

WITNESSES:

*The Sermon on the Mount*

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Other Books by Gary Gagliardi

# WITNESSES

*To the Sermon on the Mount*

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*Translated and Written  
By Gary Gagliardi*

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*A Christ's Words Book  
Clearbridge Publishing*

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*Dedicated to my granddaughter,  
Anita Corvino*

## C O N T E N T S

Letter 1 .....	1
Letter 2 .....	7
Letter 3 .....	22
Letter 4 .....	29
Letter 5 .....	36
Letter 6 .....	44
Letter 7 .....	58
Letter 8 .....	67
Letter 9 .....	78
Letter 10 .....	88
Letter 11 .....	97
Letter 12 .....	108
Letter 13 .....	118
Letter 14 .....	123
Appendix: Greek Translation .....	129
Letter 2 Translation Notes .....	135
Letter 3 Translation Notes .....	147
Letter 4 Translation Notes .....	155
Letter 4 Translation Notes .....	155
Letter 5 Translation Notes .....	167
Letter 6 Translation Notes .....	181
Letter 7 Translation Notes .....	202
Letter 8 Translation Notes .....	220
Letter 9 Translation Notes .....	246
Letter 10 Translation Notes .....	264
Letter 11 Translation Notes .....	287
Letter 12 Translation Notes .....	312
Letter 13 Translation Notes .....	329

## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

This book combines an entertaining story with a serious discussion about the translation of Jesus's words. Enjoy the story. I hope you have as much fun reading it as I did writing it. If you like, you can then read the discussion about translation that follows the story.

The story demonstrates how entertaining Jesus would have been to listen to when he spoke. This story is only partly fictional. It offers a unique view of Jesus as seen through his own words. My Jesus is humorous, engaging, and challenging. He is not the holy, lonely, tortured Christ of the cross. He is the joyful, funny, clever Christ, who can draw and hold crowds of thousands. He is a debater who can answer every challenge an accusation from opponents with a smile and a wink. A teacher who can make those who hear him laugh at themselves and thereby feel differently about their world.

This story is only partly fictional because all of Jesus's words in this story are those that we read in the "Sermon on the Mount" from Matthew 5:3 to Matthew 7:27. These words follow the same verse order as Matthew, and they are translated much more literally from the Greek than the version we see in the Bible.

The Jesus we meet in examining his original Greek words was a man of great humor. He used wordplay, double meanings, and even rhymes to convey his ideas. His language was highly descriptive. His words appear to be chosen so that they could be acted out. This story seeks to reveal that man.

Jesus's words are important, not only to Christianity, but to human history. And yet, we are much more likely to hear Paul or the Old Testament quoted by Christian pastors than Jesus. The Jesus quotes we do hear are the "safe" ones, not the interesting, controversial, and truly entertaining ones. However, it was not always this way. The original Jesus movement, spreading out from Judea to the world, was based on the excitement of Jesus's words. This work attempts to demonstrate why those words were so interesting to those who heard them in his era.

The Jesus here is shown indirectly, through the memory of specific individuals. This story is about the witnesses to the sermon as much as it is about Jesus himself. My witnesses avoid trying to explain Jesus's meaning or his philosophy. They are witnesses, offering testimony. They take

this responsibility very seriously. For them, it becomes the focus of their whole lives.

These six witnesses started as characters in a play. The play was their re-enactment of what took place during the Sermon on the Mount for early assemblies of Christ's followers. Jesus's words from Matthew were the framework on which I built the dialogue in this play. In the play, the witnesses described not only what Jesus said but what other said to him. They described what he did and what else happened as he was speaking. Once that play was finished, its dialogue and stage directions became the foundation for my story.

### The Spoken Word

Standard biblical translations attempt to render Jesus's spoken words into proper English sentences. But Jesus's Greek is not written Greek. It is spoken Greek. Like all spoken languages, Jesus's words are full of exclamations, incomplete sentences, and points of emphasis. Word order is critical. The speaker leads his listeners along word-by-word as they follow his thoughts.

Much of this is lost in translating Jesus's spoken words into grammatically correct sentences. Even more is lost in the translation into English where word order is much more structured than Greek. Even more is lost because the meaning of words changes over time.

My goal in telling this story is to capture how Jesus would have sounded to the people of his era. This means re-creating a larger context for his words. It also required filtering those words through a group of listeners that understand them in different ways. This allows the story to tell us things about Judean culture that were implicit in the words then but which are forgotten today.

In the Greek, there are many signs that this "sermon" was not a monologue at all, but rather a back and forth discussion. For example, Jesus sometimes addresses the crowd. Other times, he talks to individuals. A sermon would simply address the crowd. We know these shifts happened because in the Greek, his language switches from using the plural "you" to the singular "you". We see this both in the pronouns and the forms of the verbs. This is lost in English

translation because we use the same word “you” and the same verb forms for both the singular and the plural.

By going through the Greek, word-by-word and assuming that everything Jesus said made perfect sense, a larger context emerges. We can imagine the types of things that were said and done to create the words we have today. This addition of a larger context creates a more natural flow of ideas.

### **Connecting Ideas Together**

Even in translation, this “sermon” doesn’t read like a sermon at all. There are too many sudden shifts in topic. This starts at the beginning. What connects the eight different groups in the Beatitudes? How does a discussion of salt lead to one about light, and the one about light lead to another about the law? If this was originally a sermon that people could follow, many of Jesus’s words connecting these ideas must have been lost.

A more likely explanation is that the connections were the words of other people and the details of the events. Such questions and events are tightly constrained. They must flow logically from what Jesus said. They must lead naturally to what he says next. They must explain exclamations, incomplete sentences, and so on.

In my story, there are no sudden shifts in topic. Jesus’s statements generate questions. As he is speaking, events occur. Those questions and events connect one topic to the next. The questions and events are fiction, but they must be like what happened. What truly happened created the words that we have from a similarly logical flow of events.

### **The Humor of Jesus**

Jesus’s words were clearly meant to make people laugh. This is something else that we can know for certain from the words themselves. Greek sentence structure is more flexible than English, but its proper form puts the most important words at the beginning of the sentence. However, all humor, in every language, has the punchlines at the end of phrases. This structure is necessary to create surprise and make us laugh. This is true in English, Greek, and all other languages.

Jesus commonly puts his keywords at the end of phrases. He continually adjusts his sentence order, putting the verbs first or the subjects first, depending on the surprise he wants at the end.

Jesus also repeats certain phrases for comic effect. On modern television, characters have “catchphrases”. Jesus seems to have invented the concept. By repeating a phrase, these catchphrases become more meaningful and entertaining over time. The main “catchphrase” in this story is “the realm of the skies.” This is a more literal translation of what we usually see in the Bible as “the kingdom of heaven”.

This catchphrase itself has a larger context from a verse Jesus spoke in Matthew 4:17, translated in the KJV as, “Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” This phrase was originally used by John the Baptist and the Bible tells us that both Jesus and his disciples used it as a calling card. Once we think of the “realm of the skies” as a catchphrase, we can see many of Jesus’s statements connect to it. It unites Jesus’s ideas in an increasingly meaningful way. And, it does it in an entertaining way.

Jesus uses all the other conventions of humor as well: exaggeration, plays on words, double meanings, and so on. My desire is to communicate as much of this humor as possible.

Jesus is particularly good at wordplay. Many academics claim that Jesus taught in Aramaic, not Greek. This means that the Greek source of our Gospels is a translation itself. After writing this work, this claim doesn’t seem even remotely possible. While some plays on words can be translated between languages, a great many cannot. I cannot capture this wordplay directly in translation. Instead, I explain it indirectly through the character comments and their reactions. While explaining a joke is not as funny as hearing the joke, it is better than nothing.

### **Fresh Ears to Hear**

In this work, I purposefully translated the Greek of Jesus’s words in unfamiliar ways. My goal is to help my readers hear him as his listeners would have heard him at the time, without the filter of the following millennia of interpretation. However, this is not a “modern” translation. I avoid updating Jesus’s words to more modern ideas. In writing the fictional part of the narrative, I tried to use only words and phrases that could be easily translated from the ancient Greek.

For example, I translate “the kingdom of heaven” as “the realm of the skies.” The word translated as “kingdom” doesn’t only mean a leader’s

physical territory. It means his power to reign, his kingship, and even his palace. “Reign” captures most of this, but “the reign of the skies” sounds too much like “the rain of the skies.” So I use “realm” because at least, it allows us to hear the word with fresh ears. The word translated as “heaven” mean “sky”. Our concept of “heaven” didn’t exist in Jesus’s place and time. Jesus usually, but not always, uses the word in the plural, “skies”.

My preference is to use the broader and more common meaning of the Greek words that Jesus used, but Jesus also has his own unique way of using certain words. Fortunately, almost all of the words that he uses in the Sermon on the Mount are those that he uses commonly. This gives us a better idea of his meaning than words that he only uses once. However, Jesus also made up his own words. There is a famous example of this in the Lord’s Prayer.

We must make many decisions in how to translate a given term. While I would prefer to always translate each Greek term in the same way, the doesn’t always work. Greek words have different ranges of meaning that our words. For example, the Greek word usually translated as “come” in the Gospel means “to start”, “to set out” on a journey and “to show up” from a journey. All these ideas share a sense of beginning. There is no similar word in English. However, most commonly Jesus uses this word in the sense of “showing up”.

### **The Work Behind this Work**

I have no previous experience in writing fiction. I also have no academic credentials in translating ancient Greek. In both areas, I must describe myself as an amateur. I do this work for pleasure.

I am a professional writer. I have written over forty non-fiction works. Many of my books have won awards in many different non-fiction categories. My book translating ancient Chinese was recognized as the best multicultural book of its year. My works have been translated into over a dozen languages and sold all over the world. Hundreds of thousands of people have read my works.

My knowledge of language goes beyond ancient Chinese and ancient Greek. I have studied languages for over fifty years. I spent approximately four years studying Latin, two years on German, four years on French, three years on Japanese, five years on Spanish, fifteen years on ancient Chinese, and now about fifteen years on ancient Greek. I have studied and

used more different computer languages than I can count. I am also a little familiar with various forms of mathematical formulas, which are another type of language. Much of my experience in translating has been translating general ideas about competition into the specific languages of different competitive arenas: management, sales, marketing, and so on. Each of which has developed their own terminology.

My fifteen years spent on ancient Greek, like my time in studying ancient Chinese, was very narrowly focussed. I have limited my studies to Jesus’s words in the Gospels and related works, such as the Greek of the Septuagint, which is the source of all of Jesus’s Old Testament quotes.

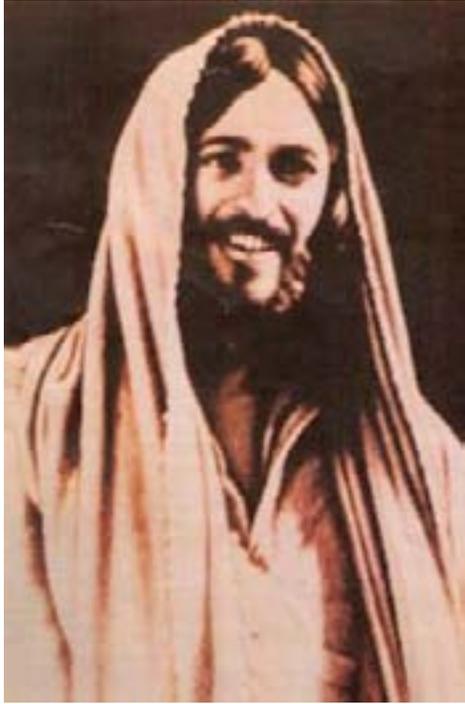
I have written a detailed article on almost every verse Jesus speaks in the Gospel. I write or update such articles almost daily at a website known as ChristsWords.com.

### **The Translation Section**

After the story concludes, this book contains a series of fourteen chapters explaining my thoughts in translating Jesus’s words. We could call this an “appendix”, but in the initial versions of this work, had twice as many pages as the story. All of that information and more is available on-line, but I have tried to trim down this “translation notes” chapters so that they are interesting. I provide it only as a convenience for those who want to understand why my translation is so different from typical Biblical ones.

These fourteen chapters examine each word of the Greek of Jesus’s words, how each word is translated in this work, and how each was translated (or left untranslated) in the King James Version. From these chapters, someone not familiar with the Greek common language of the middle east called Koine can get a good idea of how my translation was created. You can then make your own judgments about how valid it is and about how well Jesus’s words are captured in normal Biblical translations and how well they are captured here.

Sincerely,  
Gary Gagliardi



## LETTER 1: INTRODUCTION

From Festus Hippou, a witness to Jesus Christ by the will of the Father,  
To the Assemblies of the Way, a short letter of introduction:

For over a decade, my wife, children and I toured with a group of people who witnessed the gathering now known as the Sermon on the Mount. Your assembly might have been one of those that we visited. Our group travelled all over the known world, testifying about our experiences. We have stopped touring for the variety of reasons you can imagine.

Today, the practice of witnesses is to send out letters that can be read at smaller assemblies of followers. These letters can be copied and sent to other assemblies. I am writing these letters at the urging of my wife, who thinks that the story of the Sermon and our story as witnesses should be heard more broadly. By this practice, the words of the Nazarene are not only preserved but have multiplied throughout the world.

No written description can do justice to the words of the Master or seeing him speak. We performed those words because we wanted to give people today the sense of being there.

However, we must be practical. While the Master's words have been widely circulated, these letters of mine seek to provide more context for what you are reading and discussing at your assemblies. As with other witnesses whose letters you may have read, our goal has always been to increase your trust and understanding of the words of the Master. My wife's and my hope is that we can reach many more people through these letters than we did giving our testimony in person.

For example, you should know that the so-called "sermon" itself wasn't a sermon at all. It was not a prepared speech. It was a dialogue. It was a performance. The Nazarene made statements, but mostly he answered questions from those of us there. He answered those questions in a more timeless and general way than we understood at the time. From our perspective, we were being given a lot to think about.

The Sermon Witnesses, as our group came to be called, consisted originally of six people. All of us were at the Sermon. Five of us had direct

interactions with the Nazarene. One of us played what I would describe as a central role in the drama as it unfolded. Several of us also saw the Master speak at other times.

But let me first explain how our family of witnesses came to exist.

Our group was started by one woman, a lady from Tiberias named Tamar. Tiberias is the largest city on the sea of Galilee. It is the court seat of the Roman provincial government. Tamar heard the Nazarene speak at Seven Springs. Seven Springs is the name of a hillside gathering place known as “the mount”. Strangely enough, Tamar was the only one of the witnesses that didn’t interact directly with the Master at the event. However, her father, who was with her, played a major role.

Since both she and her father had been there, people asked her and her father to describe what it was like. As the Teacher grew more famous, they were invited to speak outside Tiberias. This started even before there were any organized assemblies of Followers. As assemblies formed after the Nazarene’s departure, she and her father were asked more and more frequently to bear witness to what they saw. They were invited to speak at many of the towns and villages in Galilee. As they traveled, Tamar met others who were also at the Sermon.

The first she met was Ezra. When he first met Tamar and her father, Ezra was the leader of a small religious community of a sect called the Servers. Tamar spoke at an assembly of Followers near their community. Since her father was ill at the time, she asked for someone to read the lines of the sermon while she described what had happened. Ezra volunteered to read, but, since he too had witnessed the Sermon, he added his testimony to hers. Since Tamar’s father, Enoch, had grown too weak to travel with her, he asked if Ezra would accompany her so she could continue traveling and testifying. Enoch offered Ezra a generous donation for his community if he did. Tamar’s father was a wealthy and well-known man trading cloth throughout the region. Ezra agreed to accompany Tamar. Soon after, they met Demas.

Demas was sent out as a member of a group that we called “the Distinguished”. In our language, the word for “distinguished” is “pharisee”. He was sent out to investigate the growing movement of the Followers of the

Nazarene. By this time, the Nazarene had been executed, but the movement he had started kept growing. The Distinguished did not understand why the movement didn’t die. They wanted to know more. Demas volunteered to collect information for their leaders.

Demas met Tamar and Ezra at a Follower assembly. Since he was also at the sermon, he saw that he could serve his mission more easily by traveling with them as they toured among Follower groups. Though they knew that he was a lawyer of the Distinguished, they thought he could add a valuable perspective as a witness. At the sermon, he had been part of a group that opposed the Master’s teaching. However, over time, he too had grown to love him as a teacher.

Then, the three of them met Ulla.

Ulla described herself as an old fishwife, a widow, and a grandma. She heard Tamar’s group testify to what happened at Seven Springs. It brought back her own memories of the Teacher speaking. While listening to their testimony, she called out her own comments, adding many things that had happened that they had missed. Tamar was a rich, city girl. Demas and Ezra were both scholars of different sorts: Demas in law, Ezra in history. The crowd at the sermon was mostly working people, more like Ulla. After the meeting, Tamar asked if Ulla could join them to provide her perspective. Since Tamar was rich, she offered to pay for Ulla’s travel. Since Ulla’s family was poor and she felt that she was a burden to them, she agreed.

Eventually, this group of four met me. When we met, I was traveling with a troupe of actors. All the major cities in the Empire are familiar with the theater, Greek drama, and traveling bands of performers like ours. Provincial Judeans, however, especially Galileans, know little about acting for reasons I will explain in a later letter. Though I grew up in Galilee, I am Greek.. There are a number of Greek cities in Galilee on the side opposite of Tiberias. As a Greek, I had none of the Judean aversion to the idea of playing roles in a performance.

After seeing Tamar and her associates give their testimony, I introduced myself as a fellow witness at the event. They remembered me from my interactions with the Master. This memory did not endear me to them. They

questioned me and I admitted that I was not truly a Follower at the time. However, their recognition allowed me to explain why they were giving their testimony all wrong. It wasn't that the story they told wasn't true, but the way they told that story just didn't do justice to the event.

Let me explain.

When I saw the Master, the experience was thrilling, the most interesting experience of my life, before or since. But the way that Ulla, Tamar, and the rest gave their testimony? Just boring. Endless description, but no action. They admitted that their testimony did not do justice to the Teacher. They were growing bored with it themselves.

I asked if I could work with them.

They did not readily accept me. They did not immediately like the idea of taking advice from an actor.

I pointed out that I could offer the unique perspective of a foreigner at a time when non-Judeans were a fast-growing part of the movement. Though I was not part of any Follower assembly, I considered my encounter with the Master the most important event of my life. I didn't know much about the Master, other than what I had heard at Seven Springs, but I was interested in learning more.

They took me on as an additional witness on a trial basis. At first, I expected to stay with them only for a few months, but we were together for well over a decade. I, of course, became a Follower, as all who saw the Master personally tend to do.

It took them longer to warm up to my idea for changing their presentation. My basic idea was that we should re-create the event, playing it instead of describing it. This took us some time for us to work out. As we worked on making the change, we met the last of our group, Pisca.

Pisca was just a child when she saw the Master. She was just a young maiden when she met our group. She had grown up in a shepherding tribe. She heard us speak in her area and immediately wanted to join. There were problems with her becoming a witness, mostly because of her age and the opposition of her parents. When those problems were worked out, she became the final witness traveling with our little group. Her perspective

turned out to be quite valuable, especially, since she had been one of the lucky ones.

Our presentation combined our various memories with the Nazarene's words. We construct a complete re-creation of everything that happened at Seven Springs that day. As we traveled over the years, we met a other people who were there that helped us complete that picture.

In presenting it, we wouldn't just describe it, as this book does. We would act it out. In addition to re-creating the event, we also tried to answer the questions that people have about the experience. Since one of the first things people always asked was, "What did the Teacher looked like?" we usually described him before we started our presentation to explain why we took turns portraying him.

We would tell them simply that the Nazarene was an everyman. Neither old nor young. Average height and weight. Neither dark nor light. Simple local clothes, neither rich nor poor. Hair and beard midway between the longer hair of the country and the trimmed styles of the city. No distinctive features except for how expressive his face was and how nimble he was. Both Ezra and Demas, who saw him speak more than once, felt his everyman quality was intensional, since his clothing changed as he travelled through Judea, always matching the local dress.

But what impressed us all was his personality. Especially his cheerfulness and confidence. And how much he enjoyed people. Every time someone asked him a question, he was so excited to hear from them. Even from the Distinguished who were his enemies.

But speaking as an actor, the Nazarene could intentionally adopt whatever character his message required. One moment, he was as authoritative as a ruler. The next, he was as playful as a child. And he was always surprising. Always entertaining. Pisca describe his way of speaking as someone unwrapping a special gift. He never just said a word when he could illustrate it or act it out.

The Master's later teaching sessions, as witnessed by Tamer, Ezra, and Demas, were like Seven Spring, shaped by what people asked and random events such as birds flying by. However, he did reuse his sayings and other

material. And some of it was prepared beforehand, specially the stories he told. But Seven Springs was very early in his teaching career. He only told one story there, at the very end. And it was clearly inspired by events. As Demas said, the man was so quick! He paid attention to everything and everyone around him.

When we were trying to re-create the event, none of us could really capture the Nazarene's tone and manner of speaking, so we took turns reciting his words. However, sometimes, when we testified before the dark assemblies", Demas or I alone would speak all his words because the people hearing us couldn't see who was portraying the Nazarene at different points in time. But we always preferred to take turns so that people didn't get the mistaken idea that how we acted and sounded was much like the Master.

Of course, during our re-creations, we didn't only recite the words of the Teacher. We also played the many different roles of people in the crowd who interacted with him. For me, that was always more fun because there was such a variety of people in the crowd. However, during our presentations, we also recalled our own feelings at the time, seeing him speak.

My biggest concern about these letters is capturing that feeling, especially how we enjoyed the humor of the Nazarene. Spoken humor doesn't always translate to writing. We see that problem with the Master's words as they circulate. Spoken humor is a lot different than written humor. Spoken humor is all about the pauses, the voice pitch, and the tone. Of course, when a group can see you, all your motions and postures are also part of your expression.

As my wife always points out, we laughed a lot that day, hearing the man speak his words. She believes that people will understand why we laughed if I give a complete picture of the event. I have my doubts. A joke can be funny, but an explanation of a joke usually isn't.

However, we hope everyone reading and hearing these letters will laugh as well, if just a little. The next letter will describe how that day started at Seven Springs.

With you all on the Way,  
Festus Hippou

## LETTER 2: LUCKY

From Festus, a witness to Jesus Christ by the will of the Father,  
To the Assemblies, a letter describing the start of the Sermon of the Mount:

Seven Springs is a lush rolling area on a hillside. It is watered by seven streams that flow from the hills into the sea. Grasses, rocks, wildflowers, and scrubby bushes dot the landscape. The area is well-known as a meeting site. For many days, the Teacher's heralds had been spreading the word that the Teacher would be speaking there. The posting we'd read about the event said that "Jesus the Nazarene would start speaking after mid day, around the seventh hour."

People showed up by boat and foot, mule and wagon, excited to hear the Nazarene. Hundreds of people of all types were there.

I came by boat, arriving mid-morning around the fourth hour. My friends and I had been traveling around the sea of Galilee for fun. One of my wealthier friends had the use of his father's small boat. We had been ferrying passengers here and there to earn money during the good weather. Some locals from Hippo hired us to take them to Seven Springs to hear the Teacher speak. We decided to join them.

We pulled our boat onto the sandy beach below the speaking area. We walked up the hillside to the gathering area, carrying a few skins of wine. On the way up the hillside, we were pestered by beggars and peddlers. We thought we were coming early, but there were already quite a few people there.

I didn't know Demas at the time, but he had also arrived early accompanied by a big guard named Boaz. His job was to save some good seats for a group of the Distinguished. The Distinguished expected to get the best seats at meetings. So Demas had paid some beggars, widows, and orphans to hold an area right up front for them. We noticed and commented at the beggars sitting in such good seats. It was unusual. Usually, beggars work the back of crowds. We also notice the big guard, Boaz, standing, watching over them.

The day was warm but overcast. People arrived steadily, sitting down, filling up the hillsides around the speaking area. People sat in their groups. Galileans, sitting with others from their towns and clans. Judeans from nearer Jerusalem, and a number of other ethnic groups such as ours as well. We settled down among some other Greek from the cities of the Decapolis.

Many wealthy sat up front. They sent out their servants early to save them places. Tamar, her father, and their party were, of course, among them. But people of all types arrived early and saved places for others. The flow became quite heavy about midday. The area was large, but, as it filled up, it got crowded. Ulla was somewhere deeper in the crowd with her family and others from her fishing village. Ezra was there as well with a few others from his community.

One person who wasn't in the crowd was Pisca. One of the Master's heralds saw her mother and her standing off at a distance from everyone else. Instead of chasing them away, as the girl and her mother expected, the man brought them to a place behind the speaking area, separated from the crowd. In a sense, they got some of the best places in the house.

A murmur moved through the crowd as the Nazarene arrived. He was mingling among the people. Everyone felt the excitement as he appeared. My friends and I had been drinking. Our enthusiasm was well-lubricated. As the Teacher showed up at the edge of the speaking area, we all strained to get a look at him.

Then, the chanting began.

A group of the Nazarene followers called out together, "Change your minds!"<sup>[1]</sup>

A second group of followers answered, "Because it has come near."

"The realm of the skies!" both groups shouted together.

Then the second group, took the first line, "Change your minds!"

The Nazarene, smiling, walked alone out into the center of the speaking area. The crowd applauded his appearance. He raised his arm and twirled his hand over his head. It was a signal. His students repeated the chant together.

"Change your minds!

"Because it has come near,

"The realm of the skies!"

Smiling more broadly, he twirled his arm over his head again.

His students repeated the chant. Others in the crowd began to join in.

Laughing, he twirled his arm a third time.

Many in the crowd happily chanted the lines together.

This chant was familiar to most of those there for a several reasons. It was first used by another teacher, John, the Master's cousin, and his ascetic followers. They had used it for years, and then the Nazarene and his students had adopted it. The heralds that the Master sent out to announce where and when he was speaking used the same chant to gather a crowd. These student heralds have become known as the Ones Sent, who today lead the Master's Followers. Once they had gathered a crowd by chanting in the towns and villages they visited, these heralds would make their announcement and post their written notification.

However, my friends and I had never heard the chant before. Being from the Greek side of the sea, we hadn't heard about this cousin, John. And we never saw the Nazarene's heralds. The people who we ferried to the gathering had read about the gathering from a posting in Tiberias.

After getting the crowd to repeat the change several times, we were laughing and applauding.

The Master raised his arms for quiet.

Then he pointed up a single finger into the air and twirled it. His students responded with a single line.

"The realm of the skies!"

He pointed up with a twirling finger again.

"The realm of the skies!"

Others joined in the single line.

He then pointed up again.

"The realm of the skies!"

More of the crowd joined in. Again, we found ourselves laughing.

[1] See Greek translation notes on page 142.

Then he twirled his whole arm over his head again, signalling the entire chant. We responded.

“Change your minds!

“Because it has come near,

“The realm of the skies!”

Then he twirled a single finger again.

“The realm of the skies!”

We were being trained, but we were enjoying themselves. This was a new thing. And it was fun.

The Master was laughing. Many of us were laughing as well.

Then the Master again held up his hands for quiet.

The crowd quieted down, expecting the Nazarene to immediately start speaking. But before he could start, one of the beggars holding spaces for Demas’s Distinguished called out.

“Charity for the poor!” he shouted.

The Nazarene laughed, and we laughed as well.

“Lucky! These beggars!”<sup>[2]</sup> the Master observed wryly, smiling.

His first words surprised everyone. The idea of beggars, the blind, lame, and crippled, being lucky! It had to be a joke. He said it cheerfully, not cruelly. And many of us laughed. However, many were surprised.

One of those who was surprised called out.

“How can beggars be lucky?” she asked.

To answer, the Master took a deep breath and said cheerfully, “For the breath of life!”

“But why the Divine give them such difficult lives? Is it punishment?” Another person asked.

The Master shook his head “no” and smiled.

“Because theirs is the realm of the skies,” he explained.

The Nazarene raised and twirled his hand over his head.

“Change your minds!”

“Because it has come near.”

“The realm of the skies!”

[2] See Greek translation notes on page 143.

The chant drew more laughter and some applause. Pisca remembers applauding, not the line, the man’s idea, that there was a purpose to suffering. People like her mother and her, at the time, had such difficult lives.

But the Master didn’t explain his meaning about beggars. He moved toward a group of widows and greeted them. They were also part of the group saving places for Demas’s Distinguished. He had them stand so he could embrace them and show them to the crowd.

Then he said, “Lucky! These weeping in mourning!”<sup>[3]</sup>

There was more surprise and more laughter.

“Is he joking?” I asked my friends.

They shrugged, not knowing any more than I did.

Again, some were offended.

One of the offended called out, “How is losing a loved one lucky?”

Others called out similar questions as the Master helped the widows sit back down.

Then he explained in a matter of fact tone, “Because, they themselves shall be called near.”

And again, as if to explain his answer, he pointed his twirling finger skyward.

“The realm of the skies!” the crowd responded.

We now understood the signals: a twirling hand for the full chant, the twirling finger for the single line. We applauded ourselves. The chanting was fun and united the crowd.

The Nazarene was saying surprising things, but he had gotten our attention and making a kind of sense, even to non-Judeans.

Suddenly, a little girl rushed out of the crowd toward the Teacher! The Nazarene was delighted and many of us laughed at the child and her parents trying to catch her. The Nazarene caught her up and lifted her to show to the crowd.

“Lucky!”<sup>[4]</sup> he said, “These soft ones!”

He pinched her cheek and the child giggled. More laughter came from the crowd. It was easier to think of a cute child as lucky than the beggars

[3] See Greek translation notes on page 143.,

[4] See Greek translation notes on page 143.

or widows, but describing them as “the soft ones” was clever. Compared to beggars and widows, children weren’t hardened at all to the difficulties of life.

And as was quickly becoming the pattern, several people in the crowd asked for an explanation of his statement.

“Why?”

“Yes, why lucky?”

“Because they themselves shall inherit...” he paused, smiling.

Someone shouted out, “The realm of the skies!”

Many of us laughed and applauded the man’s guess.

But the Master chuckled and shook his head “no” as he handed the child back to her mother.

“The mother earth!” he explained, patting the ground.

We laughed, for many different reasons. Some laughed because he said it was though it was obvious. Children get the earth, the land, when their parents go to the skies. Some laughed at the play on the ideas of a mother and the mother earth. Others laughed because they didn’t think that inheriting the earth, in its current state, seemed very lucky at all.

However, most of us laughed because just the way he said things was entertaining. His words were automatic and completely confident. So polished that they seemed rehearsed, but we saw it was all impromptu. He couldn’t plan for a young child to run up to him. Yet, he didn’t need to think for a moment about his responses.

The Nazarene then moved towards some rich Romans, also near the speaking area, who brought baskets of bread and bags of wine for their outing. A Roman woman offered him a small round loaf. He held it up to show the crowd.

“Lucky, these hungering!”<sup>[5]</sup> he announced, smiling.

We laughed again. Part of the reason was his exaggerated style: not just “hungry” but “hungering.” Another reason for laughter was that these Romans were clearly well-fed. The Romans among us were never hungry. Calling them hungry was funny. But it was also funny because he saying

that the hungry were lucky, just like beggars and mourners. This was a funny type of luck he was describing.

Then, one of the Romans handed the Nazarene a wineskin. The Nazarene toasted the audience.

“And thirsting!” the Master added cheerfully.

He squirted the wine in his mouth.

We again laughed.

People called out their questions, but someone who wasn’t pleased, probably one of our local political militants, called out the loudest.

“What do those rich Romans hunger and thirst for?” he cried. “Our blood?”

The man’s angry question won both laughter and some cheers of agreement, but the Nazarene smiled, and shook his head “no.”

“For this justice!” he said solemnly as he indicated his heart.

That answer triggered even more questions.

“Why hunger for justice?”

“What do Romans care about justice?”

“Because they themselves?” he said, “shall get their fill.”

This drew the first big laugh from the crowd. Here, the double meaning was clear and very funny.

Then the Teacher twirled his finger in the air.

“The realm of the skies!” we responded happily.

Then we applauded. This was our first big applause. We were only a few minutes into the “sermon”. Partly, we applauded our chanting. Partly we applauded the Roman’s getting their fill. Partly, we applauded a new realm being nearly here. Many hoped it this new reign would mean the end of Roman rule.

In response to the Teacher’s words, the Roman women started breaking up their bread loaves and passing it to the beggars, widows, and children near them.

The Nazarene pointed to her.

[5] See Greek translation notes on page 144.

“Lucky, these merciful!”<sup>[6]</sup> he exclaimed more loudly and even more cheerfully.

And again, there were the questions.

“Why?”

“Why lucky?”

“Because they themselves?” he said. “They shall receive mercy.”

Again, the Teacher twirled his arm over his head.

“Change your minds!”

“Because it has come near.”

“The realm of the skies!”

Our chanting was less ragged, more unified We were also unified in our feeling that those who are merciful receiving mercy.

Notice the coincidences that drove what had happened so far. If Demas hadn't been saving places for the Distinguished and the Distinguished hadn't been late, the beggars, widow, and orphans wouldn't have been near the front of the crowd. The Nazarene any more than he could have foreseen a child running out toward him. We were surprised by everything, but he was surprised by nothing.

This is when the Teacher moved toward our own Pisca and her mother. Remember, they had been placed by one of the man's heralds behind where the Nazarene was speaking, hidden from the crowd. The Nazarene could have planned to involving them from the beginning.

As the Nazarene approached them, the crowd noticed the woman and the girl sitting there for the first time. Pisca and her mother were frightened at the attention as he approached. They had reason. Those up front could see their skin sores, even as they tried to hide them. Word spread back through the crowd.

“Unclean!”

“An unclean woman!”

“An unclean child!”

The crowd began to buzz as the news passed.

The Teacher held out his hands to help Pisca and her mother stand.

The crowd gasped. The unclean woman was pregnant!

The word that they were unclean was still spreading, and now the crowd was buzzing about Pisca's mother's pregnancy. The Nazarene had touched them, breaking the law.

The unclean are forbidden to come near people, much less a large gathering like that one. They were far enough from the crowd that there wasn't any panic. The shock was that the Nazarene had not only helped them to stand but had continued to hold their hands up as they stood on each side of him. Their sleeves fell back showing their forearms. Their skin sores stood out, bright red circles. Some of the sores oozed.

Pisca says she would have been terrified by the crowd's reaction if the Master had not been with them. His warm smile and the light in his eyes never wavered.

The Nazarene raised his voice, so that it carried over the crowd's murmurs.

“Lucky! These spotless!”<sup>[7]</sup> he shouted out happily, smiling broadly, apparently oblivious of the negative feeling in the crowd.

Some of us laughed from surprise. Others booed in derision. Still others shushed them. Many had heard that the Master was a healer. Some had come in hopes of seeing a healing. Was this it?

People called out to him.

One voice was heard above the others, “How are they spotless?”

“By this heart!” he exclaimed, touching his own heart.

But the answer was confusing. People called out more questions.

“Are you going to heal them with your heart?”

“What do you mean?”

“Does your heart see them as spotless?”

“Does your heart allow you to break the law?”

“We want to see a healing!”

There were too many questions and comments to answer. The Teacher held up his hands for quiet. The crowd grew quieter.

The teacher pointed to one man.

[6] See Greek translation notes on page 145.

[7] Page 7. See Greek translation notes on page 145.

“Why does your heart see them as spotless?” the man asked.

“Because, they themselves?” the Nazarene said, touching Pisca’s mother’s pregnant belly. “The Divine: they shall see with their own eyes”

The tenderness in his voice. The light in his eyes. His words. The touch. It reached the crowd in some way we could never re-create in our witnessing of the event.

Pisca and her mother began crying with happiness. Others in the crowd saw them crying and were moved. Moved in many different directions, Demas usually to pointed out. Not everyone was sympathetic. But many were, especially the women. People got the message of seeing birth as a vision of the Divine. But it was so sad: an unclean child born to an unclean mother.

Some still hoped to see a healing. But there was no healing. At least not one that could be seen. Their sores stood out more vividly than ever. The crowd could see them clearly.

But the Nazarene seemed to be congratulating them. It was surprising, and strange. The crowd didn’t know what to think.

Remember, very few of the people there were true followers of the Nazarene. Even Tamar, Ezra, and Ulla had come as skeptics. Demas was there as a critic. But most were like me, neither sceptics or critics, just curious. I knew nothing about the Nazarene. Only Pisca and her mother had come out of trust, walking for days out.

As some came because they were troublemakers, looking for an opportunity to cause a stir. In Judea, political and religious zealotry are mixed together. Though the Master had just begun speaking, he had given these trouble makers an opportunity. Being friendly with Romans antagonized many of them for political reasons, but touching the unclean gave them a solid religious basis to act up. And many were drinking on the warm afternoon, and not in the jolly way that my friends and I were.

These troublemakers began heckling. Calling out insulting questions, but not letting the Nazarene answer.

“They’d really be lucky if you could heal them!”

“I’d be lucky if your Roman friends passed me some of that wine!”

“They’d really be merciful to remove their swords from our necks!”

“Look you’ve made that little girl and her mother cry!”

The last was called out by a troublemaker sitting near me. Others cried out worse. As I said, many of them were drunk, thinking themselves quite clever, in the proud tradition of hecklers everywhere.

We were surprised that the Nazarene didn’t respond. He didn’t even raise his hands for quiet as he had a moment ago. Instead, he appeared to be amused. And waiting. He looked expectantly at the crowd. It seemed as though he was silently asking us a question.

And, since most of us had come to hear the man speak, many, mostly women tried shushing the hecklers.

“Shush! Let the man answer! Let him speak!”

But the troublemakers didn’t listen.

“Oh, shush yourself!”

But as the hecklers kept it up, the big guard Boaz with Demas, stood up to support the women.

“Silence! We all came to hear the man speak!” shouted Boaz from the front of the crowd, showing them the club he carried.

With Boaz as inspiration, other men from the Roman military or the Judean guards stood up in support of Boaz and the women. As the armed men confronted the troublemakers near them, the hecklers quickly shut up.

The Master smiled and applauded the men.

“Lucky!”<sup>[8]</sup> he announced cheerfully. “These peacemakers!”

He indicated the men standing and applauded them. As he did, others in the crowd joined the applause. The men gradually took their seats on the hillside amid the applause.

“But why are they lucky?” a voice called out as the applause died.

“Because they themselves? Sons of divinity!” he exclaimed. Then he announced, “They shall be called!”

He then twirled his arm over his head. We responded instantly to the signal.

“Change your minds!”

[8] See Greek translation notes on page 146.

“Because it has come near.

“The realm of the skies!”

We laughed and applauded ourselves. And just like that, with a single chant, the crowd was brought together again. The words seemed to take on a new meaning. Just by saying them, we expressed our desire for people to change their minds.

Only when the peacekeepers among us sat down, did a few of the most drunken of the troublemakers dared grumble about them.

In response, someone called out.

“Those proud drunkards shall be trodden down!”

It was one of John’s ascetics. Some of them had stood among peace-makers. Though they are ascetics, they are not a weak or retiring group. They wear animal skins and carry clubs. It makes them look quite fierce and very easy to spot in a crowd.

Demas told me that the line about drunkards was a quote from the ancient Judean luminary Isaiah. This verse was used by John. He forbid drinking wine for his followers. Many Judean knew that the Nazarene supported John, but we all knew that Teacher had nothing against wine. We’d all seen him take a happy mouthful. Lucky!

How would the Nazarene respond?

“Lucky!”<sup>[9]</sup> he said. “These ones being hounding by themselves for the sake of virtue.”

Most of the crowd laughed. Personally, I didn’t understand enough about the ascetics to get it. John’s ascetics were already an object of fun because they don’t eat bread, drink wine, or wear woven cloth. Harassing themselves indeed!

Again the crowd asked its questions.

“Lucky not to drink?”

“Lucky to follow that crazy man, John?”

The Nazarene answered cheerfully, “Because theirs is...”

He paused pointing a twirling finger to the sky.

“The realm of the skies!” the Master said with us.

The crowd laughed. After all, the “realm of the skies” chant was originally John’s. Most of the people there knew that as well, even though I didn’t at the time.

Then, predictably, the Teacher twirled his whole arm over his head!

“Change your minds!”

“Because it has come near.”

“The realm of the skies!”

We laughed and applauded ourselves. I notice that even that trouble-maker sitting near me had joined in the chant.

At this point, the sermon was barely begun, but a lot had happened. The Nazarene had proven to be a surprise. We had all to hear about the Judean God and their seemingly growing list of religious rules. Perhaps we would hear condemnations of our political ruler. Several recent Judean religious leaders had done so.

Instead, we heard what? Was how the luck of various groups, both suffering and powerful, going to be the message?

My Greek friends and I had come on a whim. We had half expected to be bored. We were already congratulating ourselves on our decision to show up. We felt lucky to be there. We poured more wine to celebrate our good fortune.

Yours in the Christ,

Festus Hippou

[9] See Greek translation notes on page 146.

## LETTER 3: YOU ALL

From Festus, a witness to Jesus Christ by the will of the Father.

To the Assemblies, a letter where.

I have received many responses to these first letters of mine. Several asked my opinion about what certain of the Master's statements meant. I understand that these debates about the meaning of the Master's words are common in all assemblies. When we Sermon Witnesses gave our testimony before assemblies, we avoided discussions about meaning and philosophy. As much as possible, I also hope to avoid these topics in these letters as well. Such discussions were too disruptive. It was one of the reasons we didn't take questions from the crowd when we gave our testimony but answered them afterward.

I should also say that I am not a philosopher nor a learned man. I have the education of a Greek gentleman, which is to say, I can read Greek and Latin and add ledgers. In matters of philosophy and Judean principles, Demas and Ezra were both learned men. When it is appropriate, I will pass on any insights they offered about Judean beliefs and practices in these letters.

Some of you asked what we were thinking after those first few minutes of the "sermon." None of us knew what to think. At the time, these words and the Nazarene's ideas were strange, surprising, and new. Mostly surprising, even for those like Ezra and Demas with formal knowledge of Judean teachings. We did not have time to think about them as people analyze them today.

Everything passed so quickly. Many of us were trying to see exactly what was happening. Each of the Master's lines created a surprise. Many of his statements generated comments, not only those shouted out to the Master, but also within our various groups. The crowd was reacting in so many different ways to what we heard and saw. Some were laughing, but others were grumbling. Some were applauding, but others booing.

The impromptu nature of the first few minutes kept us guessing. A few of your letters expressed surprise that the Master seemed to have noth-

ing pre-planned. However, Demas had another opinion about this. Many things were called out from the crowd, but the Nazarene chose what he wanted to respond to. He chose, which people to address. The Master made those choices based upon what he wanted or maybe what he had planned to say.

But, as a crowd, we were feeling and reacting much more than we were thinking. It was a pretty exciting first few minutes. We laughed. We cried. We almost had a fight. As a crowd, we were emotionally divided by our many differences but brought back together by our chanting. And, after the first few minutes, we were eager to hear more.

The most common question in your letters was about the meaning of the repeated chant and the phrase, "realm of the skies." Through that afternoon of hearing the Master speak, the idea became very clear, but hard to define. My hope is that you all feel the same at the end of this series of letter.

This early in the sermon we all heard it in our own way. Many there knew that both the Teacher and his cousin John used the chant. To some, it meant they were touched by the Divine. To others, it meant that they were crazy. Those who were critical of the Nazarene heard this chant as meaningless, something to excite the masses. Demas, as a lawyer, heard it as a commentary on the law, a legal argument. As a skeptic, Tamar heard "change your minds" as a challenge. Pisca, who was looking for a cure, heard it as a promise full of change, hope for the future. Ulla just laughed at all of these debates. She said that these words meant exactly what they said.

Because I was interested in the theater, I always saw this chant as an effective dramatic tool, like the chorus in a Greek play. The Master made all of us into a chorus. Being a part of that chorus changed our role in the event. We weren't just watching a man talking. We were part of a drama. That made it easier for us to ask questions. The chant and "the realm of the skies" didn't need an explanation because it was the explanation. Everything that he said as Seven Springs led back to his "realm of the skies" message. Everything else he said was a stream. The realm of the skies was the sea.

Over the years, Ezra and Demas collected many little stories that the Nazarene used to explain what his “realm of the skies” was like. The Master told none of those stories that day. Similarly, later on, the Nazarene referred to himself as “the son of the man”, but he hadn’t yet adopted the title this early in his career. Demas had an interesting story about how the Nazarene came to use that title, but that story came from another time when he saw the Master talk, so it doesn’t belong as part of this testimony.

I will answer more of these types of questions in my next letter.

Let me get back to the story.

My first letter ended after the Master had called eight different groups of people “lucky”.

Several people seemed to get the idea at the same time of asking him if their particular group was lucky and why.

“Why are fisherman lucky?” asked a fisherman. There were many fishermen there, so this question got some applause.

“I’m ugly and short, am I lucky too?” someone else called out.

This generated a laugh.

The Master laughed as well, but he held up his hands to halt this line of questioning. It was clear where it was going. Instead, he indicated the whole crowd with a sweep of his right arm.

“Lucky are you all!”<sup>[1]</sup> the Nazarene said happily.

We applauded ourselves again. Some of us cheered.

But then someone complained, “Are we lucky when we are called fools for coming out here to listen to you?”

Surprisingly, the Nazarene agreed with the complaint with a big smile and a nod.

“When they chide you and hound you,” he added, even more cheerfully, “and say every worthless thing against you!”

We laughed again, but there was a lot of discussion in the crowd. I didn’t understand what so many of them were murmuring about.

My friends and I knew nothing about the Nazarene before that day. We didn’t know about how he was being criticized, so I didn’t understand this

comment. But most of those there knew about how the Nazarene and his followers were being criticized and by whom. They were discussing what they had heard in their groups.

“Are they lying to us about you?” Someone asked.

He laughed.

And again surprised us.

He shook his head in a big, happy “no.”

The crowd was surprised made their confusion known.

“His critics weren’t lying about him?”

“Didn’t they say terrible things about him?”

He held up his hands for silence so he could explain.

“Being lied to by themselves!” he said.

We laughed again.

But that response created more questions. It was a clever response, but what did it really mean?

“Why are they lying to themselves?”

He shrugged, acting somewhat guilty.

“On account of me,” he admitted.

We laughed again because of his demeanor.

“How should we react to these critics?” Someone else asked.

“Rejoice and celebrate!”<sup>[2]</sup> he said, returning to his cheerful manner.

He started clapping and encouraged us to join him. We started clapping and cheering. His happiness was infectious.

But it was confusing.

“Why should we rejoice when people criticize you?” someone asked.

“Seeing that payment of yours!” he explained enthusiastically.

He paused and smiled.

We didn’t understand the idea of “payment” at the time, but this idea would become a major theme.

“What payment,” several called out.

“How much payment?” someone else asked greedily.

This got a laugh.

[1] See Greek translation notes on page 154.

[2] See Greek translation notes on page 155.

“Huge!” the Master answered with assurance,  
 “But what kind of payment?” several asked again.  
 “In the skies,” he said pointed up with a twirling finger.  
 “The realm of the skies!” we finished.

Then we applauded and cheered our answer.

There would be many questions later about what “payment in the skies” meant, but, somehow, simply our saying together “the realm of the skies” made sense of it at the time.

“But why are do your critics harassed us so much simply for listening to you?” another person asked among all the good cheer.

“To such an extent?” the Master answered. “Because they probably would have harassed?”

He paused, giving us time to his about who they might have harassed. For most of us, nothing came to mind.

“The luminaries!” he explained.

He made the broad right-hand sweeping gesture indicating all of us again.

“Those just like you!” he finished.

The crowd laughed, and we applauded ourselves again.

It was funny that he called us luminaries. Even we Greeks of the region knew they were the most revered men of Judean history. Apparently, the Nazarene was being described as one of these enlightened. But he was saying that we, the crowd, were the real luminaries.

Then the Nazarene twirled his arm over his head.

And we all responded happily.

“Change your minds!”

“Because it has gotten near.”

“The realm of the skies!”

“Who carries the salt in these matters?” someone asked. This was, of course, a way of asking whose opinions really matters.

“You yourselves!” the Master answered, smiling mischievously. “You are the salt of the earth!”<sup>[3]</sup>

He tapped his forefinger to his brow to indicate his meaning. Among Galileans, an old “salt” is someone experience, having practical wisdom. Being “worth your salt” means not only being worth your pay, but having thoughts worth hearing.

We applauded the idea, happily. We Galileans, even the Greeks of the region, see ourselves as a salty people, a practical group, living close to nature. We make our living from the land and the sea. Not like city people in places like Jerusalem who live by trade and politics.

“But your critics can get pretty salty as well,” someone called out. “Since many of them are distinguished, isn’t their salt more seasoned than ours?”

Some laughed at the man’s play on words. Others laughed nervously a the mention of the Distinguished, who were conspicuous in their absence.

The Nazarene received the suggestion happily.

“But what if that salt...” the Master responded, “might be insipid?”

He made a face as if tasting something bad. Another play on words.

We laughed.

“In what should it be taken...” he continued, pinching his fingers together, “with a grain of salt?”

We laughed longer and louder.

As the laughter died, he threw his hands up in the air as he answered his own question.

“In nothing is it powerful,” he exclaimed happily. “Not any longer!”

This statement was received with some applause. Many there didn’t like the power that the Distinguished had acquired in Judean society.

“Except being tossed out,” he continued, happily, making a tossing-out-the-trash gesture. “To be walked on by rhwaw people.”

He indicate the crowd and then stomped around happily where he’d tossed his imaginary insipid salt. The Nazarene’s clowning made many, especially the children in the crowd, laugh. The more we laughed, the more exaggerated his gestures would become over the course of the afternoon. This drew more laughter.

Many of his gestures, such as his “throwing out the trash” motion and his stomping around for one reason or another, would be used over and

[3] See Greek translation notes on page 156.

over again in the course of the afternoon. Each repetition make them a little funnier. He had many variations of each one. When we witnesses re-enacted the event, we tried to recreate these gestures as well as we could, but the man had a certain physical grace we all lacked, except, perhaps the young Pisca.

I have noticed that when people simply read the Master's words, they miss the fact that he expressed many of his ideas in terms that allowed him to repeat his physical routines. Once you were aware of those routines, you could not hear his words without imagining him doing them. When I later heard that Master's words from other events, I can often imagine how he acted them out because even if the ideas were different, the way they were expressed were similar.

As the laughter died, the Nazarene continued.

"You yourselves are..."<sup>[4]</sup> he started, pausing as if searching for a word other than "salt".

Then the sun broke through the clouds and he smiled.

"The light of this society," he said happily.

He indicated all of us in the crowd and we applauded ourselves as we were bathed in was sunlight. We were always happy to applaud ourselves and happy for the sun.

Then, the sun went behind the cloud again.

"It really doesn't have the ability..." he continued confidently, again seemingly searching for the right word. He gestured toward us again and exclaimed, "A city!"

We laughed. Our surprisingly large crowd was bigger than some small cities.

"To be kept secret," he continued, holding his finger to his lips. "On a hill," he added, indicating our hillside. "Lying down!" He finished, plopping down, reclining as we were.

We laughed.

The sun came out again from behind the clouds. The Teacher instantly jumped up to take advantage of the light.

"Nor do they light a lamp..."<sup>[5]</sup> he started again, indicating the sun, but, just as he did, another cloud darkened its face.

"And put it beneath..." he continued confidently, noticing one of the Roman group's bread baskets. "A bushel basket!" He announced triumphantly as he pretended to hide his imaginary lamp under it.

We laughed again.

He then took his imaginary lamp out again and held it up, standing on his tip-toes.

"Instead, up...on..." he said.

As the Master teetered there, many in the crowd giggled.

What was he doing? we wondered.

The answer was waiting for the cloud to pass over the face of the sun. It did.

"A lamp stand!" he exclaimed proudly, indicating the reappeared sun as if he'd hung it in the sky. Then he continued more casually, "And it lights up everyone in the house!" He again made a sweeping gesture with his right hand to indicate us all.

The sun was dazzling after the overcast. He shielded his eyes from the glare as he looked at us.

"In this way, let it shine," he continued, smiling, "that light of yours in front of those people."<sup>[6]</sup>

We applauded the idea and again ourselves.

"So that they might see..." he said, savoring the words, "your beautiful deeds!"

He again indicated the crowd, this time with a left-hand sweep.

"And recognize that Father of yours," he continued, "the one in the skies!"

He spun hand over his head.

And we all responded happily.

"Change your minds!"

"Because it has gotten near."

"The realm of the skies!"

[5] SEE GREEK TRANSLATION NOTES ON PAGE 158.

[6] SEE GREEK TRANSLATION NOTES ON PAGE 159.

[4] SEE GREEK TRANSLATION NOTES ON PAGE 157.

And then a darker heavier layer of clouds rolled over the sun and it became much darker.

And, just as suddenly, the happy mood of the crowd changed as well.

I will describe why in my next letter.

Your witness to the Master,

Festus

## LETTER 4: DISTINGUISHED

From Festus, a witness to the Christ's teaching by the will of the Father,  
To the Assemblies of the Way, a letter describing the arrival of the Distinguished.

Once more, thank you for your letters of encouragement. Many have asked why the words that we recite are different than the Master's sayings they've heard or read in various copies that are circulating. This comes from an historical accident.

As I said, Tamar was from Tiberias, the capital of the province of Galilee. The court of the Tetrarch Antipas is there. Quintus Figuli was the official recorder in that court, responsible for recording testimony in trials and other court business. Tamar's father hired Quintus and his teach to come with them that day to record what the Teacher said. Thanks to her father's foresight, from the first time Tamar and her father described the event at Seven Springs to others, they had a complete record of the Teacher's spoken words.

Different versions capture the gist of what the Master said, but not his actual words. In many versions, the Master's words are changed so they can be more easily read, but his words were spoken, not written. Many of them seem difficult to understand or confusing without the larger context, which is what we tried to capture when we gave our testimony.

Some of you have also asked about Tamar. What was she like as the founder of our group of witnesses? You expressed surprise at our group being started and run by a woman.

At the time, Tamer was an unmarried woman past the age when women are considered marriageable. Among the Judeans, however, a father is more concerned about the marriage of his sons than about the marriage of his daughters. Tamar's father had no sons. Tamar's mother died when she was born. Without a mother, Tamar copied her father in all things. Unlike most women, she was not very agreeable. She also never met a man that measured up to her father in her eyes. Before Seven Springs, she described herself as sharp-tongued and bitter, a religious skeptic.

However, she was a very public, outgoing person, active in Tiberias society despite her status as a spinster. Her father's wealth gave her this position, but wealth doesn't matter in marrying off a daughter in Galilee. A Judean father receives a bride-price for his daughters whereas he had to give a dowry to the prospective father-in-laws of his sons. From the perspective of the Greeks and Romans, this is very backward.

However, Tamar was known as a patron of the poor. Her father's wealth made his possible. Tiberias's beggars called her "little mother" for her public giving. She took a great deal of pride in this. This fact is important in our story and to how here thinking was changed by what was said at Seven Springs.

This brings us back to what took place that day.

At first, the local Judeans noticed that there were few, if any, Distinguished there. Just Demas and, as a new member, he hadn't yet acquired the group's distinctive robes, with their long fringes.

The absence of the Distinguished was surprising. They are usually very visible at the front of the crowd in any meeting.

Their absence was also relaxing for the Judeans there. The Distinguished are the Judean people's very own, self-appointed morality police. They have become a powerful part of Judean communities. Having the Distinguished around made people nervous. Though the beginning of the sermon had hardly been without its tensions, the fact that the Distinguished had been absent had given people a certain license to behave in a more relaxed and natural way.

This open mood changed when the Distinguished arrived. These were, of course, the ones for whom Demas had been saving places. Their boat came in late. Apparently, it had run into some difficult weather in the Galilee.

Their very visible arrival cast a pall over the good mood that had been established over the last few minutes. They came as a group, over a dozen of them, working their way through the seated crowd, complaining loudly as they went. People scurried out of their way.

The Nazarene seemed happy to see them, waving a welcome as they approached.

This surprised the crowd.

For their part, the Distinguished did not seem happy to see the Nazarene. As soon as they drew near enough to the speaking area, one of them, a younger man named Simeon, called out.

"We know about the nonsense you teach!" he shouted angrily.

"Why do you, uh, scoff at that wisdom of our luminaries?" accused the older man next to him, sourly, supporting Simeon.

This man was a well-known Distinguished lawyer from Tiberias. His name was Johanon, He was Demas's master at the time and his prospective father-in-law.

"Why tear up our customary laws?" complained another of their elders who Demas called Baram.

The Nazarene was happy to answer this last question.

"Don't get accustomed to thinking that I have shown up to break up those customary laws," <sup>[1]</sup> he said, holding up a loaf of bread as he said "the customary laws" and breaking a piece off of it when he said "break up".

We laughed at the play on the words and the breaking of the bread when he said he wasn't breaking up.

"Or the luminaries," he continued, indicating the crowd.

We laughed again at being referred to as luminaries.

The Distinguished looked confused at his gesture and our laughter. They didn't understand that it was a reference to his calling us luminaries earlier.

"I really haven't shown up to break up..." the Master continued, breaking up the piece of bread smaller. "But to fill up!"

Then he cheerfully popped the piece of bread in his mouth, smiling as he chewed.

We mostly responded with chuckles but many did so nervously because of the new presence of the Distinguished.

[1] See Greek translation notes on page 165.

As the chuckling died, the Teacher held up the loaf of bread, twirled it, and nodded to his followers. It was another signal.

They responded with a different chant.

“Not upon bread alone is he going to live,”<sup>[2]</sup> said one group.

“This man,” responded a second group.

“But upon every saying pouring out through a mouth,” the first group continued.

“Of God,” answered the second group.

This is a quote from one of the oldest Judean books of law.

The Nazarene was clearly comparing the bread with the law, but his actions contradicted his words. He said that he wasn't breaking up the law when he was breaking up the bread. Of course, the comparing of “breaking up” with “filling up” was more of his wordplay.

The Distinguished chased off Demas's beggars and widows to claim their places with Boaz's support. They sat down to join the crowd, but they didn't seem happy with the Teacher's reply.

“Your clowning means nothing to the timeless law!” Baram shouted.

Then Johanon spoke again, “Why should anyone listen to you?”

The Nazarene seem to take the question seriously.

“Honestly?”<sup>[3]</sup> he said, putting his hand over his heart and then continuing with a shrug. “Because I'm telling you.”

The crowd laughed again, somewhat less reticently. The Nazarene clearly was not intimidated at all by the disapproval of the Distinguished.

“The law will survive your nonsense,” complained Johanon. “It will survive as long as the sky and the earth!”

The Nazarene made a quizzical face and answered, “While, possibly, it *might* pass away...” he said, pausing as if thinking.

“The law?” snapped Simeon, interrupting. “You're saying that the Law might pass away?”

As you will see in the course of these letters, interrupting the Teacher was always a mistake. But his pauses often invited interruption. He talked

in a way that made it easy to make wrong guesses about what he was going to say. It was a big part of what made listening to him so interesting.

However, most of us, had the sense not to shout out our mistaken assumptions.

In response to this accusation, the Nazarene smiled broadly, shaking his head “no”.

“This sky,” he said happily. Then, seemingly as an afterthought he added enthusiastically, “also this earth!”

His manner won another laugh from the crowd.

And as more of us laughed, the Distinguished got angrier. Baram bragged to the Nazarene.

“We know the law!” he claimed proudly. “We make sure our people dot each ‘i’ and cross each ‘t’ in obeying it.”

“An ‘i’?” responded the Teacher. “One?”

He drew an “i” in the air, dotting it with a flourish.

“Or one jot?” he added, drawing a “t” and crossing it. “Never is it going to from the law!”

Laughter moved through the crowd as we caught on. He had written “it” and then emphasized “it”. Even the most serious of us couldn't help but laugh. Even some of the Distinguished chuckled.

Then the Nazarene held up his loaf of bread again.

“Until, possibly, ‘it’ becomes everything!” he announced as he patted his belly happily.

Again, we laughed. The crowd seemed to have relaxed about having the Distinguished among us. The Teacher seemed happy to have them.

Then a mousy little man in back of the crowd called out a question. He wore the striped headdress of someone from Jerusalem.

“Master,” the Jerusalem man shouted loudly, “a man told me that we can undo our small obligations under the law by giving gifts at the temple.”

As a Greek, I had no idea what this issue was about, but the Judeans all understood. They all also knew that the person that the man referred to was likely one of the Distinguished.

The Nazarene acted shocked.

[2] See Greek translation notes on page 166.

[3] See Greek translation notes on page 167.

“What if, perhaps, really, he might undo one of these orders, these here?” he said with some disdain, holding up the loaf of bread. “The tiniest?”<sup>[4]</sup>

He held up his little finger to the crowd to illustrate “the tiniest”.

Then the Master shook his head sadly.

“And he might teach like this to this people?” he continued in disbelief, indicate all of us in the crowd.

“Some do,” the man affirmed. “What should happen to such a person?”

The Nazarene offered a shrug.

“Tiniest,” he answered, “he is going to be called...”

He turned his hand so his little finger pointed out from the bottom of his closed fist.

Everyone laughed, except some of the children. The gesture is a common Galilean insult about the size of a person’s manhood. Some in the crowd acted as if they were shocked that he would use such a gesture.

This was clearly not the type of religious teacher people were expecting.

The Master had to wait until the laughter died before finishing.

“In the realm of the skies!” he said innocently as if we had mistaken his meaning.

But he wiggling his little finger. Then he pointed up with his index finger, twirling it.

And we all responded heartily, “The realm of the skies!”

We laughed and cheered. The man was unique. By now we would see why he had become so well known so quickly.

Then the man held up his loaf of bread again.

“That one, however, possibly who might produce and teach like this?” he said happily, referring at once to the law and the bread. “A big one, he is going to be called...in the realm of the skies!”

He pointed a twirling index finger to the sky.

“The realm of the skies!” we responded.

The Distinguished were confused and taken back by our chanting. It was new to them.

[4] See Greek translation notes on page 168.

But they were also angry. The Nazarene was clearly attacking them and their teaching. The crowd knew it.

“Why are you telling these people to ignore the teachings of our leading religious writers, lawyers, and scholars?” Simeon called out, indicating the other Distinguished in his group.

The Nazarene smiled at the question.

“Because I’m telling you all,” he said, indicating the entire crowd, “that unless you each might go beyond...”<sup>[5]</sup>

He paused and pointed at individuals in the crowd.

“Your virtue” he said, indicating the delegation of Distinguished with a sweep of his left hand, “surpassing these writers and Distinguished. Never ever are you getting into the realm of the skies!”

He pointed the twirling finger upward.

“Change your minds! It has gotten near.”

“What?”

“The realm of the skies!”

He pointed up again.

“Change your minds! It has gotten near.”

“What?”

“The realm of the skies!”

As you might expect, this direct attack did little to calm the Distinguished. But to describe what happened next will takes some time, so we will save that until my next letter.

However, remember, the events that I am relating here don’t only reflect my personal view of what happened, but those of all the witnesses in our group.

Your friend,

Festus

[5] See Greek translation notes on page 170.

## LETTER 5: YOUR BROTHER

From Festus, a witness to the Christ by the will of the Father,  
To the Assemblies,

The Nazarene's discussion of the treatment of others.

Thank you for your letters of encouragement and for your questions.

Some of you have asked what we witnesses thought about different versions of similar sayings by the Nazarene.

In our group of witnesses, Ezra and Demas spent many years collecting these sayings. Many of them are similar to what the Master said at Seven Springs. But neither Ezra or Demas considered them poor copies. They had both seen the Nazarene speak more than once. He said similar things in similar ways, but the context was always unique to his situation. We can see some of these differences in the quotes themselves. In one saying, he might use the sea as part of an analogy. In a similar saying, he uses the desert. These differences demonstrate the kind of adaptability to circumstances that we witnessed.

Other letters asked to know more about the Master's relationship with the Distinguished. Did his popularity arise as a reaction against the Distinguished?

His popularity had little to do with the Distinguished except in that they consistently opposed it. The Nazarene had a number of hostile encounters with the Distinguished. These encounters occurred from very early in his career, even before Seven Springs. They continued until the end of his life, at Jerusalem before his execution. During those encounters, many of the issues were the same. The Master did not like the role the Distinguished played in Judean society and specific teachings of theirs. They saw the Master as a challenge to their power.

Among our witnesses, the Nazarene's challenge to the Distinguished had the biggest impact upon Demas since he was a member of the Distinguished before he became a Follower. He was devoted to the Distinguished at the time. His father had made sacrifices so he could be educated by them

and become one of them. The group was a path by which people moved up in Judean society.

In Judea, the academics, writers, and lawyers of the Distinguished have woven themselves into the social fabric and put themselves in positions of power and influence. The power of the Distinguished started in the cities where they are regularly appointed to sit on city councils and as judges. But their power now extends into the small fishing villages like the one from which Ulla came and to the traveling herding tribes like the one in which Pisca grew up. The Distinguished are shown deference everywhere in Judea, even by the Roman authorities.

This is very different from Roman society where the powerful are men of deeds rather than words. In Roman society, we Greeks tend to be the academics, writers, and lawyers. And we are considered second-class citizens, little more than slaves and servants. The Romans blame the fall of the Grecian empire on our valuing men of words above men of action. They describe this as our decline from Alexander the Great, a world conqueror, to Andronicus of Rhodes, a rewriter of earlier writers.

I took this to be the Master's view as well. When the Master said that our virtue must surpass that of the Distinguished, he was saying that we must look to people's deeds more than their words.

The Distinguished didn't want to hear this. The next Distinguished challenge to the Master at Seven Springs came from Johanon.

"You attack our virtue, but we hold to the ancient law," Johanon charged angrily. Then he continued more hesitantly, "How can you, uh, put your foolishness against these ancient, uh, proclamations."

The Master, as always, took up the challenge happily. In answering, he addressed the whole crowd, not just Johanon or the Distinguished.

"You've heard that it was proclaimed by the ancients,"<sup>[1]</sup> he began, pretending to unroll a scroll.

Then he assumed the voice of an old man, perhaps mimicking Johanon's own accents, exaggerating his age and pomposity.

<sup>1</sup> See Greek translation notes on page 173.

“You should not kill!” the Master screeched, wagging his finger at the crowd. Then he continued less certainly, “Someone who, however, might, possibly kill is going to be...uh...bound by...”

He paused, seemingly to be looking for the right word.

“That decision!” he said finally, very decisively!

We laughed, of course.

Part of it was the voice and characterization, but it was also at the weakness of the threat. Was being bound by our decision a threat of punishment? I knew that their law was very important to the Judean people, but was it really this vague?

The Nazarene continued in his normal voice as the laughter died.

“I, myself, however?”<sup>[2]</sup> he said touching his chest and emphasizing the word “myself” in mock pomposity.

This was the first time this line was used and it got a little chuckle from the crowd. This line would be repeated over and over to greater and greater laughter through the course of the afternoon.

“I tell you that everyone being irritated by that brother of his,” he continued lightly indicating everyone in the crowd with his sweeping right-hand.

Then, with a shrug, he indicated himself as well.

This generated a laugh.

“Is going to be...,” he said casually, “bound by...”

He paused as Johanon had.

“That decision!” he finished, emphasizing the word “that”.

We all laughed again.

It was the same “punishment” as for murder, just for getting irritated at you brother.

“Who, however, might possibly, say to that brother of his,” he continued, then changing his voice into that of a petulant youth, “You rags!”

We all laughed.

Among Galileans, the term “rags” refers to anyone in ragged clothing, a beggar, or miser, or simply a slob. We always thought it was a local insult,

but we have run into it in other ares as well. My own older brother called me “rags” for dressing like the Judean locals rather than like a proper Greek.

“Is going to be bound by...” he continued before pausing.

During the pause, we expected a repetition of “that decision”. Some of us even suggested it quietly.

“The town council!” the Master said instead, smiling, at surprising us.

We laughed again, both in surprise and because it made perfect sense. To our Galilean councils, all common folk, no matter how successful, are “rags”. The Judean councils always include the Distinguished, who were notoriously particular about their dress and critical of the clothing of others.

But the Master wasn’t finished.

“Someone who, however, might possibly say,” he started, then changing to the tones of an arrogant academic, “You moron!”

This kept us laughing. According to our Judean witnesses, the Distinguished routinely calls everyone who lacks their learning, “morons”.

“Is going to be bound into...” he continued.

He paused again to increase our anticipation.

We no longer expected “that decision,” but what would he say?

Then he got a kind of gleam in his eye and announced loudly in a threatening tone, “that Gehenna of the fire!”

The Master again made his throwing out the trash gesture. He then made a face and held his nose.

Again, everyone laughed.

To understand why, you need to know about “the Gehenna”. It is the name of a valley outside the walls of Jerusalem where people burn trash. Everyone in Judea and Galilee knows about it. And we all know that the place stinks, which is why the Master held his nose.

Then the Nazarene spread his arms, opening himself to more questions.

This next question was from the mousy, little man with the striped Jerusalem headdress who had asked a similar question earlier.

2 See Greek translation notes on page 174.

“Can offering gifts at the temple make up for my offenses against a brother?” the Jerusalem man asked from the back of the crowd.

Again, the Distinguished teach that offering gifts at the temple cleans up many different types of mistakes.

The Master chuckled and gestured for the man to join him.

“When, in fact, you might present that gift of yours on that altar, do you make amends for yourself?”<sup>[3]</sup> the Master said, repeating the first part of the question for those who couldn’t hear it.

Then he pretended to hold a gift out in front of him in a stately, stiff-legged walk. His path took him to where the Jerusalem man who had asked the question finally made his way out of the crowd.

“You might be reminded...” the Master started explaining to his questioner. Then he clapped his forehead as if remembering something. Then he continued in a horrified voice, “That this brother of yours has something against you!”

His exaggeration made us laugh. The man from Jerusalem laughed as well.

“Drop it off there, that gift of yours,”<sup>[4]</sup> the Master continued, pretending to put his gift down on the ground, “in front of the altar. And take off!”

He ran in a small circle around the Jerusalem man and surprised him by embracing him from behind.

Everyone laughed louder.

“First, have your mind change by that brother of yours,” the Master explained, his arm around the man’s shoulder. “And then, showing up, offer that gift!”

The Master pretended to pick up the imaginary gift, resumed his stiff-legged walk, and to present the gift at the altar.

We laughed and applauded as the Nazarene again embraced the man, sending him back into the crowd.

Amid the applause another man shouted out a complaint.

“But my brother is taking me to court!” he cried out. The man wore the blue headdress of the Judean cloth dyeing guild in Capernaum.

<sup>3</sup> See Greek translation notes on page 176.

<sup>4</sup> See Greek translation notes on page 177.

Again, the Master summoned his questioner to him, speaking to him as the man made his way through the crowd.

“Be friendly—” the Nazarene began.<sup>[5]</sup>

The Capernaum man interrupted him.

“With the judge?”

The Nazarene laughed with the rest of us, but shook his head “no.”

“With that complainant of yours!” corrected the Master, cheerfully.

The man made a face like he didn’t like the sound of that idea.

“What do I use to win him over?” the man asked.

“Speed?” the Master offered.

We laughed again.

“But he wants to work his way and I want to work my way,” the man complained. “How long can we be friendly?”

The Master put his arm around the man as he responded warmly.

“Until that time you are together with him in the way,” he explained to the man, indicating an unseen path before them.

His questioner considered the Teacher’s suggestion for a moment.

“A common path that gets me what I am want?” the Capernaum man asked.

“Don’t want” the Master corrected.

“What don’t I want?” the man asked.

“When,” the Master expanded. “He turns you over, that complainant, to that judge.”

Then the Master tugged himself by the collar of his tunic across the speaking area.

“And the judge to the officer,” he continued, again pulling himself by the collar back the other way across the speaking way.

“And,” he continued, tugging himself by the collar one more time. “Into a cell, you are going to get tossed.”

The Master made his throwing out the trash motion, but this time it ended with him throwing himself forward toward the audience.

And of course, we laughed and applauded.

<sup>5</sup> See Greek translation notes on page 178.

The Capernaum questioner laughed and applauded as well.

Then the Master gripped imaginary bars and stared out at us. Then he turned to the man who asked the question.

“Honestly, I’m telling you,”<sup>[6]</sup> he said, putting his hand over his heart. “Never are you getting out of there, until possibly, you have turned over...”

The Master searched his clothing for something and, finding it, held up a penny.

“That last penny!” he announced.

He kissed his penny good-bye, tossed it toward the man from Capernaum, who caught it. Then the Master gave the man a hug and sent him back into the audience.

We laughed and applauded.

Seeing the Teacher interact with individuals highlighted his personal warmth. He clearly enjoyed meeting people one-on-one. As they came up on stage with him, he was so happy to see them. He looked them in the eye and connected with them personally. The Master could bring people out of the crowd and get them to play along with him because he was able to get them to relax.

Pisca, who got as close to him as any witness, describes it as making you feel special by being near him. She said that she didn’t worry about the crowd, even when they were hostile to her and her mother. Instead, she focused on the Master and what he was saying to her. He was so happy to meet her and so sympathetic about her problems.

In every case, the Master wasn’t the least bit intimidating, even when he was suggesting that people were wrong in their thinking. This is why people were so willing to call out questions, even after he started bringing his questioners up to act out his little scenes with him.

This is where your humble witness, Festus, comes into this story. And I admit, I made a proper ass of myself at the time.

Of course, my excuse was that I had been drinking. My friends were drinking too. As an honest witness, I must admit that we had too much to

drink. We were full of the courage and cleverness that wine gives all young men.

After his comment about “your last penny,” one of my friends, named Janus, called out drunkenly, “My last penny went to wine!”

He held up one of our depleted wineskins.

We laughed. The crowd laughed to, encouraging us.

Another friend, Alexander, tried to top him.

“My last penny went to my wife!” he cried drunkenly, but making a sad face and tracing a tear down his cheek.

That won more laughter. I noticed that a lot of the women there applauded his action, if not his sentiment.

Then, I also felt the need to demonstrate my own cleverness.

“My last penny went to a woman,” I started cheerfully, saying the last word suggestively and outlining a shapely figure in the air. Then I said leeringly, “Who was someone else’s wife!”

My line got the biggest laugh, which was what I wanted, but it also generated a lot of hostility I didn’t expect. There were some hisses and boos coming out of the crowd after the laughter stopped

And as if to dramatized the tension, another dark cloud passed over the sun. In the gloom, the Master seemed sterner and less light-hearted.

Unfortunately, the description of what happened next in my encounter with the Master will have to wait until my next letter.

Your witness,

Festus

<sup>6</sup> See Greek translation notes on page 180.

## LETTER 6: FIDELITY

From Festus, a witness to the Christ by the will of the Father,  
To the Assemblies,

The Master's discussion of the law of fidelity, marriage, and oaths.  
Again, thank you for your letters and questions.

Again, I received questions about the Distinguished. Why, after dominated the discussion at their entry, had they quieted down? Were they listening politely?

Part of that impression is from my inability to give a complete picture of everything that was happening at any point in time. The challenges from the Distinguished did not stop suddenly. They kept it us, but the Nazarene chose to recognize others in the crowd. What had changed was the crowd. At first, they showed deference to the Distinguished, but after the Nazarene criticized them, many in the crowd chose to ignore them.

At that point, the Distinguished began making less noise. Demas said that it was partly to save themselves from embarrassment because they were being ignored, but it was also because the Nazarene began to bring up his questioners beside him in the speaking area. Demas said that the Distinguished didn't want to be divided in that way. They liked to work as a group, supporting each other. None of them wanted to be compared individually, side-by-side to the Master. This attitude changes later in the sermon.

This letter covers one of my wife's favorite parts of the testimony. This is not only because it covers marriage. During it, not one but three of our group of witnesses appear in their own, personal encounters with the Master. In my case, I did not cover myself with glory. I am a little embarrassed recalling it. This probably adds to my wife's enjoyment as well.

The Master clearly heard my joke about infidelity, spending my last cent on another man's wife. At the time, everyone stop calling out questions themselves, curious to see how he would react. I don't think it was because I was Greek. The interests was in the topic, infidelity, or, as the Judeans describe it, "defiling a woman". However, almost any Judean would have known not to speak as rudely as I had.

For those of you who are not Judean, you should know that under Judean law, sleeping with another man's wife is as serious as murder. It defiles the woman for life.

Demas said that the Distinguished at this point were hoping the Nazarene would slip up. Joking about infidelity is difficult among Judeans, especially in groups of mixed sexes. The Master had a tendency to make light of everything. Maybe he would make the mistake of treating infidelity too lightly as a Greek or Persian would. There were rumors that, despite his clothes and accent, he was raised outside of Judea, in Alexandria.

But the Distinguished also hoped that he would make a mistake the other way, taking what was clearly a joke too seriously and appear prudish. Many Judean religious groups, include Ezra's, were largely celibate. It was also rumored that the Nazarene came from these groups. The Distinguished themselves were often characterized as being prudes, but they were family men, not innocents.

In my defense of what happened next, I must point out that I was drunk and young. Though I grew up in Galilee, I am not Judean and did not understand Judean law.

For those of you who do not understand Judean law, you should know that Judean law isn't like modern, civilized laws, the decisions of men, enforced by the state and its courts. It is a very different thing altogether.

The Judeans see that traditions that they follow as as divine, more like laws of nature than man-made. For them, their law and their traditions define a special way of life, a gift of the Divine. As children, they learn that they are separated from the everyday world and ordinary people by their traditions. For them, the words "dedicated to God" and "separated" are the same. You cannot insult a Judean by calling him "different". He is proud of the fact and works toward that end. You insult him by calling him common and ordinary.

The Distinguished, however, take this idea one step further. They teach that the traditional norms aren't enough. They found a long list of obligations in their ancient written laws, a list so complex that the Judean people needed the legal help of the Distinguished to guide them through the

labyrinth of laws. This is how these Distinguished achieved their privileged position in Judean society.

Marriage has been affected by these new rules, as we will see, but not the Judean customs against sleeping with a married woman. This is well-established in written law and traditional social norms.

Some ideas are still simple, like that of the need for complete trust in marriage. Answering my jest, the Nazarene took it the same as he took every question or remark, neither too lightly nor too seriously.

“You have heard that it has been said,”<sup>[1]</sup> he started, again pretending to unroll a scroll, but, though he read it in a different voice, this voice was more authoritative and less comical.

“You don’t want to defile a woman!” he announced sternly.

Some chuckled at the voice, which did get funnier with each repetition, but others, mostly women, shushed them.

Our own Tamar admits to being among those doing the shushing. This surprised her. She was surprised by how the topic of adultery upset her. Among Judeans, only married women can commit adultery. As a spinster, the actual law didn’t apply to her. At some level, she was unhappy about that fact.

“I, myself, however?” the Master continued, smiling and pausing.

He wanted to let us wonder what he might say next, building the tension that the topic had raised.

“I am telling you all, that everyone gazing at,”<sup>[2]</sup> he continued, pausing a beat, “a woman!”

He copied my manner, both the leering sound of my voice and my drawing curved figure in the air.

“To the point of getting hot about her?” he continued, pulling open his collar and fanning himself.

We all laughed. It was immediately clear that the Master was neither a prude nor an innocent. Men can and do get excited by a woman’s looks no matter what the culture or law. And women like exciting them, at least when they want to do so.

[1] See Greek translation notes on page 181.

[2] See Greek translation notes on page 181.

“He has already defiled her,” he continued, more seriously, touching his chest, “in that heart of his.”

Some young men and boys tittered at this comment, but most of the crowd took the Master’s words seriously.

My friend, Janus, immediately called out, “When it comes to pretty women, my right eye has a heart of its own!”

He was a quick one, that Janus.

Did I mention, however, that we were drunk?

Many in the crowd, mostly men, laughed, which, of course, only encouraged us. Again, others tried to shush them. Defending my friend, however, I must say that what he said was perfectly true. A man’s eye has a will of its own to say nothing of his other body parts.

The Nazarene himself smiled and chuckled, nodding his head in agreement.

“If, however, that eye of yours,”<sup>[3]</sup> the Master responded, speaking directly to Janus.

“The right one!” interrupted Janus, standing up to make himself better heard and taking a step toward the speaking area.

He stumbled.

We laughed at the stumble.

“The right one,” observed the Nazarene, “trips you up!”

The Master copied the stumble for the part of the crowd that didn’t see it.

We laughed harder.

“Pluck it out!” suggested the Master in a cheerful voice.

He happily pretended to tug his eye out, holding it up, and wagged his finger at it accusingly.

“And toss it away from you!” he added lightheartedly, repeating his throwing-out-the-trash gesture but this time staggering a little.

We, of course, laughed. The gesture was funnier every time he used it.

“Because it helps you,” he continued still cheerfully, “when it destroys itself, one of those...”

[3] See Greek translation notes on page 184.

He seemed to search for the right word. Then held up his hand with his little finger extended.

“Members of yours!” he said brightly.

The crowd laughed. Many groaned. We all knew what that gesture meant. It was the “tiniest” insult.

“And you don’t want all that body of yours,” he continued happily in his slightly drunken tone, pretending to pick up something heavy, “maybe being tossed...”

He repeated his throwing-out-the-trash gesture but this time staggering as if bearing the weight of a body.

We laughed again. He also made it different each time!

“Into Gehenna!” he finished, using the same ominous old man’s voice as before.

The crowd responded with a gail of laughter. Many may have expected the Nazarene to tackle the topic delicately. His response was just the opposite. It was innocently playful.

Encouraged by the response of the crowd, I decided that it was my responsibility to support my friend Janus. I stood up next to him.

“My little member isn’t bothered by my right eye,” I called out, “but by my right hand here!”

Much to my embarrassment now, I then raised my right hand and made a pumping motion.

There was laughter, but mostly I heard the moans. Perhaps I had gone too far, I remember thinking as I looked around, suddenly feeling more drunk from standing up so quickly.

The Master looked up to heaven and shook his head.

Then he smiled and look directly into my eyes. Despite being drunk, I could see the man’s dark eyes so clearly.

“And if,”<sup>[4]</sup> he responded somewhat sadly but sounding very patient, holding up his own hand, then asking, “that right of yours...”

“My hand!” I shouted, holding up my hand a taking a step toward the speaker.

Like my friend, I stumbled.

The crowd laughed again.

Early on, I always claimed that I did it on purpose as a joke, copying my friend. Since becoming a true Follower, I have tried to tell the truth as well as I can, but now, I don’t really know, after all these years, why I stumbled.

“A hand,” observed the Master wryly, “trips you up.”

Again, he acting out my stumble for the crowd.

The crowd laughed louder.

“Lop it off!” he suggested jovially.

The Master held out his right forearm and pretended to chop it off with his left hand. He folded his hand into his armpit and waved his elbow as though he had chopped off his arm.

“And toss it away from you!” he continued happily, again he performing his tossing-out-the-trash gesture, but this time with one hand.

Every time it was a little different, but the laughter was greater because of the repetition. But amid the laughter, an important idea was being established in our minds. A big part of the Nazarene’s point of view was tossing out the trash, or, as he also said, letting go of the worthless.

“Because, it helps you when it destroys itself,” he said more soberly, “one of those...”

Now, he unfolded his right arm and held up his hand, wiggling its fingers.

“Members of yours,” he said with a big smile and two-shouldered shrug.

And again, we laughed harder.

Now the “members” comment referred to another, entirely more proper member. One I certainly didn’t think about when I had made my command. This quickness wasn’t lost on many in the crowd. Many applauded the man’s cleverness. When the applause died, he continued speaking directly to me in a familiar way.

“And you don’t want all that body of yours,” he continued happily, pretending to pick up something heavy.

[4] See Greek translation notes on page 187.

The crowd laughed in anticipation. We thought we knew what was coming. In this case, we were right.

“Into Gehenna,” he announced more seriously, “it might get tossed!”

He repeated his throwing-out-the-trash gesture. He then dusted off his hands.

Everyone laughed and cheered.

In my mind, I had just been thrown out with the trash, but I was laughing and applauding as well.

At this point, Ulla from of our group of witnesses, called out from the crowd. We, of course, didn’t know each other at the time. But the fishwife had noticed my comments and I noted her grin as she called out

“So you are saying,” she said loudly and clearly, “that he should divorce his hand?”

Her comment got a good laugh.

So it wasn’t just my drunk friends and I who were inspired by the Nazarene’s manner to try to get laughs. Ulla was complete sober. The man created an environment where everyone was relaxed, having a good time, laughing and joking. As I got to know Ulla years later, I found that she was blunt, practical, and outspoken. In her fishing vilage, she was known both for her earthy humor and her cutting wit.

Of course, not quite everyone was relaxed and having a good time. One group didn’t like Ulla’s comment at all. Our group of Distinguished.

Johanon, the Distinguished elder saw this joke as an open attack on Judean law, a very important law for many of the Distinguished.

“See? Your antics encourage people to mock the law!” he shouted. “Moses’s law regarding turning loose a wife is sacred!”

The elder was not completely wrong, turning loose a wife is another very serious among Judeans.

Realizing this, the crowd quieted, looking to the Master to respond. He had been ignoring many of the Distinguished questions and comments, he chose not to ignore this one.

“So it has been proclaimed,”<sup>[5]</sup> he said causally, gesturing toward Johanon, apparently referring to the elder’s comment.

We laughed at this off-hand manner.

And then, again, he pretended to unroll a scroll and read it in his old man voice.

“Whoever possibly might turn away that wife of his,” he announced in an officious tone, “let him give her..”

Here, he paused and looked at the audience, raising one eyebrow cynically. Some of us chuckled in anticipation.

“A going-to-desert-you notice!” he finished sourly, waving good-bye.

We chuckled, of course, but the topic was serious. The Distinguished complained, but no one paid attention to them, certainly not the Master.

“I myself, however?”<sup>[6]</sup> he continued, touching his chest, in a way that seemed much more serious, more caring.

“I am telling you all,” he added with a hint of anger in his voice, “that everyone setting loose that wife of his—”

“You mean even if he catches her cheating?” someone shouted out, interrupting.

“Except for the reasons of cheating,” he answered, accentuating the “except”. He finished his condemnation firmly, “He causes her to become defiled.”

His serious tone quieted most of the crowd. Many women applauded, but most of us were taken back by his vehemence. He clearly did not care for Moses’s sacred law concerning divorce.

“And anyone when he has sex with one having set herself loose?” he said sadly, “He defiles himself.”

This was a very different standard than that of Moses. It equated “loosening” a woman, as they call it, with defiling a woman, which is up there with murder.

When we were giving our testimony before various communities outside of Judea, we had many questions about Judean marriage laws and ending marriages. Cultural practices differ. So let me spend some time here

[5] See Greek translation notes on page 191.

[6] See Greek translation notes on page 191.

explaining the Judean viewpoint in a little more detail for those of you who are not Judean.

The Nazarene's standard of equating divorce with murder is less radical than it appears. Loosening a woman from marriage is very uncommon among regular Judeans. Marriages are negotiated between families. The father of the husband pays a bride price. This is the opposite of the Roman and Greek practice of the father of the bride paying a dowry to the husband, to help the family set up their new household. If a Judean son "loosens" his woman, the bride price is forfeited, but there are no new payments made. This is different than our system where a divorce requires repayment of the dowry to the father of the bride or to the bride herself.

However, such separations are very rare among Judeans. They are a poor people and only the wealthy can afford to divide a family. The interests of extended families on both sides work against divorce. When such separations do happen, it is often a tragedy, sometimes leading to death. Since the woman doesn't receive back her dowry, she has no financial resources. If she does not have a family to which she can return to support her, she must support herself. This leads to becoming a beggar or a prostitute. Her children, if any, usually stay with her husband.

"Divorce is the only vow a man can break simply by paying a lawyer to write a note," commented Ulla wryly. She was moved by the Master's intensity in speaking about "freeing" a woman,

The Nazarene smiled, nodding in agreement.

Her comment further enraged the Distinguished, especially the lawyers among them. After all, lawyer made money writing these "going-to-desert" notes. Among the wealthy, lawyers were thought to encourage these separations. Right or wrong, divorces were perfectly legal under the law.

"Without our overseeing the law," Baram, one of the other Distinguished lawyers, shouted, "no one would honor any vows, marriage or otherwise!"

He shouted, not to Ulla, who he probably judged far beneath him, but to the Master.

The Nazarene smiled more broadly, as if the challenge cheered him up out of his more serious mood. He regained the normal mischievous twinkle in his eye.

"Again, you have all heard," <sup>[7]</sup> he started lightly, "that it is proclaimed by the ancients."

And again, he pretended to unroll a scroll.

Laughter followed.

"Do not renege on a promise!" he proclaimed in his old man's voice, then wagging his finger at the audience. "You each are going to give back, however, to the Lord..."

He paused to tap firmly on his right palm with the fingers of his left hand. It is the sign for paying money among the Judeans.

"Those promises of yours!" he finished.

The drew both laughter and groans from the crowd. Groans because it was another familiar line of the Distinguished. The Distinguished required "giving back to the Lord". That is, paying them and the temple for the binding of oaths.

"I myself, however?" <sup>[8]</sup> he said, returning humbly to his own voice.

Laughter greeted the repeated phrase.

"I am telling you all," he said, making a sweeping gesture.

"Don't," he continued seriously, holding up his right hand, "make promises."

We were surprised.

Some of us laughed because the idea was so absurd on the face of it. Perhaps, it was a play on words, leading to something else.

But he didn't smiling as he usually did when playing with words. He looked like he meant it.

Several in the crowd expressed confusion about this idea. Asking what he meant.

"No promises of any kind?"

"Are you joking?"

"Really?"

[7] See Greek translation notes on page 193.

[8] See Greek translation notes on page 195.

“Really,” the Master repeated, affirming his statement.

Then, the questions became more specific.

“You mean not to promise on the Lord, but can’t we promise on the sky?” asked one loudly, “Or the earth?”

“Neither on that sky,” the Master said, gesturing toward the clouds to the left, “since a judge’s bench is for the Divine.”

And looking up, we could see a cloud that many thought looked like the big chair that judges sit in. People pointed up and a murmur passed through the crowd.

“Nor on the mother earth,” continued the Master with certainty, gesturing downward.

“Because...” he started, spotting a small rock and moving over toward it.

“A footstool!”<sup>[9]</sup> he proclaimed, lifting one of his feet and resting it on the stone. “It is for those feet of His!”

We laughed, but many still had questions,

“What about vows in Jerusalem? At the temple?” one called, asking about the specific Judean practice of swearing with gold and gifts at the temple.

“Nor in Jerusalem,” responded the Master, again shaking his head with certainty. “Since a city is,” he continued, striking a kingly pose, “for the great, a king!”

At this point, our own Ezra was inspired to call out his question.

“So our promises fall only on our own heads?” he suggested, thinking he was just rephrasing the point the Master was making. He was surprised to find he was wrong.

The Master shook his head “no,” and gestured for Ezra to come up to him.

As Ezra made his way through the crowd, the Master pointed at the old man’s head.

“Nor on that head of yours,”<sup>[10]</sup> he said, speaking to Ezra directly, “should you promise.”

[9] See Greek translation notes on page 196.

[10] See Greek translation notes on page 198.

Ezra looked surprised and confused.

“Seeing that you really don’t have the power to make a single hair” the Master explained with a smile, “light...or dark!”

The Master indicated Ezra’s grey hair and then his own dark hair.

“But how do others know I am sincere?” Ezra asked, thinking about his own situation as the leader of a community, “with nothing standing behind my word?”

“You stand behind it yourself, however?”<sup>[11]</sup> asked the Master, looking directly into Ezra eyes and touching Ezra’s heart.

“Yes, on my personal honor,” Ezra answered humbly.

The Nazarene nodded and turned to the rest of us.

“Those explanations of all of yours?” he queried, indicating us all with a sweeping arm.

“Yes!” he announced, gesturing with a thumbs up.

“Don’t we, however, sometimes want something more?” Ezra suggested,

“Something, however,” the Master responded smiling, “more than these?”

He made the thumbs up and thumbs down gesture.

“Out of our desire of ours for certainty,” responded Ezra nodding.

“Out of that worthlessness,” the Master scoffed happily.

“Are you saying that certainty doesn’t exist?” asked Ezra.

“It exists,” said the Master cheerfully, with certainty. He twirled a finger to the sky.

“The realm of the skies!” we responded.

Ezra laughed and the two of them embraced.

The crowd applauded, both Ezra for his good question, voicing what many were thinking, and for the Master who answered his questions so well.

My testimony about what happened next at Seven Springs continues in the next letter, but before I close I would like to say a few words about the

[11] See Greek translation notes on page 200.

emotional impact these events in this section of the Master's presentation had upon the lives of the witnesses in our Group.

The discussion about destroying marriages had a big effect on Pisca at the time, even though she wasn't personally part of it. She was old enough to understand what it meant when a woman was "freed" by her husband, but she had never thought about it before. She had never known it happening to anyone she knew.

However, this discussion made her think about her own life. After her clan had exiled them for their disease, as required by the law, her father had found an hold hut for them to live in. At first, he himself brought them food and visited with them from a distance. But over time, the man had stopped coming, sending servants and others. These comments made her wonder, had her own mother been turned loose, despite carrying a child?

The two, mother and daughter, had come to the Nazarene, hoping to be cured. Now, it did not appear that they would be cure, but, even if they had been cured, would they even have a home to which they could return? Her simple, childish, idea of right and wrong told her that such things were wrong, very wrong.

She was elated that the Master it made that clear that ending a marriage was wrong. Such was her childish trust in the Nazarene that his declaring it wrong made it impossible. If the Master said it was wrong, her father would not do it. Her father and mother would stay together no matter what.

Ezra had a very different issue. The Nazarene's words about vows stuck a chord within him. When he was young he had made a vow on his own head. It was a vow that he had kept it ever since. However, the Nazarene made it clear that taking such vows was a mistake. Ezra agreed in his secret heart. It was a mistake also for an old man to live to satisfy the outdated desires of a foolish young man. He had seen his vow as a debt, almost a curse, but the Nazarene thinking made him doubt that view.

Ulla too had realized at this point that she had been changed by listening to the Teacher. She had suddenly found herself laughing again. She and her husband had laughed and joked a lot when they were together, but,

since his death, it seemed like there was no more joy in the world. She had grown more introverted and humorless. Listening to the Master made her laugh again. She had actually found herself joking with her family. Then she was making jokes for the crowd!

It was like discovering there was life after death.

As for me, my transformation was simpler. I had discovered that loved the attention of the crowd. I had admired the way that the Nazarene had acted out his answer to me. It made me want to emulate him, be like him, and get the attention of crowds. This was at first a curse, then a blessing.

Your witness to the truth of what I saw and heard,

Festus

## LETTER 7: THE WORTHLESS

From Festus, a witness to the Christ by the will of the Father,  
To the Assemblies,

The Master's view of how we should treat each other.

Many of you have written asking for more information about the conflict between the Master and the Distinguished regarding marriage, divorce, and vows. All of our witness group, except for Demas, saw these conflicts as primarily about finances. The power of the Distinguished came from their claims of moral superiority, but their money came from marriage, divorce, the sealing of vows and similar legal activities. Though they all were not lawyers, they all supported a legalistic view of Judean society.

The Distinguished of every type—scholar, writer, and lawyer—use their legal knowledge to position themselves as go-betweens in all social interactions. As go-betweens, they have influence, but they also earn compensation. As trainers of the next generation, the Distinguished teach that experts are essential to the maintenance of the law.

This is a key difference between Judean and Roman societies. The Roman's conduct most of their business without the interference of any class of legal experts. Priests can play a ceremonial role, but contracts are the direct agreements between the people involved. If any go-betweens are needed, they are respected friends or relatives, not the intellectual class. Legal experts and intellectuals in general are more often relegated to the role of educators of the children, but they are viewed as idlers and trouble makers more than as valuable members of society.

So did the Nazarene take Judean law more lightly or more seriously than the Distinguished? Perhaps both. He took the criticism of his views by the Distinguished very lightly. At Seven Springs, he often implied that their beliefs came out of self interest and personal greed.

To the Distinguished, all of this was deadly serious. It challenged their position in Judean society, but more importantly, it challenged their sources of income. As trust in the Nazarene has grown among Judeans, the power of the Distinguished has waned. Even now, in less than a generation, the

influence of the Distinguished is but a shadow of what it was. The Nazarene's story and his sayings are well known among all Judeans. The role that the Distinguished played in his execution has seriously undermined their social position.

The conflict between the Master and the Distinguished over the value of a legalistic approach increase after the Nazarene pronounced legalistic vows as worthless.

"If people don't vow to God," called out the distinguished lawyer Baram, defending his earlier position, "they will break their word. Then, they can legally take revenge on one another!"

The Nazarene smiled broadly at the question, as he often did.

He pretended again to unroll a scroll.

"You have heard that it was proclaimed," he announced playfully in his old man's voice.

We laughed.

"An eye,"<sup>[1]</sup> he said, pretending to pluck out his eye again, "in return for an eye..."

We laughed as he closed one eye, pretending to hold out his plucked eye.

"It is more complicated than that!" Baram shouted.

His comment was booed by a few in the crowd.

"And," the Nazarene continued, half-laughing in his old man's voice, "a tooth in return for a tooth."

He acted out a painful struggle to pull out one of his teeth.

We laughed.

"You are oversimplifying the law!" Baram called out.

More of us booed his interruptions.

In response, the Nazarene looked at us and visibly sighed.

We laughed.

The Master held both his hands in front of him, one with the imaginary plucked eye in it, the other with the pulled tooth.

[1] See Greek translation notes on page 202.

“I myself, however?”<sup>[2]</sup> he said again in that mock pompous way, this time lisping “mythelf” as though he was missing a tooth.

We laughed.

“I am telling you all, you don’t want to compare...” he started, balancing his two hands against each other, “the worthless!”

The Master pretended to toss out both the eye and tooth with his throwing-out-the-trash gesture.

The crowd laughed at the familiar gesture, interpreting it as a judgment about the value of the Distinguished’s view.

“Oversimplification—” accused Baram again.

His interruption was instantly met with widespread booing.

Baram tried to continue, but his fellow Distinguished pulled him back as he was met with more complaints from the crowd. They understood, as he did not, that he was not winning the debate.

With the Distinguished quieted for the moment, the Master opened himself to more questions.

“Someone else?” he asked the crowd.

We called out many questions

“What do I do if someone punches me right in the jaw?” a balding young man with a thin beard asked reasonably.

“Someone punches in that right jaw of yours?” repeated the Master.

“Turn back to him,” he continued in a threatening manner, lifting his fist.

Then, changing his tone completely to a cheery one, he said, “Also the other?”

The Master offered his left jaw, smiling, pointing to it with a finger that emerged from his fist,

We laughed, but many moaned. Some didn’t like this answer.

He greeted the moans with a shocked face.

This drew more laughter.

The Master was having fun.

As I have said, the Master’s silliness was contagious.

A skinny middle-aged man with a pot-belly twirled his tunic over his head to get attention as he called out his question.

“Should I also give in to someone suing me in court?” the man complained. “I will lose my shirt!”

The man got some applause and laughter because of his looks.

The Nazarene gestured for the man to come to him.

We applauded the pot-bellied man as he worked his way through the crowd. We were surprised that he seemed entirely sober.

“And for the one wanting to sue you?”<sup>[3]</sup> the Master asked him as he approached.

“He wants money he doesn’t deserve,” responded the pot-bellied man.

“And to take it that shirt of yours,” the Master suggested, tugging on the shirt in the man’s hand.

The pot-bellied man tugged back on his shirt. This created a friendly tug of war between the two. They pulled the shirt back and forth between them, smiling and laughing.

“Let go of it!” suggested the Master.

When the pot-bellied man shook his head “no, and pulled harder, the Master took his own advice and let go. The man fell back, laughing.

We laughed and applauded.

The Master helped the man up. Then the Master took off his cloak and offered it to the shirtless man.

“Also the cloak?” offered the Master.

The pot-bellied man denied the offer, and they gave each other a hug. The man began putting on his shirt as he worked his way back to his group.

We cheered and applauded the man putting on his shirt.

As we applauded, a street urchin called out.

“So do I just let go, not fight for myself,” the dirty-faced boy asked, “even if someone forces me to bear burdens for him?”

To explain the boy’s question, in Judea and many other places we have traveled, the powerful use their guards to force bystanders to carry their

[2] See Greek translation notes on page 203.

[3] See Greek translation notes on page 205.

burdens. The powerful might travel without their own porters, but they seldom travel without guards.

The Nazarene signalled for this dirty-faced boy to join him.

“I am poor, and see the value in getting along with others,” the urchin explained as he made his way through the crowd, “but I am a free man, not a slave. Must I submit to anyone who acts like he is my master?”

“And anyone who might press you into service,”<sup>[4]</sup> the Master agreed grasping the boy’s hand welcoming him.

“Even if he wants me to go a mile?” the boy asked,

“A mile?” asked the Master, holding up a single finger. “One?”

The boy nodded.

“Go with him!” the Master suggested cheerfully.

“A whole mile?” the boy said, registering his disappointment at this advice.

The Master looked sympathetic, smiled, and added, holding up two fingers, “For two!”

We joined the boy in laughing at the advice.

“But they won’t pay me a penny!” the boy complained, holding out his hand as if he was begging, “They just asked and think I should do it!”

“To the one asking from you,”<sup>[5]</sup> the Master responded jovially, “give!”

He smiled broadly as he held up a few copper coins for the boy to see.

The urchin held out his hand as though begging.

The Master dropped the coins into the boy’s hand.

“Lucky, this beggar!” commented the urchin.

We laughed, and the Master laughed. We all applauded the boy’s quickness. The urchin held up the pennies.

“Thank you, master,” the boy continued, “Now, someone will want to borrow it all from me!”

The Master laughed and dropped some more pennies in the urchin’s hand.

“Also, for the one wanting to borrow from you!” he explained.

“Give this to him?” the boy asked.

[4] See Greek translation notes on page 207.

[5] See Greek translation notes on page 208.

“You might not want to turn away,” suggested the Nazarene cheerfully.

“If you mean I should keep my eyes on them, you’re right!” the boy agreed. “I try to keep my money a secret, even from myself. Don’t want my left hand to know what it is doing, this right hand of mine!”

The dirty-faced boy, held up his now empty right hand, having hidden the money somewhere in his clothing.

“We may all hate to give,” the boy observed, giving the Master a hug, “but no one hates the giver.”

The Master laughed and agreed, sending the boy back into the crowd.

And we all laughed and applauded him as he left.

The boy was a philosopher.

“This mad man would have us give to those who hate us!” Simeon, the Distinguished, proclaimed to the crowd.

The Master continued laughing, smiled broadly, and nodded in agreement.

We all had a good idea of what was coming. Some of us laughed in anticipation.

“You have heard that it was proclaimed,”<sup>[6]</sup> he started again, as light-heartedly as ever.

We laughed in recognition.

He pretended to unroll another scroll. “

“You should care for those close to you,” he pretended to read in his old man’s voice, “and you should hate those hated of yours!”

We laughed harder because he seemed to be mimicking Simeon’s voice.

“I myself, however?”<sup>[7]</sup> the Master said in his familiar mock humble way.

He moved towards Pisca and her mother, sitting apart from the crowd. When he reached them, he helped them to their feet.

Again, a murmured moved through the crowd, being reminded of the unclean pregnant woman and her unclean child.

[6] See Greek translation notes on page 209.

[7] See Greek translation notes on page 210.

“I am telling you all,” the Master announced to the crowd, “embrace those hated of yours.”

The Nazarene dramatically embraced Pisca and her pregnant mother. It was both a brave and foolish thing to do, to embrace the diseased. The crowd, however, reacted differently than before. Few reacted with any horror. Most looked on the Nazarene with admiration for his bravery.

Pisca remembers it as the greatest thing that ever happened to her. Her concerns about her father and mother and being cured melted away as she was hugged by the Master in front of the crowd. After over a year of being shunned by everyone but her mother, she said it was like coming alive again.

But as great as the moment was for most of us, it was a shock for the Distinguished. They hadn't noticed Pisca and her mother before. They had arrived after the Nazarene had declared them to be among the lucky. Seeing their very visible skin sores, the Distinguished couldn't contain themselves.

“They are unclean!” shouted several of the Distinguished.

“You are openly breaking our laws!” Baram shouted, accusing the Nazarene, the girl, and her mother

The Nazarene hugged the woman and her child more closely.

“And pray for those hounding you,” he said to them loudly enough for us all to hear.

“Why?” asked Pisca's mother, sadly.

“In order that you might become children,”<sup>[8]</sup> the Master explained happily, “of that Father of yours, that one in the skies.

His hand pointed upward with a twirling finger.

“The realm of the skies!” we responded.

We did it raggedly. It seemed like a long time since we had said the line. We laughed at ourselves.

And then, the sun came out from the clouds again. “

“Because, that sun of His?” the Master said, indicating the sun as he continued his explanation. “It rises on the worthless.”

He indicated himself, Pisca, and her mother.

“And the valuable,” he added, indicating the Distinguished.

Many in the crowd vocally complained about this comparison.

Then came a strange moment. The sun was shining, but a sprinkle of rain began to fall. It was refreshing in the heat of the day and only lasted a moment. But the Master recognized an opportunity.

“And not only does He shower rain on the law-abiding,” he continued, indicating the Distinguished, “but also law-breakers.”

He indicated himself, the girl, and the pregnant woman.

We laughed.

“Why should we care about those who hate us?” someone asked.

“Because, when you care for those caring for you...”<sup>[9]</sup> responded the Master. He took his arms from Pisca and her mother and wrapped them both around himself. He hugged himself with his eyes closed, moving his arms up and down his body.

We laughed.

“What compensation do you get?” he continued, taking his arms from around himself, and shaking his head. “Nothing, really. Even the tax collectors act the same way!” He gestured toward the back of the crowd.

We laughed. The tax collectors were outcasts themselves. They sat in the back of the crowd with the whores and other social pariahs.

“Also, if you all hug,” the Master continued, indicating Pisca and her mother who were embracing each other, “those relatives of yours alone, what out of the ordinary are you doing?”<sup>[10]</sup>

He paused for a moment, letting us think about the question.

“Nothing, really!” he insisted, answering it for himself. “Even those other ethnic groups are the same!”

He smiled as he gestured toward the group of Romans up front, the ones with the bread and wine. They laughed and embraced each other for the crowd's benefit.

We laughed.

Then one of the Romans called out.

[9] See Greek translation notes on page 214.

[10] See Greek translation notes on page 216.

[8] See Greek translation notes on page 212.

“What would we become if we cared about all these other worthless types?” he asked, gesturing happily toward the rest of the crowd.

The crowd booed and laughed at this insult. It was clearly meant in jest, but the Master took it seriously.

“You all will be, in fact,” <sup>[11]</sup> the Master announced dramatically with a smile, “yourselves!”

The crowd laughed.

“But what in the world would that possibly be like?” the man asked quizzically.

The Master chuckled at his tone and the rest of us joined in.

“Perfect!” the Nazarene explained, saluting the man. “Like that Father of yours, the sky one.”

He pointed his twirling finger to the sky.

“The realm of the skies!”

We applauded ourselves for saying it in unison.

“What is the Divine like?” someone asked.

“Perfect!” the Master answered laughing.

“Does he really exist?” someone else asked.

“He exists!” the Master said firmly

And we will end this letter there.

Your witness,

Festus

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[11] See Greek translation notes on page 218.

## LETTER 8: PRAYER

From Festus, a witness to the Christ by the will of the Father,  
To the Assemblies,

A Letter on the Master's view of public displays of virtue.

For our five Judean witnesses to the Sermon on the Mount, seeing the Nazarene was like seeing a luminary of their history. Even Tamar, who was skeptical about her people's traditions, was impressed by his style and demeanor. The man's personality was so appealing. His manner so confident. As a Greek, it was easy for me to imagine him raising armies and leading a nation to war.

For those of you who are not Judean, understanding the Judean attitude toward actors is important for understanding the next section of this testimony.

Acting in the Greek style is seen as a form of lying among the Judeans. Of course, actors are held in disrepute by many cultures, including among the Greeks. Like most vagabonds, they cannot be trusted with other people's property for even a moment. However, they are more dangerous than many regular travelers because they are unusually attractive and polished liars. They have few values other than their self-regard. Actors are especially notorious for seducing faithful wives and innocent daughters. Having traveled among them for several years, I admit that this view is largely accurate.

However, I am Greek and I see drama differently than the Judeans. While actors may be as a group thoroughly disreputable, I don't see acting and drama as inherently evil. People can learn deep truths from drama even though the play itself is a fiction.

The Judeans, on the other hand, see the plays as being as corrupt as the actors who play in them. Drama is a corruptor of youth. They judge most plays as glorifying violence, immorality, and behavior that is self-destructive and destructive to society. After growing up and living among them, I can see their point even though I do not personally agree with it.

When we witnesses re-created the events at Seven Springs, the Judeans of our group also did not see themselves as acting despite playing different

parts. They saw themselves as telling a story just as I am telling a story here. Storytelling is a Judean tradition. Like most peoples, Judeans use storytelling for passing down their history.

The Nazarene was the best storyteller anyone has ever seen, but we never for a moment saw him as false, like an actor. Among the Judeans, every tribe and village has storytellers. But next to the Master? They were nothing. It was like comparing a lamp to the sun. The Master entertained like a lot of storytellers, doing his different voices and acting out his words, but he was always being himself, open, hiding nothing, answering the questions put to him in the most interesting way that he could. The Master was never false. He was not playing a part. He was simply being himself.

So we turn back to our story.

Despite the presence and interruptions of the Distinguished, the mood remained happy. The Master had his opponents well in hand, but they had become an important element in the drama.

Especially after the sunshine and rain, people were full of questions. The Nazarene's idea of perfecting ourselves was especially interesting. It triggered the next questions. It came this time from a woman in the crowd. Tamar knew this woman from Tiberias. Her name was Abbiah. She was an from another merchant family in Tiberias. Like Tamar, Abbiah was known to give publicly to the poor.

"Will the Divine compensate us for our virtue?" Abbiah asked sincerely.

The Master nodded, agreeing, but he added a warning, speaking to us all.

"Take care, however, of that virtue of yours—" <sup>[1]</sup> he said.

"But everyone can see my virtue," Abbiah said proudly, interrupting. "Everyone sees that I give to those beggars."

"You don't want to perform," the Master continued, taking a dramatic pose while still addressing the crowd, "in front of those people."

He said "those people" with a hint of mock disdain, indicating us the crowd.

We laughed.

"But, I for one, want people to see me," Abbiah protested, even though he hadn't addressed her personally.

"In order to display yourself to them?" he asked her directly, raising his arms and displaying himself to us.

We laughed.

"Maybe not like that," the woman admitted, "but we all want others to admire us for our public virtue!"

"If so?" the Master continued, "you really don't want compensation!"

He pointed a twirling finger skyward.

"The realm of the skies!" we chanted.

We laughed and applauded our contribution to the dialogue.

"We won't get compensation from the Divine?" the woman responded, surprised. "Why not?"

"You all are not holding by that Father of yours, the one in the skies."

"I can't speak for everyone else, but I really do want compensation," Abbiah insisted.

Some chuckled at her response, but many in the crowd echoed her sentiments. They wanted to be compensated as well.

"Whenever you truly perform a kindness," <sup>[2]</sup> the Master speaking sincerely to her directly, "you don't want to blow a trumpet in front of you."

He pretended to blow a trumpet.

We laughed.

"Like..." he paused, again taking a pose, and then dramatically announced in a theatrical voice, "those actors!"

The crowd laughed. It was a cutting comparison.

"They perform," he said, smiling despite his words dripping with disdain, "in the meeting places and in the crowded streets, so that they might be recognized by the people."

He paused, acting as if he was accepting applause from the crowd, spreading his arms, making little bows right and left. The crowd responded by applauding him. He added flourishes to his bows.

[1] See Greek translation notes on page 227.

[2] See Greek translation notes on page 230.

“Honestly, I’m telling you all,” he said addressing the crowd again, putting his hand to his heart. “They are getting that compensation of theirs!”

He again began bowing as if he was accepting applause.

And again we played along applauding.

He acted as if he was embarrassed, holding his hands up in a “no, stop” signal, while, in the next moment, encouraging the applause with little “more, more” waves of his hands.

We laughed and applauded louder.

At this point, Abbiah approach the Master through the crowd. Her attitude seemed different are she drew close to him.

“What if I am not doing it for attention?” she asked humbly, just loud enough to be heard. “How do I do it for the Father?”

The Nazarene smiled and welcomed her up to the speaking area with him.

“Despite your performing a kindness?”<sup>[3]</sup> he asked, smiling as he teased her. “Don’t let it know,” he said, using the accent of the street urchin, “that left of yours.”

He held up her left hand.

“What it is doing,” he continued, indicating her right hand, “that right hand.”

Laughing, she put her right hand behind her back.

He laughed and the rest of us laughed.

“So that it might be yours, that kindness,”<sup>[4]</sup> he continued warmly and more quietly, indicating Abbiah’s heart, “in the hidden.”

The crowd grew more quiet, responding to his softer voice.

“And that Father of yours,” he continued quietly and sincerely, looking into the woman’s eyes, “the one seeing into the hidden? He is going to give back to you!”

He again indicated the woman’s heart.

This answer deeply affected our Tamar. She too was well-known for giving to charity in Tiberias. Tamar felt humbled by the Nazarene’s answer.

[3] See Greek translation notes on page 233.

[4] See Greek translation notes on page 234.

She realized that she hadn’t been giving for the benefit of the beggars but for her own benefit.

Apparently, others felt the same way, but not all were humbled.

One of them asked the next question.

“So we hide our charity?” someone asked cynically. “When else do we hide our virtue?”

“Also,” he said casually with big smile, “when pray for yourselves.”<sup>[5]</sup>

Oh, what an uproar that caused!

Public prayer is popular in Galilee and Judea. Very popular. It is one of the few public demonstrations that the Romans allow. This isn’t just public celebrations, like the various Greek and Roman holidays with their parades, dancing, food, and wine. Judean individual and groups pray in public to be seen by their fellow citizens.

Many in crowd loudly protested this idea. Many thought they misunderstood the Master. Calling for an end to public prayer was unthinkable.

The Distinguished saw an opportunity in the crowd’s reaction. Their elders immediately stood and encouraged the crowd’s protests.

“This fool wants to take away your right to public prayer?” shouted Simeon above the others. “Will you stand for this?”

Many in the crowd complained.

“Public prayer is our right! Public prayer is our right!” some chanted.

But the Teacher just waited patiently. He seemed secretly pleased about the outburst.

He didn’t seem at all worried by the complaints. Instead, he let the hubbub go on. People called out questions, but the Master just held his hand to his ear and shrugged as though he couldn’t hear to answer. The Nazarene seemed contented to wait for us to quiet on our own. As the noise and protests began to die, he finally twirled his hand over his head.

We responded.

“Change your minds!”

“Because it has gotten near.”

“The realm of the skies!”

[5] See Greek translation notes on page 235.

It occurred to many of us that he could have silenced the crowd at any time simply by spinning his hand to call up that chant.

We laughed at the realization. “Change your minds!”

“Because it has gotten near.”

“The realm of the skies!”

“You are not going to want to be like those actors!” he suggested with a smile.

He then took a dramatic pose expressing horror.

This drew a laugh.

“Because they love,” he declared, drawing out the words, and hugging himself again, “in those meetings and on those street corners, standing to pray for themselves.”

He began bowing over and over, more and more deeply, until we began to laugh.

“In order that they might be stars,” he explained, waving his outstretched arms and hands over his head, “to these people!”

The crowd was warming up.

“Honestly, I’m telling you,” the Master continued confidently, putting his hand to his heart.

This familiar routine created a genuine laugh.

“They are getting paid in full that compensation of theirs,” he announced happily.

He again began bowing as if he was accepting applause.

And again we played along applauding.

Again, he acted as if he was embarrassed at our applause, holding his hands up in a “no, stop” signal, while, in the next moment, encouraging the applause with little “more, more” waves of his hands.

Though the crowd had seemed angry about not praying in public, the Nazarene had won them over. He turned us around simply by repeating the routines he had established earlier. Routines that made us laugh. It is hard to argue against laughter.

Of course, most of the crowd might not have really supported public prayer all that strongly to begin with. Certainly some, like the Dedicated cer-

tainly did, but the general outcry arose because most expected there would be an outcry, given the place of public prayer in Judean society.

However, many were still had questions.

“My family has always prayed in public,” observed a tall merchant, whose accent said he was from Chorazin. “I enjoy praying with my family.”

“You, however, when you pray by yourself?”<sup>[6]</sup> the Master asked, speaking to him personally.

“By myself?” the tall man responded emotionally. “I never really prayed alone. How would I go about it?”

The Master invited the Chorazin man, who was sitting right next to the speaking area, to stand with him.

“Go into that inner sanctum of yours...” the Master explained, opening an imaginary door and leading the man through it with him. The Master encouraging tall man to duck his head under the imaginary door frame.

We laughed.

“My treasury you mean?” the merchant from Chorazin asked seriously. The Master nodded, smiling.

“And shutting that door of yours,” the Master continued, pretending to close a door. “Pray to that Father of yours.”

“The one in the sky?” the tall merchant asked, sounding worried. “You can’t see the sky in a dark treasury.”

“The One in the hidden,” the Master said, indicating the man’s heart.

“Talk to the Divine in my heart?” the merchant asked, growing more emotional as he spoke. Can he see the secret loss that I’ve hidden in my heart?”

The Master nodded.

The man was growing more emotional. We could only guess what his secret loss might be.

“And that Father of yours, the one seeing inside the hidden?” the Master assured him confidently, touching the man’s heart. “He is going to give back to you.”

[6] See Greek translation notes on page 238.

At the Master's assurance, a wave of emotion seemed to sweep over the tall merchant. He dropped to his knees and kissed the Master's hand. The Master quickly stopped him and helped him to his feet and embraced him.

They both laughed, and the Master chased the tall man back into the crowd. Some could see tears in the man's eyes.

This moved the crowd as well. Many applauded. Among the general laughter with a few sympathetic tears, the objections to not praying public seemed forgotten.

Except by the Distinguished. They complained loudly, reminding the crowd that pray publicly was their right! In protest, some of the Distinguished started praying to the Divine. Demas told us that some of the Distinguished actually expected a sign from the Divine that their prayer was heard. A bolt of lightning hitting the Nazarene would have done it.

And their prayers were answered, but not how they expected.

Another group stood up to pray very loudly together. In the Judean language, these people are called the Samarites. The terms means "the Watchers" in their language. The Watchers are half-breed Judeans, considered heretics. They usually don't speak publicly among Judeans much less pray. They were sitting among the outcasts, in the back of the crowd.

Hearing the Watcher pray was shocking to the Judeans.

They chanted together, bowing together stiffly twice at each line.

Eloowwem of Abraahm, we bow to You.

Eloowwem of Yesaaq, we bow to You.

Eloowwem of Yaaqob, we bow to You.

Eloowwem of Yusef, we bow to You.

Eloowwem of Mooshe, we bow to You.

To me, as a Greek, it sounded just like Judean prayers, but the Judeans were shocked. On hearing them, the crowd quieted.

To them, it sounded like an parody of their own prayers. The enmity between Judeans and Watchers was long and deep. If Watchers acted some way, it must be wrong. And here they were, publicly praying.

The Teacher indicated them as they continued repeating their prayer.

"Praying for yourselves, however?" he said. "I don't want to re-re-re-repeat like those other ethnic groups."<sup>[7]</sup>

To me, his comment was funny, but it affected the Judeans more deeply. To them, the Watcher's prayers seem shallow and redundant, but they were undeniably like their own. Many were surprised by their revulsion. Even the Distinguished elders quieted down. Only the Samarites continued praying stubbornly.

"Because they think that in that long-windedness of theirs," the Master commented on the continued chant, "they are going to be listened to."

We laughed.

At that point, the chant seemed like it was just going on and on.

"You don't want, really, to become like them?"<sup>[8]</sup> the Nazarene asked the crowd.

The crowd responded to his question by yelling "no", "never" and similar ideas.

The Watchers finally ended their repetition and sat down amid the shower of negativity.

"Don't we have to repeat ourselves to get the attention of the Divine," asked one man. "So that we can tell him our needs?"

The Master shook his head, "no".

"Because He has seen," the Master explained to us all, "the Divine, that Father of yours what needs you all have before anyone else."

He then pointed a twirling finger to the sky. We responded.

"The realm of the skies!"

We laughed and applauded. That idea always brought us together, even though few of us could claim to understand it.

Then a cranky-sounding woman called out, "Why should the Divine care about my needs?"

"Yours?" the Master responded, assuming a posture of prayer, spreading his arms with both palms up. "Ask Him for yourself!"

"What do we ask him?" she asked sincerely. "How?"

[7] See Greek translation notes on page 241.

[8] See Greek translation notes on page 243.

The Master seemed to think about his answer for a moment, which was unusual. He was usually so quick.

“In this way, then, do you pray for yourselves,”<sup>[9]</sup> he announced seriously, addressing the whole crowd. “All of you!”

Then he sat down among his students to the side of the speaking area so that he was hidden from the crowd. We heard his prayer, but the speaking area was empty.

“Father of ours,” he said, then he paused.

His followers repeated the line, “Father of ours.”

The crowd grew quieter.

“The one in the skies,” the Master said, pausing again.

Some of us looked for a finger pointed to the sky, but none appeared.

Instead, his followers repeated the line, “The one in the skies!”

A few of us in the crowd joined in.

“Let it be sanctified,” he said, pausing.

“Let it be sanctified,” his followers repeated the line.

More of the us joined.

“This name of Yours!”

“This name of Yours!”

Much of the crowd repeated it raggedly.

Everyone else was quiet.

“Let it show up...”

“Let it show up...”

Most of the crowd joined in raggedly.

“This reign of Yours!”

“This reign of Yours!”

The crowd followed, less raggedly, copying the exclamation.

“Let it come to be...”<sup>[10]</sup>

“Let it come to be...”

The crowd was following smoothly now.

“This desire of Yours...”

“This desire of Yours...”

[9] See Greek translation notes on page 245.

[10] See Greek translation notes on page 246.

The crowd echoed him.

We were growing louder with each line.

“As in sky also on earth!”

“As in sky also on earth!”

The crowd’s repeat of the line seemed to echo through the hills.

“This bread of ours...”<sup>[11]</sup> the Master said more quietly.

The crowd followed, speaking softer. Many of us thinking about the connection between the loaf of bread and the law.

“This bread of ours...”

“The existing upon...” the Master said.

“The existing upon?” The crowd echoed him.

We all wondered what it meant. The word was unknown to us. It seemed to cover both bread and the law.

“Give to us today!” the Master announced.

“Give to us today!” we followed.

“Also, let go for us of those debts of ours,”<sup>[12]</sup> he continued more quietly.

We repeated it more quietly, “Also, let go for us of those debts of ours.”

“Just as also we ourselves let go of those debtors of ours!” the Master announced loudly.

“Just as we ourselves let go of those debtors of ours?” we followed.

Most of us repeated the line, but very few of us said it with confidence.

Some of us chuckled. Some expressed confusion. Others were silent.

The Master smiled in recognition of our reticence.

“Also, You might not want to bring us into a trial,”<sup>[13]</sup> the Master intoned with a slightly humorous way.

“Also, You might not want to bring us into a trial,” we followed.

Everyone joined in this line, and many of us chuckled as well..

“Instead, draw us toward Yourself...” said the Master, pausing again.

“Instead, draw us toward Yourself...” we followed.

“Away from the worthless!” he finished, again, with a slightly humorous tone.

[11] See Greek translation notes on page 247.

[12] See Greek translation notes on page 248.

[13] See Greek translation notes on page 249.

“Away from the worthless!” we all joined together again.

We didn’t realize he was finished until we had sat quietly for awhile. Many were thinking about the meaning of the prayer.

Then, the sun broke through the clouds. To many, the sunshine was like the sky was answering the prayer.

Then someone called out, “That was a public prayer! I thought we weren’t supposed to get any compensation for praying in public!”

We all laughed. The Nazarene stood up, laughing. He applauded the man and all of us.

We all laughed and applauded as well, him and ourselves.

We will discuss the questions raised by the prayer in the next letter.

Your witness,

Festus

## LETTER 9: STOCKPILES

From Festus, a witness to the Sermon on the Mount.

To the Assemblies,

A Discussion about sacrifice and wealth.

Thank you again for your letters.

By this point at Seven Springs, we all knew we were witnessing something special. The crowd was quiet after the Teacher's prayer. For awhile. As with much of what the Teacher did and said that day, his prayer impressed us all differently.

As a Greek, my views of prayer was very different from those of the mostly Judean audience. I was raised with the view that the gods were better left to their own purposes. We perform certain rites at certain times of year or certain points of our lives, but the focus is more upon avoiding the bad will of the gods than soliciting their favor. Many of us are more likely to pray to the small gods, household gods, who are more our size than our major deities. Our prayers are small rituals not a dialogue.

My wife's experience as a Judean was very different. She was taught to pray by her mother. The prayer she learned asked the Divine for protection and strength, personal attributes. She asked for help for herself and others not for material things.

However, her prayers are not necessarily typical. There are many Judeans who not only pray for wealth, but also judge their Deity's favor by who much wealth they accumulate in life.

So not all Judeans reacted to the Master's prayer in the same way at the time. First, we didn't really dwell on it. It was a great moment, but when it was over, the Teacher moved on. People asked about a few aspects of the prayer, but we had many other questions as well, including ones about topics from before the prayer.

Reactions to the Master's prayer are different now. It has been discussed in detail over the years. We witnesses have discussed it amongst ourselves many times. We were asked about it often by the assemblies we visited.

Ulla remembered on the bread part. She liked bread. She found it funny how the Teacher equated bread with the law as what we exist upon. She liked to point out that bread is alive before it is baked. Leaven gives the bread life. That life grows. And, like bread, life grows old and stale, the way she was feeling before Seven Springs. Ulla wondered how this connected to the law. Demas suggested that the Nazarene was saying that Judean traditions grow stale if not renewed daily.

As a child at the time, Pisca found herself thinking about the Father part. The discussion of divorce had focused her thinking on her father. She found herself wondering about the sky Father not wanting to lead people into trials. Her and her mother's lives were consumed by the trials of disease. She wondered how their disease was necessary for the Father's will to come into being. Was their role in the Master's speech an explanation?

Tamar also found herself thinking about her father. Her father was the only thing she trusted, so she liked the way the Teacher addressed the Divine as a father rather than the traditional Judean "master". Her father also hated debt. He told her many times that more slaves were made by debt than the Roman conquest. Most slaves in Judea are bond slaves, serving to pay for their past financial debts. Though Tamar was very cynical about the Judean view of the Divine, this view of the Divine as a debt-hating Father appealed to her.

Ezra also focused on the message on debt as well, but in a broader way. In the Galilean way of speaking, most debts aren't about money. They come from the mistakes people make, and not just the mistakes that cost time or money. Just offending some people puts you in their debt.

The Judeans can be a proud people, sensitive to slights. Living among them has made other ethnic groups such as mine, more careful about what we say and do. Inviting someone to dinner can put them in your debt, but not inviting someone can be seen as a slight, also creating another type of debt. As the supreme leader of his community, he was tired of dealing with trying to find justice in all these social obligations. Ezra applauded the idea of letting go of debts and debtors in general because it was tying society into knots of increasingly complex social obligations.

Demas explained that, for the Distinguished, forgiving debts is a sensitive topic. The first Judean lawgiver, Moses, said that debts must be forgiven every seven years. Yet, the Distinguished chose to ignore that law. They said it is impractical in our modern era.

We must remember that a large number of the people there were bond slaves because of their debts or the debts of their parents. Those like Tamar's father saw the increasing numbers of those in financial bondage as a sign of the decline in society. However, a slave for a noble house could be far wealthier and more powerful than a free person living solely by their own means.

It wasn't surprising that the first question after the prayer was about debts.

"Why should we let go those who owe us?" someone asked. "Don't people need to be held accountable?"

This question could have been about social or financial debts. It could have been asked by a bond slave or a free person.

"Why shouldn't people like those stumbling drunks be held accountable?" someone else asked.

I heard this as a reference to myself and my friends. It was embarrassing. I found myself sobering up.

The Nazarene responded happily to these questions in a very general way.

"Because, when you all let go..."<sup>[1]</sup> he began, indicating the whole crowd with a right-hand sweep. Then changing to a left-hand sweep, "for these people—"

He didn't gesture toward me and my friends, but to the whole crowd. But as he did, he took a step backwards and stumbled over a rock.

The crowd laughed. The stumble was clearly intentional.

I felt that it was a referenced to me and my friend's earlier stumbles. Some of the other witnesses they took it that way was well.

[1] See Greek translation notes on page 253.

“Those missteps of theirs,” the Master continued, recovering from his stumble, smiling. “He is going to let you go as well, your Father, the sky one.”

He twirled his hand over his head.

“Change your minds!”

“Because it has gotten near.”

“The realm of the skies!”

“When, however, you all don’t want to let go of these people...”<sup>[2]</sup> he continued, again gesturing to include the whole crowd.

He took another step backwards and stumbled over the same rock.

“Those missteps of theirs,” he said, picking up the hand-sized rock that he had stumbled over, and showing it to the crowd, then tossing it over his shoulder.

He then picked up a much larger rock with both hands.

“Neither is that Father of yours going to let go,” he said, swinging the large rock back and forth in his throwing out the trash gesture, “of those missteps of yours.”

He tossed the big rock. It sailed off to the side of the speaking area.

We laughed and applauded.

A young man called out, “Does fasting atone for our missteps?”

The youth who asked the question looked frightful. When fasting, Judeans make a public show of it. They mess up their hair. They cover their faces with ashes. They wear torn or dishevelled clothes.

I should also explain that among the Judean people fasting is a form of atonement. It began with one day a year, fasting on their Day of Atonement, but, fasting grew more popular over time. More and more fasting days became part of their annual religious cycle. Then fasting became a form of personal public display. Judeans now fast any time they feel the need, but often that need is the need for attention. A drunk who embarrasses himself in public might go on a fast to show his regret or display his new found virtue. Young people were especially inclined to fast so they could go around looking dirty and messy to get attention.

[2] See Greek translation notes on page 254.

When the Master saw the young man who was fasting, he broke out into a broad smile, as he often did recognizing people. He then happily nodded his head, agreeing that fasting does atone for mistakes, but that wasn’t where the Teacher left the matter.

“When, however, you all fast?”<sup>[3]</sup> he started, speaking not to the young man, but to the crowd, “you don’t want to become like the actors!

He g took a dramatic pose.

“Gloomy!” he said sorrowfully, drawing out the word.

He made sad eyes to the crowd, and tragically laid his forearm across his forehead, tilting his head back.

“Since they mask those faces of theirs,” he continued.

He passed his hand over his face and changed his expression to a smile.

“In order that they might be stars,” he explained, waving his outstretched arms and hands over his head, “to these people!”

We laughed at the familiar line.

He then passed his hand over his face again, resuming his sad-eyed gloomy look, and announced, “Fasting!”

“Honestly, I’m telling you,” he repeated, his hand to his heart, “they are getting paid in full that compensation of theirs.”

He again began bowing as if he was accepting applause.

We laughed and again began applauding.

Again, he acted as if he was embarrassed, signalling “no, stop” and then smiling and encouraging the applause.

When the laughter died, then the Master spoke directly to the disheveled young man who had asked the question.

“You, however,”<sup>[4]</sup> he said, gesturing for the young man to leave his group of friends and join him.

“Fasting?” he asked as if he didn’t know.

We laughed because the answer was obvious.

“Since sun down last night,” the man answered as he got up and walked through the crowd to the speaker.

[3] See Greek translation notes on page 256.

[4] See Greek translation notes on page 258.

The Master smiled warmly and took the fasting youth's hand as they met. The Master turned him around to face the crowd, displaying him for us. The Teacher then produced a small vial of oil from somewhere in his clothing and handed it to the young man.

"Oil your head!" the Master told him happily.

Many in the crowd applauded.

"Yes, Teacher," the youth responded, taking the oil. He unstopped the vial, poured a little oil in his hand and smoothed down his hair.

The Master appraised his hair, nodded, and smiled approvingly. Then he produced a small rag and handed it to the man.

"And that face of yours?" the Master continued. "Wash!"

Again we laughed and applauded.

"Thanks, Teacher," the young man responded humbly, seemingly embarrassed by the attention as he wiped the ash from his face.

"This is not the way that you want to be a star to these people,"<sup>[5]</sup> the Master told him, gesturing towards the happy crowd.

"But you made me a star, calling me beside you!" the youth pointed out cheerfully.

The Master laughed.

"Fasting!" the Master said, clarifying his statement.

He again made his gloomy face and took his tragic pose.

The young man laughed, copying the Nazarene's pose.

"I guess I was showing off," the young man admitted. "But that is the tradition, isn't it. How can I atone without showing my regret to these people?"

"Instead, to that Father of yours," the Master answered, smiling warmly, putting his arm on the youth's shoulder, and pointing toward the young man's heart. "The One in the hidden."

The youth touched his heart in response.

"And that Father of yours, the one seeing into the hidden?" the Master continued, speaking to the youth and again pointing to his heart. "He is going to give back to you."

[5] See Greek translation notes on page 259.

We applauded as the Master hugged the man and sent him back to his friends in the crowd.

But many, like Tamar and her wealthy father, whose name was Enoch, were skeptical about the Nazarene and his talk of hidden rewards. Tamar's father called out the next question in his big, confident voice.

"Doesn't the Divine reward us for all our virtues, private and public?" asked Enoch. "Isn't our stock piling of wealth on earth a sign of Divine favor?"

The Master addressed his answer to us all.

"You don't want to pile up for yourselves,"<sup>[6]</sup> the Master said happily in a voice that registered disbelief, "stockpiles on the earth."

He accentuated "the earth" by dusting off his hands to make it clear that he was referring to "the earth" as dirt.

"Because my good cloth would get dirty there? Or do you mean don't stockpile them anywhere?" asked Enoch from his seat near the speaking area.

"Anywhere," the Master answered happily.

"Can you give me a little reason why not?" the older man asked reasonably, holding his fingers an inch apart.

"A moth," the Master suggested, holding his fingers an inch apart and then fluttering them like a moth.

We laughed. A moth was one little reason not to put cloth on dirt.

"Okay, you're right, we don't want to stock pile cloth for too long because of moths, the damp, and a hundred other things" Enoch responded. "But what about storing other things, say, olives? I own an olive grove. What on earth destroys jars of olives?"

"Just eating," the Master observed cheerfully.

We laughed.

"So if we store anything?" Enoch prompted.

"It takes flight!" replied the Master smiling, fluttering his whole hand like a moth taking off.

We laughed. Enoch and Tamar laughed as well.

[6] See Greek translation notes on page 261.

“Stockpiling doesn’t work for anything on the earth?” Enoch asked,

“And anywhere,” the Master added, agreeing with him.

“Well gold doesn’t get eaten by moths or people,” Enoch said with certainty. “What’s wrong with stockpiling gold?”

“Robbers,” the Master pointed out cheerfully.

“What if we have strong walls, good locks, and hire guards?” Enoch asked.

“They tunnel in,” the Master observed.

“Or bribe the guards, or something,” Enoch added thoughtfully. “Anywhere on earth, the wrong people find out where our valuables are.”

“And they rob,” the Master finished for him.

We laughed. The two were thinking alike.

“So, if the Divine grants us success, where do we stock our valuables?” asked the rich merchant.

“Pile up, instead, for yourselves, stockpiles,”<sup>[7]</sup> the Master responded, “in a sky!”

He twirled his finger over his head.

“The realm of the skies!” we responded loudly.

“What sky? Where in the sky?” Enoch asked.

“Anywhere,” the Master answered as easily as before.

“So in the sky, there are no moths and no eating?” he asked, curious about the nature of this sky realm.

“Neither a moth nor eating.” The Master agreed.

“And the compensation in the sky is, as you say, hidden?” Enoch asked, touching his heart as the Master had touched the hearts of those others to whom he had promised hidden rewards.

“It takes flight!” agreed the Master smiling, gesturing from his heart to the sky with a flutter of his hand.

We laughed. He had changed the meaning from disappearing to being lifted up.

“But our valuables still exist?” Enoch asked smiling.

“And where robbers do not tunnel in nor rob!” the Master assured him.

We laughed, and some applauded. It sounded like a good place.

But Enoch was reasonable and persistent, and he knew his own heart.

“But why can’t my heart take flight to the sky,” Enoch asked thoughtfully, “even as I stockpile my stuff on this earth?”

Many of us in the audience applauded this question. It was exactly what many were thinking.

The Master offered Enoch his hand to help him stand and take a place beside him. Enoch dusted off his clothes as he stood. For the first time, most of us saw his beautiful white clothing, trimmed in gold.

“Because wherever it is, that stockpile of yours?”<sup>[8]</sup> the Master said addressing him personally warmly, touching his chest. “There it is going to be also: that heart of yours!”

“So it is anchored,” Enoch observed, chuckling. “But i’m not very bright. This old eye of mine can only see physical things.

“The lamp of the physical being is the eye,”<sup>[9]</sup> the Master suggested, emphasizing the word “lamp”.

“So it can light up what is hidden?” Enoch asked.

“If it really is open, that eye of yours.” the Master agreed.

“How can I know?” asked the older man, sounding a little unsure of himself for the first time.

“That whole physical being of yours...” began the Master, gesturing toward the man’s body, sweeping, from head to toe.

Enoch was confused, looking down at his body.

“What about my body?” the cloth merchant asked.

At this point, the sun broke through the clouds. The sunlight struck his bright white tunic and white robe with the gold trim. All of it was made from the finest, shiniest linen. It blazed in the light.

“Bright!” observed the Master.

Enoch laughed, admiring himself in the sunlight.

“Yes, I feel very bright right now, , and everything is clear!” the older man admitted, “But, I am not always this bright, nor is my eye really it always open like this.”

[8] See Greek translation notes on page 265.

[9] See Greek translation notes on page 266.

[7] See Greek translation notes on page 263.

“It is going to be!” said the Master with certainty.

He twirled his arm over his head.

We responded.

“Change your minds!”

“Because it has gotten near.”

“The realm of the skies!”

We applauded ourselves and laughed.

Enoch laughed as well.

“But what about when my eye isn’t open to this realm of yours?” he asked.

“When, instead, that eye of yours is worthless?”<sup>[10]</sup> the Master responded rephrasing the question.

As if on cue, clouds rolled over the sun again. These clouds, however, were dark and ominous.

The crowd grew quieter. Many pointed at the darkening sky.

“That whole physical being of yours?” continued the Master to Enoch nonchalantly, again indicating his body from head to foot. “It is going to be blind!”

Some in the crowd laughed, but the comment and the darkening sky made many nervous.

But Tamar’s father laughed deep and long.

“The realm the skies is the light inside of me, isn’t it?” he asked. “And that blindness, my skepticism?”

The Master smiled and nodded.

“If, really, that light, the one in you, is a blindness?” the Nazarene said in a light-hearted way. “That blindness? So deep!”

The two men hugged and Tamar’s father returned to the crowd and sat down next to her.

Tamar could see her father was deeply affected by the experience. He touched his chest where the Master had touched him. He turned to her and said happily, “It is light! The darkness is gone!” From then on, he answered each “realm of the skies” chant with, “It is light!”

Tamar tells us that her father was a changed man until the day he died. He, like several others, used his wealth to support the Nazarene and his followers as they travelled throughout Gallilee and Judea. He started financing formation of the first Assemblies of the Way in Tiberias. It was his generosity that made our traveling as witnesses to give our testimony throughout the civilized world possible.

As always, your witness to the truth,

Festus

[10] See Greek translation notes on page 268.

## LETTER 10: WORRY

From Festus, a witness to the Christ's Sermon on the Mount by the will of the Father.

To the Assemblies, a Letter on the Master's lessons on the futility of worrying.

Again, thank you for your questions. After my last letter, many have asked about the Master and his control of the weather. This is fitting because at Seven Springs at this point many people there were murmuring about the weather as well and about whether the Nazarene was controlling it.

And as with so many things, we witnesses had different feelings about that at the time.

To the child Pisca, it seemed obvious that the Master controlled the clouds. For her, it was like seeing the works of the Divine from her people's traditional stories.

Nor was it only children who felt that way.

Ulla also saw these events as miraculous. Her view was that the Teacher was working wonders before our eyes. She was an old woman and had seen many things in her lifetime. She believed in miracles. For example, she believed that she had been visited by the ghosts of her dead mother and later her dead husband. She had a very open mind about what was possible.

But there were many like Demas and the Distinguished who did not see the sun's coming and going as wonders at all. The day was cloudy. The sun came out and then went away many times as the Nazarene spoke. A few times, the man was able to work the sun's appearance into his remarks.

Demas was willing to give the Nazarene credit, but not for controlling the clouds. Demas's view at the time was that the Teacher had a command, but not a command of the sky. It was a command of the situation. The Master paid attention to what was happening. He responded to the moment. What was happening in the sky was like what people were asking him. It seemed magical because he was able to direct the attention of those listening to what he noticed.

At the time, my view was closer to Demas's, but for a practical reason rather than a philosophical one. Yes, the sun came out and went away. It seemed magical at the time, but I had had too much wine, and I knew it. When we are drunk, we know that we are not the best judges of what is going on. Yes, the Master was clearly quicker in noticing these things than I was, but he was sober.

Tamar's view was the most out of character. To those who knew her, Tamar was practical. She showed common sense, stubbornly so. She was what they Judean people describe as a hard-headed woman. This is a complement, meaning she wasn't swayed by what she wanted to believe.

However, in her opinion of the Master's control of the weather, her view was almost poetic. She never tried to make sense of it. What we were seeing was the practical result of a change of mind, of our perceptions. The realm of the sky was nearer. The sky could touch us, and some of us could also touch the sky. Her view was unshakable because she got it from her father, who described himself as "touched by the sky".

Ezra, however, had a different viewpoint. He saw our different perceptions of cause and effect in the context of an old question. Why doesn't the "All Powerful" force us to abide by his will? Ezra thought he knew the simple answer to this difficult question.

The Divine's will is for us to make our own choices. He wills our freedom to choose. This means we always have a choice about what to believe.

This idea goes back to the oldest Judean story. The first man and first woman were given the first decision to make. They chose poorly. We, their children, live with the consequences of their poor decision as we live with the consequences of all our personal decisions. In Ezra's viewpoint, recognizing the Divine will and choosing it is always a matter of choice.

Nothing that happened with the Nazarene forced us to believe in miracles. Everything that happened could have been coincidence or, as Demas saw it, quick thinking. This was true at the time and it is still true after years of examining everything that happened that day.

But at the time, the crowd was murmuring about the Master and the sky. We were clearly divided about what was happening. Unlike the way

they are portrayed by others, Judeans are not any more superstitious than others, simply because they believing in a single divine force. Some called out questions about whether the Nazarene could control the sky.

The Nazarene just laughed and shrugged in response as if maybe he didn't know himself.

We laughed at his attitude.

It was a household slave who asked the next question. The Master selected him out of all those who were calling out things.

"That rich man," he called out, "might claim to see the light, but I am a bond slave to a wealthy man."

Several in the crowd assumed the slave was just going to complain about his master and tried to shout him down. For obvious reasons, no one wanted to hear a slave complain in public.

The Master signalled us that the man was to be heard.

"And my experience is," the slave continued angrily, "that rich men claim to serve the Divine when they are really serving Mr. Moneybags?"

The last line got a little laugh.

Mr. Moneybags is a lesser god of wealth and property among the non-Judean people of the region. Though everyone knows that it is not a slave's place to complain, many in the crowd were impressed by the man's bravery in speaking out about his master, who clearly wasn't with him.

"No one,"<sup>[1]</sup> the Master said, "has the power to render service for two masters."

He paused and we had time to think about his meaning. He answered the slave's question very generally, neither addressing just rich men nor just the Divine and Mr. Moneybags.

Many responded to this statement by asking, "Why?"

This was a repeated pattern in his style of teaching. One person might ask a question, but the Master would answer that question generally, addressing all of us. His answer, however, was vague enough to raise more questions. He would then pause, waiting for us to ask for an explanation. Many of us would ask, involving ourselves in the issue. Then he would get

more specific, but he wouldn't just be answering one person's concerns. He was answering the questions of many.

As we asked for more, the Nazarene pulled out a small money pouch to illustrate his words.

"Because either he is going to hate the one!" the Master said in exaggerated feign anger, shaking a fist to the sky.

"And care for the other," he purred, rubbing his little money bag to his cheek in a loving way..

"Or," he continued, smiling, "he is going to stick by one..."

He pointed a twirling finger up.

"The realm of the skies," we responded.

"And he is going to look down on the other," he said, sneering down to his money bag in his hand.

We laughed in response.

He then made a sweeping gesture that included us all.

"No!" he continued, clearly addressing all of us, "You all really do not have the ability to render service for the Divine."

He indicated the sky.

"And for Mr. Moneybags," he finished holding out his little coin bag.

Most of us applauded, but this idea was not accepted by everyone.

A richly dressed man with a head cloth from the Gaulanist tribes called out.

"By this, are you telling us not to care about our property?" the man asked. "Without property, we cannot care for ourselves!"

"By this,"<sup>[2]</sup> responded the Master, "I'm telling you all don't worry!"

He paused, letting the word "worry" sink in.

"About that self of yours," he gestured toward the man's body.

A field worker called out, "Even as a free man, I must slave for my masters if I want to eat!"

This statement was echoed by both slaves and freemen.

"Whatever you might eat—" the Master started.

[1] See Greek translation notes on page 271.

[2] See Greek translation notes on page 274.

“But we really need our drink,” interrupted another worker sounding slightly drunk, “to kill the pain of slaving for our bread!”

This comment drew a laugh.

“Or drink,” the Master added with a chuckle.

“With my body, I’m not going to run around without clothes!” a man called affecting a woman’s voice.

This drew a laugh as well.

“Nor for that body of yours. What you might put on,” said the Master pretending to wrap a robe around himself and posing. “Certainly not! This self is more than food. And the body? A covering!”

At this point, a flock of birds flew overhead. In Demas’s view, another event that the Master noticed and took advantage of. Or something more mysterious in the view of Ulla and Pisca.

“Look up!”<sup>[3]</sup> the Master said pointing to the birds above. “To the winged ones of the sky!”

We looked up and most of us noticed the birds for the first time. Had they just appear after he called for them?

“Because they don’t,” the Master said, pretending to scatter seed, “sow!”

He paused and a few people chuckled.

“Or hoe,” he added, pretending to rake the ground.

He paused again and more laughed.

“Or stow,” he said pretending to cut and bundle grain, “into store-houses.”

The rhyme was surprising. Many of us laughed and some applauded.

“And the Father of you all? That sky one?” The Teacher continued happily indicating the sky with a twirling finger.

“The realm of the skies,” we responded.

“He fattens them!” he continued, patting his belly.

“But they are just birds,” someone complained.

“Aren’t you yourselves more important than they?” the Master asked us in reply.

He paused, raising his hand, and waited for our answer.

[3] See Greek translation notes on page 276.

Several shouted their agreement, but as he waited, with his hand up, more and more of us raised our hands to show that we too agreed. As more hands went up, the happier the Nazarene became.

“But a bird’s life is so short,” complained another. “They don’t have to worry.”

“Who, however, from your worrying,”<sup>[4]</sup> the Master replied, “has the power to add to that lifetime of his?”

“But we live long enough to have real worries!” retorted an older man with a long gray hair. “Isn’t there a big difference between the worries of children and ours as adults?”

The Master nodded in agreement. Then he held one hand at the height of a youth and the other hand at the height of an adult. He compared them.

“Eighteen inches?” he suggested.

We all laughed. But the man with the long gray hair had another question.

“But if the Divine doesn’t want us to worry, why not make all of those worshipping him wealthy,” he asked, “to prove his power to us all?”

Many in the crowd echoed this question.

Instead of answering, the Master signalled his followers and they recited another verse from the law of Moses.

“Never are you going to test a Master!”<sup>[5]</sup> said one half of his students.

“That Divine of yours,” responded the other half of his followers.

This was the ancient basis for Ezra’s answer to the question of believing in miracles. Judeans are taught that the Divine is beyond the proofs of men.

“What else doesn’t the Divine want us to worry about?” someone else asked.

“Also, about clothing,”<sup>[6]</sup> the Master suggest, indicating his own plain robe.

“If I didn’t worry about how my children and husband dressed,” a well-dressed woman complained, “they would run around looking like a bunch of rags!”

[4] See Greek translation notes on page 272.

[5] See Greek translation notes on page 281.

[6] See Greek translation notes on page 281.

“Why do you worry?” asked the Master us all, again pausing to emphasize the last word.

“Look closely at the wildflowers of this field, how do they grow tall?” he said, indicating the height of one of the wildflowers growing nearby.

We laughed at the impossible question.

“They don’t work at all,” he continued, stretching his arms out, putting them behind his head, and leaning back, basking in the sun.

Now we laughed at the gesture and the emerging rhyme.

“Nor spin a thread ball,” he added, pretending wind a wool spinner.

We laughed at the completed rhyme.

“Are you saying the reputation that my family gets from wearing decent clothes doesn’t matter?” the well-dressed woman asked, indicating her family, all of whom were dressed in their finest.

The Master shook his head, no.

“I’m saying, however, to you all,” he explained, addressing us all and not just the woman, “that not even Solomon, with all that reputation of his, wrapped himself as well as one of these.”<sup>[7]</sup>

He plucked the flower that he had indicated earlier and held it out for the crowd to admire.

“Very poetic,” the woman responded, “But are you really comparing us to animal fodder, the fuel for our ovens?”

Laughing, the Master nodded his head in agreement.

“If, however, this fodder of this field,”<sup>[8]</sup> he announced lazily, “for today existing.”

He repeated his stretching his arms out, putting them behind his head, and leaning back, basking in the sun.

We laughed.

“And tomorrow?” he continued, shrugging, “Into the oven, it’s being tossed!”

He tossed the little flower away with his exaggerated throwing out the trash motion.

The gesture won our automatic laugh.

[7] See Greek translation notes on page 283.

[8] See Greek translation notes on page 283.

“The Divine, in this way, clothes!” the Master finished.

Ezra and Demas both claimed there was a deeper meaning in this statement, about our bodies being temporary like our clothes, but I don’t think that the average person there heard that message.

“But the Divine doesn’t clothe us like that!” the well-dressed lady complained again indicating her family.

The Master answered by first gesturing toward the woman and her family’s clothing.

“No? Much better!” he suggested.

We laughed because the woman and her family were particularly well dress.

But then the Master indicated the entire crowd with one of his sweeping gestures.

“For all of you!” he added,

We laughed and as we looked around, we saw all the different styles and colors of clothing, The different parts of Galilee and Judea each had their own dress. There was even more variety among the other ethnic groups there. And, of course, there were also the animal skins of the ascetic followers of John,

“You tiny trusters!” he accused holding out a little finger.

We laughed at ourselves.

“You all don’t want to worry, saying...”<sup>[9]</sup> Then he used a series of different funny voices, “What do we eat? Or what do we drink? Or what do we put on ourselves.”

Several more people asked other questions about the need for material things, but a big Roman called out loudly over the rest.

“In Rome,” the Roman bragged, “people never worry about bread because our Senate gives it out free, so the commoners don’t riot.”

This drew a laugh from both Romans and non-Romans.

“Because those things?”<sup>[10]</sup> the Master responded happily, “all those other ethnic groups seek after!”

Both the Judeans and non-Judeans applauded this answer.

[9] See Greek translation notes on page 288.

[10] See Greek translation notes on page 288.

“How can the Divine know everything we need?” another, older woman asked seriously.

“Because He has seen, that Father of you all,” the Master said, responding just as seriously, “sky-like, that you need these things in every area.”

“But how do those of us who follow you find a different way of satisfying our needs than others?” another person asked.

“You search, however, first,” <sup>[11]</sup> he said, “for the realm.”

He twirled his arm over his head.

The crowd responded, even those who weren’t Judean.

“Change your minds!”

“Because it has gotten near.”

“The realm of the skies!”

We applauded and laughed.

“And that virtue of His, and these things?” the Master continued. “All? They shall be put in front of you!”

He pretended to hold a platter and serve from it to those around him.

We laughed.

“But don’t we have to prepare for bad times and worry about our future?” someone asked quite reasonably.

“You all certainly don’t want to worry,” <sup>[12]</sup> the Master said, then adding “about that tomorrow.”

Many people from the crowd asked why and why not.

The Master pointed towards the east, where the sun rises.

“Because that tomorrow?” he continued in a whiney voice, “It is going to worry about itself!”

We laughed because it was true.

“Enough for this day,” he moaned, taking the tragic pose he had used early, “this suffering of it!”

We couldn’t help but laugh at the way he said it.

And that is enough letter for this day as well.

As always, your witness to the Anointed,

Festus

[11] See Greek translation notes on page 290.

[12] See Greek translation notes on page 291.

## LETTER 11: ASKING

From Festus, a witness to the Sermon on the Mount by the will of the Father.

To the Assemblies, a letter on the Master's lessons on asking rather than criticizing.

One of the letters I received about the sermon asked an interesting question. Did any of the people there think that the Master was crazy?

This is a better question than many might assume. Consider what the Nazarene was saying: things that no one had ever said before. Beggars and the diseased are lucky. Getting angry is like murder. Let people slug you. Let go of your debtors. Hug those who hate you. The list goes on and on. And the whole time, he was making jokes and exaggerating everything, pretending we could pluck out our eyes or cut off our arms.

But very few of those listening, other than the Distinguished, considered him crazy or "possessed by demons," as we say in Judea. He not only made his ideas sound reasonable and preferable to our normal way of living, but he made them entertaining and, therefore, interesting. The fact that he kept us laughing was a big part of this. Demas said that a happy person is more open to new ideas. The Master was changing our minds, like his chant commanded.

And this drove the Distinguished themselves crazy. Because his ideas and actions were very different than what they taught, but our minds were being changed. Most of us followed the Master's thinking easily, but the Distinguished couldn't.

Who were the real crazy ones?

Listening to the Master, many began seeing that certain aspects of their life were crazy. Judeans claim to believe in a Divine that cared for them as a special people, but they spent as much or more of their time worrying about worldly things as any other nation did. They were a worried people, perhaps because of their history. They worried about their next meal, when

none of them had known a famine in a generation. They especially worried about their social status and wearing the right clothing to fit in.

Each of the witnesses in our group saw the craziness of their lives differently after listening to the Master. The Nazarene confronted us with our personal demons: our anger, our fear, our vanity, our greed, who we owed, who owed us. And he challenged us to toss them out, like the trash. And the result was that we all had a great time together that day, despite his craziness, our craziness, and all the crazy divisions among us. People had their complaints about what he said, but the complaints were all part of the show.

This seems to have been true for all the other witnesses of the Nazarene as well. Not only those who saw him at Seven Springs, but witnesses who saw him at other times and other places.

And the question of crazy brings us back to our story.

An ascetic, a follower of John, wearing animal skins, asked the next question.

“We’re called crazy for not eating bread, drinking wine, or wearing cloth,” the ascetic called out. “Who is crazier, we ascetics or the worriers, who think only eating, drinking, and their appearance matters?”

“You don’t want to criticize,”<sup>[1]</sup> the Master said, making the crazy sign, twirling a finger around his ear, “when you don’t want to be criticized.”

Then someone else from the audience called out, “Why can’t a sane person criticize a crazy one?”

This was a popular sentiment among the crowd because more normal people, considered John’s followers a little crazy. Even their relatives were embarrassed by them. Many others supported this question by calling out, “Why?”

“Because by what criticisms you all criticize,”<sup>[2]</sup> the Master explained, “you all are going to be criticized as well.”

But the ascetic who called out the question wasn’t done.

“But we ascetics criticize by a spiritual measure,” the man in animal skins explained, “not the material standards of the world.”

“And by what standard you all measure,” the Master answered cheerfully, “it is going to be measured out to you all!”

Then he used his throwing-out-the-trash gesture to indicate how it was going to be measured out to us.

This got a laugh, even from the ascetic.

A man standing next to the ascetic asked the next question. It turned out that he was the ascetic’s own brother.

“Excuse my brother,” the man said. “As an ascetic, his pursuit of ‘virtue’ completely blinds him to the real world.

The Master smiled and signalled the ascetic’s brother to join him.

“What, however, do you see?”<sup>[3]</sup> the Master asked the man directly as he approached.

“That my brother has a speck of blindness,” the man responded uncertainly, “toward the practical?”

“A speck in the eye of that brother of yours?” the Master repeated as they met in the speaking area.

The man nodded in agreement.

Then the Master looked closely into the man’s eye.

“That one, however,” said the Master pointing, “in your own eye?”

“My eye?” responded the man. Clearly confused, he asked, “Something is in my eye?”

“A roof beam!” the Master announced in a worried tone.

We all laughed. He said it seriously, but a roof beam in someone’s eye? It was clearly one of his crazy exaggerations.

“A roof-beam in my eye?” the man responded, laughing. “That’s crazy!”

“You don’t see?” the Master asked, feigning confusion. “Really?”<sup>[4]</sup>

The man laughed and complained, “I just wanted to help remove my brother’s blind spot!”

“How do you say to that brother of yours?” the Master began in a chiding tone.

The Master covered his own eye with his right arm.

<sup>1</sup> See Greek translation notes on page 294.

<sup>2</sup> See Greek translation notes on page 294.

<sup>3</sup> See Greek translation notes on page 296.

<sup>4</sup> See Greek translation notes on page 298.

“Let go!” the Master said in one of his funny voices while reaching out with a shaky left hand. “I am going to toss that speck out from that eye of yours!”

We laughed.

“And look!” he continued. “That roof beam in that eye of yours!”

The Master waved the right arm covering his eye.

Then, the man laughed, catching on. He covered his own eye with his arm, copying the Master. He then waved it.

“An actor!”<sup>[5]</sup> the Nazarene said, applauding the man.

The man took a little bow, still waving the arm covering his eye.

We laughed.

“Toss out, first, from that eye of yours,” the Master then continued, removing his arm from his eye, and making his throwing-out-the-trash gesture, “that roof beam! And then you might see clearly to toss out that speck from that eye of that brother of yours!”

The man copied him, removing his arm from his eye and copying the tossing-out-the-trash gesture.

We laughed.

Then the two embraced, and the Nazarene sent the man back into the crowd.

Then a woman called out from the back of the crowd.

“Perhaps we shouldn’t criticize our brothers, but what about our enemies?” she asked. “Some types of men are just total dogs!”

Some laughed. A few applauded.

Some men barked.

But most of the crowd immediately wondered about the type of enemy she meant. Many looked to see how the woman who had asked the question was dressed so they could know which group she was with.

There are as many divisions among Galileans as there are races, towns, clans, and families. “Dogs” is a common epithet among Judeans to describe a group of enemies. It is more commonly applied to us foreigners, Greeks, Romans, and especially the hated Watchers.

The crowd was growing more raucous as various groups began calling each other names.

“And aren’t some women also sows?” a man responded to the woman.

Again, this is a common epithet for a certain type of woman. It is less than polite.

There was some laughter, but more anger. Some booed, but no one oinked. The divisions within the crowd, always just below the surface, began to appear as various opposing groups began squaring off against each other.

Inspired by the insults flying about, Demas’s boss, the Distinguished Johanon, stood up to blame the Master for the crowd’s poor behavior.

“You preach letting go of people’s faults,” Johanon complained to the Nazarene. “But people turn into dogs and sows when we do not hold them to the law.”

This attack on the Master aggravated the crowd.

“The only things sacred to your type is your social position,” someone answered from deep in the crowd. “Your pearls of wisdom are all self-serving.”

The Master did not look happy, and so he took charge. First, he raised his arms, signalling for quiet. We grew quieter, but there were still several private arguments taking place among us.

The Master twirled his hand over his head.

Some of us responded along with his students.

“Change your minds!”

“Because it has gotten near.”

“The realm of the skies!”

The Master laughed at the weak response.

“We can do better than that,” challenged a husky fisherman, one of the Master’s students.

The Master twirled his hand again, more vigorously.

More of us joined in.

“Change your minds!”

“Because it has gotten near.”

“The realm of the skies!”

The crowd began to relax. We hadn’t come out on a nice day to pick fights with one another. Well, perhaps a few of us had, but most of us still wanted to hear the master.

The Master twirled his arm again.

“Change your minds!”

“Because it has gotten near. ”

“The realm of the skies!”

We all joined in, laughing afterward and applauding.

The Master smiled broadly.

“You all don’t want to hand the sacred to those dogs,”<sup>[6]</sup> said the Master happily.

It wasn’t clear which groups he meant. Possibly those who were doing the name calling. Possibly, the Distinguished.

“Nor are you all going to toss those pearls of yours in front of those sows.”

He made his throwing out the trash motion.

We laughed in response.

“Not when they want to trample them with those feet of theirs,” he continued, crouching down like an animal and tramping around the speaking area.

We laughed louder.

“And, being twisted,” he continued, twisting his face into a goofy snarl, “they rip you all apart!”

He clawed the air with his hands, howling like a wolf.

His vehemence was so sudden and that we laughed in surprise.

“Bring us together,” someone shouted.

The crowd applauded.

The Master twirled his arm over his head.

“Change your minds!”

“Because it has gotten near. ”

“The realm of the skies!”

We said it well together and laughed and applauded our unity.

“Instead of criticizing others, what should we do,” someone asked.

“How do we get along with each other?” someone else added.

“Ask!”<sup>[7]</sup> the Master answered, indicating the sky. Then he indicated his heart and said with certainty. “And it is going to be given to you.”

He twirled a finger to the sky.

“The realm of the skies!” we answered.

“Where is the path that brings us together?” someone else called.

“Search!” he replied, again adding confidently, “And it is going to be discovered!”

“But if there was such a path,” someone shouted out. “It would be barred to many of us.”

“Knock!” the Master responded, pretending to knock on a door. Then with even more certainty, he added, “And it is going to be opened for you all!”

He pretended to open a door and welcome one person after another.

He twirled a finger to the sky.

“The realm of the skies!” we answered.

But the Distinguished Simeon didn’t like these answers.

“That’s not how the world really works!” Simeon complained.

And the Master just twirled his hand to the sky.

“Change your minds!”

“Because it has gotten near. ”

“The realm of the skies!”

We laughed and applauded ourselves again.

“How can we people be so different in your realm of the skies?” an old woman asked.

This was another one of those questions which triggered many supporting “why’s” from the crowd.

“Because everyone asking, gets!”<sup>[8]</sup> the Master said. “And the one searching discovers! And to the one knocking? It is going to be opened!”

He twirled a single finger.

“The realm of the skies!” we cheered.

<sup>7</sup> See Greek translation notes on page 304.

<sup>8</sup> See Greek translation notes on page 305.

Then one of the prostitutes in the back called out sadly, “Even for those like us?”

“Certainly!”<sup>[9]</sup> the Master responded warmly.

He twirled a single finger.

“The realm of the skies!” we shouted again.

Some of us in the crowd began to feel like we had entered the realm of the skies, a different kind of life, where our normal problems vanished. We were laughing and applauding.

“Wait! Wait!” a man shouted.

The Master quieted the crowd. The man stood up. He was middle-aged. A child of about eight stood by his side.

“If I were any kind of deity,” the man said sincerely. “I honestly wouldn’t care about most of these people. Why does this Father in the sky of yours care about any of us?”

The Master gestured for the man and his child to come to him.

“What about you? A man?” the Master asked as the man worked his way to the speaking area with his boy beside him.

“Not no deity!” the man said. “Just a fisherman.”

This drew a little cheer from the Nazarene’s students, many of whom were fishermen themselves.

As the man and his boy came beside the Nazarene, he greeted them warmly as he did everyone who joined him. Then the Nazarene addressed the crowd.

“Of him,” he said indicating the father. Then he indicated the boy beside him. “Might he ask, this child of his, for bread?”

The Master paused, indicating that he wanted to hear from us. We obliged.

“Sure he would!”

“Of course!”

“Yes! That’s what growing boys do!”

“You’re not going to want,” the Master said to the fisherman, picking up a rock and showing it to him, “a stone to give him?”

The man and the boy both looked at the stone and laughed.

“Don’t want to offer a stone!” the father assured him, “Might offer a fish though. I am a fisherman not a baker or a stone mason.”

We all laughed.

The Master dropped the stone, like a rock.

We laughed more.

“Certainly!”<sup>[10]</sup> agreed the Master with one of his big smiles. “And he might ask for a fish?”

“Absolutely!” said the fisherman enthusiastically. “We never get tired of fish!”

The boy looked at the crowd sadly and shook his head “no”.

We laughed and applauded.

Then something caught the Master’s eye and he darted into the brush at the side of the speaking area. He returned to the fisherman and his son with something behind his back.

“You aren’t going to want,” he said, taking out what was hidden, “a snake? To give to him?”

It was a live snake. We all were surprised. Snakes were common in the area, but they would normally avoid crowds like this. Pisca and Ulla thought that the Master had summoned it. Demas saw it as a coincidence. The Master could have as easily offered a toad, lizard, or even a flower if that was all that had been handy.

But this snake appeared so suddenly that we were amazed. The father was taken back.

“I don’t want to give him no snake,” the fisherman agreed.

The Master playfully offered the snake to the boy, who reached for it. He looked to the boy’s father for approval. The father shrugged and laughed. The Teacher gave the boy the snake.

We laughed and applauded as the boy took his snake and they both went back into the crowd.

Then the Master addressed us all.

“If, in fact you yourselves,”<sup>[11]</sup> he said indicating all of us. He paused, seeming to search for the right word, and then said in a teasing way, “Worthless beings!”

We laughed at the insult.

That was also part of his magic. He got us to laugh at ourselves because he laughed just as easily at himself.

“Have seen gifts, good ones,” he continued happily, “to give those kids of yours. How much better that Father of yours, the one in the skies.”

He twirled a finger.

“The realm of the skies!” we responded.

“Give good things to those asking Him?” he finished confidently.

This statement won applause, cheers and some laughter.

“What about what we want from others?” one of the wealthy women in the front of the crowd called out. “Their caring, thoughts, and attention? Can your Father in the skies help us with any of that?”

“All, in fact,”<sup>[12]</sup> the Master assured her.

“As much as I need?” the woman said almost shyly. “I need a lot!”

She spread her arms wide to show how much.

“As much as!” the Master assured her, spreading his arms even wider than hers.

Then he turned to the crowd smiling.

“When you all desire,” he said indicating the entire crowd with a sweep of his right arm, “what they might produce for you all?” He indicated the crowd again with a sweep of his left arm, “These people?”

Then he held his hands wide apart again like the lady had.

“So much as?” Then indicated the whole crowd with a right-hand sweep. “You yourselves must produce for them!” he said.

One of the Distinguished called out, “Why can’t we just follow the law and the luminaries?”

“Because this is,” the Master said, “the law and the luminaries!”

Most of us applauded.

11 See Greek translation notes on page 309.

12 See Greek translation notes on page 312.

“How do we recognize the path to the realm of the skies?” someone else asked.

“Go, all of you,”<sup>[13]</sup> the Master explained, “in through the tight gate.”

He brought his wide-spread arms together, putting his hands close. He pretended to try to squeeze through this narrow opening between his hands.

We laughed.

At our laugh, he stopped and look at us seriously, spreading his arms wide again.

“Seeing that wide and spacious?” he said sourly. “The way, the one leading into that destruction.”

He did his throwing out the trash gesture, but most of us realized not to laugh.

“And many are those going straight through it,” he said with a sad shrug.

Then he brought his hands together, making a small opening between his hands.

“Seeing that tight the gate!”<sup>[14]</sup> he explained as he tried to squeeze between his hands. His voice went up as he sucked in his stomach, “And squeezing oneself the way!”

We laughed.

When he finished squeezing through his hands, he raised his arms up in victory and he announced, “The one leading into that life!”

We applauded.

The Master applauded with us.

“And few, are,” he said, indicating us, “the ones discovering it!”

We all cheered and applauded ourselves again.

He twirled his hand to the sky.

We responded happily.

“Change your minds!”

“Because it has gotten near.”

“The realm of the skies!”

13 See Greek translation notes on page 314.

14 See Greek translation notes on page 317.

We again applauded ourselves.

Then lightning flashed in the distance. It seemed to be getting closer, from across the lake. And again, clouds darkened the sun.

As always, your witness to the words of the Anointed One,  
Festus

## LETTER 12: BATTLE

From Festus, a witness to the Sermon on the Mount by the will of the Father.

To the Assemblies, a letter on the Master's final battle with the Distinguished at Seven Springs.

This battle had been brewing since the Distinguished first arrived. And even before. The Distinguished had hated the Nazarene from the first time he began teaching. They had also fought with his cousin John before him.

The Distinguished had challenged him when they first arrived and throughout the day, but this was when it came to a boil. The person at the center of the conflict was Simeon.

The Distinguished had been quieter since the Nazarene's prayer. Demas said that this was a group decision. They had decided to try listen as much as possible rather than attack at every opportunity. This was in self-defence. The Nazarene had a tendency to make them look bad when they kept attacking him.

But they were upset the entire time. They had gotten more upset over time. They were buzzing the whole time, like a swarm of angry bees. This Simeon was stirring them up, whispering to them, finding fault with everything the Master said.

The changing weather made them take action.

The sky was getting darker, threatening rain, a heavy rain, and the hour was growing late. There was thunder and lightning in the distance.

If the Distinguished wanted to make a stand against the Nazarene, they were running out of time.

Finally, Simeon stood in front of the Master facing the crowd.

"This fool is speaking nonsense!" he announced. "Just another fake luminary! A fake like his cousin, John! Both fake luminaries! Stay away from these fake luminaries!"

The other Distinguished joined Simeon in a chant.

"Stay away from these fake luminaries!"

"Stay away from these fake luminaries!"

“Stay away from these fake luminaries!”

The Distinguished coaxed others to join them, but few did. Just a couple among the wealthy who the Distinguished knew individually.

The rest of us had come to hear the Nazarene. We were watching to see his reaction to this uprising.

At first, the Master just watched with an amused smile, but then he began raising his arm along with their chant. Then he joined them.

“Stay away from these fake luminaries!”<sup>[1]</sup> he shouted louder than the rest of them.

We were confused and amused!

Was he agreeing with his accusers? No, he was turning their attack around! He was against fakes, but who were the real fakes? Some of us began to laugh. And others applauded.

As that last chant of “fake luminaries” hung in the air, the Nazarene took over and explained.

“All those who show up before you,” he explained with a nod to the Distinguished, “in coverings of sheep.”

He pretended to throw something over his body and crouched down. He then began baaing innocently, like a sheep, and pretended to nibble on the wildflowers.

We laughed. It was as silly as anything he’d done so far. He had our complete attention. No one was even looking at the Distinguished.

“Inwardly, however, they are...” he said sadly, touching his chest.

Then he leaped up and lunged toward the crowd.

“Wolves!” he shouted, clawing the air with his hands. “Thieving predators!”

The people in front jumped back in surprise. Then, after a beat, the rest of us laughed and applauded. His clawing was a repeat of the attack of the dogs and sows. Some howled like wolves in appreciation.

But Simeon was not going quietly this time.

“If our words claw,” he said accusingly addressing the crowd, “it is because they prick your guilty consciences. Our barbs bear fruit!”

The man was trying to be clever, but he didn’t seem to realize that, in defending himself, he was confessing that he was one of the wolves.

Some in the crowd heard it that way. They laughed and pointed it out.

“From those fruits of theirs?”<sup>[2]</sup> the Master continued cheerfully, addressing Simeon’s play on words. “You are going to find out about them for yourselves.”

“And you will find out,” Simeon answered, addressing both the crowd and the Nazarene, “that the sharper our barbs, the sweeter their fruit.”

The crowd laughed and applauded. Apparently, we were going to be treated to a battle of word play between the two men.

The Master seemed to be entertained by Simeon’s language as well.

“By skill,” the Master responded, taking to the crowd, “do they collect from thorn bushes, bunches of grapes?”

He pretended to prick himself while trying to pick something.

“Or from cacti,” he wondered, “figs?”

He pretended to prick himself again, calmly sucking his pricked finger, giving Simeon the floor.

We laughed.

“But our barbs,” Simeon responded angrily, “are valuable. They perform a valuable service, producing, not figs or grapes, but beautiful people, keeping them from becoming dogs and sows.”

The last line was a bit of a miscalculation on his part. It drew barking and oinking from the jokers in the crowd. Then a wolf howl.

We laughed.

“This is why every valuable tree has beautiful fruit!”<sup>[3]</sup> The Master said cheerfully, addressing Simeon directly. “It does perform productively.”

Simeon nodded at the Nazarene’s apparent agreement.

“However, the diseased tree has worthless fruit,” the Master continued ominously. Then he changed happily to his theatrical voice and stance, announcing, “It performs.”

He made his bows to the crowd, right and left, inviting applause.

We laughed and applauded.

[2] See Greek translation notes on page 320.

[3] See Greek translation notes on page 322.

[1] See Greek translation notes on page 319.

Realizing that he was being accused of being an actor, Simeon grew angrier.

“Don’t you know who I am?” he threatened. “How dare you speak to me that way. My family is powerful!”

“It doesn’t have the power—”<sup>[4]</sup> the Master started to say.

But Simeon interrupted him, “How can you say we don’t have power? We have money, influence in court, position in society, even armed guards!”

To demonstrate, Simeon summoned the big guard Boaz to his side.

“What power do we lack?” Simeon sneered at the Master. “What can’t we do?”

“To have a valuable tree bear worthless fruits,” the Master suggested graciously. “Or to make a rotten tree produce beautiful fruits.”

We laughed. No one has that power.

There was more thunder and lightning in the distance. The sky overhead grew darker.

Many of us applauded the Master. We wanted to hear more of what he had to say before we had to leave. Few cared to hear more from the Distinguished. Some of us hoped that our applause would quiet Simeon.

It had the opposite effect. It caused the Distinguished leader to turn his anger on the crowd.

“You applaud? Laugh?” he charged. “You are all breaking the law! The temple will condemn you all if you follow this madman!”

Now the Nazarene seemed genuinely concerned about the Distinguished leader, reaching towards him as if wanting to embrace him. In response, Simeon raised his fist. The guard, Boaz, reached out to restrain Simeon from striking the Nazarene.

“Every tree, not wanting to create beautiful fruit? Chops itself off—”<sup>[5]</sup> suggested the Master, starting to make his chopping gesture.

Simeon interrupted, perhaps misinterpreting the gesture, lunging toward the Master, shouting, “I’ll chop you off!”

Boaz held Simeon back, grabbing him around the waist. But, as the guard acted, lightning flashed. A loud crack of thunder sounded.

Simeon’s arm came loose from Boaz’s, seeming to strike the Nazarene in the face. The Master’s head snapped back as lightning flashed again.

Or perhaps, the Nazarene evaded the blow, snatching his head away at the last second. We witnesses could never agree.

Both men fell to the ground. The Master fell backwards. Simeon fell forwards with Boaz holding him around the waist. Some of the Nazarene’s students rushed forward.

For a moment, the crowd was terrified. Some thought that they had both been struck by lightning.

Many gasped and cried out, “No!” “No!”

But the Nazarene instantly popped to his feet and smiled. He signalled his followers back from the speaking area and waving cheerfully to the crowd that he was unhurt. Then he helped Simeon to his feet, gesturing to Boaz to let him go.

The Nazarene smiled warmly Simeon.

The he cheerfully offered his other cheek, pointing to it.

Simeon was still burning mad, looking like he was considering taking advantage of the proffered cheek, balling his fist.

We all shouted, “No!”

At our shout, Simeon looked around as if he was in a daze. It was as if he had forgotten that we were there. He suddenly looked deflated.

The Nazarene reached out to embrace him, but Simeon pulled away. Boaz helped the leader move back among the other Distinguished. They all sat down and forced Simeon to sit with them.

“And into a fire, he tosses himself,” the Master said sadly, making a half-hearted throwing-out-the-trash gesture.

We laughed. The Master’s throwing-out-the-trash gesture lightened the mood, but the crowd was still agitated.

Ezra told us that the Master’s line about cutting down trees and casting them into the fire was originally from John, his cousin. John specifically used it to referred to the tree of Abraham being replaced. Many of the Judeans there may have recognized it. Some of the Distinguished almost

[4] See Greek translation notes on page 324.

[5] See Greek translation notes on page 325.

certainly did. Simeon may have struck out at the Master because he recognized it before it was completed.

The crowd was still upset, but the Distinguished were even more upset. Demas said that some of the younger Distinguished wanted to capture the Nazarene and take him prisoner to Jerusalem for assaulting Simeon. The elders knew that the crowd wouldn't allow it. Instead, the elders decided that they would all walk out of the assembly, shunning the Nazarene for his behavior.

The Distinguished rose up and began to leave.

At first, we didn't know what was happening. Was the meeting over? Some wondered.

But the Nazarene remain before us, waiting expectantly.

When some of us questioned him, he just said, "Watch!"<sup>[6]</sup>

We watch the Distinguished leave.

Most of us were happy to see them go.

As they walked out, the Master offered a final observation, repeating an earlier statement.

"From those fruits of theirs?" he said somewhat sadly. "You are going to find out about them for yourselves."

Then, someone started clapping. We were applauding the fact that the Distinguished were leaving. We were applauding the victory of the Master over them. Victory by offering his cheek. More and more of us began clapping.

Then everyone was applauding.

The crowd began bowing toward the Teacher and began shouting his praises.

"You are our new master!"

"Lead us, Master! We trust only you!"

"Master! We will be saved if we just trust in you, won't we?"

The Master shook his head with a sad smile.

"Not every one saying to me,"<sup>[7]</sup> he started, then changing into one of his funny voices and making a humble bow, added fawningly, "Master! Master!"

Many of us laughed. The crowd's mood brightened.

"Is going to get himself...into the realm of the skies!" he announced. He twirled his arm over his head.

"Change your minds!"

"Because it has gotten near. "

"The realm of the skies!"

He twirled his arm again.

"Change your minds!"

"Because it has gotten near. "

"The realm of the skies!"

We laughed and applauded. The chant did its work of bringing us together and restoring our mood.

"Who is going to get into the realm of the skies?" someone asked.

"Only the one serving that desire of that Father of mine! The one in the skies!" he said cheerfully, twirling a single finger.

"The realm of the skies!" we responded, just for the fun of it.

And we laughed happily and then applauded.

The Master then gave a signal to his followers and they repeated another saying of the Judean's greatest luminary, Moses.

"To a Master, that Divine of yours, you are going to bow down,"<sup>[8]</sup> said the first group of students.

"And Him alone are you going to serve," answered the others.

The Judeans among us recognized these words and applauded them.

Our mood had brightened, especially with the departure of the Distinguished, but the sky was still getting darker. Lightning flashed overhead again.

"Won't others, like the Distinguished," a wizened old man croaked, "appoint themselves to enforce this new teaching of yours?"

[6] See Greek translation notes on page 326.

[7] See Greek translation notes on page 327.

[8] See Greek translation notes on page 329.

Many in the crowd shouted “no”, but the Master signalled for them to let the old man finish.

“Claiming to act in your name,” he wheezed, “as the Distinguished say they act in the name of Moses?”

We booed his remark.

But the Master surprised us by nodding his agreement.

“Many are going to say to me on that day,”<sup>[9]</sup> he said, again switching to his fawning voice, and making a series of groveling bows, “Master! Master!”

He then affected a proud voice.

“Didn’t we, by your name,” he boasted, “act as luminaries?”

Then he affected a sibilant snakelike voice.

“And, by your name, personal demons!” he hissed. “We toss them out!”

Then he affected a booming voice.

“And, by your name, abilities!” he thundered. “Many, we produce!”

We laughed, of course, after each line.

But as we did, the sky got even darker. Thunder sounded in the distance.

“And, at that time,”<sup>[10]</sup> the Master continued lightheartedly, with the lightning flashing dramatically behind him, “I am going to say the same thing to them. Since I never ever recognized you, you all move away from me.”

He made little shoo-shoo motions with his hands.

“You self-employed workers,” he finished, “of the lawless!”

Some of us laughed. Most of us didn’t think that it was meant entirely as a joke.

In my next letter, I will describe how the sermon ended.

Your witness,

Festus

[9] See Greek translation notes on page 330.

[10] See Greek translation notes on page 333.



## LETTER 13: STORM

From Festus, a witness to the Sermon on the Mount by the will of the Father.

To the Assemblies, a letter on the ending of the Master's sermon at Seven Springs.

The Master is famous for the little stories he told to illustrate his ideas, especially his idea of the realm of the skies. According to those who saw the Nazarene speak several times, like Tamar and her father, his stories would often be acted out. In latter events, the Master would narrate the story and his students would portray its characters. Seven Springs, however, was early in his career. His students participated only by offering a few chants when signalled.

At Seven Springs, he told only one story. To the degree that it was acted out, the Master did his own acting. This story was how he ended the gathering.

We knew that the event was coming to a close. We could see the rain coming toward us from over the sea. Lightning was flashing in dark clouds that were approaching us. We were restless because the weather was coming our way.

We were also sad. We would soon be leaving. It had been a special day for all of us. None of us wanted it to end, each of us for his or her own reasons. The child Pisca was especially sad. She thought that she and her mother would soon be out in the rain. Alone. Still diseased. Still unclean and untouchable. We were all sad about the meeting coming to an end, but none of our witnesses were as sad as Pisca was.

The Teacher's story was triggered by a question from the crowd. That question may have been planned, but it seemed spontaneous. It was inspired on many people's minds.

"Are your ideas practical," a dark-skinned man called out, "given all the problems in this world?"

Several applauded the question. We had all been entertained and often amazed by how reasonable the Master could make his viewpoint seem, but his ideas were, at their heart, rather fantastic.

The Master smiled at the man's question, appreciating it as he seemed to enjoy every interaction with his audience.

"Everyone, in fact, anyone,"<sup>[1]</sup> he said confidently, "who listens to my ideas, these ones, and uses them?"

He tapped his brow knowingly and twirled his arm over his head.

We responded.

"Change your minds!"

"Because it has gotten near. "

"The realm of the skies!"

"He is going to be compared to a practical person," the Master continued, "Who constructed his house on the rocky heights."

He pointed toward the rock cliff on our left. There was a flash of lightning as he did.

"And, it fell down,"<sup>[2]</sup> he said as though that was the end of the story. Most of us laughed.

The Master feigned confusion at our laughter.

Then he gestured indicating the rain.

"The rain!" he explained.

We all laughed. It was typical of his entertaining us by misdirection.

Then he gestured toward the beach below.

"And they showed up," he said, sounding distressed.

Following his gesture towards the shore, we saw the Distinguished, boarding their boat among crashing waves.

The crowd groaned. In our heads, we imagined a group of Distinguished showing up at our houses during a rain storm. The thought made, even me, a Greek, shudder.

Again, he appeared surprised by our groan.

He made the motion of the waves with his hands.

"Those floods!" he clarified, pointing to the stormy waters below.

Again, he won a laugh of surprise and appreciation. We applauded.

"And they blew," he said, puffing out his cheeks and blowing.

He waited for our reaction, but we didn't know how to react. We expected another twist.

"These winds," he said, making a motion indicating the winds around us.

We laughed again. The twist was that there was no twist.

However, pointing out the wind made us nervous. The winds around us seemed to rise as he mentioned them. Demas assured us that this was an illusion. The winds had been rising all along. He just called our attention to them.

Then the wind motions he was making changed. His flowing hands pretended to grab something and shake it.

"And they fell against that house there," he said, pointing up to the cliff with his shaking hands. Then he paused again.

The pause built up the tension in the crowd. We heard the wind whistling around us and the thunder crack in the distance.

"And no!" he shouted over the wind.

We strained to hear him, wondering what had happened.

He pointed solemnly up toward the cliff and his imaginary house.

"It doesn't fall!" he said cheerfully, shrugging.

We laughed at the anticlimax.

He paused for a moment, leaving us to think about why.

"Because it was built," he explained, "on that rock."

He pointed to the cliff above, and he twirled a single finger over his head.

"The realm of the skies!" we responded.

We laughed. Then we applauded. The man knew how to tell a story and how to illustrate his point.

He then looked at us more seriously.

"And every one listening to my ideas?"<sup>[3]</sup> he said dolefully. "These ones? And not wanting to use them?"

[1] See Greek translation notes on page 336.

[2] See Greek translation notes on page 338.

[3] See Greek translation notes on page 340.

He shook his head sadly.

“He is going to be compared to a person, a moron,” he said.

He made a stupid face.

We laughed.

“Who constructed his house on that sandy beach,” he continued, pointing down toward the beach below.

We could still see the Distinguished boarding their boat.

We laughed. He wasn’t calling the Distinguished stupid, at least not directly but his point was clear.

“And, it came down,”<sup>[4]</sup> he said, repeating himself.

We knew what was coming, or thought that we might. And at that point, a few drops of warm rain started to fall.

“The rain!” he said, holding his hand out to catch a drop. “And they showed up,” he continued, again gesturing toward the waters below, “the floods!”

We could still see the waves crashing as the Distinguished tried to launch their boat.

“And they blew,” he said, again puffing out his cheeks, “the winds.”

He waved his hands emulating the wind, and again the wind around us seemed to blow harder.

“And they fell against that house,” the Master said as he again pretended to shake something, then pointing. “The one there! And?”

He left the question in the air as he began to pretend that he was being blown this way and that by the wind. The wind was blowing harder, but the Master’s struggles were obviously exaggerated.

It was raining. Because of the rain, we covered our heads, but the rain was warm and soft, not at all unpleasant. Water began to flow down in small runnels down the hillside. Some of those in the crowd had to move out of their watery paths.

Lightning flashed. Thunder rumbled.

Many, if not most of us, had come to think that the Nazarene was controlling the wind and weather. For some, it was a little frightening.

As he continued, the Master pretended that he was being blown from one foot to the other. He appeared as though he was trying to keep his balance. But the wind wasn’t blowing that hard. It was all for dramatic effect.

Then the Master began falling backwards, so very slowly, windmilling his arms trying to keep his balance.

We began laughing.

A big flash of lightning. A clap of thunder overhead.

The Master got a look of panic on his face, as he kept tipping backwards.

Then another lightning flash. Another crash of thunder!

The Master opened his eyes wide.

He shouted, “It fell!”

He drew out his cry as he fell backwards. He landed in a puddle behind him making a big splash. Apparently, the flowing water had created a puddle there. He had maneuvered himself into just the right position to create a big splash when he fell into it.

We laughed and applauded

The rain began to fall steadily in a warm drizzle.

The Nazarene quickly popped up from his fall. He was muddy, but he was clearly having fun. He seemed to savor his next words.

“And, it was, the crash of it?” he announced in the rain. “Huge!”

To illustrate, he stomped around in the puddle, splashing the crowd.

Then we began applauding.

And the rain started falling harder. The wind rose to a moan though the hills. The gathering was clearly over.

Then the Nazarene pointed to the sky.

We responded wholehearted.

“Change your minds!”

“Because it has gotten near. “

“The realm of the skies!”

As we chanted, the Nazarene began to embrace those around him. He sought out the girl Pisca and her mother and hug them. The crowd surged toward the Master, trying to touch him. But the crowd was too large. Few could get close

[4] See Greek translation notes on page 343.

Then it started to rain harder.

Most of us turned around and headed down the hillside, toward the sheltering groves near the shore. And as we departed, in our various groups, many of us continued chanting.

“Change your minds!”

“Because it has gotten near. “

“The realm of the skies!”

“Change your minds!”

“Because it has gotten near. “

“The realm of the skies!”

That was how the event ended for most of us.

In my next letter, I will answer any final questions that I can.

I will also describe how the event affected the lives of the witnesses in our group. My purpose is primarily to testify about the Master and how seeing him change us.

Your witness,

Festus

## LETTER 14: WITNESSES

From Festus, a witness to the Sermon on the Mount by the will of the Father.

To the Assemblies, a letter on the effect of the Sermon on the lives of its witnesses.

Thank you for your questions, I will answer the ones that I can.

As was typical at the end of one of our re-creations, many of you asked about how our lives were changed by seeing the Master. The most popular question was about Pisca's cure. Let me tell our story as we did at the end of our testimony.

After Seven Springs, most of us returned to our lives. However, we were all changed by the experience.

Tamar gave up her charity work, but her father encouraged her to tell the story of Seven Springs to her many friends in Tiberias. Tamar's father, Enoch, became an active follower and supporter of the Master. His prize possession was Quintus's recording of the Master's words, the most complete version of any teaching sessions that we have today. They traveled to see the Master several more times, but they could not get Quintus Figuli or a recorder of his calibre to travel with them.

Ezra went back to his community of Servers at Mizpa, but he resigned his role as their leader. He also renounced the vows he had taken as a young man, citing the authority of the Nazarene. With others in his community, he began collecting the sayings of the Nazarene and copying them.

When Ezra met Tamar and her father, Enoch gave him a copy of Quintus's record of the sermon. His Server community began copying and distributing it. Ezra and Demas continued to collect other sayings of the Nazarene in our travels. They continued to send them back to Mizpa to be duplicated.

Demas went back to being a lawyer among the Distinguished, but he found that he had lost interest in the letter of Judean law. He was greatly saddened at news of the Nazarene's torture and death. Most of the other Distinguished celebrated. He couldn't. Then the word spread that the

Master had been raised from the dead. At that news, Demas was elated and became a Follower. He declined the opportunity to marry his master's, Johanon's, daughter. Instead, he invented the job of spying for the Distinguished among the Followers. Then he met Tamar and joined her and Ezra as witnesses.

One thing led to another rather quickly. Tamar and Demas were married before I joined the group. The Distinguished fired Demas as a spy soon after he gave them the news of his marriage. Demas began managing the cloth business Tamar inherited from her father.

Ulla went back to her fishing village. However, Seven Springs changed her view of her life. She was no longer a widow and grandmother looking forward only to death. She discovered a new hunger for life. She found the appeal of cleaning fish overrated for an old woman.

When Tamar, Demas, and Ezra came to her village, she asked to join them, and the whole world opened up to her. Despite her age, she traveled well. The only thing she missed about her village life were her grandchildren. But she did get back to Galilee regularly over the years, so she still got to see them grow. Ezra and Ulla too were married. Their lives together were longer and more exciting than anyone would have predicted.

Of course, Pisca and her mother were cured. When the meeting broke up, they were not left in the rain. They accompanied the Master and his students for a few days afterward, but finally, the Master sent them home with one of his youngest students, Johan.

Days after they left the Nazarene, their sores began to fade. They wanted to return to the Master to thank him, but Johan stopped them. He told them that the Master would not take credit, that he would tell them that they were cured by their faith in the Father, not him. Johan became one of the Ones sent. Pisca and he remain lifelong friends.

A few of your letters even asked what happened to your witness, Festus. It starts as a sad tale.

As my friends and I left Seven Springs, I met a group of fellow Greeks, a travelling troupe of actors. They convinced me that the Master's performance was amazing because he was, in reality, a trained actor, despite his

denials. For a reasonable fee, they offered to train me so that I could be as entertaining as he was. Like the fool I was, I believed them. I started my short career as an actor.

Hearing that I was traveling with actors, my parents grieved for me as if I had died. And they were right. From my experience, actors are nothing but frauds. I don't want to discuss my time with them, but I did manage to learn something of drama, stagecraft, and acting.

I met Tamar's group. I attended a Follower assembly to hear their testimony. It brought the whole experience back to me. As an actor, I now knew that the Nazarene wasn't acting. I joined them and became a witness with them. I also became the director of our presentations re-creating the event at Seven Springs for others.

Much to my parent's joy, I also became an apprentice copyist, copying the sayings that Ezra and Demas were collecting. This was a real profession. My parents even sent me money for copies of the Nazarene's sayings. They distributed them in our Greek community. They became followers themselves. It is quite fashionable among our set in Hippos. My parents are happy that I have moved from pursuing pleasure to pursuing responsibility.

At this point, however, our group was still not complete.

Disca returned to her father and their tribe of sheep herders. Her father hadn't divorced her mother. She had a home again. Her mother gave birth to a baby brother. He was clean, or, as Disca describe him, "a spotless vision of the divine." Because Disca and her mother had been cured by the Master, they became local celebrities. They described the experience many times to others before they met Tamar.

When they heard the Nazarene had died and been raised, Disca's family became followers. They had a small assembly group within their herder group. They saw Tamar's group's performance, when we first started re-creating the event. Disca thought it was like seeing with the Master again. She immediately wanted to join our group, living that day at Seven Springs over and over. But her parents refused to let her travel with us. It was clearly improper for a girl of marriageable age to travel apart from her parents.

Especially in a group with an unmarried man, even with Tamar and Ulla chaperoning.

However, Pisca's mother, Marrah, confided with Tamar and Ulla that she was worried about her daughter's future. The girl had developed a terrible crush on the Nazarene. None of the herder boys interested her. For Pisca's part, she was sick of sheep. She had no interest in becoming a herder's wife, tending her own flock, now or in the future. Her mother didn't know what would become of her. Marrah confided this to Tamar and Ulla. Since Pisca was not interested in any herder boys, Marrah asked them to help introduced Pisca to any other good Judean boys that they might know.

Then Ulla had an evil idea. She plotted with Tamar to marry me to Pisca.

But Pisca and I hated each other from first sight. An educated Greek and a Judean goat girl? Her people herded sheep, not goats, but I called her "goat girl" to tease her. Of course, I barely knew the difference between goats and sheep, except for their flavor. As a couple, we were like oil and water. Pisca described me as the oily oil and herself as the pure, clean water. As much as Pisca liked the rest of our group? That is how much she couldn't stand the pompous, egotistical Greek.

Ulla saw how strongly we felt about each other. To her, it was a sign that we were actually attracted to one another. She decided that it was inevitable. For her part, Tamar wanted to get one of the famous "lucky ones" as part of her group. She plotted with Ulla to keep bringing us together. As the months passed, our travels seemed to bring us back in contact with Pisca's herders every couple of weeks. Their idea was that, if they kept bringing us together, nature would take its course.

Despite my teasing her, or maybe because of it, Pisca, did think that I was funny. I made her laugh. I had learned some comedy in my time as an actor. Ever since seeing the Master, Pisca had loved to laugh. Everyone who saw the Master seemed to have developed a love of laughter.

Over time, my feelings for Pisca began to change. City girls never laughed at my jokes like she did. Nor did those girls tease me like she did. Greek city girls have to be sophisticated. They are taught to be so full of themselves that you could never relax around them. Pisca was different. She

was so down to earth and easygoing. As different from city girls as a lamb is from a goat. This made her interesting. I began to realize that despite her rugged clothes and unrefined ways, she was very beautiful, especially when she smiled.

As Ulla and Tamar had foreseen, our relationship began to change. There is something tempting about what is forbidden. This is the lesson of the oldest Judean story. We found ourselves spending our time together whenever we could. If only to insult one another. My frequent presence irritated Pisca's father, Matteo. Pisca thought that this was funny too. Her mother warmed to me because I had been at Seven Springs, but her father didn't approve of me at all. I had been an actor. The lowest sort of scum. Pisca's father didn't find me the least bit funny.

The more her father attacked me, however, the more Pisca found herself defending me. I was a follower, like Pisca's parents were. I wasn't an actor anymore, but a great storyteller, helping to tell the greatest story ever. But the more she defended me, the more her father disapproved of me. He wouldn't trust a Greek with his beloved daughter.

The more Pisca's father was against us, the more we found ourselves getting together. However, neither of us were thinking about marriage. As Pisca and I grew closer, Ulla and Tamar saw their opening and spoke to Marrah on my behalf. Of course, we knew nothing about this at the time. Marrah said that she liked me well enough, but because I was Greek and not Judean, such a marriage was impossible.

The ultimate barrier to our marriage was that I wasn't Judean. This was a problem beyond Pisca's father. As I wrote earlier, Judeans see their way of life as God-given and separated from the ways of the world. Pisca would never marry a Greek who did not embrace those ancient Judean ways. Neither would either of her parents allow it.

Tamar and Ulla suggested that I could convert. Apparently, the herders knew little about conversion. However, Demas, as a lawyer, knew all about it. The Distinguished actively sought foreign converts to Judean life.

Most of you know what Judean conversion requires for an adult male. For those of you who don't, it is called circumcision. If you don't know what

that entails, ask someone else. I didn't know about the conversion at the time myself. Demas and Ezra explained it to me.

I didn't believe them at first. I thought they were joking.

They weren't.

Tamar and especially Ulla were clever in changing my thinking. The idea of conversion was tied to my wanting to be like the Nazarene. The sacrifice required courage and nobility. It was a real sacrifice, like the cross. That appealed to me. I found myself wanting to prove of my manhood for Pisca, her parents, the Nazarene, and myself.

Pisca couldn't believe that I was willing to do it when I told her. I also told her that I would do it whether she married me or not. She thought it was most romantic thing she'd ever heard.

But among all civilized people, marriages are arranged between the parents not the children. Ezra, as my master, talked to my parents in Hippo. They were anxious to see me settle down, even if it was with a Judean girl. My brother was still unmarried. They wanted grandchildren.

In the end, Pisca's parents couldn't object. Not if I was willing to undergo circumcision to demonstrate my devotion to the Father and their daughter. Ezra and Tamar worked out the marriage contract between Pisca's parents and mine. Demas did the legal work. My parent's balked at paying the bride price and insisted that I get a dowry. Tamar and Demas paid both.

And I did the hard part!

And Pisca and I were married. Our group of witnesses was complete.

And then the real adventures of our group of witnesses began. We traveled the world. We met many of the great men of our times. We encountered vicious enemies and fabulous friends. Pisca and I had children. Tamar had a child as well. Visions of the divine, all of them.

Many of your letters asked about the eventual fates of the witnesses of our group. I will only say that most of the original witnesses are no longer with us. After these many years, only Pisca and I remain. The story of their fates is not an easy topic. ,

Many letter have asked about we played any part in the formation of the other witness groups, some of which are still traveling. The short answer is

yes, with some of these groups, but not all. Tamar, Ezra, and Demas had witnessed other teaching sessions by the Nazarene. With the experience of our group re-creating the event at Seven Springs, it was natural for us to help other groups do similar things.

Pisca and I did not witness any other teachings, but h Pisca and I have helped such groups get started and keep in touch with them. If any of your assemblies are interested in hearing their testimony, contact me and I will contact them for you.

A related question your have raised is the popularity of written copies the Master's sayings. Yes, both Demas and Ezra played major roles in that.

It started with Ezra. The Servers are an old sect dedicated to copying their ancient works. They have communities in or near almost every major Judean city. They also have communities near foreign cities with large Judean populations, such as Alexandria and Babylon.

As Mizpa went from poor to prosperous from copying the Master's sayings, they became one of the most influential groups of Servers. This caused a rift within the sect, with Mizpa leading a breakaway of communities from the traditionalists. It started with Mizpa, but today many Server communities copy the Master's sayings. Each also started distribution in their local areas.

Broader distribution was based on Tamar's father's business. He had trading relationships with other cloth buyers and sellers throughout the empire. When he died, first Tamar and then Demas maintain this network. They started using these connections to acquire paper for Mizpa. As interest in the Nazarene grew, this network became involved in distributing the Master's sayings.

Many of your letters have also asked how being a witness has changed over the years. Let me just say that it is much more difficult to be a witness now than it was once. There are as many reasons as there are places in the world. The word "witness" has become, after all, more and more synonymous over time with sacrifice and suffering.

Finally, the last question I will attempt to answer is how similar what we saw at Seven Springs was to other events at which the Master taught.

This is a difficult question because neither Pisca nor I actually saw the Master again. However, we know a great deal about those other events from those who did witness them.

We can say for sure that the Nazarene said and did similar things at many other events, but he always did them a little differently. For example, he apparently often started by calling different groups, “Lucky!”

Many of his later teaching events were also much more planned than what happened at Seven Springs. At later events, especially those that included his stories, more of what occurred was planned. Part of this was teaching the Ones Sent how to take over for him once he was gone. People asked the Nazarene new questions at each event, but often people asked the same question. There is even a story about a rich man who followed the master around always asking him the same questions, hoping for a different answer.

Of course, the chant was part of all his teaching events, the Nazarene’s chant. And I can think of no better way of ending this series of letters by repeating it:

“Change your minds!”

“Because it has gotten near. “

“The realm of the skies!”

Your witness,

Festus

## TRANSLATION OF CHRIST'S WORDS

The translation of Christ's words from the Greek in this work is different from the interpretations appearing in most Bibles. It is more literal than most Biblical versions. It is closer to a transliteration, following the Greek source word by word as much as possible.

This back matter is a discussion of the translation of Jesus words. To make it easy for you to find Jesus's words, I have created a separate chapter of translation notes for each chapter that contain Jesus's words. Each Jesus quote is shown in the familiar *King James Version* (KJV), the original Greek, and then each Greek word is examined in detail. Quotes are numbered in the order that they appear in the corresponding chapter. Footnotes in each chapter of the story direct the reader to the page on which a particular quote appears in my notes.

This initial chapter on translation looks at several important and common issues in translating Jesus's Greek. I also provide some general information about using the more detailed chapters of translation notes.

### **Understanding the Source**

All translations required many decisions on the part of the translators. In Biblical translation, we believers tend to pray a lot for guidance, but that doesn't mean that any of us get it exactly right, any time, much less every time.

To translate ancient Greek, all translators must all add a lot of words to the original Greek. Greek is a much more compact language than English. This is especially true of Greek verbs, but is also true of simple words such as the Greek article and the Greek negatives. We will discuss those issues in detail later.

In translation not all words are added to communicate what is clearly in the original. Other words must be added and sometimes deleted to "clarify" the meaning when the actual words could be interpreted in some way that the translator doesn't like.

For example, it is impossible to know what is a negative question and what is a negative statement. Greek doesn't have a clear interrogatory form, like some languages, such as Japanese, do. For example, in Matthew 6:26, when Jesus compares us to birds, the KJV ends with a

question, "Are ye not much better than they?" This could also be the statement, "You are no better than they." These two statements can be taken from the same Greek and yet say opposite things.

Of course, translators can also add or delete words this to slant the meaning to our own point of view. Words that get added or deleted based on the translator's opinions about meaning. In translating ancient Chinese, translators add entire paragraphs in their "translation" to explain statements that the "translator" didn't like.

In Biblical translation, there are examples of this but I am not going to identify them or get into them here because few, if any of them, exist in the Sermon on the Mount. Most translators are wedded to specific Christian beliefs. I am wedded only to the words themselves, and my desire to explore them for myself and reveal them to others. Like the characters in my story, I do not like to get into discussion of Jesus's meaning or Christ's intentions.

### **Translating Spoken Words**

We know for certain that Jesus spoke his words. He did not write them down. Someone else did, either as he was speaking, as I have in my story, or from memory, sometime later. Jesus did not do his own writing. Translating speech is different than translating written words. Written text tends to be more organized and more grammatical. Ancient Chinese, which was never intended to duplicate a spoken language, is an extreme example of this. The ancient Chinese I have translated is much more like mathematical formulas than they are English sentences.

In interpreting all language, context is everything. These problems are multiplied when the speech occurs in a discussion rather than as part of a monologue. Of course, since the Sermon on the Mount is presented as a monologue, there is no other context other than Jesus's words, but, I described in the Preface also explains, there are problems with the text as a sermon. Changes in who is being addressed clearly indicates something more was going on.

If only one side of a conversation is recorded, a single response can have a lot of different meanings depending on the question that provides its context.

Translating Jesus's spoken words have additional problems to those of translating ancient Greek and spoken language. Jesus's Greek includes many borrowed words from Aramaic. Many of his expres-

sions are based on the Greek used in the Judean Greek Bible called the Septuagint.

### The Evolution of Meaning

Another problem with translating the Bible is that the Bible has been used as the basis for language. We see this even in Greek. Words that were unknown in any written Greek work before the Bible are now common parts of modern Greek because they appear in the Bible.

We also see this in English. The words “heaven”, “hell”, “Satan”, “sin”, “hypocrite”, “pharisee”, and many other words all have meanings today that they simply didn’t have in Jesus’s time. A surprising number of words in English take their meaning only from their use in the Bible. For example, in the Greek of Jesus’s era, “hypocrite” meant an “actor.” It did not mean a two-faced person as it has come to mean in English. This meaning came solely from its use by Jesus in the Bible. Translating a Greek word that people in Christ’s era as “actor” into the English word “hypocrite” is misleading.

We must escape from these problems if we want to hear Jesus as he sounded to those of his time. This means that we must translate these words into their common meaning at the time. For words that are untranslated such as “Pharisee” or “Satan” and whose meaning comes from the Bible itself, we must actually translate them.

In addition to these problems, we have the challenges related to specific Greek parts of speech that do not map well into the English language.

### Translating Greek Verbs

In English, verbs get much of their form, that is, their number, tense, voice, and mood from the addition of “helper” verbs. We also use pronouns to communicate the sex and number of the subject. All of this information is captured in the Greek verb’s word ending. We also add prepositions after verbs to clarify their meaning. For example, “to calm down” means something different than “to calm”. In Greek, these prepositions often appear as the prefix of the root verb as well as in the other words used with them.

This means that all verbs in Greek turn into a whole series of words in English. The Greek simplest word λέγο (*lego*) means “I say” or “I am telling”. Adding different endings can create very long strings of English words. Some of this is discussed below in the

discussion of tenses, moods, etc. but the verb could play the role of nouns. For example, the participle form of “to say” is λέγων (*legon*). This could be translated into our simple word, “saying”, but the Greek form also has information about the verb’s tense (present) and the form of its subject (masculine, singular) so, with the addition of an article, it can mean “the man now talking”.

The verbs “to be”, “to have”, and especially “to will” do not act as “helper verbs” in Greek like they do in English. In English, we string these verbs together to create the various tenses. Greek has different word endings that do this job.

Greek verbs can be used with other verbs to create more complex ideas. “Will” is especially a problem because the Greek verb often translated as “will” specifically means “to desire” or “to want” something. For example, in Greek we can say “I want to go.” The problem is that this never creates the future tense in Greek. However, it is often translated that way in the Bible because the ideas are so similar, but saying “we want to do” something is not the same as saying “we will do” it.

### Translating Greek Conjunctions

Let us start with the Greek conjunctions δὲ (*de*). This word is usually translated to “but” in English. The most interesting aspect of this word is not that it is so very different from our English “but”, but that Biblical translation so often changes it into its opposite, that is “and”, to make the text flow better. We discussed this problem in the Preface.

The first part of the sermon, which seems most like a monologue, contains no occurrences of this word. This “but” only appears once topics begin to change. We assume this is because there are questions being asked that were unrecorded. Jesus then makes a statement, which is included in the Gospels. It begins with a “but” because he is contradicting what said to him.

This word was very valuable in constructing this story. It gave me a clue about what kinds of questions were being asked. If it appears and it follows as a statement with which there is no disagreement, I created an adversarial comment in the story from someone else.

In the story δὲ is usually translated as “however” instead of “but”. This is because, in the Greek, this word always appears in the second position in a clause. It can even separate an article (“the”) from its

noun. Since I wanted to follow the Greek word for word where possible, it is rendered as “however.”

The conjunction “and” in Greek is *καὶ* (*kai*). Again, it is very similar to our “and”, connecting sentences, clauses, and words, but it is used even more widely. It can be used to mean “also”, “even”, and “just”. In a series, it has the sense of “not only-but also”.

Finally, I should mention a Greek word usually translated as “because” or “since”. This word, *gar*, causes the problems in word-for-word translation. It also always appears in the second position like *de* above. The English word “consequently” carries the same idea as “because” and can be inserted in the middle of a phrase, but we don’t typically answer questions this way in English. Causal explanations usually begin with the “because” in English so I don’t usually use “consequently.”

However, this word is another tool in recognizing when Jesus is answering a question. This word is used a lot, indicating to me that Jesus was answering a lot of questions.

### Translating Greek Negatives

Greek negatives (*οὐ* “ou”, *μή* “me”, etc.) do not work like negatives in English (“not”, “no”, etc.). They are called “particles” because they play a role not only as negative adverbs and adjectives, but as parts of negative compounds. A lot of our negative concepts (“neither”, “never”, “except”, etc.) are created out of these particles.

This is important because there is not one, but two different particles that are used. The most common is *ou* (*οὐ*, *οὐκ*). This is the negative for facts. Most English “not’s” fit this definition. The other Greek negative is *me* (*μή*). This is the negative expressing will or thought. It is used in prohibitions and expressions of doubt.

- οὐ* denies, *μή* rejects;
- οὐ* is absolute, *μή* relative;
- οὐ* objective, *μή* subjective.

The biggest translation problem is with the negative of desire and opinion. Unless it is with a verb or noun that clearly expresses a thought or desire, it needs additional words to clarify its meaning in English. For example, this subjective negative with a verb meaning “he is going to go” doesn’t mean “he is not going to go”, it means “he doesn’t want to go”. To reflect the use of this negative, I commonly add “don’t want” into the verbal phrase.

Since this is the negative used with command and requests the sense of all commands is not an absolute order, “don’t do this” but a suggestion, “you don’t want to do this”. You can easily imagine what a big difference this makes in terms of religious prohibitions. What sounds in translation like an absolute is actually more like a suggestion.

### Translating The Greek Article

The Greek article is usually translated into the English definite article “the”, but there are many key differences between the two words. First, Greek has no indefinite article (“a”, “an”) so a word without the Greek article can mean “man” or “a man”. Second, the Greek article is really a weaker form of a demonstrative pronoun, “this”, “that”, “these” and “those”. So, “the man” can also mean “this man”. Often, especially in translating spoken words, the demonstrative forms make more sense.

The article can also be used with adjectives and with some forms of verbs. Its use makes them work like nouns. Add an article to the word for “strong” and it means “the strong”. But in English, “the strong” or “the crying” always describes a general group. In Greek, the article gives that noun a very specific meaning. The article can be singular and feminine, so “the strong” becomes “that strong woman”. If the article was plural masculine, it means “those strong men”. However, if it is a neutral, it becomes “those strong things”.

In the chapters of translation notes, I provide the details about the form of the article when it doesn’t match that of an accompanying noun. However, since it usually is paired with a noun, you can assume the form matches unless otherwise noted.

In Biblical translations, the article is ignored by translators and it is sometimes added. Both are a much more serious error in regards to meaning in Greek than in English. In English, we do not use the article with the word when referring to God. However, in Greek, the article is almost always used, *o Theos*, “the God”, not *theos*, which would mean “a god”. This means that “God” is treated as a description in Greek but a proper name in English.

## Translating Greek Tenses and Moods

Greek verbs also have different tenses, voices, and moods than English verbs. The careless translation of Greek into English tenses can confuse the real meaning of the original.

Let us start with the future tense. The KJV often translates the future tense by adding “shall” or “will” before the verb. We have already discussed the problem with “will.” It confuses the meaning between what is desired and what is going to happen in the future. The problem with “shall” is that the KJV also uses “shall” with verbs of “possibility”, that is, in the subjunctive mood. The Greek subjunctive describes something that might happen. It is commonly used in different forms of if/then statements. In the KJV, it is sometimes indicated by “may” or “might” but “shall” is also used, which confuses it with the future tense.

For clarity, my translation always uses either “shall” or “is going to” to indicate the future tense. I always use “might” or “may” with the subjunctive mood.

Greek has two tenses that can be translated into the English past. The most common is imperfect, which we translate into the simple past tense. Less common is the perfect tense. It indicates something is completed in the past. We use “has” or “has been” with the past participle in English to indicate its use. For example, “he has given” or “he has been given”.

Finally, Greek has a tense that doesn’t exist in English called the aorist. It indicates something that happens at a specific point in time, which may be the past, present, or future. This is something that might happen at sometime. The KJV usually translates this as the past, but since it occurs in many if/then types statements, I will often use the present.

## Translating the Greek Verb Middle Voices

In English, we have two voices, the active and the passive. In the active, the subject does something, “he gives”. In the passive, the subject has something done to them, “he is given”.

Greek has a third voice, the middle voice in both active and passive. In this voice, the subject acts on or for him, her, or itself, “he gives himself” or “he is given by himself.”

This concept is very important in Christ’s words. It is used purposefully. It is more complex and requires work to add to the verb.

This is not done without wanting to add a more specific meaning. There is a big difference between “he judges”, “he is judged”, “he is judged by himself”, and “he judges for himself.”

## The Greek Source

The Greek source I use is called a morphological Greek New Testament (GNT) found at Tufts University Perseus Digital Library. This version of the GNT is known as the Alexandria version, revised by Brooke Foss Westcott and Fenton John Anthony Hort. The digital Greek words in that source are linked to four Lexicons: *Liddell-Scott-Jones Classical Greek Lexicon*, *Liddell and Scott’s Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (known as the *Middle Liddell*), *Lexicon to Pindar* by William J. Slater, and *A Homeric Dictionary* by Georg Autenrieth. My glossary is a compendium of these lexicons.

My sources draw from all of ancient Greek literature not just the Bible. In my translation notes, I note when a word is only found in the Bible, either the Greek New Testament or the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament.

The term “morphological” is added to the description of the Greek sources used because all kinds of information has been added to the text that didn’t appear in the original. The Greek sources that we use today have:

- punctuation,
- accent marks over vowels,
- spaces between words,
- lower case letters as well as capital letters
- chapter and verse numbers.

All of these features are inventions since the days of Christ. The original Greek in which the Bible was written was all capital letters, with no spaces between the words. Written without these features, this paragraph would look like this:

ALLOFTHESFEATRESAREINVENTIONSSINCETHE  
DAYSOFCRIST.THEORIGINALGREEKINWHICTHEBIBLE  
WASWRITTENASALLCAPITALLETTERSWITHNOSPACES  
BETWEENTHEWORDSWRITTENWITHOUTTHESEFEATRES  
THISPARAGRAPHWOULDLOOKLIKETHIS

This is not unreadable, but we must decide where the divisions between the words should be made. In Greek, we must also decide

where to add the accent marks that determine specific form and meaning of the words.

It is important to note that my glossary does not come from those lexicons developed specifically for Bible translation. Lexicons such as *Strong's Dictionary Bible* and *Thayer's and Smith's Bible Dictionary* define the Greek words by how they have been translated in the Bible in the past. These works are an invaluable resources that tell us a lot about the Biblical interpretation of words. Unfortunately, they tell us little about how those in Christ's era would have heard these same words. Their definitions are influenced over a thousand of years of Biblical interpretation.. The Bible itself has shaped not only English, but all Western languages over time. This means that these definitions have had time to drift far from the general meaning of the Greek in Christ's time,

The English Bible didn't exist before the *King James Version* (KJV) was completed in 1611. Western Europe used the Latin *Vulgate* exclusively until Martin Luther translated his German New Testament in 1522. The *King James Version* wasn't based on the morphological Greek New Testament that we use today. It was based upon a Greek version known as the *Textus Receptus*, which was a Greek translation of the *Latin Vulgate*. So, the original Greek was translated into the *Latin Vulgate*. Then, the *Latin Vulgate* into the *Textus Receptus*, and the *Textus Receptus* into the *King James Version*, which was the grandfather of all other English versions.

Though more modern bibles have updated some parts to better conform to the better Greek sources we use today, many of the decisions made by the translators of the *King James Version* have been passed down from one generation of Bibles to the next. Traditions and teaching are their underlying binding force.

### The Translation Notes Format

In the Translation Notes for each chapter, the Greek source is shown here for each verse of Christ's words used in this work. For references purposes, the King James Version of each verse is also given. The Greek words are shown in their original order. The form and meaning of each Greek word is explained. The verses follow the order they are presented in the Gospel of Matthew, which is the same order as they are presented here.

Nouns and adjectives are shown in the nominative, singular form. Verbs are shown in the first-person, singular, present, active, indicative form. Adverbs, conjunctions, particles, and prepositions do not change form. For the most common irregular words. The irregular pronouns are shown in all their forms.

The format for each entry is:

- The King James translation
- The source Greek
- The definition of each Greek word in original word order

The format for each definition is:

- The Greek translation used in this work in "quotes"
- The Greek word in Greek letters ἰῶτα in the form it appears.
- An alternative Greek spelling might appear in {braces}.
- The word form description in (parentheses)
- The Greek translation used in the KJV in [square brackets]
- The Roman letter root of the Greek word in *italics*.
- The various meanings of the word in "quotes"

### Table of Word Characteristics Abbreviations

(Bold characteristics do not exist in English)

Parts of Speech:

- **partic** = particle, as special purpose word in Greek
- adv = adverb
- adj = adjective
- art = article
- conj = conjunctions
- noun - noun
- prep = preposition
- verb = verb
- inf = infinitive: a verb that can also be a noun noun
- part = participle, the adjective form of the verb

Characteristics of Verbs, Participles, Nouns, Pronouns, and Adjectives:

Number:

- pl = plural verbs, nouns, or adjectives
- sg = singular verbs, nouns, or adjectives
- **dual** = dual, applies to couples, not used by Jesus

**Sex:**

- **masc** = masculine
- **fem** = feminine
- **neut** = neutral

Characteristics shared by Nouns, Pronouns, Participles, and Adjectives:

- **nom** = nominative (the subject of the verb)
- **acc** = accusative (the object of the verb or preposition)
- **dat** = the indirect object form with other uses
- **gen** = the possessive form with other uses

Characteristics of verbs:

**Voice:**

- **act** = active verb, the subject is acting
- **pass** = passive verb, the subject is receiving action
- **mid** = middle verb, the subject acts on or for self
- **mp** = middle passive verb, subject is acted on by self

**Tense**

- **pres** = present tense
- **imperf** = imperfect past tense, incomplete action
- **perf** = perfect past tense, completed action
- **aor** = aorist tense, a point in time, past present or future.

**Mood**

- **ind** = indicative: facts, opinions, questions, and questions
- **imper** = imperative: a command or request
- **sub** = subjective: a possibility

**Conclusion**

This chapter could be many times longer if I tried to explain all the issues related with translated Christ's words. Much of the topics in this chapter are discussed in much greater detail on the ChristsWords.com website for those who are interested. There are, for example, long articles about the translation issues with specific common words. There are also much more detailed articles on almost ever verse in the Gospels of Christ's Words.