

The JC Team

Sr. Mary Joe CSN

Volume 2



HE IS 'THE ONE'

The JC Team

Bible Stories told like never before

Volume 2

THE JC TEAM

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Chapter 1

WHERE THE WIND BLOWS

One night, a Pharisee named Nicodemus came to Jesus. “Jesus, I believe that you are a true prophet of God for you speak the truth with boldness and power. You are able to do this because the presence of God is with you.”

“The presence of God will do wonders in whoever opens his life to Him and is born again in Spirit.” Jesus spoke.

“How can one be born again? I can’t go back into my mother’s womb and be born again, can I?” Nicodemus was puzzled.

Jesus shook his head. “That is not what I meant. You don’t have to be born again in flesh, but in Spirit.”

“I still don’t understand. How can I be born of the Spirit?” Nicodemus asked again.

Jesus remained silent for a few moments. Then he asked, “Nicodemus, can you feel the wind?”

Nicodemus paused to feel the gentle breeze brisk past him. “Yes I do,” he replied.

“Do you know where it comes from? Or where it is going?” Jesus asked again.

“No, I don’t,” Nicodemus replied.

“But right this moment when you feel it against your body, you can sense which direction it is taking you in, can’t you?” Jesus asked.

Nicodemus paused again to feel. “Yes, it is moving east. I can feel it blow towards the east.”



Jesus said, “You don’t know where the wind began, and you don’t know where it will end, but right at this moment, as you feel it against you, you know which direction it is pushing you in. You know where you should take your next step by feeling the wind. Nicodemus, this is what ‘life in the Spirit’ means-taking one step at a time, in faith and surrender. To be born of the Spirit means to make an effort to constantly tune yourself to the promptings of the Spirit within, sense the push and take that step in faith...live a life guided by the

Spirit. The whole picture of our life will not be revealed to us. We may not be able to see where our life begins or ends, just like the wind....One step at a time in faith, that's life in the Spirit. When you are at crossroads and don't know which step to take next, pay attention and the Spirit will whisper "This is the way...walk in it."'"

Chapter 2

JESUS' LITTLE COMPANIONS

One evening, after a long day's walk and many hours of talk, as the crowd to whom Jesus had been preaching dispersed, the disciples requested that Jesus rest for a while.

"You must be tired, Jesus. Tomorrow morning, we have to embark on another long journey to the next village. Please do take some rest," suggested Nathanael.

Jesus, feeling weary, went a little away to a spot near a huge tree and settled beneath its shade. As he lay there with his eyes closed, he heard the voices of children talking with the disciples.

"We want to see Jesus!" a little child's voice demanded.

"The Rabbi needs rest. You can't go see him now!" John spoke.

"We just want to see him. If he is asleep we'll make sure we don't wake him," a young girl's voice pleaded.

"Not now kids. Go away!" Judas scolded them.

"We are not leaving until we've seen him," insisted an adamant little one.

Jesus lifted his head and turned to see who the little daring ones were. There was a freckle-faced boy with brown curls who appeared to be around ten years old.

With him were two younger kids, about just five and four years of age. Beside them stood a girl who seemed to be twelve years old. Amused by the little gang, Jesus rose and went towards them. “Let the children come to me,” Jesus said.

The disciples made way, and the four children rushed to Jesus in glee. Jesus smiled and picked up the littlest one.

“What is your name, son?”

“My name is Ivan.” he smiled shyly.

“I am Dan.” said the five-year-old boy who had shiny hair and blue eyes.

“I am Zeke and this is my older sister Zorah,” introduced the freckle-faced boy with brown curls.

“What do you children want from me?” Jesus smiled at them.

“We want to be your disciples!” Dan announced.

The disciples couldn’t help laughing.

“Grow up, boy! Grow up first...and then if you are good enough, we will take you in,” smiled Thomas.

“I can be a disciple now,” Dan claimed.

“You sure can, Dan.” Jesus patted his cheeks. “What do you think you should be doing as my disciple?”

“I will walk with you, listen to what you tell me, learn new things that you teach me, and I’ll tell other people about you,” Dan answered.

“You’ve passed the test. I’m taking you all in as my little disciples,” Jesus smiled at the kids and kissed little Ivan, who blushed with joy.

The next day morning, as Jesus sat on the wayside rock, little Ivan climbed on his lap and comfortably seated himself there as on a throne.

Dan sat beside Jesus. Leaning on Jesus, he pulled out three red roses. “These are for you Jesus,” he smiled.

Jesus smiled back, “All three for me?”

Dan nodded. “One for God the Father, one for God the Son, and one for God the Holy Spirit.”

Jesus kissed Dan’s forehead, “God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit accept your roses with joy. Spread this joy!”

“Jesus!” Zeke cried out loud in panic as he came running down the hill for his life, followed by an angry Zorah who was running fast to catch up with Zeke, probably to give him a spanking. Zeke slumped against Dan, nearly pushing him over, and the roses fell from Dan’s hands.

“My roses!” Dan whined.

Zeke panted, “Jesus! Zorah is coming to spank me! Save me!”



Zorah reached the spot and stared down sternly at Zeke with her hands on her hips. He gulped.

“What’s happening here?” Jesus asked.

“Zeke has been naughty again! I was feeding the chickens and he threw water all over me!” she complained.

“She wakes me up every morning that way!” he shot back.

“That’s because you are such a lazy boy and mother is tired of yelling at you to wake up!” Zorah argued.

“Sit down, Zorah,” Jesus smiled, holding Zorah’s hand.

“My roses!” Dan whimpered again glancing at Zeke.

“Roses? What roses?” Zeke looked around him. Spotting the three roses on the ground near his feet, Zeke picked them up. “Sorry, Dan! I didn’t notice them.”

Dan took one rose and presented it to Zorah, “I hope this will cheer you up, Zorah. See this rose has dew drops that make them more pretty. You are now like a rose with dewdrops,” he said and handed her the rose.

Zorah couldn’t help smiling.

“Thank you Dan... and you are like the sunshine that makes my petals bloom,” she smiled, gently patting his cheeks.

“Jesus, yesterday in our village, everyone was talking about you and the things you spoke about on the mountain where people gathered to listen to you,” Zeke suddenly remembered.

“Yes, they were saying how you encouraged to always have faith in God our Creator who provides for us,” added Zorah.

Dan put in, “I know what exactly Jesus said. I was there!” Dan stood up on the rock and imagining himself to be Jesus, he tried to imitate Jesus’ words with gestures and expressions.

“See how beautifully God cares for the lilies in the fields and birds in the skies. God their Creator knows their needs and provides them with what they need. God loves you all even more because you are made in His

image and likeness. Don't be worried about your needs. Place them all in God's hands. Set your heart first on the Kingdom of God and what He requires of you and all these other needs will be fulfilled”

“That sounds good!” commented Zeke. “So that means we don't have to work so hard after all. Trust God! He will take care of our needs....somehow.”

Zorah teased, “Looks like Zeke has got an excuse to laze around.”

Zeke grinned with a twinkle in his eye. Jesus ruffled his hair playfully.

“Faith is not an excuse to be lazy, Zeke. Let me explain...” Jesus looked around at the kids who had their eyes eagerly fixed on him.

“God cares for His creatures according to their limitations. See the lilies in the fields. They are always rooted to the ground. To survive, they need water and sunlight. God knows this and because plants cannot move, God lets the sunshine reach them wherever they are. He lets the raindrops fall on the ground they are rooted to and quench their thirst.

Now, look at the birds in the sky. God has made them more superior. They have wings to fly and sharp eyes to see. So, God doesn't have to bring their needs to them as He does for the lilies. Instead, He hides juicy fruits among the green leaves of the tall trees for them to find. These birds fly high in search of food and water,

spot them, and feed on them. When they make an effort according to their capability, God rewards them.

Now, look at you. God has made you ultra- superior! You have hands and feet to move about and a brain to think - made in the ‘image and likeness of God.’ You need not remain static like the lilies. God doesn’t have to bring your needs to you. You needn’t peck on the fruits of trees like birds because it’s alright if birds do it, but when you do it, it is called ‘stealing’.”

Zeke’s thoughts instantly raced to the spanking he got from his neighbor when he stealthily plucked and ate mangoes from his orchard.

Jesus continued, “Use the abilities God has given you and trust He will bless your efforts in His time and according to His plan. God sees your *needs* and your *hard work*. Place them with trust into God’s hands. We often get too worried about the needs to sustain our worldly life – food, clothes, and a nice home. Unfortunately, people give more importance to these needs than to the needs of their soul, which are so much more important. Because, with each day that passes away, your life on earth becomes shorter and shorter, bringing you nearer and nearer to the next life- eternal life. We should be more anxious about preparing for that. We should be more concerned about keeping our souls clean rather than our stomachs full.

That’s what I mean when I say, ‘Set your heart on the kingdom of God and what He requires of you.’ Stop

looking down at the sands of the earth, brooding over your yesterday- worrying about your today - and being anxious about your tomorrow. Instead, look up at the stars in the sky. Your future is in there, not in a tomorrow that passes away...but in the eternal future. Know what that means?”

Dan shrugged.

“It means forever and ever,” Zeke enlightened him.

Jesus continued, “Then, several things which you once considered as important will not seem so important anymore. New toys, best food, expensive clothes...no...you’ll just want to be a good person. Your worldly needs won’t form a long shopping list and your prayers won’t be for petty things. You won’t be greedy anymore, because you’ll find satisfaction in what you already have. It will be enough to fulfill your needs and your needs are now few.”

Jesus looked into the wide eyes of the children and wondered if they had grasped what he was trying to tell them.

“So children, don’t worry yourself too much about the little things in life, but the big purpose of your life – to reach Heaven. When you live life focusing on that, you will be less concerned about material needs. God will take care of your basic needs. Just get rid of your greed.”

“Hmm,” Zeke carefully pondered, rubbing his chin.
“Now, I seem to understand!”

“Look up to Heaven always. Do your best, and leave the rest to God!” added Dan jovially.

“Don’t worry, be happy!” Zorah said with a smile.

“Exactly!” Jesus was pleased the kids took to heart what he wanted them to know.

“Jesus, can I ask you something?” Ivan’s low voice sounded from Jesus’ lap.

“Yes Ivan?” Jesus affectionately gazed down at him.

“You said the other day that we have to remove the log in our eye first before trying to remove the speck from others’ eyes.” Ivan widened his eyes and peered at Jesus, “Can you see if there is a log in my eye?”

Everyone burst out laughing. Jesus smiled and kissed his little eyes, “Your eyes Ivan, are crystal clear as the morning dew!”

“What did you mean by that then?” asked Zorah.

Jesus explained, “Very often, what we see as a fault in others is a reflection of our own way of thinking. ...what we see as a speck in others’ eyes is often a reflection of the log in our own eye. Once we set our thinking right and remove the log, we’ll look and realize that we no longer see the speck in others’ eyes either.”

“Hmmm,” Zeke pondered.

Jesus went on, “Like the other day when Zeke came home from the market and told his mother that he had forgotten to buy eggs, she got upset with him, and scolded him. Zeke was so angry, he sulked and stayed away from home all day thinking that his mother didn’t love him. It was in the evening when Zorah came searching for him in the meadows that he learned his grandmother was very sick and his mother had been so worried about her. It was in that frustration that she had scolded him. Zeke understood his mom’s feelings, forgave her, went back home, and gave her a tight hug. Once he set his thinking right, the log in his eye burnt in the fire of love and the speck he saw in his mother’s eye became sparks of love.”

Zeke nodded, remembering that day. Jesus patted his head and continued, “However, there are times when we observe that others’ eyes have truly been blinded by specks and we have to try and remove them ...but after clearing our eyes first! Like the day when Zorah had an argument with her friend Aliza. She knew Aliza had made new friends with girls who were leading her astray from the path of faith. Zorah confronted her on this issue, and their friendship broke up. For days, Zorah was so angry with Aliza. Later, however, Zorah realized that blaming Aliza was not the right attitude. Zorah began to pray for Aliza. She prayed that God blesses Aliza with wisdom and enlightenment of the Spirit so she may be guided to the path of true faith again.” Looking into Zorah’s glistening eyes, Jesus continued “...and she stays

strong in that prayer till today. The hard log in her eyes has moistened and melted in her tears of love that will rain grace someday in Aliza's eyes, to wash the speck away.”

Zorah couldn't control herself and burst out sobbing. Jesus gently put his arms around her and holding her close, whispered, “Zorah, you are a true friend who really cares.”

Chapter 3

ASK... SEEK... KNOCK

One fine morning, as Jesus and his little companions were sitting on the wayside rocks, he spoke to them. “Ask and you shall receive, Seek and you shall find, Knock and it shall be opened unto you...”

Just then, they heard the loud screams of a little child.

“I want that!” the little one demanded.

Everyone turned their gaze to the nearby shop from where the yell came. There stood a little boy clutching his father’s hand and pulling him towards the sweet shop. The father, however, was not going to give in so easily. He maintained a firm ‘No’ and explained the reason, “Too many sweets will spoil your teeth and your health!”

“Let them! I still want them!” insisted the boy.

But the father would not relent. “I’m saying this because I know what is good for you, son.”

Spotting a fruit shop nearby, the father advised his wailing son, “Look son, there are red juicy apples in that shop. I’ll get you a couple of fresh apples. They are good for your teeth and your health.”

“I don’t want apples, I want sweets!” stamped the boy indignantly.

Nevertheless, the father went to the fruit shop and bought a red juicy apple for his son. He held the apple before the boy and said, "This is better than the sweets."

The boy was annoyed. He grabbed the apple and threw it furiously at his dad. He then gazed at the sweets he knew he would never get and kept crying.

Zeke laughed, "What a naughty little kid! Why can't he just take the apple and eat it in piece....I mean peace?"



"He reminds me of you!" giggled Zorah.

"That father does love his child, doesn't he?" Jesus asked the children. They all agreed.

Jesus continued, "But the child doesn't see it that way, does he? The father knows that if he buys the child sweets, he will be happy and love him for the instant

gratification- but in the long run, it would prove harmful for the child. Unfortunately, the child doesn't understand that.

The father knows that an apple on the other hand would benefit the child, though at the moment it may not taste that good. The dad gives what he knows is best for his child, but the child is not willing to accept, because what his father gives him is not what he ‘wants,’ Jesus pointed out. “But the father knows this is what his child ‘needs.’”

“That is how sometimes it is between us and God, isn’t it?” Dan spoke. “When I ask for something and I don’t get it, I have this feeling that God doesn’t love me or hears my prayers.”

“We keep gazing on at sweets we are not going to get that we don’t see the apples God is holding out in front of us,” Zorah reflected.

“And sometimes even if we see it, we get so angry that we throw it away,” Zeke added.

“And we are left without sweets and apples....what a pity!” Ivan sighed in dismay.

“Then what exactly does ‘Ask and you shall receive’ mean if we don’t always get what we ask for?” asked Zorah, quite confused.

Jesus enlightened them. “God hears whatever you ask Him for, but He often gives it only if it is good for you and according to His plan for you. And remember

always, if He ever denies what you ask for, there is something else He will offer instead...but you have to keep your eyes and hearts open to see it and receive it. Fathers always want to give the best to their children. What the child sees as a bar of tantalizing sweet chocolate is something that could harm his teeth and health if he has too much of it...and so the father offers something better, an apple that is good for his teeth and health. If a child asks for what he sees as an egg but is actually a scorpion that stings, will the father give it? If a child asks for what he sees as a fish but is, in reality, a venomous snake, will the father let him near it no matter how much he yells for it?"

Jesus looked into the wide eyes of the children. "All fathers want to give the best gift they can afford for their children. Our Father in Heaven too has a 'best gift' that He wants to give us. He wants us to ask for it more than anything else, seek for it more than anything else, and knock at His door for it more than anything else. But to receive it, to find it, and to have it opened before us, we must want it with all our hearts for only then will we use this precious gift wisely. Do you know what this 'gift' is?"

"What?" asked all the kids in one voice.

"The Holy Spirit! Ask and you will receive Him, Seek and you will find Him, Knock and He will open your mind to an amazing world of the Kingdom of Heaven. Nothing could make you happier and your life more exciting."

“I want that gift!” Ivan declared.

“Me too!” Zeke announced.

“Me three!” Zorah put in.

“Me four!” Dan smiled.

“We will all ask for the gift of the Holy Spirit together,” Jesus said. All the children closed their eyes and folded their hands in prayer.

Jesus taught them a prayer which they repeated after him.

“Heavenly Father, we open wide the door of our hearts to you. Send down your Holy Spirit and fill our hearts with Your power and love. We admit that our hearts are not holy and we have our faults and weaknesses, but that is why Lord we need You all the more. We admit our sinfulness and surrender to You our desire to be new in You. Come Spirit ...Come!”

Jesus sang this song,

“Spirit come as the **Breath of Life**

O Holy Spirit come as the **Flame of Love**

Spirit come as the **Dove of Peace**

O Holy Spirit come as **Water of Grace.”**

The children listened and sang along with Jesus.

And they could feel...the Breath, the Love, the Peace, and the Grace flow into their little souls.

Chapter 4

TALENTS

“I tell you, to those who have something, even more will be given, but those who have nothing, even the little that they have will be taken away from them,” Jesus said.

“But Jesus, is that fair?” Zeke asked. “You mean, the rich get to be richer and the poor more poor?”

Jesus shook his head. “That is not what I meant, Zeke. Listen closely. In this story, the man called his three servants and gave each of them a gold coin. He directed, ‘See what you can earn with this while I am gone.’ One of them put the coin to good use and made it ten. Another also worked and made it five. But the lazy one buried the coin and gave lame excuses for his laziness.

When the man came back and asked his servants what each had done with the coins, two of them showed how they had put the coins to use wisely and had made more shining coins. But the one who buried the coin gave back the same coin, now dusty and dull. The man got angry and gave that coin to the one who had ten because he knew that servant would use it wisely. Though I have used ‘coins’ in this story, they don’t actually refer to money but to precious talents that God has blessed each of you with. When you put your talents to work, you improve them, just as the coins multiplied. But if you don’t put your talents to work, they will rust away. So the

one who works hard in improving his talents will be blessed by God and produce more results, whereas the one who doesn't work hard will lose the talents he had for they will rust away. Then God, who had reserved blessings for him will no longer be able to give it to him and so will instead give it to the one who works harder. Fair enough? ”

Zeke nodded, “Now I understand.”

Jesus said, “God has gifted each of you with such ‘coins’. Discover them, develop them and use them for the glory of God and the good of humanity. The harder you work, the more you will be blessed. But if you let it all lazily rust.....you know the rest!”

DON'T BURY YOUR TALENTS



DISCOVER THEM AND DEVELOP THEM FOR
YOUR GOOD AND GOD'S GLORY

Chapter 5

MARY REMEMBERS

“And then what happened?” Dan asked eagerly as he held Mary’s hands.

Ivan, Dan, Zeke, and Zorah were all seated around the Blessed Virgin in the green meadow and she was telling them the story of how it all began...

Mary continued, “So Zachariah went inside the temple to make the ritual offering. As he was praying there, an angel appeared to him. He revealed himself to be Archangel Gabriel, one of the seven spirits who stands before the throne of God. Zachariah was afraid, but the angel calmed him and said that he brings him good news. God was going to bless Zachariah with a child whom he should name ‘John’. The child would grow up to be a great prophet of God. Though Zachariah had always wanted to be a father, and he and his wife Elizabeth had spent years pleading with God to give them a child, Zachariah could not believe it when the angel informed him of this. He refused to accept the message for he was an old man now and he considered it impossible to have a child at this age. The angel affirmed that the message was true, but because Zechariah had not believed, he would remain unable to speak till the child was born.”

“Was it a curse?” asked Dan.

Mary responded, “It was to reveal to Zachariah and all the people that this child was no ordinary one. The people outside were wondering why Zachariah was taking too long. Finally, when he did come out, he seemed scared and unable to speak and was communicating in signs. People realized that he had seen a vision of an angel that had shocked him. They couldn’t understand anything else. Zechariah went back home. Sometime later, as the angel had predicted, Elizabeth became pregnant. Zachariah spent the rest of the days in deep prayer. It was for this purpose too that God had made Zachariah unable to speak. In the deep silence of prayer, he was molding his son spiritually even as the baby was being formed physically in the womb of his wife. This child was ‘the chosen one’ who would pave the way for the Messiah.”

“John the Baptist!” Zorah smiled.

Mary nodded. “I still remember the day little John was born,” she reminisced.

“You were there?” Dan asked.

Mary smiled. “Yes, I was there. I was the first one who carried him and kissed him welcome into this world. And as I did so, the babe in my womb leaped in joy.”

“Jesus!” Dan exclaimed.

“Looks like Jesus was all excited to come out too,” Zorah smiled.

Mary smiled, “Maybe he was.”

“Or maybe he was jealous that John was getting his mom’s kiss!” joked Zeke.

“When was Jesus born then?” enquired Ivan.

“Six months later,” Mary said “...in Bethlehem.”

Mary continued the story. “The day little John was born, Elizabeth was asked if the child should be named after his father. She said no, he should be named ‘John’. Not everyone was pleased with that name so they went and asked Zechariah. In response, Zechariah wrote the name ‘John’ and the moment he did so, he was able to speak again and out from his heart came a beautiful canticle in praise of God.”

“What a climax!” Zeke smiled. “The moment the angel’s prophecy was fulfilled and Zachariah put the name ‘John’ for his son....his voice returned!”

“That’s God! Just amazing!” Zorah smiled.

“That day, everyone was convinced that there was something extraordinary about the boy that was born,” Mary explained.

“How was Jesus born?” asked Ivan eagerly.

Mary smiled as her mind raced back to the night the same angel came to her with good news for her. “One night as I was in my room, the Archangel Gabriel appeared and told me that God had blessed me to bear His Son into the world. He said the child should be

named ‘Immanuel’ meaning ‘God with us’. I was frightened at first and asked how it could be possible as I had never known a man.”

“You didn’t believe him?” Dan asked.

Mary shook her head, “I couldn’t at first.”

“Then did the angel make you unable to speak as he did Zachariah?” Zeke inquired.

Mary smiled. “No, he didn’t do that. Perhaps he thought I was just a silly girl and forgave me.”

A man’s voice from behind spoke. “Never before had a virgin ever conceived a child in her womb. And so to be surprised at that news was understandable. But in the case of Zachariah, he had, for example, Abraham who became the father of a boy when he was over a hundred years old. Zachariah claimed himself to be a true Jew of the priestly tribe of Aaron, upholding the faith of Abraham, the Father of the Jews, and yet he failed to live up to the faith Abraham showed when he was confronted with the same news...fatherhood at an impossible age.” Jesus sat beside his mother and looked at her affectionately.

He put his arm around Mary and spoke to the children. “Just like Abraham who had faith in the God of the impossible surrendered to His will, so did my mother surrender herself to the impossible news that the angel had for her because she knew it was the will of

God. In fact, her surrender cost her more, for she placed herself at great risk.”



“Why is Abraham called the ‘Father of faith?’” enquired Zeke curiously.

Jesus explained, “Because he believed God’s word when God told him he would give rise to generations, though he was old and childless at that moment. And later, on God’s command, he was willing to sacrifice his only son on Mt.Morai as an offering, though it broke his heart. Abraham always obeyed the will of God from his heart no matter what hardships he had to endure, for he loved God and believed that God loved him too.”

“Then we can call Mary, ‘Mother of faith’, can’t we?” Zorah said as she rested her head on Mary’s shoulder with love.

Jesus faintly smiled. “She is so. For like Abraham, she believed and surrendered to God’s will. Like Abraham, she will give rise to generations, and like Abraham, she too will offer the sacrifice on the hill....” Jesus’ voice slowly faded. Mary’s eyes glistened with tears.

Chapter 6

THE FRAGRANCE

“Kaim is here to meet you, Jesus,” spoke the disciple Bartholomew.

Jesus nodded, “Let him in.”

Kaim entered into the small room where Jesus sat with James, John, Peter, Judas Iscariot, and the child disciples Ivan and Dan.

“Yes Kaim, what can I do for you?” Jesus asked with a friendly smile.

Kaim knelt before Jesus and placed a small parcel in front of him. “This is my gift for you, Jesus.”

Kaim opened the parcel and revealed a shining diamond.

Jesus looked at him. He could see Kaim was a good man.

“You are kind, Kaim. But I would be happier if you sold it and offered the money to the poor,” Jesus replied.

“If that is so, then I will do as you say....but I do it in honor of you.” Kaim took back the diamond, bowed in reverence before Jesus, and left the room.

“Wow! What a dazzling diamond!” Dan exclaimed.

“That’s the first time I’m seeing one,” Ivan said.

“We could have made use of it,” Judas Iscariot commented. “We are running short of money.”

“We have what we need for now,” Peter spoke.

“And God will provide what we need along the way,” John added.

That evening, Jesus and his disciples, accompanied by Dan and Ivan, were heading towards the home of Simon the Pharisee, where they had been invited for dinner.

“I’m not very fond of Simon. He thinks too highly of himself,” Mathew frankly admitted to Jesus as they walked to Simon’s home.

Thomas added, “The way he walks and talks is as though he rules the world. And he proclaims himself to be righteous and perfect!”

“What I dislike most about him is the way he looks at the ‘imperfect’ ones with contempt,” said John

“I really don’t feel we are invited because he likes us. He knows that Jesus is becoming famous and wants to show off in front of his guests. Jesus, I think we should be prepared for unpleasant comments,” presumed Bartholomew.

Jesus smiled, “We’ll take it as it comes.”

Simon’s house was filled with rich guests who were curious to see and hear Jesus- the Great Preacher and Healer, the one whom all of Israel was talking about.

Jesus and his disciples were seated at the table. All eyes rested on them, critically examining them.

While they were dining, a beautiful young lady, clad in a red robe, with her long black hair left loose, entered, holding a jar of perfume. The people were not very pleased to see her and murmured to each other. “Isn’t that Magdalene? What is she doing here?”

“She is not a decent lady. Why is she coming here?” whispered a lady to another.

The lady knew that she was not a welcome guest there, but she had her reasons for being there and she was not going back till she did what she came for. Not saying a single word, she went towards Jesus, opened the perfume jar, and poured it on his feet.

The people were astounded. The fragrance of the perfume filled the room and it was obvious that it was a very expensive perfume.

Jesus didn’t say a word. He just let her do what she wanted to.

In her heart, she spoke, “Jesus, for years I have been using this perfume to attract people towards me. I have wanted to get people’s attention and the fragrance of this perfume helped me do it. But now, your words have changed me. I have heard you preach and I understand that I should change my ways. I now have made the decision never more to put this perfume on me. Instead, I pour this on your feet, for from now on, I desire to tell

others about you and bring them to you. I desire to attract people towards you and your Word, no longer towards me. This is what I desire to say by this act of mine and I believe even if I speak no words, your heart understands what I want to say.”

Simon whispered to the Pharisee next to him, “That Jesus is no prophet as people think he is, or else he would have sensed the sin in that woman the moment she touched him!”

Jesus understood the thoughts going through the minds of Simon and the other people there. Jesus countered them casually with a story, “There was a man who had two debtors: one owed him 500 denarii and the other 50 denarii. Both of them were unable to pay him back. He had pity on them both and canceled their debts. Now, which of them will love him more?”

“I suppose the one who had a greater debt will love him more,” Simon reasoned.

Jesus nodded, “You said it right. Some people think they are almost perfect and hardly indebted to anyone, even to God. To them, God’s forgiveness doesn’t mean much because they don’t feel they are in need of it. As for those who are aware of the sin in them and fall at the feet of God, words of forgiveness can be life-transforming. When I came here Simon, you gave no water for my feet, but she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time she came, she has been kissing my

feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. She has remained at my feet from the moment she came here. You saw her tears fall, didn't you? And yet those tears didn't move you? You never tried to understand the pain and shame behind those tears. Instead, you kept condemning her. Your prejudice has hardened your heart."

Lifting Magdalene from his feet Jesus kindly spoke, "Your sins are forgiven. Your faith has saved you. Go in peace."

Magdalene bowed gratefully before Jesus and walked away, wiping her tears.

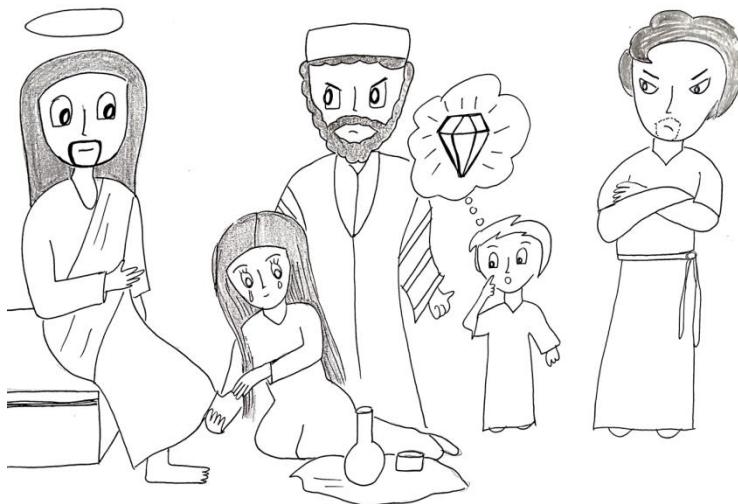
Turning to the others, Jesus spoke sternly, "The great debt of sin is there in each of you. Just because you don't care to see it or try to hide, it doesn't mean it isn't there. He who delves deep into himself to take an honest look at himself will see what he really is. And when he sees the gravity of sin in him, without despairing, let him bring it to the feet of God for he will be forgiven. That experience of forgiveness will be life-transforming, for there, 'Love' meets love."

As Magdalene was leaving, at the door she crossed Judas who commented aloud, "Could have sold that exquisite perfume for three hundred denarii and used the money for the poor. Women have no prudence." Judas said that not because he felt for the poor so much, but because he wanted to sound like one with a 'big' heart

and belittle the lady. He thought Jesus would be of the same opinion too.

The woman looked at him, quite offended.

Jesus immediately intervened, “Judas, what she has done has pleased God the Father. Do not judge for you do not see the intentions of her heart as she did this act. I see it and I acknowledge it. What she has done today will be done again on the day of my burial and will be spoken of by future generations. The poor you have with you always...I will not be always here.”



Magdalene faintly smiled and left. She was happy for she realized Jesus had understood her heart, but what did he mean when he said ‘What she has done today will be done again on the day of my burial?’ She didn’t understand that.

Months later, as she would walk to the tomb where Jesus lay buried, holding the spices and perfumes she had brought to anoint his body with, it would dawn on her that this was the day Jesus had spoken of...

As they left the Pharisee's house, Ivan tugged at Jesus' robe. Jesus looked kindly at him, "Yes, Ivan?"

"Jesus, when Kaim brought you the expensive diamond, you told him you would be happier if he sold it and gave the money to the poor, but when that lady brought the expensive perfume to anoint your feet, how come you didn't tell her the same words you told Kaim?"

Jesus explained, "Because I see the heart. Kaim gave the diamond just as an offering. But when the lady offered the perfume, her heart had more to say...."

Chapter 7

THE BLIND MAN

One fine afternoon, Jesus and his disciples were strolling around the temple when they noticed a shabby young man, sitting on the steps and leaning against the wall with his hands held out for alms. He had a stick beside him, indicating he was blind.

Peter felt sorry for him. “Why was this man born blind, Jesus? Was it because of his sins or the sins of his parents?”

Jesus looked at the lonely man and felt compassion for him. Moving towards the blind man, Jesus said, “It is neither because of his sins nor the sins of his parents. It is for God’s glory to be manifest in him. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” Jesus sat beside the man. The blind man couldn’t see him, but he could sense that someone was near him. He held out his hand to Jesus for alms.

James nudged John, “Jesus is going to heal him.”

But to the surprise of them all, Jesus did something really strange. He spat on the ground, took some mud, and rubbed it on the man’s eyes. “Go wash your eyes in the waters of Siloam!” he directed the blind man.

Jesus then got up and walked away with his disciples. As they were walking, James expressed his

confusion.“Jesus what did you just do? I thought you were going to heal him!”

Jesus smiled, “He will be healed. Haven’t you heard the Jews say that the saliva of the firstborn has healing powers?”

“But that is not how you’ve healed the other blind men we’ve met so far. Your word has the power to heal. Just one word from you can give sight to the blind,” John proclaimed in faith.

Peter, who had been pondering over what happened, put in his view, “Jesus, is there some reason you didn’t want him to see you?...or know who you are?”

Jesus gazed at Peter and smiled. He nodded.“Yes, that’s it! I don’t want him to see me now. But I will present myself to him when it is time. I will reveal myself to him as who I really am!”

Meanwhile, the poor blind man sat there for a while wondering what to do. Of course, he felt insulted when Jesus rubbed mud on his eyes because he thought Jesus was teasing him. But when Jesus firmly directed him to go to Siloam and wash his eyes, he could feel the power of those words giving him hope as he realized that it was a prophet who was speaking to him.

The blind man felt for his stick and slowly climbed to his feet. “How do I get to Siloam?” he wondered as he felt his way around. Just then, a little boy rushing down

the lane, dashed into him, throwing off his stick and almost pushing him to the ground.

“Oh! Sorry, I didn’t see you,” the boy apologized as he placed the stick back into the blind man’s hand.

“Boy, could you do a favor for this blind man?”

“What do you want me to do for you?” the boy asked willingly.

“Please take me to Siloam,” he requested.

“I can do that for you.” Picking the blind man’s hand, the boy placed it on his shoulder and directed, “Follow me.”

The man smiled, “Thank you. What is your name?”

“Sam, and yours?”

“Jacob,” said the blind man.



Sam marched forward with Jacob following close behind, firmly holding onto Sam's shoulder.

When they reached Siloam, Sam announced, "We are there now!" and cautiously led Jacob into the waters of Siloam.

Jacob washed his eyes hastily and looked around. The pitch darkness that covered his eyes was gradually disappearing in the light that now filled his sight.

Jacob stared around open-mouthed. He was seeing the world for the first time in his life!

"Are you alright?" Sam asked curiously, noticing the weird look on Jacob's face- like as though he just had the shock of his life! Jacob grabbed hold of Sam's shoulders and pressed them tight in excitement, "I can see!" Jacob then raised his hands to Heaven and burst out sobbing, "I can see. Thank you, God!"

"How...how did that happen?" Sam asked, amazed.

Jacob turned to him, "A prophet rubbed my eyes with mud and told me to wash it off in Siloam. It was the prophet!"

"What is his name?" Sam queried.

Jacob shrugged. "I don't know. But we can go back and find out. I'd like to thank him. Sam, could you take me back to where you met me?"

“Sure I can, but first...” taking Jacob’s stick, Sam threw it far into the waters of Siloam. “Let’s go!” he smiled.

On reaching the spot where Jacob had been begging, they enquired who the prophet was and where he could be found. But all they could learn was that the prophet’s name was ‘Jesus’. They were unable to gather any clue to his whereabouts.

Jacob was dismayed. He so badly wanted to thank Jesus.

Sam consoled him, “Don’t worry! You’ll get to meet him again...somewhere. Where do you live, Jacob? You want me to help you get home?”

Jacob and Sam went to where Jacob’s parents lived. Looking around, Jacob smiled and greeted the people of his village. He didn’t know who they were, but he was just so happy to see people. Everyone was astonished to see Jacob without his stick and taking strides so fast and confidently like he could see.....of course, he could see!

“Hey that man looks just like Jacob!” exclaimed a man to his companion. The companion peered curiously and gasped in disbelief “It is Jacob!”

“But it can’t be...that man can see.”

“It is me...Jacob. God has opened my eyes, now I can see,” Jacob informed all the people who stared at him in surprise.

People crowded around him all amazed and poor Jacob had to repeat his story many times. When he got tired of talking, Sam helped him do the story-telling in a melodramatic, animated way. Sam was only happy to get a lot of attention.

But the response of the crowd was mixed. Some were happy that Jacob could see again, whereas some considered it a crime to do a healing on Sabbath.

“That so called ‘prophet’ obviously cannot be a man of God for he broke the Sabbath today!” argued a rigid tall old man.

“A Jew should not work on Sabbath. It is forbidden by God!” supported another man.

“But only God can heal. God had mercy on poor Jacob! Praise be to God!” rejoiced a lady.

The Pharisees were not very pleased. They knew Jesus and were jealous of the popularity Jesus was attaining through the healings and miracles he was doing. For long they had been trying to get some reason to bring him to court.

“Let’s make Jacob testify against Jesus. We can get him jailed for breaking the Sabbath,” suggested a Pharisee to the Chief Priest, rubbing his chin with a menacing grin.

But Jacob refused. “I will never speak against the man who helped me.”

“Who do you say that man is?” scorned a Pharisee.
“Who is he to you for you to show such loyalty to him?”

Jacob boldly professed, “He is a prophet of God!”

Realizing Jacob could not be influenced, they called for Jacob’s parents.

“Was your son really born blind or is all this just an act?” demanded a Pharisee.

“Tell us where the man who healed him is. You know who he is and where he is. If you lie, you will be punished!” threatened another Pharisee.

“Your son will be tried in court for accepting the healing on Sabbath. Being his parents, you both too will be jailed with your son,” warned another.

Jacob’s parents were frightened by the threats and warnings. They tried to persuade Jacob to speak against Jesus, but he would not relent. Angered by his stubbornness, his parents told the Pharisees, “Jacob is our son and we know he was born blind. But how he got healed and who healed him, we do not know. He is old enough, you can ask him! We have nothing to do with this. Let him bear the consequences of his decision.”

Jacob was heartbroken. His family had abandoned him. How happy he had been when he was healed of his blindness! He had thought that when he would come home, his family and village would rejoice with him and celebrate. But instead of a joyous celebration, here was a noisy argument.

Jacob thought, “Giving in to their demands seems to be the easy way out of this mess. I can easily testify against Jesus and make everyone happy. I can stay with my family, in my village. The Pharisees will exalt me in the synagogue. It’s an easier choice....but.....” Jacob shook his head firmly and stated, “I will not do it.”

“The man who healed you is a sinner. He broke the Sabbath and disobeyed God,” accused a Pharisee.

Jacob responded, “I do not know if he is a sinner or not. All I know is that for years I was blind and now I can see. He made me see. I cannot deny it. I cannot deny the power of God I experienced in him.”

“What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” a stern Pharisee questioned.

“I have told you that many times already. Why do you want to keep hearing it? Do you want to be his disciples too?” Jacob answered back.

This angered the Pharisee. “You might be his disciple, not us. We are disciples of Moses!” he retorted. “We know that God has spoken to Moses, but this man is not from God. We don’t know where he comes from!”

Jacob spoke, “We know that God does not listen to sinners, but to those who worship Him and obey His will. Never have we heard of anyone opening the eyes of a man born blind. God alone has that power. And if Jesus did it, it proves he comes from God.”

The Pharisees were angered and scolded Jacob, “You are a born blind sinner and you are trying to teach us?”

“Expel him from the synagogue!” ordered the Chief Pharisee.

Jacob was thrown out of the Jewish community. As he stood outside the synagogue, he hung his head low, tears streaming down his cheeks.

Sam approached him, feeling all sorry for poor Jacob. “You were brave, Jacob!” he said softly not knowing how to console him.

Jacob slowly lifted his head and walked away.

“Where are you going?” Sam asked him.

“I don’t know,” Jacob replied and walked on.

Sam followed him from a distance.

Jacob went back to the corner where he had sat begging for years. He sat there again, leaned against the temple wall, and looked around at the people busily walking about.

His mind raced through the happenings of the day. What began as an ordinary day... the joy of healing...the sorrow of losing....

Sam watched him for a while and walked away sadly down the busy path near the market.

“Sammy!” called out an old stout man from his fruit stall. Sam turned to him.

The old man spoke, “Boy, do me a favor. My wife is in the crowd gathered near the riverside. Tell her that I’ll be going to my brother’s house after closing the shop. I’ll be home late.”

Sam nodded and headed for the riverside where a crowd of people had assembled. The ladies were leaving after the preaching there. Sam caught sight of the old man’s wife. “Your husband says he’ll be home late as he has to go to his brother’s house,” Sam informed.

“Yes, thank you, Sam. You should have come to hear the preacher. He speaks powerfully and does wonders. He’ll be here tomorrow too. Do come, Sammy,” invited the lady.

“What is his name?” Sam asked curiously.

“Jesus of Nazareth!” she answered.

Sam’s face lit up at the mention of that name. “Thank you,” Sam said and instantly dashed through, pushing past the crowd streaming out.

“Where is the prophet Jesus?” he inquired.

“Those are his disciples, ask them,” pointed a lady to a group of men near the boat. Sam nervously approached the men who seemed to be in a serious conversation.

“Where is the prophet Jesus?” Sam demanded.

The men abruptly stopped talking and looked at the boy.

“I need to see Jesus, it's urgent,” Sam said, trying to sound serious.

“What's so urgent kid?” John asked, quite amused at the boy's insistence.

“My friend Jacob has been expelled from the synagogue because of him,” Sam informed.

The disciples looked at each other curiously. “Whom is he talking about?” John asked the other disciples.

“It could be that blind man whom Jesus healed today morning. I heard the people talk about him,” said James.

“But why was he expelled?” wondered John for he hadn't yet heard of it.

“The Pharisees were trying to use him to testify against Jesus for healing on the Sabbath. He refused to oblige,” explained James.

John turned to Sammy “Do you know where he is now?”

“When they threw him out, he went back to the place where he had sat begging. He might still be there...” said Sam.

“I will go meet him,” a deeply concerned voice sounded from behind. It was Jesus.

Jacob was still there, in the same place where he had been for the past many years. He sat still with a distant, lost look and hardly noticed Jesus come near him and

stand quietly beside him, observing him with compassion for a while.

“I heard that you have been expelled,” Jesus finally spoke.

Shaken from his thoughts, Jacob looked up.

“Are you searching for someone?” Jesus asked him.

Jacob shook his head, “No.” and bent down again, drowning in his sorrowful thoughts.

Sitting next to him and placing his arm around Jacob, Jesus asked, “Do you believe in the Son of God?”

Instantly it dawned on Jacob. He recognized the presence, the touch and the voice. He looked at Jesus’ face in amazement, “You are the one....Jesus...it is you, isn’t it?”

Jesus repeated, “Do you believe in the Son of God?”

Jacob hesitated for a while and then said with a sigh, “Of course I do. Every Jew does. It is He whom we are waiting for, His reign we are yearning for...but now I don’t deserve to see Him for I am expelled. You are a prophet. Could you tell me more about Him so I could ...know Him?” Jacob eagerly gazed into Jesus’ eyes.

Jesus said, “You have already seen him. It is he who is talking to you.”

Jacob was astonished and his eyes welled with tears. “I believe...it is you.”

Jesus smiled, “To the Jews you are now labeled as ‘expelled’, but God still marks you as a true Jew and that is why you have been blessed to see the Messiah with your eyes...a vision every Jew prays and yearns for. Though I could have healed you with a word and let you see me earlier, I didn’t want to do it that way. So, I rubbed mud on your eyes and asked you to wash it away at Siloam. I didn’t want you to see me then. It is when you’ve proved your loyalty to me that I wanted to come before you and reveal to you who I really am. I’m proud of you, Jacob!”

Jesus gave Jacob a friendly pat and then stood up as though to leave. Jacob rose after him, “Jesus...would you let me come with you?”

Jesus smiled and beckoned him, saying, “Come.”

Jacob was overjoyed. Jesus embraced him.



Catching sight of Sam who was eagerly watching them from a distance, Jesus called out to him, “Are you coming with us, Sam?”

Sam smiled and ran towards them both. “Me too,” he said.

As the three walked down the street, everyone stared curiously. The Pharisees glared at them sarcastically. Jesus spoke loud for them to hear, “Today, the blind was given sight but those who claim to see, have lost their sight for they have no insight. Sabbath was made for man, not man for Sabbath!”

Jesus glanced meaningfully at the Pharisees and walked away happily with his two new teammates.

Chapter 8

BESIDE BETHSAIDA

“This is believed to be a magical pool,” explained Sam to Zeke and Dan.

“Why do they call it magical?” Dan asked curiously.

“There is an angel who hovers around it occasionally. When the angel stirs up the waters with its silver wings, the magic flows into the waters and whoever dips in the pool at that moment is healed of whatever illness he has,” explained Sam.

“Does it really work? Have you seen the angel?” Zeke wondered.

“Nobody has seen the angel. But you can see the waters being stirred up by some mysterious supernatural force. The ripples flow and....” Sam whispered as though revealing a big secret.

“It might be just the wind!” Zeke pondered, stroking his chin as he tilted his head to the side, contemplating the possibility.

“Of course not, silly! It is an angel with magical powers,” Sam insisted. “That is what we all believe.”

“But has anyone who dipped in the pool ever got healed?” Dan inquired.

Sam shrugged, “I don’t know. The timing has to be right. You should take a dip the same instant the angel

stirs the waters with his magical wings, or else the magic flows away.”

“I don’t believe in it,” Dan said.

“Me neither,” Zeke admitted.

“But look at all these sick people here near the pool. They are here because they believe in it. You don’t expect them all to be crazy do you?” Sam asked the two boys.

“But why are they not healed yet?” Zeke asked.

“The angel doesn’t come very often. And as I said, the timing has to be right too,” explained Sam.

A weak voice from nearby spoke, “I’ve been here for thirty-eight long years, waiting for that moment.”

The three children turned to where the voice came from. It was a frail paralyzed man lying on a mat.

“38 years?” Dan wondered out loud.

The man nodded. The children felt sorry for him.

Just then, Jesus and his disciples came to the pool.

“Why did you kids run away without telling us?” John spoke to the little ones. “I’ve told you many times to inform us and go. You are children, you need to be careful!”

“We were just curious to know about this pool. Sam was explaining it to us,” Zeke said.

“Jesus, look at this man,” Dan pointed to the paralyzed man lying nearby. “He has been here for 38 years!”

Jesus turned to the man and had pity on him. Kneeling beside him, Jesus asked, “Do you want to be healed?”

The man shook his head, “There is no use wanting. Whenever the angel stirs the water, there is nobody to help me into the pool so I can be healed.”

Jesus asked the same question again, “Do you want to be healed?”

The man looked up at Jesus. “Yes I do, of course, I do. But I just don’t know how to get to the pool in time!” he repeated.

Jesus sighed, held him by the hand, and encouraged him, “Try to stand up. You can do it. Get up, pick your mat and walk.”

The man pleaded, “Don’t make fun of me. You know I will fall.”

“Not when I am holding you,” Jesus assured. “Come on now, stand up. I will help you...but it will work only if you trust me and co-operate.”

The man gazed into Jesus' eyes and perceived a sincerity emanating from them. Yielding to Jesus' directive, he clutched Jesus' hand tightly and endeavored to rise. Gradually and steadily, with Jesus' assistance, he

succeeded in standing up on his feet for the first time in 38 years!

Everyone was amazed at the miracle. The man fell at Jesus' feet and thanked him.

"Do not tell about this to anyone," Jesus warned him.
"I do not want to draw the attention of the crowds."

The man promised, "If that is how you want it, then I shall not reveal your name to anyone."

But no sooner had he started walking with his mat, the man began to attract a lot of attention - for people immediately recognized him as the paralyzed man by the pool. People crowded around him to hear about the miraculous healing. Ecstatic about all the attention he was suddenly receiving after years of abandonment, the man began to talk and exaggerate about his miraculous healing. The people listened with interest and wonder.

But the synagogue officials were not pleased because it was the Sabbath, and healings were not permitted on that day. They accused him, saying, "It is the Sabbath, and according to our Law, you are not allowed to carry your mat."

The man got scared and put the blame on Jesus. "The man who made me well told me to pick up my mat and walk."

"Who was that man?" they demanded.

"I don't know his name," he replied.

“Was it the prophet Jesus?” asked one of them.

The man shrugged, “I don’t know.”

“Silly fool,” they chided him and left.

The man felt humiliated and angry.

Later, as Jesus passed through, he saw the man again and told him, "Listen, you are well now, so stop sinning or something worse may happen to you." Jesus then walked away.

The man asked an old man next to him, "What is the name of that prophet?"

The old man answered, "Jesus of Nazareth. He is more than just a prophet. He could be the Messiah himself!"

The man returned to the officials and informed them, "I have found the name of the man who healed me... Jesus of Nazareth. And he instructed me not to tell anyone about it."

"I presumed so," spoke one of the officials.

"Good!" a Pharisee rubbed his hands in glee. "We couldn't use Jacob as a bait to get hold of Jesus, but this man could be of help."

The official looked at the man and said, "He told you not to tell anyone? Then you must tell...tell everyone what he did on Sabbath, breaking the Sabbath law!"

The man nodded, and the officials appreciated his compliance. He felt happy to be appreciated by

important men like the synagogue officials. Until now, he had been just a wretched being, lying on a mat by the pool, ignored by everyone. Now, he was wanted and valued by the respectable people of society. He wanted to savor that feeling, even if it meant he would have to speak against the One who had given him this new lease of life... How ungrateful some people can be to those who bestowed kindness and mercy upon them!



Chapter 8

THE CRAZY PIGS!

One evening, Jesus and his disciples arrived on the other side of Lake Galilee, in the territory of Gerasa. As soon as Jesus got out of the boat, he was met by a man who came out of the burial caves there. This man had an evil spirit in him and lived among the tombs. Nobody could keep him tied with chains because he would somehow always smash and break them. He was too strong for anyone to control him. Day and night he wandered among the tombs and through the hills, screaming and cutting himself with stones. He was some distance away when he saw Jesus. The evil power in the man recognized Jesus, and fearing he would be exorcised, was about to make the man flee. However, Jesus commanded, “Evil spirit, come out of this man!”

The man struggled, but could not overcome the power of Jesus’ command. He fell on his knees before Jesus and screamed, “Jesus, Son of the Most High God! What do you want with me? Don’t punish me!”

Jesus asked, “What is your name?”

The man answered, “Legion, for there are many of us evil spirits in this man. Don’t order us to leave this man. We want to destroy him!”

Jesus glared at the evil spirits in the man. “I will order you to come out of him. You will not destroy him. I am the Savior and Redeemer of mankind.”

The evil spirits realized they would have to obey. They said, “Look, there is a herd of pigs feeding on a hillside nearby. Order us out of this man, but permit us to enter into those pigs so we can destroy them. We need to destroy something!”

Jesus sighed, “Alright. Go...”

The evil spirits left the man and entered the pigs. The whole herd, about two thousand pigs in all, rushed down the side of the cliff, into the lake, and drowned.

The men who had been tending to the pigs were shocked as the once calm animals suddenly became frantic and furious, rushing into the river and drowning themselves in it. They looked at each other, “What just happened?”

A few men who had heard what Jesus said to the demon-possessed man and witnessed what happened to the pigs soon after, rushed to the shocked pig caretakers and explained the story to them. By then, the river waters carrying the carcasses of the pigs were flowing through the town, and everyone watched the spectacle in disgust and horror.

“It’s Jesus, the prophet. He has power over evil spirits. He ordered them to come out of Abia and enter into the pigs and look what happened!” the men exclaimed.

The pig caretakers complained, “But why did he let them into our pigs? Couldn’t he have just ordered the evil spirits to go away? Why did he have to let our pigs die?”

The men spread the news in the town and among the farms. People became perturbed. “What if he causes more destruction? What if he casts out demons from people and lets them into our animals and plants? Our flocks and fields will get destroyed. We will lose all we have and become poor.”

“Let us ask this prophet to leave from here. Let him go do his miracles elsewhere,” said a man.

Another man asked, “What about Abia? Where is he now? Did the demons really go away from him? Is he normal now?”

The pig caretakers shrugged. “We don’t know. We didn’t see him. Our pigs were out of control and we were helplessly trying to gather them.”

One man who had witnessed the exorcism informed, “Yes, Abia is sane now. He remembers who he is. The

prophet's disciples brought clean clothes for him, which he wore after a wash in the river.”

A man spoke, “This prophet is like no other. He is a good man, and that is why the evil spirits are afraid of him. Just imagine the good that his presence can bring to our place. He could rid all evil powers from our homes and our towns. When we think of it that way, isn't his being in our town a big blessing?”

“You take that blessing. We don't want it if it costs us our hard-earned fortunes,” retorted another man.

“Let's go meet this Jesus prophet and tell him what we feel he should do,” said one of them.

The men then went to where Jesus was. Beside Jesus sat Abia, the man who had once been possessed by demons. Now, he looked so different. He looked more human, with clean clothes, neatly combed hair, a bright smile, and shining eyes. People gasped in amazement. One townsman stated, “Just this morning I had seen him scramble around in insanity and now look how he sits there, so calm and sane! This is a miracle!” The sight moved some, but others were unmoved and continued pursuing their plan.

“So, you are the prophet Jesus who caused us all this trouble by allowing the pigs to drown in the river,” stated a man.

Jesus sensed the men were disturbed and talked calmly with them. “When a human fails to bond with God through a life of prayer and piety, demons will bond with him and bind him in chains. It’s for you to visualize the magnitude of destruction these demons can cause that I permitted them to enter the pigs. Your eyes have seen and your ears have heard. This should move you to lead holy lives.”

“We can’t afford to lose our property. If you stay on, you will do more such things and make us lose money,” spoke a man in the group.

Jesus gazed at him and responded, “Are those pigs of more value to you than this human? Isn’t he your neighbor? He belongs to this town!”

Abia spoke, “Dear friends, for years I had been leading a life of sin and let many demons take control of me by doing evil things. You yourself have witnessed what state I ended up in. But here, this man of God has healed me by his word of power. What a blessing! Many in our town need this blessing. God speaks and touches through this prophet. Let many more in our town be healed by him.”

“Of course not! We can’t afford to have him here,” a man spoke.

“Not even if he can spread peace and goodness?” Abia asked.

“No, because we will suffer a loss of money if he stays,” said another man.

Abia was about to counter the man’s view when Jesus placed his arm on Abia’s shoulder and spoke, “If they don’t want me to stay, I should go.”

Abia turned to Jesus, feeling dismayed. Jesus looked at him kindly and smiled. He then instructed his disciples to prepare the boat for their return journey. Jesus stepped into the boat, and Abia followed, climbing aboard and sitting beside Jesus.

Holding Jesus’ hand, Abia spoke, “Lord, let me come with you. I want to be your disciple. Take me where you are going.”

Jesus glanced into his eyes and sensed the genuine yearning of Abia’s heart. He spoke, “Abia, I accept you as my disciple. And this is the mission I give you.” Placing his hand on Abia’s shoulder, Jesus stated, “Go back to your family, back to your town, and tell them how kind God has been to you. I came here intending to spread God’s goodness in this town, but the people have asked me to leave. I leave from here with my mission unaccomplished. However, the people will let you stay here, because you belong here. I wish you accomplish the mission for me by doing here what I was unable to do.”

Abia gazed into Jesus' eyes and the sparkle he saw in them gave him strength for what Jesus was asking him to do. He felt his life had a new purpose from now on. Abia nodded and stepped out of the boat. As the disciples rowed the boat away into the vast waters, Jesus waved at Abia and he waved back.

Abia spent the rest of his days traveling through the Ten Towns, telling what Jesus had done for him. And all who heard it were amazed.



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