

The Jesus **Lectures-2**

THE ***HEART'S*** ***PERMEABILITY***

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The Jesus Lectures-2

THE HEART'S PERMEABILITY

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DISCLAIMER and PREFACE

This book is the second in a series of ten. The series is an attempt to answer the following question: “*If Jesus were to briefly visit Earth today to give his followers an interim evaluation on how they are collectively doing—what would he say?*” Although this book is quite closely based on authorized teachings of Jesus as found in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, the actual words are imagined. Therefore, you are welcome to take from this book that which is helpful to you while discarding the rest.

In this book, Jesus is depicted describing in detail events of his life relating to THE HEART’S PERMEABILITY. These accounts are only briefly excerpted within the pages of the Holy Scriptures. Here he talks about interactions with people, gives the background to situations, and provides historical information, complementing the short accounts found in the New Testament. Much of the additional information that I imagine Jesus telling us is derived from sometimes-conflicting authoritative Bible commentaries, plus different translations of the original languages in the Bible, plus other historical writings (see Reference Materials). As such, reading this book could give you a fresh and deeper perspective on the brief accounts written in the Holy Bible of critical events that occurred in Jesus’ life.

You may discover new, intriguing insights for fully understanding YOUR OWN HEART: making you better able to appropriately respond to the Teachings of Jesus. Any possible changes in your life provoked by Lecture #2, however, should be carefully considered before implementation—since they may have dramatic ramifications!

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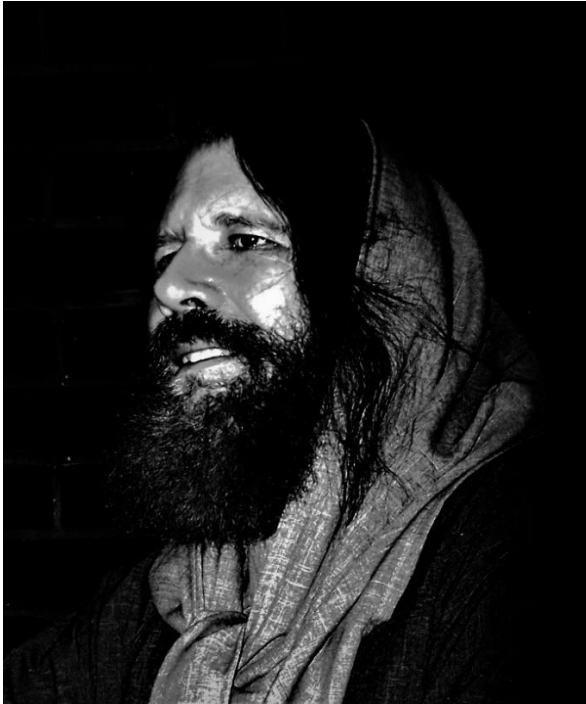
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Section 1:
INVITATION TO A
HOSTILE MEAL

(See *Luke 11:33-54*)



Welcome to Lecture #2. I, Jesus of Nazareth, am delighted you are here today, listening to my second of **ten lectures**. Whether you heard or read my first lecture “The Kingdom of God,” this second talk will reveal to you YOUR OWN HEART. *Mastering your own heart* is critical to entering and remaining within the Kingdom of God. Yes, sometimes life gets tough. But hang in there. I promise I’ll prove I’m on your side!

In my first lecture, I described to you seven deadly conflicts that can poison your heart to God. After removing those seven deadly conflicts from your mind, to remain in the Kingdom of God you must then still **allow godliness to permeate your entire life!** So, what does this mean? Well, in every aspect of your life, every second that you are conscious, every thought in your head, every action that you take—there must always be *God!*

Yes, God is all-knowing, all-powerful, and everywhere. But we can choose to ignore this reality if we wish. Just because God is here with us now while you and I interact at this moment, does not mean that we will necessarily recognize or appreciate that fact tomorrow. Just think if all people everywhere saw God with them every moment of their existence, how would that change what they thought, said, and did?

This is what it means to let godliness permeate your entire life: an *acute awareness that God is listening* to every thought in your heads, hearing every word that comes out of your mouth, and *watching* every action you attempt. No, He is not there as a vengeful Judge looking to condemn your every loose thought, careless word, or mistaken action. Rather, He is there as a dear friend, our loving Father. He is our most-enthusiastic “cheerleader” urging us onward, helping us to get back up when we inevitably fall.

Also, our Heavenly Father is greatly saddened when we choose to do things which hurt ourselves and others. This causes Him great pain, seeing his children embracing evil. Thus, those that love the Lord would in no way deliberately cause Him to be pained. Rather, they do everything in their power to make Him happy with us his dear children.

But this is tough to do. I’m reminded of a time when I was lecturing a crowd about the *FUNCTION OF LAMPS...*

I said to them: “Consider this, my friends. It’s in the evening, getting dark, and a certain man needs to continue some work he’s doing. So, he gets his lamp out, makes sure it has plenty of oil, then lights the wick. It flares up quite nicely, brightening up the whole room. The light drives away the darkness. It

allows the person to see where otherwise he'd be effectively blind. *So immediately upon lighting the lamp, he takes it down and sticks it into the cellar, locking it away where no one can see the light!* Then he goes back into the main room of his house and starts fumbling around in the dark. Do you think that is wise?"

I shut my eyes, extended my arms palms-out, and pantomimed stumbling-about.

I got a lot of laughs from that example. The little kids were nudging each other, chuckling. The grown-ups were rolling their eyes.

"You'd have to be really stupid to do that!" one person shouted out.

"Alright!" I laughed with them. "Then let's change the story. Instead of taking the nicely burning lamp down into the cellar, let's say the man immediately goes to his storeroom. He finds a nice bushel of corn. He dumps the corn out, giving him an empty, large container. *Then he brings the empty container with him to the main room, upends it, and places it over the burning lamp.* The barrel completely hides the lamp from view, blocking out its strong light! After that, he proceeds to happily bump around in the pitch-black room, stubbing his knees, knocking things over. He gets absolutely no work at all done. Do you think *that's* wise?"

Following my prior example, the little kids started tottering around with their eyes closed, arms outstretched, bumping into and knocking each other down. They were giggling and laughing. The adults were likewise roaring with laughter.

"He'd be even more stupid than the first fellow!" an elderly lady in the front of the crowd laughed, grinning toothlessly.

"Ah!" I answered, dramatically pointing to that older lady. "Good woman! What do you say that the man in my story *should* have done with his lighted lamp there in the dark room?"

The crowd quieted to hear her reply.

She boldly spoke up: "Why, any person with a right mind would know to take the lamp and put it on a *lampstand*. It needs to be set up high, not hidden away, where everybody can see it. Then the lamp's light shines out over everything!"

“And you’ve done this a few times?” I politely queried, raising an eyebrow.

“Yep! Me and thousands of others just about every single night!” she grinned.

“*The good lady is correct!*” I projected my voice forcefully out across the crowd. “But what if the man in my story realized that a lamp under a bushel or in a basement was useless. So, he corrects the error of his ways, finally placing the lamp up on a nice high lampstand. But then he was *still* fumbling and crashing around the room! What do you think might be his problem?”

At this, the crowd grew quiet again. I saw many furrowed brows as they puzzled over the problem. Then they began talking amongst themselves, debating. Finally, a few raised tentative hands.

“Yes?” I encouraged them, pointing to them one by one.

“The lamp went out... Not enough oil... Something fell in front of it, blocking the light... He closed his eyes?” they guessed.

“Yes!” I answered, pointing again to the last person who’d answered. “Light does you no good at all if you deliberately *close your eyes!* Light for your mind, your soul, your spirit is not just revelation—it’s *dependent* on your beautiful, clear, EYES. Your eyes allow the light to enter your head. If your eyes are *shut* then the greatest lamp in the world, put upon the most excellent lampstand, means nothing. You’re still fumbling around, crashing into everything, and achieving no good purpose. Truly, the ‘light of your soul,’ then, is your very own *eyes!*”

I lifted my brows, making my eyes as large as possible, peering dramatically around me in all directions.

“Master!” a man in the crowd called-out loudly. “Who would do such a thing? Surely no one would go to all the trouble of finding, lighting, positioning a lamp, and burning costly oil... only to close his eyes?”

“Right you are!” I answered loudly, congratulating him. “But are there those who, over time, get so *sick* that even the most beautiful light becomes nothing? Do you know of such people?”

The old woman nearby me nodded: “Yes, Teacher! My cousin Magda is such! As a child her eyes became diseased. Where once she danced in the light, now she can only move with a cane, tapping-out what lies before her. It’s very sad.”

Tears dripped down her wrinkled face.

I moved forward a couple steps, took her in my arms, and hugged her briefly. I whispered in her ear: “She is now healed, good woman. Go home and tell her about—and *show* to her—*your* new world of light!”

With a great wide grin of thanks, the woman turned and ran off.

“And what about older people?” I queried the crowd in a loud voice. “Can *adults* lose the ability to let light into their heads?”

“When the eyes become whitened with old age!” several shouted back from deep in the crowd. “Their eyes won’t let the light through anymore. They’ve become blinded!”

“Yes!” I answered. “Even though there may be plenty of light all around, without clear eyes allowing light into one’s head... it’s as if there was only darkness. Does anyone know how this applies to having the *Light from God* in your lives?”

“We must open our eyes to receive it?” a person replied from the crowd.

“We must not hide it from ourselves by closing our eyes?” another ventured.

“Yes!” I encouraged them. “And for your soul, what is its *true* light—that which conducts and focuses the ever-present, transcendent Light of God?”

No one answered.

“How do you decide what is right and wrong?” I urged them. “How do you differentiate the Light of God from the Darkness of Satan? How do you sift through the shades of grey to find essential, golden godliness?”

“Our... conscience?” a little boy at front gulped, looking around in embarrassment.

I grabbed him up in my arms and plunked him down on one of my shoulders, holding him high so all the crowd could see him.

“Say it again!” I laughed, bouncing him up and down.

“*Our conscience!*” he yelled happily, holding onto my long hair.

“From the mouth of a child comes the clear, crisp answer!” I exclaimed to them all. “It’s so fitting and appropriate. From the unassuming, innocent, clean mind of a young boy comes the best answer!”

I sat him back down on his feet as his mother reached out to grab him up, smiling gratefully at me.

“It’s your CONSCIENCE!” I happily yelled, dancing around in a circle, holding up my hands to the sky. “It’s that which makes you *human*. It’s that which the Lord has given you to make you more than just smart animals. It’s the *gateway* to your souls, through which all your information is filtered. And if it’s clear, pure, and soft—then God’s Light will pour though it into your heart. But if it’s diseased, hardened, or blackened... then it’s like you took your lamp and locked it away in the basement. Nothing will get in. The glorious Light of the Lord may be soaking everything around you, but inside you’ll be as black as the darkest, starless, moonless midnight!”

“Am I filled with light?” a little girl stammered, holding her daddy’s hand tightly.

I caught her up in my arms, swinging her around in a circle before handing her back to her parents.

She giggled shyly.

“Yes!” I laughed. “You are totally filled up with the spectacular, warm, luxurious Light of God!”

“But...” I frowned, looking out over the crowd at a tight band of Pharisees making their way imperiously forward. They were rudely shoving the “common” people out of their way, “—beware that the ‘light’ you *THINK* is in you... be not darkness instead!”

Smiling again, I held out my hands to a little baby held by her young mother. “May I?” I queried.

The young lady nodded, handing me her baby.

“THIS NEW HUMAN BEING!” I shouted out across the crowd. “THIS YOUNG BABY HAS NO EVIL. IT HAS NO GUILT. IT IS COMPLETELY INNOCENT. ITS EYES ARE WIDE OPEN TO EVERYTHING. IT HAS NOT YET LEARNED HOW TO BLOCK OUT THAT WHICH IS

INCONVENIENT. IT DOES NOT REJECT GOD'S LOVE. IT HAS NO THOUGHT OF INJUSTICE. EVERYTHING TO THIS BABY IS NEW AND WONDERFUL, EXCITING TO ITS EYES!"

The crowd was dead silent, stunned by my thundering shouts and the undeniable truth of my presentation.

I handed the gurgling child back to its mother.

"Beware that the light you think is inside you be not *darkness!*" I again cautioned the crowd. "*Actively* guard your minds. Keep out the Evil One that distorts your thinking. Don't turn to hate. Don't become sour and fretful. Keep the innocence of that young baby in yourselves!"

"How, Teacher?" an old man called back. "We all get grumpy and jaded!"

"Good question!" I laughed. "You must actively open your mind and soul to the entire Light of God. If you will do this, then the Heavenly Glory will flood your entire being, whether young or old. There will be no darkness, no shadows. It will fill you up! No part of you will remain untouched by God. Just let it in, in all its fullness, and IT WILL TRANSFORM YOUR ENTIRE LIFE!" I finished with another loud shout.

The entire crowd stirred with a breathless wonder. They'd come to be healed, to be entertained, to be enlightened. I'd gone far beyond that to *transcendence*...

"It's wonderful!" I continued, spinning around in a circle, my robe whipping through the air. "It's glorious! Let it happen, my friends. Fully open up your conscience to God's Words. They will drive out the darkness. They will light up every corner of your mind, as a lamp put high on a lamp-stand lights the entire room! They will brighten up everything in your life. Let the Light from God fill you up. It can happen! It can happen to *you*—just by..."

"Master!" a sharp voice broke into my speech, rudely stopping me in mid-sentence.

The crowd around me drew back, suddenly fearful.

Yes, it was that tight group of Pharisees, now standing right in front of me. They'd shoved their way through the crowd. Those pushed away glared at the revered religious leaders. All the gathered children, mothers, fathers, and

elderly were silent, knowing the Pharisees had power over their lives.

“Yes...?” I spoke slowly, looking them coolly straight in their eyes.

For a moment our gazes were locked...

Then they flinched. They looked down or away—all except for one.

Like the others, he was dressed in rich finery. I recognized him, a person of note whom I’d not previously met. He was a wealthy local businessman. He had on a purple robe usually only worn by royalty. He was a nobleman, of respected ancestry. Around his neck he wore a silver chain with dangling gold ornaments. All in all, he was a very impressive and intimidating fellow!

“I’m sorry to interrupt your wonderful teaching, Master,” he continued, meeting my gaze unflinchingly. “But I and my colleagues have been watching you all this morning. You’ve taken no food or drink. Surely you must be hungry? As it’s now time for the morning meal, it would be our great honor to invite you to come eat with us at my house. I live nearby. All is prepared and ready. Would you favor us by coming to dine with us... *now*?”

I looked at him calmly, keeping a serene and detached expression on my face. He was a young man, with an uncommon attitude amongst those of the Pharisee sect: seemingly honest and open inquiry. Although he’d obviously been urged by his older comrades to interrupt my teaching—those who now looked evasive, even angry—he seemed different.

I sensed in this eager young, wealthy Pharisee willingness to listen. He might not just automatically reject my words for predetermined debating positions. Perhaps I could teach him something profound by accepting his invitation. The crowds would wait for me. Indeed, they’d stay right outside his home, listening to whatever was loud enough to carry through the walls. Yes, they *all* might learn something that day about entering and continuing in the Kingdom of God!

“Well, Teacher?” he persisted. “Will you do us the honor of breaking bread with us?”

I nodded to the young man.

“Yes,” I answered, “I accept your kind invitation. Please lead on!”

In his nearby house, I stood politely to one side as he and each of the man’s fellow Pharisee companions made a great show of ritually washing and cleansing their hands before the meal. Indeed, some of them who’d been on the outer edge of their tight group as they pushed through the crowd, actually went into another room where they removed their clothes and (loudly splashing) cleaned their entire bodies! They were deathly afraid they might have brushed-up against some “unclean” person!

I said nothing, just observing their cleansing rituals, my arms crossed over my chest.

Already there in the large, roomy house were other guests. I noticed prominent Scribes, high-ranking Lawyers, and additional, prominent Pharisees.

This would be a significant confrontation, indeed!

Finally, the group that had come to get me out of the crush of people outside had all washed, scrubbed, and dried their hands and/or bodies using fastidiously clean cloths. The men moved into the adjacent dining room, where servants had laid out a very nice morning meal. One by one, the distinguished gentlemen stooped down and reclined on large cushions at their places alongside a long, low table.

Yet I still stood there in the adjoining hallway, my arms folded.

At the head of the table, the young man who’d invited me into his home looked at me expectantly. Over to the side of the entrance hall, prominently positioned in my path to the table, were tubs of clean water, soap, and cloths.

Servants stood at the ready to hand me anything or help me in my ritual purifications.

Instead, I walked right past all of that and sat down at the one empty spot, reclining there at the table, *ignoring* the ceremonial cleansings!

I noted the flickers of triumph passing back and forth between the stern, older men at the table. They knew they’d baited me, hooked me, and trapped me! They certainly

already knew that I did not observe man-made rituals as godly duties. They knew, in fact, that I preached forcefully *against* observing rites or traditions just for the sake of doing them.

They knew that they'd trapped me there in a highly respected person's house, *shockingly disrespecting* what they held to be as courteous and religiously mandated behavior! Of course, if I'd instead gone ahead and washed in a show of respect to the sincere young Pharisee who kindly invited me to eat with him, then they'd just claim I was a hypocrite—preaching one thing to the masses while behaving differently in private!

So, they could barely hide their glee that now, at last, they—seemingly—would walk from this meal with rhetorical arrows ready to destroy me!

The young man, however, seemed honestly shocked that I'd refused to do the ritual washing.

“Teacher!” he gasped. “I don't mean to disrespect you. But for a man of your stature and knowledge to disdain God's desires for us is inexplicable! I don't mean to be rude, but why did you not purify yourself before our meal? I had everything laid out and ready for you—all there at hand—so that it would be not the slightest inconvenience for you. You were touching and hugging those unclean commoners out there on the plaza, so surely you'd want to...?”

I cut him off with a wave of my hand. Reaching out, I took a loaf of freshly baked bread from the common pile. “Gasps” rang out around as they realized I'd defiled that plate of food for all the rest of them. Seemingly nonchalantly, I broke off a piece and started chewing on it.

“Good bread!” I sincerely congratulated him, pointedly ignoring his question. “I was indeed getting hungry. Thank you for your kind hospitality.”

The others smiled slyly, glancing furtively at each other. They thought that they had yet more proof to use against me. In front of all the gathered high-society witnesses I was literally breaking bread with “unclean” hands!

I smiled back nonchalantly to those around me, motioning for the servants to bring over a nearby platter of cheeses. I took several, munching on them slowly, enjoying their flavor.

I theatrically took a few more bites of the fresh-baked bread as well, exaggerating my chewing movements.

Then I spoke, in a jovial manner: “Ah yes, ‘unclean’ am I? And those people out on the plaza, who even now crowd around your abode eagerly awaiting my return—they too are ‘unclean’? Even the innocent children out there, some of whom I held in my own arms, are also ‘unclean’? And you all here who diligently and carefully scrub away the common crowd’s ‘stink’—you being so much better than they, after all—are utterly clean, pure, and holy? Is that the case?”

I kept eating, conspicuously enjoying the fine food.

“The Law of Moses is clear!” a bald-headed Pharisee at the end of the table opposite to the host exclaimed in a high-pitched voice. “We are to have no part of sin! Surely a ‘teacher’ of your stature understands the basic tenants of the Law?”

I put down the cheese and bread, dropping my bland smile to coldly stare him in his eyes.

“And why, then, do your servants not sit at the table and eat with us also?” I asked. “They are all good fellow Jewish people, just like us, aren’t they?” I opened my eyes wide, theatrically looking from one to the other of the many servants poised expectedly at the back of the room.

Yes, it was yet another of my “crowds.” There, waiting upon us but also listening intently, were cleanly dressed (in nice but humble attire) women, men, and older children. They seemed simultaneously pleased but apprehensive at my bold suggestion, perhaps fearing for their jobs in the rich man’s household?

The bald-headed man’s face twisted up into an expression of disdain, but no words came from his mouth except for a high-pitched “snort.”

Hearing no answer, I continued...

“And I assume since they hand us our cups, plates, and food that they are ‘clean’ from this ‘sin’ you fear so much?” I shrugged. “To me they are just as worthy and respectable as any of you fine gentlemen. In fact, I’d personally be honored to have them sit down beside me, or to mingle with them in a crowd, or to shake their hands... wouldn’t you?”

The exquisitely dressed and jeweled men at the table squirmed and grimaced—but again said nothing.

“Or... might they not be up to your standards of *highest* ‘purity’?” I shrugged. “After all, they’re just uneducated, common servants—not learned, respected, ‘saints’ such as you Pharisees, Scribes, and Lawyers?”

Ok, I was enjoying “yanking their chains”! This was something no one dared do to them. They were too wealthy and highly placed to be teased to their faces. Behind their backs, though, was an entirely different matter...

Then I lifted up the cup sitting at my place on the table before me, holding it out toward my host, and sternly asked: “Have you cleaned this cup for my usage?”

My host frowned at the servants in the back of the room, who nodded quickly in the affirmative.

“Are you *sure* you’ve had this cup cleaned appropriately for me?” I asked again.

“What?” he gulped, confused. He again looked over to his standing servants, who now seemed apprehensive and unsure.

“W-well... of, of course I...” the young man stammered.

“Ah! So, it is!” I smiled, holding it now up high in the air for all to observe. “Now I see! This cup is beautiful! Look how shiny, white, unstained, and polished it is—a marvelously clean, purified, and unblemished cup! Is it not?”

Indeed, it was so clean it almost sparkled.

And then I turned it slowly—as I continued to keep it high up in the air—upon its side while moving it through a half-circle... so that all the seated Pharisees, other guests, and the standing servants could see what was *inside* the cup.

As one, they all gasped in astonishment.

Inside... the cup they’d thought to be totally clean and ready to receive the drink—was *filled with cobwebs and little spiders!*

I laughed as one of the hairy, many-legged insects crawled out of the sideways cup. It stood poised on the back of my thumb. Gently, I “shooed” it with my other hand back into the cup.

Placing the cup back on the table, I reached over to the jug of wine, lifted it, and poured generously into my cup. Raising the cup to my lips, I drank the contents down in one long gulp.

A collective “gasp” went up...

“Very tasty!” I congratulated my host, smiling. Then... “ARE YOU SUITABLY HORRIFIED AT SUCH A THING?” I shouted at them.

I half-rose from the table, as if I were going to physically attack them!

He and all those at the table seemed in shock, their mouths hanging open...

—as in a loud voice that I knew would carry beyond the walls of the room to the crowd gathered outside, I exclaimed: “YOU PHARISEES DELIGHT IN CLEANING THE OUTSIDE OF THE CUP BUT NEGLECT WHAT IS INSIDE!”

My host tried to respond but I continued without a pause...

“*How dare you invite me into a house where you make such a show of cleansing your hands and skin but host me with filthy hearts!*” I shocked them all. “ARE YOU NOT AWARE THAT THE SAME GOD WHO MADE YOUR OUTSIDES ALSO MADE YOUR INSIDES... AND DEMANDS THAT THEY *BOTH* BE PURIFIED?”

I paused, giving them a moment to react to my outburst. I had figuratively *slapped* them in their smug faces, getting both their and the other guests’ and the servants’ stunned attention.

Then I slowly lowered myself back upon my lounging pillow.

More quietly, I continued, now speaking in a reasonable-sounding, mellow voice: “By your man-made rituals, which you so eagerly bind upon yourself and everyone else, you pretend to be the most pious, holy, and purest of all God’s children—while inside your hearts you are full of *greed, thievery, extortion, ill-intent and all manner of evil!*”

“That’s not...!” an elderly Pharisee tried to protest...

But my voice became all the harder and more intense: “Don’t you think that God sees who you really are?” I demanded. “You might fool your fellow humans. But God sees

into your hearts! What *are* you people? Are you IGNORANT, FOOLISH, BLIND... or just plain *STUPID*?"

I reached over to the fruit platter and took a couple pieces, placing them on my plate where *instantly they were covered with raw, stinking feces!*

"You work diligently to clean the outsides of your plates but allow the insides to be covered with filth!" I yelled angrily.

I *threw* the entire plate over the heads of those sitting opposite to me—who instinctively ducked down—where it *smashed* into the rock wall behind them, *splattering* the wall with brown muck.

"Teacher!" the host gasped. "That's... that's unacceptable!"

"And I totally AGREE!" I yelled back at him, now fully standing up at my place at the table to tower over the rest of them. "It's *completely* unacceptable that those who profess to be the *best* of God's chosen people—desirous even to be called modern-day 'saints'—will turn their backs on, ignore, disdain, and regard as *dung* their *fellow human beings* whose only desire is to do better at pleasing God!"

That was the last straw. I was in danger of being bodily swarmed and torn to pieces. But, fortunately, a highly respected voice replied, stilling the fury of the other guests.

"This is madness!" a long-haired, highly-placed, well-respected elderly Pharisee who sat opposite to me spat. He turned and looked with disgust at the brown stains dripping down the wall. "And you, sir, are an *insane magician!*" he finished, turning back to glare at me.

"I'm insane?" I smiled disarmingly, still towering above the dining table. "Then look at the herbs sitting before you in their pretty little vases. I see mint leaves and rue. In addition, there's a fine assortment of other little leaves ready to crumble into your food to give it nice, spicy flavors. Were these tiny plants grown in your own garden, my dear host?" I queried innocently, turning my gaze back to him.

"W-what?" he gulped, confused. "Well... yes...they were..."

I saw some of the servants in the back of the room grinning. They surreptitiously slipped out to tell the crowd still gathered outside everything that was happening inside. They'd previously heard my interaction with the people,

having been part of the crowds themselves. They knew what was coming...

“And did you give the proper *tenth* of them to the synagogue, similar as Moses requires of us to ‘tithe’ of our income?” I asked, raising an eyebrow at him.

“Yes!” he responded promptly and proudly. He seemed relieved that for the moment the threat of mob violence had seemingly passed. “I instruct my servants to meticulously count every tiny leaf, every seed produced in our garden, and every plant. Then, a precise *tenth* of all of that is given over to the synagogue and to the priests!”

“That’s absolutely amazing,” I replied, seemingly impressed. “You and your fellow Pharisees go to such exacting detail—sparing no expense or time, cutting no corners at all—to fulfill even the tiniest implications of the Law of Moses... *yet you neglect to meet the weightiest and most important aspects of godliness!*”

“That is NOT so!” the long-haired Pharisee roared, standing now at his place at the table.

His hands were white as he gripped the edge of the table fiercely.

“No?” I asked. “I’ve been told just this week by people out on the street that you, Sir, personally foreclosed on the home of three widows... just this last month! How is that the act of a *godly* banker?”

He looked like he’d been punched in his stomach, slowly sinking back into his seat.

“It was... business,” he muttered. “The law is the law! They couldn’t pay! I had no choice but to take back their collateral and...”

“Did you try to find out why they couldn’t pay?” I relentlessly pursued him, giving him no quarter. “Did you offer them any help? Did you consider modifying the terms of their loans? Did you ask the local synagogue if they could intercede? Did you try to find them help in making their payments?”

He set his lips together in a thin straight line, staring down at the table, ignoring me.

“And that’s but one recent example of where your hearts are located, my friends,” I shrugged, sitting back down at my place, now relaxed and loose.

I looked back at the young man hosting the meal from the head of the table.

“Sir,” I respectfully addressed him. “Do you not see how you Pharisees obsess on the details of laboriously and meticulously counting the leaves of your tiny plants which you have grown in your garden... yet *neglect* the high-holy and greatest requirements of the Law of Moses? It would be far better if you obsessed on ‘JUSTICE,’ ‘MERCY,’ ‘COMPASSION,’ and the ‘LOVE OF GOD!’”

My loud barks seemed like physical blows. The young man looked stricken, his face pale and drained of blood.

“You ought to have done the weightier things *first*, before anything else,” I cautioned him. “Instead, your priorities are screwed up. You’re doing the last things first... and not even getting around to the first things at all!”

“Assuming there’s some truth to what you say...” the host gulped, breathing heavily from his seething emotions, “What would you have us to do?”

Without hesitating, I then *roared* at them: “**INVERT YOURSELVES TO THOSE WHO YOU DISTAIN TO EVEN TOUCH!**”

My voice filled the entire banquet hall. My words resonated and echoed outward to those outside. Indeed, we could hear back through the walls CHEERS from the restless, growing crowd.

“Uh... ‘invert’ our s-selves?” the man stammered, shaking his head in total confusion.

I yelled at them again: “**SHOW YOUR HEARTS TO THE WORLD, AS GOD WANTS YOU TO DO!**”

I really was trying to pierce through the veil which clouded most eyes and minds of those who sat sullenly and angrily all around me. I truly wanted to reach them. I wished the best for them. I wanted them to *soften* their hard hearts. I was trying my best to *poke holes* for *permeabilizing* their exclusionary minds!

“For instance,” I continued, pointing at the man opposite to me. “You! Take your accumulated, ill-gotten gains and buy the houses of those three widows. Then give the houses back to them, free of all charges or loans. In that sort of fashion—continuing in that visible and tangible way—you can TRULY ‘purify’ what the Lord has blessed you to possess, above that of average people!”

He didn’t look up from the surface of the table, ignoring my challenge.

“And you, my dear host,” I insisted, “*throw open* your doors to all those many hungry people outside! Invite them in. Put away your hand-washing pots and cloths. Let the common people know that you love them more than you love ritualistic, exclusionary traditions of men. *Prove* to them that you have in your heart the Love of God. *Demonstrate* your godly compassion to them. *Share* your excess and good fortune with them. *Feed* them these rich, fine foods that you have in abundance—immediately helping many who today are starving or malnourished!”

The host looked overwhelmed, dizzy, his head tilting to the side, eyes stretched wide.

“And all of you here at this fine table, in your fine robes, celebrating your God-given wealth,” I continued, gesturing grandly about the table. “*Sell* your extra properties, your horded treasures, your wardrobes of fine clothes and *give* that money to the poor. Don’t just give the exact tenth of all you earn to the church, growing fat on the 90% you keep. Give *everything* to God!”

The men at the table looked stunned, uncertain, fearful...

“Yes!” I exclaimed. “Take a *leap of faith* to open yourselves fully to the total Will of God. You that claim to be the Saints of God’s people, *prove* it by your demonstrated compassion! God doesn’t call us to just observe repetitious rituals, but to be *shining beacons* of the Light of His Love for the entire world. Don’t just purify your external actions and bodies—*revitalize* your minds, your hearts, and your entire lives!”

“*We give generously to the synagogue!*” the man across from me suddenly yelled back. “We tithe everything that we have! The Priests use those donations to help the poor. We

give enough through the Church. We are ‘pure’ enough! Everyone can see that it is *we* who uphold God’s Law, not *you* who flout our customs!

I sadly shook my head in denial.

“‘Enough’?” I repeated his key word, frowning. “It’s quite true that you Pharisees *do* love to be regarded by men as the holiest and most righteous of all. You *do* love to be escorted with deference to the seats at the head of the council. You insist on the chairs facing the congregation, situated right behind the lectern at the synagogue. Yes, you surely *do* love to be greeted with awe and respect when you walk through the marketplace. And, certainly, you love when the ‘commoners’ fall down into the dirt and *bow* to you as you walk past! But both your actions and lack thereof prove without a doubt that your love does *not* extend past your own uplifted noses.”

I paused, allowing a moment of silence.

“Pure ‘enough’?” I continued. “Misery is too good for you. You are like *unclean graves* filled with rotting flesh and crumbling bones. You yearly *whitewash* them lest you accidentally brush against one and become ‘unclean.’ Yet you’re not even the equivalent of marked graves that people can see and easily avoid. Instead, you are the *unmarked* graves that no one knows are present until they walk over them and are ceremoniously defiled! Oh, yes... not ‘pure enough’ by far!”

This time the longhaired Pharisee across from me was so livid he could not even speak. The rest at the table were clearly considering murdering me then and there!

I saw more servants slipping out of the room to the gathered, surging crowds outside. They were eagerly updating them on what was happening inside the house, with more servants sneaking in to take the place of those who’d departed.

I winked at them.

Outside, coming through even the stone walls of the house, a faint chant was now audible to all: “*Jesus... Jesus... Jesus!*”

The others at the table heard the chant also, realizing that the huge, raging crowd could tear THEM to pieces if they dared physically attack me.

But they weren’t finished with me...

Another suddenly stood up at his seat, angrily confronting me. He was a white-haired, thin, elderly gentleman with a long shaggy beard.

He stood ramrod straight and glared at me with unblinking black eyes, saying: “Teacher, your words to the Pharisees at this table are completely untrue and insulting. I speak for my colleagues via my kinship as a respected *Lawyer* of Moses’ commandments. How dare you accuse my colleagues of being cold-hearted, ungodly, and corrupt! My colleagues are the best of the best. They deserve nothing less than praise and admiration. They are scrupulous in their obedience to Moses’ commands, while you, Sir—under the most charitable observation—are indifferent and lax! Indeed, your preposterous accusations upon them also tarnish, by implication, both my profession and that of the Scribes! Surely you don’t mean to condemn *all* the most ardent and loyal defenders of the Faith, by your ill-conceived, loose words?”

I narrowed my eyes, leaned back from the table, and met his cold stare with my own unblinking gaze.

“Yes, I do,” I freely admitted. “God did not appoint me to make those who are deliberately usurping their religious positions feel good about their transgressions. You lawyers interpret and extend Moses’ commands for our modern-day world... going *far beyond* anything that Moses or the Prophets intended! You are zealous to define exactly how, where, and to what extent we should do *everything!* You seek not to honor God, but to exert tight control over the entire lives of all others.”

“Those who are not learned in all the requirements of God need our guidance for...” he tried to answer me.

But I abruptly cut him off with a chop of my palm.

“Yes, you insist that God is directing your lawyerly interpretations,” I agreed. “Your restrictions, burdens, and requirements—for the most part *not* in our Holy Texts—you gleefully bind upon the people. Worse yet, you give them the same or greater weight as God’s actual Words in the Holy Scriptures. What colossal arrogance!”

How dare you...?”

“And while you are certainly entitled to your expert opinions as to how people should carry out the commandments and teachings in the Holy Scriptures,” I continued to argue, “you have no right to turn man-made rules into God’s Words! You certainly can bind whatever you want upon *yourself* as your own personal godly duty. But to insist that others must do so as well is to take upon your own selves the authority of God Himself. I tell you this quite plainly: *God is not happy sharing his Power with you!*”

They all “gasped” again at my harsh words, except for my accuser.

It was obvious he was a skilled lawyer, not daunted when facing a debater as intelligent as he. He was prepared to argue against my accusations...

“But God *has* anointed us to interpret his Holy Words to the common people,” the man smugly continued, happy to debate. “And the common people *want* us to tell them what to do. After all, we’ve studied and trained for many years to parse out God’s exact Will from the Holy Texts. Without us the people would be confused, adrift, and misdirected.”

“And God will reward your arrogance with *misery!*” I exclaimed in return, banging the palm of my hand down on the table with a loud “thump!” “You load down God’s children with heavier and heavier burdens for fulfilling your increasingly detailed mandates. It is *not* a tribute to God. It is *not* helping people fulfill God’s Will. It is a subtle *enslavement* in which you dictate *your* preferences upon an unsuspecting public!”

“I...” he tried to reply...

But I overwhelmed him with volume: “It is a monument to YOUR OWN ‘COMMAND AND CONTROL’ MENTALITY. BY THIS YOU ACCRUE AUTHORITY, POWER, PRESTIGE, AND WEALTH TO YOURSELVES!”

He looked ready to angrily reply but I again cut him off, continuing quickly...

“Publicly you appear to be the most pious and conscientious of all—while in private you *ignore* all those same requirements and rituals,” I now more softly accused him, pointing my index finger at his face. “You delight to find more

and more things to restrict, entangle, and burden the people. Yet you won't lift even one finger to make their religious duties lighter! You love to tell people what they have to do. Yet you disdain to help them achieve any of those many burdensome requirements."

"We do many good deeds!" the man argued back. "Our devotion is there for all to see. You are telling vile lies! The true 'Teachers' of the Law are we Lawyers, the Pharisees, and the Scribes. We deserve to be treated with respect and honor. *You*, however, are a deceitful pretender, liar, and blasphemer! You call yourself a 'master'? Hah! You are merely an uneducated, peasant, itinerate preacher. What have you done for the people except to give speeches? We, on the other hand, spend much of our own money constructing fine coverings at the mouths of the burial caves of our dead Prophets! We also build outstanding monuments to mark their graves. *You* will be lucky to have an unmarked grave amongst the scattered bones of thieves and murderers!"

"Do you honor the Prophets?" I asked, sadly shaking my head in the negative. "The honor *they* most desired, in their day, was for you to heed their warnings! They wanted for you to put into practice their progressive religious teachings, moving ever closer to God. Instead, you pretend devotion by decorating their graves—which in reality is endorsing and approving their *murder!*"

Again, those around the table 'gasped' at my accusations!

"Almost without fail," I relentlessly continued, "those who stood up for God in times of religious hypocrisy were attacked and summarily *killed*. Who murdered them? It was the religious authorities of their day. Why? The murderers' worldly power and prestige was threatened by the new ways of godly thinking taught by the Prophets."

My voice became icy cold as I yelled yet again: "THE MURDERERS OF THE HOLY PROPHETS WERE *YOUR* ANCESTORS, *YOUR* FATHERS, *YOUR* KIN—WHO YOU EMULATE EVEN TODAY!"

"*We are the defenders of the true Faith!*" the man roared back at me. "We are...!"

“—and so also claimed those that dutifully denounced, tortured, and killed the Prophets!” I stopped him in midsentence.

There was a shocked silence for a minute around the table.

“Truly,” I continued, more quietly and sadly, “God said to mankind many centuries ago that through his inspired Teachers He would send to us Prophets and Apostles, many of whom would be persecuted and put to death. I quote the Holy Scriptures: ‘*so that the blood of all the Prophets shed from the foundation of the world might be charged against this age and this generation*’! The massive guilt of religious pretenders today will echo forward through the ages as the greatest betrayal of God *ever*. Now is the time that the abuse and misuse of greedy men claiming to be God’s most-religious followers will be counted up and charged against them. From the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah who was killed between the altar and the sanctuary—IT SHALL ALL BE REQUIRED OF THIS PRESENT AGE AND GENERATION!”

My words rang out, filling the room and beyond.

For the first time, the dignified, well-dressed men around me at the table looked *afraid*, all except for one...

“Now is the time when you must truly stand with the brave Holy Prophets,” I continued, “or be revealed for what you really are... *yourselves* the vile thieves and murderers that you count as being the most unclean of them all!”

I sat back down at my place at the table, folding my arms while looking calmly from one to the other of the wealthy gentlemen.

If looks could killed, I’d have been dead on the spot.

“I am happy that your words are so plain, Teacher,” the man opposite to me now grinned, revealing yellowed, jagged teeth. “It makes what will happen next the more reasonable. No one will fault us for doing what your blatant blasphemy has forced upon us. Our justification is plain to all! All those present here today will be witnesses with full knowledge of these events. No one will fault us for what we’re about to do to you!”

“‘Knowledge?’” I laughed, sadly shaking my head back and forth in denial. “What do you know of knowledge? You pretend to be the greatest scholars, interpreters, and experts on

the holy Mosaic Law. And yet you have *withheld* the key knowledge that the people most need to advance in their journey to God. The many prophecies of the *Messiah*—foretold to transform, unite, and uplift the people of God—you’ve deliberately obscured, denied, and ignored.”

“That’s ridiculous,” the elderly Pharisee sneered...

“Oh?” I laughed. “In the many writings of the Holy Scriptures is described *the Christ’s* entire life. If you truly understood what you were pretending to parse out to the people, you’d be my most ardent supporters. It is *I* who proclaims the coming of the Kingdom of God! Instead, you only see threats to your own narrow self-interests. Not only have you thrown the key knowledge away which could open up your own understanding to the true Will of God—you’ve denied it to the people who look to you for guidance. *Misery* will be upon you. Your punishment will be a thousand times worst because you’ve hindered and prevented many people from entering into the doors of God’s Kingdom.”

The white-haired man clenched his teeth and *seethed* back at me: “*You* are a loathsome liar! *You* are the usurper here! *You* are misleading the people! *You* are turning them from the Official Church! *You* are nothing less than an evil blasphemer and troublemaker. The Jewish nation will greatly benefit from your *death!*”

I shrugged, not dismissing some of his accusations.

“And you’d be willing to do the deed yourself, I take it?” I calmly asked.

“With pleasure!” he grinned, whipping out a long dagger from beneath his robe, “—as would all the rest of my good brethren here at this table! We’re fully prepared for you to have an ‘accident’ at our meal, ‘slipping’ while trying to use a knife and *impelling* yourself! The rabble outside will be shocked, disappointed to not be entertained by you anymore. But they’ll get over it...”

The others at the table grimly nodded their heads in agreement, reaching for their own hidden weapons...

“Gentlemen!” my host barked, horrified. “What the hell are you...?”

Outside the chanting suddenly intensified from a faint background noise to: “JESUS! JESUS! JESUS! JESUS!” on and on, louder and louder!

I turned my head back to the host, smiling in a friendly way, wanting to calm him.

“Have no fear, good Sir,” I said. “No violence will be done in your house today. These others can only do to me that that which I allow. And lest their emotions overpower their reason, they have but to hear the voices of my many friends outside. After all, you are few... and they are many! They may eventually ‘get over’ my unexpected demise. But if I die today, so do *you*! What say your enlightened self-interests now?”

Nervously, the men at the table looked at each other, keenly aware of the loud chanting coming from all directions outside the house. They muttered angrily amongst themselves. Then they slipped their knives reluctantly back under their robes.

The white-haired man sat back down, but did *not* put his dagger away. Instead, he laid it on the tabletop with a loud “clunk,” for all—especially me—to continue to view!

“Teacher?” another man timidly enquired, raising his hand to be noticed. He was a small man, with only a thin ring of brown hair around his ritually shaved bald head. His eyes glistened with tears.

“Yes?” I gently answered.

“I am a Scribe,” he whispered faintly. “I’ve always rejoiced at the holy task of copying the glorious words of Moses and the Prophets into fresh books. Am I at fault as well?”

“Yes,” I replied honestly but kindly. “You see, there’s an ‘unholy trinity’ at work here. The obsession you exemplify by your otherwise sincere work is that God somehow cannot go *one letter* beyond the words that He already inspired in the past through the Holy Prophets. Indeed, to miscopy even one single letter would be an awful offense for you, would it not?”

The man nodded meekly, looking away from the others, then dropping his gaze to the table in front of him.

“So, after you’ve faithfully replicated in exact detail the existing Holy Words,” I mildly stated, “our ‘friends’ the Lawyers take those very same words—which actually are mainly

flexible, broad Principles—and *interpret* them for themselves and everyone else in yet further excruciating detail,” I now explained slowly and distinctly. “In this fashion, they narrow-down God’s intended purpose enlivening those words! Is this not so?”

He reluctantly answered: “It’s not my job to police those who take my freshly scribed books and...”

“*And* then the *Pharisees* come along,” I pressed him. “In their great ‘wisdom’ they act out each and every one of those minute details, parading themselves as the holiest of all! By their flaunted example they ratify to everyone that *all* should strive to do exactly as they. Thus they ‘certify’ that their rigid repetitive behavior is the ‘highest’ form of worship of them all. Starting with you, my friend, religion gets stricter and stricter, tighter and tighter, more and more painful!”

My host looked particularly stricken at my damning indictment.

But I wasn’t finished...

“So, the three of you—Scribes, Lawyers, and Pharisees—work together **CONSTRICTING AND CHOKING-OFF ALL PRODUCTIVE RELIGIOUS THOUGHT!**” I yelled again, rising again from my seat to tower over them. “**YOU DENIGRATE GOD’S ELEVATING PRINCIPLES TO ROTE OBEDIENCE OF RELATIVELY TRIVIAL DETAILS. AND YOU END UP CONSUMING AND DEVOURING ALL OF THE DUTIFULLY FOLLOWING PEOPLE’S ‘FREE’ TIME SUCH THAT EVEN IF THEY DID HAVE A CONSTRUCTIVE IDEA ABOUT HOW THEY BEST SHOULD USE THEIR OWN PARTICULAR TALENTS, CAPABILITIES, AND RESOURCES TO THE GLORY OF GOD—THERE’S NO TIME LEFT TO DO SO!**”

The humble Scribe looked up at me, stunned by my accusation.

“Do you not see the extent of your collective folly?” I continued, more gently. “In your excessive zeal to follow God, you’re keeping both yourself and others from flourishing! You’ve *stifled* God’s Creative Energy in your lives. You worship the ‘letter’ of the Law while forgetting its spirit. I am here to proclaim to you the living *Spirit of God* that infuses and enlivenes the dead letters sitting on the pages of the Holy

Scriptures. I am not against Moses' Law! I am here to proclaim the true and deepest Law of *God*."

"I'm only trying to do my job!" the scribe sobbed, shaking his head in studious denial of my argument.

"Your own words, yet again, condemn you, Teacher!" the whitehaired gentleman accused me.

One of his withered hands lovingly fingered the dagger that lay before him on the table.

"How so?" I innocently replied, sitting back down.

"Moses gave us the Law to protect us from our own selves," he snarled back at me. "He knew we'd be tempted by our own foolish human desires that you demonstrate all too vividly!"

"Oh?" I encourage him to continue.

"The Prophets that came after Moses *also* helped the people learn to control their selfish, mischievous thoughts," he spat at me. "What you slyly call 'Godly Creative Energy' is merely *Satan* seeking to turn us away from the proven Faith!"

I nodded thoughtfully, as if carefully weighing his arguments.

"Yes, this is the 'fallback' defense of all those who want to defeat my teachings," I blandly acknowledged. "You want us all back 'in our places'... under your heavy hand!"

"Under *God's* holy hand!" he yelled in triumph. "By your heretical words of sedition, I accuse you of being in league with the Evil One! You put on a good show, but it's empty of discipline, duty, loyalty, sacrifice, and godly suffering. Jesus, your so-called 'miracles' are either tricks or drawn from the nightmarish power of Satan himself! In fact, I suspect *you* are one of Satan's lying demons!"

He deserved no mercy. So, I skewered him...

"*You've* made God's glorious Path into a drear, painful, tedious affair that enriches your own pockets!" I shot back. "God does not call us to pointless suffering but to rejoicing! The true Faith is not for enslaving hordes of dutiful supplicants bowing down at the feet of the 'worthy' few, but for empowering them to use their God-given talents to live out the Good News of Salvation! *You* make God's liberating Principles into a means for assuring your own wealth, power, and prestige.

Truly it is not me that draws power from the forces of insidious Evil, but *you and your complicit friends!*"

Everyone at the table was riveted by the war of words between me and the dagger-wielder. It was as if time were slowing down. Everyone seemed to be moving in slow motion. Indeed, the whole Universe seemed to be holding its collective breath...

"By your very own words," the man continued in his deep, raspy voice, lifting up the dagger to hold it lovingly by its handle, "you admit to adding to the Law of Moses. You aren't here to support the authorities, be in submission to the Priesthood, or help the Temple. You are here to establish your *own* religion, aren't you? You accuse me of seeking power, wealth, and authority? Well, it's *you* that wants to crown yourself 'King of the Jews'—*don't* you, Jesus?"

I reached forward and took another loaf of bread out of the common basket, breaking off a chunk. Leisurely, I took a bite, chewing it slowly. It was fresh, hot, and very delicious.

"I greatly appreciate this fine breakfast at this long table in this impressive household," I nodded to my host, who was still sitting white-faced at the head of the table. "Why?—because I have no house of my own. I have no place to lay my head at night. Many evenings on the road my pillow is a stone. I have no guarantee of a meal even this very night. I live largely due to the kindness of friends, supporters, and strangers. I have no luxurious clothes as do you gentlemen. I own but this one tattered robe. I smell unclean to you because I've been out in the hot sun walking the dusty paths. I have no covered chariot as do you. You hate me not just because I come to you as did the Prophets of old with fresh revelations from God, looking to help God's children at this particular time and place—but because I am not from some royal or upper-class family."

I paused, grinning.

"Yes, it's true! I admit it!" I continued. "I'm the son of a carpenter. I work for a living, doing manual labor! I and my disciples earn our money doing odd jobs in the towns I visit. I have rough and calloused hands. But the people love me because they see I am one of them. These so-called 'commoners'—which you disdain so much you must take a bath to get

rid of their stink should you merely brush up against one of them—they are ME! I am THEM! We are ONE in the Lord! ‘My’ religion is THEIRS!”

I saw their heads snap back, as if my shouted words were physical blows.

“I have no wealth because I am not in love with the riches of this world,” I continued. “Instead, I seek the *greater* treasures of true godliness. By my actions proving my claims, your own corrupt hearts are revealed and put to shame. This is why you hate me so bitterly. It’s not because I help people understand what the Law truly teaches, but because the very teachings you claim to put above everything else condemn *you* to the darkest depths of Satan’s hell!”

I reached over to the jug, pouring more wine into my cup.

“This is very good,” I nodded again to my host.

“Hah!” the white-bearded man snorted in disgust, rising from the table. “You are a *demon*, sent to confuse and distort the teachings of Moses!” he spat over his shoulder as he angrily stalked out of the dining room, still clutching his dagger.

The gathered servants hastily moved out of his path.

I looked from one side of the table to the other, meeting each of the remaining people’s eyes. There was no way I could reach most of them. They hated me, pure and simple. So, I might as well put the nail in my coffin...

“I am a Prophet from God!” I proclaimed. “I come not to change the Law but to *fulfill* it. I come not to destroy Moses’ teachings but to proclaim their true Essence and Purpose. The Mosaic Law is itself a teacher that proved to *us* the folly of leaning on our own meager achievements. It is time for us to grow up! We need not be feeble children any longer. I tell you that the time has come for us to mature! God will no longer lead us by our hands, telling us each little thing we must do. We must think for ourselves. Each individual must take full responsibility for one’s own spirituality and unique actions honoring God. Now is the time for graduation, for putting away the things of childhood. Now is the time for celebrating our new status before God. Now is the time for gladly taking on the responsibilities of matured godly adults!”

I again stood up at my seat. I reached down and took a few slices of fruit, munching on them as I now walked slowly around the table to the host. The young nobleman was white-faced, thin-lipped, and staring straight ahead.

I put a hand on his robed shoulder in a friendly manner. I felt how rigidly his muscles were clenched, how violently his arm was trembling.

“This has been a most enjoyable breakfast,” I loudly thanked him, “—very tasty!”

Then, leaning close to him, I whispered in his ear: “You have much to consider.”

Turning, I strode purposefully out of the dining room, back through the entrance hallway, and out to the cheering throngs awaiting me.

They all chanted on seeing me emerge alive, well, and strong: “JESUS! JESUS! JESUS!”

—while behind me a number of the Pharisees, Scribes, and Lawyers I’d just left came racing after me, violently shoving aside members of the crowd. The well-dressed rich people screamed and ranted, threatening me with drawn knives, jeering and taunting me!

Some of them yelled difficult questions at me, trying to draw me into heated public debate. Despite what had happened around the breakfast table, they still hoped to provoke me into saying something politically damaging.

As I continued to walk leisurely along, now safely encircled by my closest disciples, I calmly answered the shouted questions with my own reasoned arguments.

But instead of falling into their debate-logic traps, I took every point—one after the other—and rose above their childish games to the MEANING and PURPOSE behind each of their “issues” or religious puzzles.

One by one I silenced each of my accusers. And I did it in the full hearing and sight of the cheering crowds, who were hanging on my every word.

So, I escaped the “breakfast trap” so cleverly laid by my enemies. But from that time forward they plotted my demise. They lurked in the back of all my public events, eager to find a

careless word or seditious implication to bring to the authorities. They were determined to get rid of me and my teachings... permanently!

Did my enemies see God beside them at each moment of their existence? Did they allow godliness to permeate every aspect of their lives? The answer is obvious! If they saw God at all, it was as a twisted version of their own warped minds: vengeful, angry, distorted, hate-filled, vindictive!

That is not God.

God does not fill one's heart with darkness. The true Lord of Reality lights up every corner of our lives. Where before despair and hopeless dominated, now exultation and hope triumph! Where before heartache and misery dragged us down, now healing lifts us up. Where before bitterness and anger poisoned our relationships, now compassion and empathy enliven our friendships.

That is God!

So, what is the "take-home message" from my breakfast with the Pharisees? Pardon my shouting... **DON'T ACCEPT CONSTRICTING, DISEMPOWERING, MEANINGLESS RITUALS AND EMPTY TRADITIONS!** They only paint a false-front to your life, papering-over your heart with pseudo-religiosity. You may fool other people with flaunted "holiness"—but God is not fooled. He sees your heart!

Many religious actors fool people into having no doubt that they would make it to the heavenly realm. At that final day they will be absent! Why? Because somewhere along the way, they were seduced by the external "showiness" of religious political power. Consequently, they *closed their eyes* to the truth. Keeping true godliness out of their hearts, they allowed their spirits to go dark. And in so doing, they *departed* from the Kingdom of God.

In short, their hearts *hardened*.

Don't let that happen to you!

Section 2:
DRIVING OUT THE
MONEY-CHANGERS

(See Mark 11:15-18,
Luke 19:43-48)

Do you know what happens when your hearts harden? You lose all perspective on what is true, right, and good. The very worst Example of this was some of the highest Priests of the Jewish faith. In the very center of the Jewish religion, these officials reigned imperiously over the grand, glorious Temple in Jerusalem. The very people you'd expect to be the best at following God had corroded both their and others' inner spirits. Their hearts were the darkest black, devoid of God's Light. And it was evidenced by their utter betrayal of the core Principles of true godliness.

At the very last of my ministry, everything culminated at the Temple. I was in an epic struggle, fighting to restore Godly Transformation to an atrophied, inward-grown religious framework. Many of the Mosaic Law's Priests' hearts were hate-filled, selfish, arrogant, and rotten. I and my closest disciples *attacked* the Temple, the very heart of the Jewish Faith! Our defiance was completely justified. After all, if the Leaders of God's Religion were astray—already departed or in the process of leaving the Kingdom of God—what hope was there for those who looked to them for guidance?

We planned the attack carefully. It would not be on the Holy of Holies, the center of the Temple, nor the other high Holy places inside, but in one of the outer courts where anyone was allowed to enter. As one went deeper into the temple, more and more people were excluded, until only the High

Priest could enter into the Holy of Holies, the innermost sanctum. But in the outermost “court of the Gentiles” everyone could gather. In fact, that was where the Priests allowed regular people to set up business booths and tables, catering to the needs of pilgrims arriving at the Temple.

That was where anyone could sell and buy food, or exchange foreign currency, or purchase souvenirs, or get just about anything else you’d want to buy. Most importantly, that was where you could purchase animals for blood offerings. The visitors would take the animals further into the Temple, presenting them to be used as sacrifices for sin-atonement.

The “court of the Gentiles” stretched thinly around the Temple complex. However, at one point it was a wide, roomy courtyard complex. This was where most of the actual commerce took place. So, as my disciples and I walked into that part of the court of the Gentiles, it was just like walking into any market place...

All around us there were crowds of people milling about. The booths and tables were doing brisk business, with lots of arguing and shouting. It stank of animal droppings and vegetables over-ripe in the hot sun. The merchant-men and women were sweating profusely. People were walking casually through the area carrying large baskets and jugs filled with their wares. Also, there was much through-traffic of people going deeper into the Temple. Rather than have to walk all the way around the large Temple complex, the Priests allowed traffic to “cut through” the wide, main area of the Gentile court.

In the crowds and stands there were a lot of angry people. Many of the weary pilgrims were clearly outraged by high exchange rates for their foreign currency. They were being ripped-off. To purchase things in the court of the Gentiles the pilgrims were not allowed to use Roman coins or other foreign money, but had to exchange that for Jewish currency. Most were resigned, though still unhappy, at being overcharged by the dealers. The pilgrims knew that the Priests deep inside the Temple allowed the exorbitant exchange rates because a big cut of the profits was going straight into their own pockets!

Goats were bleating, lambs scurrying around, pigeons and doves “cooing” and cages clattering. It was to all intents a regular market place, just under the license and control of the Temple Priests—who indeed were making good money from their exorbitant cuts from high prices charge to the “captive audience” pilgrims.

My disciples unobtrusively took positions at the main entrances and exits to the large flat courtyard. They would slow down or distract any responding officials or guards. Everything was in place...

I jumped up on a sturdy table and shouted loudly so all could hear me: “TODAY GOD’S TEMPLE IS RETRIEVED FROM THE HANDS AND HEARTS OF THE MONEY-GRUBBERS—THOSE WHO LOVE MONEY MORE THAN THEY LOVE GOD!”

Everybody was startled, frozen in place where they stood or sat. They looked over at me like I was some kind of raving maniac! Indeed, there would immediately be much more for them to look at...

I reached beneath my outer robe and jerked out a long whip that I’d curled around my waist. It was a “cat of nine tails” with several lengths of thin rope sprawled at the end. Each of the tassels had a sharp object fixed to its tip! It was a formidable weapon against whom any person would flinch.

With a yell of pure animal fury, I *launched* myself at the nearest table of money-changers, CRASHING into their table and *smashing* it to the ground! My whip flailed the astonished businessmen viciously, who tried to protect themselves by putting their hands over their faces!

“What?” one of them cried-out. “What the hell are you doing?”

“*I’m cleaning out your hearts!*” I shouted as I savagely kicked over yet another table.

Coins flew in every direction as the people in the crowd either dove for the clattering money or tried to scramble out of my way!

I unleashed my full righteous anger upon the business people—careening through the stalls, booths, and tables in the courtyard—violently BASHING and THROWING DOWN and

WHIPPING my way along. Animals *bleated* and *squawked* as I smashed-in the doors to their cages and freed them to run away through the scattering crowds...

And none dared stand in my path! My lifelong occupation of carpentry had forged powerful muscles in my body. That plus my righteous fury drove my slashing whip, intimidated even the toughest of them. No one wanted to confront me! Or, they figured that the palace guards would soon race in and subdue me. Fortunately, my disciples stood poised at strategic points to prevent exactly that from happening.

The crowds were screaming and running. Or, they cowered behind overturned tables and stone columns. Some dashed away to try and bring back the temple guards. Others stood rigid with shock, some falling down to the ground, petrified with fear!

“GOD’S HOLY TEMPLE SHOULD BE A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ALL NATIONS!” I yelled as I flailed away with my cutting whip, drawing blood. “YET YOU HAVE TURNED IT INTO A SQUALID DEN OF ROBBERS!”

Meanwhile, my disciples had effectively stopped most traffic from moving into or out of the court, clogging-up the passageways and preventing any quick reinforcement of the area by temple guards. In short order, I’d toppled most of the commercial booths and tables. I stood there panting in the middle of the decimated courtyard. My hair was wild and tangled, sweat pouring from my brow and torso. My whip was stained red. My robe was smeared with splattered blood.

The crowds were scattered, terrified, hiding or crouching down. Animals were bleating, running, and flapping. The plaza was ruined, the booths and tables shattered, goods and money tossed into random heaps. It was chaos!

Wearily, I reached down and grabbed the same toppled sturdy table I’d first stood upon, righting it. I climbed back onto the top of it. Then I spread my arms wide, dropping the whip.

I spoke again to the cringing, terrified crowd: “DO NOT BE AFRAID!” I shouted, panting heavily from my exertions.

I motioned for them—the huddled, sobbing clumps of shocked humanity—to come closer, to sit down on the tiles of

the courtyard. Remarkably, a strange calm settled over the plaza. It was my Heavenly Father establishing the mood for my critical lecture. Where before there was screaming and shouts, now the courtyard was silent.

“TODAY YOU ARE PART OF HISTORY!” I loudly consoled them. **“ONE DAY YOU WILL PROUDLY TELL YOUR CHILDREN AND GRANDCHILDREN THAT YOU WERE HERE TODAY!”**

The pilgrims, bleeding businessmen, and city-folks who'd been walking through all settled down wherever they stood or cowered. They still looked scared but now were intrigued. They now recognized me as the famous preacher they'd heard so much about. But most had not seen me in person until my sudden, violent attack upon them.

I heard them whispering amongst themselves, awestruck: **“It's Jesus... It's the miracle-worker... He's here... Has he come to bring the end of the world? Is he going to kill us all?”**

I called upon the Power of God to quiet not just their voices but their fears. A hushed expectancy filled the courtyard. The atmosphere was charged, electric! Even loosed animals calmed, settling down amongst the rubble. Other folks still trickled into the plaza, my disciples allowing the common city people to enter. All around the Temple the citizenry had heard the ruckus and came to see what was happening. They sat or stood around the edges, packing the large area even more tightly.

I glimpsed at distance a few temple guards running up. But spying the many people who now surrounded me, they held off trying to force their way into the decimated courtyard.

“LET PEACE BE UPON YOU!” I shouted, though a bit softer now. I was starting to get my breath back, wiping away streaming sweat from my brow. **“THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS AT HAND! WHO QUESTIONS MY ACTIONS?”**

All over the plaza, numerous hands were stuck tentatively into the air.

I pointed to an elderly, wrinkled lady sitting near me who was eagerly waving a pudgy hand.

“Teacher, what are you doing to us?” the old lady quavered, her voice trembling but sharp-edged. **“I was only trying**

to make a living selling my doves. You've cost me a good day's wage which I need to feed my family!"

"Which would you rather lose?" I asked her loudly, so that all could hear. "Which is worth more—a day's wage or your immortal soul?"

She gasped, lowering her eyes from my intense, hard-faced, wild-eyed expression.

All across the plaza, the other hands lowered as they puzzled over my words.

Then, in a softer and more compassionate tone I continued: "Have you not heard of *Esau* who sold his birthright for a single meal?"

She nodded, chastened.

"AND ALL THE REST OF YOU," I now shouted across the seated throngs, "HAVE YOU NOT HEARD OF ESAU WHO SOLD HIS BIRTHRIGHT FOR A SINGLE MEAL?"

More people nodded, but some looked puzzled. Indeed, there were many Gentiles present who had no background at all in the Holy Scriptures.

"For those who've not heard it, let me quickly tell you the story of Esau and Jacob!" I spoke loudly to the seated throngs. "One of the sons of the great Prophet Abraham was Isaac. Isaac married Rebekah, who it turned out was unable to conceive. So, Isaac prayed fervently to the Lord that his wife might bear children. God granted his wish—with twins! But the two developing children struggled within her womb, seemingly fighting each other! Knowing that her pregnancy was a gift from God, she was greatly concerned as to why this trouble in her belly should occur! So, she prayed to God to help her understand. God spoke to her directly, saying: *'The founders of two nations are within your body. The separation of the two peoples has begun. One will be stronger than the other. But the elder shall serve the younger.'*"

"God is great!" a man shouted from within the crowd, interrupting me.

"Yes, He is," I answered. "And He can do anything! He determines the paths of the celestial objects. He sets the course of history. And He offers to you and me CHOICES that will determine the final fate of you, those you love, and indeed all

mankind. What happened to you today in this courtyard will have repercussions for millennia into the future! Today you are part of history in the making, just as was the birth of Isaac's two sons."

"Tell us more, Master!" a bruised shopkeeper yelled back in a deep voice.

He absently rubbed at red slashes across his cheek where he'd been struck by my whip. I took no pleasure in hurting people. But drawing their blood was a small price for "burning-in" the lessons they were learning.

"Your minor suffering today in this court will help usher in a whole new Age of Mankind!" I exclaimed. "In like fashion, the painful birthing of the twin boys by Rebekah set the course of ancient history. The first to be born was red all over, like a hairy garment, much like you, Sir!" I smiled back at the burly, lightly bleeding shopkeeper.

He laughed ruefully, clearly flattered by the attention, absently wiping dripping blood from his cheek.

"So, he was named Esau," I continued, "which means 'hairy.' And immediately after he emerged from his mother's womb, his brother followed along—with one hand gripping the heel of the firstborn. So, the second-born was named Jacob which means 'supplanter!'"

"They were still fighting?" a young lad near me exclaimed.

"—even as newborn babies!" I laughed, putting up my fists and punching the air. "You have a brother too, don't you?" I asked.

"Yes!" he shouted back angrily. "And he's very mean to me!"

"Why do think that is?" I asked.

"He's older than me," he piped back. "So, he thinks he knows everything. Plus, he's bigger than me and can push me around!"

"But you're smarter than him, aren't you?" I answered. And without waiting for him to answer I continued: "Plus, you're nicer to your mother and father, never causing them any trouble. But your older brother is often in the streets looking for his own fun. He's being selfish while you're here in the courtyard helping your parents make a living. Am I right?"

Sitting right next to him, a middle-aged couple exchanged startled looks. “How did you know that, Teacher?” the man gasped...

I winked at them.

“As Esau and Jacob grew up,” I loudly continued, “a similar thing occurred with them. They were the opposite to each other. Esau was very red-skinned and hairy, like an animal! He loved to go hunting, spending much time away from the house out in the woods. Sure, he brought meat home for his family. But he hunted mostly for the fun of it or to get out of doing household chores. And his father admired his hairy, older, stronger son—loving to eat the wild game that Esau was so good at killing and cooking into a savory stew.”

“Sounds mighty tasty!” a man laughed, propped up against a broken animal cage.

“Yes, it was!” I agreed. “In fact, it was so good that Isaac became almost addicted to it—so much that he almost forgot he had a son called Jacob, who was doing so many other good things for him. He even disrespected his dear wife Rebekah, choosing to give his praise to this hairy, noisy, ‘manly,’ hunter-son instead of her! Esau’s bowls of wild-meat stew actually changed Isaac’s priorities. He forgot what was most important in his life!”

“My husband is just like that!” a thin lady yelped, overcome with emotion. “He loves his dinners more than he loves me! I’m just a cook to him...” She sobbed loudly, startling everyone.

“I feel your pain!” I answered. “But your husband does those bad things to you out of ignorance. Help him to better understand what God wants from him. As for Esau, he had no such excuse. He knew exactly what he was doing. He knew that his dad loved the savory stew. So, Esau learned everything about cooking stews. He bought the nicest spices, the tastiest vegetables, making the smoothest sauces from the purest fat and oils. He even added drops of mildly addicting substance. Thusly, his wild-meat stew was the most delicious in the world! In fact, he became famous for it. People would come visit at their table just to sample Esau’s famous hunter’s stew.”

“I’ll bet it wasn’t very good for the digestion!” a chubby lady sitting by a column barked-out. “I know! My husband makes me use the hottest spices. But then I have to live with his *gas* afterwards! Phewww!” she grimaced.

The crowd roared with laughter. It was quite a change from the chaos and terror of just a few minutes before...

“Very perceptive, good lady!” I called back at her. “Yes, even though Esau’s wild-meat stew was very tasty and colorful—it was hard on the digestion! His stew was loaded with hot, harsh spices. People would remark how great it was on one’s tongue, but how tough it was on their stomach afterward!”

“What about Jacob?” A short lady in a brown robe called from the other side of the plaza. “Did he compete with the hunter to cook such delicious meals?”

“Good question!” I congratulated her. “Jacob in the meantime was the ‘good’ son who stayed at home. He dutifully performed chores, helping his mother around the house. He even learned to cook—not spectacular centerpieces, but healthy, nutritious meals. He was thin, smooth-skinned, and pale. His father didn’t think much of him all, hardly even acknowledging his presence. But Rebekah remembered what God had told her: that the elder son would one day serve the younger. So, she knew that a great future was in store for her faithful younger son, despite the older brother being flashier and stronger.”

“I like Jacob!” the same young lad spoke up. “He’s just like me!”

“Yes, he’s a lot like *all* of us faithful, godly people,” I agreed. “He was decent, hard-working, loyal, and smart. But as you know, by tradition and law the oldest son is the one who inherits everything when the head of the household dies. So, Esau expected to become the eventual head of the family, with Jacob under his authority... but it turned out different!”

“What happened?” several yelled-out, intrigued.

“I will tell you what happened!” I agreeably replied. “Esau was out in the forest hunting. There was no game about. So, he continued for a long while, determined to bring home a good kill. But finally, he gave up. It’d been a while since he

ran out of his provisions. So, he turned back. But he'd gone so far into the forest that it took him a long time to return. By the time he got back to their house, he was extremely weak from hunger. In fact, he could barely move! He was afraid he'd just fall over and die from starvation. He was so weak his muscles were trembling. But then he saw Jacob at the stove boiling up a *pot of red stew*. It was not made with meat but lentils. It wasn't the fanciest or tastiest meal, but a nourishing staple—food that the family regularly ate."

"It must have looked like the best food in the world!" the young lad piped up again.

"Yes, indeed, it surely did!" I answered. "In fact, Esau was so famished that to him it seemed that Jacob's stew was going to save his life. Without it, he figured he'd drop over dead! At that moment, Esau wanted it more than anything else in the whole world. So, he staggered to a table and collapsed down in a chair, his upper body flopping flat down upon the tabletop. He just managed to gasp out: 'Jacob... bring me some of that red lentil stew of yours... I'm dying from hunger!' But Jacob saw an opportunity to bring about what his mother, Rebekah, had told him concerning God's promise. So, Jacob said to Esau: 'You may have a bowl of *my* humble stew, brother—if you will give me something in exchange for it... your *birth-right!*'"

I paused for a couple seconds to let my rapt audience absorb the enormity of what Jacob was demanding.

"His entire inheritance from his father?" someone called-out. "That's crazy! Surely none would give that away for just one bowl of stew?"

"Well, what good would that *theoretical* great reward that's far-off in the distant future be to Esau if he died of hunger?" I dramatically replied, rolling my eyes and clutching at my throat like I was dying.

Some laughed. But others were silent, their brows furrowed, deeply troubled by my story. They rightly feared that it related to *their* own present behavior...

"But surely he'd not have died from missing a meal for just a few minutes?" an elderly man warbled. "I've missed many meals. So have most everyone else here. Besides, in a rich

man's house, could not Esau just have gone gotten something else to eat, like a piece of bread? Maybe it'd not be as hot and tasty as that fresh stew, but still nourishing?"

"BUT ESAU THOUGHT HE WAS DYING!" I shouted to the crowd, my voice reverberating around the disheveled courtyard. "And... do you think he *really* thought his brother was serious—or that some offhand promise would mean anything many years in the future?"

"Ahhh..." many in the crowd nodded, understanding. "Esau was a bit stupid, sly, and untrustworthy, was he?"

"Yes, indeed!" I agreed. "In fact, he saw any 'stew' as just a means to influence others, just as he did with his own specialty stew. So, here's what happened! Esau snickered and flip-pantly said: 'Brother, I'm about to die from hunger! If I'm dead, what good is a future birthright? I agree to your terms. *Just give me a big bowl of that stew right now!*'"

"Make him swear!" someone in the crowd shouted.

"Yes!" I answered. "Jacob was smart too! He knew that Esau didn't really mean to keep his word. So, he replied to Esau: '*Only if you swear before God that you are giving me your birthright as firstborn in exchange for me giving you a big bowl of my stew!*' And Esau, irritated, impatient, feeling too weak to even move, and famished... said: "Alright! I swear it to God! I swear I give you my birthright for the stew. Ok, brother? Now give it to me quick before I die!"

"Did Jacob get the birthright?" another kid piped up close to me.

"Years later, when his father passed on," I answered, "things worked out such that God's promise to Rebekah was indeed fulfilled. Jacob became the head of the family, with his older brother, Esau, serving him. But Jacob is not what I'm teaching you about. I'm getting you to think about stupid Esau *giving up his inheritance*—all his future wealth, position, and power—all for one measly bowl of stew! Wow! It sure must have been some sort of a fabulous meal, don't you think?"

An old lady cackled back to me, her voice cracking: "Ain't no bowl of stew or meal worth thet, ah think! Even if the lad

thought he was truly starving, surely there wuz an apple to munch on somewhere?”

The crowd chuckled, amused by her folksy wisdom.

“AND WHAT DO YOU THINK HAPPENED A FEW HOURS AFTER ESAU CONSUMED THAT INCREDIBLY EXPENSIVE MEAL?” I again shouted, opening my eyes wide as I turned slowly in a circle, speaking to everyone.

“He was hungry again?” the little lad nearby me piped up loudly.

“Yes! You’re so smart!” I congratulated him as he beamed with pride. “Esau got hungry again! WHAT HE THOUGHT WAS SO ABSOLUTELY CRITICAL—IMPORTANT ENOUGH TO GIVE AWAY HIS BIRTHRIGHT IN EXCHANGE—WAS COMPLETELY GONE IN ONLY A FEW HOURS! *So, what was Esau’s greatest sin?*” I asked.

For a few moments there was complete silence.

Then a number of hands went up and they answered me thusly: “Pride... Stupidity... Arrogance over his younger brother... Using food like a drug... Thinking God did not hear his swear... Letting his hunger cloud his reason... Not honoring the future... Living only in the moment... Not setting real priorities... Putting too much value on his own stomach... Going too far away in the first place doing his own selfish things?”

“All good answers!” I smiled, stopping their responses by raising my hand. “And they are all, to some extent, correct. Esau was indeed guilty of *not recognizing what was in his own long-term, best interests*—which means he was stupid, plus all the other things you said. But the *GREATEST SIN OF ESAU WAS NONE OF THOSE THINGS!* Instead, his *greatest sin* had to do with his *heart*. Does anyone know what was wrong with his heart, indeed that which he’d done to *himself?*”

They were again silent.

“I’ll give you a clue!” I prodded them. “*Jacob* did this thing *correctly* to his own heart—though I hasten to add that Jacob was also not perfect and also did shameful things in the future.”

The little boy near me raised his hand tentatively.

“Yes?” I encouraged him.

“Did Jacob love his Mommy and Daddy?” he said.

“DID EVERYONE HEAR THAT?” I shouted over the throng. Several shook their heads “no.” I shouted back even more loudly: “*THIS YOUNG LAD ASKED IF JACOB TRULY LOVED HIS MOTHER AND FATHER?* In other words, was Jacob operating from just enlightened self-interest to become the head of the family someday? Or was he sincerely trying to *please* his beloved parents, and through them God Himself? And to the contrary, was Esau interested in pleasing anyone except himself, or was he just scamming his way to satisfying the immediate needs of his aching belly?”

“Ahhh....” They answered, nodding.

“YOU GOOD PEOPLE TODAY, HERE IN THE COURT OF THE GENTILES!” I thundered loudly. “I ASK YOU SINCERELY: ARE YOU TURNING GOD’S TEMPLE INTO A MARKETPLACE TO HELP THE WEARY PILGRIMS COMING HERE... OR MERELY TO GET YOURSELF ANOTHER BOWL OF STEW WHICH TOMORROW WILL BE *DI-GESTED-AWAY*, JUST A FADING MEMORY? —AND YOU PILGRIMS!” I continued. “ARE YOU ANGRY AT THE HONEST MERCHANTS TAKING A FAIR PROFIT, OR DO YOU *REALLY* WANT THEM TO GIVE YOU EVERYTHING FOR FREE, SUCH THAT THEIR FAMILIES STARVE?”

They all appeared stunned at my accusation, both merchants and pilgrims alike.

“But...” a weary-looking pilgrim answered. “We’re *required* to exchange our currency in order to purchase offerings for taking into the Temple with us. And that’s after us coming long distances at great expense! Don’t we deserve a break?”

“And we’re just providing a *necessary* service!” the burly man with the scratched cheek barked-out. “If they did not deal with us here, they’d have to deal with someone else at a less convenient location!”

“At what prices?” I shot back at him.

“Well...” the burly man paused. Then, defensively, he admitted: “We have to charge high rates because the Temple takes such a big cut!”

“And do you then make a good profit yourselves?” I queried, pointing a finger at him.

“Not really,” he grunted loudly. “On slow days I only break even. It is the guaranteed volume that makes it attractive to sell our goods here. On a busy day I can do well.”

“And how well do you treat those customers who you must deal with so quickly in order to turn a good profit?” I asked again.

This time none of the merchants answered.

“Not very well!” the same pilgrim that’d complained before yelled-out. “They treat me like dirt! I have no option but to pay their high prices. They look at and speak to me like I was beneath their contempt. It’s not right!”

“THIS WHOLE THING IS NOT RIGHT!” I thundered at him and all the others. “Truly it is said in the Holy Scriptures: *‘My house shall be called a house of prayer!’* But you, here, have turned what should be a holy refuge against worldliness into a nest of robbers and money-lovers! Is there any concern for your customers? Do you who sell and exchange currency have any sympathy at all for those who must deal with you? Or are they just a means for you to get money? When you see them, are they precious individual people coming from afar to honor God, or just your next sale? Where is *your* connection to God? THIS IS SUPPOSEDLY GOD’S HOLIEST PLACE ON EARTH—HIS *TEMPLE!*”

“The merchants should take their own animals to offer for *their* sins!” the nearby pilgrim shouted. “*They* are the sinners! They need the blood of their animals to wash away their *own* sins!”

“AND YET THERE *YOU* ARE WRONG!” I chastised him, glaring down at the angry pilgrim. “The blood of bulls and goats cannot forgive sins! Those sacrifices are only a *token* offering of your contrition before God. God cares not about how much blood you spill once you get deeper into the Temple. You can offer *rivers* of animal blood and it will do *nothing* for you. God cares not how many animals you slaughter! They are not what God wants from you. He does not want your token innocent animals bought in this perverted marketplace. He wants *YOU!* He wants your minds! He wants your bodies

full of hot, pulsing, alive, *human* blood! Yes, He wants your entire life. And most of all—above everything else—He wants your living, beating *hearts!*”

“But the Law of Moses commands us to...” another pilgrim began, stunned at my rant against one of the main, high-holy practices of the Temple.

“DO YOU REALLY WANT BLOOD?” I cried-out, grabbing my robe and tearing it open. Likewise, I ripped my inner shirt down to my waist, exposing my chest. “*Give me a knife and I’ll cut out my own heart for you!*” I offered in complete sincerity, shocking everyone.

“But you took *our* blood by your...” someone shouted back.

“Yes, I whipped you!” I admitted. “But that was to seize your entire attention, focusing it on *blood!*”

“Uh... good job,” the same person now laughed.

But it wasn’t a joke. I was dead serious!

“I tell you truly,” I continued, still exposing my naked chest to all around me, “that I will *give up my own body* for you, if that will free you from the nonsense of what you’re doing now. Only *one* sacrifice can atone for sin! I must be the Ultimate Sacrifice. It’s not you giving up prized livestock or token purchases, but *God* giving *His* most precious possession, his only begotten Son, for YOU!”

At that moment, the enormity of what I would soon endure settled upon me like a mountain. To that point I’d been enthused, on fire with wild abandon, caught up in my savagery and the joy of sermonizing at the Court of the Gentiles. But now the energy suddenly drained out of me and I found it hard to stand erect.

I wavered back and forth. The people near me feared I was about to fall off the table onto them. The crowd saw what was happening and gasped. It must have looked to them like the blood had literally drained from my body—as I grew pale and withered, shrinking in height. Even my eyes—which before had glowed with a fiery passion—now became sunken, withdrawn, and pinched.

Before *their* eyes I became a shriveled, standing corpse.

“But don’t grieve for me!” I panted, pulling my torn shirt back together over my chest. I feebly gathered my robe about

me with trembling hands, just managing to stay upright on the top of the sturdy table. “*Laid up for me is a magnificent reward, soon to be achieved!* And you can have it too! It is for *you* that I spill my blood, sacrifice my body, and let my mind be torn into pieces by Satan. By *my* sacrifice I win for *you* a glorious future, a birthright beyond your imagination. My blood grants you a victory over evil and death. I pave the crimson way for you to inherit eternity in the immediate presence our heavenly Father!”

The crowd was beginning to recover from my attack and dramatic speech. As I became less a superpowered hypnotic speaker and more a mere mortal human, they were falling back into their old patterns. They wanted to forget my disturbing “sermon,” move on, repair the damage I’d done, and get back to business...

But some were moved by my words, recognizing new possibilities.

“Will you allow us to enter the holy parts of the Temple, Master?” a Gentile woman close to me hesitantly asked, holding out a beseeching hand.

But if she expected sympathy, she was wrong!

“*Why are you fixated on this pile of stones?*” I sternly admonished her, startling everyone yet again.

I gathered my strength, straightening up to my full height. Now I projected a fierce determination transcending the physical weakness of my frail flesh. My momentary weakness had passed...

Toward the back of the packed, sitting crowd, I now saw more *temple guards* arriving. They were trying to find a path to get into the packed courtyard.

I ignored them and continued.

“*Is this place really the center of your affections for God?*” I demanded in a powerfully resonant voice. “I speak to both you faithful pilgrims *and* you non-Jews.”

I theatrically looked up and around, gesturing at the mighty columns of stone, the high walls, and the glistening white towers.

“Yes, this is the Temple of the true People of God,” I affirmed. “Yes, it is a grand and glorious construction made by

many people over many years to honor the true and only God. Yes, it is a force of History come down to us from past ages!”

They were deeply impressed, not just newly arrived pilgrims, but also those who'd grown up here. To many of the shopkeepers it was just a place of business, its magnificence long since faded into the background of their minds. Yet the grand construction, its long history, and its profound significance was undeniable...

“BUT LISTEN WELL TO THE WORDS I NOW SPEAK TO YOU!” I thundered at them. “I, JESUS OF NAZARETH, A SHORT TIME FROM NOW, WILL UTTERLY DESTROY THE EDIFICE THAT TRULY STANDS AT THE CENTER OF GOD’S RELIGION. AND THEN, IN A MERE THREE DAYS, BY THE POWER OF GOD, I WILL BUILD IT UP AGAIN... BETTER, BIGGER, AND FINER THAN IT EVER WAS BEFORE!”

I heard many “gasps” from the crowd, stunned by this outrageous claim. Where before I'd been an interesting, famous madman... now to many I was a *dangerous fanatic* looking to burn down the establishment. I sympathized with them, because their fear was correct!

“You doubt me?” I challenged them all, slowly turning in a circle, eyeing them all, my hands on my hips. “Truly I say to you: *with your own eyes you will soon see this happen!* Then you will understand that I'm not some raving lunatic, but the very *Son of God* Himself! You will fall on your knees and praise God for His great Power, that today you witnessed this prophesy—*right here in this very courtyard!*”

They looked bewildered, stunned at the words coming out of my mouth, fearful of the power of God evident in my booming words, not knowing how to respond?

Then, in a calmer, quieter, but still resonant voice I continued: “*The Messiah spoken of in the Law of Moses will lead you forth into a new world!* You will not need to go to some man-made Temple to find God. All people everywhere will worship God *right where they are*—in their homes, their workplaces, and in their hearts.”

This was a huge threat to the religious ruling elite. But I wasn't finished stoking their wrath...

“No more Temple?” an old woman gasped.

“Yes!” I confidently asserted. “There will be no more need for these walls, these barriers. Why? Because there will be no more Gentiles and Jews. There will be no more females and males. There will be no more youngsters and old folks. There will be no more slaves and free. There will be no more noblemen and peasants. There will be no more wealthy or poverty-stricken. For ALL WILL BE ONE, TOGETHER!” I finished with a shout of triumph.

The entire plaza was silent at my outrageous claims. Many people’s jaws were hanging open in shock.

In the silence I spoke softly, everyone still able to hear me distinctly and crisply: “God’s children will be freed from the tyranny of living up to the arbitrary rules of men. No more will we obsess on money. No more will we lord it one over the other. No longer will we disrespect and fight with each other over the price of sacrificial doves and goats. No more will we haggle over how many coins of metal the other person must pay for ‘official’ currency. Each person—no matter how lofty or lowly their status in earthly society—will be respected, appreciated, and loved!”

“Where is this place, Master?” the Gentile woman who’d spoken earlier gasped.

Tears of wonderment poured from her eyes, dripping unwiped down her face. She was caught-up in the glorious vision of this new world, new society, new Kingdom...

“Good woman,” I answered gently. “I speak of the *Kingdom of God*. It is not far from you. It is closer than you think. You have but to listen to what I’m saying, see what I’m doing, know who I am, and do what I teach—and YOU will be one of its most respected citizens!”

This statement sent a ripple of disbelief and even outrage throughout the crowd. This person was both a woman and a gentile! What I was saying—there in the Jewish Temple, the heart of the patriarchal Jewish religion—was simply unthinkable!

“We did not hear you!” a man shouted from way in the back of the crowd. “Tell us also!”

I lifted up my robed arms, acknowledging him plus all the others at the back of the courtyard.

“Sadly, yes, there are many others that do *not* hear me—even though I speak with total clarity,” I answered, a bit more loudly so all could hear. “But so that everyone today, here, in this place may have no excuse as to what I’m telling you—I preach *THE KINGDOM OF GOD!*” I yelled at the top of my voice.

Yes, I wanted my words to echo all around the courtyard and onward deep into the Temple! I spoke intensely enough such that even the Chief Priests, sequestered deep inside the huge Temple complex, would hear me!

Even more guards were gathering in the background. Certainly, the Priests already knew of this disturbance. They were amassing their forces to take back the courtyard of the Gentiles...

“THE OLD LAW IS COMING TO AN END!” I shouted with infective enthusiasm. “THE NEW AGE OF OUR GREAT GOD IS DAWNING!” I exulted, strengthened.

I opened my hands, stretching wide my fingers, grasping for their hearts. I saw a few in the crowd rallying to my defiant challenge, nodding eagerly.

“When I destroy this Temple and build it anew, I promise you I will *tear apart the veil that keeps us from the Holy of Holies!* ALL WILL FREELY ENTER INTO THE HEART OF GOD—not just a privileged few! And *your* hearts will merge *together* with your one, all-powerful, loving, and true Heavenly Father!”

“Yes! Yes!” more people were now shouting, jumping up to their feet and waving their hands in the air in excitement.

“*What would you have us to do?*” the same burly merchantman that’d spoken before yelled over the increasing noise of the throng.

“Boycott this Temple location!” I emphatically yelled back to him. “Break the hold the Priests have upon your profession! Conduct your business close to here yet outside the Temple grounds! Charge a fair price for your services! Treat all your customers as you’d like to be treated yourself under the same circumstance! Organize! Let no one else enter into this

square other than true pilgrims, intent on purifying themselves! Make the Temple into a place for prayer, helping people move closer to God! Embrace my teachings! Take ‘holiness’ out of the hands of the Temple Priests! Take charge of your own spiritual growth! Put God’s Holy of Holies into your own hearts! Don’t give away your birthright for just one bowl of tasty stew! Prize the Lord your God above all else! *Do this and you will proudly stand together with me in the Kingdom of God!*”

Clearly, they’d never before heard a sermon like this. Though they’d recently been beaten, cowed, and terrorized by *me*... all of that ill will vanished. In its place was exultation, a shared vision, and the implicit promise of regaining the Jewish nation’s past proud heritage!

“JESUS! JESUS! JESUS! JESUS!” the packed crowd now began chanting together, standing and laughing.

They held their hands held high in the air, hopping up and down. They slapped each other on their backs, embracing each other without restraint. Jews and Gentiles, pilgrims and shopkeepers, young and old—all dancing and laughing together. For the first time in their lives, they were united and *changed!*

But now, pushing their way into the crowd at the back, was a large contingent of well-armed palace guards.

“*Break up this meeting!*” one of them shouted. “The Priests have declared this gathering illegal! Stop this rioting!”

I closed the fingers on my right hand and aimed my fist at them. My left hand was still raised to the heavens.

“YOU WHO LIVE BY THE SWORD WILL DIE BY IT!” I shouted back. “The time is fast approaching when all those who in the name of God suck the blood from their own people will be brought low! Your earthly enemies will erect a wall of high pointed stakes around you. You will be trapped! There will be no escape. You and your masters—the Chief Priests, the Scribes, and the Pharisees—will all likewise be slaughtered!”

The palace guards stopped in their tracks, shocked at my defiant words. I lowered my arms, planting my hands on my robed hips.

I continued without pause: "You and your children will be crushed! There will be no hiding place! Even here in the Temple not one stone will remain upon the other. And this will happen because you did not recognize, indeed haughtily disdained, the very HAND OF GOD held out to you. God tried to bring you back to Him. Salvation was within your grasp. Yet you rejected true safety! *Utter destruction will come upon this place because of your refusal to let God into your hearts!*"

The crowd began chanting even louder and more defiantly: "JESUS! JESUS! JESUS! JESUS!"

More and more troops were coming up behind the first contingent. Now they were fighting their way into the courtyard. My followers at the entrance ways were overwhelmed.

"We must go, Master!" one of my disciples urged me. He reached up with a strong hand to pull me down from the sturdy table.

My legs were weak. I was exhausted. I could barely stand. I leaned heavily on his shoulder, letting him half-carry me towards an exit.

"Do you think they will remember?" I gasped to him, panting heavily from my exertions.

"Oh, I think so," he answered, nodding grimly. "I *definitely* think so..."

And so, the Chief Priests and the Scribes were all united against me. They were determined to destroy me by any means possible. I didn't blame them. They were just reacting logically to my violent provocation. After all, I'd threatened their base of power, their monopolistic hold on the people, and a big hunk of their lucrative livelihood. If they'd previously had any doubt about the threat I posed to them, there was none now. They were in all agreement. As one of your marvelous musicals about me sings: "*This Jesus must die!*"

But I was deeply saddened I had to confront them so violently. I was heartbroken they'd moved so far away from God. I was disgusted they would gladly kill the one who brought them Good News. Indeed, they perpetuated a vile, stinking, horrific practice at the Temple. Supposed salvation depended on slaughtering vast numbers of innocent animals. Now they

could discontinue that disgusting ritual! Yet by their lust for the *profit* the mandated ritual brought them, many of the highest and most respected leaders of the Jewish Nation had *disqualified themselves* from staying in the Kingdom of God!

Why?

It wasn't just the money itself. It wasn't even the arrogance of controlling others, or their lust for power. It was because they *did not allow godliness to permeate their hearts!* THEY, in essence, were the "elder sons" distaining their own inheritance... exchanging their birthright for one little, temporary bowl of stew! And supplanting them would be the "younger sons" whom they presently ignored or abused: the Gentiles, the women, the slaves, the commoners, the peasants, and the so-called "unclean" sinners.

Sure, the Priests of the Temple presently held high positions, unquestioned power, and ill-gotten wealth—but it was their obsession on those worldly things that *lost* them God's respect and love. They gave up so much for so little...

Many of the Priest were like many of the Lawyers of Moses' religion, who were like their eager zealots the Pharisees, who were like the haughty Sadducees. They were united in their intolerance and hateful zeal forcing everyone to do everything exactly "right." The Temple's Priests had lost their way. Instead of enthusing, helping, and empowering the people to ever-better follow God, the leaders of God's people were discouraging, blocking, and kicking people *out* of God's Kingdom!

Only a *massive upheaval* in the political, social, and religious structures would loosen that chokehold on God's People. And I was about to provide exactly that...

So how do we today allow godliness to permeate our hearts—informing and aligning our entire lives—such that we don't inadvertently drift out of the Kingdom of God? Here's a clue... Don't be like the Priests at the Temple! Don't give your soul away cheaply! No matter how "tasty" that irresistible "bowl of stew" may seem which you think you **MUST HAVE RIGHT NOW OR YOU'LL DIE...** *count the complete and full cost before consuming it!*

You *do* have a priceless Inheritance in the Kingdom of God, awaiting you from your heavenly Father. And unlike the feeble, old, shortsighted Isaac—The Lord of Reality holds you in high regard. You will not have to contrive or cheat, as did Jacob, to gain your eternal birthright from God. Your Father *loves* you and *wants* you to inherit the full glories of His Kingdom!

You will only lose your inheritance if you *yourself* choose to sell it. The “permeability” of your heart is in your own hands.

It’s *your choice...* to stay united with God or cast Him aside for a *measly little bowl of stew*.

Section 3:

DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

(See *Matthew 19:3-12*)

Yes, another sadly common Example of deliberately refusing to allow godliness to permeate one's entire heart—and thus forfeiting one's place in the Kingdom of God—is how men often mistreat their wives, even otherwise devoutly religious men!

I was challenged on just this topic by yet another group of Pharisees. They were looking for a way to break the extraordinary connection I had with the ordinary person. These supposedly “holy” men felt that challenging me on this touchy subject was a good way to alienate my followers. If I failed to uphold men's power over their wives, I'd lose half my audience. However, if I failed to stand up for women, I'd lose the other half. Either way, the Pharisees won.

True, upon hearing my arguments many men would harden their hearts. But many more women would allow me to become their spiritual Master. In the end, truth wins for people with open hearts.

I was teaching a great crowd of people, after having departed the Galilee region for my final time. It was, indeed, the last time that many of those people would see me in the flesh. So, I didn't mind at all the large contingency of Pharisees which approached me through the crowd.

I knew that although the common people held the supposedly “saintly” Pharisees in awe, that admiration was tinged by

resentment and fear. The common people would not be unhappy to see these arrogant, dictatorial, self-righteous tyrants put in their place! So, I used confrontations between me and the Pharisees to vividly burn my messages deep into the collective psyche of the people.

I knew the Pharisees were going to confront me on one of the most difficult and delicate religious issues of all. This cataclysmic confrontation would serve to clarify, without a doubt, the *key lesson* I was trying to communicate. I wanted each and every person I encountered in my ministry to know and be able to repeat this shouted statement: “OUR HEAVENLY FATHER WANTS OUR HEART. IF WE GIVE HIM ANYTHING LESS, WE WILL FALL SHORT OF PARTAKING IN HIS TRANSCENDENT GLORY!”

Appropriately, I was in the region called “Perea.” The word itself means: “The Land Beyond,” or east of the Jordan. I was moving ever nearer to my looming execution. Now was the time to leave behind any restraints, letting everything be known! There was no further need to obscure my teachings within confusing parables. I could speak freely. I could take the people all the way to the *most difficult lessons of all*, revealing the character and content of their hearts!

Yes, it was time to speak in detail about *divorce and remarriage...*

“Master!” one of the Pharisees challenged me in a shrill, piercing voice. He stepped forward to stand a mere few yards away from me. “*Is it legal and righteous for men to dismiss, repudiate, and divorce their wives for any and every cause?*”

Yes, that Pharisee went right to the center of Holiness. He thought he’d gut me like a fish, but the Pharisees were about to lay themselves open—doing so in sight of everyone there assembled! I paused, savoring the moment. This would be the greatest confrontation between me and these hate-filled “legalists.”

I was sitting on a fallen tree trunk on the top of a low hill. Spread out in each direction was a huge throng of people. There were *thousands* of people down below and around. And they were all struck silent by the enormity of the Pharisee’s

question. Nobody in the vast crowd spoke or even whispered. They were all intent upon my response.

But this wasn't the first time I'd answered that question. Indeed, I'd proclaimed on a number of previous occasions that such a practice was, in essence, an *abomination* of God's holiness. And these Pharisees knew full well my previous teachings. So, they hoped to catch me either contradicting myself or being nailed down by them as clearly being in conflict with the Law of Moses. But this wasn't just a boring question on an esoteric or minor religious point. No, this was in regard to a practice which was heartily embraced and much beloved by the Jewish male!

Yet it was already a topic of huge contention in the religious community. One group strongly denied the Mosaic practice of being able to divorce one's wife for any cause, saying doing so was ungodly. Another group was firmly on the side of a strict interpretation of the Mosaic Law, enthusiastically allowing men this right over their women. Seemingly, all the arguments had long since been made—with no clear resolution!

So, the Pharisees felt that by challenging me publicly with this question, I'd be compelled to take one or the other position. Then, using regular debate tactics, they could easily attack me regardless of the side I came down upon.

I slowly stood up, making a show of straightening out my rumped robe. Then I walked down a few steps from the top of the hill. I lightly touched several of the closest women in the crowd on their hands, *leading them back up to the top of the hill for all to see!*

Leaving the small cluster of women to stand there on the highest point of the hill, I turned back to the gathered Pharisees. They now numbered in the hundreds! Indeed, this area was a stronghold of their sect. Though the common people outnumbered them, still the mass of Pharisees on this occasion were enough—if they found sufficient justification in the eyes of the people—to storm the top of the hill and rip me limb from limb!

"I don't fully understand your question!" I replied in a loud voice to my interrogator, such that all surrounding could

hear me. I mocked my interrogator by opening my eyes wide and putting on a theatrically puzzled expression.

“Just what ‘don’t’ you understand?” he sarcastically answered, knowing I was leading him on. “It’s a simple ‘yes-or-no’ question. Surely your many followers deserve to know where you stand on this important topic? This is a critical legal and religious question. It speaks to our righteousness as God’s people. Please, ‘teacher,’ give us your answer!”

I grinned widely at him, displaying my white teeth.

“You say it is ‘legal’ and ‘righteous,’” I continued, pursing my lips in apparent concentration. “I assume that you know that the Jewish laws made by *men* allow such a religious practice. But as to it being ‘righteous’—surely you, a revered advocate of godliness, speak of what *God* thinks of us choosing to do such a thing?”

The spokesman nodded coldly.

He was a tall, thin, rigid man with short grey hair and a stringy beard. His severe, black eyes were unblinkingly fixed on me. He was impeccably dressed in the finest of clothes. Over his shoulders, shielding him from a mild wind was a black cape. *He* looked magnificent! He seemed the true embodiment of nobility and supposed “wisdom.”

Compared to him I looked like a wild-haired, ruffled, dirty ruffian. But he never smiled. *I*—on the other hand—projected warmth and compassion because that was *my* nature.

His nature, at that fateful encounter, was to embody the “Letter of the Law.” I, on the other hand, embodied the “Spirit of the Law.” He was the Dictator while I was the Liberator. He was inflexible Authority while I was the Enabler. He was Patriarchal Disapproval while I was the Supportive Mother. He was sullen Hate while I was godly Love. It was a wonderful confrontation, a truly stark contrast between the two of us!

Without hesitation he answered me in his shrill, piercing voice, which all could easily hear. He carefully “capitalized” key words: “That which God has spoken in His Holy Word is both Law *and* Righteousness. They are One and the Same!”

“Then why do you separate the two in your question?” I innocently queried, tilting my head upward to gaze at the vast

blue sky above us. I marveled at its depth against a beautiful sun lowering itself toward the horizon. “Is there a distinction between doing that which is allowed and that which is *best*?”

“What is this nonsense you speak?” he snorted. “If you are truly a Prophet from God then you don’t need to evade my question! Give us your answer: yes, or no!”

“But I *still don’t understand* your question,” I responded, seemingly respectfully deferring to his knowledge and position. I lowered my gaze from the blue sky to unblinkingly meet his cold eyes. “I cannot answer that which I don’t understand. Won’t you please be so kind as to help me know the reality behind what you are saying?”

“My question was perfectly clear, Teacher,” he answered. “But if you lack the wisdom to understand a simple question, then I’m happy to explain further. What is it *specifically* that you do not understand?”

Yes, I’d hooked him. As a good Pharisee he loved details. Nothing got a Pharisee more excited than debating about the minutiae of the Law of Moses. Now all I had to do was reel him in...

“Well, Sir,” I politely continued. “First of all, what is this thing you call ‘righteousness’?”

“*It is to be ‘right’ in the sight of our Almighty God!*” he thundered loudly.

“How?” I queried, raising one eyebrow.

“By doing all that God commanded to his people through the Holy Scriptures!” he replied in full assurance of his answer.

“Without question or doubt?” I asked.

“Of course!” he replied. “Without question or doubt!”

“And is this man’s highest duty to God, that which pleases the Lord the most—our unquestioning, unthinking obedience?” I smiled.

“Exactly!” he thundered, almost smiling himself.

“And is this, then, the *purpose* God had for His putting mankind here in this world—that we should order our lives after every detail given by Moses and the Prophets as recorded in our Holy Scripture?” I continued, making my point excruciatingly clear.

“Our purpose is to *obey God!*” he nodded sharply, his sunken eyes now glowing with a fierce fire. “*Every detail* in the Holy Scriptures must be faithfully observed. Anything less is blasphemy!”

“Ah!” I half-bowed to him, seemingly respectfully. “I now better understand the first part of your question. So, the thing that God most wants most from us is to ‘be right’ according to His Holy Scriptures?”

“Yes, of course!” the Pharisee barked out across the throng, flinging his fists up into the air over his grey-haired head in apparent triumph.

“So, when Moses wrote in the very first chapter of the very first book of our Holy Scriptures that God created us as male and female, Adam and Eve—are we to accept this without question or doubt?”

“Certainly!” he agreed, now clearly becoming irritated with my line of questioning.

“And did the Lord of all Creation intend that the man should leave his father and mother to be joined as one with his wife, becoming one flesh with her?” I asked.

“That goes without saying,” he angrily answered me. “Thus, it is written! Marriage comes from God. It is a Holy institution. Everyone knows that!”

“WHAT GOD HAS JOINED TOGETHER,” I shouted at the crowd in a deep and resonant voice. “LET NO MAN DARE TO TEAR APART!”

The crowd ‘gasp’d’ in astonishment. The logic was clear and perfect. My new statement was completely based on the oldest and most respected scripture of all. It revealed the *intent* of the institution, its *roots*, and its intended *character!*

Seemingly, the logic was irrefutable. Without siding with one or the other contentious groups on when divorce was allowable, I was instead siding with God Himself.

“What?” gasped the Pharisee, suddenly appearing not so sure of himself. Then, quickly gathering his thoughts, he shot back at me: “*But if that be true, then why did Moses himself command men to give a certificate of divorce when dismissing one’s wife?*”

“It does seem to be a contradiction, doesn’t it?” I pleasantly answered, raising my eyebrows. “The same Moses that allowed divorce also wrote of Adam and Eve, telling us God’s original intent concerning marriage.”

“The scriptures are not in conflict. They are perfect! It is *your* interpretation of those events that is in error!” exclaimed the Pharisee.

“Oh?” I mildly replied. “But perhaps there’s yet *another* possible explanation for the apparent contradiction in the Holy Texts?”

“And what might that be?” the Pharisee demanded.

“I think I have an idea to offer here...” I pondered, pausing dramatically. Then I continued: “But first there’s more that I still don’t understand in your original question, Sir,” I politely mused.

I put my hands behind my back and clutched them tightly together, pacing back and forth. I held my head down—theatrically contemplative!

The crowd was mesmerized by this debate, intent on our every movement and response.

“Yes,” I continued, now walking up to the very top of the hill where the small group of women I’d pulled from the vast crowd were still patiently standing. “As to the question concerning whether men may divorce their wives for ‘any and every cause’ what does *that* mean?”

“Just what it says!” the Pharisee defiantly retorted.

“Oh?” I shrugged, lightly touching one of the younger ladies on her robed arm. “Good woman, is there ‘any cause’ that makes you fear your husband might suddenly decide to throw you out into the streets?”

She shyly nodded.

“What is it?” I encouraged her, smiling.

“This is an outrage!” the Pharisee interrupted us. “You are speaking to ME... not this woman! In religious debate, females must remain silent!”

“This is *my* campaign-event and I’ll speak to anyone that I wish—be they Jew or Gentile, young or old, rich or poor, or male or female! If you don’t like it, you are free to leave,” I grinned disarmingly at the tall, regally dressed man.

He ground his teeth together but didn't reply.

"Please answer however you wish, dear lady," I encouraged her.

"Well..." she answered, taking courage from talking directly to me, forgetting for the moment that thousands of people were hanging on our every word, "I am getting a little fat..."

"Oh, but you look very beautiful to me!" I laughed.

I led her off a couple steps, turning her around so all could see her fully. She was dressed neck-to-feet in a thick woolen dress. Though she wasn't skinny, she certainly wasn't morbidly fat.

"Isn't she a fine-looking, lady, no matter how pleasantly plump?" I projected loudly to the crowd.

They erupted in spontaneous applause for her.

"But... my husband's complaining I'm not the thin, elegant girl he married," she whispered, her eyes filling with tears. "I've tried to stay good looking for him. But each time I have a new baby I gain pounds. It's so hard... I'm afraid..." she broke down, sobbing.

"DID YOU ALL HEAR WHAT THE GOOD LADY SAID?" I shouted to the crowd, lifting my hands up high in the air.

"No!" they called back.

"SHE SAID THAT SHE'S AFRAID!" I roared back at them harshly. My good-natured kidding vanished. "SHE TRIES HARD TO LOOK NICE FOR HER HUSBAND. BUT EACH TIME SHE HAS A BABY SHE GAINS WEIGHT! SHE SAYS, IN ESSENCE, THAT IT'S IMPOSSIBLE FOR HER TO BE PERFECT FOR HER HUSBAND!"

I turned back to the grey-haired Pharisee. "*Can a man divorce his wife for being a wee bit too fat?*" I fiercely accused him.

"According to the Holy Scripture," he immediately retorted, confident in his answer, "a man who *'hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she finds no favor in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her'* can put her away, so..."

"Not just the moral uncleanness of fornication or adultery?" I interrupted him.

“I stand by the explicit dictates of the Holy Word of God!” the Pharisee shot back at me. “When it says ‘no favor’ it means *anything* that displeases the man. And when it says ‘unclean-ness in her’ it means *all* sorts of blemishes or deformities. Everybody knows that!”

I took the shy young woman by the hand and led her around in a circle across the top of the hill, so all the crowd could get a real good look at her. She was very comely and attractive—though, as she’d said, a bit on the plump side.

“Then you would say it is common agreement,” I continued, “that if this good woman’s husband found her a bit chubby, he could legally, by God’s Law, cast her out into the streets?”

“It is her godly duty to be pleasing to her husband!” the Pharisee snorted. “She, knowing his preference for women on the skinny side should do as he says. If she willfully gains too many pounds then she is in *disrespect* and *disobedience* to her husband—and can, indeed, legally be put away and divorced!”

“DO YOU AGREE?” I called out to the thousands of people surrounding us. “SHOULD THIS GOOD WOMAN BE CAST OUT INTO THE STREETS BECAUSE SHE’S A BIT TOO CHUBBY?”

Many female voices—and, to their credit, some male voices—roared back: “NO! NO! NO!”

“AND WHAT ABOUT THIS *OTHER* GOOD WOMAN?” I shouted back at the crowd. “SHOULD SHE LIKEWISE BE CAST OUT BY HER HUSBAND?”

I took by the arm another of the women standing with me at the top of the hill. I led her around while the thousands looked at her with keen curiosity.

“*Does your husband find anything displeasing in you?*” I gently asked, using powerful resonance that projected out across the crowd.

“Well...I...I...” she stammered, “I d-don’t, t-talk t-too w-well, I s-suppose... and h-h-he...”

“SHE DOESN’T TALK LIKE A LEARNED SCHOLAR!” I laughed good-naturedly.

I opened and closed my mouth widely, illustrating her gaping speech.

“What about that?” I demanded of the Pharisee. “Should she be thrown out into the street for stammering her words?”

He stared at me coldly, refusing to answer.

“And what about these other good women?” I continued. “*This* one... and *this* one... and *this* one—anything else that your man finds displeasing, causing you to fear for your family life and personal security?” I asked.

I paused to allow them to vent their private anger.

Their complaints burst out as if I’d just broken down a dam: “I have wrinkles... He says I talk too much... I’m not as exciting as other women to him... I’m getting older... I’m a nag... I’m tired at night, not wanting his attentions in bed... I don’t know how to cook as good as others... I can’t work three jobs like he wants...”

“THAT’S ENOUGH!” I shouted, holding up my hand. “WHAT SAY YOU, MY GOOD PHARISEE? SHOULD THESE WOMEN BE LEGALLY DIVORCED BY THEIR HUSBANDS BECAUSE THEY ARE WRINKLED, TALKATIVE, UNEXCITING, GETTING OLDER, NAGS, ARE TIRED WHEN THE MAN WANTS HIS LOVE-MAKING, AREN’T THE BEST COOKS, AND CAN’T WORK LIKE MULES ANYMORE?”

“You’re being ridiculous...” he harrumphed, turning his head away.

He refused to look at the group of ladies standing there with me.

“THESE WOMEN STANDING HERE IN YOUR SIGHT LIVE IN CONSTANT FEAR THAT THEY WILL BE ARBITRARILY THROWN OUT ONTO THE STREET BY THEIR SUPPOSEDLY GODLY HUSBANDS!” I yelled. “*THAT*, SIR, IS WHAT IS ‘RIDICULOUS!’”

“*The Law of God is the Law of God!*” he shouted back at me.

“Does the Law of God intend that we Jews should be held in contempt by the rest of the world for our well-known abusive practices towards our women?” I countered.

“That is not true!” he responded angrily. “We may be firmly in good control of our silly, uncooperative women—but we are not abusive!”

“THOSE WHO STAND BEFORE YOU ARE PROOF OF THAT ABUSE!” I yelled back, looking expectantly at my small group of tearful women standing there on the top of the hill—who all nodded in affirmation. “AND THOSE GENTILES HERE IN THE AUDIENCE WHO CARE TO RESPOND TO ME CAN ALSO GIVE THEIR IMPRESSION OF US ‘GODLY JEWISH MEN!’”

Throughout the crowd, many mostly female voices agreed.

“It doesn’t matter what some unclean Gentile or ungrateful woman says!” the Spokesman shot back at me, raising a fist up in the air in defiance. “It only matters what *God* thinks of us! We Pharisees are the *true* defenders of God’s Law—not you, nor your twisted logic, nor your ridiculous antics!”

“*YOUR ‘INTERPRETATION’ OF THE LAW OF GOD IS WHAT IS THE MOST RIDICULOUS OF ALL!*” I coldly answered. Then I lowered my voice from a shout to a deep growl: “From the first time that self-and-God-aware humans walked the Earth, it was not so! This is *not* what God intended. The Lord of the Universe is not at all pleased by men treating their wives like disposable commodities. It is, indeed, an *abomination* of God’s Intent!”

The Pharisee looked ready to explode with fury...

“I REPEAT, THEN,” the spokesman almost screamed, causing many in the audience standing close to us to wince, “IF THAT’S TRUE THEN WHY DID MOSES ALLOW MEN TO WRITE OUT A DECLARATION OF DIVORCE AND THUS TO PUT AWAY THEIR WIVES?”

I had him...

“*It was for the very same reason that you stand here today fiercely defending your desire and supposed right to get rid of your fat, wrinkly, overly talkative, unexciting, aging, nagging, tired, untalented, grubby old human wife—and take another that’s more to your liking!*” I answered, just as fiercely.

“And what might that be?” he grated through clenched teeth.

“Their HARD HEARTS!” I yelled back at him.

“What?”

“MOSES ALLOWED THE PRACTICE BECAUSE THE COMMON PRACTICE BY THE MEN OF HIS TIME WAS TO EITHER LIVE IN SIN WITHOUT EVER GETTING MARRIED, OR TO THROW OUT THEIR WIFE IN SPONTANEOUS FITS OF ANGER, OR JUST TO UP AND *KILL* HER ON THE SPOT!” I angrily replied.

“And what does that have to do with God’s Will for us today?” the Spokesman laughed. Yes, he actually *laughed* at what I said!

“Moses, by insisting on a legal document being written up,” I patiently explained, “forced the *hard-hearted* men of his day to at least have to take the time to go to an official representative. Plus, they had to go to the trouble of getting a written document prepared. Only then could a man dispose of his wife, in a nonviolent way. Moses required the husbands to at least take the time to consider what they were doing!”

“But...?”

“Divorce was by *no means* a license for men to get rid of their wives,” I continued. “Quite to the contrary, Moses’ divorce document was but a partial protection to the *wives*. No longer could they be thrown out or murdered at a moment’s whim!”

“That is sheer speculation and doesn’t matter!” the Pharisee insisted. “What God has written in His Holy Word is sacred and unalterable! Your teachings are in direct opposition to the Mosaic Law. This is without question. Your very words before this large audience condemn you of vile heresy!”

The audience below was transfixed. They’d never before seen the imperious Pharisees treated in this manner!

“NOT when Moses contradicts himself!” I countered. “God made *one* man to have *one* wife, joining them together as *one* unit in His sight! Only if the woman breaks this God-given bond by *sexual unfaithfulness*—by making union with some other man—can the husband have grounds in the sight of God to divorce her! And the reason such dissolution is permitted at all by God is that the sacred bond between the two has *already* been broken by the wife. Anything less is just an excuse by the husband to not live up to his religious responsibilities.”

“Oh? And with what consequences?” my adversary queried, a sly look now in his eyes.

He sensed he’d maneuvered me into a trap from which I could not escape. Indeed, I *was* in a trap—but it was my own, from which I did not want to remove myself! This was my time to *shock* people, to *wake them up* from their self-imposed delusions, to grab them by the scruff of their necks and give them a good *shake*, to lift them up by the hair on their heads and cause them severe but revelatory mental *pain!*

“*Any man who trivially divorces his wife and marries again is in a state of adultery!*” I loudly exclaimed, accusing them all.

A great “gasp” went up from the crowd, who until now had been on my side. Being labeled as an adulterer was a severe sin for us Jewish folks. If what I said was true, then many of the remarried men in the audience were in bad trouble with God!

“And furthermore,” I continued, “the worst abomination of all is that the man who has trivially divorced his wife causes *her*, should she remarry, to *also* commit adultery!”

This time there was an icy silence from the crowd. Yes, the leader of the Pharisees was actually now smiling. His intention was not to win a debate, but to cut me away from the common people—and now he thought he’d just succeeded!

“And the *penalty*,” the Pharisee happily yelled out over the crowd, “is that if this man Jesus’ conclusion is correct—**MANY OF YOU WHO’VE DONE RIGHTLY AND PROPERLY ACCORDING TO MOSES’ LAW OF DIVORCE WILL NOW BE ‘ADULTERERS’ SUBJECT TO BEING STONED TO DEATH FOR SUPPOSED ‘INFIDELITY’!**”

That started a “mumbling” and “grumbling” amongst the thousands surrounding us...

“**ISN’T THAT TRUE, JESUS OF NAZARETH?**” he yelled again. He was challenging me to deny what was established Jewish religious Law: adultery was punishable by the offender being stoning to death!

I dramatically paused, looking up at the group of trembling women on the top of the hill. Then I looked out over the thousands who were milling about angrily below me. Finally, I

scrutinized the smirking group of hundreds of Pharisees. My audience, though riled and uneasy, waited in fascination for my reply. What would I say?

“*YES, IT’S TRUE!*” I answered, my intensity countering the anger of the crowd.

Their fascination turned instantly, beyond their ability to control, into an icy *fear*...

“No! No!” many in the crowd began shouting back at me.

“*Yes! You who’ve committed such abomination in God’s sight are rightly and correctly condemned by your own actions!*” I accused them. “You are convicted not only by the tenets of the Law of Moses, but by God’s revulsion. You are cut-off from God. Your heartless actions betray the wretched state of your own souls!”

Many anguished looks appeared in the crowd. Others looked confused and lost. Others were angry and defiant, shoving their neighbors. Arguments sprang up. The noise of the crowd was intensifying...

“*And what of us who have been married and divorced SEVERAL times?*” one man close to me shouted, running up the slope of the hill to fall at my feet. “If it had been just one woman I’ve wronged, perhaps I could find her and take her back. But I’ve done the same to five women! And those I’ve divorced for trivial reasons have themselves remarried! And some of them have also been divorced again by their new husbands! Plus, we’ve children by these various women and husbands! And what of the wife I now have? Am I to abandon her, or stop having relations with her?”

This was an honest Jewish male, convicted by my harsh teachings. He was aghast at his own sins, but had no idea how to proceed.”

“Please, Teacher...” he continued, screaming out his anguish: “WHAT MUST I DO? I BELIEVE YOU. BUT I STAND CONDEMNED WITH NO POSSIBILITY TO MAKE IT RIGHT! I SEE NOW I DESERVE TO DIE, STONED FOR MY SINS—BUT I HAVE CHILDREN WHO NEED ME! *What am I to do...?*” he sobbed.

Crying uncontrollably, he fell down at my feet, his head pressed into the dirt.

The repentant man's tirade had stilled the crowd. They were silent again, waiting to see how I'd answer the man. Would I call for them all to take up stones and rain them down upon him, publicly executing him?

"I come *not* to condemn the world," I said softly while projecting my voice so that all could clearly hear me," but to *save* the world."

I settled down upon my heels, laying a calming hand on the man's shaking forehead. "My friend, your faith has made you whole. Your sins are forgiven. Go and sin no more!"

I helped him to his feet. He hugged me, still crying, but now from relief. He turned and wobbled back down the slope to be caught up in the arms of his joyful, present wife.

"*HOW DARE YOU?*" screamed the Pharisee, shaking from outrage. "HOW DARE YOU TAKE UPON YOURSELF THE POWER OF GOD TO FORGIVE SUPPOSED SIN? SURELY YOU STAND REVEALED NOT ONLY AS A DECEIVER, BUT ALSO AS A HERETIC!"

"What would *you* do in this situation?" I calmly replied.

The crowd of thousands which moments before had seemed poised to revolt against me was now fixated upon the words of the Spokesman.

"First of all, there is no 'sin' to forgive!" the Pharisee scornfully insisted. "That man could have divorced a *thousand* woman by giving them the required Writ of Divorce. He'd still been completely legal both in the eyes of the Law and of God! And secondly..."

"A THOUSAND WOMEN, YOU SAY?" I interrupted him, coldly shouting at him. "A *THOUSAND* GOOD WOMEN WITH THEIR LIVES *RUINED* AT THE WHIMS OF ONE MAN WOULD BE LEGAL, IN YOUR VIEW—BOTH IN THE EYES OF THE LAW AND OF GOD?"

He paused, aware now that the roles had been completely reversed. In his enthusiasm to denounce me, it was *he* who had gone too far!

"Well... I m-mean... theoretically... a-according to the L-Law..." he stammered, looking about furtively.

"Yes, 'according to the Law,'" I disdainfully repeated, "you Legalists can justify *anything*, can't you? Any evil or

perverted act that you desire can somehow find a basis for justification somewhere in the Law. It is no wonder that you Pharisees love the Mosaic Lawyers so much. Because of them, you can find some teaching somewhere in the Law of Moses that—should you ignore its original intent and context—you can use to do whatever you deem desirable!”

“—and that man if convicted of *truly* having committed adultery, he was *guilty* and should be *executed!*” the Pharisee continued, choosing to ignore my arguments and proceed with his answer to my prior question.

“Yes,” I replied sadly, “—just as you would execute anyone who brings before you the true character of God, including me!”

“*You ignore or ridicule God’s Law!*” he shouted.

“I DO NOT!” I exclaimed. “I ONLY PREACH THE *INTENT* OF GOD’S WORDS, THAT YOU CHOOSE TO PRETEND DOESN’T EXIST! BEHIND EACH OF THE TEACHINGS AND EXAMPLES OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES IS SOMETHING CALLED ITS ‘MEANING!’”

“Yes! That’s what you people need me and the Lawyers to...”

“The words and Examples in the scriptures have *purpose*,” I continued, ignoring him. “They are there to *teach* us something! And, yes, it’s not always plain or obvious. The Great God of Reality wants *each* of us to personally *struggle* with figuring out how those Holy Words should best be made manifest in each of our lives. They are not absolute dictates meant for blind application no matter who gets hurt or how much evil results. You Pharisees, as the self-proclaimed ‘Great Examples’ of ‘Holiness,’ should teach *THOSE* lessons! Instead, you misdirect, mislead, and confuse a whole generation of seekers. Surely your punishment will be the worst of all offenders!”

“HOW DARE YOU INSULT...” the Pharisee began, livid with rage.

“*AND HOW DARE YOU IGNORE THE GREATEST PRINCIPLES OF GOD’S WORDS!*” I stopped him, drowning out his shrill whine with my own deep bellowing. “Have you Pharisees never heard, in dealing with your beloved wives, *these*

things in the Holy Scriptures: RESPECT, HONOR, DEDICATION, FORBEARANCE, BEAUTY, SELFLESSNESS, PURITY, HOLINESS, and LOVE? *If you fully applied those teachings to your own wives, would there ever be any thought or need of divorce?*”

“WE HAVE THE RIGHT...” the Pharisee tried to argue back at me.

“—RIGHTS WHICH NEVER NEED BE EXERCISED IF YOU’D *OPEN UP YOUR HEARTS* TO GOD’S ENTIRE WILL!” I cut him off again.

Only the small group of women moving down between me and him stopped him from physically charging me...

“But instead of treating your wives with tenderness, compassion, and respect,” I continued without a pause, “you look for every tiny fault, hoping for an excuse to throw her away. You lust to acquire a newer, younger, prettier, and more enjoyable replacement! Your hypocrisy is evident to all when you pretend to follow God in even the tiniest of His commands, yet exclude Him from your loins. ‘Thus far’ you say, allowing the Will of God only to go where you want it... yet no further! Your precious pleasures in dominating, terrorizing, and brutalizing the one who should be the closest and dearest, reveals the state of your hearts! *How you love the Lord is made evident by how you treat your wives!*”

Several of the Pharisees ran forward and grabbed their Spokesman by his arms, pulling him back. Lucky for him! He was about to physically attack me. But due to my carpentry occupation, I was much stronger than him! Although I might have turned to him my other cheek if he’d merely slapped me in the face, I’d *not* allow his knife to prematurely end my mission!

“*You’ll be sorry!*” the Spokesman screamed at me as his companions dragged him away. “You’ll not change the established, God-given Order. The *man* is in charge with *unquestioned* authority! The woman is there but to serve and pleasure the man! Moses knew this. Eve was made from Adam’s rib. She was hardly more than an extra limb! Look at your beloved rabble. Are the men embracing your female-loving teachings? Of course not! They won’t give up their power, and

neither will we. It's *you* that will come to an untimely end, *not* our God-willed commandments. And furthermore..."

The hundreds of Pharisees moved as a block, forcing their way back and out of the huge throng. Still ranting, the Spokesman's words faded away into the background noise. A big, burly man stepped forward, raising his hand high.

"Yes?" I politely nodded, motioning for him to speak.

"Teacher!" he spoke loudly and fervently. "I am like many here who've done what you've just explained we should not... like that man who you forgave his sins... standing here condemned by our own actions! Even if you take away all the past wrongs that I've done to many women, how can that change my present wretched condition? By your own words I'm still married to a woman who herself was wrongly divorced. And by having wrongly divorced other women myself in the past, am I not instantly become again an adulterer in God's sight? There is no way I can go back and untangle the past in the present, without committing further evil. Even if I were to stop having relations with my present wife, we still live together in the sight of a world that deems us married. Thus, we are condemned by you for our actions! I'm very confused. So are many of my friends who want only to do what's right. Is our situation hopeless? Is there nothing we can do?"

I smiled at him with sympathy and deep understanding.

"YOU ARE CORRECT," I called out to the mesmerized crowd who were astonished that I'd beaten the Pharisees into a hasty retreat. "YOUR SITUATION IS HOPELESS!"

This harsh judgment quieted the crowd. They looked at me, their beloved Teacher, with a mixture of horror, anger, and confusion.

"Yes," I spoke now more softly. "There is *no* way that you can make up for your disgusting atrocities of your past. Even if I forgave the sins of every person here, the *consequences* of your sins would remain, again entangling and dragging you down! And it's not just states of adultery. It is also the other many continuing effects from your many sins."

"*You're saying we're doomed?*" a shout rang out.

"Yes! By the Law you all stand condemned of murder, of thievery, of disrespect for God, of misleading others to fall

prey to Satan, of gluttony, of envy, of selfishness, of being bad fathers or mothers to your children... and a thousand other sins with continuing, terrible, unalterable consequences!”

“*Must we then go twice a year to sacrifice at the Temple in Jerusalem?*” another shouted.

“Your continuing sins is why even the best of you regularly sacrifice rivers of blood at the Temple,” I agreed. “But innocent bulls and goats *CAN NEVER MAKE RIGHT WHAT YOU’VE ALREADY MADE WRONG—whether once, twice, or a hundred times per year!*”

“So, we are then doomed!” the man before me sobbed. He slumped down to his knees, his head in his hands.

“WHAT YOU NEED...” I smiled, raising my arms, my robe flowing out beneath my arms to look like fluttering wings. I paused in that position, allowing the crowd to hang on my words. I knew that at my back the setting sun illuminated me, changing me into a glowing, ethereal angel, “...*IS THE ONLY THING THAT COULD TRULY SAVE YOU: TO START YOUR LIFE ALL OVER AGAIN!*”

The man took his hands away from his face and looked at me in awe: “Teacher!” he whispered. “Do you mean I can be *born again?*”

“YES!” I laughed, dancing forward to drag him back up to his feet and give him a manly hug. “YOU ARE RIGHT, MY FRIEND, YET AGAIN! THE ONLY THING THAT CAN SAVE YOU FROM YOUR WRETCHED STATE IS TO BE *BORN ALL OVER AGAIN!*”

“Really?”

“Yes! You can start your life all over again from the womb!” I comforted him. “You can have a totally clean slate! God will *forget* all that’s gone before. Our Heavenly Father will look at you in whatever condition you are now, as a totally new person starting again from scratch! He will give you the chance to begin again from zero, starting right where you are right now!”

“That... that would be... *incredible!*” the man gasped.

“This is something those cold-hearted Pharisees can never partake in,” I continued. “Only those willing to completely trust in God, give themselves over totally to God, allow Him to

remake them from scratch can get it. But if you do partake of this ‘incredible’ gift and are living now in conjugal relations with a woman, then in God’s eyes you are married *the very first time* to that person. Do you see how beautiful this is?”

“Yes, Teacher...” the man gasped in awe.

“And then you can proceed *from this moment onward* to do your best at honoring the Great Principles of God’s Word,” I continued. “The things that can’t be disentangled from the past are gone because you have no past. God grants you a completely new start, just as He does to a newborn baby. The innocent young child is *not* charged with the sins of its parents’ past follies.”

“Master!” the man sobbed, smiling now as he stood back up, respectfully bowing his head. “*How* can I have this wonderful thing? Tell me what I should do!”

I gestured grandly out at the thousands below us.

“TOGETHER WE WILL ACHIEVE THIS STATE RIGHT NOW, RIGHT HERE, TODAY!” I called-out in a deep, resonant, and comforting voice. “THE TIME IS ALMOST AT HAND WHEN *ALL* PEOPLE IN THE WORLD WHO WANT TO TURN THEIR LIVES OVER TO GOD MAY ALSO BE BORN AGAIN!”

I saw that my disciples, on cue, were moving closer to me, ready to receive those that would respond to my kind invitation.

“*They will have immediate access to the spiritual womb!*” I joyfully continued. “They will emerge from their birth waters into a fresh, new existence! The past will be forgotten. They will start again from wherever they happen to be in life, going forward totally new from that point onward!”

“What will this cost me, Master?” the repentant husband asked me. “I’ll pay anything!”

“God will grant you this incredible gift in exchange for what *I* will soon do for you,” I grimly informed him. “*I* will be the ultimate blood offering to God to pay the *cosmic penalty* for all the wrongs that *you* have done. I will take the place of the river of animal blood you now yearly release. I will be the innocent, pure, celestial lamb! I will take upon myself the

unspeakably huge punishment, atoning for the sins of the entire human race, both past, present, and future!”

“Thank you, Lord,” the man whispered, falling down at my feet and hugging my ankles.

“Yes, I will give the ultimate Blood Offering that will convince all of you for all time—both now and into the distant future—that God loves you enough to forget all the evil you’ve done,” I stated, gently disengaging the man’s trembling hands. “Then God will welcome you back into His radiant Presence! I will be the ‘scapegoat’ having your disgusting acts of selfishness laid upon me. I will carry those foul sins with me into the empty, terrible Void... to be forever cast away.”

“How shall we get this blessing?” someone called-out.

“*BY BEING WASHED IN MY BLOOD YOU WILL BE TOTALLY CLEAN IN GOD’S SIGHT,*” I shouted back. “*NO MATTER WHAT YOU’VE DONE IN THE PAST, OR IN WHATEVER CONDITION OF LIFE YOU FIND YOURSELF RIGHT NOW... you will be made clean!*”

“But Master!” a lady who’d stood in my small demonstration-group on the top of the hill called-out in anguish. “I have a good husband who gets drunk. When he’s drunk, he beats me terribly! Then when he sobers up, he cries to see how he’s bruised, cut, and hurt me. He promises never to do it again. And, for a while, he’s very sweet and nice to me. But then the drink calls to him. He gives-in and it happens all over, just like before! What you say sounds wonderful. But I fear that even if given a whole new start in the eyes of God, my husband—even with the best of intentions—will just fall prey to Satan’s temptations, again and again!”

“Yes, of course he will,” I sadly nodded, a look of anguish on my face. “That is the nature of human beings. Even the best of you are just grubby, fault-ridden humans. It is not in you to live a perfect life. You will *always* come up short, stumble, and fall. But if you are honest and sincere in admitting your failures and will keep trying to do better—ONCE YOU ARE REBORN, GOD WILL RENEW THAT STATUS EACH AND EVERY DAY! IF YOU ARE FAITHFUL AND JUST TO ADMIT YOUR SINS AND KEEP TRYING TO DO BETTER, THEN MY BLOOD WILL *KEEP* WASHING YOU CLEAN.

EVERY DAY YOU CAN START ALL OVER AGAIN WITH A CLEAN SLATE IN GOD'S EYES... IF YOU WILL ONLY TRY AND DO YOUR BEST!"

"And my husband...?" the woman asked, tears glittering in her soft brown eyes.

"If it's just you following me," I gently told her, "—then you must be the *shining example* that will lead him out of the stinking wasteland of his evil addictions. Perhaps you might have to live separately from him to shock him to his senses. Perhaps you might have to call in the authorities to keep him from abusing you and your children. But know that God loves you and will grant you strength to learn and grow spiritually by each trial you bravely face. As for your husband, if he will only come to me, he will find the strength to do that which to this point has seemed impossible!"

"You make me believe in the impossible," she whispered, bowing her head.

"Thank you, good lady," I congratulated her. Then, more loudly I continued: "IN GOD ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE. TAKE HOPE, GOOD PEOPLE. YOU ARE NOT LEFT TO DROWN IN THE PUTRID WASTES OF YOUR OWN MAKING. REACH OUT YOUR HAND TO GOD AND HE WILL LIFT YOU UP!"

Timidly, the woman raised both her hands to the sky. The golden setting sun lit up her hands, causing them to glow like unto myself. Others saw the wondrous warmth seemingly descending upon us and lifted their hands also. All across the sea of people hands were going up, catching the lingering rays of sunlight. It was as if we'd changed into a vast meadow of *human sunflowers* blossoming all around us!

"Hallelujah... Praise the Lord... Glory to God!" people were shouting, jumping up and down as if to rise up into the sky with ecstatic energy.

I powerfully projected my voice in reply...

"NOW TAKE YOUR GODLY, WELCOMING HANDS AND REACH OUT TO YOUR NEIGHBORS!" I commanded. "WITH EACH OF YOUR HANDS TAKE THE HAND OF A DIFFERENT PERSON AROUND YOU. LET NO ONE BE

ALONE. LET US ALL BE LINKED TOGETHER IN THE PRESENCE OF OUR HOLY FATHER!”

I walked down the hill a few steps, grabbing the hands of two of the people standing near me, a husband and his wife, who reached out for yet others. Quickly the thousands of people present were all solidly united—physically, mentally, and spiritually.

“NOW BOW YOUR HEADS, CLOSE YOUR EYES, AND REPEAT AFTER ME!” my voice rolled out across the sea of transfigured, unified people.

“Dear Father in Heaven...” I said with deep emotion.

“DEAR FATHER IN HEAVEN...” thousands of voices joined together, rumbling back at me.

“Hallowed be your Holy Name...”

“HALLOWED BE YOUR HOLY NAME...”

“Your Kingdom come...”

“YOUR KINGDOM COME...”

“Your Will be done...”

“YOUR WILL BE DONE...”

“On earth as it is in Heaven...”

“ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN...”

“Give us today the necessities of life...”

“GIVE US TODAY THE NECESSITIES OF LIFE...”

“And deliver us from the temptations of the Evil One...”

“AND DELIVER US FROM THE TEMPTATIONS OF THE EVIL ONE...”

“For we are weak, unworthy vessels of your Glory...”

“FOR WE ARE WEAK, UNWORTHY VESSELS OF YOUR GLORY...”

“Always falling short of your Holiness, causing You pain...”

“ALWAYS FALLING SHORT OF YOUR HOLINESS, CAUSING YOU PAIN...”

“For which we are dreadfully sorry...”

“FOR WHICH WE ARE DREADFULLY SORRY...”

“And ask Your help that we might learn from our mistakes to do better...”

“AND ASK YOUR HELP THAT WE MIGHT LEARN FROM OUR MISTAKES TO DO BETTER...”

“Knowing that it is not in us to save ourselves...”

“KNOWING THAT IT IS NOT IN US TO SAVE OURSELVES...”

“And only through Your infinite mercy have we any hope at all...”

“AND ONLY THROUGH YOUR INFINITE MERCY HAVE WE ANY HOPE AT ALL...”

“We open ourselves completely to Your Cleansing Light...”

“WE OPEN OURSELVES COMPLETELY TO YOUR CLEANSING LIGHT...”

“Holding back no locked drawer nor closed closet nor barred room to ourselves...”

“HOLDING BACK NO LOCKED DRAWER OR CLOSED CLOSET NOR BARRED ROOM TO OURSELVES...”

“We beg You to make us over again into Your own true Image...”

“WE BEG YOU TO MAKE US OVER AGAIN INTO YOUR OWN TRUE IMAGE...”

“Transformed from our animal nature into something far better...”

“TRANSFORMED FROM OUR ANIMAL NATURE INTO SOMETHING FAR BETTER...”

“Giving us a fresh start that we may completely escape the grip of Satan...”

“GIVING US A FRESH START THAT WE MAY COMPLETELY ESCAPE THE GRIP OF SATAN...”

“Remembering our past iniquities and failures no more...”

“REMEMBERING OUR PAST INIQUITIES AND FAILURES NO MORE...”

“Washed and made totally clean in the blood of the Lamb...”

“WASHED AND MADE TOTALLY CLEAN IN THE BLOOD OF THE LAMB...”

“Putting all our faith, trust, and hope into Your mighty Hands...”

“PUTTING ALL OUR FAITH, TRUST, AND HOPE INTO YOUR MIGHTY HANDS...”

“For Yours is the ultimate Kingdom, Power, and Glory forever...”

“FOR YOURS IS THE ULTIMATE KINGDOM, POWER, AND GLORY FOREVER...”

“Amen!”

“AMEN!”

The crowd cheered mightily, shouting again and again: “Glory to God... Amen... Praise God... Hallelujah!”

After a few minutes I released the hands of the man and his wife, giving them each a hug, and walked back up to the top of the hill.

I addressed them all again: “I call upon you all to become my disciples! There is water near here, a deep flowing stream. *Be baptized for the remission of your sins!* Start your life over. My present disciples will help you do this. It will be their joy to baptize you in the stream. Come forward right now! Make the decision that will change your lives forever. Don’t delay. Do it now!”

And thousands of people came forward to be greeted by my helpers. Though the sun was setting, we set torches blazing. The Light of God was everywhere. It was a magnificent end to my prior fierce confrontations with the Pharisees. I won. They lost.

Later, after all those who wished had been baptized in my name, and the crowd was ready to leave... I climbed back to the top of the hill and gave them this parting speech:

“*Go in the Peace of God, my friends!*” I smiled, spreading my arms wide. “Know that He will never desert you! God is not looking to find some excuse to condemn you. God is looking to bring you into His Heart. Let it happen! **OPEN YOUR HEARTS FULLY TO THE WILL OF GOD!** Determine to move closer to God every day of your life. Go from here and tell your family, friends, co-workers, and acquaintances the following Good News: **THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS AT HAND! IT IS ALMOST HERE! OPEN YOUR HEARTS THAT YOU BE NOT EXCLUDED!**”

“How, Master?” someone shouted back.

“HOW?” I grinned widely. **“YOU PERMEABILIZE YOUR HEARTS BY LOVING YOUR WIVES... BY LOVING YOUR HUSBANDS... BY LOVING YOUR CHILDREN... BY LOVING**

YOUR NEIGHBOR. YES, YOU LOVE THEM *IN SPITE OF AND INDEED BECAUSE OF* THEIR FAILINGS. YOU SYMPATHIZE WITH THEIR BLEMISHES AND IMPERFECTIONS. YOU LOVE THEM WITH THE PURE, UNSELFISH, LIBERATING LOVE OF THE LORD WHO WANTS TO LIFT THEM UP, NOT BEAT THEM DOWN!”

“Like a father or mother’s love for their children?” a nearby woman asked.

“YES!” I shouted back to her and all the rest. “YOU MUST *PROVE YOUR LOVE BY YOUR ACTIONS*, SUCH THAT THERE NEVER WILL BE THE NEED TO UTTER THAT UGLY WORD ‘DIVORCE’! LIVE LIKE YOU ARE, IN TRUTH, GOD’S CHILDREN. SHOW *HIS* MAGNIFICENT LOVE TO THE WORLD. LET EACH THOUGHT, ACTION, AND WORD FROM YOU BE HOLY, RIGHTEOUS, AND GLORIOUS. DON’T LET THE PAST DRAG YOU DOWN. FREE YOURSELF FROM THE DEMONS OF SATAN AND HIS SOURAPOLOGISTS. LEARN FROM YOUR MISTAKES AND DO BETTER. AND ABOVE ALL—*PUT YOUR ENTIRE FAITH, HOPE, AND HEARTS INTO THE PROTECTING HANDS OF YOUR LOVING, HEAVENLY FATHER!*”

I and my closest disciples departed from that place buoyed by the many rousing, thunderous *cheers* of the crowd...

Later that evening I was sitting in a lotus position on the floor, praying. I was in a secluded, cold room of a supporter’s house. I was shrouded with my long thick robe. My hands were clutched together, my head bowed. I was in anguished talk with my Father—when my *male disciples* came to me.

Hearing their tentative knock at the door, I replied: “What is it?”

From out in the hallway came a soft reply: “Master, may we speak to you in private?”

“Sure,” I said. “Come on in.”

One by one the tough-faced, bearded, strong men filed in. Then they sat around me on the floor, leaning back against the stone walls of the small room.

“Yes?” I smiled, already knowing why they had come to me in private—but allowing them to set the agenda themselves.

I was fully prepared to expand their thinking beyond their petty selfish complaints.

“Master...” one of them gulped, looking down at the floor in embarrassment, “We have a question.”

“Speak!” I encouraged him.

“Well...” he sighed, gathering his courage, “—that teaching you argued in detail with the Pharisees today... concerning *divorce*?”

“What about it?” I snapped at him, now putting a hard edge to my voice.

“Uh, we were talking together, and... well... it just doesn’t seem reasonable to us,” he gulped. “I mean it’s certainly very noble and idealistic... but not practical. Master, the people will never accept a world without divorce! You’ve set other high hurdles for us to follow you, which we’ve faithfully attempted—but this one is just impossible!”

“How so?” I replied, keeping my voice neutral.

“Well... most of us here are married, with wives ourselves,” he shrugged. “We know from experience that even the very best marriage is difficult. To deny the Writ of Divorce except for rare circumstances where a woman commits adultery is to cause men to go crazy! Women will take advantage of us. They will demand everything from us and give nothing in return. We’ll end up chained to some shrew that makes our life a living hell. Surely you could relax this requirement, Lord, if not for our sake, then for the sake of your mission? Many will leave you because of this teaching!”

I abruptly broke out in boisterous *laughter*—startling the band of intensely frowning men around me—and continued laughing, long and hard!

They were shocked by my seeming merriment, looking at each other in deep concern. Yes, they thought I’d finally “lost it” and gone over the edge! They thought that the stress and pressures had driven me utterly mad.

“Oh... *hah, hah!*” I finally finished, clutching my aching ribs. “It’s been a long time, my dear friends, since I’ve had such a good laugh.”

“But... Master...?” another of the men ventured, bewildered. “We didn’t mean to be funny...?”

Then all hint of merriment ceased and I looked them, one after the other, straight in their eyes, unblinking. My face suddenly turned icy, as hard as the walls at their backs!

“*Have you been so long with me and yet lack the faintest idea of why I’m here?*” I asked, my voice harshly rattling against the rocky walls of the room.

“If... you’re really serious... about such a rigid state of no-divorce marriage,” another disciple gulped, “then perhaps it would be best not to marry at all?”

“Which is exactly why Moses allowed wicked men of his generation the indulgence of granting a legal divorce to their ‘undesirable’ women!” I agreed, nodding. “Knowing they’d have to be faithful to their women for their whole lives, they would not have given their women even the protection of a legal marriage contract at all, no matter how flimsy or easily discarded! They’d just have used the women for their pleasure without giving anything at all in return. They’d never have officially married, just living together with no legal protection at all for the women. You talk about your women gaining some upper hand on you—WHEN YOU YOURSELVES HAVE LONG HELD ABSOLUTE POWER OVER THEM FOR ALL OF THE HISTORY OF HUMANITY!” I shouted, making them cringe. “Don’t you think it’s time for a little reciprocation?”

“But Master!” another continued to argue with me. “If men could not escape from a bad union, many would resort to *murdering* their wives to be rid of them!”

“Of course!” I agreed again, shaking my head in frustration. “The male animal is often a brute who thinks only with his sex organs. That is the nature of males, whether animal or human. My dictates have no power at all to modify the nature of such human brutes. BUT YOU ARE NOT LIKE THE COMMON MAN!” I again shouted. “IN FACT, WE—GOD’S CHOSEN PEOPLE—SHOULD BE FAR *SUPERIOR!* HOW IS IT THAT YOU CAN NOT SEE THIS?”

They were all taken-aback by my intensity. Some looked like they were about to get up and leave the room...

“No, no!” I reassured them, motioning for them to stay seated. “I’m not angry with you. I’m just a bit frustrated that you, my closest friends and dearest disciples, would not

understand this fundamental teaching. As I said before, if you truly and fully apply my teachings concerning HONESTY, RESPECTFULNESS, BEAUTY, ENLIGHTENED SELF-INTEREST, UNSELFISHNESS, HONOR, and LOVE toward your wives..." I punctuated each of the key words," then how on earth would there ever be a serious problem between the two of you?"

My male disciples looked at each other ruefully, embarrassed.

"Your women are not monsters!" I insisted. "They are feeling, responding, godly people who just happen to be blessed to bear children instead of donating seed! If you treat them with *honesty, respect, sincerity, appreciation, honor, and love*...don't you think they'll give back all of that and more? How would there ever be even a thought of divorce in such a godly and mutually supportive partnership?"

They fidgeted, looking away from me, clearly wondering how to escape this discomfiting and revealing interrogation...

"Ah, but that's the problem, isn't it?" I ruefully shook my head in sadness. "Even you, my closest disciples, *still* don't want to give your hearts completely over to God, do you? If not for the actuality, you wish to keep alive the possibility of having sexual relations with women other than your wives! Is this not true?"

"Uh.. no, Master. We wouldn't..."

"Yes, you would! Yes, you do! It's just human male nature!" I admonished him. "If you can legally by Moses' Law get rid of your wife whenever you want, then if she does not please you enough or grows tiresome you always have the option of getting yourself a younger, fresher one! And even the insinuation of that—whether acted upon or not—is the *poison* that creeps into many godly marriages, *souring* relationships, making the wife eventually *hate* and even betray you... thus giving you excuse you seek to eventually cast her aside!"

"No, Master... That's not true... I wouldn't think to do that... How can you say that of us?" they all hastily objected.

"Sure, you say the right things," I nodded thoughtfully. "But in your heart of hearts do your male, animal, sexual

needs reign supreme? Is God fine as long as He does not endanger your primal urges? Is the door open to God in all rooms of your heart, except that of your loins?"

They looked at each other in chagrin, convicted by my scathing remarks!

"Master..." one of them choked, anguished, struggling to deny his own desires. "That's not so!"

"Of course, it's so!" I smiled, lifting up an eyebrow in friendly query. "I'm the 'Master,' aren't I? Or are you contradicting me? Have *you* become the Teacher here?"

My otherwise-loyal disciple hastened to stammer an apology, but I cut him off with a wave of my hand.

"My friends, the 'root cause' of almost all divorces... is *what*?" I pointedly asked.

"Well... maybe... uh..." they fumbled for words, "The woman is disobedient... Or the woman doesn't pleasure her man sufficiently... Or the woman..."

"Why?" I demanded. "Why are these women all so 'ungodly'? Are we just cursed to have a bunch of bad young girls in our families destined to grow up to be lousy wives?"

This time they were silent, with no answers at all.

"I'll tell you the root cause of almost all divorces," I stated: "It's the infidelity of their men!"

"But according to our Religious Law, the men would be stoned for adultery..." one man argued, trailing off.

"Right!" I nodded. "And when have you ever seen a *man* stoned for adultery? Sure, it happens now and then to some wayward woman. But have you *ever* seen a man have to face the ultimate penalty for his sexual immorality?"

The embarrassed silence continued.

"Of course not!" I laughed ruefully. "It's the *women* who are supposed to be holy and pure, dedicated to their one husband—while the unspoken reality is that the man is free to spread his seed wherever and whenever he has the cheating opportunity! In fact, it's often regarded as a 'badge of honor' for men to have *several* women on the side, as a sign of the man's virility and power! And even if not in actuality, many of our good Jewish men are constantly looking, considering,

and communicating their eagerness by their actions to their wives that they are not satisfied!”

“Master, *we* don’t do that!” one of my disciples firmly insisted.

“Oh, don’t you?” I chided him. “I challenge you, my closest male disciples, with the same words I spoke to the throngs today: ‘PROVE YOUR LOVE FOR GOD BY HOW YOU TREAT YOUR WIVES!’” I again shouted. “*If you cannot be holy and righteous with those who are closest and dearest to you, how can you be so with any other?*”

There was another long, thoughtful silence.

Then one of the men spoke up, trying to liven up the mood by making a joke: “Well... at least if we’re stuck with our wives unless they commit the extreme insult of having sex with another man, putting themselves at risk of being executed—they’re also stuck with *us!*”

Several laughed, the rest smiling, admitting: “Uh, right, my passing gas... I do snore a lot at night... I admit I love wine a bit too much... Even being here with you, Master, is tough on my marriage—my wife gets real frustrated working a job, taking care of the kids, while I go running off on my spiritual adventures... I suppose I’m a bit gruff at times... It’s good they can’t just throw *us* to the side!”

“Do you think not?” I gently stated, stopping their good-natured kidding.

“What?” one of the men gulped. “But, Master, even under your stricter requirements, if us men abstain from the vile practice of adultery or fornication, then certainly our women would have no grounds at all for...”

“And *how* have I taught you and the people on many occasions to rightly define ‘adultery?’” I coldly answered him.

“Uh... say what?” another of the men asked, confused.

“Haven’t you been listening to my teachings these past couple of years?” I queried, in mock astonishment!

“Well, I mean,” he hastily tried to come up with an answer, “—the ‘intent of the heart’ you’ve taught is as important as the actual action, which means...” he trailed off, now stricken by the implications.

“That’s right!” I sternly admonished them. “Adultery and fornication are not just the actual physical sexual actions. If you even *imagine* the situation in your mind of bedding a woman other than your wife, then in the sight of God you have committed sexual immorality! You *are* an adulterer or fornicator, whether you continue on to carry out the physical act or not! *And what man has not done this in his mind, or continues to do so, if not constantly then every now and then?*”

“But... Master...” another of the men gasped, “Then... that would mean...?”

“Yes,” I nodded, quite seriously, sternly addressing them all: “—each of your wives, every wife in the world, has sufficient justification legally in the sight of God to divorce any one of you God-condemned sexually immoral men... and marry another!”

They were all shocked and greatly disturbed by this extreme statement of mine.

“Fortunately,” I continued, “if you but treat your wives with a little kindness, a bit of respect, and a tiny amount of consideration—then they will forgive you your human male animal nature... and stay with you! You’ve got great women at your side, my friends. You best be good to them in return!”

“Still, Master,” another interjected. “This is a very hard teaching. Perhaps you’d best not emphasize any more of this in your lectures to the general public? If this is so difficult for us to grasp and carry out—we who believe in you and know your many teachings—think how it will bewilder the common people!”

My face became stony as I *glared* at them!

“Should I then be like Moses, not insisting on true godliness from half of the population, the males?” I coldly replied.

“Well... perhaps make some allowances for the common practices of our society?” another shrugged.

“Oh... ‘make allowances’,” I repeated, my voice low and carefully controlled, “—like, perhaps, allowing you several wives each? Maybe that’d be better than having to be faithful and true to one?”

They all seemed to draw back against the stone walls of the room...

“Or how about if I allowed you, my faithful followers, to have a *stable* of official *concubines*?” I mildly asked. “Would that be an acceptable ‘allowance’?”

At this, they definitely looked like they were going to get up and run from the room...

“After all,” I relentlessly continued, “did not God in our Holy Scriptures in times past allow the godly men in different periods of our history these outlets for their uncontrollable lusts and desires, with which to dominate and subjugate the ‘weaker’ sex? Those practices *are* in our Holy Texts, *aren’t* they?”

One of my disciples ventured a tentative answer: “Uh... Master... I think one ornery woman at a time is quite enough for each of us, thank you very much!”

I smiled.

“So, do you see now that there is a time to put away childish, brutish ‘indulgences’ and stand up for the Full Truth of God?” I asked them.

Several nodded.

“And the time is *now!*” I exclaimed. “*This* is the time that God has chosen to reveal his full will to humanity! You are *now* ready to appropriately channel and control your animal lusts, allowing you to look upward to God! *You* are ready to respect all people, whether male or female, free or slave, rich or poor, respected or shunned. You, my closest disciples, are *ready* to not just be a nicer reflection of an ugly society. Indeed, modern society in many ways puts the official religious Spokespeople of our religion to shame!”

“How so, Master?” one asked.

“Just look around you,” I shrugged. “Rather than being restricted to the kitchen, pregnant, with a baby at each breast—there are many Examples today of women who are powerful and successful. They run their own businesses, are well-educated, and exhibit extreme talent in all endeavors including the beautiful job of birthing and raising children! It’s time that we who claim to be followers of God demonstrate by our *official* beliefs and actions His overriding love toward *all* of *His* children, don’t you think?”

“I think that we all agree that what you say is the Truth of God,” one of them answered. “But even for us, Master, it’s almost too heavy to bear...” he grunted, trailing off.

Yet another chimed in: “Yes, Master! My head is swimming with the implications of what you’ve told us. It still seems to me that you’re telling us it would be far better to never be married at all than to take on such a huge and irrevocable responsibility?”

I sighed.

“My friends,” I patiently instructed them all, “God does not expect perfection from his imperfect creations. But you must *try!* It is not good enough to say that your physical urges are too great for you to control or to channel in ways that are not destructive. Yes, God knows you better than you know yourselves. It is, indeed, the Lord of the Universe that made you as you are. The built-in urge to father babies is what keeps the human race going from one generation to another. If that driver weren’t so powerful, what man would willingly create children that would occupy almost all of his time, energy, and money for the next thirty years of his life?”

“Hah! That’s true...” one of my male disciples who had ten kids gulped knowingly.

“God knows that this is a sacred duty for most men, to make and help to raise-up the next generation of humans,” I continued. “Indeed, the honorable bed of a lifelong committed marriage is not defiled. It is a beautiful and wondrous thing to make and raise a new little human who grows up to become a God-respecting, honorable individual. This is something of which you can be truly proud. It is a powerfully internal, positive compulsion of most men and women. It is not just something that people should do as a matter of course, but a holy responsibility that honors God! So don’t view it as a burdensome, painful chore—but as one of your highest godly duties and righteous joys!”

“Still, Lord,” one of my older disciples sighed, “at times the life of a single person without those duties seems very tempting!”

I again laughed.

“Yes, that’s true,” I agreed. “And, indeed, there are some who do live their lives happily and productively without having the huge responsibilities of keeping and supporting a reasonably happy wife and God-fearing children. As you know, some are born as eunuchs, without functional male sex organs, being such from birth. Some deliberately disfigure themselves in order to gain high positions in the courts of royalty. Some are made that way by evil people who abuse and mutilate them. But there are yet others—some amongst us here today—who choose yet another high duty of godliness: to fully dedicate their resources, time, and energy to the work of the Lord rather than raising up yet another generation of humans.”

“—as you have done, Master,” one of my closest disciples acknowledged, respectfully.

“Yes, I have deliberately forgone the pleasures and positive aspects of having a wife and kids,” I admitted. “I do this deliberately, in order that *you* and all those I preach to may become my beloved children! However, this is not a proper path for many men. Indeed, only a few can make such an extreme commitment. But it is an *honorable* commitment—in its way as honorable as committing to a lifelong bond of godly marriage—to dedicate oneself entirely to advancing the Kingdom of God! Let him who is able to accept it do so. Let all others do their best to honor ALL their godly duties in the sight of the Lord of Reality!”

“Amen!” they all agreed, as I dismissed them from the room with a friendly wave of my hand; turning back to continue my intense prayers...

So, my disciples began to understand that one *can* let God into all the rooms, closets, and drawers of one’s heart while *still* enjoying the productive, good pleasures of this life. But excluding God from ANYTHING IN ONE’S LIFE is a false bargain. While seemingly getting more and greater pleasures, it actually results in far less—eventually leading to *misery*, bitter loss, and final *separation* from the presence of God.

Do you want to enter into and remain within God’s Kingdom? *Then do not exclude God from your sexual drives and*

desires! Honor God in all that you do, particularly in how you conduct your marriage. This command is for both males and females. Sure, the male has the ultimate responsibility for whether or not the marriage succeeds. But the female is not without her responsibility, namely to be a full and equal part of the ONE JOINED UNIT of husband/wife demonstrating God's heavenly love to a wicked and selfish world!

What God has joined together, let not short-sighted men or women split asunder!

Don't exclude God from your sexual nature. In everything that you do, act godly: reasonably, productively, respectfully, beautifully, and honorably! If you do this, you will gain far more than you seemingly "lose."

I know that at times—particularly under great stress or duress—it's incredibly hard to live up to these marriage ideals. But what you do when things get tough shows the true character of your heart! Is your heart *closed* to real godliness, or is it *permeable* to God's love? Remember, you have POWERFUL TOOLS for keeping your minds drenched in the real Presence of God...

Section 4:
PRAYER AND
SACRIFICE TO GOD

(See *Matthew 6:1-18*)

So, do you really want to be granted citizenship in God's Kingdom? And once there, do you *really* want to do what it takes to remain therein? Then you must completely open up your heart to God! You must make your heart fully PERMEABLE to godliness.

No place or issue or subject in your heart can be kept "off-limits" to God. Your sexuality, your marriage, your family cannot be excluded from God. To do such will cause you to inevitably drift away from God... and by your own actions depart from the Kingdom.

Do you want yet another Example of the insidious nature of this danger? Alright, I'll give you *the very best Example*. It occurs exactly and simultaneously with what otherwise would seem to be irrefutable proof of your high status in God's Kingdom! Yes, even in the very holiest of situations which seemingly demonstrate your devout obedience to God, you may be sowing the seeds of your own eventual damnation.

I taught the people about this deadly danger during my famous "Sermon on the Mount." I remember the occasion well. It was during the initial phase of my ministry, before confronting my enemies took priority. Thus, things were relaxed, lively but not tense, with honest discussion going back and forth between me, my disciples, and those attracted to my discourses.

On this occasion, a huge multitude sought me out. I freely admit that most of them didn't come to hear me talk. What

drew them was the rumors they'd heard of my healing powers. Sitting through my sermons was the "price" they reluctantly paid for the possibility of me working miracles in their lives. For me to fix their ailing or injured physical bodies, they "put up" with the transformation of their souls.

So, I withdrew from the crowd, climbing up the slope of a small mountain, such that the people could no longer overwhelm me with their demands. I sat down on a large bolder where all below could still see and hear me. My disciples sat down a bit lower on the slope, beneath the level of my feet. I spoke in a loud voice such that all could hear. I took this opportunity to lay-out my "agenda" in one long progressive speech. But it wasn't just a preacher's boring sermon. Instead, I made it into a lively discussion.

It was a beautiful day. We weren't far from the Sea of Galilee. The air was fresh and sweet. All around us flowers were blooming. A mild breeze was blowing. The meadows were green and soft. It was sunny but not hot, the sky a brilliant blue.

Many of the people had brought food for their hike into the countryside. They settled down in groups all across the plain below us. I and my close disciples were on an elevated small plateau situated up on the slope of the small mountain. It was a peaceful, friendly, excited gathering. It was much like a church picnic with thousands of families present. But it was also similar to "faith healing" events where many sick people hoped to be relived from their illnesses and pains. But they were also receptive to my teachings...

On that beautiful occasion, I spoke of many things with my disciples, teaching them at the same time as also interacting with the crowd. But then, in the hearing of the crowd, I invited *my closest disciples* to tell *me* of their deepest concerns.

Yes, I allowed them to "set the agenda."

"Master!" one of my disciples called-out forcefully, such that all could also hear and learn: "We've heard you teach often of *Godly Righteousness*. Can you give us a concise definition of what this truly consists?"

"No," I truthfully answered. "I could, but I won't. To do so would stifle your learning. God does not want for you to obey

nice-sounding rules by rote, with no thinking on your part. It's struggling with applying Godly Righteousness in each of your daily lives that you learn its true meaning. Besides, it's not an abstraction—it's an action! But at the same time, it's not merely external, but also internal. And it *does* involve that dreaded word 'sacrifice.'"

"Can you give us an example, Lord?" another politely queried.

"Certainly," I replied. "Consider a devout Pharisee. He takes great pains to regularly donate money for helping the poor and destitute. In the *synagogue* you often see him at the alms box, judiciously and carefully dropping in his clattering, valuable coins. In the *marketplace* you may see him and his retinue actually calling the poor, gathering them together, and giving each a generous donation. At *busy intersections* you may hear him and his people loudly alerting the homeless and street-people—trumpeting an invitation to anyone within ear-shot. Then when all are gathered there, you see the Pharisee and his crew going from one to the other supplicant. They evaluate each petitioner's sad condition, giving each a targeted gift. Is this Godly Righteousness?"

"Well..." my disciples mused, whispering amongst themselves.

One ventured an answer: "Truly, alms-giving is a duty of all godly people," she nodded thoughtfully. "Not as a set ritual, of course, but out of gratitude to God for all He's done for us already. By so doing, we tangibly pass to the less fortunate some of the bounty God has given to us. The godly person that closes up his heart to the suffering of others is not exhibiting the Grace of the Lord. And, since it's giving that which is often the most valued thing we possess—our money—it's definitely a *sacrifice* and a very high demonstration of our godly minds. So, what you've described sounds, indeed, like a powerful Example of Godly Righteousness."

"Ah..." I nodded to her in acknowledgement. "That's a very well thought-out and articulated answer. But perhaps it's not entirely complete. Consider yet another Example."

My disciples leaned forward in anticipation, clearly puzzled by my cryptic answers to their question.

“Consider a godly man who regularly leads public prayer at the synagogue,” I mused. “He stands upright and impressively. He raises his hands up to God in Heaven. He looks upward to the ceiling, seemingly beseeching the Lord directly. He begins with the honored phrase ‘*O Lord God of our Fathers...*’ and continues onward from there. He speaks in the first person, describing his own trials and tribulations as an Example to which all others can easily relate. He doesn’t deal in his prayer only with himself, however. He informs God in detail about all the ills, struggles, and needs of members of the congregation, giving each of their names. He petitions God to help the congregation with many diverse needs and problems, both present and future. He calls upon the Lord to smite all their enemies, oppressors, and occupiers. With great emotion he repeats these key requests to God over and over, linked to slightly different situations, as the congregation says the same things in their minds or out loud. He launches into wonderfully elaborate discourses discussing with the Lord of Reality theological points that are of great importance to the congregation. He speaks with no constraints as to the length of his prayer, but continues with great enthusiasm as long as ‘the Spirit moves him.’ Finally, he concludes with stirring praise and adoration of our great God in Heaven, asking for the Kingdom to be made manifest, restoring the Glory of the Jewish Nation. What say you? Is this Godly Righteousness?”

After a pause for reflection, another of my disciples answered: “Yes, Master,” he replied emphatically. “This is indeed the act of a righteous person. From what you’ve told us, this man has inspired the congregation with a beautiful and powerful prayer, helping them commune with God. No detail has been left out! He’s petitioned the Almighty on behalf of all the members of the congregation. He has spoken at great length on weighty matters of the Law. He’s ended up with a stirring petition to get rid of the evil Roman occupiers, re-establishing us as rulers of this wicked world. How could this not be Godly Righteousness in action, though it involves little if any sacrifice?”

“Hmmm...” I considered his reply. “And what say you, young lady?” I suddenly asked, pointing to one of the young

children there with her parents, playing in the dirt with some rocks.

Not far down the slope, she giggled and laughed, smirking! She'd been listening to me...

"Well?" I asked again, seriously awaiting her reply.

"I think... I would..." she grinned widely, "—just fall asleep! Hah!"

I laughed in return. "Oh, would you now?" I smiled compassionately. "Too long of a prayer, do you think? It'd take a real 'sacrifice' on your part to stay awake?"

"Uh huh!" she emphatically stated, nodding her small head vigorously.

"Well, it seems there may still be some problems here," I frowned, narrowing my eyes and thoughtfully stroking my beard with one of my hands. "Surely Godly Righteousness should be obvious even to small children?"

"But Master," the same male disciple spoke again, sounding confused and uncertain. "Is not *fervent prayer* a beloved duty of all godly people? Is this not a holy privilege we have to commune directly with our God? Surely vigorous and detailed petitioning of the Lord in the synagogue is a time-honored way to inspire and uplift our fellow congregational members?"

"Of course, of course!" I agreed. "But still... alright! I'll give you yet another Example to consider."

The disciples settled back expectantly, but even more puzzled than previously.

"Picture this," I continued. "That very same fellow that gave such a detailed, lengthy, personal, and rousing prayer in the synagogue does not confine his prayers just to the saved. Indeed, he regularly goes out to try and inspire the non-attendees, unbelievers, and even pagans. He loves to go to a busy intersection, where the streets are filled with many people going about their business. He stands there in his impressive church-going robe, lifts his arms up to heaven, looks up to God, and launches into a long, passionate prayer. He exclaims the virtues and power of God. He thanks the Lord that he is not like the unclean sinners surrounding him. He speaks at length about the evils of the age, asking the Lord to smite

those that delight in such wickedness. He fervently petitions God for the many dire needs of our blighted society. He skillfully builds to a climax, repeating key phrases over and over, each time more forcefully and louder. He speaks with such conviction that many stop to listen to him, watching him in awe! When he finally concludes his prayer he's soaked with sweat, trembling, and weak. The gathered audience breaks out in admiring applause! Is this, my dear friends, an example of Godly Righteousness?"

Again, my disciples whispered amongst themselves.

One of my elderly women disciples answered for the group: "Master, we've seen this happen many times. It is common practice for the leaders of the synagogue to go out onto the streets to take holiness to the people. Surely this is a sign of great devotion and conviction? It would be much easier to simply stay with one's fellow believers than to go out to confront what sometimes will be jeers and rejection. They are sacrificing their time and emotions to go out into the public street. We definitely agree that this is yet another stirring Example of Godly Righteousness!"

I pursed my lips, nodding reluctantly.

"Yes, what you say sounds reasonable," I slowly concluded. "However..." I said while squinting my eyes, pondering. "Something still doesn't feel right. Perhaps I'd best give you yet another Example to consider?"

This time, my disciples were actually squirming where they sat on the ground, boulders, or fallen tree trunks. They were disturbed by my apparent reluctance to answer their seemingly simple question. Why was I going on at such length giving all these Examples? Plus, it was in front of *thousands* of people in our spread-out audience down below!

I could see their thoughts: "What is he getting at?"

"Let's say that you see an esteemed lady from the synagogue—a very godly women well-versed in the scriptures—in the marketplace," I began. "She is normally a very healthy, rosy-cheeked, solid, and cheerful person. But you see that today her cheeks are hollowed-out, her skin is clammy and white, her eyes are sunken, her hair is dry and scraggly, and

her clothes are dirty—hanging loosely off her body! What’s going on with her?”

The nearby little girl shot her hand up into the air. “Oh, oh, oh...” she gasped in excitement, “I know this one!”

“Yes, my little friend?” I politely acknowledged her.

“She’s fasting!” the kid piped-out loudly.

“Indeed!” I smiled, nodding in the affirmative. “Good answer!”

The little girl beamed with pride.

“So, is this then a supreme Example of Godly Righteousness?” I asked them all.

This time there was no hesitation in their answers: “She’s clearly sacrificing, denying herself the pleasures and necessity of food... She’s very devout and observant, probably exercising the yearly fast... She is teaching her body to be in subjection to her spirit... She is letting the grief of her sins be expressed to all... She is showing that all earthly lusts can be controlled and subjugated to godliness... She’s a real heroine of the congregation... She’s cleansing her body to allow God’s Spirit to access her mind all the better... and...”

“That’s enough!” I cut them off, kindly. “I see you are very impressed by this Example. Yes, it clearly involves *sacrifice*, does it not? But is it really the Righteousness that God desires? Is it our best Example of Godly Righteousness? I’m still not sure... perhaps we need even another Example?”

“I can figure it out!” the little girl yelled, clapping her hands together in excitement.

Her parents looked at her disapprovingly, but I motioned with my hand for them to let her speak. I liked her youthful enthusiasm, especially when the older folks were looking like “not again” to my declaration of yet another Example to what already seemed obvious!

“Alright then,” I continued. “Picture this in your mind, young lady. *You* go to the marketplace to buy some fish, some vegetables, and some bread for your mommy—and there prominently sitting up against a main wall of a shop is a man dressed only in old torn *sacks!*”

“Sacks?” the little girl giggled, hiding her mouth with her small hand.

“Yes!” I answered, speaking directly to her. “Rough, dirty, course, plain, food-sacks with holes cut in them. And through the holes stick his head, arms, and legs. That’s all he has on! Plus, you see that his head, face, and hands are covered with black soot and ashes taken from a burned-out fire. His eyes are red. He’s muttering to himself. He’s looking up at the sky like he’s praying, then breathing very heavily and loudly!”

“Does he have a begging bowl?” the little girl asked, pursing her lips.

“Good question!” I laughed, clapping my hands down on my robe-covered knees in emphasis. “No! He’s not a beggar! Try again!”

She tilted her head to one side, scratching her small chin with one pudgy hand. Then her face lit up: “Does he have sores?”

“Another good guess!” I replied, clapping my hands together. “No! He’s not some confused sick person. He has no sores, no obvious disease, no malformation, isn’t crippled, and his words though mumbled are coherent and clear. He’s obviously of sound mind. What’s going on?”

“Ahhhh...” the little girl nodded. “I see! That was a trick question, huh?”

“Yes!” I laughed, standing up and taking a few steps down the slope to pat her affectionately on her head. “You’re very smart! So, tell us the answer.”

She giggled shyly. “He’s another fasting person, right?”

“Yes indeed!” I applauded her. “He’s another person *sacrificing* to God. He’s sitting there in the marketplace so all can see and be inspired by his Example. He’s enduring a long, voluntary, deliberate fast. He’s dressing himself in the simplest and most rudimentary garment possible. He’s showing his humility by covering himself with the remnants of burned-out fires. Surely, this is a great Example of Godly Righteousness, wouldn’t you say?”

This time, my disciples sat in anticipatory silence—obviously feeling my question was rhetorical, needing no reply.

I turned and walked back up the slope before responding to their silence.

“Well?” I pointedly asked again, showing I *did* want an articulated reply!

This time the mother of the little girl I’d questioned spoke up, firmly stating: “Teacher, those Examples are all of great men and women standing up for God. They are *sacrificing* their time, talents, and energy to the work of the synagogue. They are speaking out in public for the highest Ideals. They are donating to the poor, spending much time in prayer, and conquering the desires of the flesh. Thus, they are demonstrating their Godly Righteousness through how they use their money, their minds, and their bodies. What more could one ask of a righteous person?”

“Hmmm...” I pondered, shaking my head back and forth. “Very well said, my good woman. I see where your daughter got her smarts! And let’s also hear from her...” I looked down at her daughter: “And what do *you* think of those Examples of men and women that I gave?”

As I sat back down on my boulder, I theatrically pointed right at the little girl now sitting next to her father on the ground. She was shuffling some small rocks around.

She snorted, seemingly unimpressed.

“You didn’t like them?” I gently asked.

“They were just big show-offs!” she shrugged.

“How so?” I asked again.

“They just gave big long talks or did things to make people look at them!” she huffed, absorbed with her rocks. “They weren’t like *you!*”

“Like me?” I replied, innocently.

“Sure!” she laughed, hopping up to her feet and running up the slope to give me a spontaneous hug around my legs. “You ask me questions! You let my Daddy and Mommy talk! You care what we think! You help us be nicer! You say stuff I can understand! You make church *fun!*”

I leaned down to hug her back—then lifted her off her feet to “plop” her down on one of my shoulders. I firmly held her there as she laughed and giggled, grabbing onto my long hair.

“—and you lift me up!” she cried-out happily, turning her wide-stretched eyes up to the sky.

Standing there with my little friend securely propped up on my shoulder, I addressed the entire multitude. I projected my voice to reach both my nearby disciples and the throng spread out before us at the foot of the mountain.

“LISTEN TO ME!” I spoke even louder than before, commanding the attention of everybody. Even the common people who’d lost interest in my discussion with the disciples, impatiently awaited their chance for me to heal them of their ills, looked up at me. “I WANT YOU ALL TO DO SOMETHING FOR ME!”

Everybody was staring at me expectantly.

“YOU ALL CAME HERE TODAY BECAUSE YOU WANT SOMETHING FROM *ME!*” I continued. “YOU WANT ME TO CURE YOUR DISEASES, FIX YOUR BROKEN LIVES, GIVE YOU A BLESSING FROM GOD, GIVE YOU POWER OVER YOUR ENEMIES, OR LEAD YOU TO RISE UP AGAINST THE OCCUPIERS TO RE-ESTABLISH THE JEWISH KINGDOM’S PRIOR GLORY! BUT BEFORE I GIVE YOU ANYTHING... I REQUIRE SOMETHING FIRST FROM *YOU!*”

I paused, letting my words echo about the lower reaches of the small mountain.

“*What is it, Lord?*” someone shouted back from below.

“DOES EVERYBODY SEE THIS LITTLE GIRL ON MY SHOULDER?” I loudly stated as I walked slowly back and forth along the small plateau so that all could get a good look.

I bounced her up and down as she giggled with glee.

“Yes... We see... She’s cute!” people yelled back.

“I WANT YOU TO STOP TRYING TO BE LIKE MY ALL-SO-SERIOUS, EASILY-IMPRESSED, CAREFULLY PROPER DISCIPLES!” I stated firmly. “AND INSTEAD, I WANT YOU ALL TO BECOME, AGAIN, THIS SWEET, BOLD, AUTHENTIC, LOVING LITTLE GIRL! IF YOU WILL ONLY DO THIS ONE THING FOR ME, I WILL DO ANYTHING I CAN TO HELP YOU—AND SO WILL GOD!”

I tossed her up into the air, caught her in my arms, swung her around in a circle, and quickly hopped down the slope to place her gently back into the arms of her bewildered father.

“Yes!” she agreed, her little face aglow with a brilliant smile, sticking small clenched fists straight up into the air in triumph! “That was *fun*, Jesus!”

“You’re quite welcome,” I winked at her.

“AND NOW HEAR ME WELL!” I called out again to everybody present. “I WILL TELL YOU HOW TO BE *TRULY* RIGHTEOUS IN THE SIGHT OF GOD. DO WHAT I SAY AND WILL NEVER HAVE TO FEAR FALLING OUT OF THE ARMS OF YOUR LOVING HEAVENLY FATHER. YOU WILL STAY WRAPPED UP IN HIS LOVE, PROTECTED IN HIS WARM EMBRACE, *FOREVER!*”

“Tell us Lord... Preach it to us... Speak to us, Master... Tell us what to do and we will obey!” was enthusiastically called-out from below.

Speaking a bit more slowly, but even more intensely, I launched into a focused, powerful, tight presentation.

“BE VERY, VERY CAREFUL THAT YOU DO NOT CARRY OUT YOUR GOOD DEEDS WITH THE PURPOSE OF HAVING PEOPLE SEE HOW GREAT *YOU* ARE!” I enunciated clearly and forcefully.

I saw that my closest disciples were struck by my words, embarrassed at their previous lack of understanding, now nodding in agreement.

“WHY NOT?” I asked rhetorically, lifting up my hands, palms upward, in a pose of sincere questioning. “IT’S VERY SIMPLE!”

Intrigued, my previously casual audience was struck silent, mesmerized. So, I stopped shouting, speaking so they had to strain to hear me...

“*If that is the purpose of your good deeds, even subconsciously, then God will allow you to get what you’re after!*” I cautioned them, shaking my head sadly. “If you are looking to be honored and appreciated by your fellow men and women, then that will be your reward. Expect nothing further from God! If your focus is not on God, God will not focus on you.”

“Just like that guy who gave all that money to the poor people!” my little friend piped up from the arms of her father. “He was a jerk!”

“Yes!” I agreed, smiling down at her. “Whenever you give money to help out the poor, don’t ‘blow a trumpet’ to announce it to the world, even under the pretense of gathering the poor together! This is what blatant HYPOCRITES do! Does anyone know a good definition of ‘hypocrites’?” I asked to the crowds below.

A number of people raised their hands. I pointed to a woman close to us. “Speak loudly so all can hear!” I told the lady.

“It’s like some of those high-and-mighty Pharisees that think they’re so God-blessed but then go and throw widows out of their homes because they can no longer make house payments!” she snarled in a piercing squeal, spitting down onto the ground in disgust.

“TELL US MORE!” I encouraged her, making sure the crowd was still listening.

“They want everyone to see them loudly dropping in a handful of coins into the poor box at church,” she continued, *“but then behind everyone’s back they go and get back hundreds-more from their wicked business deals! They’re pretending to be all godly when the truth is they’re worse than heathens!”*

“WELL SAID!” I congratulated her. Then, more softly, I continued... “No matter how admirable some may appear in carrying out their acts of righteousness,” I sadly stated, “a ‘play-actor’ ends up doing great harm to the work of our Lord. Their hypocrisy poisons their message!”

“Why?” the little girl nearby me asked innocently. “I like to play-act! I’m very good at it! Am I being bad?”

I reassured her: “You’re just exercising your God-given imagination, my young friend. You’re not being bad. But when grown-ups try to fool people into thinking they are saints when in truth they are human rats, *shame* spills-over onto the honestly righteous people. If *you* tried to tell people about my teachings, would they trust you? No! They’d remember that rat who tried to hide his or her face under a smiling mask—and think that *you* might be the *same!*”

“Oh!” she gulped. “I don’t want to be a smelly old rat!”

“Well, don’t be too hard on our little rodent friends,” I grinned. “They’re not so bad out in the fields where they belong. It’s just when they’re hiding in a corner and jump out at you that they might be scary!”

“They might *bite* me!” she gasped.

“Only if you don’t know that they are there,” I retorted. “That’s when they’re the most dangerous. It’s the same with human hypocrites. If you know that someone is mean and rotten, you just stay away from him or her. But the *hidden* human rat can get close enough to stick a knife in your back!”

“Ouch!” she yelled, clutching her father tightly.

“SO INSTEAD OF MAKING A BIG SHOW TO LET EVERYONE KNOW YOU’RE DONATING AT THE POOR-BOX, MAKING AS LOUD A CLATTER AS POSSIBLE,” I continued, again shouting to the entire crowd, “HOW ABOUT NOT EVEN LETTING YOUR LEFT HAND KNOW WHAT YOUR RIGHT HAND DOES, *QUIETLY* DROPPING IN YOUR MONEY?”

Many heads were nodding.

“Your hand knows what the other one is doing?” my young friend in her Daddy’s arms gasped, amazed.

“It’s just an expression,” I winked at her. “It means to not to let even yourself get all overly proud at what you’re doing!”

“Oh!” she giggled, coyly putting her finger to her lips to “shush” herself...

“YOUR FATHER IN HEAVEN SEES ALL, KNOWS ALL, AND WILL NOT FORGET WHAT YOU DO IN HIS HONOR!” I powerfully projected my voice across the gathering of thousands of people. “*He sees your secret good deeds, make no mistake about that!*” I forcefully continued. “And what our Father sees in secret He will reward in the open. Yes, you will get the greatest rewards of all—both in this life and the one to come—if you will but trust in God rather than the fleeting attention of your fellow men and women.”

“But Teacher?” someone shouted from below. “Many godly men and women give to the poor, help the homeless, and treat the sick, doing so publicly. How are we to know the true godly righteous people from the hypocrites?”

“ANYONE ELSE HAVE A DEFINITION FOR WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A HYPOCRITE?” I again called-out loudly.

Several more hands were raised.

“Yes! How about you, there, good Sir?” I pointed to another person on the other side of the crowd.

“They make a good speech in the synagogue, saying all the right words,” a man spoke back in a deep, bellowing voice. *“But then in their real lives they go and do exactly the opposite of what they said at church! They preach to us about love and mercy then do like that lady said to the poor widows. And if you don’t accept what they say to you they eject you from the synagogue. They don’t care about helping you at all—just wanting you to listen to them sermonizing!”*

“You are correct, my friend,” I complimented him, loudly clapping my hands in appreciation. “Well said! Those that truly love God will demonstrate that commitment both publicly and privately. Those that are hypocrites—only pretending to love the Lord—will eventually slip up and show by their vile actions their true colors. And often they will reveal their selfish obsession even *during* the execution of their supposed virtuous public duties.”

“*How so, Teacher?*” someone else yelled out from below.

“Just like that gentleman said!” I answered. “Just like my young friend here said a bit ago. Just like in my Examples. Can anyone say again the main thing that *should* have allowed my disciples here to readily determine the *unrighteousness* of the Examples I gave before?”

They all looked confused but thoughtful.

“THIS IS A CRITICAL POINT!” I projected loudly. “I WANT YOU ALL TO FORM UP INTO GROUPS NO LARGER THAN SIX PEOPLE. I WANT EVERYONE TO BE IN A GROUP. I WANT YOU ALL TO DISCUSS THE QUESTION I JUST ASKED. I WANT EVERYONE IN EACH GROUP TO HAVE A TURN TO SPEAK. I’LL GIVE YOU ABOUT FIFTEEN MINUTES FOR EACH GROUP TO FIGURE OUT THEIR #1 ANSWER TO MY QUESTION. THEN I’LL CALL ON SELECTED GROUPS TO TELL EVERYONE WHAT THEY DECIDED. PROCEED!”

I sat back down, taking a break from my public discourse, my eyes closing. My throat was getting a bit sore from all the shouting. I was glad to have a rest.

Although speaking to many thousands at once was exhilarating and stimulating, it was still draining. I was breathing heavily. My legs felt a bit rubbery from my jumping and running-about. I'd been going strong all morning. The spirit indeed was willing, but my human flesh was weak!

After a couple minutes I looked up to see the little girl handing me a jug of water.

"Thirsty?" she chirped cheerfully.

I smiled wearily, taking the jug, tilting it up into the air. I took a good long drink from it. "Very good... thank you," I nodded gratefully, handing it back to her.

Not only in the crowd below, but my disciples had also formed up into groups and were enthusiastically discussing my question.

"My Daddy says that you are going to lead us to *victory!*" she said in awe, her voice low and conspiratorial.

"Indeed, I am," I slowly nodded, my voice grim. "But it's not the victory that everyone seems to want from me."

"You don't want to kill all those bad soldiers who order us around and steal all our land, money, and stuff?" she whispered back.

"Do you?" I returned the question.

She wrinkled up her nose, pondering. "Well... sometimes... 'specially when they scare me... but I guess they're mostly just doing their jobs like their bosses tell them to do. Maybe we could make their bosses be nicer?"

"Don't punish the people—change the system!" I laughed. "You really *are* a very smart young lady!"

"My Daddy says I'm too clever for my own good," she smugly agreed. Then, more seriously, she said: "What's a 'system'?"

"It's something that the Greeks *tried* to do, the Romans *think* they do, but won't be fully instituted until my *Church* really comes of age in the distant future," I mysteriously replied.

“Wow!” she gasped, putting the palms of her hands flat against her chubby cheeks in astonishment.

“It’s a secret, though,” I cautioned her, “—just between you and me. And it’s my *real* mission here, which you’ve just discovered!”

“I won’t tell!” she stated firmly, her eyes narrowed in determination.

“Thanks,” I said as I stood back up, shooing her back to her parents. I felt a lot stronger, ready to continue!

“EVERYBODY WRAP UP YOUR DISCUSSIONS!” I called out loudly. “I WANT TO HEAR YOUR ANSWERS. TO REMIND YOU, I’M LOOKING FOR THE SINGLE MOST OBVIOUS CLUE AS TO WHY THE EXAMPLES I FIRST GAVE WERE ALL OF *UNRIGHTEOUS*, NOT *GODLY RIGHTEOUS* PUBLIC ACTS!”

The groups were all settling back down, quieting, looking at me expectantly. Spokespeople from each group were ready to give me their group’s answer.

“ALRIGHT... YOU!” I pointed to a small group at the far edge of the crowd.

“Contempt for the listeners/viewers.”

“GOOD ANSWER!” I complimented them. “AND YOU THERE...” pointing on the opposite side of the crowd.”

“Feasting on continued compliments.”

“WELL SAID!” I nodded. “AND YOU... AND YOU... AND YOU...” I continued pointing to an additional group as I got back the prior new answer.

“Saying the same words over and over... Trying to tell God what God already knows... Speaking or presenting themselves at length... Addressing men and not the Lord... Making a big show of what they do... Putting themselves first and others second... Doing what’s good for them and not for the audience... Sacrificing in the open and not in secret... Making themselves the centerpiece and not God...”

“GOOD! EXCELLENT! WELL SAID!” I stopped the flow of answers. “Those are all correct! They’re all true! And yet *none* of you has yet hit upon the *one common denominator* to their unrighteousness...?”

They all looked very puzzled, especially my disciples who'd mostly been nodding approvingly to all the answers. They'd heard their own deliberations reflected in the crowd below. But some of my disciples had been shaking their heads in the negative, *not* agreeing. Yes, they knew. And that's why I didn't allow them to answer first. I wanted the people below to work it out themselves. Rather than hearing a preacher tell it, *profound revelations* meant much more when people were helped to discover them themselves!

"But Master!" one of my disciples spoke-up, the same that previously had so emphatically defended the "godly righteousness" of the person in my Examples of public prayer. "Surely those answers from the people about the prayers were *wrong!*"

I sighed. This disciple loved to pray for *our* group, going on and on and on. I'd not reproved him before for this wearisome practice, because I didn't want to dampen his enthusiasm and excitement. But perhaps now was to the time to re-focus his thoughts and efforts.

"Wrong?" I mildly replied.

"Public prayer is a very powerful duty to God that stirs the souls of all listeners!" He confidently proclaimed. "On such an occasion, one must not be timid. One should speak up strongly. We should all pour out our souls to the Lord!"

"Pour out our souls?" I mildly repeated.

"Yes!" he continued. "One should help the listeners participate by reinforcing one's main words, speaking them over and over as if in a chant. The prayer-leader should build up to a grand climax, stirring the emotions! We should speak of many things, telling God *all* our troubles, praising God from *every* aspect! Also, one should..."

"Did I teach you to pray like that?" I queried, cutting him off while simultaneously raising one eyebrow in emphasis.

He was struck silent, realizing that I had *not!* He frowned, starting to reply... but I stopped him with an upraised hand.

I turned to the crowd below that'd been straining to hear the argument from my questioning disciple.

"YOU'VE HEARD FROM THE HOLY SCRIPTURES THAT THERE IS A TIME AND PLACE FOR ALL THINGS," I

loudly began. “INDEED, THAT IS TRUE! THERE *IS* A TIME AND PLACE FOR A PRESENTATION, FOR A LECTURE, FOR A MONOLOGUE-TYPE FORMAL SERMON. HOWEVER, AS YOU SEE FROM MY OWN EXAMPLE, THAT OCCASION IS RARE. BUT IT DOES EXIST. HOWEVER, LET ME BE PERFECTLY CLEAR—A PUBLIC *PRAYER* IS *NOT* THE TIME OR THE PLACE TO PREACH A SERMON!”

“But Master...?” my male disciple started to argue with me again...

“BUT *NOTHING!*” I shot back at him. “DO YOU WANT ME TO SHOW YOU IN WHAT MANNER YOU SHOULD GIVE A PUBLIC PRAYER?” I asked both him and the crowd.

“Yes... Teach us... Show us the way... Help us do what’s right!” came back to me from the people.

My disciple, however, was skeptically nonresponsive. Indeed, he looked like he was pouting!

“Alright then,” I nodded, ignoring him. “Everybody kneel down or sit, settling both your mind and body. Close your eyes to shut out all the worldly distractions around you. Fold your hands together over your chest, signifying your submission to God. Bow your head downward in humility. *Then repeat after me, everyone together, the words that I say!*”

All across the plain, people were sinking down to their knees or sitting. A great “rustling” occurred as their robes settled into new positions. Everyone having moved into their new positions, a great silence swept over all of us. I could hear birds singing in the bushes, the “swoosh” of the gentle breeze.

I saw that my nearby little friend was also on her knees, her small hands clutched tightly, eyes screwed shut in intense concentration.

I bowed my own head as I stood there, folding my own hands together, closing my own eyes, and lowering the tone of my voice to project deeply and forcefully: “OUR DEAR FATHER IN HEAVEN...” I began then paused for the reply.

“*Our dear Father in Heaven...*” the people all together echoed back.

“MAY ALL PEOPLE IN THE WORLD HONOR YOUR NAME...”

“*May all people in the world honor Your Name...*”

“HELP US, DEAR FATHER, TO DO WHAT YOU WANT US TO DO...”

“Help us, dear Father, to do what You want us to do...”

“EVEN IF THAT IS NOT WHAT OUR OWN SELFISH NATURES DEMAND...”

“Even if that is not what our own selfish natures demand...”

“THAT OUR HIGHEST DESIRE WILL BE TO MAKE YOU HAPPY...”

“That our highest desire will be to make You happy...”

“PLEASE GIVE US WHAT WE NEED IN THIS WORLD TO PROPERLY DO OUR DUTY FOR YOU...”

“Please give us what we need in this world to properly do our duty for You...”

“HELPING US TO SEE THE OPPORTUNITIES RIGHT NOW TO MAKE YOU HAPPY...”

“Helping us to see the opportunities right now to make You happy...”

“NOT OVERLY WORRIED ABOUT WHAT TOMORROW MAY BRING...”

“Not overly worried about what tomorrow may bring...”

“BUT FOCUSING ON HOW TO BEST USE THE TALENTS YOU’VE GIVEN US, RIGHT IN THIS MOMENT...”

“But focusing on how to best use the talents You’ve given us, right in this moment...”

“AND IF IT BE YOUR WILL, PLEASE FORGIVE US OUR STUPIDITIES, FAILURES, AND SELFISH PRIDE...”

“And if it be Your Will, please forgive us our stupidities, failures, and selfish pride...”

“AS WE FROM YOUR GREAT LOVE FORGIVE THOSE WHO’VE LIKEWISE WRONGED US...”

“As we from Your great Love forgive those who’ve likewise wronged us...”

“AND HELP US TO SEE, UNDERSTAND, AND AVOID THE MANY TEMPTATIONS OF SATAN...”

“And help us to see, understand, and avoid the many temptations of Satan...”

“THAT SUBTLY PLOT AGAINST US TO LEAD US AWAY FROM YOU...”

“That subtly plot against us to lead us away from You...”

“BECAUSE YOU ARE THE ONLY TRUE AND HOLY POWER TO WHOM WE MUST BOW...”

“Because You are the only true and holy Power to Whom we must bow...”

“YOUR KINGDOM THE ONLY PLACE WE WANT TO RESIDE...”

“Your Kingdom the only place we want to reside...”

“AND YOURS THE ONLY GLORY WORTH SEEKING...”

“And Yours the only Glory worth seeking...”

“AMEN!”

“Amen!”

I took a deep breath and opened my eyes, lifting my head.

All across the plain, I could see people quietly weeping, turning to each other, hugging their neighbors.

Many who’d been here only for what I could do for them were now *changed*. By that one, simple, powerful, truly group prayer... their lives had been altered forever!

“Do you see now what I’m trying to teach you?” I asked my doubting public-prayer-speech-defender of a disciple.

“Yes, Lord...” he gulped, his head still held down, ashamed to meet my eyes.

“Prayer has *purpose!*” I intensely spoke, directly to him.

His head snapped back like I’d struck him on his chin.

Then, more gently, I walked the few steps down the slope to him, laying a calming hand on his head as I said to him: “Truly you will do great things for God in my name. You are stubborn and willful, Peter. But your saving characteristic is your willingness to learn from your mistakes. That pleases me greatly!”

He blinked back tears, reaching up with a rough, strong hand to clasp my own.

Then I backed away, turning again to the crowd: “DO YOU SEE NOW WHAT I’M TRYING TO TEACH YOU?” I repeated for all of them, seeing many heads nodding. “THEN LET’S FIND OUT WHAT YOU THINK YOU’VE LEARNED! ACCORDING TO WHAT YOU JUST PARTICIPATED IN, WHAT

SHOULD BE THE *KEY ELEMENTS* TO PUBLIC PRAYER LED BY A TRULY GODLY RIGHTEOUS PERSON?"

From below, people here and there began yelling out possible answers: "*Brief... To the point... From the heart... Spontaneous... Done with true humility... No unnecessary extras... Not a rote speech... That which moves people... Touches each person's heart... Keeps attention focused on God... No useless repetition... Short... Changes people... Brings everyone together... Not boring...*"

"FINE!" I stopped them. "Those are all excellent answers! Truly you are all growing. Your spirits are maturing. You see beyond the showy false-fronts of the many hypocrites in this world. You perceive better your own selves from the perspective of our Mighty Creator!"

My argumentative disciple tentatively raised his hand.

"Yes?" I acknowledged his question.

"Master!" he spoke, his voice heavy with emotion. "I totally accept what you tell us concerning prayer. I see the power and magnificence of what you've just done for us all. But we are not you! We don't see to the center of each point. We flounder around, fumbling our words. It often takes a lengthy discourse and much repetition to communicate our collective needs to God. That's been my experience! That's been *all* of our experiences over many years of worship in the synagogue. Could you please explain the rationale for *why* that what you've just demonstrated for us is the best way to lead public prayer?"

Coming from someone else, his words might seem alarmingly confrontational. But I knew, without a doubt he was genuinely confused, asking for my help. I nodded to him, turning back to the crowd below.

"MY DISCIPLE HERE WANTS TO KNOW THE 'WHY!'" I loudly intoned. "SHALL WE TELL HIM?"

"Yes... Yes... Yes!" many voices rang-out.

"*Is God so uninterested in us that we must gain His attention through repetitious entreaties, as do the heathens to their pagan idols?*" I asked.

"No... No... No... No!" the many voices answered from below.

“Are we so slow and stupid that we can’t grasp the meaning of what’s said unless we hear it repeated a dozen times?” I laughed, enjoying this pointed interaction.

“No... No... No... No!”

“Is God so ignorant and disconnected from this world that we must inform Him at length and in great detail about what’s going on down here with us?”

“No... No... No... No!”

“Is God so indecisive and malleable that our clever arguments and lengthy reasoning will sway Him to our ideas and wishes?”

“No... No... No... No!”

“Are we so lacking for long-winded, monologue, undorned, traditional, repetitious religious speeches about things we as faithful people already know perfectly well—that we need our public prayers to incorporate such?”

“NO... NO... NO... NO!” was emphatically shouted back at me.

I paused, looking back at my insistent disciple.

“Does that answer your question?” I politely asked.

“Yes, Master...” he gulped, white-faced with embarrassment.

“BUT MY DISCIPLE HERE IS PERFECTLY CORRECT!” I instructed the crowd below me. “What we just did together here, a few minutes ago, is not easy! It takes great discipline and sensitivity to only say what’s really most needed—and nothing more! Indeed, some of the supposed great preachers and priests of our day are very poor at this. They somehow think that the speaking of many words is the main component of virtue. But it’s not how *much* you say that’s important. It’s *WHAT* and *HOW* you say what you say that’s most important.”

“I’m so tired of long sermons!” someone in the crowd agreed, shouting loudly.

“Yes!” I agreed. “Too many of our religious leaders think that if you’re bored by what they preach it’s YOUR fault! After all, if you ‘really loved God,’ then you’d hang on their every word, no matter how lengthy, muddled, or inappropriate their

speech, right? And the solution, in their eyes, is to *SPEAK YET MORE WORDS IN THE SAME WAY AS BEFORE!*"

"It's so boring!" a teenager yelled. "I hate going to synagogue!"

"And that's because instead of preaching *better*, they preach harder!" I acknowledged the young man. "Instead of looking for more effective techniques and tools, they blame you. In their eyes it's not *their* fault that people fall asleep during their lengthy prayers or lectures. No! It's *your* fault for not loving 'God's Words' enough."

"But it's the way we've always done it!" an older woman, clearly the teenager's mother, shouted back. "It's our *tradition!* It's the way God wants us to..."

"Yes, good woman!" I agreed. "It's tradition so old that it's forgotten its *purpose!* I repeat what I said before: 'PRAYER HAS A PURPOSE!' If the purpose isn't being fulfilled, then look to improve what you're doing, not just repeat the same things said in the same ways, hoping that somehow the results will be magically different. Tradition has its place, sure, but not when it actually accomplishes the *opposite* to its intent! Is your young son's response—falling asleep—what you want from our hallowed, Jewish rituals and traditions? *Really?*"

I paused, pacing back and forth a few times, waiting for a response. None came...

"SO, DO YOU AGREE WITH ME?" I called-out to the crowds, raising both my arms, palms-out, in supplication.

"Yes... Yes... Yes... Yes... *Amen*, Teacher!" an enthusiastic applause erupted back up at us.

"Master!" one of my female disciples queried me. "Please tell us just what *is* the point—the 'purpose'—of public prayers and lectures."

"AH!" I grinned, thrusting a tightly closed fist high up into the air above my head. "MY DISCIPLE HERE WANTS TO KNOW WHAT IS THE POINT OF PUBLIC PRAYERS AND LECTURES? What do you think? Anyone have an idea? Raise your hands if you do! Let us hear what you think!"

I lowered my fist and started pointing from one to the other of many upthrust hands in the crowd, listening to their excited responses. The people were amazed that finally, at

last, someone was seeking THEIR ideas rather than just imposing upon them what *others* had already decided *for* them.

“Help us move closer to God... Be our spokesperson to God... Inspire us... Encourage us... Move people... Touch their hearts... Keep their attention locked on God... Change people... Give us deeper understanding... Help us be nicer to each other... Unite us before God... Embolden our spirits... Lift up our eyes... Tell us something useful we’ve not heard many times before!”

“ALL EXCELLENT ANSWERS!” I congratulated them. “BEYOND JUST UPHOLDING A DUSTY TRADITION, SO MUCH MORE COULD BE ACCOMPLISHED! DO YOU THINK THAT MOST OF THOSE WHO YOU’VE HEARD LEADING PUBLIC PRAYERS OR GIVING PUBLIC LECTURES UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU JUST SAID CONCERNING THE REAL PURPOSE OF WHAT THEY ARE DOING?”

“No... No... No... No!” came roaring back at us.

I was enjoying immensely this dialogue, particularly the shocked expressions on the faces of most of my disciples. Their concept was indeed one of “lording” it over the rest of the people. They’d had no doubt their job was to impart their “superior” knowledge to those who, on their own, did not know what they most needed. They assumed they’d be like school teachers to little children. But I was teaching them something radically different...

“IT’S TIME FOR US *ALL* TO GROW UP!” I shouted, my voice ringing out across the plain below. “The time of being ignorant little children ordered about by all-knowing parents is coming to an end! Both you and your religious leaders must take on new responsibilities. You will no longer go to the synagogue for your main religious experiences. Those must grow from each of your own hearts. *That’s* the ‘place’ to which you must go to find the true Kingdom of God!”

“*Hallelujah!*” someone shouted.

But most of the rest were silent, puzzled. My good Jewish brethren were used to going to synagogue, observing the rituals, upholding our shared traditions. Did I tell them to stop going to the synagogue? Say what?

“Does that startle you?” I asked, more softly. “Then hear this: *EACH ONE OF YOU WILL BE A PRIEST OR PRIEST-ESS!*”

“What?” I heard echoed throughout the crowd. “What did he say?”

I’d gone beyond tweaking rituals or questioning motives. This wasn’t just liberal fantasies. This was radical and revolutionary!

“You heard what I said!” I defiantly repeated. “You no longer can abdicate responsibility to someone else to pray your prayers, then complain about it! If those prayers are not timely, interesting, relevant, or inspiring, you can do it yourself! You can no longer expect scriptural knowledge being handed to you by either a street preacher or a lecturer in the synagogue. No, it will be your own *individual responsibility* to study and apply God’s Will in your own life.”

I heard murmuring and angry denials. I was going too far. This wasn’t entertaining anymore. This was a scary new religious philosophy!

“Yes!” I insisted, not backing off. “*YOU MUST TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR OWN SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT!*”

“Then what of the Priests?” someone whimpered.

“They have godly duties,” I acknowledged. “But those who are generous enough with their time and talents to take on the heavy duties of church leadership will also have to live up to a higher standard. For those who still need their leadership, our religious elite must stop being dictators, bosses, or professors. Instead, they must become *coaches, facilitators, and mentors!* They must no longer ignore the true needs of their people to impose what *THEY* think best. Instead, they will have to talk to, listen to, and respond to the actual needs of their flocks. No more choosing their own sermon topics. Instead, they must ask *YOU* what relevant topics *you* need taught from the scriptures!”

I saw many nods throughout the crowd, the tension of my “radical” teachings easing. They sensed I was no longer advocating burning the religious structure to the ground, just making it better.

“So instead of forcing you to take what *they* decide to give, go where *they* decide to move, and stay where *they* think is best...” I continued, smiling in a friendly way, “your religious leaders must HELP YOU TO FULLY EXPRESS YOUR OWN GOD-GIVEN RIGHTS: FOR INDIVIDUAL *STRUGGLE* APPLYING GOD’S WORDS. INDIVIDUAL *RESPONSIBILITY* FOR YOUR ACTIONS IS BETWEEN YOU AND GOD. YOU CAN NOW *EXERCISE* YOUR GOD-GIVEN TALENTS WITHIN THE BOUNDS OF GODLY CREATIVITY!”

Say what now? Each to make their own way? Each to take responsibility for their own spiritual development? Now I saw that the vast crowd below was again puzzled, uncertain, even scared!

I paused, breathing deeply to get air back into my lungs. Yes, I could see that my words baffled many. Even my own disciples appeared stunned, shaking their heads in disbelief. The old way *was* one of tribal, patriarchal, traditional dominance. It would not be easy for these people so used to giving unquestioned obedience to their strong religious leaders to take upon themselves new responsibilities. But if the *Kingdom of God* was ever to blossom fully upon Earth... they would have to think in new ways. And it was high time for them to start *opening up their minds!*

I had to convince them to PERMEATE their own hearts!

“So!” I continued. “To sum up what we’ve been discussing concerning public prayer and lecturing, IN TWO WORDS—*what is the Purpose?*”

My previously sullen, argumentative disciple raised his hand.

“Yes, my friend?” I asked.

He paused, pursing his lips, then said: “*Effective teaching!*”

I clapped my hands in approval.

“DID YOU HEAR WHAT HE SAID?” I asked the crowd.

Many of them had not heard his quiet, though intense, statement. They shouted back: “No!”

“MY FRIEND HERE WHO IS LEARNING NEW THINGS EVERYDAY, SAYS THAT THE REAL, TRUE PURPOSE OF

PUBLIC PRAYER AND LECTURING IS... ‘*Effective Teaching!*’

I let that sink in for a few seconds.

“—NOT JUST ‘TEACHING’ THE WILL AND WORD OF GOD...” I continued, “but doing it ‘EFFECTIVELY!’”

“What does *that* mean, Lord?” someone called-out from below.

“Good question!” I laughed. “So—surprise, surprise—I’ll answer it with yet more questions!”

The audience below “groaned” in good humor.

“IF YOU GO AWAY FROM A PUBLIC PRAYER OR LECTURE WITH THE NUMBER ONE THOUGHT IN YOUR HEAD THAT YOU’RE EXHAUSTED FROM STANDING SO LONG, OR YOUR REAR END IS REALLY HURTING FROM SITTING SO LONG—how is that ‘effective’ teaching?” I asked.

“It isn’t!” came back a lone reply from far in the back of the crowd.

“AND HOW ABOUT IF AN HOUR AFTER A LONG PRAYER OR LECTURE, YOU CAN’T EVEN REMEMBER WHAT THE TOPIC WAS—how is that ‘effective’ teaching?” I asked again.

“No... It’s not... No way!” more people shouted back.

“OR WHAT IF YOU SIT AND LISTEN TO SOME PRIEST OR PREACHER GO ON AND ON AND THEN AFTERWARD REALIZE YOU GOT NO NEW INSIGHT THAT YOU DIDN’T ALREADY KNOW?”

“It’s a waste of time... Why bother... I’d stop coming to listen to him!” many were agreeing, shouting out their complaints.

“IT’S FAR BETTER TO SAY *ONE* WORD THAT’S EFFECTIVE THAN A *THOUSAND* WORDS THAT ARE SOON FORGOTTEN!” I exclaimed passionately.

“Amen... Well-said, Teacher... I wish more were like you... You talk like no one else we’ve ever heard!”

“*The purpose of public prayers and lectures is not to plod through some comforting ritual, or to remind us of what we already know, or to stroke the speaker’s vanity!*” I continued, forcefully. “It’s to HELP THE HEARERS MOVE CLOSER TO

GOD! Don't forget that purpose—as do so many of our high-ranking religious leaders!”

“Should we stop going to synagogue?” several shouted.

“That's up to you!” I yelled back. “Synagogues at their worst are still places of common belief, friendship, and family events. But don't waste your time on those who by design or lack of talent fail to meet their *purpose*. Spend your time wisely. Use your precious time in the *best* way to Glorify God with your godly righteous actions. At best you've only got a short time in this world to demonstrate God's love through your actions. Don't waste it just sitting passively on a pew thinking that's what it means to be religious. FEED YOUR HEARTS RATHER THAN FREEZE THEM!”

“Master!” another of my disciples gasped. “If that's true, then where is the discipline? Where is the dedication? Where is the...”

“—*suffering*?” I coldly interrupted him. “Is that what 'church' should be? Is congregating God's believers together supposed to be an ordeal that's dutifully endured? Is plodding through the same rituals over and over what God wants from you? Is a religious service not acceptable unless we feel at the end that we've *suffered* for God by getting through that *painful* ordeal? WHY DO YOU THINK WE ARE HERE ON THIS MOUNTAIN INSTEAD OF AT THE LOCAL SYNAGOGUE?”

“Well... There are so many people... There wouldn't be room...” some of my disciples tentatively ventured.

“DO YOU THINK ALL THESE GOOD PEOPLE WOULD COME TO HEAR ME GIVE SOME REGULAR, FORMULAIC SERMON EXPOUNDING ON ESOTERIC ASPECTS OF THE LAW, OR YET AGAIN RETELLING AND RE-EXPLAINING WELL-KNOWN HOLY SCRIPTURES DOWN AT THE SYNAGOGUE?” I called-out to everyone, waving my hands grandly at the thousands of people spread out on the plain below us.

“Yes... I'd come... If it was *you* doing it, Teacher, we'd all come!” the crowd loudly replied.

I laughed, pleased with their loyalty.

“THANK YOU, MY FRIENDS!” I replied, bowing grandly. “BUT YOU COME TO HEAR ME BECAUSE I'M *NOT* THE SAME AS A REGULAR PREACHER. ISN'T THAT SO?”

“Amen... That’s true, Teacher... No one speaks like you... Tell us more!” many answered back.

“BUT ‘EFFECTIVE’ TEACHING ISN’T JUST ABOUT GIVING A LECTURE OR SAYING A LONG, FANCY PRAYER!” I continued. “A truly inspiring speech isn’t just ‘hearing’ about something! That’s *not* where you really *learn*. That’s just a starting point. The true learning takes place when you put those words into *action*. So, the best teachers don’t just explain something—they also SHOW you how to *apply* the teachings, and then HELP you to proceed to *do* it!”

“Yes!” an elderly woman nearby exclaimed. “My leaders wouldn’t lift a hand to help me feed my family. They only want my money, nothing more!”

I grimly nodded.

“That’s when the most effective learning takes place!” I stated. “A helping hand teaches far more than any long sermon. That’s why I’m going to soon be amongst you, healing your ills! My disciples will do the same. And this should be the goal of all who teach in my name: to proceed rapidly from ‘hearing’ to ‘demonstrating’ to ‘on-the-job’ *applied* TRAINING! For mature, experienced godly righteous people only a small fraction of your congregated group activities should be sitting passively listening to some speech.”

“It’s like you do with us!” my young lady friend piped up, smiling widely.

“That’s exactly right!” I agreed, nodding again. “I don’t just lecture my closest, dearest disciples. I lead them by the hand, *showing* them how to interact and help you, the people, and then patiently *guiding* them as *they* actually do it!”

“*And it’s not boring!*” she enthusiastically yelled-out. “I never feel like falling asleep when I and my Daddy and Mommy are with you, Jesus. It’s the *most* fun I’ve *ever* had!”

“I’m very glad,” I nodded again to her, politely not commenting on the short length of her life. “Thank you for the compliment.”

“You’re welcome!” she beamed back at me, sitting happily on her father’s lap.

“TRUE GODLY RIGHTEOUSNESS IS NOT JUST SITTING LISTENING TO SOME SPEECH!” I roared out,

jumping up into the air to put a visual exclamation point on my words. “IF YOU GO FROM THIS PLACE AND DO NOT PUT MY WORDS INTO ACTION—DO NOT SPREAD THE GOOD NEWS OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD TO OTHERS; DO NOT DO TO OTHERS AS I’VE SHOWN YOU HOW TO DO TODAY—then all my words will count for nothing! They will do *nothing* for you. They’ll be just interesting, entertaining *noises* that you quickly *forgot!*”

“We’ll do it, Lord... We won’t forget... We’ll live out your words... We’ll talk with others like you’ve taught us to do in small groups... We’ll ask questions... We’ll listen to what those who are hurting tell us... We’ll look to the actual needs of our neighbors and friends!” was enthusiastically called back to me.

“So, is it all just a big show?” another disciple asked, puzzled. “Is that what you’re telling us to do, Master, put on a show? You dance about, grab people, hug people, speak with different voices, thrive on conflict, grab all sorts of things to use as visual aids, have suspense, build up to a climax, tell lots of stories, involve the people in questions, puzzles, small groups, chanting, and collective prayers! Is that what you say we must do in your name—put on a good show?”

I nodded thoughtfully, acknowledging his sincere query. Then I turned back to the crowd below...

“LISTEN TO ME, MY FRIENDS!” I called out to them. “I SEE THAT YOU UNDERSTAND TRUE GODLY RIGHT-EOUSNESS MUCH BETTER. I’M IMPRESSED WITH YOUR ANSWERS. BUT DON’T GO TO THE OPPOSITE EXTREME AWAY FROM BORING, MONOLOGUE LECTURES!”

“So, no show?” the disciple frowned, clearly confused.

“If it fits your personality and talents,” I shrugged, “you can do so. But you make a good point. People can get laughing, singing, dancing, and great showmanship from many places—including drunken taverns! However, that doesn’t constitute ‘learning,’ does it? It’s just superficial emotional release. Along with keeping the interest of your audience, of course THERE MUST BE ‘SUBSTANCE.’”

“What’s substance?” the little girl piped-up, down on the ground again as she played with her pile of rocks.

“Substance is that which you hold in your hands!” I loudly told her.

“Huh?” she said, looking down at the rocks in her hands. “These?” she chirped. “You want everybody to have rocks?”

“MY WORDS CANNOT STAY AS VAGUE GENERALITIES!” I sternly instructed them all. “You must find a way to change them into tangible, hard, real outcomes. Anything less is insufficient to please God.”

“So, is that what you mean by ‘effective’ teaching?” one of my female disciples pointedly asked. “You want tangible results, not just words?”

“Yes!” I shouted for everyone to hear. “Effective teaching is when people can take the concepts and *use* them to do good and worthwhile things!”

“So, lectures are not sufficient?” my other disciple that’d asked about ‘putting on a good show’ asked in confusion.

“Judge by outcomes!” I sternly told him and the rest of the people. “If a lecture changes no behavior, it’s a waste of time! However, lectures can be effective if they are GREATLY ENHANCED by using powerful public speaking tools and techniques!”

“Like you do, Jesus?” the little girl giggled.

“Yes, just as I’m demonstrating right now,” I nodded.

“Like what things?” the child innocently asked.

“You want a short course on how to speak to others?” I asked the crowd.

“*Tell us!*” they roared back.

“Fine!” I laughed. “Do these eleven things: 1) strong *visual aids*; 2) skillfully *modulating* your voice/tone/intensity to be appropriate to the situation; 3) judicially and rigorously *picking what you say*; 4) telling targeted *stories* instead of just vague generalities; 5) giving immediate *Examples* that connect with people’s lives right now; 6) tying broad concepts into *immediate needs*; 7) *starting where people are* instead of just where you think is good for them; 8) finding good ways to directly and *actively involve each individual* in the audience; 9) *speaking from your heart* instead of a script; 10) by *speaking shorter* than the people expect; and 11) most importantly—focusing on *important problems* rather than general doctrines!”

“Wow, that’s hard!” the little girl chirped.

“Yes, it’s much harder than just writing a traditional speech,” I agreed. “But these and other good techniques greatly enhance the EFFECTIVENESS of your public and private speech. In a fifteen-minute talk or a five-minute prayer or a word of advice, would you rather end up with an ‘effectiveness’ of say ten—or one thousand?”

“*A thousand!*” many answered back.

“Then don’t just plod along doing things the way you’re used to doing them or tradition seemingly demands,” I entreated them. “Experiment! Try different things! Find out what specific good techniques work best for your audience, family, or friends. You want to grab their attention, hold their attention firmly, and implant into their minds as deeply as possible God’s Seeds resulting in *tangible, quantifiable outcomes!*”

“*But we’re not all preachers, Teacher!*” a young, burly man shouted. “*That’s all fine and good for your disciples, but what about us regular godly people?*”

“It’s exactly the same for all godly people!” I insisted. “That’s the ‘purpose’ of you interacting with others. It’s not just for you to order them about, or complain about them, or make your kids sit and listen to some speech. It’s for GOD’S WORDS TO BE PLANTED, WATERED, FED, AND CARED FOR, IN THE *BEST POSSIBLE WAY.*”

“How so?” a burly man sitting with his family asked.

“It’s what you want for your own family,” I patiently explained. “Don’t you want your wife and kids to use God’s words for growing and flourishing? This is what it means to use God’s teachings in practical ways: to have them *grow, make a strong plant, and produce many beautiful fruits to God’s Glory? AM I RIGHT?*”

The man’s wife hugged him, both of them beaming at their gathered children.

“Amen... Praise God... Preach on, Teacher... Tell it to us... Show us more... If everyone preached like you said, then I’d be in the synagogue every week!” was shouted back, the whole audience standing up and applauding.

It was as thunderous, enthusiastic noise...

Then, pausing to get my breath, I continued more quietly—such that all the audience hushed in order to hear me.

“My friends,” I continued again. “Today you are part of *history*. This event will become known as ‘The Sermon on the Mount.’ Today you are not just entertained. You are not just instructed. Instead, you are confronted by the deepest and most demanding challenges from God that you will ever hear. A brief synopsis of the main ideas we’ve fleshed out together here today on the side of this small mountain, will tower up into the religious landscape. It will stand supreme in religious literature and spiritual thought far into the distant future. And it wasn’t just you sitting here listening to me making a speech. **NO! IT WAS US TOGETHER WORKING OUT KEY PROBLEMS!**”

I saw they were “getting” what I was saying. This wasn’t just a trip to visit a faith-healer. It wasn’t just a rock-concert. It wasn’t just a spectacle or rally. It was a profoundly historical **EVENT...**

“When you hear people talking of the ‘Sermon on the Mount’ in years to come,” I continued, “be proud that you were here—not just as a passive audience, but **PART OF IT WITH ME!** And that’s what you want to do in your teaching others in my name. **MAKE YOUR AUDIENCE OR LISTENER AN ACTIVE PART OF THEIR OWN SUBSTANTIAL TEACHING!** If you do that, *you will be effective. LIKE TODAY YOU WILL DO SOMETHING FOR THEM THAT’S HISTORICAL AND WORLD-CHANGING!*”

Again, the audience below broke out in loud clapping and cheering.

“Sooooooo.... you’re saying?” another disciple hesitantly ventured.

“Yes?” I asked him.

“Uhm... well... if I understand you correctly, Master,” he tentatively continued.

“Speak your mind!” I encouraged him.

“Then you’re saying that it’s not enough to give a beautiful prayer or a terrific lecture?” he finished, obviously still not quite understanding me.

“Yes, that’s correct,” I answered.

I paused, looking down at him sitting there, confused and uncertain. Well, these were difficult lessons, to be sure. I wasn't mad at him. I just wanted to help him to get the "lesson"—not just intellectually in his mind, but emotionally in his heart!

"There are *three components* to effective teaching," I patiently explained. "The first is to help people UNDERSTAND how things work. The second is to DEMONSTRATE how things work. And the last is for your students, under your direct guidance, to actually DO THE THINGS THEMSELVES!"

"Like that little girl said... that's really hard," my reluctant disciple muttered.

"Yes, it is!" I strongly agreed. "Too many so-called great religious leaders of our time stop dead at step #1! They somehow think that giving a fancy prayer or lecture automatically causes their audience to go out and accomplish great things for God. But even the very best prayers and speeches—mine included—will not produce effective learning without personal demonstration and patient guidance in actual tasks. Is that clear enough for you, my friend? *In all that you do in my name, EXPLAIN, DEMONSTRATE, and HELP!*"

He nodded, but still looked puzzled.

I sensed that they all needed yet another story...

"Alright, then," I continued onward, "let us together consider another Example. Let's say I ask you to go and take care of people sick with leprosy."

"Leprosy?" the little girl gasped in horror. "That's awful! Their noses and fingers fall off! They get kicked out of town!"

"Yes, they are shunned," I agreed. "As such, though, they need help more than any others! But let's say you've never done this before. So, having accepted the assignment, how best would you like for me to instruct you?"

"Instruct me?" both the little girl and my doubting disciple said together. Surprised, they grinned at each other...

"Here are three choices," I continued. "ALL OF YOU, WHAT INSTRUCTION IN TREATING SICK PEOPLE WOULD YOU MOST VALUE? Listen to these three possibilities: 1) I'll give you a *general monologue lecture* on how

people all over the world go about taking care of sick people who have leprosy, what are the most effective treatments, and how they work; or 2) I'll bring some leprosy inflicted people up on the stage and *demonstrate how* to clean them, apply bandages, give them medicines, and comfort them; or 3) I'll go with you over to the actual group of sick people that I've assigned you to take care of, *help you* diagnose their particular situations, and give you immediate support and advice as you minister to each person. Which way would be the most 'effective' teaching for me to give to you?"

"Oh... I see," he grunted, sighing, "the third way, of course!"

"No!" I barked back at him.

"What?" he gulped, now even more confused.

"IT'S ALL THREE *TOGETHER!*" I smiled, opening my eyes wide in emphasis.

"It was a trick question!" the little girl laughed uproariously, clutching her sides.

I turned back to the crowd below, again projecting my voice loudly: "LET ALL YOUR TEACHING TO OTHERS BE DONE *FIRST* TO HELP THEM UNDERSTAND THE BASIC INSTRUCTIONS, *SECOND* TO DEMONSTRATE THE DETAILS, AND *THIRD* TO DIRECTLY SUPERVISE AND FACILITATE EACH PERSON DOING IT UNTIL THEY'VE LEARNED THE LESSON *INTO THEIR HANDS AND FINGERS!* You must do all three! One without the other two is not enough. Sure, you may still be 'teaching' by doing one or the other—but it's not the most *effective* teaching!"

"But Master..." one of my female disciples queried, "isn't religious instruction a lot different than, say, learning how to bake a loaf of bread? I see the truth of what you say for simple tasks—but learning abstract concepts such as godliness is completely different, isn't it?"

"NO!" I curtly answered both her and like-thinking people in the crowd. "WE ALL 'LEARN' THE SAME, NO MATTER IF IT'S BAKING BREAD OR CHANGING OUR HEARTS! SOME PEOPLE ARE BETTER THAN OTHERS AT STEP ONE, TWO, OR THREE! But everyone ultimately *learns the same*, no matter what the subject."

“But my teacher at school says some people learn best from words, or pictures, or doing stuff...” the little girl frowned.

“No!” I insisted. “Until you ‘get it’ into your hands and fingers, *you haven’t really learned it!* Sure, memorization is easier for different people by different methods, what’s called ‘superficial’ learning. But most school ‘learning’ is just becoming ‘aware’ that something exists. *True* learning is when it becomes *a part of you* such that you can use it without thinking! That’s why even the most ‘abstract’ of religious concepts **MUST BE MADE MANIFEST AS TANGIBLE ACTIONS THAT YOU DO!** You can’t just have it floating on the top of your minds. *You must embed it deep into your hearts!*”

“Oh... Master,” that female disciple frowned. “If what you say is true—and I have no doubt it is—then most of the religious instructors I’ve heard in my life don’t know what they are doing!”

“Yes,” I agreed. “The great religious orators of our time—whether they are expansively praying or lecturing or both—to rise to the level of imparting to you true learning *must then go on to demonstrate what they say by real actions, then help you, likewise, to do the same!* Otherwise, they’re just spouting hot air!”

“HOT AIR!” the little girl exclaimed in mock horror, running in circles around her mom and dad.

I grinned at her antics. At any other formal religious event both she and her parents would be kicked out. But I found her physical reactions delightful. I was reaching even the little children!

“Is it any wonder that so many of our religious leaders are perplexed that their fervent lecturing doesn’t seem to produce any results?” I shrugged. “How can it, if they mostly ignore the two other critical components of real learning? And for those that don’t really care about the effectiveness—i.e. real consequences of their teaching—their so-called ‘righteousness’ in making impressive speeches is *not* godly... in fact it’s a total sham! They are just actors pretending to be someone that they are not. They are showing you an attractive ‘face-mask’ while underneath is something vile and repulsive. They are the worst sort of *hypocrites!*”

All my disciples “gasp(ed)” at my harsh accusations.

My audience of thousand was likewise shocked. They had little love for their pompous religious leaders. But most of them didn’t regard them as phonies!

“HYPOCRITES!” the little girl brayed to the sky, waving her hands over her head as she kept running in circles.

“That... that’s a hard... a hard lesson... to hear,” one of my younger male disciples croaked out, apparently having trouble breathing he was so upset. “But if... I understand... you correctly, Master... You’re saying that we must not just have intellectual knowledge—but the talent and skill of a Master, such as you, before we can utter a single word in your name?”

“No,” I replied kindly. “You need not immediately become a Master at religion and spirituality in order to help others with the basics. But you *must* be willing to *everyday* in *every way* continually and effectively *learn* to do better! But it’s not that hard. In fact, it’s much easier than generating many learned lectures. Ask the good mothers in our fine audience. MOTHERS, IS NOT WHAT I SAY PERFECTLY CLEAR IN YOUR DAILY CARE AND RAISING OF YOUR CHILDREN?”

“Yes... Yes... Yes... *Yes!*” came a chorus of female voices.

“Our Lord God in Heaven does not expect imperfect vessels to be perfect,” I further consoled my disciples. “What pleases God greatly, however, is your willingness to *struggle* against your own imperfections. The Lord wants you to learn from your constant mistakes, managing to do just a little bit better each and every day! That is a big part of ‘Godly Righteousness’! But what will *kill* your righteousness, cause you to depart God’s Kingdom, and doom you to drifting away from God—is when you become so smug with yourself that you assume you have no need to improve!”

“Wow!” the little girl gasped, sitting down on the ground in shock. “Grownups gotta keep on learning? I thought when I get outta school I’ll know *everything?*”

I laughed.

“Yes, my young friend, you have to keep learning for your entire life—*especially* as an adult!” I continued. “God wants *continual learners* who keep trying, searching, and *evaluating your tangible results*. He wants you struggling to become

more ‘effective’ in each and every thing that you do in my name! If you do all those things then God will be happy with your efforts, no matter how limited or imperfect.”

“What single thing, then, will please God the most?” another of my disciples asked.

“Ah, good!” I laughed, clapping my hands together. “You want the ‘bottom line.’ You want the *essence* to following God. You want it all boiled down to the real ‘substance’! Alright! Let’s do it!”

“*Tell me, tell me!*” the little girl laughed.

“THAT WHICH PLEASES GOD THE MOST IS WHEN YOU USE YOUR GOD-GIVEN TALENTS AND RESOURCES TO DIRECTLY INVOLVE PEOPLE IN MEANINGFUL ACTIONS THAT GLORIFY GOD!” I shouted to everyone. “IT’S TAKING SOMEONE BY THE HAND AND LEADING THEM TO GREATER HEIGHTS. IT’S HELPING OTHERS EXERCISE THEIR GOD-GIVEN TALENTS TO DO LIKEWISE. THIS IS THE GREATEST THING YOU CAN DO FOR GOD—*NOT GIVE A PRETTY PRAYER OR LENGTHY LECTURE!*”

“So, what is it?” my little friend insisted.

“Ah, you haven’t forgotten!” I laughed, bounding over to again lift her high into the air before “plopping” her solidly down upon my left shoulder.

She “squealed” in delight, grabbing onto my hair again to happily look out over the entire vast crowd spread out below.

“MY YOUNG FRIEND HERE HASN’T FORGOTTEN THE QUESTION I ASKED YOU A BIT BACK!” I projected at the crowd. “DO YOU REMEMBER THE QUESTION? WE NEVER GOT A FINAL ANSWER ON IT! IT WAS ‘WHAT WAS THE *ONE KEY CLUE* THAT ALL THE EXAMPLES I FIRST GAVE TO YOU ABOUT PUBLIC ALMS-GIVING, PRAYER, AND FASTING WERE *NOT ACTS OF GODLY RIGHTEOUSNESS?*”

“Ahhhh.... Yes... That’s right,” people below responded.

They were amazed at how sharp the young girl’s mind was to remember after all the other subjects we’d dealt with.

“SO, WHAT SAY YOU?” I asked them all. “SHALL WE LET HER GIVE THE ANSWER?”

“Yes... Yes... Let’s hear what she has to say... From the mouth of the innocent come revelations... *Yes!*” were the enthusiastic replies.

“Well?” I asked her, craning my neck to the side to look up at her small face. “What do you think was the real ‘big clue’ that should have let my disciples realize that all my Examples were of *unrighteous* people?”

She pursed her lips, turning her face up to the blue sky in theatrical concentration. Yes, she was indeed learning from me!

She scratched her head with one hand. “HMMMMM....” She deliberated.

“Well... Speak up, child... Let’s hear it!” some people shouted from below.

“Ah!” she grinned in triumph. “They were all *stuck up!*”

I twisted my neck to look over and up at her preening on my shoulder, her nose held high in the air in demonstration.

“‘Stuck-up’, you say?” I repeated.

“Yes!” she piped.

“How so?” I asked.

“They all were saying ‘*Look at me!*’ ‘*Look at me!*’ ‘*Look at me!*’” she nodded sagely.

Keeping a firm grip on her legs dangling over my chest, I spun back to face the crowds.

“DID YOU HEAR WHAT SHE SAID?” I projected loudly.

Some were laughing at her antics. Others were cupping their ears to hear.

“SHE SAID THAT ALL MY EXAMPLES OF PRAYERS, ALMS-GIVING, AND FASTING WERE *SUSPECT* AS TO THEIR STATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS *BECAUSE* IT WAS OBVIOUS TO HER THAT THEY WERE ALL SAYING ‘LOOK AT ME!’” I shouted. “*And there’s a foul, dirty, infuriating, and ungodly ‘grown-up’ word for that attitude! Does anyone know what that word is?*” I queried the crowd.

A hefty lady with short hair near the front of the crowd shouted back: “*ARROGANT BASTARDS!* The kid’s right on the money! Even that so-called fasting person was just getting people to look at him—all made up with that sackcloth and ashes! I’ve seen the like many times. They try to make out

they're all so humble and godly when in truth they all think they're better than me. **THEY'RE ALL LOOKING DOWN THEIR NOSES AT ME... HAH! THEIR NOSES ARE STUCK UP HIGH IN THE AIR, EVEN IF THEY'RE PRETENDING IT ISN'T SO!** They're just a bunch of *snobs!*"

I heard a rumble from the crowd as many people agreed with her...

"Well said, good lady!" I congratulated her. "Now that the 'kid' points it out, it's obvious, isn't it? Those folks that want to pretend they're better than all the rest of us stand out like sore thumbs, don't they? The thing that destroys their Godly Righteousness is nothing more than good old fashioned human *arrogance!*"

"But Master?" the disciple that'd been so confused over the proper manner to pray questioned, jumping up to run forward a few steps to stand right in front of me.

"Well, you're certainly agitated today, aren't you, my friend?" I laughed, reaching over with my free hand to kindly squeeze his shoulder. "Looking for some exercise?" I said, bouncing the little girl up and down. "Maybe I should hand-off my young protégé to you!"

He ignored my kind offer.

"Master, I just don't understand!" he pleaded, his hands held together in supplication.

"Oh?" I mildly replied, retaining the kid on my shoulder. "What's the problem?"

In frustration, he shouted out his answer loud enough for everyone below to clearly hear him: "**HOW CAN WE NOT BE THE CENTER OF ATTENTION IF WE ARE TO LEAD THE PEOPLE IN PUBLIC PRAYER OR PRESENT TO THEM A SERMON ON THE WORD OF GOD?** It seems to me you're telling us we must do the impossible! *I want to obey you, Master, but it seems I'm damned if I sit and do nothing... and also damned if I stand up like I am now and have everyone look at me!*"

Without speaking a word, I stepped away from him, continuing to bounce the little girl gently up and down as she starting singing lustily and loudly a little song which she'd made up on the spot...

“Look at me, look at me!” she trilled with glee. “I’m so great! I’m so holy, more than you! Everyone should look at me! Aren’t I pretty? Aren’t I smart? Hear all my many, many, many, many, many words—if you want or not! Hah, hah, hah!” she laughed heartily.

What a clever kid! She was a born entertainer...

The crowd below erupted in admiring applause as she loosened her tight hold on my hair to make many little bows in return.

“Yay!” they shouted. “More! More! More!”

“Wheeeeeeeee!” she giggled, putting up her small hands high in the air, pudgy fingers spread wide, as I continued to hold her legs firmly so she was safe and secure on my shoulder.

“ARE WE TEACHING AN INCREDIBLY POWERFUL MESSAGE THAT THESE PEOPLE HERE WILL NEVER FORGET?” I yelled at my disciple who was still standing at the other edge of the small plateau.

“Uh... well... without a doubt, Master?” he squinted, perplexed.

“AND THOUGH I MUST BE UP HERE SAYING THE MAIN WORDS, WHERE IS THE CROWD DIRECTING ITS ATTENTION?” I asked.

His mouth dropped open in astonishment.

“It’s... to... that little... girl?” he gasped, seemingly having a light in the darkness flare up right above his head!

Yep, a first-century “light bulb” turned on for him.

“Right!” I nodded, lifting her off my shoulder to hand her back to her parents. “With *effective visuals* you can still orchestrate the proceedings while moving *yourself* off from being centerstage. You direct the people’s attention to a manifestation of your message, *not* to yourself. *It* takes centerstage—while also better-communicating your intent—rather than you!”

“It’s so beautiful...” one of my female disciples sighed, knowingly.

Yes, this was an easier lesson for the women to learn than the men. In many ways, the females habitually put themselves

second. My admonition to my closest male disciples to “think like mothers” was right on-point.

“So, how else can this be easily accomplished?” I asked the rest of the disciples. “Consider in your answers what I’ve already *DEMONSTRATED* for you here today!”

They thought about it for a few moments, then slowly starting supplying answers: “Bring others up onto the stage with you... Seek and find powerful visuals that illustrate what you’re saying... Ask questions that those in the audience can give answers to... Have others read the Holy Scriptures that you refer to in your talk, during your talk... Don’t just talk but involve others in meaningful activities... Have the audience repeat short phrases of the prayer collectively rather than you just pontificating on their behalf... Take short periods to break the congregation into small groups that together work on quick problems or puzzles... Have powerful visuals that progressively illustrate your words... Challenge them with immediate tasks that you supervise... Ask for questions or testimonials from the audience... Incorporate a relevant song into part of your talk, sung by yourself or others...”

“Good!” I stopped them. “**DO THOSE THINGS AND YOU CAN EASILY PREVENT YOURSELF FROM SEEMING TO BE—AND OFTEN SUBCONSCIOUSLY BECOMING—ARROGANT TOWARD YOUR AUDIENCE!** *Instead of ‘lording’ it over them, you work with them, together.* That’s not ‘arrogance.’ That’s a true spirit of ‘collaboration,’ where we’re helping each other better do God’s will. **IT’S WHAT GOD WANTS FROM US!**”

“And it’s a lot more fun!” the hefty lady called back, who had previously skewered the “arrogant bastards.”

“Right, good lady!” I grinned back at her. “It’s a lot more enjoyable for *everyone*, including both the audience *and* the speaker. Plus, it instills the good message about godliness with much more power!”

“But how can we be righteous if we’re just making fun of things?” my pouting disciple complained. “Are we to be just entertainers... singers or comedians?”

I instantly changed my happy demeanor to one of stern command. I slowly folded my arms over my chest, staring at him. Then I addressed everyone...

"My stubborn disciple is trying to divert us from the main topic. It's a time-honored debate tactic," I mildly responded as the crowd was transfixed by this supposed internal conflict. "I thought I'd taught my closest disciples better. But I suppose they still need firm instruction..."

The guy actually turned his back on me, refusing to face me! He needed a swift, figurative "kick-in-his-rear" to get him back on track. And I was just the one to give it to him...

"*Godly Righteousness is not about who can make the fanciest, longest, most pretentious prayer or lecture!*" I loudly insisted. It's about providing the *MOST EFFECTIVE TEACHING!* *Decide right now* if this is what you want to do! You can either elevate your own ego or *help the people to teach themselves!*"

To his credit, he spun around and fell on his face at my feet, grasping my sandals with trembling hands.

"I'm sorry, Master," he sobbed. "Whatever you instruct, I'll do my best to fulfill!"

"Get back with the others," I ordered him.

"We see your helpers trying!" someone else called out from below. "But how can we get everyone who teaches in God's name to do these things?"

"That's right!" the teenaged boy who'd spoken up earlier added. "You're only with us today! After you're gone, we're stuck with our regular, boring synagogue leaders—who don't know or understand what you've told us! And they're right... even your helpers aren't you! Is there anything we can do to get our regular religious leaders to be better?"

"Good question!" I smiled, waving a hand grandly to include all my close disciples sitting or kneeling a few feet below me on the sloping plateau. "Your tradition-bound, boring religious leaders is one problem. They probably won't listen to your criticisms. But my disciples here are different, right?" I glared at my immediate group of them.

They reluctantly nodded...

“SO JUST *TELL* THOSE WHO CLAIM TO BE MY DISCIPLES TO DO AS *I DID!*” I commanded the audience below. “THEN *REMIND* THEM WHAT I *DID!*”

“Yes... Yes... Yes... *Yes!*” came the chant from many voices.

“Do you think you can do that?” I challenged my close disciples.

“W-what, M-Master?” another disciple stammered.

“*Do what I do?*” I queried, repeating myself forcefully.

“I... w-we... can t-try?” he gulped.

“Good!” I beamed at them, raising my arms to my sides in a grand blessing to them. “THEN GO DO IT! ALL OF YOU RIGHT NOW GO DOWN TO THE CROWD. SPREAD YOURSELVES OUT AMONGST OUR EXCELLENT AUDIENCE. YOU MARRIED COUPLES AND KIDS CAN REMAIN TOGETHER. YOU WHO FEEL YOU ARE STRONG IN MY METHODS CAN GO ALONE. YOU WHO ARE UNSURE OF YOURSELVES CAN GO IN PAIRS OR JOIN WITH ONE OF THOSE CONFIDENT IN MY TEACHING TECHNIQUES.”

“What are we to do, Master?” one of my female disciples asked, wanting more details.

“YOU ARE TO DIVIDE UP THE CROWD INTO SMALLER GROUPS AND ANSWER THEIR PARTICULAR QUESTIONS!” I clarified. “AND YOU ARE TO MAKE SURE THAT YOU ANSWER AT LEAST HALF OF THE QUESTIONS WITH A QUESTION BACK TO THE QUESTIONER! YOU ARE TO PRACTICE ALL THE TOOLS THAT I’VE DEMONSTRATED FOR YOU TODAY. YOU ARE TO GIVE EACH PERSON IN YOUR SMALL GROUP AN UNINTERRUPTED SPACE FOR THEM TO QUERY YOU, IF THEY WISH TO DO SO. CAN YOU DO THIS FOR ME?”

“*Yes!*” my little female friend piped loudly.

She hopped up and down with excitement before grabbing her mother’s hand to start leading her down to the crowd below.

She’d pronounced herself one of my closest disciples. She moved me to tears. That enthusiastic little girl was exactly who I wanted opening her heart fully to God...

Not quite as enthusiastically, the older men and women started getting to their feet and following.

The last to leave was my grumpy, argumentative friend. He paused, turned to me, and spoke softly so that only he and I could hear: “Master, this is a hard task,” he sighed, his voice raspy and resigned. “*It’s much easier to just give a speech!*”

“Of course!” I heartily agreed, clapping him again on his shoulder. I also spoke softly so that the others could not hear. “But I have faith in you, my plain-speaking friend. You relate very well to the work-a-day husbands that the women dragged out to hear me today. Ask them about their troubles, tough responsibilities, and family problems—that you know all too well yourself! Help them think about what I’ve preached to them today. Help them to see how what I’ve said applies to their immediate life. Help them to find great strength and real solutions for their specific problems. Help them to take pride in true Godly Righteousness!”

“But it’s so *tiresome*, Master!” he almost moaned to me. “Their complaints are so petty, their problems so trivial, their concerns so shallow...”

“Maybe to you, but not to them!”

“Uh, sure... but they’ve given up nothing at all for you or God—and expect everything in return!” he bitterly complained. “Sometimes I just want to go and *shake* them by their scrawny throats. The other disciples and I *have* given up everything for you, yet it feels like we’ve done nothing at all. Why can’t these selfish ingrates see the Glory that God holds out to them? Surely they are all damned to hell for their *own* arrogance!”

I shrugged.

“Yes, my friend,” I sadly agreed, “they are. But you can do something about it—*IF* you can see it in your own big heart to *forgive* them their sins against God, against me, and against you. What do you say?”

He paused, straightening himself up, setting his shoulders back in resolution, and said: “I’ll try to help them, Master... *but I don’t know if I can forgive them!*”

“You must!” I firmly insisted. “It’s the only way you can help them. If you do not completely sympathize with their ‘petty little’ faults and sins, then—as they’ve told us—they will see *you* as being arrogant, lording yourself over them! They

may sullenly allow you to do your religious duty toward them, but never accept you into their innermost lives. *You can't just work on their brains or sense of religious duty.* Drilling all the right concepts and facts into their minds is not enough. You must engage them where it really matters—in their hearts!”

“But how, Master?” he gasped, overwhelmed with the responsibility I’d put upon him. “I’m not like you. I’m not comfortable *hugging* people. I’d rather have a big fight, *making* them do what’s right!”

“Yes, I know,” I agreed. “But you can learn to be better by *just doing the things I said!*”

“Master, you’ve said many things today and my mind is swamped...” he admitted. “Please, tell me again!”

I put an arm across his broad shoulders and whispered in his ear: “Truly *forgive* them their wrongs against you. Clear your heart of your resentments, anger, and grudges. Then, when you pray to God for help, *He* will forgive you *your* wrongs against *Him.*”

“But... I’m not angry at God, Master...?”

“Nonsense! At one time or another we all resent God.”

“But we’re taught that God is a relentless force to whom we can only bow in submission. ‘Obedience’ is our only hope in avoiding His righteous wrath and...”

“—and I preach the true *God of Love,*” I interrupted him. “It’s not just a comforting doctrine. The ‘wrathful God’ justifies the Pharisees, Lawyers, and Priests wielding iron hands against the people. They don’t want us to know the TRUE God!”

“Then...?”

“Then *The Lord of Reality* will guide your thoughts, words, and actions,” I comforted him. “God will empower you to do the hard things, even those you thought were impossible! But your forgiveness of other people’s wrongs against you ‘earns’ you nothing. God’s forgiveness to you is still a magnificent, free gift! Yet if you can’t do this little thing for God, then you may *think* you’re some great and wonderful ‘Holy’ man—but you’ll be a bigger *sham* than all the Examples I gave earlier!”

“I don’t want to be a phony...” he gulped.

“It’s not about you!” I grated, fearful that I’d ever really reach even my own closest disciples. “God isn’t there just to do good stuff for us! WE MUST BE WILLING TO DO WHATEVER WE CAN TO MAKE GOD HAPPY! And one of those things is to truly *love* our fellow men, women, and children... *enough to sincerely forgive them their wrongs against us*, helping them to do better! Can you do this for me and for our Heavenly Father?”

“I... can try,” he whispered, turning away to start down the slope of the mountain to the waiting crowds.

“Thank you,” I sincerely stated to his retreating back. “That’s all I want!”

Again, he paused. He turned back to me with tears glistening in his hard-set eyes. “Master, can *you* forgive me my questioning of you earlier? I did not mean to be insolent...”

“I *want* you to ask me questions!” I replied forcefully. “That’s how you and everyone else learn best—when the ‘vague generalities’ become SPECIFIC to immediate problems and challenges of your own life! There’s nothing for me to forgive.”

He deeply bowed to me, then turned away to get about attempting his task.

Later, after the extended “question a disciple session,” we did other wonderful exercises. I taught more hard lessons. My disciples learned a lot. Finally, I went amongst the throng—touching their hands, arms, and legs—healing them! Our audience went away different than they’d arrived earlier that day, their burdens both physical and spiritual lightened. I was totally exhausted, but exhilarated.

Truly my Mission was succeeding!

And so, you see that to stay in the *Kingdom of God* you must not keep God away from your concept of “self.” All must become God. In your heart of hearts, you must be determined that—as much as possible—when others see you, they see God!

Of course, there is still a “you.” Of course, you can take credit for having the courage and determination to do your part. Of course, you can’t vanish out of the way and a shining

ball of pure light takes your place. Of course, you will always be an imperfect example. Of course, God chooses in many ways to work *through* you, not obliterating you. But in the end, it's all God!

Your goal, as much as possible, is to *get to the side and let God take centerstage!* You must have no barriers to God entering and filling your heart. But This is a very difficult lesson for most humans to accept. After all, humans live to see their validation reflected-back in the admiring eyes of other *humans*. To not need such confirmation of our individual worthiness, is to deny our animal heritage of being “herd” animals compelled to be with and support each other. But to be one of the few to remain in the Kingdom of our Heavenly Father when Time comes to an end—*we must not let our individual egos get in the way of God!*

Whether we're leading a public prayer, or preaching a public sermon, or publicly doing good things for the poor, or subjugating our bodies through fasting or other sacrifices, or just talking with a friend about their problems... we must do it such that people instead of seeing “us” see God!

A person with the mindset to elevate him or herself over others will often default to the *easiest* way to achieve that goal. Anyone can achieve *self-aggrandizement* by MENTALLY OR IN ACTUALITY CHOPPING THE OTHER PEOPLE DOWN! Sorry to shout, but this is a critical point... By doing this wicked deed, the normally standing person by comparison looks taller than those who've been brutally cut-off at their knees! There's no great deed or effort needed on the part of the hatchet man. Many supposed religious leaders love to make themselves “big” by skewering and knocking-down the people around them or by condemning other religious groups!

So, in seemingly doing great deeds to the glory of God, or drawing others to God by our public words, or suffering doing the most difficult holy things... IT'S EASY FOR US TO LOSE EVERYTHING AND GAIN NOTHING if we take the Glory for ourselves instead of giving it to God!

I repeat: *we cannot restrict God from our concept of “self!”* To give our hearts entirely over to God—to let God shine into and throughout every corner, cupboard, closet, and room of

our heart; allowing God to transform our entire being—IS TO ALLOW GOD TO BECOME *US!*

Yes, you can still be yourself *and* be God. You don't have to lose your self-identity. Instead, you get to *MERGE WITH GOD* to become *greater* than you could ever have achieved on your own. Having a *permeable heart* allows you to “synergize” with God Himself! Amazing! And instead of gaining a false-elevation by cutting down all those around us, by immersion in God we *grow up* to unimaginably magnificent, *true* heights!

In other words, by giving your entire heart away to God, you lose nothing. Conversely, by selfishly looking to preserve your own private spaces in your heart of hearts, you lose everything. If you choose, you can *become* that fresh, innocent, joyful, open-hearted little child. Then God Himself will love you, catch you up in His arms, and *lift* you up higher than you ever dreamed possible!

It's that simple... and that complex.

It all depends on what's in your heart. And that depends on your heart's PERMEABILITY. Open up all its doors and let the heavenly *LIGHT* shine in...

Section 5:

EMPTY HEARTS

(See *Matthew 23:1-39*)

Now let me tell you about the very last public speech I gave. This was shortly before I was captured, condemned, tortured, and executed. I had returned to one of the outer courts of the Temple just one day after I'd rampaged through the tables and stalls of the moneychangers.

Needless to say, the officials of the Temple—particularly the Scribes and Pharisees—were not thrilled to see me return so soon to their center of power. But that was exactly where I wanted to conclude my public speaking ministry: directly confronting the worst possible hypocrisy present within my beloved, Jewish religion!

Often you don't really "get" the lesson—either in others or yourself—until you see the underlying Principles play out within the most extreme situation. In your modern mathematical terminology, this is driving the equation to its extreme. In mechanical or computational terms, it's called "stress testing." In human terms, it's finding out people's true character by putting them under great duress, often in a crisis situation. Having laid down many worthy Principles, I was now going to summarize and highlight them all together. And I was doing it in the worst possible, extreme-religious circumstance.

So, in my last great public speech I returned to and repeated many of the same positive themes I'd preached throughout my ministry. But now they were presented from the extreme *negative* perspective. This was *not* an enjoyable speech for me to make. I'd much rather have finished up my teachings by delighting, inspiring, and uplifting the people. I'd have loved giving glowing images, marvelous promises,

and heart-warming stories. But the time for positivity was gone. Now was the time for incisive accusation, unyielding confrontation, and a battle to the death!

It hurt me deeply to have to describe, in detail, the evil which caused many of the Jewish religious leaders to be cursed. But it needed to be stated, explicitly. Why? Because all those who take pleasure in cutting people off from God, while simultaneously pretending to be the Lord's greatest advocates, are *doomed!*

I had to say these things publicly in order to convince my followers of my key "take-home message." They must believe that their fellow humans are *hollow, pathetic, and wretched* if they deny God access to any part of their heart. Excluding God from even one small place in one's heart *destroys* a person from the inside out. It's the subtle poison that makes a mockery of outward Godly Righteousness.

I delivered this speech as a fast, hard monologue—uncharacteristically allowing only brief interruptions, not attempting to stimulate discussion, asking no leading questions. For this, my final public speech, I spoke uncharacteristically direct, brief, and utterly brutally!

This speech was given in one of the outlying courts of the great Temple in Jerusalem. I stood on a stone ledge a bit raised up above the crowd. All of Jerusalem was laid out below myself and the packed audience. Down beneath us—in full view of everyone there—was the hustle, confusion, and dust of everyday life. The city sprawl was starkly evident in all its sad splendor and profusion. The "heart" of God's religion, the great Temple, was thus embedded within and surrounded by day-to-day, grubby, locked-in-the-moment, desperate existence.

On this occasion I'd just finished directly confronting and confounding the Scribes and Pharisees, who'd withdrawn in outrage at my besting them. So, my final public speech was directed against the *empty spaces* that those hypocrites had recently occupied.

Many of the common folks, plus my dear, close disciples, were present. They all seemed shocked upon the withdrawal of my enemies to see me suddenly *wilt*. It was as if Satan

himself had descended upon me. Knowing in advance what I was about to say—and the terrible results thereof—I could barely stand upright. I felt like I was about to helplessly crumple down upon the stone slabs at my feet...

Certainly, the strain of all my many battles to-date was weighing heavily upon me. Yes, my looming, excruciatingly painful execution was stressing my mind to the limit. But the main agony smashing down on me was knowing I'd *not* managed to convince many precious souls to *permeate* their own hearts. This included most of the leaders of God's people! Not only would they *not* travel the new, higher path to true Godly Righteousness, they were determined to prevent anyone else from doing so in their stead.

Yes, at that point my Mission was, in large part, a failure. My enemies were enraged, united, and would soon kill me. This certainty weighed heavily upon me. But I also knew, without a doubt, that God can bring victory to any of his faithful children, no matter how dismal their present conditions might seem!

Yet in that moment I felt utterly defeated. In the next few days most who called me "Master" and "Teacher" would desert me, including all but a handful of my closest disciples. However, I took strength from the fact that my Heavenly Father would be greatly pleased by my unyielding persistence in the face of abject failure. But—worst of all—I also knew that in my darkest hour *even the Lord would have to turn his Face away from me*. That would cause me the greatest torture possible. This would happen when I voluntarily took upon myself all the Evil ever done by humanity across its entire existence. I would suffer the full penalty, *balancing the Cosmic Scales of Justice*, for all those hideous sins. I'd be cast off to drift in an utterly black, icy void—totally cut off from the Presence and Light of God.

But I knew that from that inconceivably horrible, frozen abyss the Lord at long last would rescue me. When the gigantic Cosmic Debt of humanity was fully paid, my God would bring me back. Then He would award me with the best success of all. My ultimate victory would be the wonderful

privilege of bringing some of my dear human friends directly into His everlasting, magnificent, and warm Presence!

I also knew that many of my present enemies would be cut to their hearts by the cataclysmic events soon to follow. In reaction, even they would be compelled to change their lives. Some of my tormentors would join me at that last, great Triumph! This knowledge gave me strength to continue. My last tirade against both my enemies and my casual followers would not be in vain. Many would eventually be saved!

In the end it would be worth all the terrible cost...

“MY DEAR FRIENDS,” I loudly called-out to the crowds and my close disciples, “THESE VERY SAME SCRIBES AND PHARISEES YOU JUST SAW ARGUING SO STRONGLY AGAINST ME SHOULD BE *HONORED* BY YOU—but *not* for what they do, rather for what they *represent!*”

“How so, Lord?” a lady in the audience called-out. She was visibly seething with rage at the behavior we’d all just witnessed from our so-called religious leaders.

“You must honor them for their *words,*” I continued, my face screwed up with intensity. “They speak from the authority of Moses himself. You have no other good means to know the Holy Scriptures than that which comes from their lips. We are God’s Children. Until the Law is fulfilled by the full sacrifice of the Messiah—inaugurating God’s new Kingdom—we must obey Moses! What they tell us from the scriptures is both valid and binding.”

“But you’ve told us before that they are misleading us!” someone protested.

“Their words from the Holy Scriptures *are* good,” I repeated. “But even though the Scribes and Pharisees speak all the right words, these pathetic people are *cursed!* Yes, you must obey all their teachings faithfully relating what is written in the Holy Scriptures. But beware of the many ‘enhancements’ they’ve erected to their own glorification and profit.”

“Are we, then, to give up our traditions?” someone else spoke up. The man was obviously confused and fearful. “Are we to not honor what our parents taught us, or likewise teach such to our own children?”

“Traditions that are not required by the Holy Scriptures may be helpful to some,” I slowly agreed, nodding my head wearily, “but to many others they are a heavy burden producing little or no spiritual gain. They focus on outward rote behavior, not inward conviction. They give the appearance of holiness without requiring the most difficult and precious changes necessary to pleasing God. They mire us in the past, use up the present’s fleeting moments, and prevent spiritually helpful innovation and advancements.”

“The Priests tell us what you say is heresy!” another interjected. “How can we believe you?”

“The fact that our required religious rules are in most cases but trivial diversions from true Godly Righteousness is evidenced by the behavior of their loudest proponents!” I continued. “The Scribes and Pharisees delight in requiring more and more requirements, ceremonies, rules, and rites that are both expensive and time-intensive. Yet these very same leaders make flimsy excuses about how they can’t keep them themselves! They take the already heavy load of requirements in the Law of Moses and increase those duties yet more and more! They delight in running your lives in ever-increasing detail. This is not Godly Righteousness. This is our leaders feeling powerful by making you do what they say!”

“But what if they are sincere, Teacher?” another asked. “Would they not be merely helping us to do God’s Will, since they are smarter and more knowledgeable than us?”

“If they were really sincere in what they say,” I shook my head sadly, “they would *help* you in your increased duties, responsibilities, and requirements. In order to do the many rituals and devotions laid upon you by the Scribes and Pharisees—it costs you lots of money, doesn’t it?”

People were ruefully nodding throughout the crowd.

“Then why don’t those very same *rich* Pharisees and Scribes, who use their positions to gain money from many,” I continued, “at least return some of that money to you? They could, if they wished, help you buy all the necessary items. Or they could pay for the time you have to take away from work. Or they could purchase, in advance, the necessities of the rituals. Why don’t they do this?”

People were nodding even more vigorously, muttering amongst themselves...

“THEY DELIGHT IN MAKING YOUR LIFE EVER MORE DIFFICULT AND DEMANDING. THEY LAY HEAVIER AND HEAVIER BURDENS ON YOUR SHOULDERS!” I shouted, gaining fresh energy from the sad validity of my argument. “AND YET THEY WILL NOT LIFT EVEN ONE FINGER TO HELP YOU BEAR THOSE UNPRODUCTIVE BURDENS!”

I paused, lifting both hands into the air in illustration.

“AND THOSE CEREMONIAL TRADITIONS WHICH THEY *DO* CHOOSE TO OBSERVE ARE ONLY DONE TO SEEM HOLY IN THE SIGHT OF THEIR FELLOW MEN!” I shouted again, my voice ringing powerfully throughout the large courtyard and on into the depths of the Temple.

“Yes... That’s true... I’ve seen it many times!” people muttered throughout the crowd.

“Consider one of the practices that they dearly love,” I explained. “They proudly wear a *leather box* strapped to their foreheads and left arms. It contains parchment upon which are written key passages of the Holy Scripture.”

For illustration, I put my right hand onto my forehead while holding up my left arm.

“DO NOT YOU SEE THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES MAKING THEIR BOXES OSTENTATIOUSLY EVEN EXTRA-LONG—SO AS TO APPEAR EXTRA-HOLY?” I accused them.

“Yes... We’ve seen it many times... That’s true!” people called back from the crowd.

“And what about the common practice amongst us of making fringes on our clothing? The fringes denote that by command of Moses we Jewish men are indeed a distinctly different and ‘peculiar’ people,” I noted, dropping my arms to my sides and lifting up my robe a bit so that the fringes at the bottom were evident. “DON’T THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES DELIGHT IN MAKING THEIR FRINGES EXTRA LONG, SO AS TO SEEM EXTRA-SPECIAL TO THEIR FELLOW JEWISH BRETHREN?”

“They do... Some so long they trip over them!” many in the crowd agreed, laughing loudly.

I smiled, sadly.

“Yes, some go around with huge boxes bouncing from their heads, tripping on their own dangling garments, looking like religious *clowns!*” I stumbled-about in illustration. “They’re so anxious to appear to be holy that they make a mockery of the very discipline they seem to promote. MY FRIENDS, I ASK YOU, *is this what God really wants most from us?*”

“No... No... No... No!” people all over were yelling-out.

“AND DON’T THEY LOVE TO BE ESCORTED TO THE PLACE OF HONOR AT FEASTS OR IN THE SYNAGOGUE?” I again stated forcefully, projected my voice so all could hear even deep into the corridors of the inner temple. “AND NOT ONLY DO THEY PREFER YOU CALL THEM ‘RABBI,’ BUT DEMAND YOU DO SO?”

The packed audience was getting into the theme, getting riled up!

“That’s right... I’ve no choice at all... We must salute them obediently or be thrown out of the synagogue... I never thought of it that way, but it’s true!” people loudly replied.

I sighed, slumping. “It’s not just a friendly, brotherly greeting they want from you,” I spoke softly, the people now straining to hear me. “They *demand* your respect. They revel in their *control* of your speech and actions. They enjoy *looking down* on you. They want to feel *superior* to you. They want your unquestioned *obedience...WHY?*”

The crowd was silent, expectant...

“BECAUSE THEY WANT YOUR MONEY!” I vehemently shouted. “It’s all about *money!* If you respect them enough then you’ll go where they want without question. You’ll give what they want without hesitation. You’ll allow them to control your possessions without complaint. It’s pitiful!”

“How, then, are we to know the difference,” one man pleaded with me, “—between those who lead us from good or ill motives?”

“FROM NOW ON!” I stated emphatically and loudly, “THE TRUE FOLLOWERS OF GOD NOT ONLY WILL *NOT* DEMAND FROM YOU, THEY WILL ALSO *NOT ALLOW* YOU TO CALL THEM ‘RABBI!’ This is what I’ve commanded of all my close disciples.”

“Why is this so important?” the same man asked.

“Why?” I repeated. “It’s because you all have but one Teacher—me! All of you together, under me, will be *brothers*. There will be none ‘lording’ it over you religiously. You will all be students of God together. You will be *continual learners* always growing, advancing, and improving—*together!* You will be helping each other as dear brothers and sisters in one close family. None of you will seek to dictate to the others what they must believe or do. None of you will try to control the others!”

“But can some still be the ‘fathers’ in these spiritual families?” a lady asked. She was seriously considering us all becoming a network of many small groups, one single united spiritual family.

“NO!” I answered sharply, startling her. “THERE IS BUT ONE RELIGIOUS ‘FATHER’ WHO IS ABOVE ALL. THERE IS BUT ONE TO WHOM ALL MUST TURN FOR ADVICE AND DIRECTION—*ONLY ONE!*”

“God?” a young man ventured, looking up towards the heavens...

“YES!” I answered, smiling at him. “Our dear, Heavenly Father is *above* us all, *around* us all, *in* us all, and *with* us all. None of us need turn to any religious leaders to substitute for Him. Therefore, call no religious leader here on the Earth ‘father.’ Only your biological male parent and God your spiritual Father, merit that term. All others are your brothers or your sisters—each on your own level!”

“But we are not all the same...?” a teenaged girl frowned.

“Good observation,” I smiled at her. “Some may be spiritually older, wiser, or stronger. But the true followers of myself and of our great Heavenly Father will not try to be your Master. Neither will they try to be your father. Nor will they attempt to be your dictator. To the contrary—if they’ve spiritually advanced further than you—they will reach back or down to support and protect you... just like an older brother or sister!”

“So, your true disciples will never be ‘Masters?’” another from the back of the crowd loudly asked. “Should that be a sign to us of true versus false prophets?”

“YES!” I answered emphatically. “All of you who wish to be led by God should not follow mere mortals. No matter how much your fellow humans pretend to have the authority of God to tell you what you should or should not do. Only one will be your Leader. This is the Christ, the Messiah, the only-begotten Son of the Living God! The fully confirmed Messiah will be the only one to whom you will turn for religious leadership, whom you can follow without question!”

“Then we can ignore those who dictate to us in this great Temple?” a short woman asked, apparently delighted at the thought!

“You should treat them with intelligent respect as knowledgeable resources, to whom you have the duty to be good students,” I answered. “So, question them! If they don’t allow you to question them openly, then do so in your hearts. Do not accept what they say blindly. Test their words! If those words agree with what the Messiah tells you, then fine. Follow those words. But if the words they speak lead you into unholy, unhelpful, and hurtful ways—wasting your time and resources without advancing your spiritual learning—then *discard* those misleading practices!”

“Shall we not have some amongst us to whom we can look up to as examples, Master?” queried one of my disciples standing nearby, clearly confused as to his proper role.

I sighed. Surely, you’d think they’d have learned by now...

“IF YOU WANT TO LOOK UP TO SOMEONE RELIGIOUSLY, TO ESTEEM THAT PERSON HIGHLY, AND TO GIVE DEFERENCE TO THAT PERSON’S SPEECH...” I intoned loudly, “—*then look about you as to who is doing the most in truly serving your actual needs!* That is the person who you must esteem the highest: he or she who truly is being your religious and spiritual *SERVANT!*”

“We are to follow mere *servants?*” someone gasped in astonishment.

“YES!” I answered sharply. “YOU ARE TO LIFT UP TO THE HIGHEST LEVELS OF RELIGIOUS HONOR, TO ESTEEM AS THE GREATEST, AND TO GIVE THE SINCEREST RELIGIOUS RESPECT... TO THOSE WHO HUMBLE THEIR OWN SELVES, WHO RID THEMSELVES OF THEIR OWN

HAUGHTINESS, WHO EXCLUDE FROM THEIR BEHAVIOR EMPTY PRIDE, WHO HAVE MODEST OPINIONS OF THEMSELVES, AND WHO BEHAVE ACCORDINGLY TOWARDS YOU!”

“But that’s just gratitude, not ESTEEM!” another person yelled back at me. “I’m not bowing down to some *servant!*”

“Yes, you should!” I shot back. “*Those true servants of God who prove their avocation by being spiritual servants toward you:* those are the ones that you should honor the greatest!”

“And for the rest, Lord?” one hefty woman snorted. “Should we rise up and *kill* those stuck-up snobs?”

I almost laughed, but restrained myself. She was a powerful-looking, large woman who most certainly would be capable of carrying out such a threat!

“No, my dear woman,” I gently replied. “ALL THOSE WHO EXALT THEMSELVES WITH HAUGHTINESS AND EMPTY PRIDE *WILL* BE BROUGHT LOW—but not by you or others. God will deal with them! Their ‘reward’ at attempting to dictate, control, lecture, and lord it over you will be what they fear the most! God will allow their shallow, empty, pathetic, tiny characters to be made known to all.”

“Ah...” the woman nodded. “They’ll be found out... Hah!”

“Yes!” I punctuated her statement. “They will be laughed at, disregarded, and—the worst punishment to them of all—be *ignored* as irrelevant! When they die, no one will shed a tear. Many will sigh with relief to be rid of them. And awaiting them in eternity will be a *vast, empty void* where they’ll drift in total isolation. They’ll have none to ‘Lord’ it over! They’ll be isolated in an icy darkness, aflame with the incredibly painful total absence of their Loving Father. Accompanying them will only be their own disgusting self... for all eternity!”

Even the belligerent lady was shocked by the fate of the haughty. In the silence that accompanied my radical statement, she ventured a hesitant reply: “Are they then, Lord, to be... *pitied?*”

I slowly nodded, smiling sadly.

“Now you speak with godly compassion, my friend,” I answered. “Rather than to be given unearned praise, or

unquestioned obedience, or misplaced trust—those who outwardly pretend to be the greatest of God’s People while behaving as if they never heard the words preached by their own mouths—they *should* receive your pity. Their spirits are twisted, desperate, and wretched. In their hearts they know the *emptiness* of their pursuit of earthly wealth. Yet they persist in doing evil, deriving fleeting pleasure from inflicting pain on others. As religiously knowledgeable people, they know full-well the awful fate that awaits them. And yet they still persist!”

“Why, Lord?” a thin small man off to the side, sitting high up a ledge called-out. “Why do they do what they know to be bad?”

“BECAUSE THEY’VE UTTERLY *LOST THEIR WAY*,” I thundered. “THEY LOVE POWER, FAME, AND MONEY TOO MUCH TO GIVE UP THEIR ILL-GOTTEN GAINS... AND ARE TOO WEAK OF CHARACTER TO SEEK THE SALVATION THAT STANDS RIGHT IN FRONT OF THEM.”

“Pitiful...” the large woman grated, shaking her head in disbelief.

“But their fate is well deserved,” I continued. “Not only do they drag themselves down, they seek to take as many others as they can to share their awful fate in Hell!”

“Our... religious leaders... our esteemed Scribes, Lawyers, and Pharisees,” the thin man off to the side gasped in astonishment, “—are *damned*?”

“Yes, many of them are indeed damned,” I sadly concluded, my voice trembling with emotion. “I truly wish that they would hear my words, have their hearts pricked, and open their minds to Godly Righteousness. Even now it is not too late! *I long to fill the emptiness of their hearts!* Even the most self-centered, hurtful, evil hypocrite inhabiting this wonderful Temple of God can still ‘wake up’ and change his or her life—*it’s not too late!*”

“Tell us more, Lord!” a tearful, muscular man with an arm around his wife sobbed, cut to his heart.

I knew that he was an abuser of women, but who never again would lay a finger in anger upon his female family members or relatives...

“*Listen to me!*” I projected mightily, my voice ringing into the many corridors and other courts of the Temple. “All of you Scribes, Lawyers, and Pharisees standing cowardly in the shadows—I STAND AT THE DOOR AND KNOCK! PLEASE, LET ME IN! BUT I WON’T FORCE MYSELF UPON YOU! YOU MUST ACTIVELY INVITE ME INTO YOUR HEARTS!”

I paused, listening for a response from deeper in the Temple, but hearing none...

“PLEASE, JUST DO THAT ONE SMALL THING,” I loudly continued. “GIVE ME THE INVITATION. I WILL HELP YOU HEAL YOURSELVES BY TRULY TURNING YOUR LIVES OVER TO GOD. IT’S NOT AS SCARY AS IT MIGHT SEEM. YOU’RE NOT REALLY LOSING ANYTHING AT ALL. BOTH RIGHT NOW AND IN THE END OF TIME YOU WILL GAIN FAR MORE THAN YOU ‘LOSE.’ YOU DON’T HAVE TO DENY YOURSELF PLEASURE! IN PLACE OF TEMPORARY LUSTS, YOU WILL GAIN A THOUSAND-FOLD IN THE JOY OF EVERLASTING GODLY LOVE. YOU WILL RECEIVE THE TRUE *SATISFACTION* OF GODLY RIGHTEOUSNESS. YOU WILL HAVE THE *SECURITY* OF RECIPROCAL GODLY RESPONSIBILITY! AND YOU WILL HAVE...”

“*Jesus of Nazareth!*” someone yelled from the recesses of a corridor, safely hidden from view.

The angry voice cut off my passionate speech. It was a bitter, demanding, and raspy voice...

The crowd reacted like everyone had been slapped in the face. As one, they turned to fearfully look at the corridor from which the voice had blared out.

“*I command you to leave the Temple grounds!*” the hard, imperious words reverberated throughout the court. “You are creating a dangerous situation here. You are stirring up a riot that the Romans will surely send their soldiers to put down! Leave these sanctified halls. Take your rabble out into the countryside. We don’t want you here!”

One of my most ardent, spontaneous disciples leaped up upon a stone bench. Peter stood fearlessly above the crowd, whipping his sword around above his head!

“*Who are you to speak thus to a Prophet of God?*” he demanded.

He thrust his sword skyward before jumping back down to lead a group of my people toward that corridor. They too were drawing out their swords in outrage...

I instantly flung up my hand as a signal for my disciples to stop their furious advance through the packed crowd.

“*Listen to me!*” the deep voice continued from the safety of the corridor. It now sounded less fierce, more soothing and reasonable. “*I speak for all those that this so-called ‘Prophet’ slanders!* He falsely turns you people against your beloved Religious Leaders who kindly and patiently explain to you how God wants each of your steps to be taken. He’s lying to you!”

“What do you *really* do for us other than take our money and lecture us?” a woman from the crowd shouted back.

“We are your Vigilant Spokesmen who intercede for you with intricate, effective prayers to God,” the voice from the shadows calmly replied. “We are your Shining Examples of how to live godly lives. We are your Interpreters of the confusing, challenging, and absolute Law of Moses—your kind and paternally protective Scribes, Lawyers, and Pharisees! *We* are the best of the best, anointed specifically by God to lead. We are blessed by the Lord with *expert knowledge* of the Holy Scriptures! This *Jesus* is just an uneducated, ignorant, misleading, dirty, incendiary, would-be pretender to the Throne of David!”

“He is our *defender!*” an elderly man in the crowd insisted.

“No, quite the contrary!” the voice argued. “You’ve been deceived by his antics. He’s a skilled orator, just as is Satan, his *true* father!”

“You’re wrong!” the defiant man answered. “Jesus loves is, proving so by his actions!”

But the hidden speaker just yelled back: “**JESUS OF NAZARETH SEEKS POWER OVER YOU FOR HIS OWN GAIN, NOT US! IT IS HIM THAT SEEKS TO SET YOU AGAINST THE ROMAN LEGIONS FOR HIS OWN GLORY, NOT US! IT IS THIS JESUS THAT GOD HATES, NOT US!**”

“But he doesn’t...” someone else tried to defend me.

“**YES! IT IS HIM THAT IS DAMNED TO HELL, NOT US!**” the professional-sounding speaking voice continued ruthlessly. “**TURN AWAY FROM THIS MAN! HE BEGUILSES**

YOU WITH CLEVER STORIES AND SATANIC ARGUMENTS. HIS GUIDANCE IS HERESY! HE PREACHES TO YOU LIES. HE'S NOT JUST A DANGEROUS LIBERAL, HE'S A DEADLY FANATIC! BEWARE OF HIS POISONOUS SEDUCTIONS. HE WILL LEAD YOU INTO NOTHING MORE THAN *GRIEF, BLOOD, AND DEATH!*"

I again held up a hand to stop my eagerly straining, furious followers from charging the hidden speaker. I knew that their attack could provoke a full-scale battle and riot in the Temple. That would trigger a response from the Roman soldiers stationed throughout the city.

This, of course, was exactly what the Scribes and Pharisees wanted: to destroy my legacy by staining it with the blood of innocents!

I stood silent for a minute, just staring at the dark depths of that corridor, sadly shaking my head in denial. The crowd and my disciples seemed puzzled, hearing no response from me. They were fearful that the hidden speaker had somehow silenced me with his accusations. Or, did my silence mean that there was nothing I could say in return to his powerful arguments?

The crowd and my close disciples were shocked to see *tears* starting to well from my eyes...

"*YOU ARE CURSED!*" the words exploded from my throat as I tightly clenched my fists. Tears of grief flowed freely down my cheeks. "*All you Scribes and Pharisees that pretend to be so holy, making long elaborate prayers to hide your hypocrisy, assigning evil to anyone but yourselves... you are doomed! Your own actions condemn you: plotting to gain the trust of widows, being appointed official executors of their estates—only to rob them blind!*"

The seething crowd and my close disciples settled back, nodding to my words. They were true. It was the seedy, dark underside of the Temple...

"These, the most helpless and beloved of the Lord—you greedily devour their homes! For this, God will give you the greater condemnation and the heaviest of sentences. *Shame on you!*"

Many of the crowd also had tears in their own eyes. They remembered similar occasions when they'd witnessed the greed and cruelty of their supposed religious leaders.

"Shame... Shame... Shame... *Shame!*" a few of the people in the massed audience began chanting in response.

"YOU ARE *CURSED!*" I again proclaimed loudly, flicking tears off my mustache and beard with a wave of my hand, "*—all of you Scribes and Pharisees that go to any length, traveling to the ends of the earth, to make one single convert that becomes twice the child of Hell as you!*"

The crowd began "booing" and "hissing"...

"You zealously teach your converts all the formalities, the traditions, the dictates, the details, the rituals, and the expensive requirements," I coldly stated. "These, in turn, you inflict on all the people—yet neglect Purpose, Meaning, Principles, and Righteousness! So, each generation of your members become worse than the last. Each successive wave of you demands more and more with less and less heart... increasingly brutal and devious! *Misery* will be your destiny!"

"Misery... Misery... Misery... Misery!" more of the people echoed back, increasingly vocal.

"YOU ARE *CURSED!*" I continued without pause, my mouth twisted-up in agony at my harsh words, "*—all of you Scribes and Pharisees that make elaborate excuses as to why you cannot live up to the empty promises you made to your many victims!*"

"EMPTY promises... EMPTY promises... EMPTY promises!" the crowd chanted in unison.

"Yes, you swear by the Sanctuary of the Temple or by an offering on the altar to those who give you their money that you'll use it wisely on their behalf," I accused the hidden voice. "And then when the money mysteriously vanishes, you claim the oath meant nothing. Why? Because you say that a true binding oath must be made to the *gold* of the sanctuary or to the altar *itself*? You deceitful monsters! The only oath of any validity is to swear by God Himself!"

"It's true!" several in the crowd shouted. "You steal our money!"

“Certainly, only God can see into your heart to certify that what you say is true, or punish you if your heart is *empty!*” I ruthlessly continued, pressing my point. “If the altar or the sanctuary had any validity at all as a certification of truth, it would only be by its derived connection with the Almighty. Yet your emphatic, deliberately *empty* oaths seem to carry great validity and weight by virtue of your high positions and flowery, learned language. *You say anything in the moment that will make you look good*, without any intention at all of living up to the promises you’ve made to your innocent victims! *Horror* awaits you in the afterlife, where *your* lies will all be made known, your punishment assigned accordingly!”

“Horror... Horror... Horror... *Horror!*” many of the crowd now chanted.

“*YOU ARE CURSED!*” I sobbed loudly, in abject sorrow at their terrible fate, “—*all of you Scribes and Pharisees that religiously strain your drinks through cloth lest you swallow by accident some unclean tiny gnat, while without pause you gulp down huge, unclean camels!*”

Now the crowd paused its defiant chanting to roar with laughter at my imagery.

“*It’s not a joke!*” I persisted, waving my hands for the crowd to stop laughing. “You Scribes and Pharisees are so strict to follow every rule, whether real or imagined, in the Law of Moses... that you will even take your tiny plants grown in your gardens and count out their leaves to donate a tenth of them to the Temple! But worse than your obsessive behavior, you mandate this upon everyone. The Law of Moses does not say you must do that, only to donate a tenth of your major crops. And yet you extend this requirement down to even the little herbs grown in your gardens. What ‘devotion’! What ‘diligence’ to perceived duty. What *stupidity* if by taking up all your time doing this tiny thing of little consequence—that’s not even commanded by Moses—you *neglect* to fulfill Moses’ weighty commands! It would have been far more productive to exemplify **GODLY RIGHTEOUSNESS, MERCIFUL JUSTICE, and ACTIVE FAITH!**”

“Righteousness, Justice, Faith... Righteousness, Justice, Faith... RIGHTEOUSNESS, JUSTICE, FAITH!” the crowd dutifully repeated.

“In your zeal to be the ultimate guides to God’s People your ‘tunnel-vision’ leads them to disaster!” I pressed my attack. “You are blind guides. You are obsessing on the pebbles of the road at your feet while you lead God’s people over a cliff! For this, you and all those who follow you without question will plummet to the rocks below and be *crushed!*”

“Crushed... Crushed... Crushed... *Crushed!*” everyone in the crowd now enthusiastically chanted together.

“YOU ARE CURSED!” I shouted out yet again, wiping tears from my eyes to glare fiercely at the offending corridor, “—*all you Scribes and Pharisees that studiously clean the outsides of your cups and platters while ignoring the filth and decay caked up on their insides!*”

“Wash your dishes... Wash your dishes... *Wash your dishes!*” the crowd taunted the unseen officials.

“Yes!” I continued. “You make your outsides appear holy, beautifully robed, impressively studious, impeccably perfect, and meticulously correct... while on the *inside* you are full of extortion, plundering, despoilment, ravaging of the helpless, and wicked self-indulgence. You should first clean the inside of the ‘cup and plate,’ which will automatically then extend outward! Instead, you hide your rapacious villainy inside a hollow shell of pseudo-self-righteousness. For this hypocrisy, you will *rot* in Hell!”

“Rot... Rot... Rot... *Rot!*” the crowd chanted, their combined full-throated voices now sounding like thunder against the walls of the Temple complex.

“YOU ARE CURSED!” I screamed yet again above the chanting crowd, shaking my fist at the hidden spokesperson within the corridor, “—*all of you Scribes and Pharisees that take pains to look beautiful outside while your hearts are ugly!* You are like the tombs that yearly you so correctly and carefully oversee whitewashing, such that none might chance upon them and accidentally be made unclean. Look over on the western slope of Olivet!” I directed the people’s gaze to the

high hill. “Do you see the whitened tombs there glistening in the sun?”

They paused their enthusiastic chanting to look out over the edge of the Temple mount, across the teaming city, to the slope of the small mountain there. Sure enough, there *glimmered* the whitened rocks of tombs.

“Yes... We see them... They are pure and white!” some called back to me.

“They are indeed beautiful, aren’t they?” I prodded the people, pointing.

“Very beautiful... Gorgeous... As pure as can be!” many answered in wonderment.

“BUT INSIDE, THE TOMBS ARE FULL OF DEAD MEN’S BONES!” I yelled loudly. “The graves over there have *rotting corpses* inside. If you rolled the stones from the openings, or moved the slabs, dug them up—inside those glistening, pure-white tombs are *putrid stink* from *rotting flesh*, *gnawing worms*, and *decaying organs!*”

The just-jeering crowd was struck silent by my imagery. Some turned their gaze away from the sparkling bright tombs. Parents covered the ears of their children...

“Yes, you would gag in disgust!” I relentlessly continued. “You would vomit uncontrollably. And such are the HEARTS of these Scribes and Pharisees! While outwardly they appear utterly sanctimonious and righteous, *inwardly* their empty hearts *stink* to the high heavens! Outwardly they look to be upright and pure... but inside are full of trickery, lawlessness, and evil intent. For this, their despoiling of God’s true Temple your human hearts, they will *burn* forever with a fire that will never be quenched!”

“Burn... Burn... Burn... *Burn!*” the people again took up the chant, raising their fists high above their heads in defiance.

“YOU ARE CURSED!” I cried out yet again, proclaiming the final sorrow, “—*all of you Scribes and Pharisees that rigorously defend, zealously require, and extend even the tiniest detail of God’s Law. From your positions of authority, you mandate your man-made many requirements. You claim they are implied in the Holy Scriptures, forcing all to do*

them. And yet you torture and murder the Law's true Prophets and Teachers!"

"Murderers... Murderers... *Murderers!*" the crowd accused the hidden speaker.

"Yes!" I pressed my case. Then I spoke softly though just as intensely: "You build greater and more elaborate tombs to honor the bones of the prophets. You decorate their tombs with expensive, impressive memorials. You erect lavish monuments in their names. You loudly claim that if you had lived in the days of our ancestors, you'd not have participated in killing God's beloved messengers! Yet by your very claims you certify that you consider yourselves descendants of those that covered their hands with the blood of the Prophets. They who committed the murders were the hard-hearted *religious leaders* of the times those Prophets lived, just as *you* are now!"

The crowd fell silent, horrified.

"Yes!" I continued. "You take the sins of your fathers and *add* to them, increasing their guilt. You are the children of deadly snakes. *You* are poisonous snakes, just like your forefathers! You hide in the shadows and strike out with deadly venom at all who endanger your precious prestige and nasty business deals. For such evil against the very Nature and Intent of God, you guarantee yourself a sentence of eternal suffering in the depths of Hell!"

"*Let us send them on their way right now!*" several of my closest disciples who I'd halted in their headlong rush to battle, yelled out in reply—again brandishing their swords!

"NO!" I commanded them, again stopping my sword-wielding followers in their tracks. "God does not need you to strike down His enemies. Their time to suffer will come. But that's *not* what *I* want for them."

"But they deserve it so richly!" my burly, headstrong disciple moaned, straining against my orders.

"*I did not come here to start some stupid, counter-productive war of religious vengeance, no matter how justified!*" I strongly admonished him.

Then, turning my attention back to the silent corridor, I calmly stated: "But I am not without compassion for your plight—you Scribes, Pharisees, and Priests. I don't wish for

anyone, including you, to be eternally cut off from the Almighty. So even though you will have your way with me, God will soon send to you even more Wise Men, Teachers, Interpreters, and Prophets. *Up until the day you die you will always have the opportunity to repent of your evil ways, returning to God!*"

Still, only silence from the hidden corridor...

"But, sadly for most of you," I continued, "the putrid, stinking spirits inside you will prevail. Having your ill-gotten gains threatened, you will strike out as did your fathers against God's messengers of old. You will beat up, brutally torture, and punish my Godly Instructors in your synagogues. You will harass and chase my disciples from town to town. Some of them you will even murder, just as did your forefathers the Prophets of old. Others you will not be content to merely kill, but will cause them to endure the worst torture of all... *crucifixion!*"

The crowd stopped chanting, giving out a collective "gasp" of horror. There was no death more horrific than crucifixion...

"—*all of this massive evil perpetuated merely to satisfy your own worldly lusts!*" I croaked, my strained voice breaking. "Indeed, not only are you guilty for your present heinous deeds, but for *all* the torture and murder of God's Prophets and Teachers down through the ages! Yes, upon your heads will be the blood of *all* the righteous' shed on Earth, all who were struck down for preaching the Divine Light. Your culpability extends from the blood of the righteous Abel to the blood of the murdered Zechariah. Your guilt spans all the times God reached down with concern and love to lowly, animalistic, short-sighted humans. You Scribes and Pharisees—plus complicit Priests—sow the wind and reap the whirlwind!"

Again, an arrogant *silence* from the depths of the adjoining corridor...

"But punishment will not come just upon you," I sadly continued. "Because of you, terrible times, awful turmoil, and societal destruction will come upon *all* this present generation. And it's all because you blatantly rejected God's powerful uplifting Hand. You think times are bad now? Hah! Your evil

deeds against God's messengers reap you a looming *trouble* that you cannot now imagine, even in your worst nightmares!"

"Trouble... Trouble... Trouble... *Trouble!*" the crowd all chanted in unison. The force of their massed voices seemed to *vibrate* the massive stones making up the walls and floors of the Temple!

I paused, inundated with an all-compassing sorrow. I felt the huge weight of all the damned souls in this city pressing down upon me. I wanted to save them all. Yet I knew that most didn't even care if I existed, while many others outright hated me!

I began *sobbing* uncontrollably. Seeing my abject misery, the crowd grew quiet. They were no longer so boisterous with defiance and outrage. I continued to cry, my hands dropping listlessly to my sides, staring at the people. I turned my face up to the heavens, and then looking out over the city. It was beautiful, magnificent *Jerusalem*. It bustled with life. Soon, for the vile sins of its citizens, God would allow the Romans to send their armies to raze it to the ground!

I opened my voice to speak, thought better of it, closed my mouth, opened my mouth, and closed it yet again—wavering back and forth...

The people looked from one to the other in confusion. My fierce tirade against the Scribes and Pharisees had fired them up with enthusiastic passion! It had been an entertaining "romp" for them. My present visage, though—white-faced, trembling, uncertain, with tears running freely down my cheeks... wasn't at all what they wanted from me. They wanted me to lead them in a bloodthirsty rampage of revenge! But that wasn't my purpose...

Finally, I turned my entire body such that my back was to the crowd, facing the teeming city below. I slowly lifted my hanging arms, stretching them out to my sides. Then I lifted my hands up above my head, fingers splayed and trembling.

My robe fluttered around my body in the light wind. It seemed to the people that I might be about to jump down, or drift outward on the wind, or even fly into the sky with the power of God lifting me on celestial wings!

They began mumbling and whispering amongst themselves, wondering if I'd finally lost my grip on reality. Had my mind been broken by the bruising debates with the Scribes and Pharisees? Had I finally gone completely insane?

"OH, MY PRECIOUS JERUSALEM!" My pent-up voice abruptly *erupted* out of my mouth. It was an agonized *scream* from the deepest pain, startling the audience around and behind me into complete silence. "You are the **SPLENDOR** of God's People. You the shining **JEWEL** of the Jewish nation. You the abode of God's physical, magnificent **TEMPLE**. You are the would-be **CAPITAL** of the entire religious world. You are the **SYMBOL** of earth's highest spiritual aspirations. You are the supposed **NUCLEUS** of the coming *Kingdom of God!*"

My voice trailed off...

My outstretched hands slowly came together, in heavenly supplication. Then my arms lowered, clasping together over my chest. It was as if I were hugging a dying, precious baby, rocking it tenderly in my arms.

"Oh, JERUSALEM, JERUSALEM!" I wailed, yet again weeping openly, "*—you that murder the Prophets and stone the Holy Teachers that God sends to help you. How often would I have gathered your children together as a mother bird gathers her precious chicks under her wings?*"

I paused for a moment, unable to speak. Then I continued...

"How often would I have given you my total protection, defending you to the death against all enemies?" I grated. "How often would I have kept you warm and safe from the brutal cold and storms of Satan's dark night? How often would I have tenderly nurtured your spirits to grow strong, mature, and dynamically productive? How often would I have given you lasting enjoyment in place of drudgery, fear, and ephemeral worldly pleasure? *Yet... you... would... not!*" I gasped-out.

I dropped my arms back to my sides, slumping downwards.

"YOU ARE CURSED!" I cried out yet again as I stared downward at my feet. I choked on my own harsh words and tears, "*—all you that blindly pursue creature comforts,*

security, power, and wealth more devoutly than you seek to please God!"

Suddenly my tears dried and I rose to my full height. I looked down on the many stone buildings and streets. My voice hardened...

"I TELL YOU THE AWFUL TRUTH," I yelled down. "You will be left utterly destitute. Your buildings will be leveled. You will have no homes left within which to raise your families. You will have no capitol city in which to take pride. You will have no nation from which to dominate and rule. It will all be destroyed. You will have nothing left. You will lose everything. Why? All this sorrow will come upon you *because when you reject God's infinite Love, the Lord of Reality rejects you!* You're not as irreplaceable, as unique, nor as valuable as you might think..."

I took a deep breath, lifting my head defiantly, narrowing my eyes in determination.

I turned back to the expectant crowd, to the looming Temple, and to all my many enemies that hid within its depths. I opened my reddened eyes wide, the tears now gone. My eyes glistened with an unyielding determination. I stood ramrod straight, my arms at my sides, both fists clenched tightly.

Some of those standing near to me in the crowd pulled back, cowering at my suddenly fierce visage!

"I AM GOING TO LEAVE YOU!" I thundered loudly, my voice echoing and re-echoing throughout the corridors of the Temple, then down to the city streets below. "*Those of you who want to be rid of me will have your wish fulfilled!*"

"No, Teacher... stay with us!" a few called back.

But a simmering satisfaction came from the dark corridor...

"Never again will I bother you," I promised. "You, the rulers of the Temple, are left to your own evil devices. But there's yet hope for you—up until the day that you die. Because even though I must go, I won't go far. I will always be nearby. You have but to reach out to me and I will help you move from darkness into the Light of God!"

Still, no voice answered back from the corridor. But I knew the Spokesman was still there, brooding. He and all of those

within the depths of the Temple who hated me heard my departing, chilling words.

“So, you Scribes and Pharisees plus complicit Priests—you spectacularly flashy hypocrites!” I continued, speaking slowly but powerfully, “—plus, ALL of you that give only a select part of your hearts to the Almighty. I’m talking to you doubtful believers, casual religious pretenders, industrious workers too busy to see God, bored people looking for spiritual entertainment, selfish seekers only welcoming what I can do for you, lovers of a comfortable God, usurpers of God’s glory, and hateful zealots looking to force everyone else to do what you think is best.”

“What are you saying, Teacher?” a puzzled woman nearby gasped. “Will we never see you again?”

“You *can* see me again *if* in your heart-of-hearts you will sincerely say: ‘*Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord!*’” I reassured my followers. “But all those who will *not* welcome God’s Messengers are forever damned! I do not shirk from challenging your present limited beliefs, urging you to new heights of joyful service, and laying open your own inner wickedness. *You all must PERMEABILIZE your own hearts!*”

This time there was no chanting of “doomed, doomed, doomed.” There was just a stony, sullen silence from the crowd. They now realized I was not just condemning their faithless religious leaders. They saw that the many “curses” I’d showered upon the heads of the Scribes, Pharisees, and Priests for having *God-empty hearts...* had fallen upon *them* as well!

Without another word, I turned and strode resolutely out of the courtyard. My disciples were caught off guard, running to catch up to me.

Regardless of who I’d managed to reach, if any—it was time to complete my mission. I would demonstrate with ACTION the contents of *my* heart...

Section 6:

SUMMATION



We've come to the end of my second lecture. What have we discovered? Well, first of all, it is *easy* to have a HARD HEART. It is *difficult* to keep a SOFT HEART. That's because God has given to you the power to exclude anything from your heart, including Him. But if you choose to exercise your right to *not* want Him, He does not want you!

Beware, then, that the "light" in you is not darkness. Though God has given a Spark of Himself to every self-and-God-aware creature, it can be hidden or snuffed out. Don't try to fool yourself and others into thinking you are a godly person if your heart is filled with perversion and decay. It's easy to accept things into your heart that block God's internal light.

Don't hide behind the "letter of the law" if your *spirit* does not resonate with God's Spirit. Meaningless rituals and empty traditions save nobody. Don't trade an eternal inheritance in

the *Kingdom of God* for your next worldly “meal.” When you seek to control other people, you lose control of yourself. Use the Blood of the Lamb to wash yourselves clean. Start all over with a fresh, young, soft heart. Stop being a grouchy, “realistic” adult and return to the innocence of your youth!

Don’t look for salvation just via external conformance to restrictive, traditionally religious rules. Instead, concentrate on the PERMEABILITY of your heart to godliness, opening up your mind to new realities. Learn and teach through actions rather than words alone. But don’t make humility and obedience to God a painful duty. Instead, make it your Joy. Only then will God keep *permeating* your entire life. Seek to make God happy and you will also be happy. Take yourself out of the way and you gain everything for yourself. But all those who fill themselves up with human pride will be deflated.

One of the most challenging tests you will ever face is cataloguing and understanding your own heart. Most people never think to question their own motivations. We just blindly accept our own personality, biases, prejudices, or way of thinking. It’s much easier just to do what we “like,” without ever considering the *basis from which those decisions are made*. But if we never rise above acting out our internal, genetically programmed compulsions—how can we claim to be anything other than just smart animals? I, Jesus of Nazareth, challenge you in my Lecture #2 to *understand your heart!*

Here is the “take home message” from this lecture: *God wants those who want Him*, who are willing to reach beyond their own animal instincts. Unfortunately, there aren’t many of these “seekers.” But those who do exist are the ones that will enter and remain in the Kingdom of God.

So, how do we each accomplish this difficult task? Fortunately, we can know what’s *inside* our hearts by assessing the products which come *out* of it, namely our *ACTIONS*. To truly understand your heart’s PERMEABILITY, then, you must carefully evaluate *your conduct and attitudes toward others*. And the greatest test of this is the topic of my Lecture #3: “*Dealing with difficult people.*”

See you then!

Conclusion by the Author:

Dear reader,

I hope you enjoyed reading ***The Jesus Lectures-2: The Heart's Permeability***. Once again, I remind you it is a fictional account of what I feel Jesus would say to his present-day followers, should He return for a short inspection tour. Consequently, feel free to take from it what's useful to you while discarding the rest.

But this book is not just my random thoughts about Jesus. The accounts and dialogues derive from in-depth study of authoritative Bible commentaries, different Bible translations, and history. Hopefully this format provides a feeling of reality: where you sit listening to Jesus give an in-person lecture. I hope you found my fictional depiction exceptional, interesting, and thought-provoking. For me, writing this series of ten books on Jesus was a true religious adventure, which *continues* challenging my own worldviews!

Finally, ***I need to ask you for a big favor***. If you enjoyed this book and would like to help others do so as well, **a review written by you** on the Amazon page for this book would be greatly appreciated. It's hard to get reviews nowadays and your support will be very important both for me and other readers. If you'd like to do this, I sincerely thank you in advance for your time and effort. It can be as long or short as you wish.

Thanks again for reading my unique books and going on this wild, exhilarating ride with me!

Sincerely,

Dan Lyle

REFERENCE MATERIALS:

Some of the concepts and events contained in this book are based on commentary and historical information contained in the following reference materials:

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About the Author:

Daniel Lyle holds a Ph.D. in Biology, is a lifelong amateur herpetologist, taught medical immunology and microbiology at a University, completed a career in cell biology medical & regulatory research, and has a strong interest in all aspects of cosmology and physics. From a small kid he was fascinated with dinosaurs. As such, he has always lived with exotic creatures, including harmless snakes, all housed in his own homemade beautiful habitats. Some of his tame pet pythons and anacondas ranged up to twelve feet in length. He is the author of over thirty books. They deal with diverse topics such as quality management, religion, science fiction, and graphics art. His writings go beyond the ordinary, exposing deeper aspects of life. His books are meant to be fun, conversational, practical, and helpful. His various works are available at LylePublishing.com, Creative-Theology.com. and Amazon.com.
