

THE EVIDENCE FROM THE TRIAL OF THE NAZARENE



ITS CURIOUS HISTORY

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AN HISTORICAL NOVEL
By Gary Gagliardi

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

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

Christ's Words in this Work

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

My Background

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

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



PART ONE

ARRESTED IN TIBERIAS

1.

I was visiting the city of Tiberias, Antipas's capital in Galilee, interviewing a witness. After leaving the house in which I had met her, a couple Roman soldiers approached me and asked my name. Since they were Roman, I gave them the name I was known by among the Romans. That was a mistake. They grabbed me, took away my travel bag, and bound me. They led me through the streets to a local prison and tossed me in a small cell.

Sitting on the dirt floor of my cell, I couldn't think of any reason for my arrest. My captors had said nothing. I knew my wife, Rebecca, would be worried. She was expecting me home on the late boat to Capernaum. Delays in travel were uncommon around the Sea of Galilee. Most were caused by storms. The sky had been clear.

In the middle of the night, I was awakened by a woman's voice softly calling my name from outside my cell. It was the witness that I had come to Tiberias to interview, Joanna. I wondered how she got past the guards. She was wealthy and well-positioned among the powerful in Tiberias. She was also a secret support of the Nazarene's followers. Our meeting had been in secret at the house of a Follower we both knew.

"I only have a few minutes," Joanna whispered urgently through the door. "I heard you were arrested, but I haven't been able to find out why. I wanted to warn you not to mention my name. You know my position and why I cannot be publicly involved. My husband and I will help you if we can, but we can only do that if you keep our secret. Do you understand?"

I said that I did.

Then she was gone.

Immediately I realized that I should have asked her to send a note to my wife. I comforted myself with the thought that Joanna and Rebecca had been friends. Joanna would probably contact my wife and tell her my situation without being asked.

The next morning, without getting either food or drink, I was again bound, taken from my cell, and lead through the streets again. Eventually, I

was dragged before a magistrate. We were not in a public building, but in a private courtyard of a house overlooking the sea. The Roman was seated in a chair at a breakfast table. He was about forty-five-years-old and dressed in casual clothes, but wore his medallion of office. He was clean shaven, in the Roman style. A servant, also clean shaven, leaned on the wall behind him. My two guards dropped me in front of him, untied my wrists, and went to stand by the entry way. I was kneeling before him.

"Quintus Figuli?" He asked, sipping from a cup.

I nodded, rubbing my wrists.

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

I shook my head, no.

"What is my crime, Master?" I asked.

"Pilate, the prefect in Judea, accuses you of giving false evidence," he said, as he scrutinized me. "At the famous trial."

The trial had been around six years ago.

"Not false, Master," I answered.

"Of course not," he said agreeably in a surprisingly friendly tone. "I have, of course, heard about your famous Evidence. My wife has read it and recommended it to me. Would you like some wine? Bread?"

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

"This is an informal chat, not an official meeting," the magistrate explained. The man spoke more proper Greek than the local version. He had a heavy Roman accent, sounding new to the region. "Pilate wants you, yes. I have you, for reasons only he knows, but Antipas rules here and they are not friends."

The servant gave me a plate with bread and fruit.

I picked up a small loaf of bread and tore off a piece. I held it up and said the blessing, "This bread, sufficient for now, give to us this day."

I then offered the rest of the loaf to the magistrate, but he just looked confused.

I took a bite of bread.

"That is not a Judean blessing," the magistrate observed. "Is it from the Nazarene?"

I nodded.

"I started reading collection of Nazarene's quotes you put together," the magistrate continued, almost apologetically. "But reading, especially the local Greek, is so tedious. But why would Pilate now be claiming that your evidence was false? It isn't, is it?"

"No, Master," I said around the bread in my mouth.

"My wife has heard from several witnesses who saw the man speak that the Nazarene's words were taken out of context," he continued in a business-like fashion.

It was the same old charge I'd heard again and again over the years.

"I was hired just to record the words," I said, defending myself. "Not the context!"

The man seemed taken back by my vehemence.

"Again, this is not a trial," he said trying to calm me, leaning forward. "I see it as an opportunity for us both. My job as magistrate is to arrest and hold you, but what happens next? I can hold you here quietly as long as you are useful to me. Do you understand?"

"Yes," I said. "I mean, no. I don't know how I can be useful to you."

"Let me put it simply," he said confidently with a tight smile. "Would you rather be here or on your way to Caesarea to see Pilate?"

"Here," I answered.

"As for how you can be useful to me," he said, "We shall see. If nothing else, you can give me some insight into local politics."

"But I know nothing about politics!" I claimed.

He looked at me.

"You must know something," he said. "Pilate has charged you with a crime and his reason is almost certainly political. Add to that the fact that you are the most well-known writer in the area. Your Evidence is everywhere."

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

"But you recorded the right person at the right time, didn't you?" He observed with the same tight smile. He turned to his servant. "Eutyches, the bag?"

The servant brought my travel bag. I realized that my guards hadn't carried it with us. They must have gotten it earlier.

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

"What is this?" He asked.

I swallowed the bread in my mouth.

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

"Your Evidence was a collection of the man's sayings," he said. "Correct?"

I nodded.

"So this is?" He asked.

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

"Description of the situation?"

"The missing context that everyone complains about!" I blurted. "The speaker's actions, people's questions, audience reactions."

"Your defense against Pilate's charges of false witness?" He asked.

"No, Master, not at all!" I responded.

"Of course, not, Pilate's charges are recent, brought because for some political reason," he said, reasoning it out for himself. "You clearly have been working on this for some time."

"For years," I agreed.

"Are you writing from what you remember?" He asked.

"No," I explained. "From interviews that I have recorded from witnesses."

"You didn't remember those details yourself?"

"I was too busy just recording the quotes at the time," I explained.

"Besides, I am a recorder, not a writer."

"Why are you writing this? The trial is long over. The man was executed," he explained. "Your evidence is well known."

What he was suggesting didn't sink in.

"Because the context is missing," I said. "People are right. Even during the trial, some of the man's words were twisted to mean things they didn't mean at the time."

"So your new work is a defense of the man?" He said, clearly interested.

"Not directly," I explained. "It is just a record of what happened."

"Is there anyone who is politically powerful who might not want you to finish this new work?" He asked more directly.

The idea hadn't occurred to me. I didn't know how to answer.

"The man's words in it are identical to the original," I offered.

"Will it make those who felt your original Evidence was misleading

happy?" He asked, taking a different direction.

"Maybe." I offered.

"Maybe?" He repeated, raising an eyebrow.

"I thought so when I started working on it," I said, "but some who have read it say this new work is misleading as well."

"Why?"

"The Nazarene spoke many, many times, repeating most of what he said again and again," I explained. "People at different events remember the same words, but different interactions with the audience."

"But this is a true picture of one such event?"

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

He laughed as if I had told a joke.

"You say you have been recording people about these events," the magistrate continued. "Would any of those people be politically important to someone like Pilate who said something they might regret?"

Of course, Joanna came to mind, then my wife's brothers. However, in Joanna's case, her interview had just taken place and she had said nothing about politics.

"I've interviewed a lot of people who saw the man speak," I said honestly. "None of them talked about politics, just what they heard and saw at the Nazarene's events. The only ones with official positions were some minor members of the Grand Council in Jerusalem."

"Are you sure you are not working as a spy for anyone?" The magistrate asked almost casually.

The question took me by surprise. Spies were put to death immediately.

"Of course not, Master," I said.

He reached into my bag and pulled out some papers.

"Then what are these?" He asked, showing them to me. "My servant, Eutyches, assures me that it isn't any known writing. He says it looks like some type of code."

"It is a code, but not like you think" I explained quickly. "These are my recent recordings. I don't record what people say by normal writing. It takes too long. My father and his fathers before him were recorders in the Jerusalem courts. They developed a system for fast recording. He taught me. These are examples. I copy them out later into regular writing."

"Like Tiro's code?" The magistrate's servant asked, sounding surprised.

“So tell me, Eutyches, who was Tiro and what was his code?” The magistrate asked the servant.

“Tiro was Cicero’s slave, later his freeman,” Eutyches explained. “Tiro was rumored to have developed a system of symbols for recording Cicero’s speeches. But that system was either lost or kept secret because no one knows it today.”

“Are all of your originals in this code, even the ones you recorded of the Nazarene?” The magistrate asked intently.

“Yes,” I said.

“Interesting,” he commented. “Do you destroy the originals once you’ve transferred the contents to regular writing?”

“No. I keep all my originals. I give everyone else copies that I certify.”

This appeared to satisfy him.

“You said you have read your new work to others,” he continued, indicting the scroll he had pulled from my bag. “Could there be something politically important in it?”

“As I said, I know nothing about politics,” I said. “It is just a more complete record of the Nazarene.”

The magistrate glanced at the position of the sun to check the time.

“I have some time before other duties take me away,” he said. He handed me the scroll and said, “We should run this new work by someone who does understand politics. Read it to me.”

“Now?” I asked.

“While I have time,” he said. Then he smiled and he asked, “There is nothing in there you are hiding, is there?”

I shook my head, no.

I untied the scroll and began to read.

2.

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

As the crowd settled, people began to chant, “It has come close—the realm of the skies!” This chant may have been started by the Nazarene’s students, but others in the crowd joined in. The chant built for a few moments

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

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

Many chuckled at the idea of beggars being lucky.

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

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

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

Many in the audience clapped.

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

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

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

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

He pointed at the sky, and people repeated, “It has come close —the realm of the skies!”

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

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

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

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

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

Several people laughed.

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

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

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

One of the foreigners offered the speaker a wineskin.

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

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

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

The crowd laughed.

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

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

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

Again, the Militants made complaining noises.

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

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

The audience laughed and applauded its participation.

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

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

While many laughed, others registered their objections.

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

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

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

The speaker moved toward the group.

“Lucky!” The speaker continued, indicating the two Isolationist elders.

“Those who maintain the peace.” He helped the old men stand up.

“Seeing that they are themselves—,” he said, indicating their long, gray beards to the crowd. **“Children—”**

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

“Of the divine!” The teacher continued. Then he added with certainty,

“They are going to be called!”

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

Everyone laughed again.

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

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

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

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

The crowd applauded themselves and the speaker.

* * *

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

“These are local religious groups, Master, I stammered, “except for the whores, of course,”

“In Rome, whores are a religious group as well,” he observed. “And everywhere, religion is the lifeblood of politics. By ‘Militants,’ you mean the followers of the executed revolutionary, Judas of Gamala?”

I nodded.

“Rebelled against Roman taxes?”

I nodded again.

"And the Isolationists, I know well," he said. "They call themselves, 'the children of the light' living outside Roman civic law?"

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

"And the Ascetics, followers of John the Dipper, a man killed by the Tetrarch, for sedition," the magistrate continued. "So, Mr. I-know-nothing-about-politics, were these groups, supporters or opponents of this Nazarene?"

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

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

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

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

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

I was surprised. He looked and sounded as Roman as a Caesar. I noticed that he didn't tell me the name of his family.

"But this teacher doesn't sound very religious, does he? He seems to joke about the Divine. His words are entertaining because they play against people's expectations from a religious."

"One of the main reasons I am writing this new work is so people won't forget how entertaining he was," I said.

"Can you explain this 'the realm of the skies' business? Is that some part of the Judean faith that I've never been taught?"

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

"What does it mean?"

"People debate that," I explained. "Everyone agrees only that the realm of the skies lies beyond the earth. Some say it is a physical place, the realm

of the resurrection. Others say it is a way of understanding, a realm of ideas. Still others say that it refers simply to the reign of the Divine.”

“Doesn’t the Nazarene define it?” He asked.

“No,” I admitted.

“Didn’t people ask him about it?” He continued.

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

“What does he say?”

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

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

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

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

I nodded in agreement.

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

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

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

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

“A short boat ride,” he observed. “Not a problem. Is that where you keep your originals and other writings?”

I nodded. If my wife was notified, her brothers might know someone who could help me. Although, they might also prefer to leave me to my fate.

The magistrate gestured for me to continue reading.

3.

“**Lucky are you all,**” the speaker announced to his audience. “**When**

they criticize you and harass you and proclaim every worthless thing against you! Lying to themselves!"

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

The crowd laughed.

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

This drew another laugh from the crowd.

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

The crowd chuckled.

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

People laughed.

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

Many chuckled.

"You yourselves," he announced more seriously, **"are the light of society. It really doesn't have the power."** He paused. **"Civilization,"** he announced, indicating them, **"to be kept hidden, on top of a mountain standing by itself! Not at all!"**

Many chuckled at the idea of equating this crowd with the height of civilization.

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

His audience laughed.

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

The crowd began tittering.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Many chuckled at the contradiction.

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

This started the crowd laughing again.

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

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

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

The speaker smiled again and shook his head, no.

“The sky,” he said with his mouth still full, pointing up. Then pointing down, he added, **“Also the ground.”**

More began laughing.

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

Many groups in the crowd applauded, supporting this sentiment.

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

One of the Dedicated took the bait, shouting, “Become outdated?”

The speaker tucked the remaining loaf of bread into his belt and shook his head, no.

“Become everything in existence!” He announced opening his arms wide.

This drew more applause and some laughter at the expense of the Dedicated.

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

“Whoever,” the speaker said, **“might relax one of these laws—the tiniest.”** He said, holding out his little finger and wiggling it.

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

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

This drew more laughter.

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

This made the whole crowd laugh harder.

“The one, however, who produces and teaches this?” He pulled out the remains of flat bread he used to symbolize the law and held it up. **“The greatest,’ he is going to be called—in the realm of the skies!”**

Many stood and applauded. Soon the whole crowd was laughing and cheering.

4.

A Roman centurion came to the courtyard entry standing by the two guards at the door. The magistrate nodded to him in recognition. He held up

his hand to indicate I should stop reading.

"I have some business to take care of," he said, suddenly very serious, "but you can answer some questions for me if you don't mind coming along."

I didn't mind.

The magistrate called over his servant and gave him some instructions I couldn't hear. He then got up to go meet the Roman soldier. He indicated that I should follow.

As we walked, he said, "My wife is right about this teacher's appeal. He was very entertaining. Is this use of humor common among Judean teachers?"

"Some act out the stories of our history, especially for children," I explained. "Others use humor to make fun of opponents. But the Nazarene's teaching was a celebration. Those who came to hear him left feeling like they had been to a wedding."

The soldier led the magistrate around to the side of the building. I followed them. The two guards from the courtyard entry followed us.

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

We were led to a group of about fifty soldiers. They were facing a man who had been stripped naked and tied to a whipping post. The centurion took his place in front of his troops.

The magistrate took in the situation. He then turned to me.

"You said earlier, that you were '*hired* to record only the words.' Who hired you?"

The magistrate then started taking off his tunic over his head.

"Aulus Appius of Sidon," I responded, distracted by the soldiers and the whipping post.

"Appius, the big wine distributor? I've heard he collects legal documents," he noted as he began unlacing his sandal. "But why would he be interested in a local teacher?"

"I don't know," I admitted, very confused by what was happening. "But I think he was paid by others who knew he had court recorders working for him."

"Paid by who?" The magistrate asked with more interest, standing only in

his breech cloth. Despite being almost naked, the magistrate seemed larger and more commanding than he had before. His body was well-muscled and with a number of old scars. He looked like a hard man.

"I don't know," I said, shrugging, conscious that the soldiers stood patiently as we conversed.

The magistrate's servant arrived carrying a leather scourge, which he gave to his master along. The master handed back his clothes and sandals. Then the magistrate uncoiled the whip and cracked it a few times in the air.

Then he turned toward the assembled troops and addressed them formally,

"Legionnaires!" He said. "The one from among you—" He paused and looked toward the centurion.

"Lutatis Fabrius," the officer provided.

"Lutatis Fabrius," the magistrate continued. He was every inch the master here, a hard man. "Has been declared guilty of dereliction of duty by his commanding officer. My decision as magistrate is that he shall receive twenty stripes with the scourge. I will execute the sentence myself."

The magistrate then whispered something in the ear of the man chained to the whipping post. He then looked at me and waved his hand, indicating that I should stand back.

He then administered the lashes quickly and efficiently. The troop counted them aloud as he did so. The whipped man slumped down about halfway through. When the magistrate was done whipping, he was splattered with the man's blood. Handing the whip back to his servant, he took a towel in return.

He faced the assembled troop.

"I will remember this man's name, Lutatis Fabrius, as I will remember his blood upon me," he said sternly, holding up his right arm to display the blood dripping down it. "None of you want to find yourselves in a similar position. But this man's debt has been paid. I do not want to hear about any reprisals taken against him. If I do, more punishment will follow."

He then saluted the troops. They saluted back.

The magistrate began wiping the blood from his arms with the towel as we walked back toward his house. His servant and the guards followed.

"Sorry you had to see that," he said, "but it is part of my job and best done quickly."

"I am surprise you do it, personally," I said. "Don't the troops usually handle the punishments themselves?"

"Usually, but punishment within a unit is often unfair, easier on friends harder on enemies or rivals," he said. "Plus, I am new here and my mentor taught me that it is important for my men to see me shedding blood with my own hand and, ideally, covered in it."

He again indicated his bloody torso.

"Your mentor sounds like a hard man," I said.

"He is. And a wise one as well," he said.

"What did the soldier do?"

"He seems to have left his post at the prison last night," he said casually.

I couldn't help but think about Joanna, whose visit had awakened me. Had she bribed the man? Had she been caught? I suddenly had a feeling that the magistrate was going to ask if I had witnessed anything strange at the prison. But my intuition was wrong.

"So you don't know who was paying your employer," he said as he wiped the blood from his arms and chest. "When you presented your Evidence to Pilate, did anyone there to take credit for it?"

"I don't know when are how Pilate got it," I explained. "I was first summoned by the Grand Council at the temple. They already had a copy of my recordings of the man's quotes. They wanted me to testify I recorded them and that the written quotes were accurate. Pilate did the same later."

"The Temple held a trial too?" The magistrate asked, apparently surprised. "Was Antipas involved in either trial?"

"No, but a priest told me that Antipas had seen my Evidence as well," I said.

"And, of course, everyone was there in Jerusalem because of the big festival," the magistrate noted.

We reentered the magistrate's courtyard, but we didn't return to the table. The magistrate motioned to his servant to come over and whispered something in his ear. The servant left. We remained standing as we talked.

"I need a bath," he said, again indicating the blood. "Then I have other business to attend to, but we have a few more minutes. Why were you in Jerusalem during the trial. For the festival?"

"My last instructions from Appius were to record the teacher in Jerusalem about a week before the Nazarene was executed."

"Who knew about your collection of sayings?" He asked.

"Hundreds," I admitted. "Maybe thousands. I had been selling copies for a year, almost two. When I wasn't recording, I went to the teacher's events to sell copies."

"Appius didn't mind you selling your copies?" He asked.

I shrugged.

"I sent him his copies, except for the last ones, which I gave him in person in Jerusalem. He sent me my payments and instructions. I never wrote him about my side business, but he could have heard from his local traders. I was not never bondsman. He hired me as an independent agent."

"You say he met you in Jerusalem that final week?" The magistrate asked. "Wasn't that odd?"

"It didn't seem odd at the time," I explained. "He is a big wine distributor. The Passover festival is best time of year for wine sales. I was just grateful because I got paid right away instead of waiting."

"Are you still working for Appius now?" He asked.

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

"Did he say that you were gathering evidence for a trial?"

"No," I said. "But I never asked why he wanted the recordings either."

"Why not?"

"I didn't question my good fortune?" I offered.

"That can be a mistake," the magistrate suggested dryly, again indicating his bloody torso.

Given my current situation, I nodded my understanding.

His servant returned and gave him a nod.

"My bath is ready," the magistrate explained. "Eutyches will show you to a guest room here in my house. It will be a little more comfortable than a prison cell. It may be a few hours before I can get back to you."

"Can I take my bag," I asked, indicating my travel bag, still on the breakfast table. "Can I write a note for my wife?"

"You can take your bag, but don't write your note yet," he said, signalling his servant to bring it to me. "We will discuss that later."

He then left. The servant, Eutyches, indicated that I should follow him. He then signaled the guards at the entry. They followed us. Apparently, they were not there for the house, but for me personally.

I tried to make conversation with Eutyches as we walked, but he acted as

though he didn't hear me. In walking through the house, which was surprisingly large, I noticed how spare its furnishings were. There were no decorations other than the mosaics in the walls.

The servant showed me into a small room. It had one small window blocked with bars. The room contained couch for sleeping, bare of any covers. Below the window, there was a broad ledge. Nothing else. The guards took their position outside the door. The door was shut behind me. I

I made myself comfortable, pulling the couch up to the window ledge so that I could use it as a desk. Outside was another, much smaller courtyard. I took out my writing materials and began recording notes about the morning's meeting with the magistrate.

I finished my writing and ended up laying down to nap on the couch. I may have gotten some sleep, but when I opened my eyes someone was staring at me through the window. It was a little girl. She was about seven-years-old.

When she saw was awake, she asked, "Are you the writer that Pilate wants to kill?"

"Where did you hear that?" I asked, sitting up, wondering if the guards at the door could hear.

"My mom and dad were talking about it," she said.

"My name is Quintus," I said, thinking to make friends. "What's your name?"

"You can call be Berry," she said with a smile that was missing a tooth.

"Is your father the magistrate?" I asked.

"I think that is his job here," she said. "He doesn't like it much though."

"You heard your mom and dad talking about me?" I asked.

She nodded.

"What did they say?" I asked.

"Mom said that you might have money, but we didn't want trouble with Pilate. Dad said that Uncle might be interested in your writing and Pilate probably doesn't want to kill you all that badly. I didn't really understand the rest, but they chased me out so I came to looking for you."

"Why?" I asked,

"I wanted to see what a writer looks like," she said.

"What do you think," I said, spreading my arms for evaluation.

She smiled and shrugged.

Her smile reminded me of my own daughter and I felt a stab of sorrow thinking I might never see her again.

"Are you sad?" She asked.

"Just thinking of my own daughter," I said honestly.

"Is she my age?" She asked,

"No, she is small, just about two," I said.

"Miria is two!" She exclaimed.

"Who's Miria?" I asked.

"My little sister. She doesn't talk very much, but she really likes to eat," she said. "Does your daughter like to eat?"

I laughed. "I guess she does," I answered.

"I better go. Sahra will be looking for me," she said.

And with that she vanished from the window.

I was left alone, thinking about what I had learned. The magistrate and his wife thought that Pilate would kill me. While I was thinking about it, I heard the door open.

Eutyches appeared at the door and said, "Follow me. Bring your bag."

I was suddenly afraid that a decision had been made and I was being sent to Pilate. I collected my writing materials from the ledge, putting them into my bag and followed.

I was brought back to the larger courtyard. The magistrate was again sitting at the table, drinking wine. Now he was wearing his robes of office. Almost before I sat down, the magistrate had a question.

"Why do you live in Capernaum? Why not return to Sidon?" He asked.

"At first, because Appius asked me to stay in area," I explained. "Then because I began making copies of my first recordings of the Nazarene and selling them," I explained.

"Are you one of the Nazarene's Followers?" He asked.

"Not really, Master," I said. "His Followers don't allow me near their meetings. Some are afraid I will record something against them. Others blame me for their leader's execution."

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

"I am not the only selling my copies. My wife and her cousins sell them too," I explained.

"Your wife's family?" He asked.

“My wife and I met when I was recording this,” I explained, taking out the scroll that I had been reading. “She was trying to make a record as well, but she wasn’t very fast.”

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

“Not when I was recording and she was bothering me with her questions,” I responded. I didn’t mention that she was sitting at first among the detestable ones. “But later. She is a serious Follower and respected among them.” I didn’t mention my wife’s brothers. “But she is also a very fast copyist and her copies are more readable than mine. We went into business together.”

“Before you were married?” He asked, snorting at the idea. “I have heard that you and your wife have grown quite successful selling copies of your Evidence. Is that true?”

I made an indifferent shrug. I noted that the little girl had said they had been discussing my financial.

“Have you and your wife run into problems with those who oppose the spread of this teacher’s message?” he asked.

“Their leader is called Hatarsi. We call him ‘the Syrian,’” I said. “Oddly, at first they bought copies of my work to distribute it because they thought it discredited the man. But that didn’t seem to work. Now they target those speaking about the Master in public. They try to incite mobs against them. Many local magistrates look the other way.”

“Pilate and Antipap aren’t going to do anything either,” The magistrate claimed. “Rome does not get involved in local religious disputes.”

“Do you think those opposed to the Nazarene are behind my arrest?”

“Maybe. However, if your Evidence is used both by Followers and their opponents,” he said, “you could just be caught in the crossfire. It could be either side.”

“Several of the Ones Sent have said that they aren’t discouraging the spread of my evidence,” I said.

“The Ones Sent?”

“That’s what they call the students of the Nazarene who are now the leaders of the Followers,” I explained.

“Don’t this Hatarsi’s followers attack them?” He asked.

“The crowds that come to see the Ones Sent are too large,” I explained. “Several of them have been attacked in private., however”

“And all this conflict helps you sell your evidence,” the magistrate noted. “When was there ever a document copied as much as your Evidence?”

“It is costly to make so many copies,” I countered. “Our paper costs are shocking.”

“And yet,” said the magistrate, “Here you are, no poorer for the expense. Successful, well-known, and your record is trusted by both sides.”

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

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

“I can’t see any advantages!”

The magistrate laughed. “Where are you looking?” He asked, looking me squarely in the eye.

There was only one place to look.

“I am in your hands,” I said, stating a simple fact. I was his prisoner. “What do you want me to do?”

“We have some time,” he said. “Maybe we will uncover something important if you read more of your new work and answer my questions for an hour or so, if that is okay with you?”

I nodded.

“Then we will have dinner. You can meet my wife,” he said. “She’s very familiar with your Evidence. Then, we can make decisions what comes next.”

“You are still considering sending me to Pilate?”

“Not if I can avoid it,” he said confidently. “I want to get a better sense of who the movement you are in the middle of, and why people are so passionate about it.”

I picked up the scroll and unrolled it to where we had stopped before.

5.

“Are you telling us to ignore what *they*,” a young farm worker gestured back toward the Dedicated, “tell us to do?”

“**What am I telling you all?**” The speaker asked, tucking the bread back into his belt and scratching his beard thoughtfully. “**The fact is that unless**

you each are going to outshine yourself—your virtue surpassing that of the Academics and Dedicated—never ever are you getting into—” He paused, smiling with a twinkle in his eye.

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

“The realm of the skies!” He announced.

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

“But the Dedicate are always citing our violations of any detail of the ancient laws to us,” A gruff voice called out. “How can anyone surpass them?”

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

The crowd laughed at the voice. Many also noted the weakness of the threat, despite its volume.

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

People chuckled.

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

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

“Someone, however,” the speaker continued in a more serious voice, **“who might possibly say, ‘you moron!’ He is going to bind himself—.”** He made a tossing-out-the-trash motion. **“Into the Jerusalem trash heap of the fire.”** The speaker pretended to shield his face from the flames, but then he held his nose as if something stunk.

Many laughed at the reference to Jerusalem’s smelly dump for burning

trash, Gehenna.

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

"If you present a gift on the altar, do you make amends for yourself?"

The speaker repeated for the crowd. He then acted like someone bringing an offering toward the temple's altar. He suddenly stopped and hit the side of his head with his palm. **"You might be reminded,"** he explained, **"That your brother has something against you."**

People chuckled.

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

Many laughed.

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

Applause rippled through the crowd.

"But my 'brother' is taking me to court!" Another man blurted out over the applause, almost before the speaker had finished.

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

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

This drew more laughter from the crowd.

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

People laughed.

The Teacher gripped imaginary bars, stared sadly at the audience, and said, **"Honestly, I'm telling you. Never are you getting out of there, until possibly—"** He paused. **"You have turned over—"** He reached into his belt and pulled out a copper coin. **"Your last penny!"** He kissed the coin

good-bye and tossed it into a group of children.

The children scrambled.

The people laughed and applauded.

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

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

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

Hearing the comment, the speaker smiled and shook his head, no.

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

Many chuckled at the voice. Others shushed them because for laughing at the law.

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

The crowd laughed.

"To the point of obsession," he continued, holding his head as if in pain. **"He has already betrayed his vow."** He paused and pointed to his chest, **"In his heart."**

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

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

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

Many in the crowd noticed, pointed, and laughed.

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

Now, everyone laughed.

"Trips you up!" The speaker squawked as he staggered. Then he wagged an accusing finger at his eye and said, **"Pluck it out—."** He covered the

offending eye with one hand while the other pretended to pull it out. **“And toss it away from you.”** He made a clumsy toss while still covering his right eye and grimacing in mock pain.

The people laughed.

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

The audience groaned and laughed.

“And you don’t want your body,” he continued lightheartedly, **“tossed into Jerusalem’s trash heap.”** He repeated the motion of tossing out the trash.

The crowd laughed and applauded.

Not deterred, another joker called out, “My problem isn’t my eye! It’s my right hand!” He raised his fist and forearm and pumped then up and down suggestively.

Many groaned. Others booed. Some laughed.

“And so,” the speaker responded, still smiling but sounding more concerned. **“If that right of yours—,”** he said, holding up his own hand. **“Hand and forearm.”** He clarified as he lifted his forearm, but instead of duplicating the man’s gesture, his arm fly down, hitting his leg causing him again to stumble. **“Trips you up,”** he squawked, almost falling.

Again, everyone laughed.

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

This drew more chuckles.

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

The audience began to snicker anticipating what was coming next.

“One of your—.” He paused, moving his hand very slowly down below his waist. **“Members,”** he squeaked.

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

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

The crowd guffawed.

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

The audience laughed and applauded the suggestion.

“**So,**” the speaker responded in his old man voice, “**it has been proclaimed!**”

The audience laughed harder.

Then he again pretended to open a scroll and read in a funny voice, “**Whoever possibly might cut loose that woman of his, let him give her a divorce notice.**” The speaker continued in his own voice. “**I myself, however, am telling you all—that everyone cutting loose that woman of his—except for the reason of whoring—he forces her to become betrayed in that vow.**”

Most of the crowd applauded, especially the women.

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

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

“**And if anyone marries a loose woman,**” the speaker responded easily. “**He betrays the vow to himself.**”

This drew applause and a little laughter.

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

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

It drew both laughter and groans from the crowd.

“**I myself, however,**” the speaker continued, pretending arrogance, “**am telling you all, you don’t want—anyone of you—to swear for your own benefit at all! Neither on the sky—seeing that a judge’s bench is for the Divine.**” He pointed skyward at the clouds. “**Nor on the ground,**” the teacher continued. “**Because a footstool—**” he explained, pointing at a small mound of dirt, “**is for those feet of His.**” He lifted one of his feet and rested it on the mound to illustrate.

This brought a chuckle from the crowd.

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

The speaker nodded his head in recognition of the practice.

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

The crowd laughed.

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

"Nor should you swear on that head of yours," the speaker suggested cheerily. **"Seeing that you really don't have the power to make a single hair—."** He indicated the questioner's head. **"Gray, or—."** He pointed to own head. **"Dark!"** He said this word in a menacing way.

This drew a little laughter.

"Stand up for yourselves!" He continued. **"It must be—that thinking of yours—Yes!"** He said nodding his head enthusiastically. **"Or really no!"** He added shaking his head just as enthusiastically. **"Because more than this is from—the worthless!"** He nodded toward the Dedicated in back.

The crowd laughed. Some jeered.

"So how do we get even when people don't keep their word to us?" Someone asked.

"You have heard tell that it was proclaimed," he said again pretending to unroll a scroll and reading in his old man's voice. **"An eye in return for an eye,"** Then he gave the audience a wink.

The audience chuckled.

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

More chuckled.

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

The audience laughed and clapped in support of the idea.

So," he continued. **"Someone slugs you in the right jaw."** He pretended to punch himself in the face, spinning around from the blow. **"Turn around for him,"** he explained.

The audience laughed.

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

This drew more laughter.

Another voice called out, “Isn’t settling differences man-to-man better than losing our shirts in court?”

This question generated more laughter but also shouts of agreement.

The speaker chuckled at the comment but quickly responded.

“Also,” the speaker said, **“for the one wanting to be judged against you.”** He pretended to be in a tug of war with someone. **“And take that shirt of yours—.”** He indicated that the tug-of-war rope was the shirt as he strained pulled on it. He said, **“Let go!”** He released his end of the shirt.

The crowd laughed, envisioning his opponent falling.

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

The crowd laughed harder.

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

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

The man nodded.

“Go along with him,” he said cheerfully, pretending to walk arm-in-arm with someone.

The crowd groaned at the suggestion.

“Two!” The speaker added.

Many in the crowd still groaned but many more laughed.

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

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

“And, to the one wanting from you—to borrow for himself—you might not want to turn away,” he suggested.

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

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

“You have heard tell that it was proclaimed,” the speaker responded, again pretending to unroll a scroll, this time, with more of a flourish. Reading in his old man’s voice, he intoned, **“Love those close to you.”** And then, rolling up the scroll, he sourly added, **“And hate those haters of yours!”** This was another common saying of the Dedicated.

Recognizing the line, the audience hooted.

“I myself, however, am telling you all,” he intoned. **“Care for those haters of yours,”** he said earnestly. **“Pray for those who harass you. In order that you might become children of your Father, the one in the skies.”**

He pointed to the sky in a familiar way. The audience caught on and responded raggedly, **“It has come close—the realm of the skies!”**

“Because,” explained the speaker, now smiling, **“that sun of his?”** He pointed up at the sun, hidden behind the clouds. **“He makes it rise on the worthless.”** He patted his own chest humbly. **“And the valuable,”** he indicated the detestable ones. **“Not only does He shower on the law-abiding,”** he added, indicating the Dedicated. **“But also the law-breakers,”** he added, gesturing toward the foreigners.

“If maybe—,” he started, then he pausing.

“Since you all—,” the teacher continued, indicating the whole crowd, **“care for those caring for you.”** He pretend to embrace another. **“Why? Are you paid? Never! And the—,”** he said, gesturing toward the prostitutes.

The crowd tittered in expectations.

“Tax collectors?” He said, **“They do that.”**

Many laughed.

“Also, if you all hug those brothers of yours alone,” he continued, pretending another embrace. **“What out of the ordinary are you doing?”** He paused, letting the question sink in. Then he answered it. **“Nothing,”** he suggested, gesturing toward a group of foreigners. **“Don’t even the foreigners act the same?”**

The crowd laughed, the foreigners with them.

“You are going to be, really,” he continued earnestly, indicating the whole crowd again, **“your yourselves, complete. As your Father, the sky One? Completely is.”**

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



“Do you mind if I join you,” a woman asked in a lilting Roman accent as she entered the courtyard. “This is our guest, the famous writer, Quintus, I assume?”

“Yes, Dear,” the magistrate responded, standing up and brightening at his wife’s presence. “Quintus, meet my wife, Cypros.”

“A pleasure to meet you, Lady,” I said, standing and bowing.

She looked maybe ten years in younger than the magistrate, in her early thirties, attractive in a sharp-featured way. She was a small woman, barely reaching my shoulder.

“I overheard you reading,” she responded with a tight smile. “You must be congratulated on keeping Marcus sitting still so long. ”

“She has been trying to get me to read your work, unsuccessfully thus far,” the magistrate responded with a mischievous smile.

“Did my husband mention that, despite his expensive education, he can barely read?” She answered back.

“I can read Latin alright, but the Greek letters defy me,” the man said defending himself.

“This new work of yours sounds very different from what I read,” she said. “Much more entertaining. More like the stories people tell about the Nazarene.”

“Cicero claimed the Romans’ oratory is what elevated our society above all others,” the magistrate said. “Could this man’s oratory be as important for Judean society?”

The question was beyond me.

“People left his events happy and filled with good will and that continues today,” I observed. “Many say his words are healing.”

“Do his opponents feel that way?” The magistrate’s wife, **Cypros**, asked.

“At his events, even most of the Dedicated enjoyed themselves, though they might not admit it,” I explained. ”

“Which naturally forced their leaders to hate him more,” the magistrate observed.

“Do you think that people who hate the man today, like this Hatarsi, ever heard him speak?” His wife asked me.

“Where did you hear about Hatarsi?” Her husband asked, clearly surprised his wife had known the name.

"Women talk," his wife said laughing. "New rumors about him were circulating in the market this morning."

"I doubt that Hatarsi ever heard the Nazarene speak," I said, answering her question. "Hating the growing influence of his Followers today is easier than hating the man or his message. Most think he will be revered some day."

The magistrate nodded.

He and his wife looked at each other. Something passed between them.

I asked that magistrate, "How did you know to arrest me? That I would be in Tiberias?"

"An informer," he answered casually.

"Someone in town here?" I asked.

"No idea," the magistrate admitted. "An officer was passed a note with your name, when and where you would be in Tiberias, and that you were wanted by Pilate."

"Who knew you were going to be here?" His wife asked with a look of concern.

"My wife knew my plans a week ago," I said, "but she could have told anyone, almost certainly her family. But how would anyone know that Pilate wanted me?"

"Lists of wanted men are posted with bounties," the magistrate explained. "People who know their community, such as tax collectors, check these lists."

My stomach turned at the mention of tax collectors.

"After all, your name is well known," the magistrate's wife suggested.

I didn't contradict her to explain about my name.

"I did have a question about your Evidence," she continued. "I noticed that you had signed the copy that I read. Do you do that for all your copies or was the one have special?"

"I sign all of them since the trial."

"Why?" She asked.

"Many others now sell copies of the Nazarene's sayings," I explained. "But I witnessed before Pilate. My recordings were legal evidence. A signature verifies my copies and makes my version more valuable."

"Good idea," the woman, **Cypros**, noted approvingly.

"And you have more of these scrolls, correct?" The magistrate asked.

Again, he and his wife shared a look. “Besides this one and the other that we found in your bag?”

“Yes,” I said. “When they are finished. These two are mostly finished, but I am working on several more.”

“Do you keep your work at your home in Capernaum?” The magistrate asked.

I didn’t want to say. Suddenly, I was concerned about the man’s interest in my work.

The couple continued staring at me, waiting for an answer. I didn’t see any alternative.

I nodded.

“With your notes, the originals and witness interviews?” The magistrate asked.

I nodded. This made me more nervous. Unlike my work, my notes, originals, and interviews hadn’t been copied.

“Another odd thing,” the magistrate added. “About your arrest. Romans pay bounties, but this anonymous informer didn’t claim your bounty.”

“What does that mean?” I asked.

“That turning you in was political—or personal,” the magistrate’s wife explained. “We can talk more about that later over dinner. For now, I want to hear your new work. Would you like me to read it?”

I gratefully turned the task over to her. My mind was spinning. Who had turned me in? What did this magistrate and his wife want of me?

6.

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

The speaker nodded enthusiastically but offered a caveat.

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

“If I get recognition from others?” She asked.

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

“Isn’t my kindness a good example?” She asked.

“When you truly perform a kindness,” he advised her, **“you don’t want**

to trumpet it in front of people. The same as actors, performing in the meeting places and in the crowded streets,” he said, posing like an actor blowing a horn.

People chuckled.

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

“For you, however,” the speaker said, turning again to the woman, “performing a kindness of yours—don’t let your left,” he said, holding his left hand up, “know what it is doing—that right hand of yours.” His right hand crept into his belt and furtively tossed a penny toward a group of children.

Everyone, especially the children, laughed.

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

Most cheered the idea.

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

“Also when you pray for yourself,” the speaker responded happily, “you are really not going to be—.” He paused and took a dramatic pose and announced, “Like the actors!” Then continued in his normal voice. “Because they love—in the meeting places and in the crossroads—standing to pray for themselves so that they shine among the people!” He put his hands up in the air and bowed over and over, moving his arms to draw attention to himself.”

Everyone laughed.

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

The crowd laughed.

“You, however,” he continued more seriously, addressing the man who asked the question, “when you pray, go in that inner sanctum of yours. And shutting that door of yours.” He act out shutting a door. “Pray to that Father of yours—the one within the hidden. And that Father of yours—the one seeing into the hidden—is going to pay you back.”

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

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

Everyone, including the foreigners, laughed.

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

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

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

The speaker looked at his audience quietly for a moment.

“In this way, then, you pray for yourselves,” he announced. **“All of you!”**

He looked to the sky and spread his arms. Then shifting his voice to a rich baritone, he said emotionally: **“Father of ours—the one in the skies, It is been made sacred—that name of Yours. It is starting—that reign of Yours. It is coming into being—that purpose of Yours, as much as possible in sky and on earth.”**

He again pulled out the flat bread from his belt and held it up.

“This bread of ours? The one sufficient for now? Give to us today! “Also, let go of what is owed by us, as much as we ourselves also let go of those who owe us.”

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

Many chuckled.

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

He stopped, arms outstretched, bread in hand, looking upward. His silence and that of his audience lingered. He then took a deep breath, visibly relaxing, tucked the bread away, and looked back to the crowd. He spread his hands, indicating that he was open to more questions.

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

masters also there.

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

The crowd started chuckling again.

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

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

Many laughed.

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

More laughter.

“Neither is that Father of yours,” he said, **“going to let go of those missteps of yours.”** He stepped backward one more, stumbled, and fell on his seat.

The crowd laughed. Many applauded.

★ ★ ★

Cypros paused in her reading.

“Quite an entertainer,” the magistrate remarked.

“And his advice, husband of mine?” the magistrate’s wife asked him with a sweet smile. “Do you know anyone with whose missteps got them into debt?”

He laughed.

“I see why this teaching appeals to you,” the man responded. “But I would rather pay off my debts than have them forgiven.”

The husband and wife shared a look.

Then she started reading again.



As the laughter faded, the Teacher stood up, dusting off his bottom. A beardless youth wearing the rough clothing of the Ascetics asked, “Does fasting help us pray?”

The speaker nodded but explained to the crowd, **“When, however, you all fast, you don’t want to become—like the actors!”** He said the last phrase dramatically mimicking an actor. Then he made a sad face. Pointing at it, he announced, **“Gloomy!”**

The audience laughed.

“Since they mask those faces of theirs,” he said. Passing a hand over his face, his expression changed to happy. **“So that they might show off among people!”** Returning to his sad face, he pointed to himself and announced dramatically, **“Fasting!”**

Everyone laughed.

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

Everyone laughed.

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

The youth nodded uncertainly, yes.

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

The young man smoothed his hair with it.

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

This generated more applause.

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

“Payment in the skies?” Someone scoffed.

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

In response, the speaker looked shocked.

“You don’t want to accumulate for yourselves accumulations—on the earth,” he said, emphasizing the last words as if the idea was silly.

“Where insect and eating wipe out, and where robbers tunnel in and rob?” His tone indicated that the idea was crazy.

People laughed.

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

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

The teacher shook his head, no.

“Because,” the teacher explained, **“wherever it is—that accumulation of yours.”** He pointed to the ground. **“There it is—that heart of yours.”** He made his pointing hand into a fist, pulsing it as if it was a beating heart.

Everyone laughed.

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

Many voices from the crowd agreed.

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

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

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

The rotund man in white gleamed in the ray of sun.

The crowd laughed, but many noticed the coincidence.

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

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

People chuckled nervously at the coincidence. Murmuring spread.

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

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

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

himself to one," he said, again indicating the brightening sky. **"And he is going to look down on the other."** Again, pointing to the ground.

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

Many laughed. Others applauded.

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

"We have to eat!" Cried one.

"We have to drink!" Shouted another.

"We cannot go naked!" A third complained.

"By this, I'm telling you all," the speaker explained seriously. **"Don't worry about that self of yours. What you might put in your mouth?"**

He touched his lips. **"Or drink?"** He pretended to lift a cup. **"And nor for that body of yours."** He patted his chest. **"What you might put on."** He pretended to wrap a robe around himself. **"Certainly not! This self is more than food. And the body? A covering!"**

The crowd was quiet.

At this point, a flock of birds flew overhead.

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

This drew laughter, especially from the children.

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

This drew more laughter.

"Aren't you yourselves—more important than they?" The speaker asked playfully.

There were murmurs of agreement.

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

The crowd laughed, again especially the children.

"Also," the teacher continued happily. **"About your wrappings. Why do you worry?"** He bent down and picked a wildflower. **"Look closely at the wildflowers of the countryside."** He held up the flower and sang, **"How do**

they grow? They don't slow. Nor do they sew."

Everyone laughed again.

"I'm saying, however, to you all," he continued cheerfully. **"That not even Solomon with all that recognition of his."** He stood up straight and emulated a regal stroll. **"Tossed around himself—."** He pretended to throw a cape around his shoulders. **"As well as one of these."** He held up the flower again, spinning it. **"If, however, the foliage of the countryside,"** he said, gesturing to the surrounding vegetation, **"existing for today, and tomorrow? Into the oven, it is being tossed! The Divine in this way,"** he said, holding up his flower. **"Clothes!"**

"But he doesn't clothe *us* like that!" Someone complained.

"No?" The speaker asked. He indicated their clothing. **"Much better!"** He suggested. **"For all of you! You tiny trusters!"**

Looking at all their different clothing colors and styles, people laughed.

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

The crowd laughed in response.

"Because, all these," the speaker continued, indicating the group that brought the food, **"the foreigners focus on!"**

As foreigners in that group signalled their agreement by raising a wine-skin, the audience laughed and applauded.

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

Everyone cheered.

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

This won both laughter and applause from the crowd.

7.

"The scene you offer fascinating," his wife commented, interrupting her

reading. "Much better than reading his quotes alone!"

I bowed acknowledging the complement.

"But I am confused about something," she continued. "This version contains the same sayings as in the original Evidence? And this one event included all these sayings from the Nazarene, one after another? Nothing left out? Nothing rearranged? Nothing added?"

"All the same sayings, nothing added," I agreed.

"It isn't possible!" She stated flatly.

"What isn't possible?" Both I and her husband asked together.

"When I read your Evidence," the woman explained. "I assumed its sayings were written down at different times. Topics changed. One quote addressed a group, the next, an individual. But, in this new work, the changes are just from people's questions, one after another. Is that really how it was?"

"Yes," I said, hoping that I sounded confident.

"Why is that impossible?" The magistrate asked his wife.

"You are not much of a writer, so you wouldn't know," she said, addressing her husband. "But one person could not have written down all these sayings, one after another, without missing more than the questions!"

Her husband got her point and nodded.

"Quintus uses a code for fast recording, apparently Cicero's servant, Tiro, developed something similar to record Cicero's speeches," the magistrate explained, showing off his new knowledge.

"But this was in the middle of a the countryside," his wife continued. "Not the middle of a city. In the heat of Judea, ink dries on the stone in moments. You have to continually add water and remix it. Did you have someone with you preparing your ink as you worked?"

"No," I admitted. "But I don't use ink. I used a plumbago stick."

"Plum—ba—go?" Both the magistrate and his wife repeated.

"Yes, a soft, black stone," I explained. "It blackens pottery, but you can also write with it. After my father's death, we went to live with my mother's family in Sidon. They were potters. They mix plumbago with clay to make a stick that it hard enough to write with. Here, I can show you."

I dug into the travel bag and pulled out a flat, wooden box. Opening it, I showed the sticks to the magistrate's wife.

"Black clay straws?" She guessed.

"Not straws. They are solid," I said, taking one out and showing it to her than to him. "I write with the sharp end." I pointed to the edge. "As the sharp edge wears down, I chip a new one."

"Show me!" The magistrate demanded.

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

They both looked at each other and then laughed.

"Demonstrate *writing* with it," his wife explained slowly.

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

"The wooden grips hold the stick so it doesn't break," I explained. "And they keep my hand from getting too black."

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

"Your code is like chicken scratches made with charcoal," he observed, showing it to his wife.

"What does it say?" she said, studying the paper.

"It says, 'This sentence is written in fast recording code with a plumbago stick.'" I answered.

"And with this code and writing stick, you can record a man speaking at a normal speed?" Cypros asked.

"I can demonstrate if you would like," I offered, pulling out some more paper.

"Pretend you are Cicero and make a little speech," the magistrate's wife suggested.

The man smiled and nodded.

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

"A powerful Roman became my patron there. He had me educated with his own son Drusus. Drusus became my best friend. His own family, like mine, was a nest of vipers. Drusus and I thought we would be different. He was the friend I described earlier as having a great sense of humor.

We both went to war together and won some honor. Drusus married and soon after, I met my wife, and we married. We both started families. However, when he was in his early twenties, Drusus was killed by poison.

I suspected members of his family but couldn't prove anything. Some attempted to blame me, but his father didn't believe them.

"After the death of Drusus, I went through a bad period, drinking and gambling, but my wife saved me getting my involved with her family in investing and banking. Then came the Roman bank crisis of a few years ago. This left us with some terrible debts. We fled Rome, returning to Judea. My sister and wife convinced my uncle to buy my magistrate position here in Tiberias.

"So did you get that written down?" He asked.

I nodded.

"Read it back," the magistrate commanded.

"But, since a clever man could have memorized what my husband said," the wife added. "Read it backwards, as you wrote it, word for word."

Both the magistrate and I laughed at the idea, but I did as requested. Again, I realized that the man hadn't mentioned his family name.

When I was done, the man and his wife regarded each other for a moment.

"Amazing!" He said at last. "A system that copies speech as it happens. Your employer, Appius, knows you can do this?"

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

"Because it is cheaper to send one recorder than many," the wife finished. "So your original records are all in this chicken scratching? This code?"

I nodded.

The woman and her husband looked at each other again. There was clearly a lot going on between them that I had no hope of understanding.

The magistrate asked, "Are there others who can do this? This speed recording?"

"My wife a little," I admitted.

"We should meet her," the magistrate's wife said.

"We will send for her along with your other materials," the magistrate responded.

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

Seeming to sense my anxiety, the magistrate and his wife both smiled.

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

“I assure you,” his wife said, “my husband always has the intention to keep his word.”

I am not sure that I felt reassured at all.

The magistrate signaled for me to start reading.

8.

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

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

The speaker smiled but shook his head “no.”

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

The Judeans laughed and jeered.

“When,” he continued, **“you all don’t want to be criticized. Because by what criticisms you all criticize, you are all—.”** He indicated the larger gathering, which was mostly Judean. **“Going to be criticized. Also, by what scale you all measure, it is going to be measured to you all.”**

He indicated the whole audience as one.

A thoughtful silence followed. Both groups followed Moses. The division between them, the Judeans who worshipped at the temple and the Watchers who worshipped on Mount Gerizim, went back hundreds of years. All the foreigners among them consider them the same people.

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

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

The speaker laughed.

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

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

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

The man nodded.

“The one, however in your own eye?” The teacher asked him.

The man looked confused.

“A plank!” The speaker described it, holding the flat of his hand over his

right eye.

The Watcher looked confused.

“You really don’t understand?” The teacher asked?

The Watcher shook his head, no.

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

The crowd laughed.

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

Judeans and Watchers were both laughing.

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

The audience laughed and applauded.

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

The Watcher copied him, taking his hand from his eye, and looking around blinking.

The crowd laughed.

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

The crowd laughed and cheered them both.

“You play the fool!” One of the Dedicated leaders accused the speaker from the back of the crowd. **“For the dogs.”** He pointed to the Watchers, using the common term for insulting them. **“And to the sows.”** He pointed to the prostitutes, using the common slang for describing them as well. **“Your pearls of wisdom defile the sacred!”**

The applause died down.

“You all,” the speaker said playfully indicating the Dedicated, **“don’t want to give the sacred to the dogs. Nor are you all going to toss those pearls of yours in front of the sows. Not when, they might want to trample them with those feet of theirs. And, being turned around—.”** He said using a term also mean changing one’s mind and being converted. **“They might break you all!”**

A few in the crowd started clapping. The Watchers and the detestable ones started first then foreigners. Others joined the applause, group after group until almost all were united.

The Dedicated warily began separating themselves from the crowd.

The teacher raised his hands for quiet.

“Ask,” he said addressing his audience earnestly, **“And it will be given to you *all*. Search—and you *all* are going to discover! Knock,”** he said, rapping with his knuckles over his heart. **“And it is going to be opened for you *all*!”**

The crowd celebrated the idea.

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

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

“Even for us?” A man from the detestable ones, a tax-collector, asked.

Certainly!” Responded the teacher happily.

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

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

The man looked confused.

The teacher gestured for the man and his boy to come up to the stage.

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

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

The crowd laughed.

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

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

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

The fisherman agreed. The teacher playfully offered the snake to the boy. Instead of drawing back in fear, the boy laughed and reached for it eagerly.

The teacher looked to the father for approval. When the man nodded, the teacher gave the boy the snake.

The crowd laughed and applauded.

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

Everyone laughed.

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

This left the audience quiet and thoughtful.

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

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

“As much as I need?” She asked.

“As much as,” he responded, spreading his hands far apart to show how much.

He then paused and looked at the audience seriously.

“If you all,” he said with a sweeping gesture with his right hand including the entire audience, **“desire what they might create for you— those people.”** He again indicated the whole group, this time with a sweep of his left hand. **“So much,”** he said, spreading his hands apart again. **“You yourselves, must also create for them. Because this is the traditional law and the shining lights!”**

This drew applause from the whole hillside.

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

The speaker let it continue for a few moments, but then held up his hands for silence.

As it grew quieter, a young man asked, “How do we produce the most value for others and avoid wasting our efforts?”

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

The audience chuckled at his struggles.

“Because wide and spacious,” he explained, spreading his arms wide.

“The path, the one leading—into the wasteland. And many are the ones going through it.” He made his tossing-out-the-trash motion.

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

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

Again, the teacher gestured for quiet.

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

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

This confused everyone. A few chuckled.

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

The crowd laughed.

“From those fruits of theirs,” he said with conviction, **“you are going to find out about them for yourselves. By skill, do they collect from thorn bushes—bunches of grapes!”** He held up an imaginary bunch. **“Or from cacti—figs! So every valuable tree?”** The teacher held his right forearm straight upright, with his fingers spread like the branches of a tree. **“A beautiful fruit!”** He held out his left hand as if grasping a plump fruit. **“It creates!”** Then, he twisted his right hand and forearm so the tree was crooked. **“However, the diseased tree? Worthless fruit, it creates!”** He crabbed his left hand as if holding a misshapen fruit. **“It doesn’t really have the power,”** the speaker explained, **“a tree that is valuable, to grow fruit that is worthless. Nor a tree that is rotten, to create fruits that are beautiful. Every tree—not wanting to create beautiful fruit—cuts itself off,”** he said simply, chopping at his tree arm. **“And—into the fire—it tosses itself.”** He made a throwing-out-the-garbage motion.

The crowd chuckled.

“Watch!” The speaker announced, directing the audience’s attention

back to the Dedicated. **“From those fruits of theirs, you are going to find out about them for yourselves!”**

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

Most of the remaining applauded and some began to cheer.

“You are our new master!” Someone shouted to the teacher.

Several cheered this statement.

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

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

The speaker surprised the crowd by nodding his agreement.

“Many are going to say to me on that day,” the speaker responded. He switched to the fawning voice again and whined, **“Master! Master! Didn’t we—by your name—act as shining lights? And—by your name—people’s demons? We tossed them out! And—by your name—powers? Many, we created!”**

The crowd laughed.

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

The people applauded.

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

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

Most laughed, thinking that he meant the house.

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

This generated new laughter.

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

Many laughed, thinking that he meant the Dedicated.

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

People laughed.

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

Most laughed, but no one knew what to think.

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

Everyone applauded enthusiastically.

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

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

“And, *it* came down—,” he said again, but now everyone knew what was coming. **“The rain, and *they* showed up—the floods. And *they* blew—the winds. And *they* fell against that house—that one!”** He pointed down to the beach, his voice growing somber. **“And? It. Fell!”** He said slowly. **“And, *it* was—the crash of it?”** He went silent for a moment, staring at the audience intently until it was dead quiet. Then he suddenly whooped, **“Stupendous!”**

The crowd jumped. Then everyone laughed.

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

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

9.

The magistrate’s wife, Cypros finished and began re-rolling the scroll.

“Interesting,” the magistrate said. “So the question is, whose house is

going to fall? The Dedicated's? Judea's? Rome's?"

"Or no one's?" His wife suggested, "If people follow this teacher's ideas."

They both chuckled.

"Which raises another question," she continued. "Do you believe that this teacher was raised from the dead as his Followers claim?"

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

"A wise man never contradicts his wife," the magistrate agreed with a chuckle. His wife laughed and applauded.

At that point a female servant came in and signaled the magistrate's wife.

She said, "Gentlemen, our meal is ready, can you follow me?"

She led us into a formal dining room, a round table, surrounded by couches. She had dining robes hanging there for us. There were places set for three. After dressing, I took the place they indicated. The magistrate sat next to me.

Before she sat down, **Cypros nodded to another female servant by the door. She brought in three children, a boy, the girl I had met at my window earlier, and a toddler.**

"Children, I would like you to meet the famous writer, Quintus Figuli," Cypros said.

She put her hand on the boy's head and said, "Quintus, this is Marcus, our oldest. He's eight." The boy made a polite bow with a serious look on his face.

She then put her hand on the girl's head and said, "This is Berenice, our oldest daughter, she's seven." The young girl smiled in secret recognition and curtsied.

Cypros then picked up the toddler and said, "This is our youngest daughter, Miriamne. I forget, how old are you, Miria?" The girl held up two fingers and then hid her face in her mother's shoulder.

I chuckled. "Miria! I have a daughter just your age!"

The little girl turned and looked around the room. Not seeing any other little girl, she scowled at me.

"Not here," I clarified, "She is at home with her mom."

The adults laughed. Cypros handed the toddler back to their nurse and took a seat on her couch. **I found myself imagining our two-year old playing with theirs.**

The magistrate began serving the wine, which was already on the table.

As he poured, he said. "In any case, this teacher, The Master, as you call him, disappeared years ago and yet his influence grows. How many heard him speak when he was alive?" The magistrate continued.

"Tens of thousands?" I guessed.

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

I thought for a moment.

"A hundred thousand?" I guessed.

"Much more," his wife said confidently. "Many times that, I think."

"Hundreds of thousands is probably closer to the mark," her husband agreed.

A pair of servants brought hand bowls of water to the table for each of us. We all performed the ritual of cleansing our people hands before meals. It was the first sign I had seen that I was truly in a Judean household.

The servants then began bringing food dishes starting with the bread.

I took up a small loaf, tore off a piece and passed it to Cypros. I held my piece up and started the blessing, "This bread, sufficient for now, give to us this day."

She apparently was more familiar with the ritual than her husband. She tore off a piece and passed it to him. She held up her piece and said, "Also, let go of what is owed by us."

"A prayer before meals? A new ritual of the followers of the Nazarene?" Her husband guessed. "What do I say?"

"The next line is 'As much as we let go of those who owe us,'" his wife prompted. I wondered if she remember it from her reading of it she had heard the prayer before.

He tore of his piece of bread and repeated the line. I was somewhat

"My wife is much more religious than I am," the magistrate explained. "Though she didn't adopt the Judean God until our marriage."

"I do like the idea of being a special people, with a special God," she admitted. "Separate from all the regular people of the world. The narrow path, I think your Nazarene called it."

"He didn't seem to like how the Dedicated consider themselves special," her husband pointed out.

"I wished that I had been able to hear the man speak," his wife responded, ignoring her. "Especially after reading your new work."

Her husband rolled his eyes.

"My wife has been interested in this teacher for some time," the magistrate explained. "She want to see his student's speak sometime."

"They are called the Ones Sent," **Cypros** added. "Right?"

I nodded.

"Have you met them?" She asked.

"Yes, several of them. When I was following the teacher and in my work since then," I admitted, explaining no more than was needed. The magistrate and his wife clearly had their secrets, but I had mine as well.

"Really?" She exclaimed. "Are any of them as entertaining as their teacher?"

"No," I said. "But, they recount events from his life, his sayings, and act out some of his stories like they did what he was alive."

"They acted out his stories?" She asked.

"What stories?" Asked her husband.

"They come a little later in the Evidence," she explained to him. "Lessons describing the realm of the skies. I hope the Ones Sent return to the area soon."

"They are probably safer in Jerusalem," he husband said. "You mentioned news in the marketplace about Hatarsi, the leader of the Follower's opponents?"

"There is a rumor going around that he is raising a private army, up near Syria," she said. "Recruiting mostly young Militants. They call themselves 'the Daggers.'"

"If true, he is a fool to let the news out," the magistrate said. "The Roman's won't allow an army, even if the fighting is only between religious sects."

"But there is more to the story," Cypros added enthusiastically. "They say that Hatarsi's financial support comes from Jerusalem. From Gamaliel himself, head of the Great Council. And Pilate has given some sort of tacit permission as long as they don't make trouble in Judea or Decapolis."

"I don't believe it," the magistrate said. "Pilate is a lot of things, but he isn't someone who can be bribed. If it was Antipas, I might believe it."

"Well, something might be going on with Antipas as well," his wife said, obviously very pleased to know things that her husband did not. "I saw Joanna, Chuza's wife."

I was startled to hear the name.

Then turning to me, the magistrate explained. "Chuza is the estate manager for Antipas's palace here in Tiberias, richer and more powerful than almost anyone else in this city, even though he is technically a slave."

At that point, Eutyches, the servant, who was lurking in the back of the room, not serving the meal nor eating himself, made a loud grunt of disapproval.

"Eutyches is more defensive of our social position than we are," Cypros explained.

"What did Joanna have to say?" Her husband asked. "Antipas would never use her to send us a message, even a personal one. He would use my brother, I think."

"She didn't really say anything, but she approached me and tried to make small talk," Cypros explained. "She was clearly very nervous about something. Then she asked if she could come over tomorrow so we could talk."

"She invited herself here?" Her husband said, surprised. "Maybe she has heard we have a house guest."

"I thought Quintus's presence was a secret," Cypros responded. "One we are trying to keep from Antipas specifically."

"I never thought I could keep it from the palace here," the magistrate responded. "Just from Antipas himself. The palace hears everything, but they don't bother Antipas with much, especially when he is in the field, fighting a war, or when he is staying at his other palace in Autocratoris."

"Talk of Antipas spoils my appetite," his wife complained. "We are worrying our dinner guest. Let us have a nice meal and get to know one another."

For the rest of the meal, we made polite conversation. They asked me about my wife, our daughter, our life in Capernaum, and our business. They talked about their children. There were a few serious questions about our business, how much we charged for our copies, how many we sold. I knew I was being evaluated or rather sized up for something, but I was in no position to resist answering them. All in all, I felt that they were very easy to talk to despite being as Roman as they were.

After the meal was done, the magistrate himself gave the ritual after meal blessing and we again washed our hands.

They told me that they needed to discuss my situation, and, when they had made some decisions, the magistrate would come discuss my situation

with me.

Then, I was led back to my small room.

The magistrate appeared about an hour later.

"Are you sending me to Pilate?" I asked. "Or keeping me here?"

"For now, keeping you here," he said seriously. "We are going to try a number of different things. First, you are going to teach Eutyches your system of recording, or at least start. If Antipas hears about your being here, I want to tell him that your system has value as a military code system. Every ruler is interested in new code systems. Can you do that? Are you willing?"

"It will take several days," I said. "Depending on how well your servant knows written languages."

"Shouldn't be a problem. Eutyches is literate in six languages, including several local ones," he said.

"Antipas might give me sanctuary in exchange for a code system?" I asked.

"As long as Pilate doesn't know about it," the magistrate explained.

"Unfortunately, from what you said about your business, you aren't wealthy enough to offer Antipas a big enough bribe for long-term sanctuary."

So that was what the questions about our business were about.

"Do you still want to send for my wife?" I asked.

He nodded.

"Write a note to her. Eutyches will carry it to her, taking some of my men with him."

"Why the extra men to deliver a note?" I asked.

"The men are to help her bring what she needs so she can move out quietly, without telling anyone locally what she is doing," the magistrate explained.

"Not her family?" I asked.

"Nor friends," he said sternly. "You clearly have enemies, personal or political within your sphere. It won't do either of us any good if Pilate gets news you are here."

"What do I tell her?" I asked.

He thought for a moment.

"Write that she must leave and send a note to her family and friends," he said carefully, "It should say that you never made it to your witness interviews here in Tiberias."

"Because if I didn't go to the witness interview, I wouldn't have been arrested," I deduced.

"Exactly," he said. "And the news has to be positive. You stumbled on an exciting opportunity for your business elsewhere. She should write that she left because you needed her assistance in working on that opportunity."

"So her note to her family won't worry them," I said. "But what do I tell my wife? Do I tell her that I have been arrested?"

"Not exactly," he said. "Tell her the truth: that you are both to be my secret guests here. Tell her that I am the noble Marcus Julius Agrippa, a grandson of Herod the Great, a nephew of the Tetrarch, Antipas. Throw in that the Emperor Tiberias was, and maybe still is, my patron in Rome. Write her that I am interested in your business and the Nazarene and that I want to learn more, but, because of my family and position, I must keep my interest a secret."

"Is all of that true?" I asked.

"Absolutely," he said. "I have grown shy about giving out my name, given the Herod family's reputation. But also write that this secret may be a matter of life and death. That is also true and believable coming from a Herod."

"That *will* worry her," I said.

"A little worry is good," he responded. "And be sure to tell her to bring all your records: your new work, the originals and earliest copies of the Evidence, and all of your notes."

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