begged from us. I, and John too, looked straight at him and I said, 'Look at us.' He turned to us expectantly, hoping to get

something from us, but I said, 'I have neither silver nor gold, but I will give you what I have: in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, walk!' Then I took him by the right hand and helped him to stand up. Instantly his feet and ankles became firm, he jumped up, stood, and began to walk, and he went with us into the Temple, walking and jumping and praising God.

Everyone could see him walking and praising God, and they recognized him as the man who used to sit begging at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple. They were all astonished and perplexed at what had happened to him. Everyone came running towards us in great excitement, to the Portico of Solomon, as it is called, where the man was still clinging to the two of us.

This was a too good an opportunity. When I saw the people gathering, I addressed them, 'Men of Israel, why are you so surprised at this? Why are you staring at us as though we had made this man walk by our own power or holiness? It is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our ancestors, who has glorified his servant Jesus whom you handed over and then disowned in the presence of Pilate after he had given his verdict to release him. It was you who accused the Holy and Upright One, you who demanded that a murderer should be released to you while you killed the prince of life. God, however, raised him from the dead, and to that fact we are witnesses; and it is the name of Jesus which, through faith in him, has brought back the strength of this man whom you see here and who is well known to you. It is faith in him that has restored this man to health, as you can all see.

Now I know, brothers, that neither you nor your leaders had any idea what you were really doing; but this was the way God carried out what he had foretold, when he said through all his prophets that his Christ would suffer. Now you must repent and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, and so that the Lord may send the time of comfort. Then he will send you the Christ he has predestined, that is

Jesus, whom heaven must keep till the universal restoration comes which God proclaimed, speaking through his holy prophets.

Moses, for example, said, "From among your brothers the Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me; you will listen to whatever he tells you. Anyone who refuses to listen to that prophet shall be cut off from the people." In fact, all the prophets that have ever spoken, from Samuel onwards, have predicted these days. You are the heirs of the prophets, the heirs of the covenant God made with your ancestors when he told Abraham, "All the nations of the earth will be blessed in your descendants". It was for you in the first place that God raised up his servant and sent him to bless you as every one of you turns from his wicked ways.

Our First Arrest

While I was still talking to the people the priests came up to us, accompanied by the captain of the Temple and the Sadducees police. They were extremely annoyed at us teaching the people the resurrection from the dead by proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus. They arrested us, and, as it was already late, they kept us in prison till the next day. But many of those who had listened to our message became believers; the total number of men had now risen to something like five thousand.

The next day the rulers, elders and scribes held a meeting in Jerusalem with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, Jonathan, Alexander and all the members of the high-priestly families. They made us prisoners stand in the middle and began to interrogate us, 'By what power, and by whose name have you men done this?'

Then I, but not I, rather the Holy Spirit, addressed them, 'Rulers of the people, and elders! If you are questioning us today about an act of kindness to a cripple and asking us how he was healed, you must know, all of you, and the whole people of Israel, that it is by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified and God raised from the dead, by this name and by no other that this man stands before you cured. This is the stone which you, the builders, rejected but which has

become the cornerstone. Only in him is there salvation, for of all the names in the world given to men, this is the only one by which we can be saved.'

They were astonished at the fearlessness shown by us, thinking that we were uneducated laymen but they recognized us as associates of Jesus. When they saw the man who had been cured standing by our side, they could find no answer. So they ordered us to stand outside while the Sanhedrin had a private discussion, but Nicodemus and Joseph were both there. 'What are we going to do with these men?' they asked one another. 'It is obvious to everybody in Jerusalem that a notable miracle has been worked through them, and we cannot deny it. But to stop the whole thing spreading any further among the people, let us threaten them against ever speaking to anyone in this name again.' So they called us in and gave us a warning on no account to make statements or to teach in the name of Jesus.

But we retorted, 'You must judge whether in God's eyes it is right to listen to you and not to God. We cannot stop proclaiming what we have seen and heard.' The court repeated the threats and then released us, they could not think of any way to punish us since all the people were giving glory to God for what had happened. The man who had been miraculously cured was over forty years old.

Giving Thanks to God

As soon as we were released we went to the community and told them everything the chief priests and elders had said to us. When all heard it they lifted up their voices to God with one heart. 'Master,' I prayed aloud, 'it is you who made sky and earth and sea, and everything in them; it is you who said through the Holy Spirit and speaking through our ancestor David, your servant: Why this uproar among the nations, this impotent muttering of the peoples? Kings on earth take up position, princes plot together against the Lord and his Anointed.

This is what has come true: in this very city Herod and Pontius Pilate plotted together with the gentile nations and the peoples of Israel, against your holy

servant Jesus whom you anointed, to bring about the very thing that you in your strength and your wisdom had predetermined should happen. And now, Lord, take note of their threats and help your servants to proclaim your message with all fearlessness, by stretching out your hand to heal and to work miracles and marvels through the name of your holy servant Jesus.'

As we all prayed, the house where we were assembled rocked. From this time we were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to proclaim the word of God fearlessly.

Communal Sharing

I praised God that the whole group of believers was united, heart and soul; no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, as everything they owned was held in common. We apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus with great power, and we were all accorded great respect.

I made sure none of our members was ever in want, as all those who owned land or houses would sell them, and bring the money from the sale of them, to present it to the apostles; it was then distributed to any who might be in need. There was a Levite of Cypriot origin called Joseph whom the apostles surnamed Barnabas (which means 'son of encouragement'). He owned a piece of land and he sold it and brought the money and presented it to us apostles. Those episodes were gratifying but even Jesus had an avaricious Judas and so did we.

There was another man called Ananias. He and his wife, Sapphira, agreed to sell a property, but with his wife's connivance he kept back part of the price and brought the rest and presented it to us apostles. I was enraged when I heard about this, I said to him, 'Ananias, how can Satan have so possessed you that you should lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land? While you still owned the land, wasn't it yours to keep, and after you had sold it wasn't the money yours to do with as you liked? What put this scheme into your mind? You have been lying not

to men, but to God.' When he heard this Ananias fell down dead. And a great fear came upon everyone present. I was resolute, this was God's will.

The younger men got up, wrapped up the body, carried it out and buried it. About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had taken place. I challenged her, 'Tell me, was this the price you sold the land for?' 'Yes,' she said, 'that was the price.' I then said, 'Why did you and your husband agree to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test? Listen! At the door are the footsteps of those who have buried your husband; they will carry you out, too.' Instantly she dropped dead at my feet.

When the young men came in they found she was dead, and they carried her out and buried her by the side of her husband. And a great fear came upon the whole church and on all who heard it. I was humbled by the power God had given me.

Working Miracles, Preaching the Good News

I and all the apostles worked many signs and miracles among the people. One in heart, we all used to meet in the Portico of Solomon. No one else dared to join us, but the people were loud in their praise and the numbers of men and women who came to believe in the Lord increased steadily.

Many signs and wonders were worked among the people at the hands of us apostles so that the sick were taken out into the streets and laid on beds and sleeping-mats in the hope that at least my shadow might fall across some of them as I went past. People even came crowding in from the towns round about Jerusalem, bringing with them their sick and those tormented by unclean spirits, and all of them were cured. It would have been easy for me to grow proud of my abilities to cure but I remembered how I could not walk unaided on the sea of Galilee and how I denied my Lord three times in his passion.

Finally I had learned humility.

Second Arrest

We were warned by Nicodemus but just let it happen. The high priest intervened with all his supporters from the party of the Sadducees. Filled with jealousy, they arrested all of us apostles and had us put in the public gaol. But at night the angel of the Lord opened the prison gates and said as he led us out, 'Go and take up position in the Temple, and tell the people all about this new Life.' We did as we were told; we went into the Temple at dawn and began to preach.

Nicodemus told us of their dilemma, for when the high priest arrived, he and his supporters convened the Sanhedrin -- this was the full Senate of Israel -- and sent to the gaol for us to be brought. But when the officials arrived at the prison they found we were not inside, so they went back and reported, 'We found the gaol securely locked and the warders on duty at the gates, but when we unlocked the door we found no one inside.' When the captain of the Temple and the chief priests heard this news they wondered what could be happening. Then a man arrived with fresh news. 'Look!' he said, 'the men you imprisoned are in the Temple. They are standing there preaching to the people.'

The captain went with his men and fetched us -- though not by force, for they were afraid that the people might stone them. When they had brought us in to face the Sanhedrin, the high priest demanded an explanation. 'We gave you a strong warning', he said, 'not to preach in this name, and what have you done? You have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and seem determined to fix the guilt for this man's death on us.'

In reply I said, 'Obedience to God comes before obedience to men; it was the God of our ancestors who raised up Jesus, whom you executed by hanging on a tree. By his own right hand God has now raised him up to be leader and Savior, to give repentance and forgiveness of sins through him to Israel. We are witnesses to this, we and the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him.'

This so infuriated them that they wanted to put us to death. We were united in our determination to die for Jesus before we would desist from preaching his good news. One member of the Sanhedrin, however, a Pharisee called Gamaliel, who was a teacher of the Law respected by the whole people, stood up and asked to have us taken outside for a time. Then he addressed the Sanhedrin, 'Men of Israel, be careful how you deal with these people. Some time ago there arose Theudas. He claimed to be someone important, and collected about four hundred followers; but when he was killed, all his followers scattered and that was the end of them. And then there was Judas the Galilean, at the time of the census, who attracted crowds of supporters; but he was killed too, and all his followers dispersed. What I suggest, therefore, is that you leave these men alone and let them go. If this enterprise, this movement of theirs, is of human origin it will break up of its own accord; but if it does in fact come from God you will be unable to destroy it. Take care not to find yourselves fighting against God.'

His advice was accepted; and they had us apostles called in, gave orders for us to be flogged, warned us not to speak in the name of Jesus and released us. And so we left the presence of the Sanhedrin, glad to have had the honor of suffering humiliation and pain for the sake of the name of our Lord. It would not be the last time we would suffer for him. We ignored the threats of the Sanhedrin, every day we went on ceaselessly teaching and proclaiming the good news of Christ Jesus, both in the temple and in private houses.

Appointment of Seven Presbyters

About this time, when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenists made a complaint to me against the Hebrews: in the daily distribution their own widows were being overlooked. So I consulted the others and we Twelve called a full meeting of the disciples and I addressed them, 'It would not be right for us to neglect the word of God so as to give out food; you, brothers, must select from among

yourselves seven men of good reputation, filled with the Spirit and with wisdom, to whom we can hand over this duty. We ourselves will continue to devote ourselves to prayer and to the service of the word.' The whole assembly approved of this proposal and elected Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, together with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus of Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these seven presbyters to us apostles, and after prayer we laid our hands on them.

I was by now relentless, the word of the Lord continued to spread: the number of disciples in Jerusalem was greatly increased, and a large group of priests made their submission to the faith.

First Martyr

We were to suffer our first martyrdom. The presbyter, Stephen, was filled with grace and power and began to work miracles and great signs among the people. Then certain people came forward to debate with Stephen, some from Cyrene and Alexandria who were members of the synagogue called the Synagogue of Freedmen, and others from Cilicia and Asia. They found they could not stand up against him because of his wisdom and the Spirit who prompted what he said. So they procured some men to say, 'We heard him using blasphemous language against Moses and against God.'

Having turned the people against him, they took Stephen by surprise, and arrested him and brought him before the Sanhedrin. There they put up false witnesses to say, 'This man is always making speeches against this Holy Place and the Law. We have heard him say that Jesus, this Nazarene, is going to destroy this Place and alter the traditions that Moses handed down to us.' The members of the Sanhedrin all looked intently at Stephen, and his face appeared to them like the face of an angel. The high priest asked, 'Is this true?'

Joseph and Nicodemus, they who had taken Jesus down from the cross, were powerless to stem the tide of hatred that washed over Stephen as he took the members of the Sanhedrin through a long history of the Jews finishing with:

'You stubborn people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears. You are always resisting the Holy Spirit, just as your ancestors used to do. Can you name a single prophet your ancestors never persecuted? They killed those who foretold the coming of the Upright One, and now you have become his betrayers, his murderers. In spite of being given the Law through angels, you have not kept it.'

They were infuriated when they heard this, and ground their teeth at him. But Stephen, filled with the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at God's right hand. 'Look! I can see heaven thrown open,' he said, 'and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God.' All the members of the council shouted out and stopped their ears with their hands; then they made a concerted rush at him, thrust him out of the city and stoned him. The witnesses put down their clothes at the feet of a young man called Saul. As they were stoning him, Stephen said in invocation, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' Then he knelt down and said aloud, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them.' And with these words he fell asleep. Saul approved of the killing.

Persecution led by Saul

That day a bitter persecution started against the church in Jerusalem, and everyone except we apostles scattered to the country districts of Judaea and Samaria. Saul began doing great harm to the church; he went from house to house arresting both men and women and sending them to prison.

Once the faithful had scattered, they went from place to place preaching the good news. One of the presbyters, Philip, went to a Samaritan town and proclaimed the Christ to them. The people unanimously welcomed the message Philip preached, because they had heard of the miracles he worked and because they

saw them for themselves. For unclean spirits came shrieking out of many who were possessed, and several paralytics and cripples were cured. As a result there was great rejoicing in that town.

Now a man called Simon had for some time been practicing magic arts in the town and astounded the Samaritan people. He had given it out that he was someone momentous, and everyone believed in him; eminent citizens and ordinary people alike had declared, 'He is the divine power that is called Great.' He had this following because for a considerable period they had been astounded by his wizardry.

But when they came to accept Philip's preaching of the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women, and even Simon himself became a believer. After his baptism Simon went round constantly with Philip and was astonished when he saw the wonders and great miracles that took place.

When we apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, John and I went down there and prayed for them to receive the Holy Spirit, for as yet he had not come down on any of them: they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then we laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

When Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered us money, with the words, 'Give me the same power so that anyone I lay my hands on will receive the Holy Spirit.' I answered him, 'May your silver be lost forever, and you with it, for thinking that money could buy what God has given for nothing! You have no share, no part, in this, God can see how your heart is warped. Repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that this scheme of yours may be forgiven; it is plain to me that you are held in the bitterness of gall and the chains of sin.' Simon replied, 'Pray to the Lord for me yourselves so that none of the things you have spoken about may happen to me.' Having given our

testimony and proclaimed the word of the Lord, we went back to Jerusalem, preaching the good news to a number of Samaritan villages.

Saul's Conversion

Meanwhile Saul was still breathing threats to slaughter the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked for letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus, that would authorize him to arrest and take to Jerusalem any followers of the Way, men or women, that he might find.

Saul would tell us of his conversion. While he was travelling to Damascus and approaching the city, suddenly a light from heaven shone all round him. He fell to the ground, and then he heard a voice saying, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' 'Who are you, Lord?' he asked, and the answer came, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. Get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you are to do.'

The men travelling with Saul stood there speechless, for though they heard the voice they could see no one. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing at all, and they had to lead him into Damascus by the hand. For three days he was without his sight and took neither food nor drink.

There was a disciple in Damascus called Ananias, and he had a vision in which the Lord said to him, 'Ananias!' When he replied, 'Here I am, Lord,' the Lord said, 'Get up and go to Straight Street and ask at the house of Judas for someone called Saul, who comes from Tarsus. At this moment he is praying, and has seen a man called Ananias coming in and laying hands on him to give him back his sight.'

But in response, Ananias said, 'Lord, I have heard from many people about this man and all the harm he has been doing to your holy people in Jerusalem. He has come here with a warrant from the chief priests to arrest everybody who invokes your name.' The Lord replied, 'Go, for this man is my chosen instrument to bring my

name before gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; I myself will show him how much he must suffer for my name.'

Then Ananias went. He entered the house, and laid his hands on Saul and said, 'Brother Saul, I have been sent by the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, so that you may recover your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.' It was as though scales fell away from Saul's eyes and immediately he was able to see again. So he got up and was baptized, and after taking some food he regained his strength.

After Saul had spent only a few days with the disciples in Damascus, he began preaching in the synagogues, 'Jesus is the Son of God.' All his hearers were amazed, and said, 'Surely, this is the man who did such damage in Jerusalem to the people who invoke this name, and who came here for the sole purpose of arresting them to have them tried by the chief priests?'

Saul's power increased steadily, and he was able to throw the Jewish colony at Damascus into complete confusion by the way he demonstrated that Jesus was the Christ. Some time passed, and the Jews worked out a plot to kill him, but news of it reached Saul. They were keeping watch at the gates day and night in order to arrest him, but the disciples took him by night and let him down from the wall, lowering him in a basket.

When he got to Jerusalem he tried to join us disciples, but we were all afraid of him; we could not believe he was really a disciple of Jesus. Barnabas, however, took charge of him, introduced him to us apostles, and explained how the Lord had appeared to him and spoken to him on his journey, and how he had preached fearlessly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. Saul now started to go round with us in Jerusalem, preaching fearlessly in the name of the Lord. But after he had spoken to the Hellenists and argued with them, they became determined to kill him.

When we learned this, a few of us took him to Caesarea and sent him off from there to Tarsus. The churches throughout Judaea, Galilee and Samaria were now left

in peace, building themselves up and living in the fear of the Lord; encouraged by the Holy Spirit, they continued to grow.

My Missionary Journey

I became an itinerant preacher in the countries to the north. I visited one place after another and eventually came to God's holy people living down in Lydda. There I found a man called Aeneas, a paralytic who had been bedridden for eight years. I said to him, 'Aeneas, Jesus Christ cures you, get up and make your bed.' Aeneas got up immediately; everybody who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they were converted to the Lord.

At Jaffa there was a disciple called Tabitha, or in Greek, Dorcas, who never tired of doing good or giving to those in need. But it happened that at this time she became ill and died, and they washed her and laid her out in an upper room. Lydda is not far from Jaffa, so when the disciples heard that I was there, they sent two men to urge me, 'Come to us without delay.' I went back with them immediately, and on my arrival they took me to the upper room, where all the widows stood round me in tears, showing me tunics and other clothes Dorcas had made when she was with them. I sent everyone out of the room and knelt down and prayed. Then I turned to the dead woman and said, 'Tabitha, stand up.' She opened her eyes, looked at me and sat up. I helped her to her feet, then called in the members of the congregation and widows and showed them she was alive.

Christianity is for the Gentiles!

The whole of Jaffa heard about it and many believed in the Lord. I stayed on some time in Jaffa, lodging with a leather-tanner called Simon. One of the centurions of the Italica cohort stationed in Caesarea was called Cornelius. He and the whole of his household were devout and God-fearing, and he gave generously to Jewish causes and prayed constantly to God. One day at about the ninth hour he had a vision in which he distinctly saw the angel of God come into his house and call out to him,

'Cornelius!' He stared at the vision in terror and exclaimed, 'What is it, Lord?' The angel answered, 'Your prayers and charitable gifts have been accepted by God. Now you must send some men to Jaffa and fetch a man called Simon, known as Peter, who is lodging with Simon the tanner whose house is by the sea.' When the angel who said this had gone, Cornelius called two of the slaves and a devout soldier of his staff, told them all that had happened, and sent them off to Jaffa.

Next day, while they were still on their journey and had only a short distance to go before reaching the town, I went to the housetop at about the sixth hour to say my prayers. I felt hungry and was looking forward to my meal, but before it was ready I fell into a trance and saw heaven thrown open and something like a big sheet being let down to earth by its four corners; it contained every kind of animal, reptile and bird. A voice then said to me, 'Now, Peter, kill and eat!' But I answered, 'Certainly not, Lord; I have never yet eaten anything profane or unclean.' Again, a second time, the voice spoke to me, 'What God has made clean, you have no right to call profane.' This was repeated three times, and then suddenly the container was drawn up to heaven again.

I was still at a loss over the meaning of the vision I had seen, when the men sent by Cornelius arrived. They had asked where Simon's house was and they were now standing at the door, calling out to know if the Simon known as Peter was lodging there. While my mind was still on the vision, the Spirit told me, 'Look! Some men have come to see you. Hurry down, and do not hesitate to return with them; it was I who told them to come.' I went down and said to them, 'I am the man you are looking for; why have you come?' They said, 'The centurion Cornelius, who is an upright and God-fearing man, highly regarded by the entire Jewish people, was told by God through a holy angel to send for you and bring you to his house and to listen to what you have to say.'

So I asked them in and gave them lodging. Next day, I was ready to go off with them, accompanied by some of the brothers from Jaffa. We reached Caesarea the following day, and Cornelius was waiting for us. He had asked his relations and close friends to be there, and as I reached the house Cornelius went out to meet me, fell at my feet and did me reverence. But I helped him up. 'Stand up,' I said, 'after all, I am only a man!' Talking together we went in to meet all the people assembled there, and I said to them, 'You know it is forbidden for Jews to mix with people of another race and visit them; but God has made it clear to me that I must not call anyone profane or unclean. That is why I made no objection to coming when I was sent for; but I should like to know exactly why you sent for me.'

Cornelius replied, 'At this time three days ago I was in my house saying the prayers for the ninth hour, when I suddenly saw a man in front of me in shining robes. He said, "Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your charitable gifts have not been forgotten by God; so now you must send to Jaffa and fetch Simon known as Peter who is lodging in the house of Simon the tanner, by the sea." So I sent for you at once, and you have been kind enough to come. Here we all are, assembled in front of you to hear all the instructions God has given you.'

Then I addressed them, 'I now really understand', I said, 'that God has no favorites, but that anybody of any nationality who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. 'God sent his word to the people of Israel, and it was to them that the good news of peace was brought by Jesus Christ -- he is the Lord of all.

You know what happened all over Judaea, how Jesus of Nazareth began in Galilee, after John had been preaching baptism. God had anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and because God was with him, Jesus went about doing good and curing all who had fallen into the power of the devil. Now we are witnesses to everything he did throughout the countryside of Judaea and in Jerusalem itself: and they killed him by hanging him on a tree, yet on the third day God raised him

to life and allowed him to be seen, not by the whole people but only by certain witnesses that God had chosen beforehand.

Now we are those witnesses - we have eaten and drunk with him after his resurrection from the dead - and he has ordered us to proclaim this to his people and to bear witness that God has appointed him to judge everyone, alive or dead. It is to him that all the prophets bear this witness: that all who believe in Jesus will have their sins forgiven through his name.'

While I was still speaking the Holy Spirit came down on all the listeners. Jewish believers who had accompanied me were all astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit should be poured out on gentiles too, since they could hear them speaking strange languages and proclaiming the greatness of God. I myself then said, 'Could anyone refuse the water of baptism to these people, now they have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?' I then gave orders for them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

Afterwards they begged me to stay on for some days. The apostles and the brothers in Judaea heard that gentiles too had accepted the word of God, and when I came up to Jerusalem the circumcised believers protested to me and said, 'So you have been visiting the uncircumcised and eating with them!' In reply I gave them the details point by point, 'One day, when I was in the town of Jaffa,' I began, 'I fell into a trance as I was praying and had a vision of something like a big sheet being let down from heaven by its four corners. This sheet came right down beside me. I looked carefully into it and saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, reptiles, and birds of heaven. Then I heard a voice that said to me, "Now, Peter, kill and eat!" But I answered, "Certainly not, Lord; nothing profane or unclean has ever crossed my lips." And a second time the voice spoke from heaven, "What God has made clean, you have no right to call profane." This was repeated three times, before the whole of it was drawn up to heaven again.

Just at that moment, three men stopped outside the house where we were staying; they had been sent from Caesarea to fetch me, and the Spirit told me to have no hesitation about going back with them. The six brothers here came with me as well, and we entered the man's house. He told us he had seen an angel standing in his house who said, "Send to Jaffa and fetch Simon known as Peter; he has a message for you that will save you and your entire household." I had scarcely begun to speak when the Holy Spirit came down on them in the same way as it came on us at the beginning, and I remembered that the Lord had said, "John baptized with water, but you will baptize with the Holy Spirit." I realized then that God was giving them the identical gift he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ; and who was I to stand in God's way?'

This account satisfied them, and they gave glory to God, saying, 'God has clearly granted to the gentiles too the repentance that leads to life.' As time passed I heard that those who had scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen travelled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, but they proclaimed the message only to Jews. But some of them, however, who came from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch where they started preaching also to the Greeks, proclaiming the good news of the Lord Jesus to them. The Lord helped them, and a great number believed and were converted to the Lord.

Barnabas recruits Paul

The news of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem and we sent Barnabas out to Antioch. As he reported, he was glad to see for himself that God had given grace, and he urged them all to remain faithful to the Lord with heartfelt devotion; for he was a good man, filled with the Holy Spirit and with faith. A large number of people were won over to the Lord. Returning brethren told us that Barnabas then left for Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. I was told they stayed together in that church a whole year,

instructing a large number of people. It was at Antioch that we disciples were first called 'Christians'.

Third Arrest

More trouble loomed, Herod started persecuting us. He had James the brother of John beheaded, and when he saw that this pleased the Jews he went on to arrest me as well. As it was during the days of Unleavened Bread that he had arrested me, he put me in prison, assigning four sections of four soldiers each to guard me, meaning to try me in public after the Passover. All the time I was under guard the church prayed to God for me unremittingly.

On the night before Herod was to try me, I was sleeping between two soldiers, fastened with two chains, while guards kept watch at the main entrance to the prison. Then suddenly an angel of the Lord stood there, and the cell was filled with light. He tapped me on the side and woke me. 'Get up!' he said, 'Hurry!' - and the chains fell from my hands. The angel then said, 'Put on your belt and sandals.' After I had done this, the angel next said, 'Wrap your cloak round you and follow me.' I followed him out, but had no idea that what the angel did was all happening in reality, I thought I was seeing a vision. We passed through the first guard post and then the second and reached the iron gate leading to the city. This opened of its own accord, we went through it and had walked the whole length of one street when suddenly the angel left me.

It was only then that I came to myself. And I said to myself, 'Now I know it is all true. The Lord really did send his angel to save me from Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting.' As soon as I realized this I went straight to the house of Mary the mother of John Mark, where a number of people had assembled and were praying. I knocked at the outside door and a servant called Rhoda came to answer it. She recognized my voice and was so overcome with joy that, instead of opening the door, she ran inside with the news that I was standing at the main

entrance. They said to her, 'You are out of your mind,' but she insisted that it was true. Then they said, 'It must be his angel!'

I, meanwhile, was still knocking. When they opened the door, they were amazed to see that it really was me. I raised his hand for silence and described to them how the Lord had led me out of prison. I added, 'Tell James and the brothers.' Then I left and went into hiding.

As you can imagine, when daylight came there was a great commotion among the soldiers, who could not figure out what had become of me. Herod put out an unsuccessful search for me; he had the guards questioned, and before leaving Judaea to take up residence in Caesarea he gave orders for their execution.

The Lord would make Herod pay for his treatment of me. Herod was on bad terms with the Tyrians and Sidonians, yet they sent a joint deputation which managed to enlist the support of Blastus, the king's chamberlain, and through him negotiated a treaty, since their country depended for its food supply on the king's territory. A day was fixed, and Herod, wearing his robes of state and seated on a throne, began to make a speech to them. The people acclaimed him with, 'It is a god speaking, not a man!' and at that moment the angel of the Lord struck him down, because he had not given the glory to God. He was eaten away by worms and died.

Mission of Paul and Barnabas to the Gentiles

The word of God continued to spread and to gain followers. Barnabas and Saul completed their task at Jerusalem and came back to meet with me, bringing John Mark with them. In the church at Antioch the following were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen, who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

One day while they were offering worship to the Lord and keeping a fast, the Holy Spirit said, 'I want Barnabas and Saul set apart for the work to which I have called them.' So it was that after fasting and prayer they laid their hands on them and sent

them off. So these two, sent on their mission by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and from there set sail for Cyprus. They landed at Salamis and proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews; John acted as their assistant.

Council of Jerusalem

But soon a broad dissension arose in our own ranks. I sent messengers all over the provinces we had taught in, telling all to come to Jerusalem for some who had come down from Judea were instructing the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the Mosaic practice, you cannot be saved.”* Because there arose no little dissension and debate by Paul and Barnabas with this group from Judea, it was decided that Paul, Barnabas, and many others should go up to Jerusalem to have me lead the Apostles in deciding this question.

Accordingly, Paul and Barnabas were sent on their journey by their church, and passed through Phoenicia and Samaria telling of the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the brothers. When they arrived in Jerusalem, they were welcomed by me and the other apostles and the presbyters. I arranged a meeting of everyone who had come to Jerusalem. I asked Paul and Barnabas to report their mission to the gentiles and what God had done with them. But some from the party of the Pharisees who had become believers stood up and said, “It is necessary to circumcise them and direct them to observe the Mosaic law.”* We apostles and the presbyters met together to see about this matter. I could see Paul was restraining himself with great difficulty.

After much debate had taken place, I got up and said to them, “My brothers, you are well aware that from early days God made his choice among you that through my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God, who knows the heart, bore witness by granting them the holy Spirit just as he did us. He made no distinction between us and them, for by faith he purified their hearts. Why, then, are you now putting God to the test by placing on the shoulders of the

disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear? On the contrary, we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they.”

The whole assembly fell silent, and they listened while Paul and Barnabas described more of the signs and wonders God had worked among the Gentiles through them.

After they had fallen silent, James responded, “My brothers, listen to me. Peter has described how God first concerned himself with acquiring from among the Gentiles a people for his name. The words of the prophets agree with this, as is written: ‘After this I shall return and rebuild the fallen hut of David; from its ruins I shall rebuild it and raise it up again, so that the rest of humanity may seek out the Lord, even all the Gentiles on whom my name is invoked. Thus says the Lord who accomplishes these things, known from of old.’

It is my judgment, therefore, that we ought to stop troubling the Gentiles who turn to God, but tell them by letter to avoid pollution from idols, unlawful marriage, the meat of strangled animals, and blood.

Then we apostles and presbyters, in agreement with the whole church, decided to choose representatives and to send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. The ones chosen were Judas, who was called Barsabbas, and Silas, leaders among the brothers.

This is the letter delivered by them: “The apostles and the presbyters, your brothers, to the brothers in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia of Gentile origin: greetings. Since we have heard that some of our number without any mandate from us, have upset you with their teachings and disturbed your peace of mind, we have with one accord decided to choose representatives and to send them to you along with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, who have dedicated their lives to the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. So we are sending Judas and Silas who will also convey this same

message by word of mouth: ‘It is the decision of the holy Spirit and of us not to place on you any burden beyond these necessities, namely, to abstain from meat sacrificed to idols, from blood, from meats of strangled animals, and from unlawful marriage. If you keep free of these, you will be doing what is right. Farewell.’

And so they were sent on their journey. Upon their arrival in Antioch they called the assembly together and delivered the letter. When the people read it, they were delighted with the exhortation. Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, exhorted and strengthened the brothers with many words. After they had spent some time there, they were sent off with greetings of peace from the brothers to those who had commissioned them. But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and proclaiming with many others the word of the Lord.

I Fall Out With Paul

I continued to preach in the towns and cities of Galatia, but I met with Saul’s wrath. He wrote a letter to all the Galatian churches and I quote:

“When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face because he clearly was wrong. For, until some people came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to draw back and separated himself, because he was afraid of the circumcised. And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not on the right road in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of everyone: If you, though a Jew, are living like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?”

I met with Paul and agreed that my behavior was confusing to the new Gentile converts. Paul and I had a meal with twelve of them the next day to set an example. I also wrote a letter¹ that week to all the churches I had founded or visited. I knew I

¹ See Appendix

did not have Paul's gift of writing but I did my best, knowing it was not really my thoughts being written but those of the Spirit.

Paul, my friend

I found out that Paul was in house arrest in Rome. I decided to visit him there, I would preach to the Jews, he would, if possible, preach to the gentiles. I was concerned for Paul, he had been brought up a strict, very orthodox Jew and that upbringing was hard to shake. I never did ask him what he thought of Jesus's many joustings with the scribes and Pharisees over trivial issues like plucking handfuls of grain and curing the blind on the Sabbath, maybe I needed to.

I was in Corinth when one of his letters was read to the assembly. I felt for him that he needed to write this way, and I quote, "Even if I were not an apostle to others, I should still be an apostle to you who are the seal of my apostolate in the Lord. My answer to those who want to interrogate me is this: Have we not every right to eat and drink? And the right to take a Christian woman around with us like all the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Peter? Are Barnabas and I the only ones who are not allowed to stop working?" He went on to say about marriage and being supported by the Community, "I myself have never exercised these rights and I am not writing all this to secure this treatment for myself. I would rather die than let anyone take away something I can boast of."

So I went to meet with Paul and we soon became good friends, having many a discussion of liberalism versus orthodoxy. In effect I never left Rome, it proved to be a fertile ground for the spread of Christianity as it was now called. I again wrote a letter² to all the Churches, like Paul I was deeply concerned about the emergence of many false prophets and teachers. Our churches were very young and powerful voices could easily leave the new converts astray.

² See Appendix

My Death

Some years passed, there was a new emperor now, a man who thought he was a god. His name was Nero. As he lay on his couch on the roof of his palace he could see and smell the slums of Rome in the distance. So, he ordered them burned and hundreds of people died. A stupid act, that of a madman, he giggled and fiddled as he watched the flames and heard the screams. But a revolution was soon building, his throne was in jeopardy, he needed a scapegoat. First it was to be the Jews but they deflected the blame onto this new sect, the Christians. Nero had dozens of us imprisoned, hundreds more fled the city.

I was one of the first to be arrested, Paul shortly afterwards in a distant city and brought to Rome. We lay in filth in a dark, damp dungeon for months. Then Nero remembered us. We were taken to the Appian way so all travelers to Rome could learn the lesson that Nero was god and not some peasant from Judea.

And so my Lord's prediction came true: *"In all truth I tell you Simon, when you were young you put on your own belt and walked where you liked; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands and somebody else will put a belt round you and take you where you would rather not go."*

Paul was executed by beheading – he was a Roman citizen so awarded that fate. I was to be crucified. I asked to be nailed to a cross upside down, I did not merit the same treatment as my Lord.

They could kill Paul and me, but Christianity was here to stay. There is only one God and Nero certainly is not Him. As for me, I knew my Master was awaiting me.

Appendix: Letters of Peter

First Letter of Peter

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Greetings from Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to my fellow Jews (of the diaspora that followed the exile into Babylon), to all those in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, to all of you known before you were born by God the Father, to all of you sanctified by the Spirit, to all of you who have chosen obedience to Jesus Christ and been sprinkled with his blood; May grace and peace be yours in abundance.

Join me in offering glory and blessings to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who in his great mercy gave us salvation, a new birth and a living hope, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. He has promised us an inheritance that is imperishable, pure and unfading, awaiting us in heaven and kept secure there by the power of God. An inheritance, safeguarded by our faith, that will be revealed in the last days.

In this you should rejoice, although for a little time you may have to suffer through various trials. Just as the perishableness of gold is tested by fire, so the genuineness of your faith must prove to be for the praise, honor and glory of Jesus Christ. It is genuine if, although you have not seen him you love him, although you do not see him now yet you believe in him. If so, you should rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy as you strive for the goal of your faith, namely, the salvation of your souls.

Therefore, gird up the loins of your mind, live with moderation and self-restraint, set your hopes completely on the gift of heaven revealed to you by Jesus Christ. Like obedient children, do not let your actions be controlled by the desires of your former ignorance but, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in every aspect of your conduct, for it is written, “Be holy because I am holy.”

Now since you call “Father” him who judges each of us impartially according to our good works, conduct yourself with reverence during your time on this earth. Realize that you were ransomed from your former futile way of life as handed onto you by your ancestors. You were not ransomed by perishable things like silver and gold but by the precious blood of Christ. He has been known since the foundation of the world but he has been revealed to you in these days, to you who believe God raised him from the dead and gave him glory. Your faith and hope are in the Father and the Son, buttressed by the Spirit.

Love one another intensely from a pure heart. You have purified yourselves by obedience to the truth of Christ, purified yourselves for sincere mutual love. You have been born anew, not from perishable but from imperishable seed, through the word of God which is living and forever. For “All flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers wilt, but the Word of the Lord remains forever.” This is the Word that has been preached to you.

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Therefore, rid yourselves of the desire to do evil to others, to be sly and hiding under a false appearance, to undermine others, to feel a resentful longing because of their possessions or good fortune. Like a newborn baby, shed your sly and envious ways and desire the milk of salvation. Then you will taste that the Lord is sweet.

Just as the Lord when he came was rejected by men but chosen and made honorable by God as the foundation stone of a spiritual house, of a holy priesthood, so may you be living stones for that same spiritual house. Thus scripture says: Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect and precious, and he who believes in him shall not be perplexed and confused.

To you who believe, Jesus Christ is an honor but to them that do not believe, he is the stone that their builders rejected, a stone that will cause them to stumble and be for them a rock of scandal. But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood,

a holy nation, a people bought with his blood. He has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light that you may sing about his supreme virtues. In previous times you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not obtained his mercy, but now you have.

Dearly beloved, I urge you as strangers and pilgrims on this earth, to control your fleshly desires that war against the soul. Keep your conversation exemplary to the gentiles, that even as they falsely criticize you now as evildoers, soon by the good works which they see you do, they will be converted and glorify God on the day of judgment.

Be subject to human creatures for God's sake, whether the king who reigns over us or the governor who acts for him in punishing evil doers. Praise all good people. For the will of God is that by doing these things well you may silence the voices of ignorant and foolish men. Act as free men but do not make liberty a cloak for doing evil to others - act as servants of God, honor all men, love your brothers, fear God, honor the king.

Servants, be subject to your masters and obey them, not only the good and gentle masters but also those who treat you badly. For what good is it if you commit sin and are punished for it, you have not learned anything. But if you do good things and are patient when you are wrongly treated, this is worthy of thanks before God. For this is what you are called to do. Christ also suffered for us, he who did no sin, neither did evil words come from his mouth, who when he was scorned did not scorn, who when he suffered did not threaten vengeance. He left you an example to follow in his footsteps. He himself bore our sins in his body upon the cross so that we, becoming dead to sin should live to life. By his scourges you were healed, for you were as sheep going astray, but now are saved by the shepherd and bishop of your souls.

In like manner let wives be subject to their husbands so that if any husband does not believe the words I speak they may be saved by the words of their wives, by chaste conversations spoken with fear of the Lord. Saved not by the plaiting of the hair, by the wearing of gold, by the putting on of apparel, but by what comes from the heart, by a meek and quiet spirit which is rich in the sight of God. This is how the holy women of antiquity who trusted in God conducted themselves, being subject to their husbands. This is how Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. You are their daughters, do well without creating any disturbance.

And you husbands, you know how to live with your wives, giving them honor as the weaker vessel, but as co-heirs to the grace of God, so that your prayers are not tainted with hypocrisy.

And to all of you, be of one mind, have compassion for one another, be lovers of the brotherhood, be merciful, modest and humble. Do not return evil for evil, nor criticism for criticism, but on the contrary, give all a blessing. This is why you have been called, to inherit God's blessing. Love life and its good days, don't be sly or let your tongue speak evil. Avoid evil, do good, seek peace and pursue it. Because the eyes of the Lord are upon the just and his ears attentive to their prayers, but the Lord frowns upon those who do evil things.

No one can hurt you if you seek only good. But if you do also suffer anything for justice sake, then blessed are you. Do not be afraid of them and don't be troubled, but keep the Lord Jesus within your heart, always ready to answer those who ask the reason for the hope that is within you. Your conscience will be good if you act with modesty and fear of God. They may speak evil of you but they should be ashamed who falsely accuse you because the words you speak are given you by Christ. For it is better to do well and suffer, if such be the will of God, than to do ill. Because Christ also died once for our sins, the just for the unjust, being put to death in the

flesh but coming back to life in the spirit. By this coming back he spoke to all of our spirits that are still in this earthly prison.

People were incredulous in the days of Noah but God was patient in the days when the ark was being built. Then a few, eight souls in all, were saved by water. Baptism is of the same form, it saves you now, not the putting away of the filth of the flesh but having a good conscience towards God and being saved by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Gone into heaven, the angels being made subject to him, he is at the right hand of God, having overcome down death and sin that we might be heirs to life everlasting.

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Therefore, since Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same resolution he had, for whoever has bodily suffering in this life, has broken with sin, because for the rest of his life on earth he is not ruled by human passions but only by the will of God. You spent quite long enough in the past doing what the gentiles like to do: living in debauchery, evil desires, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and wanton idolatry. They cannot understand why you do not plunge into the same swamp of profligacy and they scorn you; but they will give an account of their actions to him who stands ready to judge the living and the dead. For this is why the gospel was preached even to the dead because he is their judge too, the dead had to be told the good news as well, so that though, in their life on earth, they had been through the judgement that comes to all humanity, they might reach God's life in the spirit.

The end of all things is near, so keep your minds calm and sober for prayer. Above all preserve an intense love for each other, since love covers over many a sin. Welcome each other into your houses without grumbling. Each one of you has received a special grace, so, like good stewards responsible for all these varied graces of God, put it at the service of others. If anyone is a speaker, let it be as the words of

God, if anyone serves, let it be as in strength granted by God; so that in everything God may receive the glory, through Jesus Christ, since to him alone belong all glory and power for ever and ever. Amen.

My dear friends, do not be taken aback at the testing by fire which is taking place among you, as though something strange were happening to you; but in so far as you share in the sufferings of Christ, be glad, so that you may enjoy a much greater gladness when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for bearing Christ's name, blessed are you, for on you rests the Spirit of God, the Spirit of glory. None of you should ever deserve to suffer for being a murderer, a thief, a criminal or an informer; but if any one of you should suffer for being a Christian, then there must be no shame but thanksgiving to God for bearing this name. The time has come for the judgement to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the end for those who refuse to believe God's gospel? If it is hard for the upright to be saved, what will happen to the wicked and to sinners? So even those whom God allows to suffer should commit themselves to a Creator who is trustworthy, and go on doing good.

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I urge the elders among you, as a fellow-elder myself and a witness to the sufferings of Christ, and as one who is to have a share in the glory that is to be revealed, give a shepherd's care to the flock of God that is entrusted to you, watch over it, not simply as a duty but gladly, as God wants; not for sordid money, but because you are eager to do it. Do not lord it over the group which is in your charge, but be an example for the flock. When the chief shepherd appears, you will be given the unfading crown of glory.

In the same way, younger people, be subject to the elders. Humility towards one another must be the garment you all wear constantly, because God opposes the proud but accords his favor to the humble. Bow down, then, before the power of God now,

so that he may raise you up in due time; unload all your burden on to him, since he is concerned about you. Keep sober and alert, because your enemy the devil is on the prowl like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. Stand up to him, strong in faith and in the knowledge that it is the same kind of suffering that the community of your brothers throughout the world is undergoing. You will have to suffer only for a little while: the God of all grace who called you to eternal glory in Christ will restore you, he will confirm, strengthen and support you. His power lasts for ever and ever. Amen.

I write these few words to you through Silvanus, who is a trustworthy brother, to encourage you and attest that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it! Your sister in Babylon, who is with you among the chosen, sends you greetings; so does my son, Mark. Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace to you all who are in Christ.

Second Letter of Peter

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From Simon Peter, servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have received a faith as precious as our own, given through the saving justice of our God and Savior Jesus Christ. Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of our Lord.

By his divine power, he has lavished on us all the things we need for life and for true devotion, through the knowledge of him who has called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these, the greatest and priceless promises have been lavished on us, that through them you should share the divine nature and escape the corruption rife in the world through disordered passion. With this in view, do your utmost to support your faith with goodness, goodness with understanding, understanding with self-control, self-control with perseverance, perseverance with devotion, devotion with kindness to the brothers, and kindness to the brothers with love. The possession and growth of these qualities will prevent your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ from being ineffectual or unproductive. But without them, a person is blind or short-sighted, forgetting how the sins of the past were washed away. Instead of this, brothers, never allow your choice or calling to waver; then there will be no danger of your stumbling, for in this way you will be given the generous gift of entry to the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

That is why I will always go on recalling the same truths to you, even though you already know them and are firmly fixed in these truths. I am sure it is my duty, as long as I am in this tent, to keep stirring you up with reminders, since I know the time for me to lay aside this tent is coming soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me. And I shall take great care that after my own departure you will still have a means to recall these things to mind. When we told you about the power and the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, we were not slavishly repeating cleverly invented

myths; no, we had seen his majesty with our own eyes. He was honored and glorified by God the Father, when a voice came to him from the transcendent Glory, This is my Son, the Beloved; he enjoys my favor. We ourselves heard this voice from heaven, when we were with him on the holy mountain.

So we have confirmation of the words of the prophets; and you will be right to pay attention to it as to a lamp for lighting a way through the dark, until the dawn comes and the morning star rises in your minds. At the same time, we must recognize that the interpretation of scriptural prophecy is never a matter for the individual. For no prophecy ever came from human initiative. When people spoke for God it was the Holy Spirit that moved them.

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As there were false prophets in the past history of our people, so you too will have your false teachers, who will insinuate their own disruptive views and, by disowning the Lord who bought them freedom, will bring upon themselves speedy destruction. Many will copy their debauched behavior, and the Way of Truth will be brought into disrepute on their account. In their greed they will try to make a profit out of you with untrue tales. But the judgement made upon them long ago is not idle, and the destruction awaiting them is for ever on the watch. When angels sinned, God did not spare them: he sent them down into the underworld and consigned them to the dark abyss to be held there until the Judgement. He did not spare the world in ancient times: he saved only Noah, the preacher of uprightness, along with seven others, when he sent the Flood over a world of sinners. He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by reducing them to ashes as a warning to future sinners; but rescued Lot, an upright man who had been sickened by the debauched way in which these vile people behaved- for that upright man, living among them, was outraged in his upright soul by the crimes that he saw and heard every day. All this shows that the Lord is well able to rescue the good from their trials, and hold the wicked for their

punishment until the Day of Judgement, especially those who follow the desires of their corrupt human nature and have no respect for the Lord's authority.

Such self-willed people with no reverence are not afraid of offending against the glorious ones, but the angels in their greater strength and power make no complaint or accusation against them in the Lord's presence. But these people speak evil of what they do not understand; they are like brute beasts, born only to be caught and killed, and like beasts they will be destroyed, being injured in return for the injuries they have inflicted. Debauchery even by day they make their pleasure; they are unsightly blots, and amuse themselves by their trickery even when they are sharing your table; with their eyes always looking for adultery, people with an insatiable capacity for sinning, they will seduce any but the most stable soul. Where greed is concerned they are at their peak of fitness. They are under a curse.

They have left the right path and wandered off to follow the path of Balaam son of Bosor, who set his heart on a dishonest reward, but soon had his fault pointed out to him; a dumb beast of burden, speaking with a human voice, put a stop to the madness of the prophet. People like this are dried-up springs, fogs swirling in the wind, and the gloom of darkness is stored up for them. With their high-sounding but empty talk they tempt back people who have scarcely escaped from those who live in error, by playing on the disordered desires of their human nature and by debaucheries. They may promise freedom but are themselves slaves to corruption; because if anyone lets himself be dominated by anything, then he is a slave to it; and anyone who has escaped the pollution of the world by coming to know our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and who then allows himself to be entangled and mastered by it a second time, ends up by being worse than he was before. It would have been better for them never to have learnt the way of uprightness, than to learn it and then desert the holy commandment that was entrusted to them. What they have done is exactly

as the proverb rightly says: The dog goes back to its vomit and: As soon as the sow has been washed, it wallows in the mud.

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My dear friends, this is the second letter I have written to you, trying to awaken in you by my reminders an unclouded understanding. Remember what was said in the past by the holy prophets and the command of the Lord and Savior given by your apostles.

First of all, do not forget that in the final days there will come sarcastic scoffers whose life is ruled by their passions. 'What has happened to the promise of his coming?' they will say, 'Since our Fathers died everything has gone on just as it has since the beginning of creation!' They deliberately ignore the fact that long ago there were the heavens and the earth, formed out of water and through water by the Word of God, and that it was through these same factors that the world of those days was destroyed by the floodwaters. It is the same Word which is reserving the present heavens and earth for fire, keeping them till the Day of Judgement and of the destruction of sinners.

But there is one thing, my dear friends, that you must never forget: that with the Lord, a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not being slow in carrying out his promises, as some people think he is; rather is he being patient with you, wanting nobody to be lost and everybody to be brought to repentance. The Day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then with a roar the sky will vanish, the elements will catch fire and melt away, the earth and all that it contains will be burned up.

Since everything is coming to an end like this, what holy and saintly lives you should be living while you wait for the Day of God to come, and try to hasten its coming: on that Day the sky will dissolve in flames and the elements melt in the heat. What we are waiting for, relying on his promises, is the new heavens and new

earth, where uprightness will be at home. So then, my dear friends, while you are waiting, do your best to live blameless and unsullied lives so that he will find you at peace. Think of our Lord's patience as your opportunity to be saved; our brother Paul, who is so dear to us, told you this when he wrote to you with the wisdom that he was given. He makes this point too in his letters as a whole wherever he touches on these things. In all his letters there are of course some passages which are hard to understand, and these are the ones that uneducated and unbalanced people distort, in the same way as they distort the rest of scripture--to their own destruction. Since you have been forewarned about this, my dear friends, be careful that you do not come to the point of losing the firm ground that you are standing on, carried away by the errors of unprincipled people. Instead, continue to grow in the grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory, in time and eternity. Amen.