

THE EVIDENCE FROM THE TRIAL OF THE NAZARENE



ITS CURIOUS HISTORY

AN HISTORICAL NOVEL
By Gary Gagliardi

Clearbridge Publishing

Work in Progress For Circulation Please Pass On

I am sending this work out because I want to hear from people about what I am doing, from believers and non-believers, those who are very familiar with the Gospels and those who are not at all familiar. I was called to write this, but I have not written fiction before. My experience is in translation. This work grew out of a decade of work translating the Greek of Christ's words. Everything else got added into it to explain what I found in translation.

Please send any feedback to gagliardi.gary@gmail.com.

Christ's Words in this Work

Christ's words in the following work are a rigorous word-by-word translation from the original Greek. To view the research for specific verses, go to christswords.com/evidence-links.

My Background

I have written more than three dozen books on competitive strategy, eleven of which have won book award recognition. Before that, I was in business. My wife and I built an *INC* 500 company. As a hobby, I studied languages, Latin, German, computer languages—which led to starting our software company—French, Spanish, and Japanese. After selling our software company, I studied ancient Chinese, doing the only award-winning English translation of Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*, the basis for my work in strategy.

I attended Catholic schools for 12 years. After high-school, I spent some years studying world religions, reading the major books of most world religions. All my study, especially my interest in science, lead me back to Christianity. My wife and I regularly attend services at a Protestant church. To read more about me, you can go to GaryGagliardi.com. My website translating Christ's words at Christswords.com. My other work is at ScienceOfStrategy.com.



1 .

ARRESTED IN TIBERIAS

I was in the city of Tiberias, Antipas's capital in Galilee, interviewing witnesses. After leaving a witness's house, a couple Roman soldiers asked my name. Since they were Roman, I gave them the name I was known by among the Romans. That was a mistake. They grabbed and bound me. They led me through the streets and tossed me in a local prison. Still bound in my cell, I couldn't think of any reasons that the Romans would want to arrest me. My captors had said nothing. I worried about my wife and daughter, who was barely two years-old. My wife was expecting my home on the evening boat to Capernaum. She would be wondering what had happened to me.

The next morning, I was dragged before a magistrate. We were not in a public building, but in a private courtyard of a house overlooking the Sea of Galilee. The Roman was reclining at his breakfast table. He was dressed in casual clothes, but he wore his medallion of office. A servant leaned on the wall behind him. The two guards dropped me in front of him, untied my wrists, and went to stand by the entry way. I was kneeling before him.

"Quintus Figuli?" He asked, sipping some wine.

I nodded, rubbing my wrists. It was my Roman name.

"Did you know you were a wanted man?" He asked.

I shook my head.

"Pilate, the prefect, accuses you of giving false evidence," he said with a chuckle. "At a Roman trial over six years ago."

"Not false, master," I croaked.

"No?" He said with a smile. His manner was casual. It was unnerving. "I have, of course, heard about your famous Evidence. Would you like some wine? Bread?"

My mouth was so dry that I just nodded, indicating the jug of wine. He motioned that I should take a couch at the table. He signaled his servant who brought a cup and poured some wine into it. It was heavily watered so I drank greedily. When done, I held the cup out for more.

"This is an informal chat, not an official meeting," the magistrate explained. The man spoke more proper Greek than the local version. He had a heavy Roman accent. "Pilate wants you, yes. I have you, but Pilate is no

friend of mine.”

The servant gave me a plate with bread and fruit. I took a bite of bread.

“I started reading your Evidence,” the magistrate continued, almost apologetically. “But reading, especially the local Greek, is so tedious. And Pilate is now saying that your evidence was false. Is it?”

“No, master,” I said around the bread in my mouth.

“Several who heard the man speak disagree,” he continued casually. “They say that the condemned man’s words were taken out of context.”

“I was hired just to record the words,” I said vehemently.

“Again, this is not a trial,” he said, chuckling and leaning forward. “I see it as an opportunity for us both. My job as magistrate is to arrest and hold you, but what happens next? I could send you to Pilate, but, for now, no one knows I have you. I can hold you here quietly as long as you are useful to me. Do you understand?”

“Yes,” I said. “I mean, no. I don’t know how I can be useful to you.”

“Let me put it simply,” he said confidently. “Would you rather be here or on your way to Jerusalem to see Pilate?”

“Here,” I answered.

“As for how you can be useful to me,” he said, “I am new to the area. I need to understand local politics.”

“But I know nothing about politics!” I claimed.

He looked at me and laughed.

“Of course you do!” He said. “You are the most well-known writer here. Your Evidence is everywhere.”

“Not a writer,” I explained. “A recorder. I write down what people say as they say it.”

“But you recorded the right person at the right time, didn’t you?” He observed with a wry smile. He turned to his servant. “Eutyches, the bag?”

The servant brought my travel bag, taken when I was arrested.

The magistrate pulled out a fat scroll and set it on the table between us.

“What is this?” He asked.

I swallowed the bread in my mouth.

“A more complete record than the Evidence,” I explained. “Or the beginning of it.”

“Your Evidence were the man’s sayings,” he said. “So this is?”

“The same quotes, but with a description of the situation,” I answered.

“Description of the situation?” He asked.

“The speaker’s actions, people’s questions, audience reactions. I recorded witnesses—,” I started to explain.

The magistrate interrupted. “You didn’t remember those details yourself?”

“I was too busy just recording the quotes,” I explained.

“So you heard about Pilate’s charges of false witness?” He asked.

“No, master, not at all!” I responded. “But many others have complained.”

“So this document provides the context Pilate claims was missing?” He asked.

“Maybe,” I said tentatively. “For the first event I recorded.”

“Maybe?” He repeated, raising an eyebrow.

“I thought so when I started working on it,” I said, “but some say this new work is misleading as well.”

“Why?” The magistrate asked.

“There were many such events where similar things were said,” I explained. “People at different events remember the same words, but different interactions with the audience.”

“But this is a true picture of one such event?” He asked.

“Yes,” I answered. “As true as the witnesses and their memories.”

He laughed.

“Read it to me,” he commanded as he handed me the scroll.

“Now?” I asked.

He nodded.

I untied the scroll and began to read.

* * *

The event was a gathering on a hillside near Heptapegon by the sea of Galilee. Up the hillside, below a cliff, there was a flat area that made a natural stage. Hundreds of people were seated along the slope from the lake. The weather was warm, but clouds obscured the sun.

As the crowd settled, several people began to chant, “It has come close—the realm of the skies!”

This chant may have been started by the Nazarene’s students, but others in the crowd joined in. The chant built for a few moments as the teacher

walked onto the stage. He was smiling. He raised his right hand to point at the sky with every chorus of “the realm of the skies.” After a short while, he held up his hands for quiet.

“**Lucky! The beggars!**” He said in a cheerful tenor, indicating a group of beggars who were seated near the stage area.

Many laughed at the idea of beggars being lucky.

“**For the breath of life,**” he continued earnestly, closing his eyes and taking a deep breath. He spoke the common tongue like a local, but with a slight accent.

“**Because theirs is,—the realm of the skies!**” he said happily.

As he paused and pointed to the sky, his followers acted as a chorus, again chanting the line, “It has come close—the realm of the skies!”

Many in the audience clapped.

The teacher moved toward a pair of widows dressed for mourning.

“**Lucky! Those in mourning!**” He said warmly, indicating the women.

Some in the crowd chuckled at the idea of people in mourning being lucky. Others shushed them.

“**Because,**” the speaker explained, holding the women’s outstretched hands. “**They themselves are going to be summoned.**”

He pointed at the sky, and his followers and others in the crowd repeated, “It has come close —the realm of the skies!”

A group of children pressed toward him, their parents trailing behind. A little girl dashed out and held her arms toward the speaker to be picked up. The speaker obliged with a smiling nod to her parents who were trying to catch her.

“**Lucky!**” He announced once more. “**The malleable ones!**” He held up the child for the crowd to see. “**Because they themselves are going to inherit—,**” He paused as he moved toward the child’s parents.

“The realm of the skies?” Several in the crowd suggested.

He smiled, shook his head, no. He put the child in the arms of her mother.

“**The earth!**” He said, spreading his arms wide to indicate the lands around them.

Several people laughed.

He then moved on toward a group of foreigners. They had a large basket of bread loaves and several full wineskins lying in front of them.

“Lucky, the hungry!” He said indicating their food and drink.

Many laughed at the idea of the well-fed foreigners being hungry.

One of the foreigners offered the speaker a wineskin.

“And the thirsty!” The speaker added, raising the wineskin and squirting some wine into his mouth.

This generated even more laughter, but there were several Militants in the crowd. They reacted badly, shouting abuse against the foreigners.

“For justice?” The speaker asked. **“Because,”** he added playfully, gesturing to include both the foreigners and the Militants, **“they are going to get their fill.”**

The crowd laughed at what could be interpreted as a threat.

The speaker pointed to the sky, generating another chorus of “The realm of the sky is near!” More of the audience joined in.

The speaker returned the wineskin to its owner. Meanwhile, the foreign women started passing out bread to some nearby children.

“Lucky,” he said, indicating these women. **“Are those who are merciful.”**

Again, the Militants made complaining noises.

“Because,” he said, indicating again both the foreigners and the Militants. **“They themselves are going to receive mercy.”**

He pointed to the sky to signal the chorus. “It has come close—the realm of the skies!” Now most of the audience was joining in a ragged way.

The audience laughed and applauded its participation.

The smiling teacher quickly made his way toward a group of prostitutes. They were seated near the tax collectors and other detestables. Two of these women were clearly pregnant.

“Lucky!” The teacher announced, taking these soon-to-be mothers by the hand. He had them stand so the crowd could see them. The women blushed. **“The pure!”** He said.

While many laughed, others registered their objections.

“Of heart!” The speaker amended touching his own heart. **“For they themselves, are going to see—.”** He laid his hands on their large bellies and said, **“The divine!”**

At his touch, the women’s embarrassment changed to something that looked like joy. The women embraced his hands, tears streaming down their faces. This brought tears to the eyes of many in the crowd.

The audience was quiet, watching, but a few from a group of Isolationists were clearly shocked. As the speaker helped the pregnant women sit down again, two young Isolationists started complaining and getting up. A pair of their elders pulled them back down again and quieted them.

The speaker moved toward the group.

“Lucky!” The speaker continued, indicating the two Isolationist elders. **“Those who maintain the peace.”** He helped the old men stand up. **“Seeing that they are themselves—,”** he said, indicating their long, grey beards to the crowd. **“Children—”**

The crowd, including the Isolationists, both young and old, laughed.

“Of the divine!” The teacher continued. Then he added with certainty, **“They are going to be called!”**

He pointed to the sky. This created a chorus of, “It has come close—the realm of the skies!” from the whole audience.

Everyone laughed again.

The speaker moved toward a nearby group of Ascetics. **“Lucky!”** He continued cheerfully, **“those who hound themselves—for the sake of virtue!”** He indicated the scrawny, roughly dressed men.”

The crowd, including the Ascetics themselves, chuckled at the characterization.

“Because theirs is—the realm of the skies!”

The teacher pointed again to the sky. The whole audience chanted as one, “It has come close—the realm of the skies!”

The crowd applauded themselves and the speaker.

* * *

“Militants? Isolationists? Ascetics? Even whores,” the magistrate commented, interrupting my reading. “And you said you knew nothing about politics!”

“These are local religious groups, master—except for the whores, I mean,” I stammered.

“In Rome, religious fervor is mocked,” he observed. “But here, it is the life blood of politics. By ‘Militants,’ you mean the followers of the executed revolutionary, Judas of Gamala?”

I nodded.

“Rebelledd against Roman taxes?”

I nodded again. "And frequent bathing," I added.

He laughed.

"And the Isolationists, followers of Esse, the separatist. They reject Roman civic law?" He asked.

"They are very religious and live in their own religious communities," I corrected.

"And the Ascetics, followers of John the Dipper, killed by the Tetrarch, for sedition," the magistrate continued.

"So, Mr. Know-Nothing-About-Politics," he asked, "Were these non-political groups, supporters or opponents of this teacher?"

"It isn't simple," I explained. "These groups all like some of his ideas, but opposed others, such as the man's friendliness toward foreigners and the detestables."

"Interesting," the magistrate said, thoughtfully. "The foreigners, they were Romans?"

"There were all types of foreigners in the crowd, but the group with the food were Romans like you, master," I agreed.

The Roman official laughed and signaled his servant to pour more wine.

"Oh, I'm not Roman," he explained, chuckling at my surprise. "I was raised in Rome. My position is Roman. Even my name is Roman. Mother named me to enhance my future prospects." He said the last two words sourly. "But my grandfather declared that he and our family would follow your Judean God. My family holds me to that pledge."

I was surprised. He looked as Roman as Caesar.

"But this teacher doesn't sound very religious, does he? He hasn't even mentioned your God. Except for this 'the realm of the skies' business? Is that some part of the Judean faith that I've never heard?"

"No," I said. "Not traditionally."

"What does it mean?" He asked.

"People debate that," I explained. "Everyone agrees only that the realm of the skies lies beyond the earth. Some say it is a physical place, the realm of the resurrection. Others say it is a way of understanding, a realm of ideas. Others say that it refers simply to the reign of the Divine."

"Doesn't the Nazarene define it?" He asked.

"No," I admitted.

"Didn't people ask him about it?" He continued.

“Not at this event, but at later ones,” I said.

“What does he say?” The magistrate pressed.

“He implies that it is hard to define,” I said honestly. “He compares it to different things, in stories and analogies.”

“But people didn’t question it at first? Isn’t that odd?” He asked.

I shrugged. “To foreigners, perhaps, but people here found the idea uplifting,” I offered. “People now say, ‘It has come close—the realm of the skies,’ to express joy when something good happens, and they give consolation when something bad happens.”

“And, it has a certain humor to it,” the magistrate suggested, chuckling. “Like saying, ‘The universe almost makes sense, just not our part of it.’”

I nodded in agreement.

“However, maybe you are right after all,” he continued thoughtfully. “I am Roman, despite my family. Romans think of the empire and its army as the authors of their fate. People who live closer to the land look to the skies. The rain, sun, and harvest determine their fortunes. We Romans reap taxes. We no longer look to the skies.”

I didn’t know what to say, but sensing his friendliness, I asked a favor. “My wife must be worried,” I said. “Can you get word to her about where I am?”

“Your wife?” He asked, sipping his wine. “Is she here in Tiberias?”

“No, in Capernaum, where we live,” I answered.

“A short boat ride,” he observed. “Not a problem.”

I nodded, still worried about my situation, but, if my wife was notified, her family might be able to help.

The magistrate gestured for me to continue reading.

* * *

“**Lucky are you all,**” the speaker announced to his audience. “**When they criticize you and harass you and proclaim every worthless thing against you! Lying to themselves!**”

He then indicated himself and said humbly, “**For my sake.**” He made a comical curtsy.

The crowd laughed.

“**Enjoy!**” He said happily. “**And shine!**” He said, making a shimmering motion with his hands.

This drew another laugh from the crowd.

“**For massive is your payment—in the skies! Since this is how,**” he continued, with an easy shrug, “**they might have harassed the shining lights before you.**”

The crowd chuckled.

“**You all are,**” he continued affectionately, “**the salt of the earth!**” He tapped his temple knowingly to make it clear he was referring to the salt of their common sense. “**But—**” he said, striking his forehead with his palm as if something suddenly occurred to him. “**What if?**” He asked, “**The salt is insipid? Played for a fool?**”

The crowd laughed.

“**In what,**” the speaker demanded, “**is it going to get salty?**” He tapped his forehead again. “**In nothing,**” he said sadly. “**It is worth nothing except being dumped out.**” He made the motion of throwing out trash. “**And being walked on by people.**” He tramped around to illustrate.

Many chuckled.

“**You yourselves,**” he announced more seriously, “**are the light of the social order. It really doesn’t have the power—,**” he said pausing. “**The city,**” he clarified, pointing toward Jerusalem. “**To be kept hidden, on top of a mountain standing for itself! Not at all!**”

Many chuckled at the idea of equating this crowd with Jerusalem.

“**Do they light up a lamp,**” the teacher continued, holding up an imaginary lamp, “**and put it—.**” He moved the imaginary lamp under his tunic, below his belly. “**Beneath a bushel basket?**”

Many in the audience laughed.

“**Instead,**” he continued, lifting his arms, raising the imaginary lamp up high, reaching up as far as he could. He rose slowly on his tip-toes, teetering precariously as he reached out.

As he teetered on his toes, the crowd began tittering.

“**On a lamp stand!**” He announced triumphantly, placing his lamp. “**And it lights up everyone in the house! In this way,**” he continued, pointing up to his pretend lamp, “**let that light of yours shine out in front of other people.**”

As he said this, or perhaps right before, the sun came out from behind a cloud and blazed down so brightly that the speaker had to shield his eyes from the glare.

“So that they might see,” he said, squinting but smiling, “your worthy deeds! And, recognize your Father, the one—in the skies!”

He directed the audience’s attention to the bright sky. He pointed up, generating a chorus of, “It has come close—the realm of the skies!”

As the crowd applauded, a group of religious Academics and the Dedicated arrived. They stood at the back of the crowd. A wave of nervous reaction passed through the audience. These two groups of scolds acted as the local morality monitors.

At that point, some darker clouds rolled over the face of the sun, casting a gloom on the hillside.

A voice from among the Dedicated shouted, “Are you overturning our traditional laws, the writings of the shining lights?”

The crowd murmured, but the speaker smiled more broadly. Before answering, he went back to the foreigners and obtained a small loaf of bread.

“You all might not want to assume that I have shown up to tear up—,” he said as he tore off a piece of bread and held it up, “the laws or the shining lights. I really haven’t shown up to tear up—,” he said as he tore off and held up another piece of bread.

Many chuckled at the contradiction.

“But to fill up!” He announced gleefully, as he began putting the pieces of bread in his mouth.

This started the crowd laughing again.

“Because honestly,” he said, speaking around the food in his mouth, “I’m telling you. While possibly *it* just might pass away—.”

He paused and chewed contentedly, letting the crowd wonder what might pass away.

During this pause, one of the Dedicated shouted out angrily, “The law?”

The speaker smiled again and shook his head, no, as he swallowed.

“The sky,” he said, pointing up. Then pointing down, he added, “Also the ground.”

More began laughing.

“An ‘i’? One?” He said, holding up a single finger. “Or one apostrophe?” He shook his head, no. “Not ever,” he exclaimed. “Is it going to pass out of the law!”

Many groups in the crowd applauded, supporting this sentiment.

“Until,” the speaker added thoughtfully, “it might—.” Again he paused,

as if tempting the Dedicated to shout something.

One took the bait, shouting, “Outdated?”

The speaker shook his head, no.

“All come into existence!” He announced opening his arms wide.

This drew more applause and laughter.

“Are the Dedicated wrong when they tell us we can ignore some laws if we make offerings at the temple?” An older man called out,

“Whoever,” the speaker said, pointing toward the Dedicated from behind a concealing hand, **“might relax one of these laws—the tiniest.”** He said, holding out his little finger and wiggling it.

The adults in the crowd laughed. This was a common rude gesture belittling someone’s manhood.

“And he might teach the people this,” he continued. **“‘The tiniest,’ he is going to be called.”** He wiggled his little finger again.

This drew more laughter.

“In the realm of the skies!” The speaker added innocently, nodding up at the sky.

This made the whole crowd laugh harder.

“The one, however, who produces and teaches this?” He held up the loaf of bread. **“The greatest,’ he is going to be called—in the realm of the skies!”**

At this point, many stood and applauded. Soon the whole crowd was laughing and cheering.

* * *

The magistrate put up his hand to indicate I should pause.

“Is this use of humor common among Judean teachers?” He asked quiz-zically.

“Some act out the stories of our history, especially for children,” I answered. “Others use humor to make fun of opponents. But the Nazarene changed teaching into merrymaking. Those who came to hear him left with smiles and stories to tell.”

“I had a close friend who could get people laughing like that,” the magistrate observed. “He was very clever, and willing to play the fool. Everyone loved him. This teacher seems much the same.

The magistrate thought for a moment, then he turned and looked at me

seriously.

“You mentioned earlier that you were hired to write down the man’s sayings. Who hired you?”

“Aulus Appius of Sidon,” I responded.

“The wine distributor? I’ve heard he collects legal documents,” he noted. “But why would he be interested in a local teacher?”

“I don’t know,” I admitted. “But I suspect that he was paid by others who knew he had court recorders working for him.”

“Paid by Judeans?” The magistrate asked with more intensity.

“I don’t know,” I said, shrugging. “But, when I was summoned to the trial of the Nazarene, I was told to bring the quotes I had recorded.”

“So Pilate might have hired you?” He asked, suddenly very focused.

“The Evidence wasn’t used first in the Roman trial,” I explained, “I was first summoned by the Grand Council at the temple. They had a copy of my recordings, but like Pilate later, they wanted me to testify that the quotes were accurate.”

“The Temple held a trial too?” The magistrate asked, apparently surprised. “Do you know if Antipas was involved?”

“Not in the trial, but a priest mentioned that Antipas had seen my Evidence,” I said.

At that point, he motioned to his servant to come over and whispered something in his ear. The servant left only to return sometime later.

“Why were you in Jerusalem during the trial?” He pressed.

“My last instructions from Appius were to record the teacher in Jerusalem about a week before the Nazarene was tried.”

“Who knew about your collection of sayings?” He asked.

“Hundreds,” I admitted. “Maybe thousands. I had been selling copies for over a year. When I wasn’t recording, I went to the teacher’s events to sell copies.”

“Appius didn’t mind you selling your copies?” He asked.

I shrugged. “I sent him his copies. He sent me my payments and instructions. I never wrote him about my side business. I was not his bondsman. He hired me as an independent agent.”

“Are you still working for Appius?” He asked more casually.

“No,” I said. “After the trial, I never heard from him again.”

“Did he ever say he was gathering evidence for a trial?” He asked.

“No,” I said. “But I never asked why he wanted the recordings.”

“Why not?” He asked.

“I didn’t question my good fortune?” I offered.

“That can be a mistake,” the magistrate suggested dryly.

Given my current situation, I nodded.

“Why live in Capernaum? Why not return to Sidon?” He asked.

“At first, Appius asked me to stay,” I explained. “But it took him over a month to get back to me. I ended up making copies of my first recordings and selling them,” I explained.

“Are you one of this teacher’s Followers?” He asked.

“No, master,” I said. “His Followers will not allow me near their meetings now. Some are afraid I will record something against them. Others blame me for their leader’s execution.”

He raised his eyebrows. “But the Followers still buy copies of your Evidence?”

“My wife and her cousins sell them now,” I explained.

“Your wife?” He asked.

“We met at this first event,” I explained, tapping the scroll I was reading. “She saw me recording. She was trying to make a record as well, but she wasn’t very fast.”

“Love at first sight?” The magistrate asked, obviously interested.

“Not when I was recording and she was bothering me with her questions,” I responded. I didn’t mention that she was from among the detestables and that made matters worse. “But later. She is a serious Follower, but she is also a very fast copyist and her copies are more readable than mine. We went into business together.”

“Before you were married?” He asked, snorting at the idea. “You may be the luckiest fool I’ve ever met.”

“Maybe,” I admitted.

“You and your wife have grown quite successful selling copies of your Evidence, haven’t you?” The magistrate noted.

I nodded again.

He laughed and indicated that I should continue reading.

* * *

“Are you telling us to ignore what *they* tell us to do?” A young field worker

near the front of the crowd asked, gesturing back toward the Dedicated.

“What am I telling you all?” The speaker asked, scratching his beard thoughtfully. **“The fact is that unless you each are going to outshine yourself—your virtue surpassing that of the Academics and Dedicated—never ever are you getting into—”** He paused and looked up, smiling with a twinkle in his eye.

Many in the crowd began chuckling. Most knew what was coming next.

“The realm of the skies!” He announced proudly to everyone’s satisfaction.

Some clapped loudly, but others were surprised at the direct criticism of the Academics and Dedicated.

“But murdering people is still wrong, right?” A gruff voice called out jokingly. He implied who he meant to murder by gesturing toward the back of the crowd.

Many snorted while others tittered.

“At some time, you have heard that it was proclaimed by the ancients—.” He then pretended to unroll a scroll. He affected an old man’s wavering voice reading from it, **“You might not want to murder. Someone who, however, might possibly murder is going to—.”** The speaker paused, looking threateningly at the crowd, then screeched, **“Bind himself by the decision!”**

The crowd laughed at the voice and the weakness of the threat, despite its volume.

The speaker continued in his own light-hearted manner. **“I, myself, however,”** he said, polishing his fingers on his chest in a mock pompous way, **“teach that everyone being irritated by his brother is going to—.”** He paused for dramatic effect. **“Bind himself by the decision.”**

People chuckled.

“Who, however, might possibly say,” he continued lightly, **“to that brother of his, ‘you rag’ is going to—.”** Another pause. **“Bind himself to the court.”**

The crowd laughed. The quality of people’s clothing often determined a court’s judgment. To the courts, most of the audience would have been considered the “rags” of society.

“Someone, however,” the speaker continued in a more serious voice, **“who might possibly say, ‘you moron!’ He is going to bind himself—.”**

He made a tossing-out-the-trash motion. **“Into the Gehenna of the fire.”** The speaker pretended to shield his face from the flames, but then he held his nose as if something stunk.

Many laughed at the reference to Jerusalem’s smelly dump for burning trash, but some took this threat more seriously because of the speaker’s tone.

“Can an offering at the temple make up for my offenses against a brother?” A sad voice asked quietly.

“If you present a gift on the altar, do you make amends for yourself?” The speaker repeated for the crowd. He then silently acted out a scene of someone bringing an offering toward the temple’s altar. He suddenly stopped and hit the side of his head with his palm. **“You might be reminded,”** he explained, **“That your brother has something against you.”**

People chuckled.

“Drop it off there,” he said, pretending to put his offering on the ground, **“That gift of yours, in front of the altar and take off.”** He turned and walked away from his imaginary gift, checking it over his shoulder and waving good-bye to it.

Many laughed.

“First,” the speaker continued, **“settle with that brother of yours.”** He pretended to embrace someone. **“And then coming back,”** he said, pretending to pick up his imaginary gift and resuming his march to the altar, **“offer the gift.”** He laid his imaginary gift on the imaginary altar, bowing deeply.

Applause rippled through the crowd.

“But my ‘brother’ is taking me to court!” Another man blurted out over the applause, almost before the speaker had finished.

Both the question and the man’s abrupt manner drew some laughs.

“Be friendly to that plaintiff of yours, Speedy,” the speaker advised to the man.

This drew more laughter from the crowd.

“Until you are together with him.” The speaker knit his hands together. **“In the way forward.”** His intertwined hands pointed their index fingers forward. **“He shouldn’t want at any time to turn you over to the judge,”** he said, tugging on the shoulder of his tunic. **“And the judge to the officer,”** he added, tugging himself in another direction. **“And, into a cell,”** he said, **“getting tossed.”** The speaker flung himself as if he had been pushed.

People laughed.

The speaker gripped imaginary bars, stared with a woe-be-gone face at the audience, and said sadly, "**Honestly, I'm telling you. Never are you getting out of there, until—possibly.**" He paused. "**You have turned over—**" He reached into his belt and pulled out a copper coin. "**Your last penny!**" He kissed the coin good-bye and tossed it into a group of children.

The children scrambled, people laughed, and many clapped.

"My last penny went to wine," complained a slightly drunken voice, getting a few hoots.

"My last penny went to my wife," said another, winning an even larger laugh.

"My last penny went to some women who *weren't* my wife," said a third joker suggestively. This won the biggest laugh of all but many groans.

The speaker was smiling, but he was also shaking his head, no.

"**You have heard that it has been said—**," he repeated. Then again, switching to his old man's voice, he pretended to read from a scroll, "**You don't want to betray your vows!**"

Many chuckled at the voice. Others shushed them because it sounded like they were laughing at the law.

"**I myself, however, am telling you,**" The speaker continued easily, with an air of braggadocio, "**that everyone gazing at—**," He then went silent, pretending that something caught his eye. He turned his head to stare. "**A woman!**" He said as if in awe while drawing the shape of a woman in the air.

The crowd cackled.

"**To the point of obsession,**" he continued, closing his eyes for a moment with a big smile on his face. Then shaking his head as if waking, he said more seriously, "**He has already betrayed his vow.**" He paused and added sadly, "**In his heart.**"

Most were silent, but a few in the crowd snickered despite his tone.

"When it comes to women, my right eye has a mind of its own!" The joker responded.

This brought guffaws from several in the crowd, but most looked to see how the teacher would react.

The speaker surprised them, grinning at the comment.

"**If, however, that eye of yours—**," he answered quickly. "**The right one?**" He pointed to his own right eye. Then his right eye slowly began to

wander as if following something while his left eye focused on the man he was addressing.

Many in the crowd noticed, pointed, and laughed.

As his eyes crossed, the speaker attempted to take a step only to stumble.

Everyone laughed.

“Trips you up!” The speaker squawked as he staggered. Then he wagged an accusing finger at his eye angrily and said, **“Pluck it out—.”** He covered the offending eye with one hand while the other pretended to pull it out. **“And toss it away from you.”** He made a clumsy toss while still covering his right eye and grimacing in mock pain.

The people laughed at his antics.

“Because,” he explained, **“it helps you when it destroys itself—.”** He paused, moving his hand as if to protect his privates. **“One of your—members,”** he said carefully,

The audience groaned and laughed.

“And you don’t want your body,” he continued lightheartedly, **“tossed into the Gehenna.”** He repeated the motion of tossing out the trash followed by holding his nose and waving away an imaginary stench.

The crowd laughed and applauded.

But another joker, a tall tradesman, called out, “My problem isn’t my eye! It’s my right hand!” He raised his fist and pumped it up and down suggestively.

Many laughed. Many groaned. Others booed.

“And so,” the speaker responded, smiling but sounding concerned. **“If that right of yours—,”** he said, holding up his own hand. **“Hand and forearm.”** He clarified, moving his forearm up and then down, but instead of duplicating the man’s gesture, his hand seemed to fly out of control hitting his leg. **“Trips you up,”** he squawked, again stumbling, and, this time, almost falling.

Again, everyone laughed.

“Lop it off!” His left hand chopped at his right forearm. Again, he grimaced comically. **“And toss it away!”** He repeated his tossing-out-the-trash motion one-handed.

This drew more chuckles.

“Because,” he explained, **“it helps you when it destroys itself—.”**

The audience began to snicker anticipating what was coming next. **“One of your—.”** He paused, moving his hand very slowly down. **“Members,”** he squeaked.

Everyone cracked up, even the children who didn’t understand it all.

The speaker shrugged nonchalantly and continued cheerfully, **“And you don’t want that whole body of yours—.”** He paused, then called out, **“Into the Gehenna!”** Again, he made the throwing-out-the-trash gesture as he said, **“It is tossed!”**

The crowd guffawed.

As the laughter died down, a middle-aged woman near the stage indicated the tall tradesman and asked loudly. “So you are saying he should divorce his hand?”

The audience laughed and applauded the suggestion.

“So,” the speaker responded officially, **“it has been proclaimed!”**

The audience laughed harder.

But after thinking for a moment, he raised his hand for silence.

Then he again pretended to open a scroll and read in his old man voice, **“Whoever possibly might cut loose that woman of his, let him give her a divorce notice.”** Though he used a funny voice, there was something more serious in his manner. **“I myself, however,”** the speaker casually in his own voice. **“Am telling you all—.”** His voice then became more serious. **“That everyone cutting loose that woman of his—.”**

At this point, the tall tradesman raised his arm and fist above the crowd and repeated his suggestive gesture.

The crowd groaned, snickered, booed, and laughed.

“Except for the reason of whoring,” the speaker added in response, gesturing toward the errant hand.

This brought more laughter, but the audience sensed from the speaker’s tone that this was a serious subject.

After waiting for quiet, the speaker’s voice became more impassioned, as he said, **“He makes her to become betrayed in the vow.”**

Most of the crowd applauded, especially the women.

“And the loose woman? Can I marry her?” A new voice joked.

The crowd and the speaker both groaned and laughed together at the question.

“And if anyone marries a loose woman,” the speaker responded easily.

“He betrays the vow to *himself*.”

This drew applause and a little laughter.

The another woman complained loudly, “Marriage is the one promise that people can cancel with a note.”

The speaker responded more playfully. **“Again, you have all heard tell that it was proclaimed by the ancients.”** He then pretended to unroll another scroll. **“Do not renege on a promise,”** he read in his old man’s voice. Wagging his finger, he screeched a common line used by the Dedicated to shame people, **“You each are going to give back to the Lord—those promises of yours.”**

This also drew both laughter and groans from the crowd.

“I myself, however,” the speaker continued, pretending arrogance, **“am telling you all, you don’t want—anyone of you—to swear for your own benefit at all! Neither on the sky—seeing that a judge’s bench is for the Divine.”** He pointed skyward at a rectangular cloud.

People looked up to see that the cloud looked like a judge’s bench. A murmur passed through the audience.

“Nor on the ground,” The teacher continued. **“Because a footstool—,”** he explained, pointing at a small mound of dirt, **“is for those feet of His.”** He lifted one of his feet and rested it on the mound to illustrate.

This brought a chuckle from the crowd.

“We are told to seal our oaths in Jerusalem,” someone complained. “With gifts for the altar or gold for the temple!”

The speaker nodded his head in recognition of the practice.

“Nor in Jerusalem,” he responded, **“Because a city is for—the great,”** he proclaimed in a grand manner, **“A king!”**

The crowd laughed.

“Don’t our oaths fall upon our own heads?” A man in the crowd asked indicating his head of gray hair.

“Nor should you swear on that head of yours,” the speaker suggested cheerily. **“Seeing that you really don’t have the power to make a single hair—.”** He indicated the questioner’s head. **“Gray, or—.”** He plucked a hair from his own head, showing it to the crowd. **“Dark!”** He said as if in pain, rubbing his head.

This drew a little laughter.

“Stand up for yourselves!” He continued. **“It must be—that thinking**

of yours—Yes!” He said nodding his head enthusiastically. “Or really no!” He added shaking his head just as enthusiastically. “Because more than this is from—.” Using one hand to hide an accusing finger pointed at the Dedicated, he said, “The worthless!”

The crowd laughed. Some jeered.

“So if people don’t keep their word to us,” someone suggested, “can we beat them up?”

The crowd again both laughed and groaned.

The speaker smiled but again shook his head, no.

“You have heard tell that it was proclaimed,” he said again pretending to unroll a scroll. “An eye in return for an eye,” he read happily squeaking in his old man’s voice while giving the audience a wink.

The audience chuckled.

“And—.” He held his jaw as if in pain. “A tooth in return for a tooth.” He said as if his tongue was swollen.

More chuckled.

“I myself, however,” the speaker said, thumping his chest, “am telling you all, you do not want to compare—.” He pretended to pluck out an eye with one hand and a tooth with the other. He held both hands out to the crowd, palms up, as if balancing a scale. “The worthless!” He announced, tossing both away casually over his shoulders.

The audience laughed and clapped in support of the idea.

So,” he continued. “Someone slugs you in the right jaw.” He pretended to punch his own face. Then, he spun around as if from the blow. “Turn around for him,” he explained.

The audience laughed.

Then he offered his left jaw to his imaginary attacker. “Also another?” He requested, pointing to it.

This drew more laughter.

Amid the mirth, another male voice called out, “Isn’t settling differences man-to-man better than losing our shirts in court?”

This question generated more laughter but also shouts of agreement.

The speaker chuckled at the comment but quickly responded.

“Also,” the speaker said, “for the one wanting to be judged against you.” He pretended to take off his shirt and get into a tug of war with someone using the shirt. “And take that shirt of yours—.” He strained, pulling

at the imaginary shirt and then said, “**Let go!**” He released his end.

The crowd laughed, envisioning his opponent falling.

“**Also the cloak!**” He added, pretending to take off his cloak, tossing it on top of his fallen opponent.

The crowd laughed harder.

“What about when the powerful force us to bear their burdens?” Someone asked.

“**And so,**” the teacher asked, “**someone forcing you a mile? One?**” He held up a single finger.

The man nodded.

“**Go along with him,**” he said cheerfully, illustrating walking with two fingers of his hand.

The crowd groaned at the suggestion.

“**Two!**” The speaker added, turning the walking fingers upright to indicate the number, two.

Many in the crowd still groaned but many more laughed.

“**To the one asking from you, give!**” The speaker explained, holding his hands out like a beggar.

The groans continued but the laughter also increased. Someone shouted, “Lucky the beggars!” This got more people laughing.

“But some will pick our pockets,” another voice complained.

Many in the crowd agreed.

“**And,**” the speaker answered, “**to the one wanting from you.**” He held up his left hand, directing the audience’s attention to it. “**To borrow for himself.**” As he looked toward his left hand, his right hand attempted to pick his own pocket.

A child called out, “Look! His left doesn’t know what it is doing—that right hand of his!”

At the child’s call, he looked down catching his errant right hand in the act. He caught it with his left.

“**You might not want to turn away,**” he suggested.

This kept everyone laughing. Many noticed that “don’t turn away” meant both “don’t abandon” and “keep watching.”

“What if someone who hates me asks me to give?” Another man challenged.

“**You have heard tell that it was proclaimed,**” the speaker responded,

again pretending to unroll a scroll, this time, with more of a flourish.

The crowd laughed.

Reading in his old man's voice, he intoned, "**Love those close to you.**" And then, rolling up the scroll, he sourly added another common saying of the Dedicated, "**And hate those haters of yours!**"

Recognizing the line, the audience hooted.

"**I myself, however, am telling you all,**" he intoned.

This drew a small laugh, but the audience also sensed his intensity.

"**Care for those haters of yours,**" he said earnestly. "**Pray for those who harass you. In order that you might become children of your Father, the one in the skies.**"

He pointed to the sky in a familiar way. The crowd missed the cue. He raised his eyebrows and pointed more emphatically. The audience caught on and responded raggedly, "It has come close—the realm of the skies!"

"**Because,**" explained the speaker, now smiling, "**that sun of his?**" He pointed up at the sun, hidden behind the clouds. "**He makes it rise on the worthless.**" He patted his own chest humbly.

Most people laughed but a few protested.

"**And the valuable,**" he continued, gesturing toward a group of farm workers.

The others applauded.

"**Not only does He shower on the law-abiding,**" he added, indicating the Dedicated. "**But also the law-breakers,**" he added, gesturing toward the foreigners. "**If maybe—,**" he started, then he corrected himself. "**Since you all—,**" the teacher continued, indicating the whole crowd, "**care for those caring for you.**" He hugged himself. "**Why? Are you paid? Never! And the uh—,**" he said, gesturing toward the prostitutes. "**Uh—tax collectors? They do the same.**"

Everyone laughed.

"**Also, if you all hug those brothers of yours alone,**" he continued, hugging himself again. "**What out of the ordinary are you doing?**" He paused, letting the question sink in. Then he answered it. "**Nothing,**" he suggested, gesturing toward a group of Greeks. "**Don't even the foreigners act the same?**"

The crowd laughed, the Greeks with them.

"**You are going to be, really,**" he continued earnestly, indicating the

whole crowd again, “**your yourselves, complete. As your Father, the sky one completely is.**”

He pointed to the sky and the crowd chanted, “It has come close—the realm of the skies!”

* * *

“After so much joking, I wonder what is serious,” said the magistrate, interrupting. “Caring for enemies, was that a joke?”

“People left his events happy and filled with good will,” I observed. “The feeling drew everyone together. Even most of the Dedicated enjoyed themselves and felt closer to the people.”

“Which naturally forced their leaders to hate him more,” the magistrate observed. “What do these groups say today?”

“Many still claim he was degrading our traditions,” I admitted. “But those who hate him the most seem to be those who never heard him speak.”

The magistrate nodded, seemingly lost in thought.

During the pause, I asked, “How did you know to arrest me?”

“An informer,” he answered casually.

“Were you looking for me?” I asked.

“Not really,” the magistrate admitted. “One of my men got a note with your name, who you would visit in Tiberias, and when, and that you were wanted by Pilate, Did many people know you were going to be here?”

“I told my wife my plans a week ago,” I said, “but she could have told anyone, almost certainly her family.”

“You didn’t know you were wanted,” he noted. “But someone who knew your whereabouts did.”

“Maybe an unlucky coincidence,” I suggested. “Someone who knew that Pilate wanted me happened to hear my plans. But how would they know that Pilate wanted me?”

“Lists of men wanted by the Romans are posted with their bounties,” the magistrate explained. “People who know their community check these lists, often the tax collectors, and tell us where to find the wanted to collect the bounties.”

My stomach turned at the mention of tax collectors.

“After all, your name is well known,” the magistrate continued. I didn’t interrupt to explain about my name. ““Why do you personally sign all those

copies of the Evidence you sell?”

“Many others now sell copies of the Nazarene’s sayings,” I explained. “But I was called before Pilate. My quotes were legal evidence. This makes my version more valuable.”

“Good idea,” He noted. “Did your wife think of it?”

“No, that was my idea,” I said, defending myself. “Like creating these new versions.” I indicated the scroll.

“There are more of these scrolls, correct?” He asked. “Besides this one and the other that we found in your bag?”

“Yes,” I said. “Or there will be, when they are finished. These two are mostly finished, but I am working on three or four more, one for each section of the original Evidence. I am was gathering notes on the third scroll when I was arrested.”

“Where are the others and your notes?” He asked.

I didn’t want to say, suddenly fearful of losing my last several years work, but I didn’t see any alternative.

“At my home in Capernaum,” I admitted.

He nodded, thinking.

“Another odd thing,” he said finally. “Romans pay bounties, but this anonymous informer didn’t claim any bounty on you.”

“What does that mean?” I asked.

“That turning you in to the Romans was political—or personal,” the magistrate responded.

As I thought about that, he signalled me to start reading again.

* * *

“Does the Divine repay us for our generosity?” An older woman asked.

The speaker nodded enthusiastically but offered a caveat.

“**Pay attention, however,**” the speaker warned, “**to this virtue of yours. You don’t want to *perform* in front of people in order to see yourselves through them. Unless, however, you really don’t want *compensation!*”** He said, nodding toward the sky.

“So, if I get recognition from others for having praiseworthy values?” She asked.

“**You are not going to get it from that Father of yours, the one in the skies,**” he answered.

“But I want others to see how kind I am!” She protested.

“**When you truly perform a kindness,**” he advised her, “**you don’t want to trumpet it in front of people. The same as actors, performing in the meeting places—.**” He took the exaggerated pose of an actor blowing a horn. “**And in the crowded streets,**” he said, blowing his imaginary horn again.

This got people chuckling.

“**So that they might be recognized by the people,**” he continued. “**Honestly, I’m telling you, they are getting paid in full.**” He put his hand up to his chin and patted his stomach, signaling being full. “**That pay of theirs.**” He said these words with obvious distaste.

“**For you, however,**” the speaker said, turning again to the woman, “**performing a kindness of yours—.**” He mimicked the voice of the child that had shouted out earlier. “**Don’t let your left,**” he said, holding his left hand up, “**know what it is doing—that right hand of yours.**” His right hand furtively tossed a penny toward a group of children.

Everyone, especially the children, laughed.

“**In this way, it might be that,**” he said, returning to his own voice, “**your kindness is hidden!**” He held his fingers up to his lips. “**And that Father of yours, the one seeing into the hidden,**” he said, “**is going to give back to you.**”

Most cheered the idea.

“What about getting recognition for being pious and praying?” One of the Dedicated asked.

“**Also when you pray for yourself,**” the speaker responded happily, “**you are really not going to be—like the actors!**” He dramatically orated the last phrase. “**Because they love—in the meeting places and in the cross-roads, standing to pray for themselves so that they shine among the people!**” He put his hands up in the air and bowed over and over, moving his arms to draw attention to himself.”

Everyone laughed.

“**Honestly, I’m telling you, they are getting paid in full,**” he said, putting his hand up to his chin again. “**That pay of theirs,**” he said again with distaste.

The crowd laughed.

“**You, however,**” he continued more seriously, addressing the man who

asked the question, “when you pray, go in that inner sanctum of yours. And shutting that door of yours.” He pretended to shut a door. “Pray to that Father of yours—the one within the hidden. And that Father of yours—the one seeing into the hidden—is going to pay you back.”

The audience clapped, but a foreigner complained loudly, “What about religious pageantry? Magnificence? Flamboyance?”

“Praying, like that?” The speaker responded cheerfully, “I don’t want to babble like the foreigners because they think that—in their long-windedness—they are going to be listened to.”

Everyone, including the foreigners, laughed.

“You all don’t want,” he continued more seriously, “really, to become like them. Because He has seen, the Divine—that Father of yours—what needs you all have before anyone.”

“Why should He care about my needs?” A cranky-sounding woman’s voice called out.

“Yours?” The speaker asked, pointing at her. Then indicating the sky with both hands, he told the woman, “Ask Him!”

The speaker looked at his audience quietly for a moment. The crowd sensed a change in his manner.

“In this way, then, you pray for yourselves,” he announced in a rich baritone that the crowd had not heard before. “All of you!”

He looked to the sky and spread his arms.

“Father of ours—the one in the skies,

“It is been made sacred—that name of Yours.

“It is starting—that reign of Yours.

“It is coming into being—that purpose of Yours, as much as possible in sky and on earth.

“This bread of ours? The one sufficient for now? Give to us today!

“Also, let go of what is owed by us,

“As much as we ourselves also let go of those who owe to us.”

He paused and said more lightly, “Also, You *might* not want to bring us to trial.”

Many laughed.

Returning to the baritone, he said sincerely, “Instead, pull us toward Yourself, away from the worthless.”

He stopped, arms outstretched, looking upward. His silence and that

of his audience lingered. He then took a deep breath, visibly relaxing, and looked back to the crowd. He spread his hands, indicating that he was open to more questions.

“Why do we let our debtors go?” A man asked. A murmur went through the crowd. Many were bondsmen, indebted to their masters, who were also there.

“**Because,**” the teacher explained, returning to his cheery tenor, “**if you all—**” He made a sweeping gesture with his right hand to indicate the whole crowd. “**Let go of these people.**” He made another sweeping gesture with his left hand to again include the whole crowd. “**Those missteps of theirs,**” he said, taking a step that turned into a little stumble. He looked critically at the ground where he had stumbled.

The crowd started chuckling again.

“**He is going to let you go as well,**” the speaker continued. “**That Father of yours, the sky one.**”

He pointed to the sky, generating a chorus of “It has come close—the realm of the skies!”

Many laughed.

“**If, however, you all,**” the teacher continued, indicating the whole crowd with his right-hand again, “**don’t want to let go of these people.**” He made a left-handed sweeping gesture to again include the whole audience. “**Those missteps of theirs,**” he said, taking another step and again making a small stumble. He again looked askance at the ground.

More laughter.

“**Neither is that Father of yours,**” he said, “**going to let go of those missteps of yours.**” He began taking another step, but this time his feet crossed and he stumbled, spinning across the stage.

People laughed. Many applauded.

As the laughter faded, a beardless man aping the rough clothing of the Ascetics asked, “Does fasting help us pray?”

The speaker nodded his agreement but said, “**When, however, you all fast, you don’t want to become—like the actors!**” Again he said the last phrase dramatically. Then he made a sad face. Pointing at it, he announced, “**Sullen!**”

The audience laughed.

“**Since they mask those faces of theirs,**” he said. Passing a hand over

his face, his expression changed to happy. Moving a hand over his face again, his expression changed to anger. Another pass and it changed to surprised. **“So that they might show off among people!”** Returning to his sad face, he pointed to himself and announced dramatically, **“Fasting!”**

Everyone laughed.

“Honestly, I’m telling you, they are getting paid in full.” He put his hand up to his chin and said sourly, **“That pay of theirs.”**

Everyone laughed.

“You, however,” he said, pointing to the beardless youth, whose hair was messy hair and whose face was dirty. **“Fasting?”**

The youth uncertainly nodded, yes.

“Oil your head!” The speaker suggested, taking a vial of grooming oil from inside his clothes and handing it to him.

The young man smoothed his hair with it.

“And that face of yours? Wash!” The teacher suggested. **“So, you don’t show off for people. Fasting, instead, for that Father of yours, the one in on the hidden,”** the speaker continued in a serious voice. **“And that Father of yours, the one seeing into the hidden, He is going to repay you.”**

This generated more applause.

At this point, several people were calling out questions at once. Several of those questions were skeptical.

“Payment in the skies?” Someone scoffed.

“Aren’t our sky clothes and food going to fall to the ground?” Another asked.

In response, the speaker gave these critics a confused stare.

“You don’t want to accumulate for yourselves accumulations—on the earth,” he said, emphasizing the last words as if the idea was silly. **“Where insect and eating—wipe out? And where robbers tunnel in and rob?”** His tone indicated that the idea was crazy.

People laughed.

“Accumulate, instead, for yourselves accumulations in a sky!” He commanded joyously. **“Where neither insect nor eating wipes out! And where robbers do not tunnel in nor rob!”**

The people voiced their support.

But a rotund, wealthy man dressed in white linen called out, “Can’t my heart be in the sky as I accumulate stuff on the earth?”

The teacher shook his head, no.

“**Because,**” the teacher explained, “**wherever it is—that accumulation of yours.**” He pointed to the ground. “**There it is—.**” He appeared to pick something up. “**That heart of yours.**” He held out his hand, pulsing it as if it held a beating heart.

Everyone laughed.

“But my eyes can only see what is on the earth,” a wealthy man protested.

Many voices from the crowd agreed.

The speaker responded seriously. “**The lamp of the body is the eye,**” he explained. “**If, then, it is—that eye of yours? In focus. That whole body of yours?**”

As he said this, or perhaps right before, the clouds parted and a ray of bright sunlight fell upon the questioner.

“**Shining!**” The speaker declared. “**It is going to be!**”

The rotund man in white preened in the sunlight.

The crowd laughed, but many noticed the coincidence.

“**If, however, your eye is worthless,**” the speaker continued. “**That whole body of yours, it is going to be—dark!**”

As he said “dark” or right before, clouds again passed over the sun.

People chuckled nervously at the coincidence. Murmuring spread.

“**If the light—the one in you?**” The speaker continued, his voice growing more ominous. “**A darkness? It is the darkness so dark!**”

The crowd was silent. Many were watching the sky, which was growing darker.

“**No one has the power,**” the teacher explained in his rich baritone, “**to slave for two masters. Because either he is going to hate the one.**” He nodded toward the sky, which was now getting brighter. “**And care for the other.**” He gestured toward the ground. “**Or he is going to attach himself to one,**” he said, again indicating the brightening sky. “**And he is going to look down on the other.**” Again, pointing to the ground.

“**You all do not have the power, to serve the Divine—,**” he said, gazing upward, a smile growing on his face. Then, gesturing toward the rich man in white, he added cheerfully, “**And Mr. Moneybags.**”

Many laughed. Others applauded.

However, as the applause died, some called out their objections.

“We have to eat!” Cried one.

“We have to drink!” Shouted another who sounded a little drunk.

“We cannot go naked!” A third squawked.

“**By this, I’m telling you all,**” the speaker explained seriously. “**Don’t worry about that self of yours. What you might put in your mouth?**” He touched his lips. “**Or drink?**” He pretended to lift a cup. “**And nor for that body of yours.**” He patted his chest. “**What you might put on.**” He pretended to wrap a robe around himself. “**Certainly not! This self is more than food. And the body? A covering!**”

The crowd was quiet.

At this point, a flock of birds flew overhead beneath the clouds.

“**Look!**” He said, pointing upward. “**Up to the winged ones belonging to the sky!**” The speaker suggested. “**Because they don’t really sow—nor hoe—nor stow—,**” he said in a sing-song voice.

This drew laughter, especially from the children.

“**In storehouses,**” he continued. “**And your Father? The sky one? He fattens them!**” He patted his own belly.

This drew more laughter.

“**Aren’t you yourselves—more important than them?**” The speaker asked playfully.

There were murmurs of agreement.

“**Who, from your worrying.**” He held one hand as high as a child sitting by the stage. “**Has the power to add to his stature.**” He held his other hand as high as a man next to the child. He compared the difference in height between his two hands and added, “**Eighteen inches?**”

The crowd laughed, again especially the children.

“**Also,**” the teacher continued happily. “**About your coverings. Why do you worry?**” He bent down and picked a wildflower. “**Look closely at the wildflowers of the countryside.**” He held up the flower and sang, “**How do they grow? They don’t slow. Nor do they sew.**”

Everyone laughed again.

“**I’m saying, however, to you all,**” he continued cheerfully. “**That not even Solomon with all that recognition of his.**” He stood up straight and emulated a regal stroll. “**Tossed around himself—.**” He pretended to throw a cape around his shoulders. “**As well as one of these.**” He held up the flower again, spinning it. “**If, however, the foliage of the countryside,**” he said, gesturing to the surrounding vegetation, “**existing for today, and**

tomorrow? Into the oven, it is being tossed! The Divine in this way,” he said, holding up his flower. **“Clothes!”**

“But he doesn’t clothe *us* like that!” Someone complained.

“No?” The speaker asked. He indicated their clothing. **“Much better!”** He suggested. Together, the audience was a riot of clothing colors and styles. **“For all of you! You tiny trusters!”**

People laughed.

“You all,” he continued playfully, **“don’t want to worry, saying.”** His voice whined, **“What do we eat? What do we drink? What do we put on ourselves?”**

This drew more laughter.

A group of foreigners enthusiastically began making whining noises.

The crowd laughed in response.

“Because, all these,” the speaker continued, pointing accusingly at the whiners, **“the foreigners focus on!”**

As foreigners whined their agreement, the audience laughed and applauded.

As the crowd quieted, the teacher continued sincerely. **“Because He has seen—that heavenly Father of yours—that you need these things. But focus primarily on the realm in the skies and that justice of His. And these things?”** He spread his arms and spun around. **“The entirety of them? It is going to be put in front of you all!”**

Everyone cheered.

“You all,” he continued happily, **“certainly don’t want to worry about tomorrow—because tomorrow? It is going to worry about itself! Enough for today?”** He asked merrily. **“The hardships of today!”** He answered.

This won both laughter and applause from the crowd.

A man from a group of Watchers called out, “So Judeans worry too much about their possessions?”

The Judeans, who made up the bulk of the crowd, jeered.

* * *

The magistrate held up his hand for me to stop.

“Aren’t the Watchers just another clan of Judeans?” He asked.

“And old split in our people,” I explained. “Judeans consider the Watchers

an idol worshiping mongrel race while the Watchers think Judeans lost the true faith during their captivity in Babylon. Until the Roman peace, neither group let the other in their territory.”

“Another political division?” He noted, chuckling. “

He looked at the scroll. We were getting towards the end. A puzzled look was on his face.

“That’s odd,” he said.

“What’s odd?” I asked.

“It seems impossible,” he said slowly.

“Impossible?” I asked. “What?”

“Your evidence,” he said flatly, giving me a hard look.

“My evidence? Why impossible?” I asked concerned.

“You claim these are the same sayings as the original Evidence?” He asked.

“Yes,” I said, sounding uncertain even to my own ears.

“And you wrote down these sayings—all of them—by yourself?” He pressed.

“Yes,” I said, confused.

“And this one event included all these sayings from the Nazarene,” he continued, sternly, tapping the scroll. “One after another? Nothing left out? Nothing rearranged? Nothing added?”

“No, master,” I said, more confused.

“It isn’t possible!” He stated flatly.

“What isn’t possible?” I asked with growing alarm.

“When I first tried to read your Evidence,” the magistrate explained. “I assumed its sayings were written down at different times. Topics changed. One quote addressed a group, the next, an individual. But in your new work, the changes are just from people’s questions. Is that really how it was?”

“Yes,” I said, hoping that I sounded confident.

“But one person could not have written down all these sayings, one after another, without missing more than the questions!” He said emphatically. “No one writes as fast as a man speaks. In court, three or four work together to take down the testimony.”

“Or more,” I agreed, relaxing now that I understood his concerns. “But I don’t record as other people do.”

“How then? By magic?” He asked cynically.

“A kind of magic,” I explained. “My father and his fathers before him were recorders in the Jerusalem courts. They developed a code for fast recording. He taught me. With that code, one recorder could do the work of two.”

“Still not fast enough,” the magistrate maintained with certainty.

“No,” I admitted. “But after my father died, we went to live with my mother’s family in Sidon. They were potters. They introduced me to plumbago.”

“Plumbago?” He repeated.

“Yes, a soft, black stone,” I explained. “It blackens pottery, but you can also write with it.”

“A type of ink?” He asked, clearly not convinced.

“Writing without ink,” I explained. “Can I have my pack? I can show you.”

The magistrate signalled to his servant. The servant picked up the bag as if he didn’t want to touch it and dropped it in front of me. I dug into it and pulled out a flat, wooden box. Opening it, I showed him the sticks.

“Black clay straws?” He guessed.

“Not straws. They are solid,” I said, taking one out and showing it to him. “A recording stick, plumbago mixed with clay. No ink. No quill. I write with the sharp end.” I pointed to the edge. “As the edge wears down, I chip a new one.”

“Show me!” He demanded.

I chipped a new edge on the stick with my knife.

He laughed.

“Demonstrate *writing* with it,” he explained slowly.

Feeling the fool, I pulled some paper and wooden grips from my pack.

“The wooden grips hold the stick so it doesn’t break,” I explained. “And they keep my hand clean.”

I then wrote a series of letters and symbols on the paper and showed it to him.

“Like chicken scratches made with charcoal,” he observed. “What does it say?”

“It says, ‘This sentence is written in fast recording code with a plumbago stick.’” I answered.

He looked at the paper again as if trying to decipher its symbols.

“I need a better demonstration,” he commanded. “Tell me when you are

ready and write down what I say.”

I said that I was ready.

“I am the Aedile of Tiberias,” he said, speaking very quickly. “I am Judean by birth but Roman by training. My mother named me in honour of a Roman statesman rather than my own father. My grandfather had my father killed when I was a boy. A political dispute. I was exiled from Judea. My mother sent me to Rome.

“A powerful Roman became my patron there. He had me educated with his own son Drusus. Drusus became my best friend. His family, like mine, was a nest of vipers. Drusus and I thought we would be different. He was the friend I described earlier as having a great sense of humor. However, when he was in his early twenties, he was killed by poison. I suspected members of his family but couldn’t prove anything. Some attempted to blame me, but his father didn’t believe them.

“After the death of Drusus, I began drinking and gambling. I fell into debt. I fled Rome, returning to Judea, only to be imprisoned here for debt. After a failed suicide, my sister and wife convinced my uncle to pay my debts, buying my freedom. He also purchased my magistrate position here in Tiberias.

“So did you get that written down?” He asked.

I nodded.

“Read it back,” the magistrate commanded. “But since a clever man could have memorized what I said, read it backwards, word for word.”

I laughed, but did as requested. It was easy.

“Amazing!” He said when I finished. “A code that copies speech as it happens. Appius knows you can do this?”

“Of course,” I replied. “I charge more. He only hires me when he needs my particular skills, usually when travel is involved.”

“Because it is cheaper to send one recorder than many,” he finished. “Are there others who can do this?”

“My wife a little,” I admitted. “But no one else.”

“No wonder she was bothering you with questions when you met,” the magistrate said. “I should meet her. We will send for her along with your other scrolls.”

At first, I felt elated at the news that my wife would be joining me, but then I began to worry. Would Rebecca be under arrest as well? What would

happen to my scrolls? Who would watch the business?

Seeming to sense my anxiety, the magistrate smiled warmly.

“As I said, this is an opportunity for us both,” he explained. “Your skills and fame are unique. We can work together.”

The magistrate signalled for me to start reading again. I started the part about the Watchers over again.

* * *

A man from a group of Watchers called out, “So Judeans worry too much about their possessions?”

The Judeans, who made up the bulk of the crowd, booed.

The speaker smiled but shook his head “no.”

“**You all,**” he said to the Watchers, “**don’t want to criticize.**”

The Judeans laughed and jeered.

“**When,**” he continued, “**you all don’t want to be criticized.**” He nodded toward the Judeans, making a sour face. Now it was the Watchers turn to mock them. “**Because by what criticisms you all criticize.**” He indicated both groups. “**You are all going to be criticized. Also, by what scale you all measure, it is going to be measured to you all.**”

A thoughtful silence followed.

It was broken when another Watcher called out, “My brother is a moron. I see what you are saying.”

Some laughed but others remembered what the teacher said about calling others morons and booed.

The speaker laughed.

“**What, however,**” the speaker asked playfully, “**do you see?**”

The Watcher, realizing his mistake, amended his statement. “I meant to say my brother has a little problem seeing, just a little speck in his eye.”

“**The speck? In the eye of that brother of yours?**” The speaker asked.

The man nodded.

“**The one, however in your own eye?**” He queried.

The man looked confused.

“**A plank!**” The speaker described it, holding the flat of his hand over an eye. “**You really don’t understand?**”

The Watcher shook his head, no.

The speaker stumbled around, his eye covered, like a blind man.

The crowd laughed.

“Really? How do you say to that brother of yours?” He covered his eye and started using a thick Watcher accent. “Let go! I am going to take that speck from that eye of yours.” He returned to his own voice. “And look!” He exclaimed, pointing at the hand covering his eye. “The plank in that eye of yours!”

Judeans and Watchers were both laughing.

The Watcher caught on. He covered his own eye with his hand, copying the speaker, looking around blindly.

The audience laughed and applauded.

“Mr. Actor!” The speaker said with appreciation, clapping with the rest. Then he continued more kindly. “Toss out—first—from that eye of yours—the plank.” The speaker took his hand from his eye.

The Watcher copied him, looking around blinking.

The crowd laughed.

“And then you might see clearly—to toss out the speck from the eye of that brother of yours,” the speaker said.

The crowd laughed and cheered them both.

“You play the fool!” One of the Dedicated leaders accused the speaker from the back of the crowd. “For the dogs.” He pointed to the Watchers. “And to the sows.” He pointed to the prostitutes. “Your pearls of wisdom defile the sacred!”

The applause died down.

“You all don’t want to give the sacred to the dogs,” the speaker said lightly, turning the insult around. “Nor are you all going to toss those pearls of yours in front of the sows. Not when, they might want to trample them with those feet of theirs.” He trampled around. “And, being turned around—” He stared intensively at the Dedicated, smiled, and said intensely, “They might break you all!”

A few in the crowd started clapping. Others joined the applause, group after group, Watchers, detestables, first then foreigners and almost all the Judeans.

The Dedicated warily began separating themselves from the crowd.

The teacher raised his hands for quiet.

“Ask,” he said addressing his audience earnestly, “And it will be given to you all. Search—and you all are going to discover! Knock,” he said,

rapping with his knuckles over his heart. **“And it is going to be opened for you all!”**

The crowd celebrated the idea.

“Because,” the speaker continued warmly, **“Everyone asking? Gets! Not only does the one searching discover, but also to the one knocking?”** He again rapped on his heart. **“It is going to be opened.”**

The audience cheered the idea, but there were still many doubters.

“Even for us?” One of the detestables, a tax-collector, asked.

“Certainly!” Responded the teacher happily.

“Why should any Divinity care about us?” Asked a burly, sunburnt man with a ten-year-old boy by his side.

“What about you?” The speaker responded. **“A man?”**

The man looked confused.

The teacher invited the man and his boy to the stage.

“From him,” the teacher said to the crowd, putting his hand on the man’s shoulder. Then moving his hand to the boy’s shoulder. **“He might beg for bread—this child of his.”** Then the teacher picked up a stone from the ground. **“No stone?”** He asked as he showed the stone to the man, his boy, and the crowd. **“Are you going to want to hand out?”**

“I might offer a fish. I’m a fisherman,” the sunburnt man responded.

The crowd laughed.

“Certainly!” The speaker agreed, dropping the stone like a rock. **“And a fish!”** He again indicated the boy. **“He might ask?”**

The fisherman nodded in agreement. The speaker picked up something else from the ground.

“No snake?” The teacher asked, showing a small garden snake to the crowd. **“Are you going to want to hand out?”**

The fisherman agreed. The teacher playfully offered the snake to the boy. Instead of drawing back in fear, the boy laughed and reached for it eagerly. The teacher looked to the father for approval. When the man nodded, the teacher gave the boy the snake.

The crowd laughed and applauded.

“If, when you yourselves,” the speaker said, making his sweeping gesturing taking in the whole crowd, **“being—.”** He paused, looked them over, waved his hand indecisively, shrugged, and said in a resigned way, **“Worthless.”**

Everyone laughed.

“Have recognized worthwhile gifts to give those kids of yours,” the speaker continued sincerely. **“How much better will that Father of yours, the one in the skies,”** he said grandly. **“Give worth to those begging Him?”**

This left the audience quiet and thoughtful.

A young woman called out, “What about what we want from others? Their caring, thought, and attention? Can the Father help with any of that?”

“All, in fact,” the teacher answered playfully.

“As much as I need?” She asked.

“As much as,” he responded, spreading his hands far apart to show how much. **“If you all,”** he said with a sweeping gesture with his right hand including the entire audience, **“desire what they might create for you—those people.”** He again indicated the whole group, this time with a sweep of his left hand. **“So much,”** he said, spreading his hands apart again. **“You yourselves, must also create for them.”**

“Because this,” the teacher explained, **“is the traditional law. Also? The shining lights!”** He announced.

This drew applause from the whole hillside.

Spontaneously, the crowd started chanting, “It has come close—the realm of the skies!”

The speaker let it continued, but then held up his hands for silence.

“But do we have to follow the crowd?” A young man asked.

The speaker shook his head, no.

“Go,” the teacher advised. **“All of you, in through the narrow opening,”** He opened a narrow gap between his hands and tried to squeeze his body through it sideways.

The audience chuckled at his struggles.

“Because wide and spacious,” he explained, spreading his arms wide. **“The path, the one leading—.”** He made his tossing-out-the-trash motion. **“Into that destruction!”** He held his nose and wave away the imaginary fumes of the trash heap.

The crowd laughed.

“And many,” the speaker said, making the Roman salute toward Rome. **“Are the ones going through it.”**

The crowd, except for the Romans, laughed and jeered.

But the speaker wasn't done. Turning toward Jerusalem, he made the temple salute.

Most of the crowd continued laughing, the Romans joining them, but the Dedicated grumbled loudly.

"Because narrow the opening," the speaker explained, bringing his hands a few inches apart again and trying to fit through the gap. **"And squeezing itself—"** His voice went up an octave as he sucked in his belly. **"The way—the one leading into—"** He squeezed through. **"The life!"** He exclaimed, raising his arms in triumph. **"And, few,"** he said, nodding at his audience, **"are the ones discovering it."**

The crowd again started chanting, "It has come close—the realm of the skies!"

Again, the teacher gestured for quiet.

As the crowd quieted, a leader of the Dedicated shouted out, "This man is a fool! He is no shining light!"

"Hold fast against fake shining lights!" The speaker countered, seemingly agreeing with his accuser.

This confused everyone. A few chuckled.

"Those who make their way toward you in coverings of sheep," the teacher clarified. **"Inwardly, however, they are wolves!"** He made his hands into claws, snarling, and rending the air. **"Rapacious!"**

The crowd laughed.

"From those fruits of theirs," he said with conviction, **"you are going to find out about them for yourselves. By skill, they collect—from thorn bushes—"** He pretended to berate someone, his wagging finger becoming a slashing claw. **"Bunches of grapes!"** He turned his hands over, smiling as if accepting a gift from the berated. **"Or from cacti—"** Another berating. **"Figs!"** Another gift. **"So every valuable tree?"** The teacher held his right forearm straight upright, with his fingers spread like the branches of a tree. **"A beautiful fruit!"** He held out his left hand as if grasping a plump fruit. **"It creates!"** Then, he twisted his right hand and forearm so the tree was crooked. **"However, the diseased tree? Worthless fruit, it creates!"** He crabbed his left hand as if holding a misshapen fruit. **"It doesn't really have the power,"** the speaker explained, **"a tree that is valuable, to grow fruit that is worthless. Nor a tree that is rotten, to create fruits that are beautiful."**

At this point, the Dedicated began shouting their defense.

“What tree produced this fool?” Shouted one.

“Foolish as a child!” Claimed another.

“The child of the man who was forced to marry a pregnant woman!” Yelled third.

Other repeated this accusation. They shortened it and began chanting, “The child of the man!” Over and over again.

The speaker however merely laughed and bowed as if accepting the title. Then, he pointed confidently at the sky generating a chorus of “It has come close—the realm of the skies!” He pointed up over and over again, creating his own repeated chorus. The crowd join his chorus, drowning out that of the Dedicated. When they gave up, he held his hands hand for quiet.

“**Every tree—not wanting to create beautiful fruit—cuts itself off,**” he said simply. “**And—into the fire—it tosses itself.**” He made his throwing-out-the-garbage motion.

The crowd chuckled.

“**Watch!**” The speaker announced, directing the audience’s attention back to the Dedicated. “**From those fruits of theirs, you are going to find out about them for yourselves!**”

At this, many in the crowd turned around to face the Dedicated. Many of the Dedicated still seemed to want a confrontation, but their wiser heads prevailed. The crowd had made their choice. The Academics and the Dedicated began withdrawing. A few from the crowd joined them as they began to leave.

Most applauded and some began to cheer.

“You are our new master!” Someone shouted.

Many supported this sentiment.

“**Not every one saying to me.**” Switching to a fawning voice, he cried, “**Master! Master!**” Returning to his serious voice, he said wistfully, “**Is going to get himself into the realm of the skies. Except the one serving the purpose of that Father of mine, the one in the skies!**”

“On that day,” someone called out cynically, “Won’t a new group claim moral superiority in *your* name?”

The speaker surprised the crowd by nodding his agreement.

“**Many are going to say to me on that day,**” the speaker responded. He switched to the fawning voice again and whined, “**Master! Master! Didn’t**

we—by your name—act as shining lights? And by your name! People’s demons? We tossed them out! And by your name! Powers? Many, we created!”

The crowd laughed.

“And, at that time, I am going to say the same thing to them.” Then he announced grimly, “Since I never ever recognized you, you all are cut off from me, working immorality—for yourselves.”

The people applauded.

The speaker accepted the applause, but gestured toward the sky, indicating the lateness of the hour.

“Everyone,” he said hopefully, “in fact, anyone, who listens to these ideas of mine *and*—uses them. He is going to be compared to a practical person, who constructed his house on a rocky heights.” He gestured toward the cliff behind him. Then he said, “And, *it fell down*—.”

Most laughed, thinking that he meant the house.

Then he added, “*The rain!*” He illustrated the fall of rain with his fingers.

This generated new laughter.

“*And they showed up*—,” he said sourly.

Many laughed, thinking that he meant the Dedicated.

“*The floods,*” he continued, sweeping his arms around like swirling waters.

People laughed and hooted.

“*And they blew*—,” he said puffing out his cheeks.

Most laughed, but no one knew what to think.

“*The winds,*” he continued as if it was obvious. “*And they fell against that house.*” He held his hands apart and shook them as if they were the wind shaking a house. “*And, no!*” He exclaimed, adding slowly. “*It. Does. Not. Fall!*” He paused, then explained, “*Because? It was built on rock!*”

Everyone applauded enthusiastically.

“*And each one,*” he said dolefully, “*listening to my ideas. And not wanting to use them? He is going to be compared to a stupid person who constructed his house on a sandy beach.*”

He pointed toward the beach below them. The group of Dedicated could be seen there, moving away along the shore.

“*And, it came down*—,” he said again, but now everyone knew what was coming. “*The rain, and they showed up—the floods. And they*

blew—the winds. And they fell against that house—that one!” He pointed down to the beach, his voice growing somber. “**And? It. Fell.** He said slowly. “**And, it was—the crash of it?**” He went silent for a moment, staring at the audience intently until it was dead quiet. Then he suddenly whooped, “**Stupendous!**”

The crowd jumped. Then everyone laughed.

As they quieted, some began chanting joyously, “It has come close—the realm of the skies!” Soon everyone joined in. “It has come close—the realm of the skies!” Faster and faster. “It has come close—the realm of the skies!” The chant sped along, faster and faster until it collapsed of its own momentum and the audience broke into cheers and applause.

At this point, the teacher bowed to them all and moved into the crowd. The crowd’s cheers continued for some time.

* * *

This was the end of the first scroll.

“Interesting,” the magistrate said. “So the question is, whose house is going to fall? The Dedicated’s? Judea’s? Rome’s?”

“Or no one’s?” I suggested, “If we follow his ideas.”

The magistrate laughed.

“Which reminds me,” he continued. “Do you believe that this teacher was raised from the dead as his Followers claim?”

“My wife assures me that it is true,” I said earnestly.

“A wise man never contradicts his wife,” the magistrate agreed with a chuckle. “In any case, this man disappeared years ago and yet his influence grows. How many heard him speak?”

“Tens of thousands?” I guessed.

“That many? Impressive!” He responded. “And how many take his words to heart today?”

I thought for a moment.

“Hundreds of thousands?” I ventured. “More?”

“Do you see why this is important politically?” He asked.

“I am beginning to,” I said.

“And the Followers have leaders, those who travelled with the Nazarene. I have heard they are called the Ones Sent,” he said.

I nodded.

“Have you met them?” He asked.

“Two of my wife’s brothers are among the Ones Sent,” I admitted.

“Really?” He exclaimed. “So not only are you famous, respected, but politically connected as well!”

“Not so connected,” I said sourly.

“Your brother-in-laws don’t approve of your marriage?” The magistrate guessed.

“One is fine,” I explained. “But the eldest doesn’t like our marriage, considers me a foreigner, and hates our business.”

“Which is another reason why you are not welcome among the Followers,” he observed. “And they grow more numerous every day.”

I nodded again.

“And these Followers have opponents, violent opponents,” he continued. “And they too have a leader.”

“Ha-Tarsi, one of the Dedicated,” I agreed. “We call him ‘the Syrian’. He brings Followers before local courts. Has them publicly beaten.”

“And Ha-Tarsi, as you call him, may be building his own army, mostly from among young Militants,” the magistrate said.

“I hadn’t heard that,” I said, surprised and worried at the news.

“It isn’t common knowledge,” the magistrate explained. “Ha-Tarsi’s financial support comes from Jerusalem. Gamaliel, head of the Great Council, is his patron.”

“The Romans won’t like that,” I observed.

“See, you *are* learning politics!” The magistrate claimed. “But as long as the violence focuses on opposing religious sects, Pilate does nothing. Rome does not get involved in local religious disputes. But a private army? That flies in the face of Roman law.”

“What does this have to do with me?” I asked.

“Isn’t your Evidence used by both Followers and their opponents?” The magistrate asked knowingly. “Both to defend the Nazarene and to attack him?”

“But I am just the recorder!” I protested. “Others remember his words. The One’s Sent know many by heart.”

“But memories are in people’s heads. They fade. You put the words on paper,” the magistrate explained. “When was there ever a document copied as much as your Evidence?”

"It is costly to make so many copies," I explained.

"And yet," said the magistrate, "Here you are, no poorer for the expense. Well-known and successful. And the words you sell are trusted because they were used at a Roman trial."

"If so trusted, why would Pilate charge me with falsifying evidence?"

"Maybe some people don't want those words trusted quite so much," the magistrate suggested. "Or maybe Pilate just wants you in his control. Of maybe Pilate or someone else wants you to stop selling copies of your Evidence. You are in the middle: between Followers and opponents. Between the Judeans and Romans. The middle is a dangerous place. But it is not without its advantages if you know how to use it."

"But I don't know how to use it," I claimed. "I am just a recorder."

The magistrate laughed.

"But I might," he offered sincerely.

"I am in your hands," I said, stating a simple fact. "What do you want me to do?"

"For now," he said confidently. "Write a note to your wife. My servant, Eutyches, will take it to her. He will see that she doesn't talk to anyone."

"She won't like that," I said. "Her family is very close."

"I understand," the magistrate said sympathetically. "But you have enemies, perhaps in your own family. And it won't do either of us any good if Pilate gets you."

"What do I tell her?" I asked.

He thought for a moment.

"Write that she must send a note to her family," he said carefully, "saying that you never made it to your witness interviews here in Tiberias because you stumbled on a business opportunity elsewhere and that you need her assistance.

"Then tell her the truth: that you are both to be my secret guests here. Tell her that I am the noble Marcus Julius Agrippa, a grandson of Herod the Great, a nephew of the Tetrarch, Antipas. Throw in that the Emperor Tiberias was, and maybe still is, my patron in Rome. Write her that I am interested in her faith and want to learn more, but, because of my family and position, I must keep my interest a secret. Write that this secrecy may be a matter of life and death.

"Tell her to bring your other scrolls."

The Hillside

* * *