

## Opening.

From the words of the wisest king to ever walk the Earth, “Again I looked and saw all the *oppression* that was taking place under the Sun:

I saw the tears of the oppressed— and they have no comforter; power was on the side of their oppressors— and they have no comforter.

And I declared that the Dead, who had *already* died, are happier than the Living, who are still alive. But better than *both* is he who has not yet been, who has not seen the *evil* that is done under the Sun.

And I saw that all labor and all achievement spring from man’s *envy* of his neighbor. This *too* is meaningless, a chasing after the wind” {Eccl. 4:1-4}.

## Enemies of the Father’s Son.

Now ...close your eyes. Picture Jesus on the pavement before Pilate, the Son of God standing before the ruler of men, the Roman governor on his seat of judgment {his *bema*}. Back and forth this goes, with Pilate questioning the Lord of Glory, and Jesus offering him the untrammelled truth ...then Pilate shaking his head in disbelief. Over and over again, after the most thorough of Roman examinations, Pilate can find no charges which will stick to Jesus. Again and again, he stands before the Jews and declares ‘there is *no guilt* in this Man— nothing worthy of death!’ [i] Luke 23:4, “I find no basis for a charge against this Man;” [ii] “He has done nothing to deserve death,” v. 15 {vv. 13-16}; [iii] “I have found in Him no grounds for the death penalty,” v. 22.

Then, in order to satisfy the mob {if that’s even *possible*, in any place and time!}, we get this. Listen to me closely, before you watch this, as I quote from a Medieval Age. “There were young knights among them who had never been present at a stricken field. Some could not look upon it, some could not speak. They held themselves apart from the others who were *cutting down* prisoners at my lord’s orders, for the prisoners were a body too numerous to be guarded by those of us who were left. Then Jean De Rye, an aged knight of purple who had been sore wounded in the fight, rode up to the group of young knights and said: ‘Are ye maidens with your downcast eyes? Look well upon it. See *all* of it. Close your eyes to *nothing*. For the battle is fought to be *won*, and this is what *happens* if you lose.’” Here’s what I want to say. *Watch* it, all of it, every second. Because this is what *happens* when the kingdom of darkness *wins*, just for a moment. Jesus said, “**But this is your *hour*— when darkness reigns**” {Lk. 22:53}. This is what *envy* and arrogance can do; this is what *misguided* zeal and *religious* hatred

can inspire. *Evil*. That the suffering of the Messiah “for the sins of many” {Isa. 53:12} was foreknown and foreordained by His *Abba* does not negate the horrific cruelty of the Cross, nor the travesty of human justice which sent Him there!

**Reader Engagement— Pull up the YouTube clip from *The Passion of the Christ*: ‘Jesus Scourged.’**

Yet even after this, what do we see in the Gospels? Stirred by the fervor of their religious leaders’ hatred and envy, they *scream* for Jesus’ death. “**What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ? ...Crucify Him! Why? What crime has He committed? ...But they shouted all the louder, ‘Crucify, crucify!’**” {Matt. 27:22-23}. It’s just one word in the Greek, like the football chants of a rabid fan-base: ‘*D-fense, D-fense!*’ If I were to yell, ‘*Ar-kan-sas!*’ what would you say in return? It is pure mob mentality at this point. As Matthew recorded, “**When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar [a riot] was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. ‘I am innocent of this man’s blood,’ he said. ‘It is your responsibility!’**” {27:24}. And “**all the people answered, ‘Let His blood be on us and on our children,’**” v. 25. And it *was*. One generation away, in 70 AD, the Day of Reckoning would come.

I was thinking about Jesus the other day, about the inevitability of Jesus’ death. It *was going to happen*; it *was bound to happen*. You can’t bring the Message He brought and live the Life He lived, you can’t teach the things He taught and so beautifully illustrate by your actions a Life of devotion to God, passion for God, and allegiance to His Kingdom in *complete* contradiction to the kingdoms of this Earth, to their gluttony and greed, their *lust* for Mammon and *hunger* for power, to the worship of *oneself* ...and not get killed sooner or later. Jesus painted a very clear picture of the Kingdom of Grace, a Kingdom He tells Pilate is “**not of this world.**” It is a Kingdom in which the world’s order of power, prominence, and possession is inverted, and replaced by justice, mercy, and humility {Mic. 6:8}. It is a Kingdom of exuberant abundance and lavish generosity, supplied by the merciful hand of the Master.

It is a Kingdom which neither cares for nor prioritizes the Profit Motive which makes our modern world ‘go round.’ The Bankers running our show on the national and international level would *gouge* out their eyes and *rip* the ears off their heads before they would consider expunging all debt every seven years, pressing the ‘reset’ button on economic relations, as God instructed His people Israel {cf. Deut. 15:1-11, which begins with, “**At the end of every seven years you must cancel debts.**”}. *That* is a Message *no one* wants to listen to: “Where is the profit in that? Where in the world will we make our money?” I don’t know. Try fleecing taxpayers for your ridiculously outsized bonuses; it’s always worked before. The world today produces enough food to feed its entire population several times over ...so why doesn’t it happen?

Why are people around the globe starving to death this very moment? Because as Gandhi once said, “There is enough for everyone’s *need*; there is not enough for everyone’s *greed*.”

What is Jesus’ Kingdom? **It is the piercing Light which clashes violently with the darkness of men’s deeds— both individually and corporately, systemically.** And let’s be honest: *nobody* in our world wants to hear the Message of a Kingdom which demands every ounce of allegiance we possess. No ‘king’ or ‘queen’ wants to hear their kingdom, however large or small, is— apart from allegiance to *Abba*— inconsequential to Eternity and will one Day be crushed by the “**weight of glory.**” Nobody.

### **Eyewitnesses of the Fact.**

So Jesus goes to His death, hanging on *our* cross and suffering in *our* stead, with the courage and heroism only a perfect Man could display— a *God*-man, undivided deity and sinless humanity welded as One forevermore. When the price of sin was paid and the ransom of Mankind accomplished, He cried out, “**It is *finished* ...forever!**” {Jn. 19:30}. Then, as Peter boldly declares over and over again in the Book of Acts before the very people he once cowered from: “**This Man,**” Jesus of Nazareth {Acts 2:22}, “**was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and *you*, with the help of wicked men, put Him to death by nailing Him to the Cross. But God *raised* Him from the dead, freeing Him from the agony of death, because it was *impossible* for death to keep its hold on Him,**” vv. 23-24. Impossible indeed! ...for Death to *hold* the Author of Life! Peter then quotes from a Messianic Psalm {16}: “**Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will live in hope, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay,**” vv. 26-27.

Acts 2:31 interprets this by saying, “**Seeing what was ahead,**” David as a prophet, “**spoke of the *Resurrection* of the Christ [‘the Messiah, the Anointed One of God’], that He was not abandoned to the Grave, nor did His Body see decay.**” In v. 32 he says, “**God has *raised* this Jesus to *Life*, and we are all *witnesses* of the fact.**” A *martus* is a legal, historical “**witness,**” one who bears testimony in a judicial sense to people, places and things. Peter’s conclusion? “**Therefore, let all Israel be assured of this: God has *made* this Jesus, whom *you* crucified, both Lord and Christ**”— Master and Messiah {v. 36}!

In ch. 3 Peter bears witness to a crowd of astonished onlookers who have come running to try and find out how this crippled beggar who used to sit under Solomon’s Colonnade got healed. In the Spirit of the Living God he says, “**You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. You *killed* the Author of Life, but God *raised* Him from the dead. We are *witnesses* of**

this" {vv. 14-15}. The next day in ch. 4, after having been seized by the Sanhedrin and jailed overnight, Peter and John stand before the very men who crucified the Lord of Glory. **"Then Peter, *filled* with the Holy Spirit, said to them: 'Rulers and Elders of the People! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the People of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Messiah of Nazareth, whom *you* crucified but whom *God* raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. He is 'the Stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone, the foundation stone.' Salvation is found in *no one* else, for there is *no* other name under Heaven given to Men [Mankind] by which we *must be saved*,"** vv. 8-12.

What is the central theme, from beginning to end, of every Message preached in the Acts of the Apostles? **It is the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Cross may be the focal point of human His-Story, but the Resurrection is the *turning* point!** If Death is not dead and the Grave not a conquered enemy, then we have *no hope* for a Life beyond the walls of this world. Cause Jesus' Story is our Story, and how His Story ends is how our Story will end. If Jesus is still in the Grave, then we are all in big, *big* trouble. But as Scripture amply testifies, **"He is risen! He is not here. Why do you look for the Living among the Dead?"** In light of our addictions and idolatry, we might ask, 'Why do we look for Life in the midst of Death?' The power of the Grave could not bind the love of the Father!

## Finale.

Precisely because the Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth has happened as an historical event *within the space and time of our world*, its *effects* are to be felt, seen, heard and experienced *within* our world, in the here and now of the present Day. A solid grasp of the future hope held out to us in Jesus leads directly {and maybe to many Believers, surprisingly} to a vision of the present which is the basis of our Mission as Apprentices of the Master.

**A New World is on its way, but a New World could be underway, even as we speak.** To hope, to long, to desire, to dream of a better future is to align ourselves with the ultimate outworking of *Abba's* will — the *redemption* and *restoration* of a fallen Universe. **Restoration is the point.** Not to cast Creation to the wind and let it all dissolve one day, not to allow the devil and his demons to forever mar the image of *Abba* in Creation, but to *renew* it, to *restore* it, to redeem it from the Curse under which Creation groans — Romans 8:19-23. Paul say's in Romans 8:22-23, **"We know that the whole Creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only Creation, but we ourselves, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as Sons, the redemption**

**of our bodies.”** See how Paul links the restoration of Creation with the Resurrection? All of Creation awaits this Day, the Day of our **“redemption”** and resurrection, when it will be **“brought into the *glorious* freedom of the Children of God”** {v. 21b}.

You see this? We have the **“first-fruits of the Spirit,”** which means the *same* power that raised Christ Jesus from the grave is dwelling inside of us! Do you believe in the *reality* of Resurrection— resurrection in the Here and Now— in all the pain and heartache of your present circumstances? What are you and I facing right now which is too *great* for the power of God, or too *slight* for His love to move over and within?

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