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Chapter One Starry, Starry Night...

(Matthew 1&2; Luke 1)

A Birth in Bethlehem

The scene was set over Bethlehem. The small, sleepy town was about to play host to the greatest awakening of all time. In a dark, dusty cave, a tired couple fell to the straw, exhausted by the journey and the night. The place was little more than a shed, a few slats of wood fronting a cave set in the hills.

Mary whispered: I'm so tired...
Joseph replied: Don't worry; I'll make a bed.

Their voices were strained, their throats dry from the travelling and their bodies weary from the long day. Joseph busied himself with a makeshift bed of hay and blankets.

Mary: I think the baby's coming... Joseph! I can't - not here!
Joseph: We'll be all right - you'll be all right, we'll get through it somehow...
Mary: You might! But will I... And the baby... it's so dirty here...
Joseph: Lie down. Here, there's a bed of straw, it's clean. Come on.

Joseph Proposes, Mary is Pregnant

It had not always been this way - Joseph so supportive and concerned. Mary's pregnancy was no ordinary occurrence and when Joseph first heard of it nine months ago he was far from the willing partner.

Joseph: Mary - my beloved, I'd like you to... No, that's no good. Can't say that. Think, think. How do people propose? I know! Mary, my love, I want you to... No, that won't do either. My dearest Mary? No I can't say that! Mary! Will you marry me? Marry me! No, no, no. I definitely can't do it like that. Mary... Will you be my wife?

Mary, on her way to break the difficult news to Joseph, faltered in the doorway as she overheard this. She dropped her head and turned to leave. Joseph realised she was there and hurried over.

Joseph: Oh... Mary... I... I've something to marry you... I mean, something to tell you.
Mary: Yes, I heard.
Joseph: Mary, I want to... I mean - I'd like to... or rather, I want you to... well, will you? Be my wife, I mean.
Mary: Joseph, please listen to me first. Something's happened. Something that may make you change your mind.
Joseph: What do you mean?
Mary: I mean... I mean... I'm pregnant.

There was a pause as the idea slowly sank in.

Joseph: But I...
Mary: Look, I know what you must think.
Joseph: I'm sorry, I don't think I understood you. For a minute then I thought you said...
Mary: I'm pregnant.
Joseph: Yes... that's what I thought you said!
Mary: Listen Joseph...
Joseph: But how could you? I mean, you and me, we're supposed to be... Well, you never said anything. How could you do something like that? And what about your mother - does she know?
Mary: Joseph, listen to me. It's not what you think.
Joseph: Do I know him? The father, I mean, do I know him?
Mary: You could say that, yes.
Joseph: Good friend of the family, is he?
Mary: Joseph, please...
Joseph: And what about God? I don't suppose you've even considered Him in all of this? You do realise He knows? You can't hope to hide it from Him, you know.

The Sketch Gospel

Mary: Oh yes, He knows all about it, Joseph.
Joseph: Well, I'm glad somebody does...
Mary: You see - He is the father.
Joseph: What?

Mary understood little of this herself. All she knew for sure was that God had promised her a child, and that this child would be unique, ruling over the house of Jacob forever.

Mary: God is the father of my child, Joseph. Or perhaps I should say - I am the mother of His son. There's no other man involved - it's God, His Spirit I suppose. That's all.
Joseph: And this... child?
Mary: He's going to be the Messiah, Joseph. We're to call him Jesus. Can you believe it - our child, the Messiah!
Joseph: I don't know, I don't know if I do believe it? You say - 'Our child' but it isn't, it's not mine anyway. Not if it's God's.
Mary: No. But He has chosen us - both of us, to bring up His Son.
Joseph: But the disgrace, what about my reputation, my family, my friends? What will they say? And what about you - once you start to show... well it's unthinkable. You know what people will say - and what they'll do! It'll be dangerous for you to just go out of the door. This is disastrous.
Mary: I don't think it is. I'm scared, Joseph. Just like you. But I can't stop this now. No one can. I've decided. Now it's up to you. It's your choice, Joseph.

Mary looked at him long and hard. She loved this man dearly, and had longed for the day when they would be married. Now all of that seemed to be slipping away, out of her limited reach. She turned and left him.

Joseph: Mary! Wait! Give me some time. This is such a shock! Mary! Please!

Joseph ran out into the bright daylight, but she had moved swiftly and the dusty brushing of her heels against the street was already fading into the distance.

Now here they were, miles from home in Bethlehem, come to register for the Roman Census, and barely a corner of the town free in which to lay their heads for the night. Meanwhile, on the hills above the town...

The Shepherds

Jake: Luke, are all the sheep safe?
Luke: Dunno.
Eli: Well go off and check 'em Luke, make sure they're all there... Off you go, that's a good lad. Of course, you know what'll happen. He'll get to fifteen and fall asleep again. Same thing, every night, he never learns does he?
Jake: Poor lad. Shepherding's not a bad life - but I'm not sure he's cut out for it...
Luke: Lads, lads, have you seen what's going on up there?
Eli: Not them vultures again is it?
Jake: If it is they got very big harps and they've learnt to sing.
Eli: Sing?
Luke: Aye. Come with me I've got a shock for you. Look!
Eli: My goodness! Them's not vultures - them's...
Luke and Jake: Yes?
Eli: Angels!
Jake: Wow! You're kidding!
Luke: What's an angel?
Eli: A spiritual being believed to be a celestial attendant or messenger of the omnipotent deity.
Jake: Pardon?
Eli: One of God's assistants.
Luke: Ooh listen - what's that they're singing about?
Jake: Sounds like 'Glory to God in the forest'. Why forest?

The Sketch Gospel

Luke: No, it's glory to 'God in the Highlands', must be something to do with the hill dwellers.

Eli: No you daft dollop of sheep's doin's, they're singing highest. 'Glory to God in the highest', and if I'm not mistaken... aye, they're singing about a new baby what's been born.

Luke: Oh great I love babies, let's go find him.

Jake: Oh sure, that should be easy, after all there's only been about fourteen million new babies born tonight.

Eli: Hang on they ain't finished yet, they're singing about him being... I don't believe it.

Luke: What?

Eli: Well, unless I'm much mistaken...

Luke: Yes?

Eli: Well they seem to be singing about him being in an animal trough. Poor little mite.

Jake: Shouldn't be too difficult to spot then.

Luke: Perhaps he's been abandoned there.

Eli: No, listen. 'Peace on earth', that's what they're singing now. Aye, I think we'd better go find this baby, see what's going on. Come on lads. Oops! Careful where you're treading now...

The shepherds left the hillsides and, their flocks forgotten, came stumbling into the town, searching for the mysterious child. When they found him he was indeed wrapped in rags and lying in an animal trough. In hushed amazement they came in, gazed in silence then ran into the night, stopping regularly to tell everyone they met about the wonder of the new child. As one Shepherd returned home...

A Shepherd Tells His Mother

Luke: Ma, Ma! You're not going to believe this!

Luke's mother was a wise old bird. Not easily ruffled, or indeed, hoodwinked.

Mother: Luke, do you know what time it is?

Luke: Ma, come here. Come here. Look, look!

Mother: Where are you?

Luke: Out here, on the step. Look at that sky! Look at that sky!

Mother: Very nice, now do you want a snack before you turn in?

Luke: Mum! The sky!

Mother: We're all out of figs but I could do you your favourite – fish and grapes.

Luke: That star, Ma. Look - I've seen him.

Mother: Him? Him?

Luke: The Messiah! That's his star; he's in a stable.

Mother: The Messiah, in a stable? Come on, Luke, you've had a hard day...

Luke: He's a beautiful baby boy, Mum. Scrunched blue eyes and no teeth!

Mother: Sounds like your father.

Luke: Ma! I'm serious. He's amazing!

Mother: And I suppose He's got a nice gold cot and a purple nightshirt with a big 'M' on the front!

Luke: Mum! Listen, will you...

Mother: Mind you, all this talk of babies makes me wonder about your cousin, she shouldn't have gone to register in that state. I hope she's not had it yet. She didn't need to go... Joseph's the one they want.

Luke: Ah! That's the other thing, Mum. I've seen Mary too...

Mother: What!

Luke: And she is all right.

Mother: You've seen her – in the town - in Bethlehem? She's safe then?

Luke: Oh yes. She was in er... she was in... The stable.

Mother: 'The Stable'? Don't think I know that one, dear, is it an inn?

Luke: No, not exactly. It's not 'The Stable' so much as 'a stable'.

Mother: A... stable... a stable... with cattle and sheep? And... dung! Look at your feet!

The Sketch Gospel

Luke: Exactly. Sit down, Ma.

The Wise Men

Meanwhile, somewhere in the East, thousands of miles away, three wise men were watering their camels. Studying the movement of the planets they had been struck by an extraordinary phenomenon.

Balthasar: You know, I'm sure I had it here somewhere.
Melchior: What are you looking for now?
Balthasar: The map! I'm sure I had it, honestly. I put it in when I packed the Frankincense...
Gaspar: Oh no, don't say you've forgotten the presents as well!
Balthasar: No, no, of course not... look - here's the incense. Whoops! No, that's my underarm body-balm.
Melchior: Twelve months! Twelve months we've been on the road.
Balthasar: Eleven.
Melchior: What?
Balthasar: It's eleven actually, eleven months and thirty days. It's only the 24th today, 25th tomorrow, then it'll be twelve months. You know, I think we might have taken a wrong turn somewhere.
Gaspar: How can you take a wrong turn following a star?
Balthasar: True. At least we can rely on that star.
Melchior: Thank goodness for that star.
Gaspar: You can say that again, can't go wrong there...
Melchior: Wait a minute, what are you two doing? It's this one - isn't it?
Gaspar: Is it? I thought it was this one!
Balthasar: No, it's this one!
Melchior: Next time an expert in astronomy might come in handy.
Balthasar: I think you mean astrology.
Gaspar: Isn't it archaeology?
Balthasar: No! Be quiet! Anyway, what do you mean - next time? There won't be a next time - this is an historic occasion - the King of kings an' all that. Which reminds me, I had a dream last night.
Melchior: Another one?
Balthasar: Actually it was very funny. You'll never guess what happened.
Melchior: Correct. I won't.
Balthasar: Oh come on, guess. You'll love it, it's hilarious.
Melchior: Okay - you dreamt that it took us a whole two years to find the King.
Balthasar: Oh, be serious... Okay I'll tell you. I dreamt... I dreamt... You'll love this... I actually dreamt that a bunch of stupid shepherds found him before we did.
Melchior: That's not funny - it may be true.
Balthasar: Oh, don't be ridiculous. This is the King we're talking about. He wouldn't make himself available to any old riff raff, would he? I mean - shepherds, they'd leave a nasty trail on his carpet. And how would they ever get in his palace. No, mate. It takes wise men to find him. Not simple folk.
Melchior: Well, perhaps we should have brought a wise man with us then?
Balthasar: Very funny. Strange dream though - it all seemed to be in a stable. Ugh, yes, I remember now. A dirty old shed, it was. Isn't it funny how dreams can be so distorted? Must've been that camel's cheese.
Melchior: Might be the truth.
Balthasar: WHAT! The King of Kings - born in a cattle shed - amongst all that... muck! What kind of king is that?
Melchior: A very unusual one, I guess. With no high and mighty aspirations - unlike one or two people I could mention.
Gaspar: Careful!
Melchior: Just explaining that's all. He obviously wants to be accessible to ordinary people.
Balthasar: Ah, but if he's that accessible, then why's it taken us twelve months to get lost behind this star. I mean that star.
Gaspar: Yes! They call us wise men.

The Sketch Gospel

Melchior: Ah well, there's wisdom and there's wisdom.
Balthasar: Oh well that's cleared that one up then!
Melchior: What I mean is – if he really has come for ordinary folks, then we'd better make sure we're not too wise to go looking for him. A king who comes to simple people can be a bit much for the wise to swallow...
Gaspar: But what about these gifts then? They won't be much good to a peasant king!
Melchior: Oh I think they'll be all right.
Gaspar: What? Gold, frankincense and myrrh? It's a strange mixture.
Melchior: Well... I get the feeling this is no ordinary baby.
Balthasar: You get a feeling? From a star!
Melchior: This one's different, believe me.
Gaspar: Yes but why gold, Frankenstein and myrrh?
Balthasar: Gold because he's a king.
Gaspar: And the Frankenstein?
Balthasar: Frankincense! It's what they use in temples, it's religious. And I reckon he's gonna be a great spiritual leader.
Melchior: Fair enough, but not myrrh. That's a spice for putting on dead bodies.
Balthasar: Perhaps his death will be significant.
Melchior: You're death'll be significant in a minute.
Balthasar: Come on. That star's on the move again, and I think we've got a long way to go yet...
Melchior: Isn't it this way?
Gaspar: Or this way?
Balthasar: No! Concentrate!

And so the wise men continued on their journey – a voyage across a vast continent that would take them two years and ultimately result in the death of numerous children.

Simeon and Anna – Jesus is Circumcised

When Jesus was eight days old Mary and Joseph took him to the Temple to be circumcised, as was the custom. As they stood in the Temple courts an old man named Simeon approached them, his eyes wide and sparkling with anticipation. He took the child and said,

Simeon: I have waited and waited for this moment. Like a tree growing and twisting, being battered and weathered by the storms of a lifetime – yet this moment makes it all worthwhile. Lord, I can die in peace now, now that I have seen this child. The deliverer – the saviour. Who would have thought that a tiny fragile baby like this could be the salvation for everyone? But my eyes have seen it, and still see it. A living, crying, breathing gift from God.

He held the baby aloft, his old eyes wet with tears, and then he turned to Mary and Joseph.

Simeon: This child will be a mixed blessing to you. Some will love him – others will hate him. And their hatred will be a white-hot blade piercing your souls. But it will all be for the good – no one will be able to stand before this man and pretend. No one. He is the embodiment of truth – and he will be the success and the failure of many. You are blessed.
Joseph: Blessed!
Simeon: Oh yes.
Mary: But you just predicted trouble for us...
Simeon: Not trouble – conflict – there's a difference.

At that moment an old prophetess called Anna approached. She had been living in the Temple for decades – fasting and praying.

Anna: Praise God!
Joseph: What now?

The Sketch Gospel

Anna: I've been in this Temple for years – but I've never seen anything like this.
Joseph: We've just brought our child to be circumcised...
Anna: Just? Just!? But this is no ordinary child – look! He's the pride of Israel – he's the child of the nation! The whole world will glory in him one day. Praise God! Look, everyone, look! The baby!
Simeon: You'll not stop her now. She's been waiting too. She'll tell everyone.
Mary: But we don't want a fuss!
Simeon: Your whole life will be a fuss from now on. This is just the beginning. God bless you both. You've made a weary man very happy.

Simeon and Anna slipped away and left them. Mary and Joseph took the boy and moved into a rented house for his early childhood. Eventually the wise men from the east came sweeping out of the night and arrived, banging on their front door with torches, servants and bags of treasure. But they made one mistake; they visited the local king and told him of the powerful new baby. Soon the streets were swimming with soldiers, the night air thick with the stench of newborn blood. King Herod sent a task force to wipe out every child under the age of two. But he failed. One baby disappeared into the night with his parents. One baby made it safely to Egypt, where he stayed until the mighty Herod was dead.

Chapter Two Early Days

(Matthew 3&4; Mark 1; Luke 2-4; John 1-4)

Jesus Visits the Temple as a Boy

Jesus grew up in the town of Nazareth, in the district of Galilee. His parents settled there after their return from Egypt and each year they journeyed to the Temple in Jerusalem for the feast of Passover. When he was twelve they took Jesus along and after, as they made their way back, they discovered he was no longer with them. Mary was distraught. They fought their way back through the tide of people, searching the swathes of extended families - but there was no sign of their son. Desperately they took the road back towards Jerusalem. After three days of frantic searching they found him, sitting in the Temple courts, debating with the teachers.

Joseph: Son! What are you doing here! For goodness sake, we've been out of our minds. We've been looking everywhere. Everywhere! You shouldn't be here like this. You must not wander off like that!
Jesus: Why were you searching for me?
Mary: Why? Why? Because we love you! Why have you put us through this? Your father and I have been sick with worry.
Jesus: Didn't you realise I'd be here? Where else would I be?
Joseph: What d'you mean? We thought you'd be with us – going home!
Jesus: But this is my Father's house.

Mary and Joseph looked around, at the bemused and expectant faces of the religious leaders, at the towering ancient walls.

Mary: Sometimes Jesus I don't understand you. We're your parents, of course we'd be concerned about you – we've been beside ourselves with worry.
Jesus: But there's really no need. We've been talking here that's all. Talking about the scriptures and the prophets and the law. I've just been here – in my Father's house.
Mary: You're father's house is in Nazareth, Jesus. And we have to go back there. Sometimes I just don't understand you...

They took Jesus and led him away. His parents were saddened by his behaviour but the teachers of the law were impressed, some of his answers and questions had astonished them.

The years passed, Jesus grew strong and learnt his father's carpentry trade. He was popular in his home town and learnt quickly. He soon grew into a strong, intelligent young man.

The Sketch Gospel

John the Baptist Begins His Ministry

When Jesus reached the age of thirty, stories began to leak into his town about an uproar in the surrounding wilderness. A wild man had emerged from the desert and was disrupting the status quo.

John: Listen up! All you who think you've got your lives organised. Listen hard! Things are going to change. You need to change. This thunder you hear heralds the lightning work of God's spirit. Humble yourselves. Submit to the good work of God. Submit and receive what he has for you. Bend your knee and bow your head. Let his grace rain down on you like refreshing rain. Forgive and be forgiven. Take hold of the broom and clean-sweep your houses. It's up to you. Start again. Come to the water and be washed. The time is right, so get ready! Be honest, be kind, be generous and do everything with integrity.

The crowds swarmed to see this wild man, and many succumbed to his call and went into the river Jordan to be washed clean of their sins. John welcomed them all and never refused anyone the baptism and forgiveness of God. Then, one day, the crowds parted and John's own cousin walked through the sea of people. There was a terrible pause, a moment when John himself fell to his knees in the rippling waters.

John: It's not for me to baptise you. You must wash me. Forgive me, cousin, I'm not good enough to even touch you...

Jesus: Don't say that, John. For now - I need your baptism. Please.

So John baptised his cousin, and as Jesus came up out of the water the sky rang with thunder as if a voice was rumbling through the clouds.

John: Did you hear? Did you hear that? God is speaking! Listen hard... This is his son, the one he loves, with whom he is well pleased. Listen – he's speaking!

The thunder rattled on and the people were astonished. As Jesus rose up from the river and made his way into the nearby desert John addressed the crowds once more.

John: You come to me for baptism and go away wet and clean – but the one who is coming will baptise you with fire. Fire! God's spirit will come to you and burn inside you, changing you, refining you from the inside out. You will never be the same again. God is waiting to work in you, to change you, to burn up all that is harmful and to nurture all that is good. Be assured. He's started already, today, right now, as you have been watching.

Jesus is Tempted in the Wilderness

As they watched, Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, turned and strode away from them. He left the company and friendship of his cousin and made for the desert. He walked on, not stopping until the last face was miles behind him and his only companions were the rocks and the wild animals. Before long a serpent slithered by his feet and a voice permeated his thoughts.

The devil said: What are you doing out here, all alone? Don't trust God's care. Grab what you can now. You know your own power. Eat and drink - it won't matter. Look at those rocks, imagine the sweet smell of loaves that size. If you want to deprive yourself then fine – but do it tomorrow. Can't you just smell that bread?

Jesus said: Man can't live on bread alone, I need the word of God. How long will a mere loaf of bread sustain me? How long before it cracks and dries in this heat?

The devil said: Come here, come up here. Look! Nice view eh? Every one of these kingdoms is yours. Ultimate power at your finger tips. Think of it as a present from me to you. Instant glory – supreme satisfaction, no strings attached. It's all yours – just worship me a little, give me your undivided attention.

Jesus said: I'll worship God. And only him. He's the one who can bestow glory and satisfaction.

The Sketch Gospel

The devil said: Don't worry if you fall into sin, God'll pull you out, it says so in the Bible. Look, I'll prove it. Throw yourself down from here and I promise God'll send his angels to catch you and lower you gently down to the ground. You won't get hurt, you'll never get near those jagged rocks. God cares too much for you.

Jesus said: Yes. But I can trust the word of God, without testing it. In fact – it is written – don't you dare to even think of putting God to the test.

The devil said: Yes. But you'd better make sure it works, just in case.

Jesus said: Be gone! It's finished. This test is over. And I refute everything you say, Satan, you're a liar and every word you say is tainted with death.

And so it was decided. The snake slithered away into the burning heat and Jesus was comforted by angels. He would conduct his ministry from a place of humble trust, not out of the need to succeed and wield power. After forty days in the wilderness Jesus returned to Galilee and began to work.

The First Followers of Jesus

John was still busy preaching and baptising, and when he saw Jesus, returning from the wilderness, he pointed him out to the crowds.

John: There! You see that man over there – you're looking at the Lamb of God – the sacrifice who will take away the sins of the world once and for all. When I baptised him I saw heaven open and God's Holy Spirit descend upon him. This is no ordinary man – I am baptising people with simple, cold water – he will baptise you with the complex fire of God. This man is greater than I will ever be – because although he appears after me – in reality he was before me.

The people demanded to know if John himself was the Messiah they had been waiting for, but he told them plainly:

John: I am simply the one to point the way. I am a signpost in the wilderness, that's all.

John had his own band of loyal followers, and when he spotted Jesus the next day and pointed him out once more they decided to act.

John: Look! There he is again – the Lamb of God. Take note. I promise you I will soon disappear but this man will rise up and affect everyone.

Two of John's disciples took immediate action, they went after Jesus.

Phillip: Come on.
Andrew: Where are you going?
Phillip: Where do you think? If John says this is the man – then I believe him, come on.

They followed Jesus from a distance; but eventually he stopped, waited and confronted them.

Jesus: Why are you following me?
Phillip: Us? Er... we... we weren't.
Andrew: Yes we were!
Phillip: Were we?
Andrew: Yes! It was your idea – remember!
Phillip: Oh... I suppose so...
Andrew: We know John, your cousin. He said we should meet you. I'm Andrew – I'm a fisherman.

Jesus: And what about you Phillip?
Phillip: Me? Oh I'm... Wait a minute – how do you know my name?
Jesus: I know more than your name Phillip. What do you want with me?
Andrew: We want to come with you.
Phillip: Yes. We want to be disciples!

The Sketch Gospel

Jesus: Well... slow down a little. Come with me today and then see.

Jesus took Andrew and Phillip to his home and they stayed together for the rest of that day. In the evening, as the sun was setting, Andrew came back. He was not alone.

Andrew: Jesus? Jesus? Are you in?

Jesus: Yes, what is it Andrew? I'm a little tired...

Andrew: I brought someone to see you...

Jesus: Who's this?

Andrew: My brother, tell him your name Simon.

Simon: Oh! Okay... it's Simon.

Andrew: He wasn't a follower of John – so I don't know if he'd be any good at being a disciple – probably not! But I told him he had to meet you. I told him you're the Messiah, and I brought him. Look! What do you think?

Jesus: I think... I think you've done a good thing. And as for you Simon...

Simon: What?

Jesus: You look pretty solid to me, I'm going to call you Peter.

Simon: Peter?

Jesus: Yes – it means rock.

Simon: I don't feel like a rock.

Jesus: Perhaps not at the moment – but you will.

Nathanael – the True Israelite

The next day Jesus found Philip.

Jesus: I'm going to Cana – come with me.

Philip: Okay – but first - meet Nathanael.

Jesus: Nathanael, now you look like a true Israelite – I'd say there's not a false bone in your body.

Nathanael: How do you know that?

Jesus: I've seen you before, I saw you a while back standing under that fig tree.

Nathanael: Amazing! Philip told me you were the one Moses wrote about and I didn't believe him.

Jesus: No?

Nathanael: No – well, can you blame me, he told me you came from Nazareth! Nazareth, I said, you've got to be kidding! Nothing good comes out of that place. But now I can see he's right – you are God's son – you're the King of Israel.

Jesus! Wow! Slow down! You believe because I spotted you under a tree? Before this is over you'll see heaven itself opened up – and you'll see the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man. You've seen nothing yet.

The Wedding at Cana

So Jesus left Bethany and travelled to Cana in Galilee. Once there he went to a local wedding with his mother and some of his disciples. Though he had not yet begun preaching or performed any miracles he was soon in deep discussion with one of the other guests.

Silus: They say you're quite an amazing chap, Jesus. In fact, they say quite a lot about you...

Jesus: Really? So... do you believe what they say?

Silus: Oh, far be it from me to latch on to rumours...

Jesus: Rumours?

Silus: Well, hearsay...

Jesus: Tell me more.

Silus: Oh, I promised I wouldn't breathe a word...

Jesus: Promised who?

Silus: Er... them. You know, the ones who are saying these things. I'm sure they're wrong.

Jesus: Oh no doubt... Why?

The Sketch Gospel

Silus: Well, you wouldn't say those sorts of things would you?
Jesus: I might do.
Silus: Really? But they said...
Jesus: Yes?
Silus: Well, like I say, far be it from me to latch on to...
Jesus: Rumours? What other... rumours do they say?
Silus: Oh well, just the usual stuff, you're a nice chap, into social reform, charity, you're nice and friendly, life and soul of the party... Generally an easy-going sort of prophet...
Jesus: And what d'you think?
Silus: Well, I could go along with that. I've been blessed with a lot of faith you know... It's just the latest gossip, I mean, suggestions, that I can't quite swallow... I know you're a good teacher, but they say you keep bringing God into everything.
Jesus: Do you want to see the kingdom of God?
Silus: You see, there you go again... one minute we're discussing... Well, I mean... Okay, the thought had crossed my mind. You know everyone muses about... well... God. Don't they?
Jesus: Yes, I thought so. Then listen — you must be born again.
Silus: What?
Jesus: You must be born a second time, of the Spirit. Only then will you see my Father's kingdom...
Silus: Your Father's kingdom? So they weren't exaggerated, those things I heard.

Water into Wine

Elsewhere the disciples were concerned; Peter and Nathanael had caught the worried frowns and heard the nervous whispers from the groom's family.

Peter: I might have known something like this would happen if we brought Jesus.
Nathanael: Well, it's not our fault. It wasn't our job to order the extra wine.
Peter: Nobody ordered the extra wine — that's just it.
Nathanael: Well, they'll just have to make do with water, won't they?
Peter: Are you serious, with him here?
Nathanael: What else can we do? Limit everyone to half a glass? It's too late for even that. I blame those Greeks, they just don't know when they've had enough...

Mary spotted them and came straight over.

Mary: What's wrong? What's going on?
Peter: Oh, nothing, Mary...
Nathanael: There's no wine, Mary, they've run out.

Peter pulled Nathanael aside.

Peter: What on earth did you tell her that for? She'll only tell him now...
Mary: No wine, is it true?
Peter: No. Well... Yes, I suppose so. But don't blame us, it's those Canaanites, not to mention the Greeks...

Mary turned away but Peter caught her arm.

Peter: Mary, whatever you do, don't tell him.

Mary slipped away and went straight over to speak to her son.

Peter: Did you see that? She went and told him... Where are you going?

Nathanael abandoned Peter and followed Mary over to Jesus. When he returned Peter was furious.

The Sketch Gospel

Peter: Oh that's torn it now.
Nathanael: Water.
Peter: What?
Nathanael: He wants water.
Peter: Water?
Nathanael: He's told the servants to fill those jars. A hundred and eighty gallons of the stuff.
Peter: What good is that going to do? They can't make do with that; there'll be a riot.

Nathanael handed him a glass.

Nathanael: Here, start passing this out.
Peter: Don't be ridiculous, don't involve me in this. What d'you expect it to do, turn into wine...!

Peter shook his head and took a sip. He spluttered, coughed and took a second swig.

Peter: But... er... Hang on... this is... Nathanael! This is... Look! Look! Jesus, can I have a word with you a minute.... This... this is wine... here taste it... Do you realise, you've just done a miracle, look at it, there's enough for everyone. Gallons... Oceans of the stuff!

This was Jesus's first miracle and on seeing it his disciples began to put their faith in him.

Nicodemus

From there Jesus and his disciples went to Capernaum and then onto Jerusalem for the Passover feast. In the city Jesus performed several miraculous signs, and some of the local people began to believe in him. Word soon spread and, intrigued, one of the Pharisees asked to meet him secretly.

So, late one evening, Nicodemus hovered in a back street, waiting in the shadows. When he heard footsteps he stepped out into the fading light, but it wasn't his expected rendezvous.

Nicodemus: Oh! Oh, Matthias, it's you... I mean, good evening. Lovely evening, w... w... w... wouldn't you say?
Matthias: Well, apart from the biting wind, the freezing fog, this fine drizzle and those black clouds overhead, yes, it's wonderful. I'm surprised you're not sun-bathing on the patio.
Nicodemus: What? Oh yes, very good, very er... funny. Actually... I er... I thought I'd come for a late night stroll.
Matthias: Really, that's not like you. The sedan cracking under the strain again?
Nicodemus: No, no, no, no, not at all. I just thought I'd er... take the dog for a walk.
Matthias: Nicodemus you are slipping. Bending to such menial tasks. The servants aren't on strike again are they?
Nicodemus: No, no, no everything's fine.
Matthias: Where is he then?
Nicodemus: Actually I really must be getting along, you know how it is...
Matthias: Nicodemus, your dog, where is he?
Nicodemus: What?
Matthias: The dog, remember? You were taking him for a walk.
Nicodemus: Sorry? The dog? Oh! The dog. Oh no, don't say he's slipped off again, this really is the limit, that's the third time this week.
Matthias: I see... well, hadn't we better look for him?
Nicodemus: No, I don't think so.
Matthias: You don't think so?
Nicodemus: Oh no, he's always running off. You know what these dumb animals are like... I mean they're so... dumb. No he'll come home when he's ready.
Matthias: Well in that case how about a quick sauna, my club's just around the corner.

The Sketch Gospel

Nicodemus: Sorry Matthias, any other night I'd love to, but if the dog comes back and finds me gone...

Matthias: I thought you said he'd find his own way home?

Nicodemus: Oh well... yes... yes... he probably will, but better to be safe than sorry. Well, hadn't you better be off then?

Matthias: I'm not sure – I'm still worried about your dog.

Nicodemus: Oh I'm sure there's really nothing to worry about, he'll find his way home. He's hardly going to be mugged by a gang of teenage kittens, is he? Actually I must be, you know, getting along...

Matthias: If I didn't know you better, Nicodemus, I'd say you were trying to get rid of me.

Nicodemus: Me! Get rid of you! Of course not! You stay here if you want. We can be out in the freezing rain all night if you like. I just thought you might prefer a party and a log fire. But by all means...

Matthias: Don't worry, old boy, I understand.

Nicodemus: Do you?

Matthias: Yes, your secret's safe with me. I know when I'm not wanted. It's that lady friend, isn't it?

Nicodemus: Is it?

Matthias: Yes. The one from the booking office at the Roman Bath's, the one who always saves you your own special towel, I've noticed...

Nicodemus: No look... It's not like that at all...

Matthias: Don't worry – your secret's safe with me...

And with a sly wink and a mischievous grin Matthias sloped off into the night. As he left, Jesus appeared from the shadows.

Jesus: Nicodemus! Hello – it's me - Jesus!

Nicodemus: Shhh! I mean... Oh! Hello, how are you doing?

Jesus: Fine, I heard you were looking for me.

Nicodemus: I er... I... I'd like a few words with you.

Jesus: Okay, Nicodemus, fire away...

Nicodemus: Actually you couldn't keep your voice down a little, could you... Possibly... It's not that I'm ashamed or anything... I just... well...

Jesus: Yes?

Nicodemus: Well, I... Anyway, what I want to know is... Well, we've seen you do all these amazing things, you know miracles and the like. And you're pretty good at flooring the Pharisees whenever they open their mouths. So er... Well it looks very much to me as if you must have come from... you know.

Nicodemus pointed up. Jesus followed his extended finger.

Jesus: Where? From up there?

Nicodemus: Well no, not there, but higher, you know in the spiritual sense, from heaven. You know... God's kingdom and all that.

Jesus: Nicodemus, would you like to see God's kingdom?

Nicodemus: Well, not right now, no, but...

Jesus: The truth of the matter is, you can't even begin to see it unless you've been born over.

Nicodemus: Born over what?

Jesus: Born over. Born again.

Nicodemus: Again?

Jesus: Yes.

Nicodemus: You mean like... Hmm... Sounds a bit extreme. I mean, I believe in the impossible and all that but my mother's 92 and she's a little old for that sort of thing...

Jesus: No Nicodemus, I'm not talking about physical birth... You've been there done that, you don't need to go through that again...

Nicodemus: That's a relief!

The Sketch Gospel

Jesus: I'm talking about your spiritual life. That needs to be given birth. Don't be surprised at that. Everyone needs a spiritual birth, to give their spirit life. Just as it is with the body. How could you be alive if you'd never been born? Well how can you be spiritually alive without a spiritual birth?

Nicodemus: Is it painful?

Jesus: Mmm... Sometimes. Perhaps. It means a whole new start.

Nicodemus: What do I do for that then?

Jesus: Only God can do it. He has to do it in you. His spirit will bring it about.

Nicodemus: How?

Jesus: God's spirit is like the wind, Nicodemus, you can't see it, you can't control it. You just have to let it happen.

Nicodemus: When?

Jesus: One day soon, you'll see a sign. You're a scholar, you know your theology, when the people were crossing the desert and they got poisoned by snake bites what did Moses do?

Nicodemus: Put a bronze snake on a pole and told the people they'd be well if they looked up at it.

Jesus: Exactly. Well soon the Son of Man will be lifted up, just like that snake, and if you look to him, then you too will be well.

Nicodemus: How can that be?

Jesus: Faith, Nicodemus, faith. No more, no less. It's the simplest thing in the world... and the hardest. Faith, pure and simple.

Nicodemus pondered these things for a while, Jesus jabbed a finger back up the road.

Jesus: Is this the quickest way back?
Nicodemus: Mmm? Oh... yes, sure...

Jesus left him and walked off into the fading light.

Nicodemus: Hmm, faith. Hmm, born again... simple, yes... and difficult. I think I see...

Nicodemus wandered off, still muttering to himself.

The Samaritan Woman at the Well

Jesus and his disciples meanwhile took some time out. They went into the Judean countryside for a while, and from there they went on to a town called Sychar in Samaria. The disciples headed into town to buy some food, leaving Jesus alone for a while. Tired from the journey he sat down by Jacob's well. Before long a Samaritan woman came to draw some water.

Jesus: Would you give me some water to drink?
Woman: What? You're a Jew aren't you? And your asking me for a drink!

The Jews and Samaritans were sworn enemies.

Jews: Well, you have a bucket to draw water, and I'm empty-handed.
Woman: But I can't... It isn't right!
Jesus: If you knew who was asking for a drink then you wouldn't say that, you would ask him and he would give you life-giving water.
Woman: But you've already said, you don't have a bucket and the well is deep. How can you possibly get this life-giving water?
Jesus: If you only knew who it is you're speaking to...
Woman: Why? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob who gave us this well? He stood right here and drank from it himself! You can't be greater than him, surely?
Jesus: Anyone who drinks this water will get thirsty again. But anyone who drinks the water that I can give will never be thirsty again. I can supply the kind of water that will turn into a spring inside you, welling up to eternal life.

The Sketch Gospel

- Woman: I don't understand that but, please, give me some of that water so I won't ever have to draw any from this well again. It's hard work!
- Jesus: Okay, but first - go and fetch your husband and come back here.
- Woman: I haven't got a husband.
- Jesus: Hmm... You can say that again. I think you've had... let me see... five - and the man you are living with now is not your husband. You've been honest there.
- Woman: How did you know that? You must be a prophet. Well, if you are tell me this! You Jews say we should worship God in Jerusalem but our ancestors worshipped God here on this mountain. So that can't be right.
- Jesus: Believe me, the time is coming when you won't worship on this mountain or in Jerusalem. We Jews worship the God we know - your worship is guesswork. Believe me - God's salvation is coming through the Jews. But the time will come, well no, it's here already, when it won't matter who you are or where you come from - everyone will be able to worship the Father in spirit and in truth. That is the kind of worshiper he wants. It's not about geography or history. God is spirit and only by the power of his spirit can anyone worship him as he really is.
- Woman: I don't know about that - but I've been told about the Messiah and that when he comes he will tell us everything.
- Jesus: Absolutely. And you're looking at him right now!

At that moment Andrew, Peter and the others returned from the town. They were appalled to see him talking with a Samaritan woman, and she took the hint and left. But before long she was back, with many of the local inhabitants. She had told them about this extraordinary stranger and they were desperate to meet him for themselves. They begged him to stay for a while so Jesus and his disciples remained with them for a few days. When they met him and heard him speak many of the locals believed in him. Two days later he left them and moved on.

Chapter Three **A New Kind of Fishing**

(Matthew 4,8,9&12; Mark 1-3; Luke 4-6; John 4&5)

Jesus Heals an Official's Son

After two days with the Samaritans Jesus, Andrew, Peter, Nathanael and Philip returned to Galilee. The people there had been in Jerusalem for the Passover and had seen for themselves the things Jesus was doing, they were quick to welcome him, and eager for him to teach in his synagogues. When he visited Cana a second time a royal official begged him to visit his home.

- Official: It's my son, he's very sick. Please come and help.
- Jesus: This is not just about miracles. This is not magic.
- Official: I know, it's not for me, it's for my son. He's going to die.
- Jesus: Will no one ever believe without the spectacle of miracles?
- Official: Please! I do believe! I believe you can help my son, I believe that if you just come to my house he will be better. Please! It's a matter of life and death!
- Jesus: Then go, and keep on believing. Your son has the life you ask for.
- Official: What?
- Jesus: Go home! Your son will be all right. I don't need to visit your house. He'll recover.

When the official returned to his house he discovered the truth - that his son had recovered at the same moment when Jesus had pronounced him well. As a result the official and all his family became believers.

Isaiah's Prophecy

Jesus moved on to Nazareth, his home town, and on the Sabbath he went to the synagogue. He stood up to read from the scriptures and unrolled the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He read these words to the company present.

- Jesus: The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,

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He has chosen me and sent me to bring good news to the poor –
To take His love, and new life to those who have no hope.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives.
To break the chains of poverty, riches, loneliness and sin.
To bring recovery of sight to the blind,
Healing for the sick, strength for the faint
And purpose for the lost.
The Spirit of the Lord is upon you,
Because he has chosen those who are broken,
Those who are incomplete,
Those who are inadequate,
To be a signpost
And to show the world - the way home.

When he had finished he rolled up the scroll, sat down and said,

Jesus: Today these words have been fulfilled in your hearing.

They knew that he was the son of Joseph the carpenter and were amazed at his speech and delivery.

Jesus: No prophet is welcome in his home town, in the place where people remember him as an ordinary child. You may say to me: 'Do here what you've been doing everywhere else' – but remember, in the days of Elisha there were many lepers in Israel – but who was healed? No Jew – only Naaman from Syria. It's not easy to perform miracles where hearts are hard and faith is stubborn.

Of course, this enraged the people and they threatened to kill him. They took hold of him and swept him out of the synagogue up to the brow of the hill on which the town was built. They were all for throwing him off the cliff edge there and then, but Jesus stepped free of them, parted the crowd and strode through. Soon after he left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum.

Jesus Calls Four Fisherman

Jesus was walking beside the sea a few days later when he spotted some familiar faces. Peter and Andrew were back working, fishing on the lake. He called out to them.

Jesus: Andrew! Peter! Come with me – I'll show you a new kind of fishing. How would you like to catch people instead of fish?
Peter: But we're busy here.
Jesus: Come with me and you'll be a lot busier!
Andrew: Come on, let's go.
Peter: Okay.

Further along the shore two more fishermen, James and John, were sitting mending their nets.

John: Where are you going?
Andrew: We're giving up fishing.
Jesus: You know these two?
Andrew: Yes, that's James and that's his brother, John. They work with Zebedee, their father.
Jesus: Come with us. I'll show you a whole new life.
James: Are you going to throw out the Romans, then?
Jesus: Follow me and you'll find out.

Immediately they threw down their nets and climbed out of the boat. They travelled through Galilee, Jesus preaching in the synagogues, casting out demons and healing many sick people. Crowds came from miles around. The people were amazed at his teaching, for he did not quote other teachers and prophets – he spoke with his own authority and his words came with power and conviction. The people were overwhelmed when

The Sketch Gospel

he took control over evil spirits and commanded them to leave those who were possessed. They could see he had authority – not just over the physical but the spiritual too. News of him spread across the entire region.

Jesus Heals Peter's Mother-in-law

After one visit to the synagogue in Capernaum Jesus and his disciples went to Peter and Andrew's home. Peter's mother-in-law was ill in bed with a fever. They found her lying coated in sweat, her breath rattling inside her tortured body. Jesus looked down at her face, her mouth was stretched white against the teeth, the cheeks hollow below her dark eyes.

Jesus: Get up. Come on. Stand up!
Peter: But she's not well...
Jesus: Quiet. Come on, stand up.

The rasping breath stopped and there was suddenly no sound at all from the body on the bed.

Peter: You've killed her... she's stopped breathing... she's dead!

But even as Peter threw himself at the foot of the bed, the contorted face relaxed and a look of calm passed over the eyes. Quietly the woman began breathing normally again. She took Jesus's hand and sat up, the colour rushing back into her cheeks.

Andrew: Careful, don't get up too fast.
Mother-in-law: Strange, I feel fine, better than I have for a long time.
Peter: Incredible!
Mother-in-law: I'm thirsty.
Andrew: I'll get you a drink.
Mother-in-law: No, no, I'll do it. I fell like some exercise. Anyone like any food?

That evening the street outside the house was sprawling with people. Men and women and children came to Jesus for healing, and as the sun went down Jesus worked late, curing those who were sick and delivering those who were demon-possessed.

He was up early the next morning and slipped off to a quiet place to pray, but soon Peter and the others came and disturbed him.

Peter: Everyone's looking for you again. The town's full of people who want to see you!
Jesus: Let's go somewhere else.
Andrew: Somewhere else?
Jesus: Yes. It's too busy here now. We must move on.
Peter: But where?
Jesus: To the other towns and villages round here, that's why I've come – to bring the good news to everyone.

Jesus Heals a Leper

They left and went on through Galilee, Jesus preaching in the synagogues and driving out demons. But it was not long before the crowds grew too big and they could no longer move about freely. Peter and Andrew assessed the situation one day, themselves astonished by the turn of events.

Peter: I blame that leper – d'you remember?
Andrew: Yes, the one who came right up to us and threw himself down in front of Jesus. I can understand him being desperate, when you're sick like that no one wants to know you anymore.
Peter: Quite right too! You don't want a warm embrace from someone like that. He'd probably leave his fingers all over you. Which is why we all ran a mile the moment he leapt out of the bushes at Jesus.
Andrew: Well, leprosy's highly contagious! Hardly makes you Flavour-of-the-Month, does it? Poor chap had gone out to a lonely place in the wilderness and was just sat there waiting to shrivel up and die.

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Peter: Not now though – he’s right back to his old chatty self.
Andrew: Yes, and everyone knows about that little miracle.
Peter: I heard him just yesterday: ‘Yes,’ he was saying, ‘I met this Jesus fella and, oh he’s amazing, he can do anything, just ask him and he’ll sort it out. Just like that. No, I wouldn’t have believed it before either, but now... well! I’d say he could do anything. Anything!’
Andrew: Strange really, he used to be the one stuck out in the wilderness...
Peter: Yes... And now it’s us!
Actor I am really glad he was so excited about getting better, but it was a bit of a shame he was so quick to tell everyone - now we’re the ones who can’t travel about so safely and easily, everyone’s craving to get a piece of Jesus. Now he’s the one who has to hide out in lonely places like this to get a bit of peace and quiet...
Peter: They don’t listen do they? He always tells them to keep it buttoned. He knows everyone’ll come clamouring for his attention.
Andrew: When I first met him I wanted to tell everyone – I thought the whole world had to know. But it doesn’t work like that does it? Has to be in the right way at the right time, otherwise, we just make it more difficult for him to do the things he wants to do... Shame.

A Lame Man is Lowered Through the Roof

Several days later Jesus and his friends returned to Capernaum. They met in a local house and soon the crowd was so large that no one could get in, or even come close to the building. As he was teaching four friends arrived, carrying a paralytic, Ezra, on a stretcher. But there were so many people they could not find a way though to the door into the house.

Thomas: Get back on that stretcher.
Ezra: I don’t feel too ill actually.
Benjamin: Course you do, now lie down.
Ezra: But honestly - I feel fine...
Ruth: Well, you look a funny colour to me.
Ezra: What!!
Josh: Look, of course you’re not well - you haven’t walked for twenty-three years.
Ezra: Well... that is true, but...
Ruth: I mean, just look at his eyes, and feel that temperature!
Ezra: What do you mean? Oh listen, please, will you put me down? I don’t want to go... stop it... let me go... HELP! HELP! I’m being pushed into this...
Josh: No your not - you’re being carried... Now be quiet. It’s for your own good.
Ruth: Of course you want to see Jesus. I mean - who wouldn’t.
Ezra: ME!
Thomas: Oh... stop complaining.

The four friends struggled under the man’s weight as they cast a doubtful eye over the proceedings.

Benjamin: This crowd’s far too big. We’ll never get him through.
Ezra: What? Oh dear, what a shame, and I was so looking forward to it. Still... can’t win ‘em all.

However, the others were not listening, instead they were looking upwards.

Ezra: Hey, what are you planning now?
Josh: The roof.
Ezra: THE ROOF!
Josh: The roof.
Thomas: Good idea.
Ezra: What do you mean - good idea? It’s an extremely dangerous idea.
Benjamin: If we just remove a tiles, and that beam...
Ezra: Now listen, who’s gonna pay for all this damage?

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Thomas: We'll all pay.
Ezra: Who asked you?
Ruth: Agreed. We'll all pay.
Ezra: I won't.
Benjamin: Then we will.
Ezra: You're mad.
Ruth: And you're gonna be healed.
Ezra: I might not want to be.

The friends paused and a communal sigh ran around the group.

Benjamin: Oh all right. You win. Come on, let's go, folks.

They placed him on the floor and turned to walk away, leaving Ezra stranded on the stretcher.

Ezra: Ah! Well, on the other hand... If you put it like that...

With a shout they ran back, scooped him up and rushed him around to the back of the house. As Jesus continued teaching the crowd heard a commotion above and bits of roofing began to fall on the assembled company. Soon voices were raised on the rooftop and a shadowy stretcher appeared through the newly-made hole. The friends lowered the man down and then gathered around a back window eagerly awaiting the outcome.

Thomas: What did Jesus just say?
Josh: Oh! He said his sins are forgiven.
Ruth: But... he can't say that. That's not fair.
Benjamin: Ruth! You said he was going to be healed, not forgiven.
Ruth: Don't blame me, I didn't know he'd been sinning, did I?
Thomas: Wait a minute, let's all keep cool. I still believe he'll be healed, don't you?
Ruth: Well... I suppose so.
Josh: I do. Of course Jesus will heal him.

An awkward silence fell as they turned on Benjamin.

Benjamin: What are you looking at me for? All right, I believe it too... I think. Maybe.
Josh: Hey, look! He's gone. And where's Jesus?
Benjamin: Oh that's great. Forgives his sins, and off he goes...

As they stood staring inside, Ezra appeared around the side of the house and joined the group.

Ezra: Hello, what are you lot doing?
Ruth: We're looking for... Oh!
Benjamin: What is it... AHH!! It's you!
Thomas: Help! He's been healed.
Josh: Amazing! Amazing! Praise God, a miracle.
Benjamin: I told you didn't I?
Ruth: Er no – you said you weren't too sure. In fact when we first thought of the idea I believe you said – if Jesus can heal that wreck I'll eat his stretcher...
Benjamin: Be quiet!

Ezra did not wait around, he leapt down the crowded street, fighting his way through the bodies, dancing and laughing his way home for the first time in his life.

When the crowds saw this they were amazed and the air was full of their awe and wonder, but the religious leaders were not so impressed, their faces sour they went from that place muttering and plotting to undermine the work of Jesus.

The Sketch Gospel

Jesus Calls Matthew the Tax Collector

A few days later Jesus was walking beside the lake again, and the crowds began to gather. Jesus spotted a tax collector at work down there. He moved closer, caught his eye and beckoned to him.

Matthew: What? What is it?
Jesus: D'you enjoy your work?
Matthew: Pays the rent.
Jesus: And plenty more besides I should think.
Matthew: Yes! You could say that.
Jesus: You know what I would say?
Matthew: No, what?
Jesus: Leave all that and come with me.
Matthew: Leave it?
Jesus: Yes.
Matthew: All this money? But I'm authorised – by the Romans no less! I have a responsibility to collect this.
Jesus: I'm giving you a different responsibility. Come with me.

Matthew looked down at the piles of money on his table. In a split-second his life passed before him.

Matthew: Well, I...
Jesus: What have you got to lose?
Matthew: Plenty!
Jesus: I'm only asking... it's not a demand, but you're wasted here.
Matthew: Wasted? Wait. I'm coming.

He scooped the coins into a leather bag and slung it over his shoulder.

Matthew: My name's Matthew by the way.
Jesus: I know. Where d'you live, Matthew?
Matthew: I'll show you. You hungry?

At Matthew's House

Matthew took Jesus and the other disciples back to his home. That evening he invited his friends round to join Jesus for a party. But some of the religious leaders heard about this and came along too. It wasn't difficult to slip in, Matthew's house was chock-a-block with people, food and wine. As the evening wore on Peter raised his voice above the others.

Peter: Jesus! I've got someone here who wants to ask you a question.
Pharisee: What do you think you're doing here? You're a religious man aren't you?
Jesus: What do you mean?
Pharisee: You know! You're a respected teacher! Yet look at you! Feasting and drinking!
Jesus: I'm enjoying the hospitality of my friends.
Pharisee: Yes! And look at them – sinners and tax collectors! Gluttons and parasites all of them. Open your eyes! Can't you see?
Jesus: I see people who are blind, people who are lost, people who are sick and afraid. What do you see?
Pharisee: I see whores and criminals.
Jesus: Then you don't see at all. I have not come for those who are well. My home is with those who need who need a doctor. So if you consider yourself healthy - what are you doing here?

The Pharisee shook his head and left, muttering.

New Wine in New Wineskins

Andrew: Lord, this is Stephen, he's a disciple of John the Baptist.
Jesus: Oh! How is my cousin – is he okay? It's so long since I saw him.

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Stephen: What are you doing here? Why are you celebrating when John lives out in the wilderness?
Jesus: Is he all right?
Stephen: He sent us to find out what you're doing. Why are you living like this?
Jesus: Like what?
Stephen: Well, look at your disciples. They're living like kings. Why do they gorge themselves like this when John's friends live such a sober life? We pray and fast – but look at you all. Life's one big party for you!
Jesus: Well, when you attend a wedding with the bride and groom – you don't fast then do you? You don't look at the mountains of good food and say – sorry – I'm not hungry. You celebrate with those who are celebrating. There will be plenty of time for fasting and praying when the bridegroom has left. No one throws a bucket of ice-cold water on a warm, rosy fire. This is what the kingdom's like.
Stephen: What do you mean?
Jesus: God is always on the move – just like the pillar of fire that led your ancestors across the desert – you cannot pin him down – you cannot box him in. The old covenant is passing away before your eyes – a new age is dawning. It's like wine. No one puts new wine into old, cracked skins – the wine would just ferment and break them open. The old traditions can't contain the changes that are coming. God is doing a new thing - new wine means new wineskins.
Stephen: But old wine is always better than new.
Jesus: You're right – people don't want change when the old traditions have worked so well. But if you try and patch old cloth with new – it won't work. They won't be compatible. You have to cut fresh cloth.

The Healing at the Pool of Bethesda

A few weeks later Jesus travelled to Jerusalem for one of the feasts. The disciples were with him. As he drew near to the sheep gate he came to the pool of Bethesda.

Nathanael: What are we doing here, Lord?
Jesus: Looking for someone who is sick.
James: Someone sick? You're kidding – there are thousands here – look at them all – deaf, blind, paralysed, diseased...
Philip: Yes – if we stay around much longer we'll catch something and join them.
Jesus: There!
James: Where?
Jesus: There – that paralysed man.
Matthew: Which paralysed man? There are thousands!
Andrew: Don't exaggerate, Matthew, there are a hundred.
Matthew: Oh well – that narrows it down then.
Jesus: Wait here – I'm going to see him.
Philip: What? But you'll never get through there...

Jesus wove his way through the carpet of immobile bodies until he reached a lone paralytic.

Jesus: What are you doing here?
Paralytic: What?
Jesus: What are you doing here?
Paralytic: I'm waiting for the waters to stir. When they froth and foam they say that the angel of the Lord has stirred them up and the first one in will be healed.
Jesus: Have you ever been in the water?
Paralytic: Of course not! Or I wouldn't still be paralysed, would I?
Jesus: Why have you never made it?
Paralytic: Because I'm paralysed?!
Jesus: So if you get in the water you'll be able to walk.
Paralytic: Yes!
Jesus: And until you do – you can't walk.

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Paralytic: Yes!
Jesus: So how will you ever get healed?
Paralytic: The water! When it stirs it has healing power!
Jesus: But how will you get down there?
Paralytic: What?
Jesus: I think you heard my question.
Paralytic: I just have to get in the water... then I'll be able to walk...
Jesus: How?
Paralytic: I've told you – the angel stirs up the water...
Jesus: You know what I mean. All you have to do is walk into the water – then you'll be able to walk, right? But you can't walk. Do you really want to be healed?
Paralytic: Of course! Why do you think I've been sitting here waiting for 38 years?
Jesus: I think this has become your life. I think you have friends here, and a social life. I think you are used to begging and leaning on those around. I think it's safe and comfortable for you.
Paralytic: That's a terrible thing to say – what do you know?
Jesus: I know you can be well.
Paralytic: It's easy for you to say – you can sprint down there!
Jesus: There is another way.
Paralytic: How?
Jesus: Do you want to get better?
Paralytic: Yes! Of course... But no one will help me into the water.
Jesus: Then get up.
Paralytic: What?
Jesus: Get up, pick up that mat of yours and walk. Believe me – you can do it.
Paralytic: Just like that?
Jesus: Just like that.

At once the man felt strength returning to his legs. He stretched them, turned onto his knees and stood up.

Paralytic: I haven't done this for 38 years! I'm cured! I can walk – I don't believe it!
Jesus: You'd better! Because it's down to your faith. You can walk down to the water now if you want... Jump in when it froths up next time if you like...

The Pharisees Investigate the Healing

The healed man ran from that place, tears streaming down his face. Jesus returned to his disciples and they left the pool, quietly slipping away through the infected crowds.

Pharisee: Hold on a minute. What do you think you're doing?
Paralytic: What?
Pharisee: What are you doing?
Paralytic: I'm running – I haven't done it for years!!
Pharisee: I don't mean that – I mean that.
Paralytic: Oh this! It's just my old mat. Do you want it – I don't need it now.
Pharisee: Of course I don't want it – I'm not carrying that on the Sabbath and you shouldn't be either. You're breaking the law.
Paralytic: Why?
Pharisee: Because that's work. Carrying and fetching is work! The Sabbath is a day of rest.
Paralytic: Look! You're missing the point here. I'm carrying this because I don't need it anymore.
Pharisee: Well - if you don't need it then why are you breaking the law carrying it?
Paralytic: Because I've just been cured. I used to lie on it by the pool back there, waiting to be healed. Well it's happened - I've been healed.
Pharisee: You jumped into the water? I didn't think that worked.
Paralytic: Of course I didn't jump – I couldn't have jumped if you fired me from a catapult, I was totally paralysed.
Pharisee: So?

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Paralytic: So – this man came along and told me to pick up my mat and walk. So I did.
Pharisee: Who? Who told you to do that on the Sabbath? Tell me?
Paralytic: I would – but I’ve no idea. He just came up to me and told me to get up. So I did.
Pharisee: You’re in deep trouble.
Paralytic: You’ll have to catch me first! Bye!
Pharisee: Come back!

The man slipped away and went to the Temple. There, Jesus caught up with him again.

Jesus: See! You’re well!
Paralytic: You! What’s your name?
Jesus: Why?
Paralytic: I want to know, what’s your name?
Jesus: You’re well now – so stop sinning – or something worse may happen!
Paralytic: Not you as well!
Jesus: What?
Paralytic: Not you as well – on about my mat! I had to carry it – it wouldn’t walk on its own.
Jesus: What mat?
Paralytic: The mat you told me to pick up and carry! I didn’t know it was a sin!
Jesus: It’s not. I’m not talking about that.
Paralytic: Then what other sins have I done?
Jesus: You know.
Paralytic: Who are you?
Jesus: I’m from Nazareth. I’m here with my disciples.
Paralytic: Yes, but what’s your name?
Jesus: Jesus – but don’t do what your planning. Don’t let sin rule you. Please.

The Debate about the Sabbath

The man went straight to the Pharisees and told them who had healed him. Before long the Pharisees had cornered Jesus.

Pharisee: What do you think you’re doing?
Jesus: What do you think I’m doing?
Pharisee: Breaking the law. You told that man to carry his mat on the Sabbath.
Jesus: No. I told that man to be healed.
Pharisee: Then you should not.
Jesus: Because of a mat?
Pharisee: Because healing people is work – and that is forbidden on the Sabbath.
Jesus: Doing God’s work is forbidden on the Sabbath?
Pharisee: Yes.
Jesus: Miracles are forbidden on the Sabbath?
Pharisee: Yes.
Jesus: Well you’d better tell God then – because I only copy what I see him already doing.

Jesus and his disciples left that place and put the city behind them. But the Pharisees followed them.

Pharisee: Hey!
Jesus: What now?
Pharisee: Stop your disciples from eating that corn!
Jesus: Why? Don’t tell me eating on the Sabbath is a sin as well?
Pharisee: Don’t be flippant! Of course not! But they are harvesting corn and that’s work!
Jesus: Harvesting corn? They are breaking off the heads and eating the kernels. It’s hardly harvesting!
Pharisee: It’s not allowed. Our law forbids it.
Jesus: Our law? And what do you know of our law?
Pharisee: Everything. We have studied it for years.

The Sketch Gospel

Jesus: Good, then you'll recall the time when David and his men went into the Temple and ate the consecrated bread. That was not lawful – but they were starving and God did not punish them. Why? Because he cares more about dying men than dying traditions.

Pharisee: How dare you say that?

Jesus: Can't you see? Which came first? The people or the Sabbath?

Pharisee: That's a ridiculous question.

Jesus: Exactly. The answer is obvious. So why can you not see that it makes more sense to keep people alive rather than traditions. Man is more important than the Sabbath. You are so concerned about the law and the Temple – yet standing before you is someone much more important than either of those. Open your eyes.

Pharisee: We will – we'll be watching you – every step you take. So be careful.

Jesus Heals a Man with a Withered Hand

From there Jesus went to the synagogue. There was a man there with a withered hand. The Pharisees had followed Jesus and were watching him very closely. Jesus called to the man.

Jesus: What's your name?

Simeon: Simeon.

Jesus: Simeon, come and stand here with me at the front.

The man stood up and self-consciously made his way towards Jesus. Every eye in the place rested upon him as he shuffled forward.

Jesus: The teachers here do not want me to help you. Do you know why? Because today is the Sabbath – and we must do no work.

Pharisee: Well you tell us, Jesus, is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?

Jesus: Which is lawful? To do harm or to do good? To do what is right? Or to do what is evil? Don't you know the scripture that says: It is kindness God wants – not rituals?

No one spoke.

Jesus: Then I will not speak either – I will simply do. Simeon, stretch out your hand.

Simeon lifted his arm and before their eyes the muscles relaxed, the sinews swelled and the balled fist unravelled. The Pharisees were furious, but the man was happy.

Jesus Commissions the Twelve

Jesus left and continued to minister to the people, teaching, healing and casting out demons. One night, after an exceptionally busy day, he went off alone to pray. The next morning his disciples gathered together.

Peter: Ohh, my head, I really shouldn't have stayed up last night. That last exorcism really took it out of me.

James: Too right. I mean, you can have too much of a good thing.

Philip: I haven't had an early night for weeks now.

John: I expect we'll be off out again today. Following the master.

Nathanael: Oh dear... I mean – that's wonderful!

Matthew: Oh no, I can't cope with more miracles today.

Jesus arrived at that moment, deep in thought.

Peter: Ah Jesus, er good... to see you again...

Jesus: I've been praying this morning...

Nathanael: Oh oh!

Andrew: Yes, we, er, we were just talking about that....

Matthew: Good night last night wasn't it Lord.... Ahem, yes, well, listen, about today...

Jesus: Yes, Matthew?

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Matthew: Er, well...
Jesus: Yes?
Matthew: John wanted to have a word with you about it.
Jesus: Yes John?
John: No, no, it's Philip.
Philip: Nathanael!
Nathanael: Oh no – it's Peter – he's a bit under the weather. I'm fine!
Peter: Thanks very much Nathanael...
John: Actually, Lord, I have got a bit of a bad throat after last night. I've been chatting with Andrew and I really think I'd better take it easy.
James: And Lord, my ankle has swollen up something awful.
John: And my cold's come back, master.
Matthew: Not to mention my catarrh.
Andrew: So... is that okay? If we have the day off, I mean?
James: Yes, we'd rather not come with you today — if you don't mind. I mean, there's only a few little villages round here.
Philip: Yes! One or two demons, the odd adulteress...
Nathanael: Four weddings...
Andrew: And a funeral.
Peter: So that's not a lot for you really. Is it? Barely anything to do at all. So, is that okay?
Jesus: Peter, I'm not asking you to come with me today.
Peter: Well naturally, we can understand your disappointed... what?
John: You mean we don't have to follow you today?
Jesus: No.
Matthew: Oh thanks, Lord.
Philip: That's a relief I can tell you, Lord.
Peter: Come on, let's put our feet up.
Matthew: I've got some shopping to do.
John: I'm going back to bed...
Nathanael: Think I'll go for a nice soak in the bath.
Jesus: Wait a minute – just one thing - today I'm sending you out. Like lambs among wolves.
James: Sorry... I didn't quite catch that.
Jesus: Today, you are going out - alone.
Peter: You mean... us?
Nathanael: On our own?
Matthew: Without you?
John: All by ourselves?
Peter: Like...
Philip: Lambs...
Andrew: Among...
James: Wolves?
Peter: That's not exactly a word of encouragement, Lord.
Jesus: There's a lot to do. Healings, miracles, wonders, signs. I need you to be out there, doing it. Demonstrating the kingdom of God, preaching with words and miracles. You can do it.

For a long time the disciples looked at each. Centuries of time seemed to pass as the truth sunk in.

John: But... My cold.
Peter: My head.
James: My feet.
Matthew: Not to mention my catarrh.
Jesus: You said that today you'd rather not come with me.
Peter: Oh... oh yes, but we didn't mean it. I mean, we can't heal anyone.
Philip: You do the miracle stuff .We can't cure those crowds.
Matthew: We're more sick than they are.

The Sketch Gospel

John: I couldn't give a sermon with my throat.
James: Yes, and how on earth could I go the second mile with my ankle like this.
Nathanael: And my neck's so stiff I'd never be able to turn the other cheek.
Jesus: Listen to me! I am giving you all power and authority to heal and preach and drive out demons.
Andrew: Gosh! Thanks Lord...
Jesus: Go — and trust in me. I'm not asking you to rely on your own resources. Of course you're all falling apart. You're scared. But when you see the blind, the lame, the broken-hearted, you'll forget all that. Remember that I have asked you to heal them, because God's asked me to ask you. Go, just follow this road and you'll soon come to the next village. I'll meet you there later.

One by one the disciples turned and left.

James: But Lord, I hate to keep on, but with my ankle I'll never be able to walk all that way...
Jesus: All right James, let me have a look. Aha... I see...
James: You see I'd love to be out there with all the others on that front line, but... Oh! Oh, that's odd... It seems to be all right all of a sudden.
Jesus: Have faith, James, have faith. The village is that way.

Chapter Four **Feet of Clay and the Breath of God**

(Isaiah 42; Matthew 5-8&10; Mark 3; Luke 6)

Take a good look at my carefully chosen servant.
I love him dearly and take great delight in him.
I have placed my Spirit on him and he will proclaim justice to the nations.
He will not quarrel or shout, or make a great commotion in the streets.
He will not break off a bruised reed, or snuff out a smouldering wick.
Instead, he will be gentle to those who are weak and kind to those who are helpless.
The mere sound of his name will signal hope.
He will persist until justice triumphs and all the nations will put their hope in him.

Jesus Chooses Twelve Disciples

After his night of prayer, alone on the mountainside, Jesus appointed his twelve official followers: Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, Thaddeus and Judas Iscariot. He chose them from among the many disciples who followed him now, and they became his closest friends, learning from him and accompanying him everywhere.

The Beatitudes

That day Jesus took them back up the mountainside and began to teach them.

Jesus: Everybody wants to be happy,
Everybody wants to be satisfied,
Everybody wants to be peaceful and fulfilled.
What do you think? Am I right?

A few murmurs slithered around the group.

Jesus: But everyone looks in the wrong place for these things.
Happiness comes with humility, kindness, caring and service.
Let me illustrate:
Happy are those who feel they are nothing — because God will make them into something.
Happy are those who are hungry — because they are ready to be filled.

The Sketch Gospel

Happy are those who are mourning – they will know the comfort of God.
Happy are those who have nothing – God will give them the world.
Philip: But shouldn't we work to help those who are hungry, those who mourn?
Peter: Yes! Isn't that what we see you doing all the time?
Jesus: Of course! The kingdom is a paradox – you should help the hungry, the sick, the disadvantaged. In the kingdom of heaven there will no sickness, sadness or shortage – that's what I'm showing you now in my time on earth. But the kingdom of this world has not yet been restored – so in the meantime – you will suffer, you will hunger, you will know trouble. And you will be persecuted. But even that is blessed – when people persecute you for my sake – then be glad.
John: But how? Why?
Jesus: Because a great reward is kept in heaven for those who suffer for my sake. So – be merciful and God will show you his mercy, be humble and God will lift you up. Work for peace and strive for purity then you will see God and more than that – you will be his children!
James: And what if we can't do all that?
Jesus: It is very difficult – that's true James, but in your darkest hour remember - all things are possible with God. And for those who are already rich, well-fed, complacent and acclaimed on this earth – they have already received their comfort, their food and their laughter – there is little reward left for them in heaven. People may praise you but many a false prophet has been welcomed with open arms in the past. So be on your guard and take care.

A heavy silence fell over the group as they considered these hard words.

Jesus: So - to come back to my question - if you want happiness don't seek it... Look for the things of God instead... Thaddaeus, pass me that bag of food. Yes, that's the one. Now, see this meat? Taste it, what's it lacking? Right – salt. Salt adds flavour, it seasons, it preserves. You're like that – you are salt for the peoples of the world. So don't lose that distinct flavour – fight to keep it – if you lose your power to preserve goodness – the whole world might well go rotten.
Imagine this: two friends, in years to come, meeting in the home of one of them:

Salt and Light

The scene is a front lounge. Jim is watching television. There is a knock at the door. Jim opens it, his eyes still very much on the TV.

Jim: Yes?
Stewart: Er, Jim, it's me - Stewart, I've come for the midweek Bible study meeting.
Jim: Oh, yes, yes. Right, come in. Great to see you again! Er... Do I know you?
Stewart: Well, I've only been at St Clarence's a couple of months, but you share the peace with me rather a lot... I'm the one who doesn't like being hugged... Anyway, I felt I needed to grow a bit more in my faith - so I thought I'd try this house group.
Jim: Oh, right. Good idea. Fancy a beer?
Stewart: Not right now, Jim.
Jim: Not one of those puritans are you? Sorry, sorry. Just my sense of humour. Anyway, you were saying.
Stewart: Well, I've been a Christian for...
Jim: Do you watch football? It's the qualifier...
Stewart: No, not right now Jim. Listen, I feel that I need to take more time to listen to God - like those men of faith from the past, they were really sold out for Him. It's amazing reading it in here.
Jim: In where?
Stewart: The Bible, Jim.
Jim: Which bit?
Stewart: Well, all of it.
Jim: All of it? I only have time to read a few verses a week. Do you play football, then?

The Sketch Gospel

Stewart: Not lately...

Jim: Yes, I do an' all, love it. Course, the missus goes on a bit at me about playing on Sunday. But I manage to get to church every other week. Providing I don't oversleep of course.

Stewart: Jim, can I ask you something?

Jim: Fire away - in the words of the old cornfield - I'm all ears! Get it? All ears... hey have you heard the latest one about the Bishop and the... Oh I'll tell you that one later, when the wife isn't about. She's a bit narrow when it comes to jokes, you know.

Stewart: Jim, this question?

Jim: Oh, yes, ask away, anything, providing it's not the European Cup, I'm a bit behind on that one.

Stewart: Well, do you think Jesus was a fanatic?

Jim: What, like a football fanatic, you mean?

Stewart: No, Jim. I mean was he radical?

Jim: Oh I dunno. That's dodgy ground. Ask the vicar when he gets here. He might know.

Stewart: Yes, where are the others Jim?

Jim: Probably watching this actually. They're usually late when it's the football. Tell you what. You obviously want a good natter, I'll video this and we can watch it later, when they all get here.

Stewart: Didn't Jesus say we should be like him, take up our cross, be different, you know?

Jim: Oh yes, yes, but you don't want to take that too much to heart. I mean, if you don't go out and enjoy the world... you'd never have the chance to convert anyone, would you?

Stewart: That's true Jim, very true.

Jim: Exactly.

Stewart: How many people have you converted then?

Jim: Well... that's difficult to say, isn't it?

Stewart: I want to be a man of God, Jim. I don't want to be just half a Christian. I want to be serious about it.

Jim: Oh well, of course you do. So do I, I'm serious about it Stewart.

Stewart: Are you, are you really Jim?

Jim: Yes.

Stewart: Only I'm beginning to wonder how serious today's Christians really are.

Jim: Oh yes, I'm deadly serious. We all are. Why else would I give up my Wednesday evenings for a house group meeting? That's why I've joined the video club - it keeps me in touch with those in the media. After all, Jesus said we mustn't hide our lamp under a barrel...

Jesus: A city on a hill can't be hidden away. You can see it for miles around. You don't light a lamp and then cover it up - what good would that be? You'd be stumbling around in the dark and so would everyone else. I am the light of the world - and you will be lights for the world if you stay close to me. Like a mirror reflecting the light of God.

Lights for the World

Stewart: Why is your house all dark, Jim?

Jim: Oh I've got lots of lights. There's one in every room. There's a switch over there.

Stewart: Shall I turn it on then?

Jim: Oh no - the neighbours might see and it might start them talking.

Stewart: But Jim - we can't do anything in the dark.

Jim: Oh sure we can, fancy a doughnut?

Stewart: If you can find it?

Jim: I put them in the fridge - there's a light in there - it comes on when you open the door. Here we are.

Stewart: So why is it still dark?

The Sketch Gospel

Jim: Oh I took the bulb out – didn't want to cause a fuss you know. Here we go – one doughnut.

Stewart: Jim – this is an old sock.

Jim: Is it? Ooh yes!

Stewart: What's it doing in the fridge?

Jim: I get the rooms mixed up sometimes – not easy in the pitch black. Here this is the doughnut.

Stewart: No. This a handkerchief. A used one.

Jim: Oh!

Stewart: Jim, surely it would be okay to put on one light?

Jim: Oh I do. Regularly. I switch them all on sometimes.

Stewart: When?

Jim: On Sunday morning. I unscrew all the bulbs, take them down to church and we plug them all in and switch them on together. It makes a beautiful sight.

Jesus: Let your light shine before people – so that they may see the good things you do – and that will season the world. Here's a good guide for living. Ask yourself what you want people to do for you. Then go and do it for them. Even for your enemies.

James: Our enemies?

Jesus: Yes, James. Anybody can be nice to other nice people – that won't make an impact. Love those who hate you, care for those who couldn't care less. Watch out for those who are only watching out for themselves. After all, God sends the sun and the rain on everyone – so you shower your good deeds on all alike.
If someone demands your coat, offer him your sweater too, if they take your money – offer them your wallet to keep it in.

Bear One Another's Burdens

Jim: Nice to see you, Stewart.

Stewart: Nice to see you, Jim.

Jim: That looks a heavy case, let me hold it for you, Stewart.

Stewart: That's kind of you, Jim. Thanks.

Jim: No problem. Just doing my Christian duty and all that. Boy! It is heavy.

Stewart: Yes, just been to Siberia for a holiday. Had to take lots of warm clothes and big boots.

Jim: Feels like it. Aren't you going to offer to carry mine?

Stewart: Your what?

Jim: My case.

Stewart: You haven't got one.

Jim: I have now! Yours – and it weighs a ton!

Stewart: But you offered to carry it for me!

Jim: Exactly - bear one another's burdens and all that. Do unto others as you'd have them do to you. You want me to carry your case don't you?

Stewart: Of course.

Jim: Good! Then carry it yourself!

Stewart: Jim – that doesn't make sense.

Jim: Of course it does. Anyway – the Christian life isn't supposed to make sense.

Stewart: Well it's not very nice - offering to carry my bag then making me carry it instead.

Jim: Ah well – what's the point of only doing things for nice people – that won't get you any prizes. Do good to those who take advantage of you.

Stewart: You seem to know an awful lot about this stuff.

Jim: Oh I do Stewart. I do. So give us your coat and lend us a tenner.

Jesus: Don't take advantage of people – don't pick on them or criticise them. The rulebook you apply to others will be applied to you. Don't judge or you will be judged. Don't condemn and you will not be condemned, Forgive and you too will be forgiven. Be generous in your thinking and kind in your living. Help and give without expecting any return and you will reap a great reward.

The Sketch Gospel

It's so easy to spot the tiny flaws in others, some people make a living out of it, but how hard it is to see the mountain of rubbish piled up in our own back yard.

Specks and Logs

Michelle and Stewart are getting ready to go out for the evening.

Michelle: Oh look, how on earth did you manage that?
Stewart: I just slipped, that's all.
Michelle: But red wine, I ask you.
Stewart: It's rosé actually.
Michelle: Oh the good stuff, what a waste.
Stewart: Listen don't make such a fuss, it's only a few spots.
Michelle: But it's your best tie.
Stewart: Yes, but it is getting old, and I never did like it that much.
Michelle: I bought you that tie.
Stewart: Oh! Did you? Well, it'll be all right, there's no need to keep on.
Michelle: But we're going to my mother's, what on earth will she think?
Stewart: Think! I didn't know your mother ever did...
Michelle: I'll ignore that comment. What are you going to do about this mess?
Stewart: It's not a mess.
Michelle: It is. You look terrible, it's all over the place.
Stewart: You're exaggerating as usual.
Michelle: Oh am I? Well, I'll tell you one thing. I'm not going out with you while you look like that. You're just an embarrassment to me. Now give me that cloth...

Michelle turns to wipe off the stains, revealing a much larger stain down the back of her jacket.

The Ten Commandments

Jesus: Remember the Ten Commandments? They are still important – I haven't come to do away with them. Not at all! Love God, and love your neighbour – there is nothing else more important in life than these two priorities.
Don't steal, don't kill, don't lie, don't commit adultery, don't envy or covet, don't blaspheme, respect your parents and guardians, respect the one who made you and knows you better than anyone. Talk to him, honour him, but don't brag about it – and when you talk to him, please, please, please - don't waffle or use superfluous language.

Praying

Michelle: Lord, we just really want to just, in a very real sort of way, Lord, say how much, Lord, we really just want to move into a time of honestly and openly, just most sincerely, really coming before you in a very spirit-filled and born-again sense to let you know as it were, how much Lord, we really and just always want to. Amen.

Jesus: Instead – try this...

The Lord's Prayer

Stewart: Father in heaven we want to praise you, and say how wonderful you are.
May we do the things that you want us to do,
And help us to live our lives in a way that satisfies heaven.
Please show us how to do this, and please give us all the daily things we need –
and help us not to be selfish with them.
We are sorry for the times when we have been selfish;
In fact we are sorry for all the things we have done wrong.
We remember all those who have annoyed us,
Hurt us or upset us - and we forgive them.
Please keep us away from the things that are not good for us,
And help us when we want do the things that are wrong.
Help us to think of you - and all the good things that you do for us.

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Because you made everything,
You own everything,
And you love everything.
You are God forever and we love you and thank you.

Jesus: It is vital that you forgive others if you want God to forgive you. Forgiveness is the oil of life. Without it the mechanics dry up and fall apart. And when you pray remember two things - God is good and he likes you!

Good Gifts

Son: Mum, you know it's Christmas soon?
Michelle: Yes, dear.
Son: Well, mum, you know Freddie next door?
Michelle: Yes, dear.
Son: He's getting a motorbike mum!
Michelle: Yes, dear.
Son: Well, mum...
Michelle: Yes, dear?
Son: Can I have one?
Michelle: No, dear.
Son: Ohhh... why not?
Michelle: Because he's 43 and you're only 7, dear. You wouldn't know how to use it.
Son: Oh. Mum?
Michelle: Yes, dear.
Son: Can I have a box of Lego instead?
Michelle: Of course, dear.
Son: Really? Wicked!!

Money and Worry

Jesus: In the same way your heavenly Father delights to give good gifts to those who ask him.
Now, money. Make no mistake – money makes the world go round. To most people it is the most important thing in life. It occupies their thoughts, their energies, their hopes and dreams. It causes illness, pain and stress. But you must avoid this. Don't lay your life down on the altar of money. You will only end up serving it – when it should serve you. Love people and use things – don't get this the wrong way round. For some of you this will be the hardest struggle of your life. But don't worry about money and possessions. Take one day at a time. God's name is I am – he is here, with you now, in the present. If you try and battle the future before you get there you will be fighting alone, live the moment.
Who knows – tomorrow there might be a plague of locusts; or an epidemic of frogs; or both.
You might fall in love; or catch fleas; or fall in love and catch fleas.
It may be your birthday, and everyone may forget. Or your wedding anniversary, and you may forget!
But don't worry.
Instead, keep your eyes on today. Keep looking for the work of God and everything else will fall into place. After all, do the flowers worry? Do the birds get ulcers? Does the grass have panic attacks? Yet God looks after them. So don't worry about tomorrow - when you get there God will have arrived ahead of you. Instead, keep looking to Him, and find out what he wants you to do.

Blind Guides

Jim: Stewart, have I shown you my new home-cinema with complete Dolby quadraphonic digital DVD surround-sound bass booster mega gain wall-to-wall visuals?
Stewart: Er... sorry, can you say that again?

The Sketch Gospel

Jim: No, not really, I'll show you. It's got these six huge speakers, they're so you can hear it. That big flat screen there – that's like a... er... big... flat... screen. So you can see it.

Stewart: That's vital really isn't it?

Jim: It is if you want to watch something. This is the DVD player – that's a sort of piece of equipment that plays DVD's.

Stewart: And what are DVD's?

Jim: Well you know CD's?

Stewart: Yes.

Jim: They're not those.

Stewart: Right. Are they like videos?

Jim: Ah! Good question – they are – but they're not.

Stewart: What's that?

Jim: That's... a black box which looks... well... great! And does something to make it all work.

Stewart: And how do you turn it on?

Jim: Ah! Well you see this book here? It's got pages in it and if you look at few in the back there's something called an index. And in there there's a sub-section called O and it should tell you there.

Stewart: So... can we watch something then?

Jim: No idea. Looks good though doesn't it?

Jesus: When one blind man leads another – both of them fall into a ditch. Be careful who you aspire to. Any student will be like his teacher. And be careful also who you teach. Don't scatter the precious seeds of your faith before fools – they will only trample on them and kick them around like a cheap ball. And then they'll turn on you. Be wise, wrap your words in parables and stories – then those who have the ears will hear – and the fools will just laugh and chatter idly. Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock persistently and the door will open to you. Keep on, don't give up, until you find the way that leads to life.

The Narrow Way

Stewart: Er, excuse me, I'm not quite sure which way to go. Can you help me?

Guide: Certainly sir, only too pleased to be of assistance. If you'd like to continue straight ahead - it's a clear road, no hold-ups or sharp turns; no traffic jams on the road to His Excellency's land of leisure.

Stewart: To be honest that isn't where I'm trying to get to, I'm on my way to...

Guide: Excuse me, sir... I'm sorry, what was your name again?

Stewart: Stewart.

Guide: Well, Stew, if you're on your way to Heav... ahem... that other place, then I'm sure you don't quite understand what you're letting yourself in for. The roads are dreadful, no baggage allowed at all and they charge you everything you've got just to begin. Some people say that the gatekeeper even takes peoples' lives. And that's just the start of it - doubt and ridicule are very nasty little bottlenecks, and if you take a wrong turn and end up in persecution, well, it can be murder there you know. And then there's always traffic jams around the house of humility, not to mention the road-works outside compassion cottage. I just can't see why people bother following that way at all.

Stewart: Oh... what's this way like then?

Guide: Ah well, Stew, this road is a tremendous feat of evasion. It by-passes all those spiritual ups and downs, all nasty hold ups of principal, any unscrupulous attacks of conscience and especially the extortionate cost of love and compassion. Of course, we can't quite match the amenities of erm... you know where, but frankly, Stew, I don't think it's all it's cracked up to be anyway. And we have plenty of customers.

Stewart: So you do get people coming this way?

Guide: Oh good grief Stew, yes! Millions of them! We can barely cope. And can you blame them? We make no demands on people and do everything possible to make them

The Sketch Gospel

comfortable. You won't find us upsetting your apple cart, Stew. All we ask is a few very simple questions when people get here. Now if I can just find the forms...

Stewart: But I haven't said I want to go this way.

Guide: Stew, there's no need for concern, really. There are only a couple of questions that we need to ask. I'm sorry they're a bit personal but we do keep the answers confidential. Have you, at any time, had any association with... well, with God?

Stewart: Yes, of course.

Guide: Ah. Well, never mind, we may be able to get round that. How about Jesus?

Stewart: Yes, he's been showing me the way and I've been using his guide book.

Guide: Stew, Stew, you do disappoint me. I'm afraid I can't let you go any further until you promise to adopt a much more apathetic attitude to these things, and an extremely vague expression when referring to 'God' and 'the Bible'. In fact, why not lend me that book, I can soon mislay it for you.

Stewart: I'm not handing anything over to you, I just want some directions to the narrow gate.

Guide: In that case get out of the way and stop holding up the people behind you. Ah, Madam, welcome. So nice to see you. If you'd just like to sign here... I mean sign here. Thank you. Let me wish you a safe journey and a very warm welcome.

Jesus: Watch out for blind guides and false prophets. They excel in sweet words and easy answers. But they can be crooks in the guise of a friend. How will you know? Look at the fruit of their labours. A good tree bears good, healthy fruit, a rotten tree bears corrupted fruit. You wouldn't want to eat that. Every good person brings goodness from the store accumulated in their lives, every bad person brings bad things out of the same place. Be wise about these things, don't be hoodwinked. Sweet talk doesn't always mean sweet fruit.

Likewise – God won't be hoodwinked either. Not everyone who claims to be serving him is speaking the truth. People may claim to have conquered the world for God – but some have done it for themselves alone and when they reach the gates of eternal life they will find them locked and securely bolted against them. I know these words are hard – life will always be a struggle. Humankind will always be torn in two – comprised as they are of the breath of God and feet of clay. The dust of their bones will grow weary, crumble, fade away and die. But the divine breath in their lungs will always be reaching for God, creating, living, loving and moving on. Remember all I have told you today – but remembering alone is not enough. Put these words into practise and you will be like a wise man who builds his life on a secure and steady foundation. Ignore them and the perils of life will rise up and wash you away.

The Two Houses – Wise and Foolish

Stewart: Hello? Hello? Jim is that you? Yes? Oh good. Yes - it's me, Stewart. Yes. Hello? How are you? How's your in-growing toenail? Is it? Oh dear, never mind wrap it in packing tape and bubble-wrap, that should stop the mess. Listen, it's about those houses, the ones we've bought. Yes, I'm here now. Looking at it. I know I said 'it'. I'm looking at 'it' now. I know, that's the point. It is very nice - but where's the other one?

That's right, remember - you said there were going to be two? One for each of us. So where's the second one?

What? It's right next to the first one? You mean in that mosquito-infested swamp?

Yes - there's only a swamp. In fact there's rather a lot of water here - but only one house! Yes - I suppose you could say it's funny! No - I'm not laughing, am I? Yes, I've got that photo here now. There are two houses in it all right. Oh yes, the one on the left is definitely the best, beautiful paintwork, nice garden, lovely patio, pretty sandstone all round. Lovely! Very impressive. Much better than the old tumbledown shack on the right stuck on that ugly rock. But that's the problem - it's the nice one on the left that's disappeared!

The Sketch Gospel

Chapter Five A Matter of Life and Death

(Matthew 8,9&11-13; Mark 3&4; Luke7&8)

The Centurion's Servant

When Jesus had finished teaching his disciples he led them back down the mountain and into Capernaum. The crowds followed him once again and soon a centurion came to him and begged Jesus to heal his servant. The man had great faith and astounded Jesus with his level of trust. Before long the centurion was hurrying home.

Marcus: Centurion! Where are you off to in such a hurry' ?
Centurion: Can't stop, Marcus, got to get home.
Marcus: Really, bit of a crisis on, eh?
Centurion: No, just the opposite. My servant has just been healed by Jesus. And I'm off home to see him.
Marcus: You mean, that prophet?
Centurion: He's more than a prophet, Marcus, He's God's anointed.
Marcus: Maybe, but He didn't do much for me, I took my slave to see Him.
Centurion: Your slave, why did you want to take him?
Marcus: Oh, I didn't want to take him. I knew it was no good. I knew that Jesus would just look at him and spout some religious stuff about repenting.
Centurion: And what did he do?
Marcus: He looked at him and spouted some religious stuff about repenting.
Centurion: Well, you can hardly complain then you got what you expected!
Marcus: Huh, my slave was extremely disappointed, I can tell you.
Centurion: Why?
Marcus: Because he wasn't really that ill, he just wanted Jesus to tell me that he wasn't fit to work. But that wouldn't have made any difference to me. I know he's not fit to work – he's not fit for anything.
Centurion: Marcus, I must go...
Marcus: What happened, then? When he got healed, what happened?
Centurion: Jesus just said the word...
Marcus: Yes, and?
Centurion: And that was enough. My servant was healed. Jesus has that authority.
Marcus: So... He was able to see again, was he?
Centurion: He wasn't blind, Marcus, he had a serious fever... that is, until five minutes ago.
Marcus: Five minutes? Wait a minute, if he's at home and you're here... How do you know?
Centurion: Jesus told me. He said, 'Go home – what you believe could happen just has.'
Marcus: So - you don't know he's cured at all, you haven't seen him...
Centurion: Marcus – I know what authority is – I have hundreds of men at my beck and call – I say jump and they jump. It's the same with Jesus – he is a man of authority – one word from him and sickness has to go.
Marcus: You don't know that! Your servant could be worse than ever. He's probably dead by now... Hang on, who's that running up the road. It looks like...no, can't be...
Centurion: It is —that's my servant.
Marcus: But I don't understand, how did you know?
Centurion: I didn't Marcus, I just believed.

The Widow of Nain

From Capernaum Jesus went on to Nain. A large, lively crowd followed him and as he and his disciples approached the town gate a funeral procession was coming out towards them. Behind the coffin a woman was weeping terribly, her heart visibly broken.

Peter: Perhaps we should move out of here, Lord, we don't want to disrupt this funeral with this rabble behind us.
Jesus: Andrew – find out what's going on will you?
Peter: What? Look it's obvious – there's a box, there's six men carrying it, there's a lot of unhappy people – I think that means it's a funeral. We should give them some space.

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Andrew: The woman crying has just lost her only son. She's a widow and she's heartbroken.
Peter: Well that's pretty obvious. Wouldn't you be?
Jesus: Peter...
Peter: Yes.
Jesus: Be quiet.
Peter: But Lord...
Jesus: Be quiet! Andrew, take me over.
Peter: What?
Jesus: Peter – stay here and keep the others quiet – your good at crowd control.
Andrew: Here she is. This is the mother.
Jesus: Don't cry – all will be well. Can you stop the coffin for a moment? Andrew, tell them to lay it down so I can put my hands on it.
Peter: Is this a good idea, Lord?
Jesus: I thought you were looking after the crowd?
Andrew: Lord, they're going to put the coffin on that wall.

A hush fell over the assembled group as the coffin was laid down and Jesus walked to it and touched the lid of the box.

Jesus: Young man – I'm talking to you - get up now. It's time.

There was a cry of horror as the box shuddered, the lid moved, and a pale hand crept out and clutched at the side.

Jesus: Andrew, Peter, quick! Lift the lid and help him out.

The crowd erupted into cheers, gasps and applause as the dead man sat up, gasping for air and looking around with wide eyes. His mother ran over and threw herself at her son, sobbing and laughing at the same time. The people shouted praises to God – they could not believe their eyes and were convinced that Jesus was a prophet sent from God to help his people.

The Messengers from John the Baptist

John the Baptist was now in prison, arrested by Herod for haranguing him about his illegal marriage - for Herod had married the wife of his brother, Philip. Stories began to filter back to John about Jesus and his popularity, so he sent two of his disciples to Jesus to find out for themselves what was going on. When they found Jesus a huge crowd surrounded him.

Nathan: Jesus! Jesus of Nazareth! Your cousin sent us to find you! He has a question for you.
Jesus: John? How is he? Is he surviving in prison? Is he all right?
Nathan: He has a question for you.
Jesus: Is he all right though? Are they feeding him?
Nathan: He's concerned about you.
Jesus: Me?
Nathan: Yes – are you the one we were waiting for – or should we look for someone else?
Jesus: John wants to know that?
Nathan: Yes.
Jesus: But... Is Herod going to set him free?
Nathan: We don't know. But God keeps him alive. And he is concerned about God's work. He needs to know if you are the one.
Jesus: Oh, John, John... The most dedicated of men... My poor, poor cousin... I miss him.
Nathan: But are you the one?
Jesus: Well, look around you! What do you see? That man there – when he came today he was blind, that woman whispering to that child, she was deaf, those two boys playing chase, they were crippled. Tell John what you see – the poor are receiving the good news of God. Surely John will read these signs and know for himself. He won't have any doubts.
Nathan: I'll tell him.

The Sketch Gospel

Jesus: Yes, do - and also tell him – I'm thinking and praying. I have not forgotten my cousin. And these people have not either. I'll show you. Listen up everyone. Who did you see when you went out into the desert? A man living in ease and luxury? No – you saw a prophet – a true prophet – and more than that, the messenger who prepared the way for the coming of God's kingdom. And here it is! Listen to me, everyone, there is no one born who is greater than John – yet the least person in God's kingdom will be greater than he. Nathan?

Nathan: Yes?

Jesus: Everyone who is weak and weighed down can come to me and I will give them rest. Exchange your burden for mine and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart, and my burden is light. It will set your mind at rest and bring peace to your soul.

At the House of Simon the Pharisee

Later that day one of the local Pharisees, Simon, invited Jesus to his home for a meal. So Jesus went, ate with him and enjoyed his hospitality. But while they were eating a local prostitute appeared in the doorway. She had heard that Jesus was in the town and so she slipped in and sat behind him. She began to cry and her tears washed over the dust on Jesus's feet. She wiped the tears with her hair and then took some perfume she had brought in an alabaster jar and doused his feet with the sweet oil. Simon the Pharisee watched bemused. He turned to one of the other guests.

Simon: If this man's a prophet then I'm the Emperor. A prophet would know immediately who she is and what she's up to...

Jesus: Simon! That reminds me...

Simon: Yes, teacher?

Jesus: I have a story for you.

Simon: Go ahead – I've heard you're a good storyteller.

Jesus: There were two men who owed money to a moneylender. One had huge debts – he owed thousands. The other owed just a little. One day – the moneylender was in a good mood – in a generous moment he called them both in and said, 'Forget the debts – you're in the clear!'

Simon: That sounds rather unlikely.

Jesus: It does! But not impossible. Now I have a question – which one will be more grateful – the one who owed a lot, or the one who owed a little.

Simon: I think you hardly need ask – but I'll tell you – the one who owed a lot. Surely it would be as if his life were starting again.

Jesus: Exactly! Well put.

Simon: If I may say, Jesus, that was not the most engrossing of tales.

Jesus: No – but it was true.

Simon: Really?

Jesus: Oh yes, did you not recognise yourself?

Simon: Me?

Jesus: Simon, you see this woman? When I arrived you forgot to offer me water to wash my feet – she has done it for you with her tears and her hair. You forgot to greet me with the kiss of a friend – she has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not offer me any oil or perfume – she has doused me in hers. The person who knows the greatest forgiveness – expresses the greatest love. Her sins are forgiven and she cannot stop showing love. Her debts were large – but today they have been cancelled.

Simon: You can't do that!

Jesus: Do what?

Simon: Forgive sins. Not here, not like this. Only God can forgive sins – and not here in my house! It has to be done in the Temple, through the priests!

Jesus: Simon, if your forgiveness is small – your gratitude is small.

Simon: It's not about gratitude!

Jesus: She is forgiven Simon, no matter what you think of her. Her sins are gone. Her faith has saved her.

The Sketch Gospel

Jesus left and the house remained in turmoil for some time.

Jesus Drives Out Demons

Jesus and his disciples left that town and went onto others, continuing the ministry of healing, preaching and deliverance. Others were with him too, Mary, Joanna, Suzanna and other women who were supporting Jesus out of their own finances. Jesus had driven demons out of some of them and he continued to exorcise those brought to him with evil spirits. It caused a stir and many of the religious leaders felt threatened and regularly argued with him.

One day Jesus and his disciples entered a house and the place was so packed no one could move. He healed a man who was unable to speak or hear, by driving a demon out of him.

Jesus: You may have heard the Pharisees claim that I drive out demons by the power of Beelzebub – but think about the ridiculousness of that. Any house divided will fall – I drive out demons not by the power of the devil – but by the hand of God. He has sent me to bring light to dark corners. To illuminate those who live in the darkest of places. Some of you have been overwhelmed by a strong enemy – but if a stronger man breaks into your life, then he can break the power of the tyrant and release you. Walk in the light – not in the darkness. Your eyes are most important. They are the windows of your soul – the lamp for your body. If your eyes feast on light, then your whole body will be good. And your soul will be healthy.

Andrew: Jesus – your family is outside. They're worried about you, they've brought food.

Jesus: My family? This is now my family. These are my brothers and sisters. It seems a hard thing to say – but these are my family.

Andrew: But, Lord, your mother wants to talk to you.

Jesus: I understand. But think on this – my father, my mother, my brothers and sisters – they are the people who hear the Word of God and put his will into practise. My family is extended now – and those who love God are part of it.

The Parable of the Sower

Jesus left the house and went on down to the lake. So many people thronged about him that he got into a boat and pushed out onto the water. He began to teach them.

Jesus: Do you see the men in the fields over there? What are they doing? Yes, farming. But what are they actually doing? Right, sowing seeds. Now you've all seen farmers out at work. What happens when they sow?

Philip: They take handfuls of seed and scatter it on the land.

Jesus: And then?

Philip: Then they take another handful of seed and scatter that.

Jesus: And then?

Peter: Lord, this could go on all day.

Jesus: True – just like a farmer sowing seeds. But think – use your eyes. What happens to the seed?

Andrew: It lands on the ground and grows.

Jesus: Does it?

Peter: Yes!

Jesus: Does it all grow?

Peter: What?

Jesus: Does it all grow?

Peter: How do I know, I'm a fisherman, not a farmer.

Jesus: But look! Use your eyes. What do you see happening to the seed?

Andrew: It goes all over the place.

Jesus: Exactly.

Philip: Some lands on soil...

Andrew: But not all of it.

Jesus: Right! Now listen, a farmer went out to sow his seed on the land. He took a handful and he scattered it. Now, some of it landed... where?

The Sketch Gospel

Andrew: On the path?
Jesus: Yes. That wouldn't grow – because the birds flew down, and you know what they're like – they ate up that seed in seconds. So the farmer threw out some more and some of it landed...?
Peter: On the stony ground.
Jesus: Okay, so what would happen to that?
Peter: It wouldn't grow.
Jesus: Ah, well it might.
Peter: I told you – I'm a fisherman, not a farmer.
Jesus: Patience, Peter, patience. You're half-right. It did start to grow, because there was a little soil, in fact it sprang up quickly. But it had no deep roots so when the sun came up the plants dried and withered away. Another handful of seed. Where now?
Philip: Thorns!
Jesus: Right! Fast-growing weeds. They soon grew up taller than the plants, blocked out the light and choked them.
Peter: He's not much of a farmer.
Jesus: Well a quarter of his seed did land on good soil. That took root, grew up and bore a good crop.
Peter: Thank goodness for that!
Jesus: But remember what I said – listen and look carefully – there's more to this story than meets the eye.

Why Use Parables?

Later, when the crowds had gone home the disciples gathered around him and asked him about the parable.

Peter: Why do you speak in stories all the time? Why not just come straight out and say what you mean?
Jesus: You are privileged Peter, all of you are. I am sharing with you the secrets of God's kingdom, but for those outside I have to speak more carefully. I speak in images and parables so that those who want to hear will hear, but those who want to scoff will not understand. For those who listen with the tiniest seed of faith – they will receive much more. But those with nothing but criticism will have even that taken from them. Do you remember the words of the prophet Isaiah? 'Though seeing – they do not see...'
Andrew: I remember that one – '...though hearing they do not hear. The people's hearts have turned to stone and though they listen they do not hear, and though they look they do not see.'
Jesus: Well, said, Andrew. For if they did see, then they would surely understand, and they would certainly repent and turn to God.
Peter: Don't you want them to understand?
Jesus: Of course I do, Peter. My Father does not want anyone to be lost – but to offer the truth openly on a plate would not make them swallow it. To you the truth is a sign of hope, a flag to rally the troops. But to them it's a sword, a deadly weapon that threatens danger and destruction. You have to be careful how you wield it. But you are fortunate – you hear and see the kingdom of God at work.
Peter: Er, yes, Lord, actually, while we're on that subject – could you just go over that story again, just to make sure that we all got the meaning. Only I think Andrew might have missed some of it...
Jesus: Peter! Don't you understand either?
Peter: Me? Oh yes, yes! It's Philip, and all the others, I just want them to be sure...
Jesus: Right... Well, the seed in the story represents the word of God, sown by the farmer across the land. The seeds landing on the path are like those people who hear the message but don't understand, and having not understood the words bounce off them like seed off the hard ground. Then the evil one, like the birds, swoops in and steals away the word of life.
Andrew: And the seed on the stony ground?

The Sketch Gospel

Jesus: That is rather like those who hear the word, understand and embrace it. But do so without considering the difficulties. Then when the heat of troubles, problems and persecution comes along – they are not prepared and soon give up. With no deep roots their faith withers and dies.

Peter: I think I know about the thorns. The word falls on listening ears, it takes root, and begins to grow in the people's lives. Then something grows up to throttle their faith. Am I right?

Jesus: Yes! But would you like to be more specific?

Peter: Not really.

Jesus: Okay – well, I will then. The worries and riches and pleasures of life are like the thorns that grow up and choke – they distract and make the faith unfruitful.

Peter: I nearly had it!

Jesus: Yes Peter – you nearly did. The seed in the good soil is obvious – that's like the word that falls on the lives ready to receive it, ready to persevere, and willing to bear long-term fruit.

The Parables of the Mustard Seed and the Weeds

Andrew: Why do you talk about seeds and sowers, Lord?

Jesus: Because the kingdom is very similar. It's like a tiny mustard seed, which is so small you can barely see it. But plant it, water it and it grows into the mightiest of plants – even birds come and rest in its shade. The kingdom is like that – it has small beginnings that will reach out forever.

Peter: Let's make that happen then! Now!

Jesus: It takes time Peter, the farmer who sows seed has to leave it in the ground and wait. He doesn't understand the process but he knows it will grow and one day he will wake up and find the crop there, ready for harvesting. That's the nature of the kingdom. It will grow. Plant that seed and one life will harvest many.

Andrew: So will it change everyone?

Jesus: That would be good – but it's not like that. Another farming story for you. A man goes out and sows good, healthy seed in his fields.

Peter: There's an awful lot of sowing going on...

Jesus: Yes! That's right – there is - but not all the seed is good. Indeed, while this man and his workers sleep an enemy creeps into his fields and scatters weeds everywhere. The man doesn't know about this until the wheat sprouts and grows up, then all the weeds grow up around it. On seeing this the man's workers said, 'Where did all these thorns come from? We didn't sow weeds?' But the farmer knows, he's not stupid, he says, 'An enemy has done this, someone has crept in and sabotaged our work.'

Peter: I'd go and sort them out – right there and then, they wouldn't do it again.

Jesus: Well, that's what the man's workers want to do – but the farmer says 'No'.

Andrew: They should just go out and pull up all the weeds, that would scupper the bad guy.

Jesus: Again the farmer says 'No'. He's much more concerned about the good wheat, he doesn't want that damaged or trampled in the process of pulling up the weeds. So he lets the weeds stay there, growing alongside the good crop until it's time to harvest the lot. Then they pull up everything and divide it up. The weeds are tied in bundles and burned...

Peter: Good! I hope the fire's very, very hot...

Jesus: Then the wheat is collected and gathered in the barn for safe storage.

Peter: And what about the enemy who sowed the weeds?

Jesus: Oh well that's another story. You tell me what this one means.

Peter: What!

Andrew: Maybe you could tell us?

Jesus: You mean you don't know?

Peter: Yes! No! Er... sort of...

Andrew: Perhaps you could just confirm our thinking, Lord...

Jesus: Okay. Well, the farmer is the Son of Man, his fields are the world, and the good crop represents the people of the kingdom. The enemy is the devil and the weeds he sows

The Sketch Gospel

are the people who belong to him. In this world the people of the light will always live alongside the people of the dark. But at the end of the age God will send out his angels to harvest the world, and then they will weed out everything that causes sin and all those who do evil. The people of the light will then enter into the kingdom of light, but the children of darkness will be thrown into the furnace. And believe me Peter, that will be very, very hot.

Peter: Lord – what about a fishing story?
Jesus: A fishing story?
Peter: Yes – I think I could get the gist of that a little better than all this farming business.
Jesus: All right. Well, some fishermen went out in their boats and threw down their nets for a night’s fishing.
Peter: That’s more like it!
Andrew: If they’re anything like Peter, Lord, they wouldn’t catch a thing!
Jesus: Ah well, these were not like Peter, Andrew, their nets were full.
Peter: Lord!
Jesus: I’m just joking Peter. But if this story is similar to the one I told about weeds and wheat – what do you think is in the net?
Peter: Good and bad fish.
Jesus: Exactly. But the fisherman didn’t start sifting the nets while they were still in the water, they waited until they had pulled them aboard and rowed back to shore. Then, when the fishing was done and the night was over, they sat down and meticulously sifted the catch. The good fish were collected in baskets, while the bad fish were thrown away. That is how it will be at the end of the age.
Peter: I hope I’m amongst the good fish, Lord.
Jesus: So do I Peter, and you will be. No one can snatch away the people my Father has given me.

Jesus Calms a Storm

That evening the crowds began to gather again. On seeing them all, Jesus decided to cross the lake to get some solace and rest. He got into a boat and the disciples joined him. They sailed across the water while Jesus fell asleep in the stern. But the lake of Galilee is prone to sudden storms and while they were crossing a powerful wind blew up and the rain began lashing across the boat.

Peter: Bail out! Get that water out of the boat!
Andrew: We are doing!
Philip: We’ll never make it...
Peter: Shut up and bail.
Andrew: Where’s Jesus?
Philip: Asleep!
Peter: Oh great! Just when we could do with a spare pair of hands.
Andrew: Give him a break – he’s been working day after day from dawn till dark...
Peter: Well, he won’t be for much longer if this storm keeps up. Bartholomew! Keep a hold of that sail! Matthew! Row boy, row! Tax collectors!
Andrew: Maybe we should wake him.
Peter: You’ve changed your tune quick enough.
Andrew: He might be able to do something.
Peter: Oh sure – knowing him he’ll probably have a quick chat with the weather and ask it nicely to calm down a little!
Philip: I think Andrew’s right we should wake him. Off you go Andrew.
Andrew: Me!
Peter: It was your idea.
Andrew: Thanks!
Peter: Off you go then.
Andrew: I’m going!
Philip: Hurry up – we’re sinking!
Andrew: Well Jesus won’t be able to stop that, will he?
Philip: Perhaps he’ll let the boat go down then resurrect it – like that chap in the coffin!

The Sketch Gospel

Peter: What? And all the rest of us as well! Go on Andrew, wake him up. Quick!
Andrew: Jesus? Wake up.
Peter: Louder than that – there’s a storm raging!
Andrew: All right. Master! WAKE UP! We’re drowning!!
Jesus: What? Where... What’s going on?
Andrew: There’s a storm Lord – we’re sinking. The boat’s in a bit of trouble.
Peter: A bit of trouble? We’re going to die!
Jesus: What? Oh... oh you of little faith! Where’s your trust? Why are you so afraid?
Philip: The waves Lord, the hurricane – that’s why!
Jesus: Quiet! Calm down.
Philip: Sorry.
Jesus: No, not you – I’m talking to the wind. Be still!
Philip: It’s... it’s worked!
Peter: How did you do that?
Jesus: Have you forgotten so quickly Peter? Where’s your faith? I’m going back to sleep. Wake me when we get across.
Philip: What about if there’s another storm?
Jesus: There won’t be.
Philip: Oh! Right... Thanks!
Andrew: This is incredible – he told the weather what to do!
Peter: Yes. Which, if you remember, is what I said he might do.
Andrew: Yes – but you didn’t really expect it did you?
Peter: Might have.
Philip: How does he do that? Even the wind and the sea does what he says... Astonishing...
Peter: Quiet – or you’ll wake him up again.

The Gerasene Demoniacs

Jesus and his disciples finished their journey across the lake, the water now calm, and they arrived on the other side in the pagan country of the Gerasenes. The moment they set foot ashore two men came tearing across the rough ground towards them, screaming and spitting violent threats.

Peter: Oh great! That’s all we need after that storm – a couple of nutters to haunt us.
Andrew: Who are they?
Philip: There’s a farmer over there – go and ask him.
Peter: Yes – but don’t go near his pigs.
Andrew: Me again? Why is it always me?
Peter: And hurry back – after surviving that storm we may yet be torn to shreds by these two madmen!

The two men slowed as they saw Jesus step ashore. One of them faltered, stopped dead, then turned and fled, his eyes wide. But the other one came on, his arms flailing like a windmill and the foam and spit hanging like a curtain from his sagging jaw.

Andrew: The farmer says they live amongst the dead, there’s a burial ground nearby and the people keep them chained up there. The locals are terrified of them. They run rampant and no one can contain them.
Peter: Well they’ve broken their chains all right – look at them, hanging from their wrists like bits of old string.
Madman: What do you want with me Jesus? You’re the Son of the Most High – what do you want? Don’t torture me, please don’t hurt me!
Peter: What’s he going on about? Torture?
Jesus: What’s your name?
Madman: Legion, my name’s legion.
Peter: Legion?
Jesus: He’s possessed – by a legion of evil spirits.
Peter: Oh that’s all we need!
Madman: Don’t hurt me, don’t hurt me, Son of God leave me in peace! Go away!

The Sketch Gospel

Jesus: Be quiet and come out, now.
Madman: Don't torture us, let us go into those pigs.
Jesus: Fine. Go into the pigs, then.

The man let out a piercing scream that shook the disciples rigid. The nearby pigs squealed too and began to stampede across the hill towards the cliff edge.

Peter: They're going to fall off the edge.
Andrew: The farmer's not going to be happy.
Philip: Look at the man! Look at the man! He's dead.

The madman was lying in a heap of rags, his body rigid and still.

Andrew: Is he dead Lord?
Jesus: Dead? No – I've come to change people for the better – not the worse.
Peter: Well, he ain't moving.
Philip: Yes he is. Look!

The man coughed, spluttered and sat up. His eyes had lost the wild aggression and his muscles were relaxed for the first time.

Madman: What... What happened? Where am I?
Jesus: You're alive and well. And probably very hungry.
Madman: I am! What's going on?
Peter: Oh oh, there'll be trouble now – look – our local farmer just ran off into town. You can bet he'll bring back trouble.
Madman: Who are you all?
Andrew: This is Jesus, he healed you.
Madman: Can I come with you? Where do you live?
Jesus: We're Jews, we live in Capernaum.
Madman: Fine. I'll come with you.
Jesus: No I think it might be better if you stay here.
Farmer: Oi!
Peter: Oh oh!
Farmer: We don't want you here.
Peter: Is that why you've brought half the town to meet us!
Farmer: I told them about my pigs. You've ruined me!
Philip: Did you tell them about the man here! Look at him. Do you recognise him? That one there sitting happily on the sand. He's the one that was spitting fire and beating up the neighbours ten minutes ago.
Farmer: We can see his changed. I don't deny that. But that's another reason – we don't understand your magic – you'd better go. Now!
Madman: Let me come with you, they don't want me here.
Jesus: No, go back to your family tell them and everyone you meet how much God has done for you. Show them how kind he has been and how much he has changed you.

The disciples climbed back into the boat and pushed off again. The local people were amazed and terrified by the change in the man. He went through the town and surrounding district telling everyone what God had done.

Peter: That makes a change!
Philip: What?
Peter: Well, normally Jesus tells everyone to keep quiet about their healing.
Philip: This isn't Israel is it?
Peter: No, I guess not. It doesn't matter if he goes blabbing all over the region – it won't cause a riot or stop Jesus from doing what he has to do.

The Sketch Gospel

Jairus's Daughter and the Woman Who Touched Jesus

The next day, as they landed in Capernaum, a large crowd gathered around Jesus again. One of the officials from the local synagogue, a man called Jairus, fell to his knees at Jesus's feet.

Jairus: My daughter is dying, Master please come and see her. You can help her I know. I've seen you heal people and work miracles. Please come and help my little girl. She's only twelve, she's barely started to live.
Jesus: Of course I'll come. You lead the way and my disciples and I will follow.
John: We'll never make it through these crowds Lord, there are so many people.
Jesus: We will John, just don't take your eyes off that man.

They followed Jairus through the crush of people. All around voices clamoured for attention and hands grasped at Jesus and his friends.

Jesus: Wait! Stop!
Peter: What is it, Lord?
Jesus: I felt someone touch me.
James: I think we all felt someone touch us, Lord. The important thing is not to make eye contact – some of these people are seriously deranged.
Jesus: I don't mean the crowd. Who touched me?
Peter: It might be easier to ask who didn't? Look at them all!
Jesus: Someone reached out in faith. I felt power go out of me.
Peter: Power?
John: Lord, how can someone take power from you without you knowing it?
Jesus: That's what I'm saying, I do know it. Someone touched me.
James: Lord, Jairus is waiting – his daughter is not getting any better.
Jesus: I'm aware of that. Now who touched me?

For a time there was nothing but the continued hollering from the crowd, then, the wall of bodies parted and a tiny, hunched figure shuffled through and stood hunched in front of Jesus.

Leah: I did Lord. It was me. I've been ill for years, bleeding inside. No one has been able to help me. I've spent everything on doctors and it hasn't got any better. When I saw you I knew that if I could just touch your clothes I would be all right. I'm sorry, I'm sorry I touched you – but it worked. The pain's gone. The bleeding's stopped. I feel fine for the first time in years. I'm sorry Lord, but I had to.
Jesus: You don't need to apologise – your faith has made you better. Go in peace – your suffering is over.
James: Lord! Please, Jairus is still waiting.
John: No he's not. He's gone.
Peter: What? Don't say his daughter's better as well! After we came all this way!
John: No – far from it. She's dead. Some men just came from his house to tell him.
Jesus: This is not over yet. Fetch Jairus back.
James: What?
Jesus: Now! Go!
Peter: Jesus – this is not going to look good. We could have saved her.
Jesus: Don't worry Peter, we still can.
Peter: How?
Jesus: Make a way through this crowd so we can find Jairus and get to his house!
Peter: Right! GET OUT OF THE WAY! MOVE! JESUS COMING THROUGH!

As they neared the home of Jairus Jesus took three of his disciples aside.

Jesus: No one else is to come in with me – just you three.
Jairus: Teacher – don't bother – my little girl is dead. It's too late.
Jesus: It's never too late, Jairus. She's not dead, she is just asleep.

The Sketch Gospel

The people nearby laughed and muttered quietly, but Jesus ignored them and went on into the house. He turned out the mourners and took the girl's mother and father and the three disciples to the girl's bed. She lay still, her face pale and her mouth a dead line. Jesus took her hand and spoke softly to her.

Jesus: Little girl, wake up. Jairus, I think it might be wise to get some food.
Jairus: Why?
Jesus: She's going to be hungry. Little girl, I'm telling you now, wake up!
James: She's opening her eyes!
Jesus: Wake up, that's it. You're okay. You're well, come on, sit up.
Jairus: She's alive! You're alive!
Jesus: She will be fine now. Get her some food and water, let her walk around.
Jairus: Jesus, how can ever I repay you...
Jesus: You don't have to Jairus, but for one thing.
Jairus: Anything.
Jesus: Please don't tell anyone what has happened here today.
Jairus: I won't – but it may be obvious to some people!
Jesus: That's okay.
James: Jesus?
Jesus: What is it?
James: There are two blind men outside asking to see you.
Peter: I think you'd better rephrase that.
James: You know what I mean.
John: Can't it wait! Look – he's only just recovering from raising the dead!
Jesus: I'm hardly recovering John. It's Jairus's daughter who was ill remember. Take me to the men.

Jesus went out and met the two men. They begged him to take away their blindness and soon left with their eyes open. As they went Jesus warned them to tell no one, and before they were out of sight another group brought a man with a demon to Jesus. He drove the demon out and the man, who had been mute, was able to speak again. By now a crowd had assembled and when they saw this they were amazed. Word began to spread again and the two blind men who had been healed spread the news throughout the region.

Chapter Six Food and Water

(Matthew 9-11&13-16; Mark 6-8; Luke 9; John 6-7)

Hidden Treasure and Precious Pearls

One day Jesus and Peter sat talking in his home in Capernaum.

Peter: Things are moving so fast, Lord. Miracles, healings, the crowds – it's hard to cope with. People are swooping on you like vultures. It's difficult to understand sometimes. I feel like we're caught in a storm here.
Jesus: Well, people are very excitable, Peter, and they've seen something new here. Something very precious.
Peter: But they all want a piece of you. Always grabbing for you, always begging at you.
Jesus: The kingdom of God is a valuable commodity, it's rather like a box of treasure buried in a field. For years it's been out of sight, a mystery. Then one day, after a storm, a man walks through the field and comes across part of it, washed up by the weather. He digs up the box, finds the treasure, then buries it again and goes off to sell everything he owns to buy the entire field. That's what these people are doing. They are desperate for some treasure in their lives.
Or, you could say the kingdom is like an expert looking for fine pearls. Once he finds the best he sells all the rest so that he can buy that single pearl – worth more than all the rest of his collection put together.
Peter: Yes, well that's all well and good... but...

The Sketch Gospel

Jesus: Wait a minute Peter, remember what I said about listening and looking. Tell me what you see in those stories?

Peter: I'm not very good on parables and the like – I'm more of an action man.

Jesus: So is the man in the story. He found treasure and immediately went out and sold all his possessions, that's action.

Peter: It's mad!

Jesus: Is it?

Peter: Yes! For a field!

Jesus: Peter it's not about a field.

Peter: Oh right, yes, I see your point.

Jesus: Do you?

Peter: No. Not really...

Jesus: The field is like your life...

Peter: My life?

Jesus: Yes – and you've been blindly stumbling through...

Peter: Thanks for your confidence in me.

Jesus: Then you've come across the treasure of the kingdom of God, and like you said, you're an action man, so you've given up everything for this one thing that's worth more than anything else. You've given up what you cannot keep to gain what you cannot lose.

Peter: I haven't sold everything though.

Jesus: No, but you've relegated it all to second place in your daily life.

Peter: And that's the parable?

Jesus: Yes – so now tell me about the second one? What's that mean?

Peter: It's the same as the first.

Jesus: Is it?

Peter: More or less.

Jesus: Really? Tell it back to me...

Peter: Oh I don't know... Er... the kingdom is like a precious pearl and then a man finds it.

Jesus: No. You didn't listen Peter. I said the kingdom is like an expert looking for pearls.

Peter: That's what I said.

Jesus: No. You said the kingdom is like the pearl – that's the first parable. In the second I'm likening the kingdom to the expert. When the expert finds the pearl he does everything to gain it. So if the expert in the story is the kingdom then you are the pearl. What's that mean?

Peter: That... the kingdom somehow comes looking for me?

Jesus: Exactly. Peter, you did not choose me you know, I chose you.

Peter: But if I understand it right you're asking me, you're asking all of us, to give up everything for you.

Jesus: Yes. Don't think that I've come to make life easy for you. I've come with a sword. A sword that will divide families and friends. It will not be easy to acknowledge your faith in me when others would rather you refuse it. But every person who has given up home or family or possessions for my sake will receive a hundred times more from my Father in heaven. You see, Peter, following me means taking up your cross – every day.

Peter: A cross! I don't understand! You're talking about crucifixion now!

Jesus: I'm talking about losing your life – so you can find it again. Anyone who tries to hold onto their life will lose it – but whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.

Peter: This is hard to take Lord.

Jesus: I know but you needn't be afraid. You see those sparrows – not a single creature falls to the ground without my Father knowing it. He knows every detail of life. And he knows every detail of your life and believe me, you are worth much more to him than a sparrow.

The Sketch Gospel

The Death of John the Baptist

As the stories of healings and miracles continued to circulate Herod heard about them and was convinced that John the Baptist had risen from the dead. First he had imprisoned John, then he had murdered him. He had been tricked into this by his wife, Herodias, who held a grudge against John for denouncing her marriage to the king. On his birthday Herod threw a banquet for the military commanders and high officials of Galilee, and deep into the celebrations Salome, Herodias' daughter, came in and danced for him. This so pleased the inebriated Herod that he offered to give the girl anything she desired. After a conference with her mother she requested the head of John the Baptist on a platter. So ended the life of Jesus's cousin. John's disciples came, took his body away and buried it. Then they went and told Jesus the sad news.

Jesus Feeds Five Thousand People

As the days rolled by the crowds grew and the people gathered wherever Jesus went. He taught them, healed their sick and told them parables about the kingdom of heaven. One day they gathered on a hillside for another round of signs and stories. As it grew dark Peter leapt to his feet.

Peter: This is all very well, Lord, but it's getting late and we've got this bunch to feed now, look at them, thousands of the vultures and they're ravenous!

Jesus: Peter, they're people.

Peter: What?

Jesus: These vultures, they happen to be people.

Peter: I don't care if they're furry kittens... They're starving, and now they think you can feed 'em.

Jesus: Do they?

Peter: YES!

Philip: Coz someone happened to mention about a few gallons of wine...

Peter: Well, it was just in passing...

Philip: Five million gallons, Peter says, enough to bathe the Roman Army he says...

Jesus: Do we have any food?

Peter: No!

Andrew: Well, we've got a few rolls.

Peter: Don't be stupid, put 'em away...

Jesus: How much is there, Andrew?

Andrew: Five loaves and two fishes.

Peter: Huh, five loaves and two fishes... Pull the other one, it's got...

Jesus: Bring them here.

Peter: WHAT! But you heard what he said - five loaves, that wouldn't keep me in sandwiches.

Philip: Yes, but look how much you can put away...

Peter: Shut up!

Andrew: Here, Jesus.

Andrew handed over the meagre pile of food.

Peter: Jesus, listen to me, please.

Andrew: Shh. He's saying grace.

Peter: I think we all need to say a few prayers...

Jesus held up the food and began to pray. Reluctantly they all bowed their heads. A few murmured amen's dribbled out.

Peter: Right, now listen, this is madness...

Jesus: Peter, take this, there'll be enough.

Peter: Enough? Have you seen the size of those guys. They'll eat me for breakfast - never mind a handful of rolls and fish fillets!

James reached across, took a handful of bread and began handing it out. The others followed, getting the crowds to sit in small groups and dispersing the food amongst them.

The Sketch Gospel

Peter: Andrew, where are you going? Those guys, look at 'em! I mean, Goliath was their little brother.

Jesus: Peter, you needn't be frightened.

Peter: Me? Frightened! Oh no no, course not. Not me Lord

Jesus: Good. Then take this and help the others feed the people. We've a lot to get through.

Peter: Really? You don't say? Jesus, you don't seem to understand. That crowd, they're mean out there, they'll murder us when we offer them this.

Philip: So? Only the other day you said you'd happily die for Jesus.

Peter: Huh, well...did I? Maybe, but not over a packed lunch.

Jesus: Peter, just do it. Why are you so slow to believe? Do you see any riot? Do you see any anger? Any dissatisfaction? Peter, the people came here hungry, they're being fed. LOOK!

Peter sadly turned and looked out over the hillside. Thousands were eagerly chewing on thick bread and meaty fish.

Peter: Lord, I'm sorry, I'm so stupid, so proud. Why do you bother with me? These other guys, they're much quicker to do what you say.

Jesus: Peter, are you only just beginning to understand? Haven't you realised the depths of God's love? You have so much still to learn.

Peter: But I keep getting it wrong.

Jesus: That's okay, you're in good company.

Andrew: Lord, we've collected up the leftovers – you'll never believe how many we've got.

Jesus Walks on Water

As the day drew to a close Jesus sent his disciples away to Bethsaida. They went down to the lake and set off across the water to Capernaum. It was to be an eventful night.

Peter: It had been a long hard day - I can tell you; and we were all grabbing a well-earned rest in my boat as we crossed over to Capernaum. You see, Jesus had been preaching most of the day and he had a habit of wearing the rest of us out with his enthusiasm. And to top it all he had done the refreshments for five thousand people. Anyway, usual story - he went off to a hill to pray, we went off in a boat to sleep. And that was when all the trouble began... There I was, happily dreaming of owning my own fishing fleet, when suddenly it seemed like the whole of the lake had landed in my lap. Well, needless to say, I decided it was time to wake up. Unfortunately, so did everyone else, and there was a general state of panic. The boat was bouncing around, disciples everywhere you looked, fish flying in your face. Well, I thought we'd had it. I wouldn't have minded so much - but I hadn't even finished paying for the boat. Anyway, I turned round - and there he was, just standing there - on the water. Now, we were a little surprised at this as you can imagine! I thought he was a ghost - that is until he spoke. *'Don't be afraid,'* he said, *'it's only me.'* Of course, I had to be the one to open my mouth as usual. *'If it's you, Lord,'* I said, *'call me out to walk on the water.'* And of course, Jesus just looked at me and said: *'Come.'* So me, being me, I did it. I got up and climbed out of the boat - and it was easy. I walked on the water... Until I stopped to think. And then I remembered my school days, and the education that proved the impossibility of what I was already doing. I thought of my friends... and, frankly - I was embarrassed. I wondered what the other disciples would think as I sank silently beneath the waves. Perhaps it was better to die with them in the security of my old boat.

The Sketch Gospel

After all - it was a safe, sturdy craft that had weathered many storms before. Perhaps it would weather this one too. Then the others would be warm and dry, while I sat shivering and sneezing in front of the fire.

And what would my wife say? When I arrived home late yet again, but this time with soggy clothes and a dose of flu.

And anyway, even if I could do it - who'd ever believe me. The religious leaders would spend years trying to explain and dismiss it. What was the point?

And yet... in spite of all of this, for some strange reason Jesus was still speaking to me, still calling me - to take that risk and keep walking...

Andrew: Shame you sank, Peter.
Peter: I did not sink, Andrew... I tripped...
Andrew: You sank!
Peter: I had an aqua-pedestrian problem.
Andrew: You sank!
Peter: Okay, I sank.
Andrew: Good job Jesus was there to pull you up! What was it you said: 'Lord, please could you help me because I seem to be having a little problem?'
Peter: That was the gist of it, yes.
Andrew: And what did he say?
Peter: I don't remember. Something like: 'Well done Peter - you did an amazing thing.'
Andrew: Wasn't it more like 'Oh you of little faith - why did you doubt?'
Peter: That was the gist of it yes.
Andrew: Don't worry brother - at least you were out there to sink. The rest of us'll never know what it's like to walk on water, not even for five seconds.

The Bread of Life

The next day the people who Jesus had fed discovered he had left their district, so they climbed into boats and followed his route across the lake. Before long they had tracked him down and were hounding him for more miracles.

Sarah: Lord! We missed you! Where were you? When did you come over here!
Jesus: I think it was the food you missed, Sarah. Am I right?
Sarah: The food?
Jesus: Yes - I fed you for free yesterday - haven't you just come back for more?
Sarah: That's unfair!
Jesus: Is it? Why are you here then?
Sarah: Teach us some more. Heal the sick. Tell us a few stories.
Jesus: Don't waste your energies chasing the spectacular, Sarah. If you're serious then look for the real food of God. The bread that won't go mouldy.
Sarah: What's that?
Jesus: The Son of Man can give you that bread. If you do what God requires.
Sarah: What does God require? Quick - tell us, you've got a captive audience.
Jesus: Believe in the one he sent.
Sarah: We believe in all the prophets he's sent. Show us a sign and we'll follow you - like Moses, God gave him manna for the people. That was a sign.
Jesus: I see we're back on bread again. Did you not have breakfast, Sarah?
Sarah: I resent that. We're asking you for a sign!
Jesus: Then I will tell you the truth. I am the bread you're looking for. If you come to me you will never be hungry, if you believe in me you will never be thirsty. People ate the manna that Moses gave and they were hungry again, the bread of life will satisfy you forever. My Father's desire is that everyone who looks to the son shall have eternal life.
Sarah: Your father? I knew your father - Joseph, he fixed my door.
Jesus: I'm telling you the truth if you come to me I will never push you away. I have seen the Father - and the bread that I am offering is the life of the world.
Sarah: How can you feed the entire world? Where would you store it all?

The Sketch Gospel

Jesus: The bread I'm talking about is not made of dough – it is my own flesh and blood.
Sarah: Your flesh? You've lost us, teacher. You really have. We came looking for you in good faith – but we didn't expect this. It's too strange.
Jesus: Are you offended by this? I promise you that if you eat the flesh and blood of the Son of Man you will have the life of God within you. By eating my flesh and blood you and I will become one, united by God's spirit. I will be in you and you will be in me.
Sarah: This is confusing. We did not come here for this, Jesus. Come on everyone, let's go.

Many of Jesus's followers gave up and turned back that day, unable to accept this teaching. Jesus watched them leave, then he turned to his closest friends.

What Makes a Person Unclean

Jesus: What about you? Do you want to give up too?
Peter: I don't understand it all Lord. It's hard teaching.
Jesus: So do you want to leave?
Peter: Yes! But where would we go? We've come too far. We know you have the words of eternal life, we know that God has sent you. We have nowhere else to go!
Jesus: I see. You know - I handpicked each one of you – and yet even one of my closest friends is going to betray me. It's a lonely day for me, Peter. A lonely day.
Pharisee: Jesus! I'd like a word with you!
Jesus: What is it now?
Pharisee: We have heard that you and your disciples are not observing the proper washing rituals. You've been seen eating with unclean fingers.
Jesus: Oh! You and your rituals. Listen to me – it is not what you pick up with your hands or touch with your feet that makes you unclean.
Pharisee: But...
Jesus: I said listen! It is what comes out of here – inside you that makes you unclean. It's not dust or sand or grime that matters, it's greed, malice, theft, adultery, immorality, deceit, envy, murder, slander, arrogance, idiocy and profanity. That's what makes you unclean and all of that comes from within. From your heart and your mind. Clean that up!
Pharisee: But Jesus – what about the commandments and the law?
Jesus: Take a close look at yourself and you will see – you have long since let go of the commands of God and are simply holding on to the traditions of men. Your observances are no more than superstition – you want to get back in touch with God! And that's all I'm saying. I have to go now, it's been a hard few days, I'm tired.

A Persistent Canaanite Woman

Jesus left Palestine and went to the vicinity of Tyre and Sidon, he desperately wanted some rest and time to recuperate but even here people came looking and a pagan Canaanite woman sought him out.

Naomi: Is Jesus here?
Andrew: He's tired. He's resting.
Naomi: I'm sorry to disturb you, but my daughter is sick. Please come and help her.
Andrew: I'm afraid he's very tired. He's had a long journey and he's been working too hard. He came here to get away for a while.
Naomi: But I know he can help us. I've heard the stories.
Andrew: I'm sorry, maybe another day.
Naomi: Please! My little girl has an evil spirit! I know he can help her.
Andrew: He can't! Not now, not today!
Naomi: I won't leave until he agrees to come with me.
Jesus: What is it? What's all the noise?
Naomi: Jesus! Please come and help my daughter, she's very sick, she has a demon.
Jesus: I'm sorry – I have come for those in Israel – I don't have time to help everyone.
Naomi: I WILL NOT GO! PLEASE – I know you can help me!

The Sketch Gospel

Jesus: I have to help God's children first – it wouldn't be right to take what is theirs and throw it to the dogs.
Naomi: No – but even the dogs are allowed to eat the scraps that fall from the table!
Jesus: But we're talking about heavenly food here!
Naomi: Then let me sweep up a few divine crumbs!
Jesus: You're a very persistent woman – and witty too! For that I will help you. Go home – your little girl is cured.
Naomi: Really?
Jesus: Really. She'll be fine.
Naomi: Thank you, thank you...
Jesus: Go home! And let me sleep.

Jesus Heals a Deaf Mute

Jesus and his disciples moved on after a couple of days. They travelled back through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and on into the region of Decapolis. Once there he went up into the hills and the people came to him in droves, bringing those who were lame, blind, crippled and mute. One group of friends arrived with a man who could not hear or speak.

Andrew: Lord, this is David, he's brought his brother to you.
David: He can't speak and he can't hear.
Jesus: What do you want me to do for him?
David: It's obvious isn't it?
Jesus: Tell me.
David: Well we want him to be healed. We want you to give him his hearing and fix his voice. You can do that, can't you?
Jesus: Can I?
David: Yes! Everyone says so.
Jesus: Bring your brother over here, away from the crowd.
David: Here, he's here.
Jesus: Bring him over here.
David: Lord, if you just touch him I know he will be better.
Jesus: If I just touch him?
David: Yes!

Jesus placed his fingers in the deaf man's ears and held them there for a while.

Jesus: How long has he been like this?
David: Years.

Jesus withdrew his fingers and spat on them. He rubbed the foamy saliva around in his fingers then opened the man's mouth and touched his tongue with his wet forefinger. Jesus looked up to heaven and gave a deep sigh. The man leapt backwards, groaned and shouted.

Jesus: Well, he's better now, David. Your faith has healed him.
David: Is that it?
Jesus: Well, unless I'm very much mistaken that's him laughing and shouting now. I presume he couldn't do that before.
David: No! He certainly couldn't! Thank you.
Jesus: David, I know your brother has just received the ability to talk – but can I ask you something? Tell him to keep quiet.
David: What?
Jesus: About this. About his healing. You too. It would be better for us if you didn't spread the news.
David: Oh sure. We promise.

But promises get broken, and the news of this and other healings spread everywhere.

The Sketch Gospel

Jesus Feeds Four Thousand People

The crowds continued to come as more and more heard the stories. Before long Jesus was preaching to thousands again – and the days were passing without adequate food for everyone.

- Jesus: These people have been with us for three days now and they have had very little to eat. I'm concerned that they will come to me for healing and end up getting sick from lack of food. We can't send them away hungry.
- Peter: Oh great!
- Jesus: You have an idea Peter?
- Peter: No but I think you do.
- Jesus: Well, we can't send them home hungry, some of them have come long distances.
- Philip: But where can anyone get enough food to feed them out here? There must three thousand of them.
- Jesus: Four I think. Do we have any food?
- Peter: Oh, oh! Here we go.
- Jesus: You all right Peter?
- Peter: Oh yes, I've just got a good memory.
- Jesus: And how's your courage?
- Peter: About the same as last time.
- Jesus: Oh dear. I thought so. Philip tell everyone to sit down, preferably in groups of about fifty or so. How much food do we have between us?
- Philip: Seven loaves and a few small fish.
- Peter: Oh well that should make it easier then.
- Jesus: Should it?
- Peter: Oh sure. Last time we only had five loaves, with seven you could feed the world!
- Jesus: Glad to see your faith's healthy Peter.
- Peter: Are you?
- Jesus: Yes – because you can pass out the first few handfuls! I'll just give thanks and you can start.
- Philip: What are you looking for Peter?
- Peter: A hole in the ground – I could do with one right now.
- Jesus: There you go Peter – one handful of crumbs or two?

With seven loaves and a few fish Jesus fed the thousands who sat upon the hillsides. As they cleared up afterwards they found themselves with seven basketfuls of leftovers.

The Pharisees Ask for a Sign

Jesus and his disciples got into a boat and crossed to the region of Dalmanutha. There a group of Pharisees and Sadducees came to him and fired a barrage of questions at him.

- Pharisee: You say all these grand things about yourself and Moses and bread from heaven – well, prove it. Give us a sign that you are who you say you are. Give us irrefutable proof and we will believe you.
- Jesus: Oh... if only. Look. You see that sky? You can read that can't you? What colour is it?
- Pharisee: Red.
- Jesus: Red. And when the sky is red what do people say?
- Pharisee: Tomorrow will be fair. But what's this got to do with...
- Jesus: And when the sky is overcast in the morning?
- Pharisee: It'll probably be stormy. Look...
- Jesus: No. You look. You can read the sky, you can interpret the weather forecast and trust that, yet you cannot see what is happening right in front of your nose. Look at the signs around you – see what is happening!
- Pharisee: We just want a miraculous sign from you.
- Jesus: You've had one! You've had many. But you won't see! But as you keep asking I will tell you this. The only sign I will give you here and now is the one of Jonah.
- Pharisee: Jonah?

The Sketch Gospel

Jesus: Yes. I give you the miracle of Jonah.
Pharisee: The man swallowed by a whale?
Jesus: Well – you’re the religious teacher – you tell me what happened to him.
Pharisee: He was swallowed by a whale and spewed up on a beach in Nineveh.
Jesus: And how long was he in the belly of the whale?
Pharisee: Three days.
Jesus: And why was he there?
Pharisee: Because God was sending him to a rebellious and sinful nation.
Jesus: Good. Well you work it out from there. That’s your sign. A man buried for three days who reappears to a sinful people.
Pharisee: But...
Jesus: No buts, that’s it. You work it out. I’m going back to Bethsaida. Goodbye.

Chapter Seven The Truth, the Whole Truth, and Nothing But...

(Matthew 16-18; Mark 8&9; Luke 9; John 7-8)

The Yeast of the Pharisees

As they made the crossing over the lake Jesus warned his disciples about those who would seek to mislead them.

Jesus: Watch out for the Pharisees and Sadducees – they claim maturity and wisdom but they are blind guides, believe me. They have eyes but they do not use them.
Philip: Lord, I’m afraid we don’t have much food with us – just the one loaf of bread.
Jesus: What?
Philip: We just have one loaf of bread. It was Andrew – he forgot to bring the leftovers from the feast.
James: Seven giant baskets and you somehow overlooked them!
Jesus: Listen to me – be careful of the yeast of the Pharisees. It will work its way into your lives and corrupt everything. The kingdom is good yeast, giving the whole of life a lift. But the yeast of the Pharisees is deadly.
Philip: Why’s he going on about yeast?
James: Maybe it’s because you mentioned bread.
Philip: Well it’s not my fault.
Jesus: Listen to me! Why are you thinking about your stomachs! I’m talking about your souls! Are you as dull as the Pharisees? Don’t you understand either? What’s wrong with you all? Don’t you remember everything I’ve been telling you? Are your hearts closed too?
Philip: Lord, we’re sorry if we upset you.
Jesus: You haven’t upset me – but please, open your eyes and ears. Don’t you be like the Pharisees. How many baskets of bread were left after I fed 5000?
Philip: Eleven. No! Twelve, I think.
Jesus: And now?
Philip: Seven – but we’ve left them all on the shore!
Jesus: Don’t you think I can turn this one loaf into a hundred if we need it? Don’t worry about food and your stomachs. I want you to be concerned about the Pharisees and their deception.
Philip: Oh! Sorry Lord. So you’re saying... we’ll be all right?
Jesus: Your stomachs will! But not your souls unless you are cautious. You must all be wise as serpents and gentle as doves.

Jesus Heals a Blind Man

Jesus and his disciples came to Bethsaida and climbed bedraggled from the boat. Some people brought another blind man to Jesus. Jesus led him away from the others, spat on his hands and rubbed the spit on his milky, white eyes. The blind man tried to back away as he felt the warm moisture on his face but Jesus held him firmly and applied the spittle to his lifeless eyeballs.

The Sketch Gospel

Jesus: Now tell me, what to do you see?
Blind Man: Nothing and it stings!
Jesus: Come on – look. You haven't tried this for years. Open your eyes and look.
Blind Man: Nothing. It's dark.
Jesus: So you can see that it's dark?
Blind Man: Well... yes, I suppose so.
Jesus: What else do you see?
Blind Man: I can see something! Strange sticks walking around! No, it's the trees! I can see the trees moving. They're running about.
Jesus: Come here.

Jesus spat again and applied his hands once more to the man's eyes.

Jesus: Now what?
Blind Man: My eyes feel hot.
Jesus: Keep looking.
Blind Man: Ahh!
Jesus: What is it? Open your eyes.
Blind Man: I can't!
Jesus: Why not?
Blind Man: It's too bright - everything's burning and bright yellow.
Jesus: Cover your face with your hands then open your eyes again. That's it. You're not used to the light. How's that?
Blind Man: My fingers! I can see my fingers! I can see! I can see! I can really see. Look! It's my hands! Ahh! It's too bright.
Jesus: Take it slowly. Your eyes will adjust to the sunlight. You see over there? That's it – have a squint – those people? Those are the trees you saw moving around. You can see. Your eyes will be fine now.
Blind Man: It's a miracle! You've done a miracle!
Jesus: Yes - but please don't shout! Keep your voice down or they'll all want one...

Peter's Declaration about Jesus

Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. While they were away from the crowds Jesus took the opportunity to talk privately with his disciples.

Jesus: Peter, who do you think I am?
Peter: Sorry?
Jesus: Who am I?
Peter: Well, you're... you know... you're Jesus aren't you?
Jesus: And?
Peter: And I'm Peter. Look are you feeling all right?
Jesus: No, no, I mean what else d'you think I am?
Peter: Oh! I see. Well, you're a good friend.
Jesus: And?
Peter: All right then you're my best friend.
Jesus: And?
Peter: And er... well, a lot of people say that your other things like, a really good person. Or...
Jesus: Or what?
Peter: Or a really good teacher. They say you've got some really good ideas... although a lot of them seem to think that your good ideas are bad.
Jesus: What else?
Peter: Well, you know, the usual religious stuff, some of them think you're a prophet.
Jesus: And what about you?
Peter: Oh well, yes, I agree. I go along with all that. Prophet, teacher, friend. The lot.
Jesus: And?

The Sketch Gospel

Peter: And what?
Jesus: Anything else?
Peter: Well, all right then, don't quote me but between you and me...
Jesus: Yes?
Peter: Well I think you're, you know, ahem the er... ahem the... rmm mmm.
Jesus: Sorry?
Peter: I said... you're the... you know... and also... the ahem.
Jesus: Peter, what are you trying to say?
Peter: All right, look... I don't think you're just a good person, and I don't think you're just a prophet. Somewhere deep down in here I've got a gut feeling that you're a lot more than that, that you're... well, the Son of God. The Messiah. The centre of the universe and the Saviour of everyone. But... you know, that's just a hunch.
Jesus: Peter. It's more than a hunch, believe me, God has shown you this.
Peter: Has he?
Jesus: Oh yes. So hang onto it. It'll change your life forever. You're going to be a solid rock Peter, the foundation of the church. You're going to have the keys of the kingdom.
Peter: Really?
Jesus: Oh yes. But for me – it means that I must soon be handed over to the authorities. We will go to Jerusalem and they will put me to terrible suffering. Hard times are coming, Peter.
Peter: No way!
Jesus: Yes. It must be.
Peter: No! We'll stop them, we'll protect you! There are twelve of us and lots more beside. We'll spread the word, contact everyone who's been following you...
Jesus: Peter, don't you remember what happened when I fed those thousands?
Peter: What do you mean?
Jesus: When I began to reveal the truth about myself – they all ran away. And they will do it again.
Peter: No! We won't let it happen. We will stop the authorities from ever getting near you. It'll be easier than you think.
Jesus: Get behind me, Satan!
Peter: What?
Jesus: You are in danger of becoming a stumbling block to me, Peter. You are not obeying the things of God, but the things of men. Satan would have you deter me from going to Jerusalem, but I will go, and Satan will not stop me.
Peter: I'm sorry Lord, I...
Jesus: Peter listen. If anyone chooses to follow me than they must take up their cross in order to do it. Walking the way of God involves surrender, total and public surrender. You must not be ashamed of your love for God, or in the end, he will be ashamed of his love for you. Give up your life and you will then find it, but try and hang on for grim death and grim death is all you will have. What will it gain anyone if they spend their life to get everything in the whole world? They may become the richest tycoon – but that will still not be enough to buy back their soul. Surrender your soul to God, Peter, don't lose it the world. Then, when the Son of Man returns in glory, your reward will be magnificent.

The Transfiguration

Six days later Jesus took those who had become his closest friends, Peter, James and John, and led them up a high mountain.

Peter: Well! This is all very nice, Lord - I mean, you know, just the four of us up here. You - me - them. Yes, it's all very... er... nice! Isn't it, chaps? Bit cold, but nice.
James: Oh! Oh, yes, yes, yes... Isn't it John?
John: Oh... it's very... nice here.
Peter: Well, er... shall we do something then? Swap a few stories, or something?
James: Peter, just be quiet will you?

The Sketch Gospel

Peter: Sorry! Only trying to make conversation, just sort of chatting... Just... passing the...

James and John were no longer listening, they were staring at Jesus. Peter followed their gaze.

Peter: Hey! What's going on? Look at that!! Jesus's face... and his hands... and who's that with him? Those two figures dressed in white, goodness, turn down the brightness a bit, will you? Oh that's great! I thought this was just going to be a private do! Good grief!! Look! Loo... loo... LOOK!

James & John: We ARE looking!

Peter: Well, say something.

James & John: AAAAAHHH!

Peter: I know, let's er... let's do something...

James: Oh sure. Brilliant idea. Let's play 'I spy' shall we? Something beginning with er... 'T'?

Peter: James, shut up. I know - I've got it. Let's build something!

James & John: BUILD SOMETHING!?!?

Peter: Yes. A house. Just here. For Jesus and er... them other fellas.

John: Oh yes? And what do you suggest we build it with? Spit?

Peter: Okay, okay... a tent. Let's put up a tent for them.

James: Are you crazy?

Peter: Well, a shelter then. One for each of them.

John: One each! Only three? Why stop there? Let's build a little village.

James: How about a synagogue!

John: Yes, or a life-size replica of Solomon's Temple.

Peter: Now you're being stupid.

James & John: WE'RE being stupid?!

Peter: Hang on – Shh! D'you hear that?

John: What now? An approaching stonemason, perhaps?

Peter: No! Listen... See? There it is again.

John: Yes, I've got it - a voice -

James: 'This is my own dear son, I am pleased with Him, listen to Him.'

John: Not a lot you can say to that is there?

Peter: Well, I could er...

James & John: SHUT UP!

Peter: Oh!

John: And 'listen to Him.'

Jesus Heals a Deaf and Dumb Boy

As they came down the mountain the following day Jesus warned his disciples to tell no one what they had seen.

Jesus: You must not talk of this until the Son of Man has risen from the dead.

Peter: What exactly does that mean – risen from the dead?

James: Well I think it would mean – being dead one minute – and risen the next.

Peter: But that involves dying...

James: Yes.

John: But Lord – what about the prophecy about Elijah coming first – before the Messiah?

Jesus: Elijah has come first – but the religious leaders failed to recognise him. In fact – they rejected and despised him, in the same way that they will reject and despise the Son of Man.

John: You're talking about your cousin, John?

Jesus: Yes.

Peter: John the Baptist?

Jesus: Yes. Hello? What's going on here?

They had reached the other disciples who were now surrounded by a large insistent crowd.

The Sketch Gospel

Andrew: Lord! We were trying to help this man, but we've failed miserably!
Jesus: What is it?
Father: I brought my son to your disciples – he has a demon and it throws him into the fire and tries to drown him in water. I pleaded with them to drive it out but they won't.
Andrew; Not won't. Can't! We tried Lord, but it's too difficult.
Jesus: Everything is possible if you have faith.
Andrew: Then we don't have enough!
Jesus: Oh... this generation! Where is your perspective and understanding? How many times do I have to go over these things? Bring the boy to me.

When they brought the boy to Jesus the demon immediately threw him into a convulsion and he fell fitting to the ground.

Father: Have mercy Jesus – he is my only son! Don't let the demon kill him, please. He's deaf and dumb. If you can do it – help him.
Jesus: Oh I can do it! Anything is possible for the person with faith.
Father: I do have some faith – but it's weak and it goes up and down. And sometimes I'm overwhelmed with doubts.
Jesus: Take heart and believe. Lift your courage and lift up your head. All will be well.

As Jesus was speaking the crowd began to form around him and the struggling boy.

Jesus: This crowd is getting too big. I'd better sort this out. Deaf and dumb spirit – come out. Leave the boy alone! Now!

The boy gave a piercing shriek and convulsed violently, he trembled like a dying fish and then fell still and silent.

Philip: He's dead!
Jesus: No he's not. He's more alive than he's ever been. Help him up.

They hauled the boy to his feet. He was shaken and his face was white but he began to talk coherently for the first time and his father hugged him. Afterwards the disciples questioned Jesus about the deliverance.

Philip: Why couldn't we drive the demon out?
Jesus: Because your faith is small. And you need to discover more about the power of prayer and fasting. With the right kind of faith you can do anything.
Philip: You can certainly do anything Lord. The crowds are amazed by you.
Jesus: Really? Listen to me carefully – it won't be long before those same crowds hand the Son Man over to be killed. Then three days later he will rise again.

The disciples withdrew nervously.

Philip: Three days later... What's he mean?
Peter: He's said this before... I don't understand.
Andrew: He scares me when he talks like that.
James: He can't really mean they'll kill him.
John: Perhaps he means the Romans.
Peter: Then we'd better keep our eyes open. He's always warning us to be on our guard.
John: Yes, but not about the Romans.
Peter: Well, we should be careful, that's all I'm saying.

Money from a Fish's Mouth

Jesus and his disciples arrived back in Capernaum. As they entered the town they were accosted by tax collectors, looking for the Temple tax.

Tax Collector: You! Simon Peter, yes you – does your master pay his taxes?

The Sketch Gospel

Peter: Taxes?
Tax Collector: Yes! Does he pay them?
Peter: Of course. But if you knew who he really was you wouldn't be worried about taxes.
John: Actually – if they knew who he really was – they'd probably double the charge!

In Capernaum they went into Jesus's house.

Jesus: Peter.
Peter: Yes, Lord.
Jesus: Who pays taxes to the king? The king's sons or those outside the family?
Peter: Those outside – the ordinary people.
Jesus: Then the king's children must be exempt?
Peter: I suppose so.
Jesus: Are we not children of the king Peter?
Peter: Er... children of Herod? I don't think so...
Jesus: And what about the other king – the king of heaven?
Peter: Lord, you've lost me.
Jesus: Well, we'd better not offend the tax collectors, and they obviously want our money so this is what I want you to do. Go and find us a four drachma coin.
Peter: Where?
Jesus: Well, use your skills. What are you good at?
Peter: Fishing – but you can't pay with perch.
Jesus: Go catch a fish Peter, do what you're good at. Look in its mouth and you'll find just what we need.
Peter: A coin? In a fish's mouth?
Jesus: Absolutely.
Peter: Why don't you send Matthew to do what he's good at – he'd bring back twice as much as we need! There'd be plenty left over for a feast!
Jesus: Peter!
Peter: I'm going. A fish's mouth right? Right! Lord?
Jesus: What?
Peter: Don't tell the others what I'm doing will you? Just in case it all goes pear-shaped. They still haven't shut up about the unfortunate walking on water incident.
Jesus: It wasn't unfortunate – you learnt a great lesson about faith.
Peter: Did I?
Jesus: Yes, now go and put it into practise.

Become Like a Child

Andrew: Lord, there's a young girl at the door, can she come in and sit with us?
Jesus: Of course. You know Peter, on the subject of faith, you should not worry about looking foolish. Unless you become like a little child you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.
Peter: What do you mean?
Jesus: Let me show you. Bring the girl inside. That's it. What's your name?
Tabitha: Tabitha.
Jesus: Well Tabitha, how would you like to go fishing with Peter, this big tough fisherman here?
Tabitha: Yes please! In his boat?
Jesus: If you like. And would you do me a favour?
Tabitha: Okay.
Jesus: The first fish that you catch – open its mouth and look inside. Will you do that?
Tabitha: Okay. Is there something special in there?
Jesus: Yes, there's something very special in there – there's a big coin!
Tabitha: Wow! Come on Peter – let's go catch a big fish!!
Jesus: Off you go Peter – catch that fish...
John: Poor old Peter – gets all the duff jobs.
James: He does them so well though!

The Sketch Gospel

Who is the Greatest?

Jesus: James – what were you and the others talking about on the way here today?
James: Ah! Well – lots of things Lord...
Jesus: Anything in particular? You appeared to have a heated debate at one point?
James: Oh not really... Just... nothing.
Jesus: John – what’s he hiding from me?
John: Oh nothing.
Jesus: Andrew?
Andrew: Just – the weather.
Jesus: The weather!
Philip: Yes – the weather.
Jesus: You remember Tabitha, the little girl who just came in?
James: Yes.
Jesus: To be first in the kingdom of God – you must be last.
Philip: Last? But James said...
Jesus: James said what?
Philip: Nothing.
Jesus: You’ve been with me a while now. You’ve seen miracles, done some yourself. Heard stories. Told plenty yourself. But little Tabitha – she hasn’t witnessed any of that and yet – she will be greater than all of you in the kingdom. That’s what you were arguing about, wasn’t it? Which one of you is the greatest? Who will have the top job in heaven. Will it be James and John – with your fiery courage... Andrew, always willing to make new friends... Matthew, with your wisdom and cunning... Or Philip, always open to questions and new ideas... Well, it won’t be any of you. It will be little Tabitha, she will be ahead of all of you.
Philip: But Lord, she doesn’t know anything!
Jesus: Exactly. She should be the last in the queue – which is why she will be at the front – ahead of you all. Because the kingdom of heaven turns everything on its head. The first will be last and the last will be first.
James: You can’t mean that.
Jesus: I can and I do.
James: But a little child like that? Someone so small and insignificant!
Jesus: Whoever humbles themselves will be made great, that’s how it works. And on the subject of children whoever welcomes a child in my name – welcomes me. But if anyone – anyone – should cause one of these little ones to fall into sin – then it would be better if they were thrown into the deepest lake with a millstone around their neck. Anyone giving childlike believers a hard time will not escape – they will be severely punished. So don’t look down on children and their simple trust – it’s a goldmine and much appreciated in heaven.

Peter came back from fishing with a coin for their taxes.

Peter: What about forgiveness, Lord?
Jesus: What about forgiveness?
Peter: Well – how many times do I have to forgive someone when they do the same thing over and over again? Twice?
Jesus: More than that.
Peter: Okay, three times then.
Jesus: Higher, Peter.
Peter: Surely not four or five... Higher? Not six or seven?
Jesus: No – not six or seven.
Peter: Thank goodness for that.
Jesus: Seventy-seven – at least! Here, sit down before you faint Peter, I’ve got another story for you. The kingdom of heaven is like a king who was settling debts owed to him by his servant...

The Sketch Gospel

The Unforgiving Servant

King: Now, I suppose you know why I've called you here today?
Servant: Er... to polish your boots, sir?
King: No.
Servant: Oh, er... to feed your Majesty's royal dogs perhaps.
King: No.
Servant: Er... I know - to lend you some money?
King: NO! I am the King - why would I borrow money from you?
Servant: Of course not, sir.
King: But - you are partly right - you owe me some money.
Servant: Really, do I? Oh dear.
King: Yes! Oh dear indeed. Do you know how much?
Servant: 50 pence?
King: Try again.
Servant: £1?
King: £100,000!
Servant: £100,000! Are you sure? But, I'm broke... My wife's broke, my children are broke, my animals are broke, we're all broke...
King: Oh stop grovelling... stop grovelling, get up.
Servant: Yes, okay, sorry. But we'll never be able to pay you what we owe you, sir. I'm really, really, really sorry.
King: All right then - only one thing for it. You don't have to pay me at all. I'll let you off the entire amount.
Servant: Wow! Really? Oh thank you. Thank you...
King: Yes, well, don't let it happen again.
Servant: I won't, sir. Goodbye. Hey! I'm a free man, I got away with it, I got away with it... Hang on. Isn't that Josiah over there. Hey - Josiah, you owe me some money! A lot of money!
Josiah: Oh no, do I? Oh dear! How much - £100?
Servant: No.
Josiah: £200?
Servant: No.
Josiah: Not £500?
Servant: NO! £5 - you owe me £5, I want it now.
Josiah: But I can't - I'm broke. My wife's broke, my children are broke, my animals are broke, we're all broke...
Servant: Oh don't give me those excuses. Right, you're going into prison until you pay it all back... Off you go!
King: Ah! Just the man I'm looking for.
Servant: Ah King! Hello, how are you?
King: I am not too good.
Servant: Oh dear. Not flu I hope.
King: I have heard very bad things. Very, very bad things.
Servant: The drains aren't blocked again are they?
King: No!
Servant: It's not your dodgy tummy again?
King: NO! But you will have one soon. I let you off £100, 000, so what did you do?
Servant: I was very grateful.
King: And?
Servant: And I went to tell everyone what a nice person you are.
King: No you didn't - I heard what you did - you threw Josiah into prison for just £5.
Servant: Did I? Oh that must have been a mistake. Are you sure it wasn't my brother who did that? People are always getting us mixed up... We're very alike, only I'm better looking...
King: Quiet! I let you off - why didn't you forgive him for his debt? It's too late now. You don't have time to explain - you're off to prison.
Servant: Am I? What for? To visit Josiah?

The Sketch Gospel

King: No - to replace him! Guards! Set Josiah free and throw this man in jail. Come on, it's prison food for you...

Jesus: So you see – it's the same with forgiveness. My Father in heaven will treat you as you treat others. Forgive others from the heart, don't hold grudges, and you will be forgiven much.

Thunderbolts from Heaven on a Samaritan Village

As the Jewish feast of Tabernacles approached Jesus's brothers encouraged him to go to Jerusalem and continue his ministry in public there, but Jesus held back, knowing the time was not right. He waited until they had left then set off with his disciples, leaving secretly and quietly. On the way they came to a Samaritan village, but when James and John went in the locals did not welcome them. They returned wild-eyed and breathing fire.

James: Lord – the people of the town don't want us here! Can you believe that?

John: What will you do Lord? Call down a thunderbolt on the town and burn it up?

Jesus: No! We'll just go on to the next village.

James: But Lord – they were quite vocal about disliking us.

John: Are you sure you don't want to send down a bolt on them?

Jesus: No!

John: Not even a little one?

Jesus: No! We must keep moving.

James: It wouldn't take long Lord, and they wouldn't reject you again.

Jesus: They wouldn't be able to do anything again!

John: Then let us do something Lord, you're obviously in a rush. We'll stay here, and fast and pray for the villagers – then ask God for a miracle.

Jesus: What miracle?

John: Fire, torture and torment for every single person there.

Jesus: Come on! We're wasting time, it's getting dark.

James: If you set fire to the village it would light our path.

Jesus: We're going.

John: Not even a little molten lava?

Jesus: No!

James: Just singe a few of them perhaps?

Jesus: No, no, no.

James: Shame.

Jesus: If you want to heap burning coals on them...

John: We do, we do!

Jesus: Then pray for them...

James: For a river of white-hot ash to wash away the houses?

Jesus: No! Pray for their welfare.

James: Their welfare?

Jesus: Yes, love your enemies and pray for those who offend you.

John: That's not very dramatic Lord.

Jesus: No but it might affect them forever.

James: So would a vat of boiling lava...

Counting the Cost

As Jesus and his friends walked along a fellow traveller came alongside them.

Andrew: Lord, there's a man here who's asking to join us.

Traveller: Lord, I've heard all about your teaching and I promise I will follow you wherever you go.

Jesus: Will you? Consider it carefully – foxes have holes, birds of the air have nests... but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head. Do you have a home?

Traveller: Yes and a family.

Jesus: Will you miss them?

Traveller: Yes, I love them dearly.

The Sketch Gospel

Jesus: Then think carefully before you decide. Once you begin work you should not keep looking back. When a man begins ploughing he cannot afford to keep glancing behind – if he does his furrows will meander all over the field. Any good farmer looks straight ahead, keeping course. Can you do that?

Traveller: I think so. But I have just lost my father. Will you wait for me while we bury him?

Jesus: I'm afraid I don't have time. We must go on. Let the dead bury their own dead. We must move on to proclaim the kingdom of God.

Traveller: Lord, this is hard!

Jesus: When a man begins building – he must first make sure he can pay for the materials. When a general goes to war, he only does so if he has the weapons to win it. I don't want you to be disappointed. If you can take up your cross and follow me, then do it. But you must consider the decision very carefully. These other disciples have given up everything to follow me – and they will receive a hundred times that for their reward.

Jesus and his disciples arrived in Jerusalem for the feast of Tabernacles. They kept a low profile for the first few days, then Jesus went to the Temple and began to teach there. He provoked a variety of reactions amongst the people.

Some said: He is amazing – he is a really good man.

But others said: No, he's trying to deceive us. How can the Christ come from Galilee anyway! The scriptures say he will come from Bethlehem.

Still others asked: Where did he get such learning, though? He speaks with such confidence and authority!

Some said: Isn't this the man the authorities are trying to kill? Yet here he is out in public and no one's tried to assassinate him. Perhaps they have concluded he really is the Messiah!

And others said: This man must be the Christ – when the Messiah comes he could not do anything more powerful than the things Jesus has done. Surely!

But others doubted: Why does he claim that people are trying to kill him? It's obviously not the case. Is he mad? Is he demon-possessed? What's wrong with him?

The Temple Guards

The Temple guards, sent by the priests to arrest Jesus, were themselves impressed and inspired, and they returned to the chief priests empty-handed.

Caiaphas: Where is he? Why haven't you brought him to us?

Guard: He is unbelievable! We've never seen anyone like him!

Caiaphas: You weren't paid to go and look at him!

Guard: But the way he speaks – it's so wise.

Caiaphas: I hardly think you're the person to make a judgement on wisdom. You can't even obey orders - you should have arrested him.

Guard: What for? Being witty and clever and outstanding?

Caiaphas: You'll be outstanding in a minute – outstanding in the wilderness looking for work.

Guard: But he had the crowd in the palm of his hand.

Caiaphas: The crowd! What do they know?

Guard: They know a good preacher when they hear it.

Caiaphas: Well, you obviously don't. This man is a wanted criminal.

Guard: You should go and see for yourself.

Caiaphas: I have done and I know that no prophet comes from backwoods Galilee. Listen to the man's accent for goodness sake. He sounds like some daft yokel.

Guard: You should listen to his words, not the way he's saying them...

Caiaphas: And you should listen to my words! Bring that man in – or find yourself another job. Go! Imbecile!

The Sketch Gospel

The Woman Caught in Adultery

After the feast had ended Jesus went to the Temple courts at dawn with Andrew. As he sat on the ground, teaching the people, a group of Pharisees pushed their way through bearing a woman. They threw her to the ground before Jesus and gathered around her. Jesus knelt in the dust and began to write in it with his finger.

Pharisee 1: Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. What shall we do with her?
Pharisee 2: According to the Law of Moses, we should stone her.
Pharisee 3: Yes. Stone her!
Pharisee 4: Stone her, stone her...
Andrew: What evidence is there of this charge?
Pharisee 2: Well, she was caught... in adultery... in the act.
Pharisee 3: Red-handed!
Pharisee 4: Red faced as well!
All Pharisees: Yes, stone her, stone her, adulteress!
Andrew: I see, by whom?

There was a hushed silence, the crowd looked from one to another.

Pharisee 1: Him...
Pharisee 2: No. It was him.
Pharisee 3: No, it wasn't, it was him.

They all turned and stared at the final Pharisee who had no one else to blame.

Andrew: You saw her?
Pharisee 4: Well... Yes... Sort of... She was... with another man...
Andrew: And it was definitely this woman?
Pharisee 4: Well... I think so... She looks guilty enough to me.
All Pharisee: Yes, stone her! Stone her!
Andrew: Quiet please! How do you know it was this woman? Do you recognise her?
Pharisee 4: Well... she's about the right shape... and she's female...
Andrew: Yes, but that's not enough...
Pharisee 4: I know! I remember now! She's wearing the same dress. Well, similar... I think... actually it was green with purple flowers... but it's from the same shop.
Pharisee 1: Look, what does it matter whether he can identify her, she's guilty, and the law says stone her.
Pharisee 2: Yes, stone her!
Pharisee 3: Stone her!
Pharisee 4: String her up!
Pharisees 2 & 3: What?
Pharisee 4: Sorry, I meant stone her.
Andrew: Just exactly what is she meant to be guilty of?
Pharisee 2: He saw 'em, her and another man.
Pharisee 3: Yes, and they were together, holding...
Andrew: Holding what?
Pharisee 2: Holding conversation.
Pharisee 3: Holding hands.
Pharisee 4: Holding each other!
All Pharisees: Stone her, stone her!
Andrew: And you can testify to this?
Pharisee 3: 'Course he can.
Pharisee 2: Yes, he saw 'em.
Andrew: Well?
Pharisee 4: Sure, I saw them when I was down in the woods with Rachel... Oops!
Pharisee 3: You were with my wife?
Pharisee 4: Oh dear, is that the time already? Sorry, must dash, I've arranged to meet some woman... er... **someone** this morning.

The Sketch Gospel

As the man's frantic steps died away there was an awkward silence.

Pharisee 2: Well, I still say stone her. She looks like an adulteress if nothing else...
Pharisee 3: Yes, just look at her eyes, she's got unfaithful eyes.
All Pharisees: Stone her, stone her! Adulteress, prostitute. Stone her...

Having reached their verdict, the Pharisees picked up stones and advanced on the woman. Jesus looked up at them for the first time.

Jesus: Whichever one of you has committed no sin may throw the first stone.

Then Jesus resumed writing in the dust. There was a stunned silence as the truth sank in and the Pharisees looked ruefully at each other.

Pharisee 1: Go on then.

One by one they dropped their stones, turned sharply and left.

Jesus: Where are they? Is there no one left to condemn you?
Woman: No one, Sir.
Jesus: Then I certainly don't condemn you either. Go, and put your life of sin behind you.

Chapter Eight Seeing and Believing

(Luke 10-13; John 9&10)

The Light of the World

When Jesus next spoke to the people he began by saying:

Jesus: I am the light of the world. If you follow me you will never walk in darkness. My light will fill your life and illuminate your being. It will guide you and give you hope.

But the Pharisees contested this and argued with him.

Pharisee: How can you prove that? You are your own witness. Who else is going to testify for you?

Jesus: I don't need another to testify on my behalf.

Pharisee: Then it proves nothing. You can say what you want.

Jesus: My life is my testimony – my proof is the kingdom of God at work. Look at what I do. Look at the signs you see, read those if you don't want to listen to me.

Pharisee: You're avoiding the issue.

Jesus: No – you're avoiding the issue. You argue and you criticise – but you won't listen and look. My Father is clearly confirming what I say.

Pharisee: Where is your father?

Jesus: Yes – I'm not surprised you can't see him. You have never known him, have you? But if you knew me you would get to know him.

Pharisee: You should be careful with your offensive talk – you tread a fine line.

Jesus: Offensive? Just honest. You know that I won't be scared off.

Pharisee: What are you planning to do?

Jesus: I am going away, and you will look for me but you won't find me – because you cannot go where I am going. Instead you will die in your stubborn sin.

Pharisee: Are you talking about committing suicide – is that why we can't follow you?

Jesus: I am talking about death. You come from below – but I am descended from my Father, and if you refuse to believe that then you will certainly die in your sin.

The Sketch Gospel

Pharisee: You seem obsessed with death!

The Truth Will Set You Free

Jesus: When you have lifted up the Son of Man – remember this conversation. Then you will know I am who I claim to be.

Pharisee: And then what?

Jesus: Then if you hold onto my teaching you will know the truth – and the truth will set you free. Are you free now?

Pharisee: I don't know.

Jesus: Then you obviously do not know the truth – for the truth will set you free. And if it does not set you free - it cannot be the truth. Because when the son sets you free – you will certainly know it. But for now you plan to kill me because you have no room for the truth. I tell you only what I have seen unfolding in my Father's presence. But you obey your father and that is why murder is around the corner.

Pharisee: Abraham is our father!

Jesus: If he were then you would be obedient like he was when he surrendered his only son. No. Abraham is not your father.

Pharisee: Well God is then! You can't deny that!

Jesus: If God were your Father then you would listen to me – it's obvious! I came from God and you would know it and you would love me. Instead with every fibre of your being you fight against me. Surely that is evidence enough. You belong to your father all right – the devil. It's born out in your actions – he was a murderer from the beginning and he will turn you into murderers too.

Pharisee: You're paranoid! Worse – possessed. You're obsessed with dying and intent on bringing it on yourself.

Jesus: I promise you I am not possessed – I simply honour my Father, while you dishonour me. But I beg you - listen to my words and obey them and you will never see death.

Pharisee: This is madness. Of course, we'll see death. We'll all see death. And you sooner than the rest of us if you continue to harangue and insult us!

Jesus: I am only telling you the truth. If I kept quiet then I would be a liar – like you. But I tell you – I know God, I have come from him.

Pharisee: Abraham came from God – but he died – we will all die!

Jesus: Yes – but let me tell you – Abraham foresaw this day – if he were here now he would rejoice at my words and my presence here. You claim his wisdom yet have not got the ability to use it.

Pharisee: How can you claim to know what Abraham would or wouldn't do?

Jesus: I know him.

Pharisee: How? You're barely forty years old – do you claim to have met him somewhere?

Jesus: Before Abraham was born – I was there. I have been around since the beginning of the world.

Pharisee: Only God has been around that long.

Jesus: Exactly.

The Pharisees were furious at this claim and picked up stones to club Jesus to death but he hid himself and later slipped away from the Temple grounds.

The Blind Man's Story

Benjamin: I haven't always been a fisherman - oh no, I used to beg for money. Every day I used to slowly make my way to the market stalls, down by the side of the road, and there I would sit - begging. I used to listen to people - because I couldn't see them, and one day I heard this man telling stories.

I sat there and listened for a while, then suddenly someone grabbed me by the arm - it gave me an awful shock! I tried to get away - I thought they were after me for begging - but it was no good, I could not run they had me cornered. One of them asked who had sinned most - me or my parents! Thanks very much I thought, quite a compliment. Then one of them, the one who'd been telling the stories, led me away a few steps, and the next thing - splat! All this cold, slimy mud hit me in the face. I

The Sketch Gospel

tried to wipe it off, but he started rubbing it in. There was some water nearby - a little pool, I'd listened to people drinking from it; the man took me over and told me to have a good wash. Well, of course I needed a good wash - I'd been covered in mud! First they told me I'm a sinner, then they covered me in mud, then they told me I needed a bath!

Well, I didn't waste any time there, I soon washed my eyes with water and got the slime out - and that was when I realised, it wasn't just the mud that had gone, it was the blindness too! I could see! I could see! Now if you've always been able to see - that's no big surprise, but I'd been blind from the day I was born. So of course, you can imagine - I went crazy. I was running about, throwing things, picking children up, looking at people, watching the insects. It was the best day of my life.

Until - I got arrested. The religious leaders whipped me off to court, they wanted to know about the mud, and the begging and how I could suddenly see on the Sabbath - apparently I'd broken the law by getting better on a holy day. The Sabbath is far too holy for miracles. I told them what had happened and they said, 'Who did this to you?' I said I didn't know, but he was obviously a prophet. And they said, 'How do you know that?' I said, 'Because I used to be blind and now I can see.' So they said, 'That's not the point! This man is a troublemaker.' I said, 'He's a miracle-worker.' But they said, 'He can't be - because he does not observe the Sabbath.' So I asked how he could do a miracle if he wasn't a miracle-worker, which threw them a bit. In fact, they were so flustered that they even dragged in my parents. Though I didn't know it was them at first - I'd never seen them before. It was only when they spoke that I knew. The religious leaders demanded to know how I could possibly see when I was supposed to be blind. To which my parents replied, 'He can't see - he is blind!' They didn't know I'd been healed. When I threw a coin at my dad and it hit him squarely on the nose he knew then I could see. But he still said, 'You'd better ask him how it happened, he's old enough to tell you for himself!' Well, I listened to all the questions and interrogation but I really had no defence, all I could say was - 'I used to be blind but now I can see. And that's the truth.'

So they accused me of being a disciple of this man - I said I'd never seen him before - literally. So they threw me out of the court. Later that day another man came up to me, and I thought he was going to give me a hard time, but he asked me a strange question. He said,

Jesus: Do you believe in the Son of Man?

Benjamin: I said, I don't know who he is. He said,

Jesus: You are looking at him right now.

Benjamin: And I knew that voice and I realised instantly this was the man who had healed me. So I fell down on my knees and I grabbed his feet and I sobbed and sobbed. It was as if a dam had burst inside and I let the whole lot out - all over the Messiah's sandals... Of course, the Pharisees weren't pleased.

The Good Shepherd

Pharisee: What's going on here? Did you heal this man's eyes on the Sabbath?

Jesus: I helped him to see. I am just doing what I came to do.

Pharisee: What? Break the Sabbath rules?

Jesus: No - I came to make the blind see and the seeing blind.

Pharisee: What's that mean?

Jesus: It means you're one of the blind. Although you claim to see.

Pharisee: I do see. I see a law-breaker and a trouble-maker.

Jesus: Then you see nothing at all. I promise you I have come to look after the lost sheep of this world - you accuse me of being a robber and a thief - yet you cannot see how you yourselves steal and kill the vulnerable lambs. I am the shepherd who has come to care for the sheep - so much so that I will lay down my life for them. You may not recognise the voice of a true shepherd - but the sheep know it, and they will listen and follow. I know them all by name, and no one can snatch them out of the flock now I am here. I deliver them into my Father's safekeeping and he will watch over them. You see, the Father and I are one.

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Pharisee: If you persist in aligning yourself with God we will stone you.
Jesus: Really? I have shown you many great miracles from God – so for which one of these will you kill me?
Pharisee: We're not going to stone you for a miracle – but for blasphemy. Because you claim to be God.
Jesus: That's just an excuse. Your own scriptures refer to people as gods and sons of the most high. If they were called that – how much more the one God himself has anointed and set apart to come into the world? Certainly, if I do not do what God does then reject me – but if I do the works of the kingdom then acknowledge that. Even if you don't like what I say – believe the miracles! Look around you - they're happening every day. And that is purely to persuade you that the Father and I are one.

Once again the Pharisees tried to arrest Jesus but he escaped and slipped across the Jordan to the place where John had previously been baptising. Those who came to see him in that lonely place acknowledged that all John had said about Jesus was true and many of the people believed in him.

Jesus Sends Out Seventy-two Followers

Around this time Jesus chose seventy-two of his followers and appointed them to travel in twos to the towns and villages ahead of him.

Jesus: The harvest out there is huge – and you are the first of many workers who are needed to bring it in. There is so much work to do – so pray hard for more helpers, more people who will harvest with you. As you travel don't worry about spare food or clothing. Go into a village, eat what you are given and in return supply them with the kingdom of God. Heal the sick, and drive out demons. When you are welcomed in people's homes bless them, but when you are rejected shake the dust from your clothes as you leave that town. Wherever you go tell them the kingdom of God is near.

When the seventy-two returned they were excited and overjoyed. They said, 'Even the demons submit to us in your name.'

Jesus: I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. You have authority to trample on snakes and scorpions, to overcome all the power of the enemy. Nothing will harm you in my name. All things are possible for you – but remember the most important thing – your names are written in heaven. Let that be your joy. Let that be your inspiration. You are a precious part of God's kingdom. I praise you my Father – for you have taken those that the world has forgotten, chosen those the world has rejected. You have given to them the things that are hidden from the popular, the successful, the wise and the powerful. And you have done it with joy. Many people would have given anything to get a glimpse of these days and to hear a whisper of these things – but you have chosen to reveal them to this generation and these people. Thank you Father.

The Good Samaritan

Not long after this an expert in the law came to Jesus.

Expert: Teacher – what must I do to live forever?
Jesus: You study the scriptures – what do you see in them?
Expert: I see the commandments. Love the Lord your God with every part of you – your heart, mind, will, soul and strength, and love your neighbour as you love yourself.
Jesus: Exactly. Do that and you will live.
Expert: But... who is my neighbour? How far does that stretch?
Jesus: Who is your neighbour? Well... here's a story - a man was travelling from Jerusalem to Jericho. Dangerous country, a hazardous trip. A gang of bandits leapt

The Sketch Gospel

Expert: out from the hills and beat him badly. They took his money, his coat, his clothes and left him dying in a pool of blood.
Expert: It happens.
Jesus: Yes! And so does the next bit. A priest came travelling by, a very religious man, he knew he should love his neighbour as himself. So he saw the body, and he smelt the blood and the vomit. And worried that the bandits might still be at large he steered a path around the body - and ran for his life. A few hours later a Levite came that way. The injured man was very close to death by now. The Levite, who worked in the Temple every day, knew the law and the scriptures very well. He saw the man, thought he was probably dead and didn't want to make himself unclean by touching the corpse. So he hurried on too. Are you getting the picture?
Expert: Oh yes! No one's going to help him and he's going to die.
Jesus: That would have happened but for one man's compassion. One man who came along on a donkey, saw the victim, washed his wounds, bandaged him and took him to the nearest inn. Once there he paid for a room for the injured man and for clothes, food and medicine.
Expert: A kind, courageous, generous person.
Jesus: Yes. And a Samaritan – one of our sworn enemies.
Expert: A Samaritan!
Jesus: Yes, so which of these three men acted like a neighbour to the man who was attacked? The priest? The Levite?
Expert: No! The other one!
Jesus: You mean the kind, courageous, generous person?
Expert: Yes! I suppose so... The one who showed concern for the man.
Jesus: Then there's your answer – go and do the same. A neighbour is not someone who is near you – it's someone who needs you.

Martha and Mary

Jesus and his disciples went on to a village where they stayed with two sisters, Martha and Mary. While Jesus and his disciples rested Mary came and sat with them, listening to them talk. Martha, meanwhile, busied herself preparing food for them.

Martha: Mary – can you help please.
Mary: In a minute.
Martha: No – now!
Mary: But we're just in the middle of a story. Go on Jesus.
Jesus: So the man went and...
Martha: Lord, can have a word with you please?
Jesus: What is it Martha? The meat's not burnt is it?
Martha: No! But it nearly was.
Jesus: Don't worry – it'll taste great. You're a wonderful cook.
Martha: I don't know about that. Jesus, can you send Mary to help me?
Jesus: Martha, come in here for a minute and put your feet up with us.
Martha: Put my feet up! I don't have time for that! Look! Look! Everything still needs doing, I can't sit about all day like her!
Jesus: Martha, listen...
Martha: No you listen! These things don't just happen on their own, you know. They need planning and preparation. I've got so much to do here and she's not helping. Tell her!
Jesus: Martha – if it goes wrong – it goes wrong. It's us you're preparing it for – your friends. We've come to see you – not just to eat your food.
Martha: But your tired, you're hungry, you've had a long journey...
Jesus: Yes – and what we really need now is a rest and some good friendship.
Martha: So you don't want my food?
Jesus: Of course we do! Martha, Martha – you worry about so much. But you've got it all out of proportion. Our friendship is the most important thing – you're flustered about so many things – but you've forgotten who you're doing them for.
Martha: And I suppose Mary hasn't?

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Jesus: She has come to see us and to listen to us – what could be better?
Martha: But who will do all the work – we'll starve!
Jesus: Martha, I'm not saying that all these other things aren't important. Of course they are, but the most important thing is relationship – your relationship with me... and with your sister. You're angry with her because she wants to be with me.
Martha: I suppose I am.
Jesus: Don't be – she has chosen what is best, and it won't be taken away from her.

The Friend at Midnight

After they had left Mary and Martha's Jesus began to teach his disciples about prayer.

Jesus: Suppose one of you has a friend. Peter – Andrew come here.
Peter: He's not my friend – he's my brother.
Andrew: I'm the only friend you've got!
Jesus: Be quiet. Now, Andrew you are about to have visitors but you've got no food in the house. Peter – it's midnight, it's dark and cold, you're tired, you've had a long day and you've just dozed off to sleep. However, you're about to get a rude awakening. Andrew you go over there, bang on that tree for a door.
Andrew: Peter! Wake up!
Peter: Get lost! I'm asleep.
Andrew: But it's me – Andrew!
Peter: I know – that's why I said – get lost!
Andrew: But I'm your best friend you can't leave me stranded like this!
Peter: Want a bet?
Jesus: So – Andrew? Feel like giving up?
Andrew: Yes!
Jesus: Are you going to give up?
Andrew: No! Peter! Have you gone back to sleep!

Peter turned and snored in Andrew's direction.

Andrew: Right! Jesus, pass me that metal pot.

Andrew took the pot and began striking it with a ladle.

Peter: What's that racket?
Andrew: Me! I'm still here.
Peter: Jesus, pass me that bucket of water. Thanks. Here Andrew, you can have this.

With a swing of his mighty arms Peter hurled the water over his brother.

Andrew: Ahhhh! Jesus is that allowed?
Jesus: Anything's allowed. Do you want to give up?
Andrew: No!

He cupped his hands to his mouth, took a step nearer to Peter and yelled.

Andrew: WAKE UP!

Peter, however, chose not to wake up.

Andrew: WAKE UP! I SAID...
Peter: All right, all right, you're deafening me!
Andrew: Good! WAKE UP!!!
Peter: I said, all right! I'm awake. What do you want?
Andrew: Just a loaf of bread for my visitors.
Peter: Just the one?

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Andrew: Well... make it three – I'm hungry after all that shouting.
Peter: There. Now go away.
Andrew: Thanks. That's great.
Peter: Thank goodness for that. Now I can get some peace.
Andrew: Er Peter...
Peter: What is it now?
Andrew: I don't suppose you've got any wine to go with it?
Peter: Go away!
Andrew: Peter?
Peter: I'm asleep...
Andrew: Then... WAKE UP!
Jesus: And so it goes on. And let me tell you – even though Peter would not get up and help Andrew just because he's his brother...
Peter: Especially because he's my brother...
Jesus: He did help him because he persisted and kept on asking. And doesn't it feel like that when you're praying sometimes? Banging on the ceiling trying to get a response? So I'm telling you – keep on asking, keep on searching, keep on knocking on that door. Don't give up and you will get an answer. Though like Andrew here – it make take hard work and time. And sometimes, even shouting...

Clean Up on the Inside

One of the Pharisees invited Jesus to his home for a meal. He noticed that Jesus did not wash before the meal and expressed his surprise.

Pharisee: Teacher – why did you not undertake the ceremonial washing as decreed by the law?
Jesus: You see this cup? You Pharisees wash the outside – but look – it's the inside that is stained and needs a clean. Ceremonial washing will not solve anything. It's inside that matters.
Pharisee: Are you saying that age-old teaching counts for nothing?
Jesus: I'm saying that you have distorted the original truth laid down. You are like whitewashed graves – smart and bright on the outside – but everything inside is dead and rotting.
Pharisee: Teacher – that is very offensive!
Jesus: And so is exploiting the poor, so is looking after number one, saving the best for yourselves and giving your scraps to God. He is very offended by that. Much more so than the offence you take at my telling the truth. You load people down with burdens of conscience that they cannot possibly carry – and then you stand back and lift not even a finger to help them.
Pharisee: Have you finished?
Jesus: Have you finished? Or will you continue to exploit your position and wear hypocrisy like a glamorous outfit. You praise the prophets and the saints of old – yet it was your own forefathers who murdered them. You have taken away the key of knowledge, have not used it yourself and prevent anyone else from doing so.
Pharisee: I think you'd better leave Jesus. I opened my home in all good faith and you've abused the privilege.
Jesus: I warn the people about the yeast of the Pharisees – and I warn you - take care. There is nothing hidden that will not be exposed. Hypocrisy will not cover your tracks for long. What you plot in the dark will be broadcast in daylight. Whisper evil in a corner and it will echo from the rooftops. I know that murder is in your minds – but I do not fear those who can kill the body, and I beg you to fear instead the one who can dispose of your soul. You are worth so much to my Father in heaven - but if you continue to disown me then you will be disowned before the angels of God on judgement day. You're right, it is time I went.

The Rich Fool

So Jesus left that place. A crowd followed him and one of them asked a question.

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Brother: Teacher – my brother and I have inherited some money – yet he won't share it with me.

Jesus: So what do you want me to do?

Brother: Tell him to divide it between us.

Jesus: Who appointed me as an arbiter between you?

Brother: But you've got authority – he'll listen to you.

Jesus: I see. Perhaps you would rather I just work a miracle, click my fingers and make you as rich as he is?

Brother: That's not a bad idea!

Jesus: Be careful! You are much more than the money in your bank. Greed is cancer for the soul, your life is not quantified by the possessions you own. Listen to me, there was once a very rich man...

Brother: Did he have a brother?

Jesus: No! But he did have such a bumper crop that he had to extend his barns to store it all. This went on for some years until he was obscenely rich and ran out of space to store his wealth. So he looked at it all, and said, 'I'll build bigger barns, store everything, then sit back, eat, drink and be merry for the rest of my life. Ah! Bliss!'

Brother: Sounds good to me.

Jesus: Does it? That very night his heart exploded in his chest, and as he lay dying he saw a vision of God, and he heard a voice say; 'You fool! Your time has run out, tonight your life is over. Now who will get everything you have stored up for yourself?'

Brother: That's horrible.

Jesus: Yes – and common. It's the way it is with so many people who are rich in this life – but poor in the things of God. If I were you I would tell your brother to keep the inheritance so you can concentrate on your spiritual welfare. Life is more than food and clothes, yet the days are filled with worry for these things. Worry won't add days to your life – it will only diminish them. So do not set your hearts on what will wear out – instead, set your hearts on God's kingdom, because he delights to satisfy that kind of hunger, and everything else in life will fall in line behind that priority.

Be Ready and Prepared for the Son of Man

Brother: Sounds like a lot of hard work.

Jesus: It is hard work! Believe me – it's not the easy option. You should always be ready, always prepared to serve, so that when the master returns he won't find you idly sitting around gossiping. You can be sure of one thing. If the homeowner knew on which night the burglars were coming he would not have stayed out late, leaving the house unattended. So don't be lazy or incompetent in your spiritual lives. Stay fit and alert – or the Son of Man may return when you least expect him.

Peter: Are you directing this at us Lord, or everyone?

Jesus: I have come to set a fire blazing on the earth. Peter, one that will affect everyone, and I can tell you for sure – I wish it had already been done. I have a mortal baptism to undergo and the very thought of it is terrifying. The repercussions of what I am about to do will be felt right across the globe, and as a result families will be torn asunder and friendships ripped apart. Lives will be changed forever, some for the better and some for the worse.

Philip: Lord – there are stories that Pilate has recently taken the blood from dead Galileans and used it in sacrificial rituals. This can't go on! Isn't it time you stopped the Roman domination?

Jesus: Those Galileans who died were no worse than any others, Philip, neither were those poor victims who died recently in the disaster of the tower at Siloam. No, they were no worse than any in Jerusalem – yet all of Jerusalem will die if each person does not repent and turn from their sins.

Jesus Heals a Crippled Woman on the Sabbath

The following Sabbath Jesus healed a woman whose body had been bent and twisted for eighteen years. He performed this miracle in the synagogue and when the rulers saw this they were infuriated.

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Ruler: Woman, there are six days for work. If you want to be healed come on another day – not on the Sabbath.

Jesus: You hypocrite! Have you not watered your oxen today?

Ruler: Of course!

Jesus: Then you must have untied it and led it to water.

Ruler: Yes! How else would I have done it? The water won't get up and come to the oxen!

Jesus: Then how does that work differ from my work here? You have cared for your animals this morning – I have cared for this woman.

Ruler: That's ridiculous!

Jesus: No – what you say is ridiculous. Listen to yourselves! 'Don't come on the Sabbath for healing'. What is the synagogue if not a place of prayer and deliverance? This is God's meeting place, and when he meets with people – they are changed. The kingdom of God will not stop growing because of your Sabbath rules. It's like yeast that spreads and permeates the whole batch of dough – once it is in there – it will develop of its own accord. That is its very nature. Nothing can stop it.

Chapter Nine **Money, Money, Money**

(Luke 13-17)

Jesus Heals on the Sabbath

One Sabbath Jesus went to eat at the house of a prominent Pharisee. As ever he was being watched carefully by the religious leaders. A man came to him for healing and so Jesus addressed the assembled company.

Jesus: Is it legal to heal on the Sabbath or not?

No one said a word.

Jesus: Fair enough. I will do it then.

Jesus reached out, touched the man and healed him.

Jesus: Your faith has made you well. Go, you will be fine now.

Looking around at the sombre faces he addressed them again.

Jesus: If one of you has a child or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath, which one of you will wait until the next day to pull them out? Exactly no one. You will all do everything you can to rescue that which is dear to you. And so will I.

The Great Banquet

Jesus turned to the Pharisee who was hosting the meal.

Jesus: In future when you invite people to a meal, don't call your friends, your relatives or your rich neighbours – instead invite the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind. They will bring with them a blessing – although they can't pay you back – because the Lord will certainly reward you at the resurrection.

Host: Those who are invited to eat at God's feast will be very happy.

Jesus: Yes, and perhaps surprised too. If I may - another story? A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. Rather like this meal here. As soon as the banquet was prepared he sent out his servants to collect his friends and bring them on down. However the first one said:

First friend: I'd love to come but I've just bought myself a field and I'd really like to go and look at the soil in it.

Jesus: The second friend said:

Second friend: I've just bought some prize oxen and I want to go and see them pull. Sorry.

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Jesus: The third friend said:
Third friend: I've just got married! I'm off on honeymoon with my wife.
Jesus: And others made similar excuses:
Fourth friend: Yes well, I don't think that sort of thing's for me. I mean - banquets are all right for those who want that sort of thing. But I don't believe in them, myself. Try someone else. My grandmother might come...
Fifth friend: Too busy. I might be able to come later on - when I've sorted out a few things... my house, my children, the wife, my job, my future, my past, my health, my money... Try me again some time. You know - in twenty years or so. I might be able to make it then.
Sixth friend: Oh no! Not a party! I get embarrassed about banquets these days. I mean, I couldn't tell my friends I was going to... one of those things. No. Sorry. Oh - you won't tell anyone you invited me will you?
Seventh friend: Oh I don't think it's important to come to your party in particular. I've had other invitations and I mean, any banquet will do. Won't it? You're not trying to tell me your way of banqueting is better than someone else's. Yes - I could come to your party, but I think it's important to keep an open mind. We can all have our different parties together, can't we? Anyway - I think your way of banqueting is a bit old-fashioned!
Jesus: When the man heard each of these excuses he retired to consider the situation. The banquet was ready, the table laid, the food prepared. So he called his servants again and said, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town. Bring in the poor and the homeless, the waifs and strays, the street children and the tramps.' The servants went out and the impoverished came in. But there was still more room, so the man sent his servants again and told them to compel the poor and the injured to come and enjoy the banquet, and he said, 'Not one of those originally invited will taste my banquet - instead everyone else will enjoy it.'

The Tower Builder and the Warring King

Jesus left that place and journeyed on to Jerusalem. Large crowds gathered around him and followed as he travelled. Jesus discussed with them the true cost of being a disciple.

Jesus: Suppose one of you wants to build a tower, what do you do? Matthew?
Matthew: Sit down and work out if you've got the money to buy bricks.
Jesus: And if not?
Matthew: Then it would be a bad financial decision.
Jesus: And the result?
Matthew: A lot of laughter on the part of your friends.
Jesus: Quite. Or suppose a king wanted to go to war against another king, what should he do? What do you think Judas?
Judas: Amass a large army and arm them well.
Jesus: And if he cannot afford to do that?
Judas: Make peace quickly. Or go into hiding for a while! I know a few good caves...
Jesus: In the same way it is best to sit down and consider what it costs to be a disciple. For anyone who cannot afford to give up everything should not begin the journey. Salt is good - but if after a while it loses its saltiness it's not fit for anything. Then it is thrown out. As good as useless. Think about these things and weigh them carefully.

The Lost Sheep

When the Pharisees and religious teachers saw the kind of sinners who were following Jesus they muttered mournfully about it between themselves. But Jesus, knowing this, told them a story.

Jesus: Imagine a farmer who has a hundred sheep.
Farmer: Right my Luvlies, come on then, time to get you little lambs bedded down. That's it in you come, don't want any of you endin' up as lamb chops for lions now, do we? That's it 10, 20, 30, 40, 50... 98, 99...99... 99... 'ello? There's one missin'. Can't

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have that. Now where is he? Come on, where are you? Now don't be sheepish. You can't pull the wool over my eyes...

Jesus: He looked all day and all night. Searched every hill, every valley, every lane, every stream. Until, tired but persistent, he found it curled up in a ditch, dirty and bruised.

Farmer: There you are! You're always running off thinking you know best, I dunno. Good job I found you afore you ended up next to the carrots on someone's plate. You could have wound up wearing a coat of mint sauce...

Jesus: And so he wrapped the lamb around his shoulders and carried it back. Then he called on all his friends and neighbours and invited them in for a hearty celebration. The party went on all night. There was singing and dancing, food and wine – fortunately there was no lamb on the menu though. In the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one person who repents than over the ninety-nine who don't need to.

The Lost Coin

Jesus: Or suppose a woman who has ten silver coins loses one. It is vital to her because it is part of her dowry.

Esther: Now where did I last see that? I came in, took the necklace off, put it on the table. No it's not there. Before that I was talking to the neighbours on the step – so it must be outside. No, it's not there. Before that I was making bread, ah – I bet it's in the bowl... No... no. Before that I was sweeping the floor – it must be in the bristles of the broom. There it is! Oh no – that's an old rotten olive. Ugh! Before that I was doing some washing – must be in the water jar. Yes! No! That's a dead cockroach! Lovely! Before that I was fixing that broken stool leg – it must be wedged inside the new joint. I'll just have to break the leg off the stool again... There! Oh! Nothing there. Now I'll have to fix it again... Before that I was mending that leather apron – I bet it's in the new lining! Just rip it open here... Aha! What's this? Yes – here it is! Oh! A piece of dried cow dung. Ughhhh! I'll have to mend that again now. Where is it? Think, think. Table, neighbours, bread, sweeping, washing, stool, apron... Well before all that I was... sleeping. The bed! Maybe I went to sleep with the coins round my neck! Let's have a look in there... What's this under the covers? An old sandal ... no, that's not it... Wait, there's something else... a ladle... and a bucket... a sling shot ... leftovers from last night's fish dinner... and... what's this – right down the bottom – something small and round – oh - a broken toe nail! I give up. No I can't give up. I've got to find it.

Jesus: I can promise you – if it takes all day and all night she will not stop looking until she finds her precious silver coin!

Esther: Got it! Oh no – that's just an old tooth from when I was little.

Jesus: And when eventually she does...

Esther: What's this in my pocket? Oh – I had it all the time!

Jesus: Then she is so happy she tells all her friends about it and they all rejoice and celebrate! In the same way there is a huge celebration in heaven every time one sinner repents.

The Prodigal Son

Jesus: Let me tell you one more story...

Prodigal: Father you know you have this wonderful estate here?

Father: Yes.

Prodigal: What will happen to it when you die?

Father: You and your brother will inherit it all. You know that. All of my wealth is yours.

Prodigal: Then I'd like my share now please.

Father: Now?

Prodigal: Yes. I've got plans.

Father: Plans? You've got a family – and a life here – why do you need plans?

Prodigal: I don't need them – but I have them. It's a free country – I'd like some money so I can explore it.

Father: You break my heart son – I never imagined this. Your brother's quite happy here...

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Prodigal: Exactly!

Father: Where will you go?

Prodigal: Somewhere... Everywhere... I don't know. I just want to live a little.

Father: Because you've been so restricted here? With all the parties and friends and gatherings that we have!

Prodigal: It's not the same. They're your friends – your parties – your gatherings – I want some of my own.

Father: Come to me in the morning and I'll have it ready for you. Son, don't do anything stupid.

Prodigal: I'll see you in the morning.

Jesus: So the son took his father's money and ran like the wind. He did not stop until he came to a city in a distant country. There he squandered all off his inheritance on wine, women and parties. Then, just as he ran out of money a famine hit the land and there was an acute shortage of food. He begged a local farmer for some work so the man gave him a job looking after his pigs. The boy was so hungry he was tempted to eat the filthy scraps that the pigs were chewing. He just had no choice – no one would give him any food. Then, an idea came to him.

Prodigal: My father has loads of food – his poorest servants live better than I do. If I go back he might give me a job, and I can eat his food. It can't be worse than this.

Jesus: So as he set off for home he rehearsed the words he would use to greet his father.

Prodigal: Okay, let's see... 'Father – I'm starving! Give me some food I haven't had a hot meal in days!' No, no, that's no good. I know – 'Father – I got mugged – there I was doing a nice respectable job and two men came in and stole everything'. No, he'd never believe that. 'Father – I've run out of capital. I didn't budget properly with your money, I had enough for the rent – but I was overeating a little and somehow I spent it all on olives.' Spent it all on Olive more like – that's no good. What can I say? I could tell the truth I suppose... 'Father – I've messed everything up.' Ooh, bit painful to admit that – but it might just work. 'Father – I've messed up my life, I've wasted all your money – I've hurt you – I've hurt God – I'm a miserable, miserable, miserable sinner... Please give me a job.' Yes – I like that!

Jesus: And so he prepared his set speech, ready to greet his father and beg for a new start. He practised it over and over, so much so that he was still practising when the family home came into view over the horizon. A dark figure appeared to be running straight at him. He panicked.

Prodigal: Right! What was I going to say? Help! Think, think! 'Father I've lifed up my mess, I've money'd all your waste, I'm a sinnerable mimbler – please jivv me a gob?'

Jesus: But before he could get the words right – the dark figure was upon him. A body hit him like a speeding train, knocking the breath from him and sending him sprawling backwards. At first he thought he heard angry shouting – but then he realised it was laughter. The figure standing over him, laughing and clapping, was his father. The boy got to his knees.

Prodigal: Father - it's me...

Father: I know it's you. I've been looking for you every day since you left.

Prodigal: I'm sorry - I've mixed everything up – I mean, I've messed everything up...

Father: I know – welcome home!

Prodigal: But father – I'm a mineral sizzler... I mean, a miserable singer...

Father: I know! I've heard you! Come on – let's go... Your mother will blow her top!

Prodigal: That's what I'm worried about!

Father: With happiness, son, with happiness! We were so worried about you – thank you for coming home. We forgive you, we love you. Now let's get that fatted calf on the spit. I'm starving and I bet you are too!

Prodigal: Oh well, just a little peckish you know, I could probably eat a morsel or two.

Jesus: So they began to celebrate. The whole house was aglow with laughter and warmth, the sounds of eating and drinking rang through the night air. Then - the older brother appeared. He had been out working late in the fields.

Older brother: What's going on?

Father: Look! It's your brother! He's back! It's miraculous!

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Older brother: It's madness!
Father: Come on, join the party.
Older brother: The party? What about the payback?
Father: Payback?
Older brother: Yes – or are we overlooking the lost millions and the days of depression and the sleepless nights?
Father: That doesn't matter now. Your brother was lost – worse, dead as far as we were concerned. That's why things were so terrible. But now he's safe and he's back! Look!
Older brother: I can see. But he didn't have to endure the agonies, did he? He was out there swanning about, wallowing in the easy life. It was me left at home trying to help you through the loneliness – I never abandoned you. I stayed to help. Where's my party? Or perhaps you want me to run away too and then we can have another celebration like this?
Father: I know it's hard for you. It does seem unfair. But all of this is yours too. We can have a party for you – we'll do it tomorrow if you like. Don't turn sour now – just because we are happy to see your brother alive and well. In my darkest nights I have picture him dead and lost – but how else can I react when he comes back alive and looking for a new start?

Who Needs to Repent?

Afterwards as Jesus was talking with his disciples Peter took him to one side.

Peter: Lord – I thought everyone needed to repent!
Jesus: They do.
Peter: Well then, why did you tell those Pharisees there are ninety-nine who don't need to?
Jesus: I didn't.
Peter: You did, you said there is more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over the ninety-nine who don't need to.
Jesus: Ah! That's because they think they are the ninety-nine.
Peter: But they're not – they're as bad as all of us! Worse in fact!
Jesus: How do you think they would have reacted if I had told them that? Instead – I appealed to their misguided belief that they belong to the ninety-nine sinless.
Peter: But why?
Jesus: Didn't you see the look of disappointment on their faces when they feared they might be missing out on a sinner's party? If they don't repent – there'll be no celebration for them. We may yet get through to them Peter, but it will take time and wisdom. I feel another story coming on... Listen up everyone.

The Shrewd Manager

Jesus: There was once a rich man...
Peter: Another one?
Jesus: Oh yes, Peter – but this story is about his manager. One day the rich man pulls him into his office and says:
Rich man: What's this I've been hearing about you?
Manager: What do you mean?
Rich man: Look at these accounts – you've been running a huge bill on your expense account. Explain yourself.
Manager: Ah – well, you see, it's sort of like this...
Rich man: Don't bother. You're fired.
Manager: No!
Rich man: What do you mean no! Yes! You're fired. Pack up your belongings and sort out any outstanding deals – you're out of here.
Jesus: So the manager went off by himself to think for a while.
Manager: Hmm... This is difficult. I'm getting old – I can't just go and work in the fields and I can't build houses. I don't want to end up begging, I need to get a few friends on my side.

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Jesus: A week later the rich man called the manager in again.
Rich man: What have you been up to now?
Manager: Nothing!
Rich man: I don't think so. Look at this. A delivery note for four hundred gallons of olive oil from Isaiah the innkeeper – any idea how much he really owes me?
Manager: Four hundred gallons of olive oil?
Rich man: Eight hundred. Here's another - from Philip the farmer. A delivery note for four thousand bushels of wheat. Any idea how much he owes me?
Manager: Two thousand? Perhaps he was being generous?
Rich man: Eight thousand! Methuselah the moneylender – fifteen thousand drachma. Guess how much he owes.
Manager: Er... thirty thousand?
Rich man: Well done you've got the hang of it now. And not only these – but you see that mountain of paperwork over there, the one holding the ceiling up – every one of them has paid me just half of what they owe. Now why would they do that, do you think?
Manager: Perhaps they are not very good at adding up?
Rich man: Perhaps someone not a million miles from me is very good at adding up!
Manager: Really? That's interesting. Who would that be?
Rich man: Well let's think, ooh now there's a clue here. A thank you note from Shadrach the shepherd. 'Dear Rich man,' he was never very good with names, 'dear rich man – thank you so much for cutting my debt in half I will be forever grateful and always treasure that nice manager of yours.' Bit of a giveaway there, I think.
Manager: Perhaps he means your new manager – you know the one who's going to replace me...
Rich man: Be quiet! I know what you're up to. You're a wise and cunning worker. You know that any one of these will offer you a job now, and I can't call in their full debts or I'll look bad. You have acted very shrewdly indeed. So for that – you can keep your job with me, just make doubly sure you apply the same cunning to my business deals.
Jesus: That man used all his wiles and energy to further his career – and you should do the same – for the kingdom. The people of this world are wise and cunning for their own good – so you be smart too. Be clever and energetic about the good and righteous things; don't just get by on good behaviour. Spend your lives extravagantly for God's kingdom.

The Pharisees were listening to Jesus and sneering amongst themselves. Jesus noticed this.

Jesus: Be careful – you justify yourselves before men – but God knows your hearts. What is valuable to man – is detestable to God.

Lazarus and Dives

Jesus went on to tell another story

Jesus: There was once a very rich man called Dives. He was so rich he lived his life in ease and luxury, in a huge mansion, dressed in purple and fine linens. One day a poor beggar called Lazarus was laid at his gates and whenever the rich man waddled past him, Lazarus would beg for a little money. But the rich man ignored him and the poor man became so thin and ill that his body developed terrible sores. The rich man's many dogs gathered around him and licked the weeping wounds. It was a horrible sight. After long days of suffering Lazarus died and went to heaven. Soon after the rich man had a heart attack and died too, due to all the rich food he was eating. As he lay in torment in hell he looked up and saw Lazarus up in heaven, feasting at the heavenly banquet, in peace and luxury. So he called out to Father Abraham, who was overseeing the proceedings.
Dives: Hey! Abraham – you up in heaven there!
Abraham: What is it?

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Dives: What's that flea-infested beggar doing in paradise?
Abraham: Enjoying the finest foods and best wines.
Dives: You know what I mean – he should not be up there. Send him down.
Abraham: What made you an expert in the afterlife? You never gave it a thought when you were living in luxury on the earth.
Dives: Well, at least get him to dip his finger in a drop of water and bring it down to me. It's so hot down here my mouth is burning up.
Abraham: So? Dives – when you were alive you had every indulgence known to man. You have had your reward already. Lazarus had nothing, less than nothing. Now he is getting his reward. And even if that were not the case – there is a giant chasm between heaven and hell with no bridge across. Lazarus couldn't get to you if he wanted to.
Dives: Then let me ask a favour – I have five brothers. Send Lazarus to my father's house to tell them, to warn them.
Abraham: They have plenty of warning! They have had Moses, the prophets, and the scriptures.
Dives: That is not enough, they can ignore that! But if someone came back from the dead then they would certainly sit up and take notice.
Abraham: If they do not take any notice of Moses and the prophets – then believe me – they will not be convinced even if a man were to rise from the dead. They would still find the words to explain it away.
Peter: Lord, what about us? Are we like that? Will we miss what God is saying? You have to help us, our faith is so small. Increase it for us!
Jesus: You only need a tiny kernel of faith, Peter, that will be enough. It will develop and mature until all things are possible. You will be able to speak to mountains and trees and have them obey you.
Peter: That's what I want. I want faith like that! I want to command mountains and trees. I want people to know that I'm different. I want them to stop me in the street and...
Jesus: Peter?
Peter: What?
Jesus: Suppose you had a servant.
Peter: That would be nice.
Jesus: You could send him out to look after your crops, tend your sheep, plough up the land.
Peter: Sounds perfect.
Jesus: Yes, but when the servant comes in at the end of an evening, hot, tired, weary from the day would you say: 'Sit down, take it easy, let me make you a hot meal and look after your every need...'?
Peter: No way! If he's my servant then he can make me some food.
Jesus: Exactly! He would serve you first and then, only then, could he eat.
Peter: Sure, and only after he'd cleaned my sandals, swept the house, tidied the furniture...
Jesus: And you would not expect him to come to you for congratulations for doing what is, after all, just his job?
Peter: Of course not! What's your point Lord?
Jesus: Simply this. When you have done what God has asked you to do, when you've served him and demonstrated great faith – don't look for rewards. Be matter-of-fact about it. Just say to yourself, I did what was expected of me, just like that servant.

Chapter Ten **The Great and the Good**

(Matthew 19-20&26; Mark 10&14; Luke 17-19; John 11&12)

Lazarus is Raised from the Dead

Mary and Martha, the sisters who lived in Bethany, sent a message to Jesus. Lazarus, their brother was very sick and on the verge of death. 'Your dear friend is ill,' they said, 'please help.' When he received the message Jesus said:

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Jesus: This will not end in death. No - this is for the praise of God and so that his son may be glorified through the outcome.

However, though he cared a lot for Martha, Mary and Lazarus – he stayed where he was for a while and did not go straight to Bethany to help. Then, after a couple of days, he said to his disciples:

Jesus: Let's go back to Judea.

Thomas: But Lord, they recently tried to kill you there. Don't you remember that crowd threatening to stone you?

Jesus: Time is short, Thomas, I must keep working while it is still day – the night will not be long coming.

Thomas: But we won't make it back to Judea before nightfall, Lord.

Jesus: I'm not talking about temporal day and night. Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep – it's time I went to wake him.

Thomas: If he's just asleep he'll recover.

Jesus: No Thomas. He's not sleeping. He's dead.

Thomas: Then why did you wait here for two days? You might have been able to keep him alive.

Jesus: I'm glad I was not there – you're about to see a miracle Thomas, and it will boost your faith. Come on, let's go.

Thomas: Well – if you're determined to risk death in Judea – we might as well all risk it with you.

The Resurrection and the Life

Jesus and his friends went to Judea and Bethany, which was less than two miles from Jerusalem. When they arrived there a few days later there was a large party of mourners, weeping and wailing. Martha ran to meet Jesus, her eyes wild.

Martha: Where were you? You should have been here! We sent word.

Jesus: I did not come straight away.

Martha: I know that! If you had done my brother would still be alive! Instead he's dead and cold and it's your fault!

Jesus: I'm sorry I was not here.

Martha: You had the power to do something.

Jesus: Your brother will rise.

Martha: I know that! I know he will rise on the last day. But what about this day – and all the other days we have to live without him.

Jesus: Martha – I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live forever – even though their bodies die. Do you believe this?

Martha: Yes, Lord. In spite of what's happened I still believe that you are the Son of God, the one the prophets said would come into the world.

Jesus: Where's your sister? Where's Mary?

Martha: She's too upset, she wouldn't come to see you. She feels betrayed.

Jesus: Go and tell her I want to see her. Ask her to come out.

Martha: Mary! Mary! Come and see him, he's here! He wants to see you! Mary!

When Mary heard this she got up immediately and came out to see Jesus.

Mary: Lord – where were you? If you had been here my brother would not be dead.

Jesus: Mary, Mary don't cry. It's not over yet. Where is he buried?

Mary: Come and see, I'll show you.

They took Jesus to the tomb, it was a cave with a large stone rolled across the entrance. When Jesus saw the grave he wept openly.

Mary: You really loved him, didn't you Lord?

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Jesus: Yes, I did.

But many could not understand why the man who opened blind eyes could not have saved his own friend.

Jesus: Open the tomb!

Martha: But Lord – it will stink!

Jesus: Take away the stone.

Martha: He's been dead four days. Four days! Please don't embarrass us like this.

Jesus: Martha, have you forgotten what I said already? Believe and you'll see the glory of God. Please open the tomb.

It took several men to roll the stone away, as they did Jesus looked up to heaven and prayed.

Jesus: Father! Thank you for listening to me, thank that you always listen. Lord, may these people see and believe today that you sent me. Lazarus! Come out!

There was a stunned silence. Dust and sunlight played around the door of the grave. The men who had opened the tomb fell back but there was no bad smell.

Jesus: Lazarus! Wake up! Come out! Now!

A muffled cough rang out. Then another. Then the sound of shuffling feet.

Martha: What's happening!

Mary: It's him! Look!

A bandaged figure appeared in the doorway, his legs locked together by the grave wrappings, his face cloaked in white cloth. Gasps and screams ricocheted round the crowd.

Martha: He's alive! Lazarus!

Jesus: Take off the grave clothes quick, before he falls over.

Mary ran and hugged her brother whilst Martha fell in the dust and worked at the bandages on his feet. Others unwrapped his face and hands. Mary showered her lost brother with kisses. Jesus watched and wept again and quickly brushed the tears from his face.

In Jerusalem the Pharisees heard of the miracle and reacted rather differently.

The Pharisees Plot to Kill Jesus

Caiaphas: I've called this meeting of the Sanhedrin because of the latest happenings with Jesus of Nazareth. You have all heard about this dead friend of his.

Nicodemus: Not dead any more by all accounts!

Caiaphas: Dead people don't get better.

Nicodemus: They have a habit of doing so round him.

Caiaphas: Are you with him or us?

Nicodemus: I'm on the side of truth.

Caiaphas: Hmm – as enigmatic as ever, Nicodemus.

Annas: This doesn't solve the problem at hand. We're all sick of him. He ridicules us, everything he does goes well - and when we're nearby we look like fools. The people are losing respect.

Nicodemus: He only speaks the truth, Caiaphas.

Caiaphas: Shut up about your truth! This is accomplishing nothing!

Annas: If we let him carry on the people will get more and more excited. The next thing you know there'll be an uprising and then slaughter.

Nicodemus: He doesn't talk of uprising.

Annas: He doesn't have to – it's never far from the people's minds. Believe me it will happen if he carries on.

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Caiaphas: Yes and the Romans will certainly not tolerate that. They'll take away our land and our freedom.
Nicodemus: Freedom? What freedom?
Annas: The freedom to be Jewish! At least we have that.
Nicodemus: For all the good it's worth.
Caiaphas: Are you despising your own heritage now? That Jesus has really got to you hasn't he? Another reason to dispose of him.
Nicodemus: What do you mean – dispose of him?
Annas: Yes, what exactly are you saying Caiaphas?
Caiaphas: Simply this – it's better for one man to die than for the whole nation to be slaughtered. He's always talking about death – well then – let's give it to him.

Though Caiaphas did not realise it he was prophesying, and from that day on the religious leaders plotted to take Jesus's life. Now Jesus could no longer move around publicly, instead he withdrew to a village called Ephraim, it was a lonely place not far from the desert.

The Ten Lepers

As Jesus was entering a village on the Samaritan border ten men with leprosy greeted him. They stood at a distance, their bodies a mess of wounds and rags.

Leper: Lord! Please have pity on us. Help us.
Jesus: What do you want me to do?
Leper: Look at us! Isn't it obvious?
Jesus: Go and show yourself to the priests.
Leper: We can't! We're unclean like this!
Jesus: Go and show yourselves. Take heart, have faith.

They turned and shuffled away but as they went the flesh on their bodies changed from the deathly white of the disease to new pink and healthy skin.

Leper: Jesus! Jesus! It's me look! Do you recognise me? I'm healed. Look! It's safe to touch me. My hands, my face – the disease has gone. Thank you Lord, thank you. You have made me normal again.
Jesus: What about the others? Didn't they get better too?
Leper: Oh! Yes! We all did! It's a miracle!
Jesus: So where are they?
Leper: They... they went on to the priest. They ran on, they were excited.
Jesus: Did they not think to come back and give glory to God for what he had done?
Leper: I'm sorry Lord. I could go and find them for you.
Jesus: No, don't worry. You go and live your new life – your faith has made you better. Go. Surprise a few people!

The man turned and ran, leaping rocks and vaulting fallen trees. Jesus watched him then turned to his disciples.

The Return of the Son of Man

Jesus: You know, the time will come when you will long to see days like this again. And people will certainly try and conjure them up. They'll run to you and say, 'Look! Here's the Son of Man. Back again!' Or 'There he is! Out doing some great work!' Don't believe them. The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be totally rejected. Then, when he finally does return, people will be eating and drinking, working and resting, playing games and going to church, living their lives like any normal day. Totally unsuspecting of what is to come. It will arrive with sudden force, just like the flood in the days of Noah, or the fire that fell upon Sodom and Gomorrah. Then one person will be taken, another left. Two people will be at work, one will disappear. A couple will be in bed, one will vanish.
Peter: When? When will the kingdom come like that?

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Jesus: It has already come! The kingdom has started in you Peter, and you Andrew, Thomas, Bartholomew – all of you. The kingdom of God has been born within you, wherever you go you take that kingdom with you.

Peter: But what about these dramatic things? The fire and the flood and the sudden force? When will all that be?

Jesus: Only God knows, Peter, the Son of Man himself has no idea. Does that disappoint you?

Peter: Yes! I hope it's soon!

Jesus: Watch for the signs Peter. All of you, keep your eyes open – wherever there's a dead body you know it because the vultures gather overhead. Well, you will see similar signs – when something important occurs, news soon travels. Keep watching and waiting, and keep praying for it to happen.

The Persistent Widow and the Unjust Judge

Peter: Praying is hard, Lord.

Jesus: It is Peter! But it's worth it! In a certain town, not too far away there was a judge. He was totally unjust, he feared neither God nor any man. He didn't care about anyone. A widow came to him one day and said:

Widow: Er excuse me... Sir... Might I bother you for a moment?

Judge: No you might not. Go away!

Widow: But I have a complaint.

Judge: I'm so pleased, now go away.

Widow: But it's a big problem.

Judge: You're a big problem, now go away!

Widow: How dare you speak to me like that!

Judge: I'll speak to you however I like.

Widow: But I've come to you for justice!

Judge: Well you've come to the wrong place. I only do insults!

Widow: Please! Help me!

Judge: No – you help me. Go away so I can have my afternoon snooze.

Widow: This is appalling. You're a fraud!

Judge: And you're a whinge bag.

Widow: Now look... I'm telling you...

Judge: And I'm not listening.

Widow: But...

Judge: No buts... I'm on sabbatical.

Widow: Since when?

Judge: Since you arrived. You're all nag, nag, nag, nag, nag.

Judge: Oh it's nagging you want is it?

Judge: No.

Widow: Right! Well, here we go then... Look at the state of this place, you haven't cleaned up for a month. Old fish, rotting grapes, stagnant underwear. And look at you, you're just sitting around fat and listless. Look at the belly on you, you look like an overweight sea monster. Get some exercise. That garden out there could do with a decade's work. And I don't know what's died in your bed but it smells like old cheese mixed with an incontinent bison. And when did you last have a wash? And a shave, and a haircut? And what do you call...

Judge: All right, all right, all right!

Widow: But I'm just getting started.

Judge: You'll be getting more than started in a minute.

Widow: Let me finish.

Judge: I'll finish you and use you for manure in that wreck of a garden out there, along with the overweight sea monster and incontinent bison. Woman – you are driving me up the wall. I don't care about you and I don't care about justice – but you'll give me a hernia with all this wailing and teeth gnashing. Whatever you want – yes! Yes! I'll do it, you can have it! I'll see that whoever has wronged you is strung up by the eyebrows and boiled in molten camel dung.

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Widow: Really?
Judge: Yes! Now get out before I change my mind you feisty old bin bag!
Jesus: Take note of that. Even though the judge was the most despicable of men – the widow’s persistence paid off.
Peter: But God’s not like that!
Jesus: No – but some people fear that he is. But if you keep crying out for justice for his people – do you think he will keep putting you off? Will he ignore you? I tell you he won’t. But that kind of persistence takes faith, and in years to come, will there still be that kind of faith around?

The Pharisee and the Tax Collector

Some of those with Jesus were confident of their own goodness, so he told them another parable.

Jesus: Two men went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee,
Pharisee: God, I thank that I am not like other people.
Jesus: The other was a tax collector.
Tax collector: God, forgive me.
Pharisee: Lord you see what I’m like ...
Tax collector: You know what I do...
Pharisee: When it comes to money...
Tax collector: I’m greedy.
Pharisee: When it comes to the commandments...
Tax collector: I break every rule in the book.
Pharisee: And when it comes to prayer and fasting.
Tax collector: I never make any time for talking to you. Please have mercy on me, I’m just like all the other rejects -
Pharisee: Thieves, adulterers and lawbreakers...
Tax collector: I stand convicted because
Pharisee: I can proudly say I’m not like any of those. I say these things because...
Tax collector: I am a terrible hypocrite...
Pharisee: I look at that tax collector in the Temple here
Tax Collector: And I’m ashamed. I see that Pharisee over there...
Pharisee: And I think – ‘Heaven forbid I should end up like him:
Tax collector: He is so...
Pharisee: Despised, repellent, greedy and sinful’.
Tax collector: Very different to me. I can barely raise my head to say
Pharisee: Lord, I thank you that I am set apart and will never...
Tax collector: ‘Show mercy. Please forgive me.’
Pharisee: Share the company of an evil man. I am justified and
Tax collector: I am proud. I have sinned terribly.
Pharisee: I must dash. I’m very busy.
Jesus: I tell you for certain – the tax collector went home forgiven, but the Pharisee, he just went home. Humble yourselves and God will lift you up. Elevate yourselves and he will bring you crashing down.

Marriage and Divorce

Not long after this the crowds began to follow Jesus again. There were Pharisees among them and they set out to trap Jesus into saying something that would incriminate him in their eyes.

Pharisee: Teacher, is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife any time he wants to?
Jesus: You know the scriptures – you tell me.
Pharisee: Moses said we could write a certificate of divorce and send her away.
Jesus: Are you after a divorce then?
Pharisee: No! I’m after the truth.
Jesus: The truth! Well, let me tell you this – Moses wrote that law because your hearts are hard. But go back further – look at his account of creation. God made man and woman and it says: ‘For this reason a man will leave his parents and be united with

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his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' You see – they are no longer separate individuals – but have become one unique partnership. That's God's doing – and you should not try and break apart what God has put together.

James: So what exactly are you saying, Lord?

Jesus: One person may divorce another because of unfaithfulness. But if anyone should divorce for another reason then they commit adultery when they marry another person.

James: That's hard to take Lord. I think we'd better all stay single!

Jesus: Some people do stay single – for a variety of reasons. Some even stay single so they may devote themselves to the work of the kingdom. But that's not the way for many people.

Blessing the Children

As Jesus and his friends were talking the people around began to bring their children to him. The parents asked Jesus to pray for them and they begged him to place his hands on the children to bless them.

John: Lord, we've got better things to do than this!

James: Yes! There's hundred of them – it'll take all day!

Jesus: Let it take all day then. There's no better thing for us do than welcome these little ones.

John: But they're just children. They're making so much noise we can't hear your stories.

Jesus: Does that matter?

John: Of course. What's the point of you teaching if no one can hear you?

Jesus: John, I teach people so that they will come closer to me. So if the children want to come – then I've been successful.

James: But what about all the adults?

Jesus: The kingdom of God belongs to those who become like children. Look at their simple trust, look at their simple faith. The hunger and joy in their faces. Don't ever put that down. Encourage that kind of faith in your own lives – if it grows – you will grow closer to God.

The Rich Young Leader

As Jesus moved off again a religious leader came to him and knelt in the dirt.

Agur: Good teacher, how can I be good enough to get into heaven?

Jesus: Only God is good enough for heaven. If you want to enter eternal life then do what he tells you. Obey the ten commandments.

Agur: Which ones?

Jesus: All of them! Don't steal, don't commit murder, don't lie or commit adultery, honour your parents and guardians, love your neighbour as you love yourself. You know the commandments, I'm sure.

Agur: But I do all of these. Every single one of them! All my life I've battled to get it right. I've worn myself out doing it. Yet I still seem to lack something.

Jesus: Do you want the truth?

Agur: Yes!

Jesus: There is only one thing that you're missing – just one blind spot in your life.

Agur: What is it? Tell me and I'll do it.

Jesus: How much money do you have?

Agur: No idea. A lot.

Jesus: Exactly, I think you have so much that it's come between you and God. If you want to see eternal life then move that stack of wealth out of the way. It's blocking your view.

Agur: My money?

Jesus: Yes. My advice is simple – sell everything and give the money to the poor. They need it much more than you do. Sell what you don't need and then you will have purchased what you cannot buy. Treasure in heaven.

Agur: Lord, I have a lot of money.

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Jesus: I know. Leave it behind and come with me.
Agur: Lord...
Jesus: I know – you don't want to give it up, do you?
Agur: No. If only there was something else I could do...
Jesus: There isn't. That's your problem.
Agur: I'm sorry Lord, you ask for too much.
Jesus: Yes, I think I do.

A Camel through the Eye of a Needle

As the rich man turned and left, his head hanging and his feet dragging in the dirt, Jesus turned to his disciples.

Jesus: It is so hard for those who have plenty to get into heaven.
James: But that was a hard thing you asked of him.
Jesus: It's a hard thing for anyone – but harder for those who have a lot to lose. Have you ever ridden a camel through the eye of a needle?
James: No – of course not!
Jesus: What about a whale? Have you ever seen a whale creep into your house through a crack in the wall?
James: No! That's ridiculous.
Jesus: Well, it's easier for a whale to do that than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven.
James: Then it's impossible. We have no chance of ever being saved. No one has.
Jesus: Yes, James – it is impossible – by your own efforts. But with God's efforts – you have every chance of being saved.
Peter: But Lord, we have given up plenty for you.
John: Yes – we've left everything behind for you.
Jesus: When the new earth is born, and the heavens are remade, then there will be a huge payout. Everyone who has left homes, families, friends and possessions for me will receive a hundred times as much. But be careful - those people who are now first in life – the important and the prominent - they will be the last in heaven.
Peter: Lord, is that fair though?
Jesus: Fair? No... and yes.
Peter: What?

The Workers in the Vineyard – the Last will be First

Jesus: Let me illustrate it for you. The kingdom is like a man who owned a large estate. And first thing in the morning he went out to hire men to work in his vineyards. When he hired them he promised to pay them one denarius for that day's labour, so they happily went along and set to work. Half way through the morning he went out again and found more workers. He agreed to pay them a denarius and they set to work too. After lunch he hired some more and again mid-way through the afternoon. In the evening, just before the workers finished, he spotted a couple more men and hired them. An hour later the men finished work and lined up for their pay. Those hired last came first and they received a denarius for their labours. The others saw this and thought 'They've worked for an hour and been paid a denarius – great! We've been here ten hours we'll get ten times as much.'
However, when they lined up for their pay they received what they had earned – one denarius.
Peter: That's not fair!
Jesus: Isn't it, Peter? They had agreed to work one day for one denarius.
Peter: Yes! But they sweated in the hot sun for hours. The last two workers only spent an hour in the cool evening.
Jesus: Yes, but that's not the point. Each worker agreed to work for one denarius. They received that. If the estate manager chooses to be generous and pay everyone the same that's up to him.

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Peter: But it just doesn't seem right! It's naïve. There's bound to be trouble from the other workers.

Jesus: It's no business of the other workers. They are simply envious of those who worked less. Yet if the owner is generous all the more reason why they should be generous too and be happy for those who got the same, even though they were not able to work the whole day.

Peter: But why?

Jesus: If nothing else it shows they have a benevolent employer.

Peter: But it still doesn't seem fair.

Jesus: You're right! The kingdom isn't fair. If it were about fairness – no one would get in. That's why it's about grace – infinite and undeserved, abundant and naïve.

Peter: It's still hard to see the logic, Lord.

Jesus: It is. But with God, the first will be last and the last will be first. Life is turned on its head, Peter, even if the process does make you sick. Everything will be turned upside-down and for a while it will seem as if there is nothing but chaos.

Peter: When? What do you mean?

Jesus: Soon, because I'm going to be taken from you. Every prophecy about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. There will be lies, violence, mockery and murder. And it will all be visited on the Son of Man. Then, after three days, he will rise.

Peter: Lord, what do you mean?

Jesus: You don't understand now, Peter, but soon you will. I promise – you will.

James and John and Their Mother's Request

Nearby James and John were in quiet conversation together.

John: James?

James: Yes John.

John: I've been thinking.

James: Oh that makes a change.

John: Yes. You know we've been friends with Jesus for a good while now?

James: Yes.

John: Well what I want to know is, why does he get all the limelight all the time?

James: Probably because he's the Messiah. He's only the greatest person who ever lived.

John: No, not Jesus - Peter - I'm talking about Peter. Why's he get all the limelight all the time? Why are people always coming to him and not us?

James: I suppose it could be because we haven't walked on water, or been given the keys of the kingdom, or been called the rock on which God's going to build his church.

John: True. But neither do we have a talent for getting it wrong all the time and looking like a prize turnip.

James: True. Maybe it's because we're not very good at always putting our foot in it, or regularly getting told off by Jesus.

John: Exactly. But you know what I've been thinking?

James: What?

John: I was thinking it's time we had some of that.

James: Some of what – 'getting told off by Jesus'?

John: No. It's time we got some of the limelight.

James: Not a bad idea. I'd been thinking something like that too.

John: I mean, think of all the marvellous things we've done.

James: Yes... we told Jesus to burn down that village because they weren't very nice to us.

John: Shh! I wasn't thinking about that one. I mean, we saw the transfiguration.

James: Oh yes! Course we did. That was brilliant. That was fantastic. What was that then?

John: You know, we were on that hill and we saw Moses and Elijah, we were there with Peter.

James: Oh yes, Peter again!

John: That was the time he wanted to put up a few tents and guess what?

James: Jesus told him off!

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John: Exactly! Not that we take any pleasure from that. So anyway, I was thinking we should have just a little reward, nothing too fancy. Just a little something to say thank you for our devotion and service and humility.

James: Good idea, you mean a little present like a few drachmas or something?

John: Yes, just a small *thank you* present. Like a pot of honey or... eternal life.

James: Good one.

John: Well that's the best thing, isn't it?

James: Yes, it's brilliant. We get a new body and it doesn't rot anymore. No more wrinkles and spots.

John: And we do deserve it.

James: Of course we do.

John: Mind you, we are going to get that anyway.

James: Are we?

John: Yes, you've heard Jesus talking, he said that God sent him so that anyone who believes can have eternal life.

James: Anyone? Oh well we don't just want any old eternal life. Tell you what then - we'll be first in the queue. You know, have the expensive seats, the best view, the ones with the cushions and free wine and figs.

John: I don't like figs.

James: I'll have yours then.

John: Okay, and we'll definitely make sure we're ahead of Peter, he can be third in the queue.

James: Definitely. Let's go and ask Jesus now.

John: Great idea. And I'll tell you something, Jesus will like this. He likes humble faith. I bet he won't tell us off like he does Peter.

James: By the way, you'll do the asking won't you, John? Just in case we do get a mild telling off...

John: No, you can do it, it was your idea...

James: It wasn't! You started it.

John: Tell you what - we'll get our mum to do it!

James and John brought their mother to Jesus, she knelt before him and begged him a favour.

Rachel: Lord – you've made such an impact on my sons. They have changed forever.

Jesus: They have, so what do you want?

Rachel: A simple favour.

Jesus: Is any favour ever that simple?

Rachel: It is for you! Lord, my boys are the best, they are the most dedicated, the most fervent of followers. Promise me that they can sit next to you in your kingdom.

James: I'll have the right hand side, Lord. John's happy to be on the left.

Jesus: Is he now?

James: Oh yes, we don't want to argue about it. We're happy with that arrangement.

Rachel: So... is that settled then?

Jesus: No.

Rachel: No? But Lord, be fair. Who has worked harder than them? Who has healed more people, which other disciple has done more miracles? We're not asking much when you consider their talent.

Jesus: You are asking everything. Way beyond what you imagine.

Rachel: But that's all right. You're Jesus. You can do everything!

Jesus: Yes, but can they?

Rachel: What do you mean?

Jesus: Can they go through what I'm about to go through? Can they endure what I'm about to endure?

Rachel: I don't know what you mean, I just want the best for them.

Jesus: And if the best should involve the worst? If the glory should involve the grimmest – what then? Would you still like them to have it? There is a way before me that will

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involve the darkest night this world has ever seen. Can they walk through that? Would you want them to? Can they eat and drink the meal that is prepared for me?

Rachel: They are very brave, my boys!

Jesus: Yes. They are, you're right! And they will one day walk that hard path to eternal life. But I'm afraid I cannot grant your request.

Rachel: Oh! Why?

Jesus: Because you ask the wrong person. Only my Father can grant your request. Talk to him about it. Please.

The Greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven

As the mother of James and John stood and left the other disciples closed in on the brothers.

Matthew: I can't believe you just asked that!

Thomas: Who do you think you are?

Judas: You won't even be sweeping the streets in heaven – you'll be lucky if they let you clean the soles of my shoes.

James: Your shoes! Don't make me laugh, Judas. You'll be lucky!

Judas: Oh yes?

James: Yes!

Judas: Well maybe you and I had better settle this properly.

James: I'd love to – under a quiet, shady tree somewhere.

Judas: Good idea – I wouldn't want to spatter your entrails all over your brother.

James: Right!

Judas: Right!

Jesus: Wrong.

Judas: What?

Jesus: What are you arguing about now?

Thomas: Oh nothing.

Matthew: We're not arguing, Lord.

Jesus: Really?

Matthew: Really. We're just having a friendly discussion.

Jesus: If this is friendly - I wouldn't like to see anything hostile between you lot.

Thomas: It's them Lord. James and John. They started it!

John: Didn't!

Thomas: Did!

James: Didn't!

Judas: Did!

Jesus: Oh please – this ridiculous.

Judas: Don't blame us...

John: Don't blame us either...

Jesus: Stop it. Stop for a minute and listen to yourselves. You're just like all the others.

James: Which others?

Jesus: Everyone. All those out there who've never heard my teaching. You're no different. Now listen to me because this is important. You have to nurture humility in your lives. Pride is an ugly thing, arrogance is pitiful, believe me. Out there, in life, in work, in families – people lord it over one another, trying to outdo each other, always trying to pull rank and put each other down. It can't be that way with you. If you want to be great – then be a servant. If you have ambition then use it to be the greatest at caring and serving others. Your kindness for others is the measure of your greatness. It's true, believe me. Set yourselves up as top dog and you'll end up looking like some dumb animal.

James: But Lord that's hard for us when we've learnt so much.

Jesus: Perhaps, but remember – where I have come from we know everything. Yet I have come for one reason – to be a servant to every single person on earth. The more you are – the more you can give.

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Blind Bartimaeus

They took up their journey again, the disciples thoughtful and chastened. As they drew near to Jericho they spotted a blind man who was sitting beside the road begging. As he heard Jesus draw near the man leapt on his feet and called out.

Bartimaeus: Son of David, is that you?
Philip: Be quiet.
Bartimaeus: Who said that? Is that you son of David?
Philip: No it isn't, now be quiet, we're in a hurry.
Bartimaeus: But I want to see Jesus!
Philip: We haven't got time, he's already healed three lepers and a deaf mute today. We have to keep going.
Bartimaeus: Son of David! Stop!
Philip: Be quiet!
Bartimaeus: Jesus – please, show me some mercy! I know you can! Help me! Is that you now?
Philip: No it's me again. Philip.
Bartimaeus: Oh not you! Go away.
Philip: We will if you just give us the chance. Stop trying to distract Jesus. He's had a busy day.
Bartimaeus: But it won't take long – I've heard how quickly he heals people.
Philip: The last thing he wants to do now is heal a noisy beggar like you.
Bartimaeus: He has to heal me.
Philip: No he does not!
Bartimaeus: He does. It's what the prophet said – he came to give sight to the blind.
Philip: Yes – and peace to the world. Which we won't get if you keep on nagging like this.
Bartimaeus: I want to be healed! Jesus! Listen to me. Show me some mercy!
Jesus: Bring the blind man to me.
Philip: Good news old man – he wants to see you. Cheer up!
Bartimaeus: What do you mean – cheer up? You're the miserable one!
Philip: But he wants to see you – it's good news!
Bartimaeus: Oh it's good news now is it? You've changed your tune. A minute ago it was 'shut up', now it's 'cheer up'!
Philip: Look, do you want me to take you or not?
Bartimaeus: Not long ago it was 'be quiet', now it's 'be healed'!
Philip: Get up!
Bartimaeus: That's it – drag me around like an old sack!
Philip: Come on... Lord, here he is – I've brought you someone for healing.
Bartimaeus: Nearly killed me in the process!
Jesus: What's your name?
Bartimaeus: Bartimaeus, Lord.
Jesus: And what do you want me to do, Bartimaeus?
Bartimaeus: What?
Jesus: What do you want me to do for you?
Bartimaeus: Well your disciple stepped on my toe when he dragged me over...
Philip: He wants to see, Lord.
Bartimaeus: I'll tell him! I want to see Lord. Please – your followers tried to shoo me away, but I know you can help me, I've heard all the stories.
Jesus: Go then! Your faith has made you well again.
Bartimaeus: You mean – just like that? I can see?
Jesus: Well, you tell me...
Philip: Open your eyes.
Bartimaeus: I know what to do... It's just been a long time... Aaaahhh!
Philip: What is it?
Bartimaeus: It's so bright, what's all that whiteness?
Philip: It's just the sun. Come on, I'll help you over to the shade.
Bartimaeus: Don't step on my foot again...
Philip: I won't...

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Bartimaeus: Aaaaahhhh!
Philip: What is it now?
Bartimaeus: I can see! I can really see! Ow it hurts! But I can really see. Praise God!

When the crowds around Jesus saw the miracle they praised God too.

Zacchaeus

Jesus and his friends then moved on into Jericho. The people followed him as he picked up pace and soon many of the people from the town had gathered around him in such large crowds that it was difficult to get through. One man in the town was so short he could not see over the heads of the others. He scrambled up into a nearby tree and looked down over the babbling crowds. As he crept along an overhanging branch he slipped round it and found himself hanging right over Jesus, looking down on him and his disciples.

Jesus: Hello! You're keen!
Zacchaeus: Are you the one they call Jesus?
Jesus: That I am.
Zacchaeus: From Nazareth?
Jesus: Right again.
Zacchaeus: I've heard about you.
Jesus: All good things I hope.
Zacchaeus: Most of them, yes. They say you don't mind who your friends are.
Jesus: On the contrary – I pick my friends very carefully.
Zacchaeus: So you won't want me then?
Jesus: I've no idea. Who are you?
Zacchaeus: I'm a tax collector.
Jesus: I didn't mean that – I meant what's your name?
Zacchaeus: Zacchaeus – but most people round here already know that.
Jesus: You're popular then?
Zacchaeus: No – just the opposite.
Jesus: You know Zacchaeus, I'm getting a crick in my neck here and you must be getting dizzy, hanging upside-down like that. Have you got any food in?
Zacchaeus: Have I got food in? Eating's my hobby.
Jesus: Excellent. Can I come to your house now?
Zacchaeus: But...
Jesus: Don't you want me to come?
Zacchaeus: No, it's not that – are you sure you want to? It won't make you popular – people hate me round here. Most of them can't stand me.
Jesus: All the more food for us then! Come on Zacchaeus, I'm getting hungry!

At the House of Zacchaeus

Zacchaeus righted himself on the branch and dropped to the ground. Jesus followed him to a nearby house and the crowds followed them both. Soon there was a party in full swing and the smell of good food and wine filled the streets outside. As evening fell, Zacchaeus stood in the doorway of his house and addressed the muttering crowds.

Zacchaeus: Listen! I've got some good news! I've been thinking – it's time I set things straight. I have got far too much here – I'm giving half of it away to the poor. That's right – you heard correctly. And that's not all, if I've cheated anyone here...
Man: What do you mean – if?
Zacchaeus: Okay – you're right – I know I've cheated some of you.
Woman: Some?
Zacchaeus: All right – all of you! So I've decided I'm going to pay you all back twice as much... No wait a minute, let me just work it out... Three times – no! Four times as much as I took from you. And that's not the drink talking – my head is clearer than it has been for years. Four times as much! So you'd better form an orderly queue. Quick before I change my mind.
Jesus: Zacchaeus – you have just proved a point.

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Zacchaeus: What's that, Lord?
Jesus: That today salvation has come to this town. And more than that – to this house.
Zacchaeus: What do you mean?
Jesus: The Son of Man came to look for those who are lost. Today he has found one of them.
Peter: What about the kingdom Lord?
James: Yes! Are you going to reveal that to us now?
Jesus: These things take time, James.
James: But Lord...

Ten Minas and Ten Servants

Jesus: Listen! Another story for you. There was a once a royal nobleman...
Nobleman: Right! Listen up everyone. I'm off to a distant part of the country – I have to make a long journey and it will take some time. I am to be crowned king of the entire country – so I must go to the capital. In the meantime I'm going to distribute part of my wealth amongst you and I expect each of you to use it wisely and increase it for me. Got it?
Jesus: They had got it. He gave ten of his servants ten minas each. And he left. When he came back he called the servants before him, one at a time.
Nobleman: Right! Let's see how you all did.
1st Servant: Sir – you gave me ten minas – I've used them to earn ten more. Here's twenty.
Nobleman: Well done! You have been faithful with this small matter – so, now that I am running the country I am free to give you jurisdiction over – not ten minas – but ten cities. That's promotion for you. Well done! Thank you for your faithful service. Next!
2nd Servant: Sir, I invested your money and have made another five minas for you.
Nobleman: Good man! Not as many as the first servant but that's all right – from now on you will be running five cities. Next!
3rd Servant: Sir, here it is.
Nobleman: Here's what?
3rd Servant: Your mina. I kept it safe, polished it every day, and put it in a pretty box for you.
Nobleman: Well done good and faithful... What! You did what!
3rd Servant: I kept it safe, put it in a box and...
Nobleman: I heard you the first time!
3rd Servant: Then why did you ask me to say it all again?
Nobleman: You won't be saying anything again. Ever! Not unless you have a very good reason for your idleness.
3rd Servant: I wasn't idle I...
Nobleman: I gave you a gift and a job to do. Explain yourself.
3rd Servant: Well sir, it's not that straightforward. You see I sat down and did some hard thinking.
Nobleman: Oh did you?
3rd Servant: Yes. And I thought about you.
Nobleman: Did you?
3rd Servant: Yes – you're a hard man you know – demanding all the profit. Expecting money when you do no work for it. Putting pressure on us to produce a profit.
Nobleman: And what did you do when you'd done all this marvellous thinking?
3rd Servant: Oh by that time you'd come back. And I was tired so I made a cup of tea and put my feet up.
Nobleman: So you didn't in fact put this mina in a box and polish it?
3rd Servant: No. I made that bit up to please you. But I did all the other things!
Nobleman: What? You mean the sitting and thinking and doing nothing?
3rd Servant: Yes.
Nobleman: Was that wise?
3rd Servant: Wise?
Nobleman: Yes – I suppose that's a difficult concept for you... Well, I tell you what I will do. I will judge you in the way you describe me. I'm a hard man you say? Well – here is

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my harsh judgement. You could have deposited my money so that if nothing else it would have earned interest. Because you did not I will take away the little you have and give it to the first servant.
2nd Servant: But sir – he’s already got ten.
Nobleman: Exactly! Those who use their gifts will receive even more. Those who waste the little they have will lose everything. Take him away.

Mary Anoints Jesus

Jesus continued on his way to Jerusalem. His disciples accompanied him and six days before the Passover feast they arrived in Bethany. While he was there Simon the leper held a feast in his home to honour Jesus. Martha was there, serving the food as ever, and her brother Lazarus sat with the disciples at the table. Her sister Mary took a jar of very expensive nard, broke it open and poured the essence over Jesus’s feet. The scent of the perfume filled the whole house.

Judas: Lord! Have you seen what she’s doing?
Jesus: It would be impossible to miss it, Judas.
Judas: Stop her – before it’s all gone – it’s worth a fortune. Look she’s tipping it everywhere.
Jesus: No – she’s pouring it on my feet.

As Jesus spoke, Mary took the rest of the perfume and poured it over his head.

Judas: This is madness, Lord. We could have sold this and given the money away. I couldn’t have earned that much in a year.
Jesus: Do you really have charity in mind, Judas?
Judas: What do you mean?
Jesus: Or would you prefer to give half away and keep the rest back for other things?
Judas: It would help with the finances, I suppose...
Jesus: Judas, you will always have the poor with you – you can help them any time you choose. But you will not always have me. Mary has chosen to help me now – she has anointed me for my burial and it won’t be taken from her. Look at her, what she has done is incredible. Many things may be forgotten Judas, including your convenient inclination towards charity – but she will never be forgotten, what she has done here today will be talked about all over the world. For the rest of time.

Chapter Eleven Triumph, Tears and Talents

(Matthew 21-26; Mark 11-14; Luke 19-22; John 11&12)

Palm Sunday - The Disciples Fetch a Donkey

On their way to Jerusalem Jesus and his followers stopped at the Mount of Olives. While they waited there Jesus sent two of his disciples ahead to a nearby village.

Peter: You’re not serious
Andrew: That’s what he said.
Peter: No he didn’t!
Andrew: What do you mean, no he didn’t? You weren’t even there.
Peter: All right then, but what’s he want it for?
Andrew: Riding into town, what else do you think?
Peter: Well, it’s cheaper than a horse, I suppose.
Andrew: Oh, we’re not paying for it.
Peter: I beg your pardon?
Andrew: We’re just to collect the animals and if anyone asks...
Peter: They fell off the back of a chariot.
Andrew: No! He said just tell them he needs them.

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Peter: Oh I see. And I suppose we can just pick up a couple of new cloaks, a few jars of wine and a basket of figs while we're at it.

Andrew: No. We haven't got time. But with the animals we just say: The Master needs them.

Peter: The Master needs them.

Andrew: There you are, you've got it already.

Peter: Andrew, have you ever heard of stealing? Only this largely resembles it. Oh, oh, don't look now, there's a right mean bruiser approaching. Ignore him. Whatever you do don't make eye contact or he'll break your legs.

Andrew: Ah, excuse me, hello?

Peter: Shh! What do you think you're doing?

Andrew: We've come for your animals.

Brutus: Oh have you!

Peter: Oh no, no, no - course not.

Andrew: Yes we have. We're taking them with us.

Brutus: Oh, anything else you want, like a black eye and a broken nose?

Peter: No, not really he was just having you on. We're just... browsing.

Andrew: No we're not. We were told to fetch your donkeys.

Brutus: Oh! Well, why didn't you say so in the first place?

Peter: You mean - we can have them?

Brutus: NO! Clear off!

Peter: Ah, fine, super, can't argue with that then. Perfectly reasonable. Have a nice day.

Andrew: But... The Master needs them

Peter: You keep out of this.

Brutus: The Master?

Peter: Sorry to bother you, we'll be off now, don't worry about Andrew here... Just a bit of a mix up. We don't normally let him out on the streets.

Brutus: Are you talking about that prophet from Galilee?

Andrew: Yes! D'you know him?

Brutus: He took my son's packed lunch away.

Peter: Did he? Oh dear, I am sorry...

Brutus: I'm not. He gave him twelve baskets of bread and fish in return. Those animals you wanted? Sure, have them. If he wants them...

Peter: Really? Thanks. He's going to ride into town on them.

Brutus: You're joking. On those? No way! I can let you have my best horse for him. I've got the most magnificent animal in town, better than anything the Roman officers can get.

Peter: Great idea...

Andrew: No thanks.

Peter: What? But think of the splash he could make with a good horse...

Andrew: Come on Peter, we'd better be off. He only wanted these donkeys.

Peter: Nice guy that. See I told you it would be easy...

The Triumphal Entry

So the disciples took the donkey and her colt and led them back to Jesus. He was waiting for them outside the village. The disciples then threw their cloaks over the donkey and Jesus climbed on. They led him into the city like that, seated astride a humble donkey and it soon caught the attention of the crowds who were on their way there for the feast. They began to gather beside the road to watch and children climbed aboard their parents' shoulders, tugged palm leaves from the trees and threw them down in the road before Jesus. Soon the street was a carpet of leaves and cloaks as adults threw down their coats too. The procession grew and the noise outside the city was deafening.

The crowd cried: Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is the son of David and the kingdom he carries. Hosanna! Hosanna in the highest!

The Pharisees were there too, and they were not pleased.

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The Pharisees Complain

Caiaphas: You know what he's doing don't you?
Annas: You mean the prophecy?
Caiaphas: Yes. Look at him! Your king comes riding on a donkey! Just like Zechariah said he would. And look at the people – swallowing it like hungry sheep.
Annas: He's doing it deliberately, isn't he!
Caiaphas: Oh yes, he knows what he's about all right. He knows the scriptures better than us. He knows he's proclaiming himself their king – gentle and riding on the back of a donkey.
Annas: We have to stop him! The people are out of control!
Caiaphas: Jesus! Jesus! Listen! Look what you're doing! Shut these people up before there's a riot! You know this is dangerous! You're playing with fire.
Jesus: No, Caiaphas – you're playing with fire. You know I can't stop these people. And if I did the very stones beneath your feet would cry out and tell you what you refuse to see for yourself.
Caiaphas: What's that then?
Jesus: Listen to the crowds and you'll know.
Annas: Behold the king of the Jews. Listen to them. That's blasphemy!
Caiaphas: Not quite – but it's close enough.
Jesus: Can you hear them Caiaphas? Can you hear the words of God whispering in the very fabric of life. Look around you – the trees know more than you!
Caiaphas: You are on very unstable ground, Jesus. And soon enough it will crumble beneath your feet.

Jesus Weeps for Jerusalem

The crowds continued to shout and the Pharisees melted away into dark corners. Jesus climbed from the donkey and as he looked out over the nearby city he knelt in the dust and wept.

Peter: Lord, what is it? What's wrong?
Jesus: Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem! If only you could see what makes for peace.
Peter: Peace? You mean there's going to be trouble, Lord?
Jesus: Look around you, Peter – before long this place will be surrounded, and your enemies will encircle the city. They will be swarming on the hills like deadly insects. There will be slaughter and terrible carnage. The place will be raised to the ground.
Peter: Why Lord?
Jesus: Because they did not recognise God when he visited them. They refused his hand of care on the day of his coming.

Jesus wept again and the people around melted away from him in fear. Peter and the other disciples sat with him in his grief, waiting for the pain to subside. As evening fell they entered the city and went up to the Temple. Jesus looked at all that was going on there, and then he and the others returned to Bethany for the night.

Jesus Curses the Fig Tree

The next day Jesus and his disciples left Bethany early and made for Jerusalem. On the way Jesus felt hungry so he stopped at a fig tree and searched for some food.

Jesus: Where's the fruit on this tree? Can you see it, Peter?
Peter: Lord – it's bare! It's not the season for figs yet.
Jesus: Then it will never be again. Not on this tree.
Peter: Lord?
Jesus: No one will ever eat fruit from this tree again – it will always be barren. Come on let's keep moving, I'm hungry.

The Sketch Gospel

Jesus Cleanses the Temple

On reaching Jerusalem Jesus and his friends went straight to the Temple area. Jesus saw the moneychangers at work and showed them no mercy.

Jesus: This is a house of prayer.
Moneylender: What?
Jesus: This place is my Father's house and yet you have turned it into a hideout for thieves and robbers. Get out!
Moneylender: This is my workplace!
Jesus: No! It's my Father's home. I'm giving you fair warning - if you don't move soon it won't only be this table that's broken - it won't only be your money that is spilled. Get out! Get out! OUT! OUT! NOW!

Jesus overturned the tables, scattering money and doves like a snowstorm. He stopped those who were bringing in mechanise and he gathered the people around him.

Jesus: The scriptures tell you clearly - the Temple is a place of prayer. For everyone. It is not for the rich or those who can afford it! Prayer is free - and in this place anyone can pray. Guard against those who would just look to make a profit from piety. Prayer is God's gift to you - no one should have to pay for it. Ever.

The blind and the lame came to him and he healed them, also groups of children who ran around the Temple shouting:

Children: Hosanna to the Son of David!

The chief priests and the teachers of the law were appalled by this display but could do nothing to stop it. Instead, they pursued their plans to get rid of Jesus once and for all.

The Fig Tree Withered

The next day, on their way from Bethany once again, Jesus and his disciples passed the same fig tree.

Peter: Lord! Look! The fig tree - it's withered!
Jesus: Yes - it's the one I cursed yesterday.
Peter: But how did it die so quickly?
Jesus: Faith, Peter, faith. I've told you before - if you believe and don't doubt you won't just be able to speak to trees - you'll be able to change the world! Whatever you ask for in my name - believe and you will receive it. Pray in faith and don't doubt and anything is possible. Simply trust God and as you pray forgive anyone who has hurt you, let go any go of any grudges or grievances you hold.

Some Greeks Come Looking for Jesus

In the Temple Jesus began teaching again and while he spoke some Greeks came to see him.

Philip: Andrew?
Andrew: Shh - I'm listening - Jesus is talking about seeds...
Philip: He's always talking about seeds, I've got some people who want to see him. Some Greeks.
Andrew: Well, there he is - point him out.
Philip: No - they want to meet him!
Andrew: Well, there he is...
Philip: But you're good at that - not me.
Andrew: Good at what?
Philip: Taking people to meet Jesus. You do it all the time.
Andrew: Are you joking?
Philip: No! You're always taking people to meet him - that boy at the feeding of the 5000 - your own brother - now these Greeks...

The Sketch Gospel

Andrew: I haven't taken the Greeks yet!
Philip: No, but you will won't you?
Andrew: It's not that hard Philip.
Philip: It is! It might not be for you – but well, you never know what they might say about him or to him. You know. It might be embarrassing. They might just want to insult him. Or worse!
Andrew: Philip – I think your Greeks are getting a bit impatient. I wouldn't keep them waiting they look a bit mean to me.
Philip: Well at least come with me!
Andrew: What – like a bodyguard?
Philip: Just for support. Please!
Andrew: Okay – but I've missed everything Jesus has just said about seeds.
Philip: Don't worry, I'm sure he'll say it all again some time.

Andrew led the way and he and Philip took the Greeks to Jesus. Jesus spoke to them then addressed the crowd.

Jesus: The time has come – soon the Son of Man will be glorified. If a single seed falls into the ground and dies then it produces many seeds. But if it is protected and kept safe it will never fall into the ground, never die and never bear any fruit. If you love your life then let it go, die to your own desires and you will bear much fruit. If you try and hold on desperately to your own life you will lose it and the fruit you bear will be small. My advice is this – let go of yourself – be reckless in your concern for others and you will have life forever. Abundant and permanent. No mistake. So, as I see the future looming, what should I say? 'Father, please save me from the difficulties to come'? No, I dare not – because this is the very reason I came to earth. Father – show your glory on the earth!
Voice: I have shown my glory, and promise I will do so again.
Philip: What was that? Was it thunder?
Andrew: I'm not sure – it sounded like a voice to me...
Jesus: Listen hard! That voice was for your benefit not mine.
Philip: Then it was a voice!
Jesus: The earth is about to be judged – and the clock is ticking for the prince of this world. He is on his way out, but when I am lifted up, then I will draw everyone to me.
Philip: Lord, why do you talk about being lifted up?
Jesus: I have come into the world to dispel the darkness. I have not come to judge but to save, and when I am lifted up - then you will know. Those who believe in me – believe in the one who sent me, it's his words I tell you now, not my own.

The Pharisees Question Jesus's Authority

The next day Jesus came back to the Temple, to teach again. As he walked in the chief priests and elders gathered round him to try and trick him.

Annas: We have heard you this week and seen you riding in on that donkey. What gives you the authority to do all these things?
Jesus: I'll tell you – if you will just answer me one question.
Annas: What?
Jesus: John's baptism.
Annas: What about it?
Jesus: Did it come from God or from man?
Annas: Ah! Give us a minute, please.
Joseph: What do we say?
Annas: I'm not sure – if we say it came from God he'll say why didn't we listen to him then.
Joseph: But we can't say it was only man-made – the people here will murder us! There'll be a riot!
Annas: We cannot say it came from God!

The Sketch Gospel

Joseph: And we cannot say man – so we're cornered.
Annas: I've got it! Jesus?
Jesus: Yes?
Annas: We humbly admit that we don't know. You have us baffled there.
Jesus: Then you have me baffled too – and I won't tell you where my authority comes from. Instead – here's another story. There was a man who had two sons...
Annas: Is this the one about the son who runs away from home?
Jesus: No! But I'm glad you remember that, Annas. No, this one is different. Tell me what you think of it – I'd like to know. The father goes to his older son and says:

The Parable of the Two Sons

Father: Simeon, I'd like you to go and work in the vineyard for me today. Will you do that?
Simeon: Dad! I've been working there all week. I'm tired and bored of it. I've got blisters on my hands and calluses on my feet. My shoes are worn out and my back aches. My face is burnt and my neck is sore. My eyes are dry and my throat is dusty. My nose is runny and my brain's stuffed up. My ear aches and my arm's asleep. My spirit is broken and my soul is sore.
Father: So – is that a yes or a no?
Simeon: No! No, no, no.
Father: Do you want some time to think about it?
Simeon: No!
Father: You seem a little unsure...
Simeon: Father, I'd rather sit on an ants' nest in my birthday suit!
Father: Is that your final answer?
Simeon: Yes!
Father: I'll take that as a no then. I'm going to see your brother... Now where is he? Levi?
Levi: Ah! There you are.
Levi: Yes?
Father: Levi, your brother won't work in the vineyard today – will you go and work for me?
Levi: I love working for you dad. It makes me feel great! It brightens my world and lightens my day. It lifts my spirits and gives me a buzz. It puts a spring in my step and a smile on my face. It makes me hap-hap-happy all day long to work for you. It's so satisfying!
Father: So is that a yes or a no?
Levi: I giant confirmatory! A massive affirmative.
Father: Pardon?
Levi: A big fat yes!
Father: Great... I'll bring you some bread and wine down for lunch. See you later, Levi.
Levi: Bye! Right – I'm off to labour in the hot sun – I'll just put my feet up and have a doze before I go. Ah, that's better!
Father: Levi? Levi? Is that you out there labouring in the vines?
Simeon: No! It's me.
Father: Who? Simeon? What are you doing here?
Simeon: I changed my mind. I came anyway. Hey, that bread looks good.
Father: It is! Where's Levi?
Simeon: When I went past his window he was still in bed. D'you know I reckon we might have a bumper crop this year. What d'you think?
Father: I think I never know where I stand with you two...
Jesus: So, what do you think, Annas? Which son obeyed his father, the one who smiled and said yes, or the one who argued and said no?
Annas: The one who argued.
Jesus: Exactly. As the old saying goes, action speaks louder than words. You can say anything you like but in the end – it's your life that will tell the story. Do you know who is clamouring at the gates of heaven right now?
Annas: No.
Jesus: The sinners, lawbreakers and prostitutes. They're first in the queue. John came along and they listened hard, but you did not believe him. So now – they're ahead of you

The Sketch Gospel

in the race for righteousness. I would take care with all your religious talk – it's not what you say – it's what you do that counts.

Annas: You don't endear yourself to us with stories like that, you know.

Jesus: I am not here to endear myself to you. I am here to tell stories though, so here's another.

The Evil Tenants

Jesus: A landowner planted a vineyard then hired it out to some farmers.

Landowner: Consider this land yours while you rent it from me. I've built a good strong wall round it, dug a winepress for you and constructed a tower. You'll find the soil is good and the climate here very favourable. All the best!

Jesus: And the landowner went away on a long journey. As harvest time approached he sent a servant to collect some of the fruit of the vineyard.

Servant: Hello? Anyone home? I've come to collect some fruit for the landowner.

Farmer: What? Go away! This is our land.

Servant: But the landowner sent me to get some fruit.

Farmer: Well, you can't have any. We grew it - not you!

Servant: But this land is not yours.

Farmer: Yes it is! Go away before we do you some damage.

Servant: But...

Farmer: Right! Okay folks – fancy a game of catch with this old servant?

Servant: Ow! Let go!

Jesus: But they didn't let go. They beat him badly and sent him away covered in blood and bruises. So the landowner send a second servant.

2nd Servant: Hello? Anyone home?

Farmer: Not another one!

2nd Servant: I've just come for...

Farmer: A bit of a beating! Right folks, here's another one!

2nd Servant: Ow! Ow! Aghh!

Jesus: And so they did the same to the second servant and sent him away black and blue. But the landowner persisted, he sent a third servant, then a fourth. All of them came back in the same state. He was running out of healthy servants. So he thought for a while then said,

Landowner: I know, I'll send my only son to see them. They know I love him dearly, they wouldn't dare treat him badly.

Jesus: So off the son went.

Farmer: Hey look! Good news! The landowner's sent his son! Excellent! If we get rid of him the man'll have no heirs and the land will be ours forever. Come on! Anyone got a rope – let's string him up!

Jesus: So they took the son, beat him up and killed him. Now, what do you think? When the landowner finally returns what should he do to those farmers?

Annas: He should take the land away from them and give it to tenants who will pay their rent properly.

Jesus: Exactly! In fact he will do more than that – he will kill the wicked farmers. So be careful how you treat the messengers who come to you.

Annas: God forbid that we should ever treat his servants like that.

Jesus: It's too late! Don't you know the meaning of the scripture that says: 'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone.' The rejected rock – is now the vital cornerstone. And as result the kingdom will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce plenty of fruit. And those who stumbled on God's cornerstone will be crushed by that same rejected rock.

When the chief priests heard this they were incensed and looked for a way to arrest Jesus. They met in private to plot his downfall.

The Sketch Gospel

The False Witnesses – The Plot to Kill Jesus

Caiaphas: Get me witnesses! We know he's been blaspheming all over the place! Someone must have heard! If we can prove that, we have him! Get me someone who'll testify!

Annas: I have! I've found three witnesses.

Caiaphas: Really? And they'll testify?

Annas: They say they have evidence.

Caiaphas: Where are they?

Annas: The guards have them now, they're outside, waiting to see you.

Caiaphas: Then what are you waiting for? Send them in!

Annas: Guards! Bring in the witnesses. That's it line up there in front of Caiaphas.

Caiaphas: Okay simmer down, simmer down. Now we have to convict this Jesus of Nazareth, and we have to do it quick. You understand? He's very clever. My guess is we'll only get one chance and I don't want any mistakes. A quick two and a half minutes and I want him done for blasphemy. Got it?

First Witness: Well, sort of...I...

Caiaphas: Shut up! You all said you've got evidence, right? Come on then, convince me. You there, you go first.

First Witness: Well, Caiaphas, it's like this... Him there - he heard Jesus say that...

Caiaphas: You heard him say what?

Second Witness: Ah! Well, you see, it wasn't me... it was him there. He saw Jesus, I mean he heard Jesus. Didn't you?

Caiaphas: Well?

Third Witness: Well, I suppose I did see Jesus er... once. Walking in the distance. Although I could've been mistaken...

Caiaphas: Oh, for heaven's sake!

Annas: No, listen Caiaphas, he did see him, DIDN'T YOU!

Third Witness: Oh yes, I remember now, it was... it was... in the...

Second Witness: In the city?

First Witness: In the afternoon?

Third Witness: In the swamp!

Second Witness: In the swamp!?

Third Witness: Well, by the swamp, I think... I was with that old... er...

First Witness: Crowd?

Third Witness: No.

Second Witness: Dog?

Third Witness: No.

Caiaphas: Not prostitute?

Third Witness: YES! That was it! Yes that was the day all right!!

Caiaphas: We've just lost the case.

Third Witness: Oh... no. When I said 'with' I actually meant... near! Yes, that's it - near that... old prostitute. Whew.

Caiaphas: Annas, do these clowns have any evidence at all?

Annas: Oh yes.

First Witness: Yes, yes, yes!

Second Witness: Of course.

Third Witness: Do we?

First Witness: Yes! You heard Jesus - REMEMBER? Remember what he said...

Second Witness: Yes, it's coming back to you now, isn't it? You heard him say...

Caiaphas: What did you hear him say?

Third Witness: Er... well he said...

Caiaphas: What?

Third Witness: He said, let me think now... 'If...'

Caiaphas: If?

Third Witness: If.

Caiaphas: If what?

Third Witness: If... er...

Caiaphas: If you?

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Third Witness: That was it. He said if you! If you!
Caiaphas: If you... what?
Third Witness: 'If you... something or other.'
Caiaphas: 'Destroy?'
Third Witness: Yes! Destroy... if you destroy...
Caiaphas: Destroy what?
Third Witness: This er... this... table! That was it.
Caiaphas: Table?
Third Witness: Yes! This table. If you destroy this table. That's what he said. Terrible isn't it? He was always talking about destroying one table or another... Disgusting!
Caiaphas: Take him away.
First Witness: No wait, I heard him say that too. Only he said - if you destroy this TEMPLE! TEMPLE! Not table... Then I will rebuild it in - three weeks!
Second Witness: Days.
First Witness: What?
Second Witness: Three days, he said three days!
Third Witness: I thought he said three bricks!
Caiaphas: What?
Third Witness: He said if you destroy this table...
All: TEMPLE!
Third Witness: Sorry! Temple... er I will rebuild it with three bricks! Or was it four?
First Witness: Oh, it doesn't matter - the point is he threatened to knock down the Temple and that's not...
Caiaphas: What? Not fair?
First Witness: Blasphemous!
Caiaphas: Not blasphemous?
First Witness: Yes... NO! I mean yes - it is blasphemous... Isn't it?
Caiaphas: No! It is not. And now we have no evidence. Just go away all of you.
Third Witness: Perhaps I should have mentioned about him saying he was God? But I didn't think it was that important...
Caiaphas: You heard him say that?
Third Witness: Well... no... but I could always say I did!
Caiaphas: Brilliant! In fact - you can all say that. Come on - let's go to court!

The Great Banquet (2)

As the Passover feast drew closer Jesus continued to teach the people in the Temple.

Jesus: There was a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He sent out his servants to invite all his friends. But for some reason they all refused to come. So, he sent out more invitations. The servants went with gifts and wedding outfits, luxury transport and garlands of flowers to entice the guests to the son's banquet. But no matter how hard they tried the king's friends would not come. They made feeble excuses, slammed their doors and refused to attend. Instead, they threw their own banquets, glamorous and glittering affairs that were only pale imitations of the king's wedding feast. When the servants persisted some of the men seized them, abused them and even murdered some.

The king was enraged. He could barely believe that his friends had treated him in this way. So he mobilised his army and sent them to destroy those who had refused to come to the banquet. Smoke streamed from their cities as their houses and farms went up in flames, and the soldiers exacted retribution upon them.

Then the king turned to his servants and ordered them to go back out into the streets and invite anyone they could find. The banquet was ready and prepared and he was determined to celebrate his son's wedding. So they went out and gathered in the beggars and sinners from the streets. They invited everyone, the good and the bad and before long the king's halls were filled with guests. Each person was supplied with a new outfit for the occasion and those who had spent their lives in the gutter suddenly found themselves reclining in exorbitant splendour.

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As the king walked amongst the guests he noticed one man who was not wearing the proper wedding outfit as supplied by the servants. He asked the man how he had got in without wedding clothes. The man looked embarrassed and did not know what to say. The king, enraged once more, turned to his soldiers and commanded them to tie up the man and throw him out into the darkness, so the uninvited guest was expelled. You see, many are called to the kingdom banquet – but only a few are chosen.

The Question about Paying Taxes

The Pharisees continued their ploys to try and trap Jesus.

Pharisee: Teacher, we know you are a man of great integrity. You are very honest and always tell the truth.

Jesus: Surely that's a requirement of every teacher.

Pharisee: Well said, but you are a man who is particularly strong, you're never swayed by the opinions of others, no matter who they are.

Jesus: What is it you want of me now?

Pharisee: Nothing teacher, we would just like your opinion on a difficult matter. Should we pay taxes to Caesar or not? What do you think?

Jesus: I think there is more to your question that meets the eye.

Pharisee: We only seek truth, Lord.

Jesus: No – you seek ever more duplicitous ways to protect yourselves.

Pharisee: Please, teacher, just settle this matter for us.

Jesus: Okay. Do have a denarius?

Pharisee: Somewhere... Yes here we are.

Jesus: Turn it over. Whose head is imprinted on it?

Pharisee: Caesar's of course.

Jesus: And whose inscription?

Pharisee: Caesar's!

Jesus: Then the answer is straightforward. Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and give to God what is God's.

Sadducee: Good answer teacher – I know you like parables, I have one for you.

Jesus: Is it about the kingdom of God – or the kingdom of man?

Sadducee: You decide, teacher.

Jesus: Then I know already. The kingdom of man.

Sadducee: We have heard you talk of resurrection. Well, Moses told us that if a man dies without having children his brother must marry the widow and have children for the dead man. Now there were once seven brothers. The first one married and died without having any children, so the second one married the widow. The same thing happened, and went on happening so that each brother married the poor widow and left her childless.

Jesus: The poor woman must have been very tired!

Sadducee: Indeed – but there is a much worse dilemma for her. When she herself dies and goes to this heaven you talk of whose wife will she be? The first brother's or the last? They have all married her.

Jesus: Marriage is a temporal thing – made for us while we're on earth. Heaven is beyond time and not subject to the same order. But I think your question has nothing to do with marriage – just as your understanding has nothing to do with the things of God. So as to your real question – the one of resurrection and your doubts about eternal life, well let me tell you this. Look no further than your writings of Moses – when God appeared to him in the burning bush he declared himself to be the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, men who had long since slipped off this planet and yet God still claimed to be their God. Since he is God of the living they must still be alive. Not on this earth – but somewhere else - in eternity. You're theology is adrift, think again.

The Sadducees were silenced by the wisdom Jesus spoke so one of the Pharisees took up the dialogue.

The Sketch Gospel

The Greatest Commandment

Joseph: Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in all of the law?
Jesus: The most important one? Let's see... It is the first. Love the Lord your God with every part of you – your soul, your mind, your heart and your strength. This is the greatest and the second is very close. Love your neighbour as you love yourself. All the laws of God hang on these two commandments.
Joseph: Well said. There is no other God in heaven or earth and there is no better thing than to love him with all your heart, understanding and strength, and to love your neighbour as you describe. This is much more important than offerings to God, or sacrifices. Love and obedience is surely the way.
Jesus: It is! You are very close to the kingdom of God, very close.

After this no one dared ask him any more questions and the Pharisees and Sadducees slipped away.

The Poor Widow's Expensive Offering

Jesus sat down opposite the Temple offering box. He sat in silence for a while, watching the crowds placing their money into the Temple treasury. The disciples watched him watching them.

Jesus: You see the rich folks lined up here with their money – you're an expert on things of the purse Matthew, who do you think is going to give the most to God?
Matthew: Hard to tell Lord, those bags might contain bounties of gold – or just tiny copper. That man there seems rather weighed down.
Jesus: Perhaps it's his burdens that are heavy – not his giving.
Matthew: True. There's nothing like money for bringing out the worry in us. I've seen it a million times sitting in my tax booth.
Jesus: Perhaps we should study their faces, rather than their purses.
Matthew: What do you mean?
Jesus: Matthew – where your money is – that's where your heart is.
Matthew: Lord?
Jesus: You can tell a person's true loyalty by watching their wallet. What do you spend your money on? Food?
Matthew: We all need to eat, Lord.
Jesus: True. A big house perhaps?
Matthew: And we all need a roof.
Jesus: What about God, and divine investment? Do we need that?
Matthew: Ah! Well...
Jesus: Look – Matthew – see that widow. Is she rich?
Matthew: Poor as a starving mouse I should think. You wouldn't get many tax payments out of her.
Jesus: No – but look – see how much she's putting in the offering box.
Matthew: Perhaps I blinked and missed it – but she didn't put anything in, did she?
Jesus: Yes. She put everything. Two tiny, copper coins.
Matthew: They wouldn't buy me a morning snack.
Jesus: No – and yet they have bought her a slice of heaven. All these other people here - they gave out of their wealth – they won't even notice the difference. But this poor widow, shuffling away into obscurity, she gave out of her poverty. She has nothing left because she has invested everything in God. And you know something? God manages his finances well – he always pays his people back. A full measure, pressed down and filled up again until it's overflowing.

The Destruction of the Temple

As they left the Temple the disciples were marvelling at the architecture.

Jesus: Don't be impressed by the size of the stonework here.
Judas: Why not Lord – it's magnificent! There's nothing like it...
Jesus: No, and neither will there be anything like the sound of its fall as every stone comes crashing down.

The Sketch Gospel

Judas: What do you mean Lord? Is there to be an earthquake?
Jesus: An earthquake? No. Every one of these stones will be thrown down, smashed and crushed by man when this place is surrounded and plundered.
Judas: When? Soon?
Jesus: Oh yes, Judas, very soon. Oh Jerusalem! How I longed to come and hold you, how I dreamt of visiting you and gathering your children like a hen gathers its chicks under its wings. I ached to comfort you – but it's too late. You have rejected all that is good – and killed all that is hopeful. The prophets are gone and soon the Son of Man must suffer the same fate at your murderous hands. Oh Jerusalem... When you're lying in rubble, will you realise then what you have done? I wonder... I wonder...

The End of the World

They went up to the Mount of Olives and sat down. Peter, Andrew, James and John took Jesus to one side.

Peter: Lord, tell us about the future, when is all that destruction going to happen? At the end of the world? Is that soon?
Jesus: Be careful – lots of people will claim to be the Messiah. Many will come along and say look, there's the Saviour, or here's the man with all the answers. Don't believe them. People will rush to the desert, or congregate in lonely places, don't follow them, it's a hoax. At night when you're alone in the wilderness you may think you hear many lions roar – but when you really hear a lion – then you know it. Don't be taken in by those who would claim divine rights. There will be wars and rumours of conflict, revolutions and stories of the end. But before the end really comes there will be great upheaval - earthquakes, famines, diseases, epidemics. Nations and kingdoms will rise up and slaughter one another, and there will be dramatic signs from heaven. But even these are just the first birth pains of the new world that is to come.
Peter: It sounds bad, Lord.
Jesus: It will be hard. You will be handed over to the local authorities, beaten, imprisoned, murdered. Some of you will stand before great leaders, many will die in unknown obscurity, but every one who loses their life for my sake will find it. And remember - blessed are you when you are persecuted because of me. And when they bring you before the courts and the nations' leaders – don't worry about your defence, God's spirit will speak through you, and no one will be able to contradict you, in fact many will wonder at your words, and some will come to believe because of your testimony. Families will fall apart, and children will rebel. All people will hate you because of me, but don't fear, not a hair on your head will perish without my Father's say so, and those who stand firm to the end will receive eternal life.
Peter: And when will all this be?
Jesus: Only when everyone has heard about me, only when every nation has the chance to hear. Jerusalem will be surrounded and Daniel's prophecy about the monster of desecration in the Temple will come true. The sun will be darkened, and the moon shut down, stars will fall and the planets will shudder and tremble. The terror on the earth will reach its climax and then the Son of Man will appear in the sky and all the nations will see and mourn. The clouds of the sky will bear the Son of Man in great power and glory – and you will be glad because the day of redemption is then very near.
Peter: But when Lord, when?
Jesus: No one knows. I don't. You must just remain alert, Peter. Keep watching for the signs. When the fig tree buds you look at it and know that summer is on the way. Look at these other signs, watch for them and when you see them you will know. But you must stay alert. Remember the days of Noah – people were distracted – they saw the ark Noah was building but ignored the sign. They were eating and drinking, working and planning their futures when all of a sudden the flood came. That's how it will be – sudden. Two people will be working together – suddenly one will be taken and the other left behind. A man and wife will be asleep in bed. The husband will stir and wake and find he is alone. His wife will be gone. Taken away. Be

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careful. Stay vigilant, you really have no idea when the Son of Man will arrive. At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten young virgins. They took their lamps and awaited the arrival of the bridegroom. But he didn't come so they all fell asleep. Suddenly, in the middle of the night a voice cried out, 'Look out! Wake up!' And they awoke and rubbed their eyes and looked, and they saw the bridegroom approaching. So they lit their lamps again for him, but while they had slept the oil had run out. Now, only five of them had brought spare oil, the others were left in darkness. They begged to borrow some oil but the other five said, 'No, if we share the oil we may all run out. Quickly - go and buy some more!' So the five left and went to get more oil. But while they were gone the bridegroom returned and took the five who were ready to the wedding banquet. When the others returned the door was locked and they were shut out. No amount of calling and knocking could save them then. So be careful, keep watch – because you really do not know when the Son of Man will come back.

The Parable of the Talents

Peter: What should we do while we wait for your kingdom, Lord?
Jesus: Use what you have wisely, Peter. There was a man who had three servants. He was going off on a long journey so he called the three together.
Nobleman: I'm about to go travelling and I would like the three of you to look after my talents. To one I shall give five, to two I shall give two and to three I shall give one.
First Servant: Pardon?
Nobleman: To you I shall give five talents.
First Servant: Oh thank you!
Nobleman: To you I shall give two talents.
Second Servant: Oh thank you!
Nobleman: And to you I shall give one talent.
Third Servant: Oh!
Nobleman: What? No thank you?
Third Servant: Oh... All right then... thank you...
Nobleman: Good! Now I shall be gone some time so I expect you to use the money wisely, increase it for my benefit and then return it gladly when I get back. Got it?
First Servant: Oh yes.
Jesus: So the man went on his journey. After a long trip he returned home tired, but expectant.
Nobleman: So – how did we all do?
First Servant: Wonderful! I invested your money in my own business, increased the share option, put up the interest rate, reduced the spending, tripled the benefits...
Nobleman: Yes, yes, etc. etc. The question is – how much did you make?
First Servant: Another five talents! I doubled what you gave me.
Nobleman: Excellent! Next!
Second Servant: I did the same.
Nobleman: What? Increased the whatsit, doubled the thingy and tripled the whatchamacallit?
Second Servant: That's right.
Nobleman: With what results?
Second Servant: The same.
Nobleman: What! Five more talents!! That's marvellous.
Second Servant: Er... no... no... just two more – but it is double what you gave me!
Nobleman: Oh! Right! That's okay then. Next!
Third Servant: I did the same.
Nobleman: What? Increased the thingy, doubled the whatchamacallit and tripled the whatsit?
Third Servant: Something like that.
Nobleman: So where's my profit?
Third Servant: Here – one talent.
Nobleman: That's not profit! That's what I gave you!
Third Servant: Is it?
Nobleman: Yes! And you know it.

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Third Servant: Okay, I admit it - I didn't do all of those things. I just sat on it.
Nobleman: Why?
Third Servant: Well, you're not fair! You only gave me one and you gave the others more! I only had one measly talent, what could I do with that?
Nobleman: If nothing else you could have deposited it so I got a bit of interest.
Third Servant: Yes, but you're a hard man – demanding we make you lots of money when you just go off on holiday.
Nobleman: May I remind you - that is my measly talent you are talking about – and you are my measly servant. I pay you to help me.
Third Servant: Well, I don't like it.
Nobleman: Fair enough – you're fired. Take his talent off him, tie him up and throw him into outer darkness. Do you have your own teeth?
Third Servant: Yes, why?
Nobleman: Because you'll spend the rest of eternity gnashing them. Goodbye!

The Sheep and the Goats

Jesus: When the Son of Man comes in his glory, accompanied by the angels of heaven, all the nations will gather on the plain before him. He will separate them out, just like a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right, and the goats on his left. Then the king will say to the goats:
King: I have a bone to pick with you. I was hungry one day but you gave me nothing, thirsty and you gave me no water. I was lonely but you ignored me, dying and you gave me no medicine, I was in prison and you never visited me.
Goats: When? When did we see you like that? We don't remember, we promise if we had seen you we would have helped you. We didn't want to ignore you, we love you Lord.
King: Whenever you saw others in pain, or lost, hungry or thirsty and did nothing for them – you were ignoring me. Away from me, you evil people.
Goats: But Lord...
King: Go! It's over, your chance has passed. Now, you sheep over here. I want to say thank you.
Sheep: What for?
King: For everything you did for me. I was hungry and thirsty and you fed me, naked and you brought me clothes, alone and you befriended me, sad and you comforted me. You took time to visit me, to sit with me, to hold me when I was dying.
Sheep: When Lord? We don't recall that! When did we help you?
King: When you did it for the least person on earth. When you sat with those children, when you talked to those street beggars, when you gave encouragement to the homeless, and hope to those who had none.
Sheep: Lord, we didn't realise that was the case.
King: It doesn't matter. Whenever your love became more than words you were helping me. Come into the kingdom, and I will show you the inheritance that my Father has prepared for you. Well done, good and faithful servants.

Judas Offers to Betray Jesus

As the Passover drew nearer Jesus continued to preach each day in the Temple. The chief priests persisted in their plot against him, conscious of the fragility of the situation with the city full of crowds for the Passover. They watched for any chance to catch him alone, and their opportunity loomed when one of the disciples, Judas Iscariot, came looking for them one dark night.

Judas: I'm looking for Caiaphas.
Annas: Who are you?
Judas: Judas Iscariot, I have a message for him.
Annas: What is it?
Judas: I will only talk to him.
Annas: He's a busy man, he doesn't have time for strangers...
Caiaphas: It's all right Annas, let him in. Judas is it?

The Sketch Gospel

Judas: Yes.
Caiaphas: Well, what do you want to tell me?
Judas: I have news of... a mutual acquaintance – I know some of his plans.
Caiaphas: Do you? And why would that be of interest to us?
Judas: Caiaphas, we're neither of us stupid.
Caiaphas: Well, I know I'm not.
Judas: Do you really want me to spell out my reasons for coming?
Caiaphas: Try me.
Judas: You want a certain man and I can give him to you, in a quiet secluded place where there'll be no riots, no crowds, no trouble whatsoever. You can arrest him and slip him away quietly with no fuss. Is that clear enough for you?
Annas: This is not a game. We have the future of Israel at stake here.
Judas: I don't doubt it.
Caiaphas: So what about you?
Judas: I'll be there.
Caiaphas: I don't mean that – I mean, why are you here now? This man's a friend of yours, isn't he?
Judas: He is.
Caiaphas: So?
Judas: So I have my reasons.
Caiaphas: All right. Let's talk about the money.
Judas: Money?
Caiaphas: Oh come on. You said I'm no idiot. How much do you want for this betrayal?
Judas: Thirty pieces of silver. But I'd rather we didn't use the word betrayal.
Caiaphas: Fine. Deliver the man into my hands and you will be paid. Where? When?
Judas: Thursday evening. We're to share a Passover meal in a hired room in Jerusalem, when it's over he will take the usual route home. On the way he will pass through the garden of Gethsemane. If you come with soldiers well-armed he'll be yours for the taking.
Annas: It'll be dark! If there's struggle it could get messy up there.
Caiaphas: Yes. Not to mention the small problem of quickly and easily identifying him amongst his friends.
Judas: Then I'll... lead you to him. I'll leave your soldiers in no doubt which one he is.
Caiaphas: How?
Judas: With a kiss.
Caiaphas: That'll be clear – if a little treacherous. You won't back out now will you? It could be very embarrassing if we turn up and you're not there.
Judas: You can rely on me – I won't let you down.
Caiaphas: What did he do to you, I wonder? Did he upset you recently?
Judas: You could say that.
Annas: There was a disagreement over some expensive nard...
Judas: Look, I've told you what I'll do, are we agreed?
Caiaphas: Of course.
Judas: Good. Then don't let me down.
Caiaphas: Oh we won't. We shall be looking forward to it.
Judas: I won't.

Chapter Twelve It Started with a Kiss...

(Matthew 26; Mark 14; Luke 22; John 13-18)

The Last Supper

Every life must face the final journey, the crossing from life to death, and his went under that great white wave too. Brought on as it was by a friend, it was timely and consequential. There are many details and we will only touch on them briefly here.

A last meal with his friends ushered in the betrayal by one of them and the abandonment by all.

The Sketch Gospel

Peter: Lord, where do you want to celebrate the Passover?
Jesus: In Jerusalem. Peter and John, go into the city and you will meet a man carrying a water jar.
Peter: A water jar?
John: Yes, Peter, it's a jar for carrying water.
Peter: I know, John. Sorry Lord, carry on.
Jesus: Follow him closely, see which house he enters, then go up to the house, knock on the door and ask for the house owner.
Peter: The house owner?
John: Yes Peter, he's the one who owns the house.
Peter: I know! Sorry Lord, carry on.
Jesus: When the owner comes to the door tell him the teacher is ready to celebrate the Passover and ask him to show you the guest room.
Peter: The guest room?
John: Yes, it's a room for...
Peter: I know!
Jesus: Listen you two – he will show you a large spacious room upstairs in his house. It should be furnished and ready for the meal. Got that?
John: I have Lord.
Jesus: What about you, Peter?
Peter: No comment.
Jesus: Off you go then.

So Peter and John left and went into the city. They soon spotted the man with the water jar and followed him to the house.

John: The teacher's ready to celebrate the Passover, is the house safe today?
Peter: Safe? He didn't mention anything about safe. What is it? Is the roof dodgy?
John: No Peter. Think about it. The authorities are looking for Jesus to do him some harm.
Peter: I'll do them some harm!
John: No doubt – but that's what this is all about. That's why he's sent us ahead. No one knows where he's going to be tonight except us. If the house is clear then we can bring him here for the meal.
Peter: No one tells me anything.
John: Can you wonder?

The Argument about Greatness

When evening came Jesus and his disciples ventured into the city and went to the house. As they sat down to eat a dispute broke out amongst them.

James: Let me sit there.
Peter: No that's my place!
James: You always take the best seats!
Matthew: What about me – I always have to wait for the second sitting.
Peter: Don't be ridiculous – it's just a question of priorities.
Matthew: What priorities?
Peter: Well it's obvious isn't it?
James: He's referring to his special status as a prime slab!
Peter: Rock! Not slab...
James: Pebble, more like...
Peter: Oh yes?
James: Yes!
Peter: Outside!
James: It'll be a pleasure!
Jesus: I'm glad I took the precautions of setting this meal up quietly – because you two are about to bring the whole Roman army down on us!

The Sketch Gospel

Peter: Sorry, Lord.
James: Yes, sorry, it was his fault.
Peter: Was not!
Jesus: Peter! James! Please! You're doing it again.
James: Sorry.
Peter: Sorry.
Jesus: You're acting like everyone else. Lording it over one another, trying to outdo each other and push each other down. Push yourself down a little for a change. Out there it's dog-eat-dog – but not with you, with you it must be different. Decrease a little so that those around you might increase. If you want to be the greatest – serve. Reduce your ego and increase your concern for others. Who is more important? Those who sit like you now at the table – or those who serve you? Well, I'm here as one who serves you. You have stood by me through these past three years, through the good and the bad, and now I'm going to pass my vocation to you – so be ready for it. Please.

They took their places at the table, their squabbling put aside, and Jesus watched as they reclined.

Jesus: My time is drawing to a close. It's now thirty-three years since I came from God to that bare stable in Bethlehem, and soon I must return to my Father in heaven. He has placed all things under my jurisdiction. All things – there is nothing beyond my reach.

Jesus Washes His Disciple's Feet

As the disciples helped themselves to the food Jesus busied himself with a towel and a jug of water.

Peter: Looking back Lord, it is amazing, so many miracles and healings; you'll soon be made King now, for sure.
James: Yes, and then perhaps we can rule with you.
John: You'll certainly need a bit of help!
Judas: A lot of help.
James: I bet you're glad you've got us...
Judas: You know, this is what God's kingdom is about, Jesus is in charge, and we'll soon be ruling with him...
John: Hey, wait a minute, he chose me first.
Judas: So?
John: So I have a few rights to be over you.
Judas: Wait a minute, says who?
Peter: What do you mean he chose you first? If it wasn't for me you wouldn't be here at all!
John: How do you work that one out?
Peter: Me and Andrew was walking along the shore with him when I spotted you.
John: I think he spotted us – not you!
James: Look it doesn't matter who spotted who - we are all gonna reign anyway.
Peter: Right, we'll soon settle this. Jesus you tell us, who's gonna be higher up in...

They turned to Jesus and stared, aghast. He was standing before them, a towel and a bowl of water in his hands.

John: What...what... Master, what are you doing?
Jesus: Whoever wants to be first in my kingdom must be the servant of all. If you want to be great, then follow me, and learn what it is to serve....

Jesus knelt and began to wash John's feet.

James: But, you can't do this, they're his feet.
John: Well, they're not my shoulders are they?

The Sketch Gospel

James: But, d’you know where they’ve been...?
Jesus: When you know where you’ve come from, and where you’re going – then you’ll not find it strange to wash even the worst leper’s feet.
Peter: He’s not washing my feet.
James: I doubt if he’ll want to, d’you know what you’ve just stepped in?

Jesus dried John’s feet with the towel and began washing Judas’s feet.

Jesus: My kingdom is not of this world. You are to follow my example and lay down your lives for one another.

He wiped the drops of water gently from Judas then stood and placed a hand on Peter’s shoulder. Peter shrugged it off roughly.

Jesus: Peter, listen to me, I must wash your feet.
Peter: Lord, you can’t do this, not you, it’s not right.
Jesus: I must.
Peter: NO! Not like this! Not like some ignorant slave! Never! It’s not right!
Jesus: Peter, if I don’t wash your feet, then you’re no longer my disciple.
Peter: What?
Jesus: If I do not wash your feet then you are not part of my life and work.

They stared at each other in silence for a moment. The seconds stretched into hours, then Jesus stooped before Peter and began to tip water over his friend’s feet.

Jesus: No slave is greater than his master, as I wash your feet, so you must also serve each other. I have set an example for you, you then should wash one another’s feet.
Peter: Lord, I want everything you have. Wash all of me – not just my feet! I want to be totally serving you... My hands - look at them! Wash these...
Jesus: Peter! Listen! It’s not about being clean! It’s about lowering yourself to serve. I know you’re wholehearted about this – I’ve seen you in action. Many times. I’ve washed your feet and that’s enough – you’re immersed in me now. You’re okay, you’re clean.
Peter: Are you sure?
Jesus: I’m sure. Come on, let’s eat.
Judas: Good idea – I’m starving. And this food looks great!
Thomas: Yes, thanks for arranging this Lord. Look like being the best Passover I’ve ever had.
Jesus: Yes, I’ve looked forward to this meal for a long time.
Peter: Me too. All day!
Jesus: I have been longing to eat this with you...
Thomas: It was well worth waiting for, look at that meat!
Jesus: Yes – let’s eat – before my suffering begins.
Thomas: What?
Peter: John, what’s he mean? Why’s he always on about suffering?

The Bread and the Wine and the New Covenant

Jesus: I promise you the next time I share this meal with you it will be with my Father and the kingdom of God will have arrived.
Judas: Talking of the kingdom Lord, I really like those parables, especially that one about the prodigal son – tell us it again.
Jesus: No, Judas, the time for stories is passed. But remember that one about the lost son, and understand it later.
Judas: What do you mean?
Thomas: Anyway. How about another drink? John?
Peter: Good idea, Thomas, I’ll have one.
Thomas: Yes, I thought you might have one, Peter.

The Sketch Gospel

Jesus: Peter, lend me your cup a moment. All of you, listen now, take this cup of wine and share it among yourselves – for I won't drink it again until the day of my Father's kingdom.

Peter: Share it? But that's mine! And there's plenty to go round.

Jesus: Take it, Peter, drink it and pass it to Thomas. This is the blood of the new covenant, poured out for the forgiveness of peoples' sins. I won't drink it again until I drink it anew in my Father's kingdom.

John: And what a day that will be Lord!

Jesus: Yes, and what a feast. John, take this bread and pass it round to the others.

John: Should I break it up Lord?

Jesus: No, let me do it. Father, I thank you for grain from the earth and wine from its fruit. Here, John, pass these pieces around. This is my body, broken for you, in the future do this and remember me, and the events of this night.

Judas: Yes, tell us about the future Lord.

Jesus: No Judas. Now is the time for action, not stories.

Denial, Betrayal and a New Commandment

Thomas: You're not eating, Jesus.

Jesus: No Thomas. My appetite is not so good – I'm afraid I have bad news for you.

Thomas: What now?

Jesus: One of you is going to betray me.

Thomas: No!

Peter: You've got things wrong there Lord, the Pharisees maybe – but not us.

Jesus: I'm afraid so, Peter.

Peter: Well... is it me?

Thomas: Or me?

John: Not me Lord?

Jesus: The one who is about to dip his bread into the bowl with me.

Judas: Is it me, Lord?

Jesus: Go and do it quickly, don't waste time about it Judas, eternity hangs on your shoulders.

Peter: Eternity? What? Where's he going Lord? What's going on?

Thomas: Oh well that's ruined the party now!

Jesus: Thomas this is no party. This is a meal you must continue to share. The bread that I have broken – this represents my body which will soon be broken and torn apart by sinful men. And when you drink the wine remember my blood streaming down the wood as I'm lifted up, watering the earth and giving life to the souls of this world.

Thomas: We'll help you Lord, we'll suffer with you!

Jesus: Will you? Can you bear what I must bear?

Peter: You know the answer to that Lord.

Jesus: Yes, Peter, and I am afraid you will deny me.

Peter: NO!

Jesus: Yes. Three times, Peter.

Peter: NO!

Jesus: I'm afraid so. And soon, before the cock crows to usher in tomorrow's dawn.

Peter: NO!

Jesus: Yes. But I've been praying for you – and I have good news too, afterwards, after Satan has distracted you, you will turn back to me. And when you do, strengthen your brothers. Give them courage and spur them on, Peter. I know you can do it, and I know you will.

Peter: But Lord...

Jesus: I don't have long to say everything, Peter, so I must go on. I'm giving you all a new commandment now. The most powerful commandment in the world. Love each other. Show others that you care – do that and the world will sit up and take notice. Ignore that and anything you say will be empty. I'm telling you again – love one another.

John: I suppose we'll try Lord...

The Sketch Gospel

The Way to God

Jesus: Ah John, don't look so worried, don't panic. God will help you, trust him and trust in me and what I'm telling you. In my Father's house there are many rooms and there is one for each of you – I wouldn't tell you that if it were not true. That's why I have to leave you, so that I can go and prepare those rooms for you, then, when all is ready, I will come back and take you home. You know where that is, don't you?

Peter: Yes, Lord.

John: Absolutely.

Thomas: I don't!

John: What?

Thomas: I don't know what you're talking about – and I bet these others don't either! Do you Peter?

Peter: Well...

Thomas: We have no idea where you're going so how can we follow you? Speak plainly Lord, please!

Jesus: I will for you Thomas – you're looking for the way?

Thomas: Yes!

Jesus: Well I am that way. I am the way, the truth and the life. I am going to my Father soon – and if anyone else should want to come to my Father too then they must follow me, listen to me, and obey me. Live as I have lived. If you have really known me – then you will know the Father too.

Philip: Show us the Father, Lord, please. Just show us him now.

Jesus: Haven't you seen him all along? Have you looked at me and missed him? All these months together, and you still don't recognise God at work? The words I have said, the things I have done, they are not my own. I am part of the Father and the Father is part of me. Intertwined. Search for God and look to me. If you will only believe this you will do much greater things than I have been doing. Ask anything in my name and if it brings glory to God I will do it for you.

Thomas: Lord, if you go away, as you say you will – how will we cope? We'll fall apart without you. We can't stay in the same room ten minutes without arguing.

Jesus: God will send you help, Thomas. An advisor, a comforter, a guide for the way ahead.

Thomas: Another man?

Jesus: No. His own presence working within you. His Holy Spirit. Soon I will disappear from the world, and people will be ignorant of God, they will look for him but they won't find him. Instead they will find you – and you will know what to do because you will have the spirit of God in you.

Thomas: Why can't you just stay with us?

Jesus: Because I am one man. I can't go all over the world at one time. You can. You and the millions of others who God touches. It's much better for me to go away, because that will release God's power in all of your lives, like the seed in the ground it will multiply again and again – until people everywhere have the opportunity to know my Father.

Thaddaeus: Lord, isn't there some way you could just show yourself to the whole world?

Jesus: No, Thaddaeus. That was never the plan – you are to show yourselves to the world.

Thaddaeus: Us? But people will just laugh!

Jesus: Some will yes – but when you meet people who will listen you'll find yourself recalling everything I've said to you – then no one will laugh. Many will listen and some will even obey.

Thaddaeus: I hope so Lord.

Jesus: Trust me! Don't be worried, it will happen. I'm going to leave you one other thing - the gift of peace. Not dreamy tranquillity, but internal calm, order amongst the chaos.

Peter: Lord...

Jesus: I'm sorry Peter, we must go, the time is short and we must head back to the Mount of Olives.

The Sketch Gospel

The Vine

As they walked through the darkness Jesus continued to speak quietly to them.

Jesus: This very night you will all panic and run. Remember the scripture that says – ‘I will strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered...’? It’s about to unfold.

Peter: Lord, I want to talk to you about that.

Jesus: Peter, I’ve told you, it will happen. And as to your own fears – before the cock crows twice you will have denied me three times.

Peter: No way. I will die with you tonight Lord. I promise. Nothing will stop that. Nothing.

Thomas: Me too Lord, whatever happens we’re with you.

Jesus: I am the true vine and my Father is the gardener. Just like any gardener he prunes the branches. He cuts back and he throws away dead branches. He prunes the good ones so that they will be fruitful not once, but many times.

Peter: Lord, if you say you’re the vine – what are we – the branches?

Jesus: Exactly.

Peter: Will we be cut off? Will I be cut off?

Jesus: No. You may be cut back, you may be trained and disciplined to grow properly, but you are in me now. You’ll never be severed. You are a branch on the vine, you all are. So remain in the vine, stay within my love. And I say again – love one another. Love each other the way I have loved you. There is no greater love than this – to give up your life for someone. To lay it down for a friend. You are my friends and I will do that for you. So please, love each other.

Peter: But Lord – there are many people I would prefer to...

Jesus: I know Peter. But you have to be uncompromising, and if people hate you comfort yourself with this thought – they hated me first. You’re in good company. So love them, and notch up points in heaven. Remember – in this world you will always have trouble, it’s inevitable. But I have overcome the world – so keep that in mind. Now I need some time to pray.

Jesus Prays for His Disciples

Jesus looked towards heaven and spoke aloud.

Jesus: Father, the time has come – glorify your son, so that your son may glorify you. Let there be no doubt Father. I have brought you glory in these past three years through the things I have done, every move, every breath has come from you, now vindicate your son with the glory he once had when the world began.

Thank you for my friends here – you have given them to me and I have taught them about you. Every word you sent to me has been passed to them, I have cared for them, loved them and protected them. I have only lost one – and I am sorry to lose him but the prophecies will be fulfilled and the scriptures will come true. Sanctify them Father and all those who will believe because of them. I pray for the future and for everyone who will believe, may they be united in you, and in their love for each other. May the world look and know that you sent me and that you love them as you love me.

Righteous Father, thank you for your love for me – may those you have given me see your glory at work now, the glory born of love before the world began.

Jesus Prays for a Way Out

When he had finished praying Jesus left with his disciples and crossed to the Kidron Valley. They came to an olive grove, a place called Gethsemane.

Jesus: Sit here and rest in the grove while I take some time to pray. James, John, Peter - will you come with me?

Peter: Anywhere Lord.

Jesus: Just a few steps further into the trees, Peter. That’s far enough for now.

John: You look troubled, Lord.

The Sketch Gospel

Jesus: I am, John, my soul feels so heavy. My spirit is torn inside, full of sorrow and terrible pain. Awful. I feel like dying. I can barely speak... Stay here, let me have some time alone.

Going a little further into the garden he fell to the ground and pushed his face into the dirt. He pressed his fingers deep into the soil and tore handfuls from the ground in his clenched fists.

Jesus: Father... Oh Father... Please help me. The weight of this is too much for me. I'm not sure if I can go through with it. Please, Father, help me. If there's any other way at all, any other way, then let it be. Can you take this cup from me? Can you?

As he prayed blood appeared on his face and dripped like sweat from his forehead. It streaked his face and mingled with the dirt smudged on his cheeks.

Jesus: My God! Please, listen to me. My Father and my God – is there no other way? Father, speak to me – you have been here every moment of every day, you have heard my prayers and answered every one. Can you not answer this one now?

He stared up at the blackened sky and listened to the silence. Behind him the disciples leant on one another and dozed after their large meal. Jesus stood and turned.

Jesus: Simon! James! Wake up! Can't you stay alert for one hour? Don't fail me now, please. Stay awake and pray. For me and for yourselves.

Jesus turned away and stepped further into the shadows. He fell to the floor again and prayed.

Jesus: Father, is there really no other way?

A troubled silence filled the garden.

Jesus: Father!

There was no response, no reply.

Jesus: Then I will do it. If it's not possible to take this cup of suffering from my lips then I'll drink it. Your will be done my true and loving Father. Your will be done.

Jesus is Arrested

When Jesus came back he found his friends asleep again.

Jesus: Still sleeping and resting? Enough! It's over! Wake up. Simon! John! That's it, get up – you don't want to miss this moment.

Peter: Lord? What? What moment?

Jesus: The moment when the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinful men. Look, here comes my betrayer now.

Peter: Soldiers!

John: That's Judas, isn't it?

Peter: What's going on?

James: Torches, lanterns, priests, swords! Whatever it is - they're serious.

Jesus: Who are you looking for?

Centurion: Jesus of Nazareth.

Jesus: Well, here he is, what do you want?

Peter: Careful Lord, this has the makings of a trap.

Jesus: I told you I'm here, what do you want?

Centurion: Is that him?

Judas: Yes, it is. Come with me, I'll take you to him. Lord, it's me - Judas.

Jesus: I can see that. You've done your work well. What do you want of me?

The Sketch Gospel

Judas: I've come to greet you.
Jesus: Is it so long since we last met?
Judas: Now is your time, Lord. Now you can show yourself.
Jesus: I will, but not as you expect, Judas. Kiss me and let it be done.
Judas: That's him, that's your man. Arrest him.
Peter: What? No!
Jesus: Put your sword away, Peter.
Peter: I told you, we'll die with you, Lord. John! James! You take the two on the left.
Jesus: No! No! Put your swords away – all of you. I will drink this cup, Satan will not stop me. Peter! James! Put the weapons away. Please! Well... What are you waiting for? I'm here now so take me. But leave my friends – they have nothing to do with this.
Peter: No Lord!
Jesus: Peter, stand back, let them through. I'm telling you.

But Peter took a step forward, swung his sword and sliced through the ear of the High Priest's servant.

Jesus: Oh Peter! Peter! Those who live by the sword die by it, don't you know that by now? Bring the boy to me, quickly, before they seize me and there's more bloodshed.

Jesus reached out and touched the servant's ear, the blood flow stopped and the skin healed immediately.

Jesus: Don't you think that I could call down a legion of my Father's angels if I wanted to do battle with these men? Of course I could. But that's not the war I'm here to wage. If we stage a pitch battle here everything will be in vain, I came to fulfil the law and the scriptures and I will do it.
Centurion: Take him! Careful, make sure he's unarmed.
Jesus: Unarmed? I've been unarmed from the first day of my ministry. I sat in the Temple courts teaching and preaching, didn't you see me? Did you really think you would need so much armour to capture me. Here, tie my hands...
Centurion: Careful!
Jesus: I promise there's no need to be so hesitant. The power you fear will only be unleashed after I am lifted up.
Centurion: Take him away! And you, the prisoner, shut up!

The disciples fell back into the shadows as the soldiers seized Jesus and dragged him away. As the sound of their running feet disappeared into the night a young man followed the murderous crowd at a distance, until one of the soldiers turned and grabbed his clothes. The young man panicked, tore himself from the garments and fled naked.

Chapter Thirteen **Slaughter of the Innocent**

(Matthew 26&27; Mark 14&15; Luke 22&23; John 18&19)

The Jewish Trial

The detachment of soldiers and the Jewish officials bound Jesus and took him to Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was High Priest that year.

Annas: So – at last! No more parables, no more miracles, just the man. No interfering crowds... Just the man. What shall we do with this remarkable teacher?
Jesus: I think you already have your plan in mind.
Annas: Silence! You've said enough! You may speak when I ask you to. Now, talking of plans, tell me about yours.
Jesus: Why do you ask me that now?
Annas: Answer the question – you're not normally so restrained with your opinions.

The Sketch Gospel

Jesus: I have spoken openly to everyone. I have taught in the synagogues and the Temple – you have heard me yourself on many occasions – so what is to be gained by my repeating everything here?
Annas: You may just save your life.
Jesus: I have not come to save my life. I have come to save yours.
Annas: Mine?
Jesus: Yes – and if you don't understand that – ask some of the priests here, they have been very interested in my teaching.

As he said this one of the Jewish officials struck him in the face.

Annas: Is this the way you answer a High Priest? You know nothing! You claim great wisdom yet act like a fool!
Jesus: If I have not spoken the truth then correct me, if you cannot correct me then why hit me?
Annas: He's rambling. Take him to Caiaphas.

So they took Jesus to Caiaphas, and all the chief priests, elders and teachers of the law came together to question him.

Caiaphas: Jesus of Nazareth, you know we wish you no harm.
Jesus: I know you are scared, and desperate.
Caiaphas: Stick to the point! We intend you no harm, but you persist in causing unrest. The crowds are out of control, swarming in the streets like wild animals. That's very dangerous! You know the Romans are itching to depose our government and tear down the Temple.
Jesus: The Temple will be pulled down, you won't stop that.
Caiaphas: So I hear. In fact, did you not say that you will tear down the Temple and then - and I love this part – rebuild it in three days!!
Jesus: No, I said if you tear this Temple down I will replace it with one that is not man-made.
Caiaphas: This Temple, that Temple, what's it matter? That's treason! And, what's more, we have witnesses to collaborate this charge.
Jesus: Why? I don't deny what I said. In fact, I openly admit it.
Caiaphas: Quiet! Bring in the witnesses!

The chief priests brought several witnesses before the court to testify against Jesus, but their stories were confused and inconsistent and they could not agree with one another.

Caiaphas: Well, Nazarene? Are you going to answer any of these accusations?

But Jesus remained silent.

Caiaphas: Then I have one more question for you – one you must address. Tell us now, once and for all – are you the Christ? Are you the Son of God?
Jesus: I am.
Caiaphas: I'm sorry – I don't think we all caught that.
Jesus: It is as you say. I am. And I promise you this – in the future you will see the Son of Man at the right hand of God coming with the angels and all the glory of heaven.
Caiaphas: Thank you! Thank you! At last we get to the truth. No more evidence needed. Is this man not blaspheming right here in front of you as you sit in this court and watch? Tell me! Now! What sentence for this crime?
Annas: Death.
Caiaphas: Yes, Annas. Death.

The Sketch Gospel

Then the other priests and elders began to chant and call out at Jesus. They gathered around him, closed in on him and began to spit on him. One of them took a blindfold, wrapped it tightly around Jesus's head and began to beat him.

Priest: Who hit you, Messiah? Prophecy, tell us? Who was that? And that? Who drew blood then? Come on! Prophecy to us!
Caiaphas: Enough. Stop it! Guards, take him outside and beat him properly.

Peter Denies Jesus Three Times

All of the disciples had fled and gone into hiding, except for Peter and John. They had followed Jesus to the High Priest's house, keeping a safe distance and dodging from dark doorway to street corner. John was known to the High Priest and was therefore able to enter the inner courtyard, but Peter remained in the yard outside, warming his hands on the struggling embers of a midnight fire.

Girl: Hey!
Peter: What?
Girl: I know you.
Peter: Don't think so.
Girl: I've seen you around.
Peter: Doubt it, I'm not from round here.
Girl: But I have seen you here in the city - in the synagogues and hanging around the Temple.
Peter: Me? No.
Girl: Yes, I remember now – you were with him.
Peter: Who?
Girl: What d'you mean who!? The one in there. Jesus of Nazareth.
Peter: Don't be ridiculous, I'm just in town because of the Passover. Leave me alone, I'm tired.

Peter pulled back from the fire and leant against the wall in the shadows, but the servant girl kept her eyes on him, frowning as she watched him. A second servant girl appeared next to her, they talked for a while and both began pointing at Peter.

Girl: Hey! She remembers you too. You've been around for a while.
Peter: I have not! I've just got into town. I'm new round here.
Girl: Then what are you doing waiting out here – when he's in there.
Peter: Who? I don't know what you're talking about!
Girl: It is him, I'm sure of it. He was with Jesus of Nazareth.
Peter: I swear I was not! Why would I lie? I don't know him!

The girl fell silent again and Peter withdrew further into the shadows, cold now, but afraid to get near the light of the fire. Another long hour passed by, then another man looked over and spoke up.

Man: She's right, you know! I've been trying to work it out. You were in the garden when we arrested him, I saw you in the torchlight – you look the same near the fire here. You were in the garden right next to him, in fact, you lashed out with a sword to defend him!
Peter: For God's sake! I did not. I wasn't there. How many times do I have to say it? Who is he anyway? What's so special about him?
Girl: You should know!
Peter: I don't! I've never even set eyes on him and don't ever want to...

As he was speaking a sound ripped across the darkness of the yard. Peter froze and stared in horror at the faces around him. It was the sound of a cock crowing. Peter went outside and wept bitterly.

The Sketch Gospel

Judas Returns Thirty Pieces of Silver

At daybreak the chief priests and the teachers of the law met together to decide what to do with Jesus. He was a broken man, bloodied and bruised by the night's ordeal.

Annas: Tell us, Nazarene, once more for the record – do you still claim to be the Christ?
Jesus: If I say so, who will believe me? Who here will admit I am? But from now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of God.
Annas: Are you then the Son of God? Tell us! Are you? Once and for all - are you?
Jesus: What you say is true.
Annas: Why do we need more evidence? Caiaphas is right. He's a blasphemer – and the law says kill him. So do I - I say kill him. What did Caiaphas say? Better that one man die for the whole nation – he was right. This is the one man who must die.
Judas: No!
Annas: Who are you? Judas! What are you doing here? How did you get in?
Judas: It wasn't difficult... What are you doing?
Annas: Executing justice. What are you doing?
Judas: I don't know... Look at him... Look at you Jesus... I thought I was doing the right thing... Show them Lord! Show them what you can do. You don't have to take this! Not from them. They're just fools, less than fools! Show them their folly, show them your power! Now is the time! Come on, wake up!
Annas: He should not be in here!
Judas: What have they done to you Lord? What have they done, so much blood...
Annas: Get him out of here!
Judas: You can't kill him. You can't kill Jesus.
Annas: We can and what's more we will. Have you come for your money – is that it?
Judas: Money? Money! I've got my money - look! Every coin covered in his blood. This wasn't supposed to be like this! If you kill him you'll regret it forever.
Annas: Throw him out! Now!
Judas: You won't get away with it! Take your hands off me! I'm going! Here! Have your blood money back – every damned coin! You murderous hypocrites!

Judas hurled the money across the stone floor and left. The chief priests collected up the coins and consulted one another.

Annas: We can't put this in the Temple treasury. It's unclean, it's blood money.
Joseph: We'll buy some land, put it to some good use, a burial ground or something like that.
Annas: Fine go and sort it out, and as quickly as possible, I want this matter dealt with. Now back to the business in hand. If he's to be put to death then the Romans must do it. Take him to Pilate, he'll take care of it.

The Roman Trial

So they led Jesus away and handed him over to the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate. As it was the Passover the Jews remained outside the Roman palace, so as to avoid making themselves unclean before the feast. Pilate came out to see them.

Pilate: Yes? What is it?
Caiaphas: We bring you a dangerous revolutionary, sir. We just want you to put him to death.
Pilate: For what crime?
Caiaphas: Inciting revolution.
Pilate: Be more specific! How?
Caiaphas: Stirring up the people, talking about the Jewish kingdom and claiming to be the new Messiah.
Pilate: The Messiah? Fascinating... Let's have a look at this new god. Hmm. Doesn't look too dangerous to me. Judge him in your own court. He looks harmless enough. I'm busy, I have a province to run.
Caiaphas: He opposes paying taxes to Caesar.

The Sketch Gospel

Pilate: Taxes?
Caiaphas: Yes. And he claims to be king.
Pilate: I see. Are you? Speak up, are you king of the Jews?
Jesus: So you say.
Pilate: No I do not say, I am asking you? Bring him inside.
Caiaphas: We can't, it's the Passover.
Pilate: Oh yes, you and your little rituals. Don't touch this, don't step on that. All right, guards, bring him inside. That's it, Stand him there. Now, what's your name?
Jesus: Jesus, son of Joseph from Nazareth.
Pilate: And you're the self-proclaimed king of the Jews are you? You don't look like the usual subversive. Can't shut them up normally. Do you deserve this punishment, Jew?
Jesus: This world is not my home...
Pilate: Speak up!
Jesus: My kingdom is not of this world...
Pilate: Then where? Outside the empire somewhere?
Jesus: No, if it were physical my followers would fight for it. But the battle is a spiritual one. So too is the kingdom.
Pilate: So you are a king of sorts?
Jesus: Yes. It's the reason I was born – to bring light and truth to the world.
Pilate: Truth? Huh, what is truth? Who could ever pin that one down? Oh... this could go on all night, you're no more guilty than I am. Mad perhaps but not guilty, come back outside. Guards! Help him walk.
Caiaphas: Pilate, do you see what we mean?
Pilate: I see a poor wretch of a man, victimised because he is different.
Caiaphas: He is not a victim! He's a criminal! He speaks against God, against us, against you, against heaven, against Rome even.
Pilate: Well, Jesus of Nazareth, do you? You see he is not bothered by your accusations, if he were guilty he would have some transparent defence. He seems to care more for truth than his own life.
Caiaphas: So he claims – but he is no simpleton. He has stirred up the people from Galilee to Jerusalem.
Pilate: Galilee? Is he a Galilean then?
Caiaphas: Can't you tell from his accent?
Pilate: He barely said two words to me. But no matter, if he's a Galilean then Herod can deal with him. Galilee's his jurisdiction and he's in town right now. Let him decide the matter.

Herod Meets Jesus

So they took Jesus to see Herod who was overjoyed at the meeting.

Herod: Delightful! I have heard so much about this man. Miracles galore, so they say. Is that true Nazarene? Are you a miracle worker? Hmm. No answer. You've not cut out his tongue, have you? I hope not I want to hear one of those magnificent stories of his. Prodigals running off after lost sheep, Samaritans beating up nagging widows. Come on, Jesus, spin us a yarn. D'you know, I thought you would be taller somehow. Yes. And a bit better looking, though it's hard to tell behind the swellings there. So you claim to be God? And yet man. That's a new one – clever too. Would you like some wine? Ooh no – you can make your own can't you, and bread. And you can fish for money! Perhaps he's got a sore throat. Have you a sore throat? I could get my physician to take a look, mind you, you'd need a wash first. Oh come on Jesus, this is boring! Talk to me.
Caiaphas: If I might be permitted to speak, your majesty?
Herod: What?
Caiaphas: He is a very difficult man. You can see he snubs you – he has no respect for authority. It's true he has done one or two little... tricks you might call them. But really he's a danger to himself, and to the peace of the region.

The Sketch Gospel

Herod: Hmm... Well... so you say. I don't see what all the fuss is about myself. Rather disappointing after all the noise people were making. Take him back to Pilate.

Caiaphas: Yes, your majesty.

Herod: Ooh, but before you go, if he is a king... He'd better have a robe. You! Bring over that purple cloak. Yes, that's the one. Wrap it round him. Glorious! That's better. Now you really look like a king. Isn't he supposed to be able to prophesy? How about we blindfold him and take it in turns hitting him, then we can see if he knows who's doing it.

Caiaphas: With respect, sir, we've already done that. It doesn't work.

Herod: And I thought the Romans were the callous ones. Oh just hit him a few times then, anything to get a bit of noise from the man.

Pilate Releases Barabbas

Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and abused Jesus for a while, then they gave him back to Caiaphas who in turn took him back to Pilate. Throughout all of this Jesus never said a word. It was the custom at Passover to release one prisoner chosen by the people. Pilate gathered the priests together again.

Pilate: You have brought me this man... what was his name? Jesus, that's right, Jesus of Nazareth. You pronounce sentence on him as if he's a criminal with some terrible bloodlust, and yet I have examined him and found no basis whatsoever for your charges. Neither has Herod. He and I are not stupid. If I were concerned for this man's safety I would say there is some sort of conspiracy going on here. But I'm not. So I will have him flogged and then release him.

Caiaphas: You can't!

Pilate: I can and I will. It's your custom at Passover to release one prisoner. Well, here he is.

Caiaphas: No!

Pilate: Fine, let's ask the people, it is they who must decide.

A large crowd had gathered outside Pilate's palace. As the governor took his place on the judge's seat he called for silence.

Pilate: Who shall I free at the feast? Barabbas – the murderer? Or Jesus, the king of the Jews?

Incited by the priests the crowd called out for Barabbas to be released.

Pilate: Barabbas! Do you know what you're saying – the man's a dangerous criminal!

Caiaphas: They want Barabbas – you must honour their wishes, you said yourself - it's the people who decide.

Pilate: There is something very wrong here. Very wrong... What shall I do with Jesus?

Caiaphas: You hear the crowd – listen to that chanting – crucify – crucify – crucify – I think that's plain enough.

Pilate: Do you really want me to condemn your king?

Caiaphas: He is not our king – Caesar is.

Pilate: You've had this planned from the start haven't you? Well let me tell you this, Caiaphas, I wasn't going to say anything, but I will. Last night my wife dreamt of this. The torment of an innocent man going to his death haunted her sleep last night. You can have your crucifixion – but there is more at work here than you or I know – and there is blood on both our hands. Guards, crucify the Nazarene, and bring me a bowl and a lot of water.

The Crown of Thorns and the Flogging

The soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium, there the whole company gathered around him, beat him and spat on him. They twisted a crown out of cruel thorns and pushed it down hard on his head, so that the barbs cut deeply into his scalp. They put a staff in his right hand and bowed down in mock worship before him.

The Sketch Gospel

Then they stripped the robe from his back and flogged him with a whip made of knotted cords and weighted lead.

Jesus is Crucified

After thirty-nine lashes, when he could barely stand, they threw a roughly hewn cross bar upon his shoulders and forced him to carry it through the city towards Golgotha, the place of execution. The cross fell from his withered shoulders, so as they were passing through the streets of Jerusalem they enlisted some help. They took hold of a man called Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way into the city from the country. They made him walk behind Jesus, carrying the cross for him. As Jesus hauled himself up the hill towards Golgotha the crowds shouted around him, some of the women following him were mourning and wailing, Jesus turned to them.

Jesus: Daughters of Jerusalem – don't shed tears for me – cry for yourselves, and for your children. It will not be long before your torment is so bad you will plead for the hills to crush you and put you out of your misery. You will bless those who were unable to bring into children into such a world. If they do this kind of thing now, while they have the light, what will they do when they walk in darkness?

And he turned and stumbled on his way, a Roman whip cracking just behind his left shoulder. Two other men were led out to die with him. The three were taken to Golgotha, which means *The Place of the Skull* and there they were crucified, Jesus in the middle with the two others beside him on his left and right. They offered Jesus drugs to deaden the pain but he refused, so they pinned him to the cross beam and lifted him up.

Jesus: Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.
Centurion: Here, soldier, put this sign above his head.
Soldier: *Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews?* Sir, is that a good idea to put that up?
Centurion: Just do it! It's Pilate's idea... not mine.

The soldiers took Jesus's clothes and divided them into four so they would each get a fair share. However, his undergarment was a single piece of cloth and not easy to divide.

Soldier: Let's not tear this, it's good cloth – lets throw lots to see who should get it.

So they gambled for his undergarment, fulfilling the scriptures that said, 'They divided my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.'

They gambled as they sat and watched Jesus bleeding to death on the cross, his body slowly crushed by its own weight as his arms were stretched like taught leather from the nails and his chest collapsed against his heart. The crowd had no mercy for him, and the chief priests and teachers of the law watched with gloating smeared on their faces.

Caiaphas: How long was it – three days? You'd better hurry up and get down from that cross if you want to start rebuilding the Temple!
Annas: What's that sign say above his head? I can't read it.
Caiaphas: *King of the Jews.*
Annas: Who wrote that?
Caiaphas: Pilate! I told him to change it but he refused.
Annas: King? Well, you'll have to do better than that then, Jesus. Come down and tell us a story and I'll believe in you, oh high and mighty one!
Soldier: If you're king of the Jews – then save yourself! There were plenty of others you saved. Don't forget yourself! Come on, I'll catch you, just jump down...

The Two Criminals Crucified with Jesus

The two criminals crucified with Jesus also hurled insults across at him.

Thief: I heard you were the Christ. Is that right? Well? Say something!

The Sketch Gospel

Murderer: He can't say something. Can't you see? The king of the world's busy right now – dying like a common criminal!

Thief: Come on, I've always wanted to see a miracle – this is my last chance! Turn them Pharisees into salt or something! You can do it. It would brighten my day no end.

Murderer: Don't listen to him Jesus – you get on and die like the rest of us.

Thief: No! Do listen! You can't go round telling people you can save them and then just climb on a cross and bleed to death. That's not right!

Murderer: Shut up – give him a break.

Thief: Why should I? I got nothing else to do up here. Except die.

Murderer: Well, hurry up and do that then. Make the world a better place.

Thief: Jesus – can you hear him? Tell him off. You're the king, put him in prison he's giving me a hard time.

Murderer: I'll give you more than that...

Thief: Oh yes? What you gonna do? Hit me with your cross bar?

Murderer: Shut up!

Thief: I tell you what – we'll settle this on the other side.

Murderer: What do you mean?

Thief: When you and me get to hell – I'll beat the living daylight out of you.

Murderer: There won't be any living daylight left in me. And you forget something.

Thief: What?

Murderer: You might be up here for robbery – but I'm up here for murder – so I should watch your mouth.

Thief: Oh I'm trembling.

Murderer: Anyway – I'm not going to hell.

Thief: You wish! They haven't put us up here for good behaviour.

Murderer: I don't care I'm not going there.

Thief: You'll go where the big boss puts you mate. No arguing. And I'll be in the room next door! Can't wait! Hey Jesus! Tell him, tell him he's going to hell.

Murderer: Aren't you afraid of God? D'you really want to be damned?

Thief: I'm not afraid of anything or anyone – least of all you.

Murderer: Jesus?

Thief: Don't bother talking to him.

Murderer: Shut up. Jesus? I know you can hear me.

Thief: He's not listening to you – he thinks he's far too good for the likes of us. He won't bend his ear for you, mate.

Murderer: Lord, listen to me, take no notice of him. I know I said those things before, but I'm scared. I know you're different – we're up here because of what we've done but you haven't done anything, have you? Jesus, I know you can hear, and I know I haven't got any right to ask you for a favour...

Thief: Don't bother!

Murderer: Lord, I've heard about the things you've done... Healing and changing people... When you come into this kingdom of yours – remember me, will you? Please?

Thief: It's too late now, mate. No good coming grovelling after a life of crime.

Murderer: Jesus, please!

Jesus: I heard you. It's not too late, I will remember you, and more than that – I promise you that today you will be with me in paradise.

Thief: What! That's not fair! Don't listen to him Jesus! Get off that cross and give me a lift home instead.

Jesus: What I've said I've said – he will be with me in paradise. And nothing can change that now.

John and Mary, the Mother of Jesus

A group of frightened woman stood close to Jesus's cross, staring up at the tiny withered figure. When Jesus saw his mother among them and John standing nearby he summoned his strength and called down to them.

The Sketch Gospel

Jesus: Mary – look! Look to John over there. See him – from now on this is your son. John – you hear me? You take my mother and make her yours. Look after her, care for her. Comfort her in her grieving.

John was the only disciple who had followed Jesus to Golgotha, the others were absent, in hiding. As the last words died away a cloud passed over the hill and all went dark. It was as if night had suddenly fallen and the light had been extinguished forever. The voice of Jesus cried out in that darkness.

Jesus: My God! Where are you? Where have you gone? Why have you forsaken me now? Where are you? Father! Listen to me!

But the sky remained dark and silent, and this time there was no voice from heaven affirming God's own dear son. The land was silent and the day remained as night. Eventually Jesus raised his head one last time.

Jesus Dies

Jesus: I'm thirsty... Please get me a drink...

The soldiers ran for a sponge, soaked it and jammed it onto the end of a hyssop branch. They held up the sour wine and Jesus drank. He shook the drops from his mouth and called out again.

Jesus: It's done, at last it's over.

Soldier: What's he talking about?

Jesus: It's finished. Father – into your hands I commit my spirit.

And with that he bowed his head, breathed his last and died.

In the same moment there was an earthquake, tombs cracked and split open, and the bodies of many of the dead arose refreshed and alive again. The curtain in the Temple hiding the holiest place from the people was torn in two, rendering access for everyone.

The Centurion Believes

When the soldiers who had crucified Jesus felt the earthquake they were terrified. The centurion in charge was amazed and said:

Centurion: It's true isn't it? He really was the Son of God.

Soldier: Sir?

Centurion: Look – open your eyes man, if that's not God at work I don't know what is. It's true – he was the Son of God! He was a righteous man - and we've killed him!

Soldier: Only doing what we were told, sir.

Caiaphas: Centurion?

Centurion: What?

Caiaphas: Tomorrow is the Sabbath – we don't want these bodies here for that.

Centurion: They'll be here until they die! That's what you wanted, wasn't it! Caiaphas!

Caiaphas: Can't you speed their deaths?

Centurion: Why, because it happens to please you?

Caiaphas: It is a matter of law for us.

Centurion: Well so is this for me! Go and ask Pilate, I need his jurisdiction.

Caiaphas: I already have, he said you may do whatever is required to finish them off.

Centurion: You don't waste time, do you?

Caiaphas: Make especially sure the one in the middle is dead.

Centurion: Oh you have no worries there – we already did enough to kill him.

Caiaphas: Is he dead already then?

Centurion: Oh yes. Come with me and I'll show you.

The soldiers went and broke the legs of the two criminals either side of Jesus. Without the use of their legs they could no longer push their bodies up to enable them to breathe and they were soon suffocated. Jesus however was already dead.

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Caiaphas: Can you not do something to make absolutely sure?
Centurion: What did this man do to you? Look at him? His back is torn open, his chest is crushed, his face is nothing but gashes and bruises. What more do you want?
Caiaphas: I want there to be no doubt. That's your job isn't it?
Centurion: Fine. Soldier?
Soldier: Yes, sir.
Centurion: Use your spear and stab him in the side. Oh I wouldn't go if I were you Caiaphas, stay and watch the grisly deed – I'm sure it'll confirm your nagging doubts. Look! See? The blood is separated – blood and water. You only get that if he's dead. So - he's dead. Happy now?
Caiaphas: More than happy. And I shall report your attitude to Pilate.

Joseph of Arimathea Asks for the Body of Jesus

As evening approached Joseph, a prominent, wealthy Pharisee, came to Pilate.

Joseph: Sir, I've come with a request.
Pilate: Not another heretic you want executing I hope!
Joseph: No, just the opposite. I'd like to take the body of Jesus and give him a proper burial.
Pilate: A proper burial? He's a convicted criminal isn't he? Don't say you've changed your minds now!
Joseph: I've not changed my mind, Pilate, I never believed he was guilty.
Pilate: You Jews! You're nothing but a muddle of old law and chronic superstition. Is he a king or not then? Tell me, put me out of my misery.
Joseph: You've been in misery? Over our king?
Pilate: Oh yes! Ever since my wife and her wretched dream! I've had no peace. No peace at all! The sooner he's taken away and laid to rest the better.
Joseph: So I may take his body?
Pilate: If he's dead, yes.
Joseph: Thank you, sir.
Pilate: But you've not answered my question. Is he a king or not?
Joseph: Oh yes, Pilate. Without a doubt.

Joseph was accompanied by Nicodemus, a Pharisee and a member of the Jewish council. They took the body of Jesus down from the cross and wrapped it in clean linen. Nicodemus had brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes so they quickly wrapped the body in strips of cloth along with the spices, according to Jewish burial customs. They were, however, not able to anoint the body properly as the Sabbath was fast approaching. There was a garden near Golgotha, containing a new tomb that Joseph had purchased. They took Jesus's body and placed it in the newly cut rock. Then they rolled a large, heavy stone in front of the entrance and left the body there. Mary Magdalene was sitting watching them as they laid Jesus to rest. She immediately went home and prepared spices to embalm the body.

Guards Stationed by Jesus's Tomb

The following day the chief priests went to Pilate again.

Caiaphas: Sir, we have one more request.
Pilate: Oh! Not more! What now?
Caiaphas: We hear that our colleague Joseph of Arimathea has laid the body in his tomb.
Pilate: You don't want to crucify him again do you? Just to be sure?
Caiaphas: Of course not. On the contrary we want to make very sure he stays in there.
Pilate: Well I won't let you nail him to the floor – I can assure you of that now.
Caiaphas: Just a simple guard will do, Pilate.
Pilate: A guard! He's a dead man for goodness sake!
Caiaphas: Maybe – but he made grand claims about resurrection.
Pilate: Oh – so you believe his claims now do you?
Caiaphas: Don't be ridiculous. But his followers do and they may attempt to steal his body. If you just place a guard by the entrance it will be simpler for all of us.
Pilate: Simpler for you perhaps – you're not riddled with sleepless nights and bad dreams.

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Caiaphas: Pardon?
Pilate: Oh nothing. Yes you can have your guard.
Caiaphas: And may we seal the tomb as well?
Pilate: Yes! But that's it! No more requests! No more final favours for this Jesus of Nazareth. The matter, like his body, is now laid to rest. And I will personally crucify anyone I hear even mentioning his name again. Got it?
Caiaphas: Yes, Pilate.

So they went and sealed the stone protecting the tomb. Then they placed a guard in front and went home.

Chapter Fourteen Back for Good

(Matthew 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20&21; Acts 1)

The Resurrection

Very early on Sunday morning, before dawn had broken, the ground in the garden shook and the tomb trembled violently. The soldiers guarding the tomb were terrified.

Guard 1: What was that?
Guard 2: It felt like... like an earthquake.
Guard 1: The tomb! Look, it's half open, the seal's broken! How did that happen?

As they watched an angel appeared before them, took hold of the stone covering the tomb and rolled it back.

Guard 1: How did he do that?
Guard 2: I... I... I... don't know. Who he is?
Guard 1: I don't know, and I don't want to find out.

The angel turned and stared at them, and his blazing vision petrified the soldiers. They stumbled and fell back into the undergrowth. As they did other footsteps could be heard approaching the tomb through the half-light.

The Women Come to the Tomb

Salome: How will we ever move that stone to embalm the body?
Mary: We'll find a way, there has to be some way. Joanna, do you have the spices safe?
Joanna: I wrapped them in some cloth, but Mary, you said yourself, they covered the tomb with a giant rock. We'll never move it.
Salome: We won't have to if the soldiers get to us first! Goodness knows what they'll do to us if they find us trying to open his tomb.
Mary: Salome, stop worrying! You've got the oils?
Salome: Yes.
Mary: Joanna you've got the spices?
Joanna: I've told you once. Yes!
Mary: Good, then let's go quietly now, we're making enough noise to wake the dead. And no – Joanna don't make any joke about that!

The women approached the tomb, heads bowed and spices clutched close to their bodies. Mary was the first to look up and see the damage.

Mary: The stone!
Joanna: I told you it would be a problem...
Mary: No! Look! It's moved, the tomb's open!

There was a crash as Salome's jar tumbled from beneath her cloak to the hard ground. Joanna kicked the shattered fragments aside as she pushed her way past.

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Salome: Joanna! Be careful, you don't know what's gone on here...
Joanna: I've got a good idea, I bet those Roman's have taken him away.
Salome: Mary! Where are you going?
Mary: To get the others. You stay here. Joanna, be careful.
Salome: Mary! Come back.
Joanna: I'm going to get to the bottom of this.
Salome: Let's just go home, Joanna, something's not right...
Angel: Don't be afraid.
Joanna: Who... who are you?
Angel: A messenger.
Salome: Joanna, don't get close, come away...
Angel: Don't be afraid, no one's going to hurt you.
Joanna: What are you doing here? Where's Jesus?
Angel: He is not here. Why are you looking amongst the dead for someone who is alive?
Joanna: Alive?
Angel: Yes! He's risen. He's not here. Come closer, that's right, you don't need to be nervous. Look! You see where they laid his body? See the empty grave clothes? He's gone!
Salome: But why?
Angel: Don't you remember? He told you this would happen. Time and again he said, 'The Son of Man must be handed over to sinful men, be crucified and on the third day rise again.' Remember? Now quick! Go and tell the others, John and Peter and all the rest. Tell them he's going to Galilee to meet you there. Hurry! Now!

Peter and John Come Running

Shocked and bewildered the women ran from the tomb to find the disciples. Mary meanwhile had found Peter and John and told them what she had seen.

Mary: They've taken Jesus out of the tomb!
John: What?
Mary: It's true, John, he's gone. We don't know where they've put him! Hurry, come and look.
Peter: This had better not be a joke! Have you seen what time it is!
Mary: It's anything but a joke! Come on Peter, hurry!

Peter and John ran for the tomb with Mary close behind. John was the more athletic of the two and as they neared the grave he ran ahead. He slowed as he came to the tomb and stared at the open doorway. He peered inside, leaning on the stone as he gasped for breath.

Peter: Out the way, John!

Peter came crashing through and hurtled straight inside the open tomb. He stared aghast at the empty grave clothes, huffing and snorting as he tried to make sense of it.

Peter: She was right! The woman was right! He's gone! John look, he's gone!
John: I know – I can see! He's risen isn't he?
Peter: What?
John: He's risen.
Peter: I don't know what you're on about! He's gone. The Romans have done it again. They've lost his body! I bet it was Caiaphas and his murdering cronies. Crucifixion wasn't enough for them – now they're into body-snatching.
John: Peter think! Listen to yourself – it doesn't make sense.
Peter: I know it doesn't make sense – but I'll find out who's responsible. Come on!

Peter left the garden muttering to himself, with John close behind. They passed Mary on the way but simply pushed her aside. They returned to their homes but Mary went on to the tomb for a second time. She looked in but would not enter, afraid of what she might find. She sat on a rock and began to weep quietly. A figure

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stepped from the shadows but Mary was leaning forward to see inside the tomb and she did not see it. She did spy two angels though, sitting inside the grave.

Angel: What's wrong? Why are you crying?
Mary: They have taken my Lord away, and I don't know where to find him. I just want to anoint his body.
Angel: He's not here. Didn't you hear us tell the other women? He's gone. This is a place for dead men.
Mary: I don't understand.
Angel: You will.

Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene

As she sat weeping Mary heard a footfall behind her. She turned to see the gardener looking down at her.

Mary Was it you? Did you open the tomb and move him?
Jesus: Why are you crying? Who are you looking for?
Mary: I've already said – I told them in there. I'm looking for Jesus. They've taken him away and I may never see him again.
Jesus: Mary.
Mary: If you just tell me where he is I... Jesus?
Jesus: Yes, Mary, it's me.
Mary: Jesus? But how? What's happened – is it really you?
Jesus: Yes, Mary, it really is.

Overcome with joy she threw herself at Jesus's feet and clung to them for dear life.

Mary: Teacher! You're alive! Thank you! Thank you! You're alive.
Jesus: Listen to me Mary, I have to go back to my Father soon, so don't try to hold onto me. I'll be with you for a while. Now listen I have a job for you. This is really, really important. Go and tell the others about this. Give them this message, say: Jesus said, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' Have you got that?
Mary: I think so, but...
Jesus: No buts, come on, you have to do it now. I'll see you again soon, I promise.

Mary leapt up and ran, her head still turned on him, her eyes fixed in case he should disappear again. Eventually she lost sight of him and fled through the trees. Jesus stretched and yawned and followed a different path through the garden. As he passed the tomb he glanced at the white figures inside and gave them a smile. The angels nodded back and melted into the rear of the cave.

Joanna: Salome, hurry up! We have to get back and tell the others.
Salome: I'm sorry, I didn't ask to twist my ankle.
Joanna: Well perhaps if you hadn't have spilt some oil on the way you wouldn't have slipped in it.
Salome: Joanna – that's unfair!
Jesus: Having problems?
Joanna: Oh!
Salome: It's my ankle it's... Jesus? Is it you?
Joanna: But how? You're supposed to be... What are you doing here?
Salome: Lord – it's really you!
Jesus: Don't panic, I have a message for you to pass on. Go and tell the others I'm going to Galilee.
Joanna: To Galilee?
Jesus: Yes.
Salome: But suppose they don't believe us? You come with us. You tell them.
Jesus: No, I want you to do it. Please.

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The Disciples Refuse to Believe

Joanna and Salome ran back to the city and hammered on the door of the house where the disciples were staying. John and Peter appeared in the doorway. Mary was there too, her face flushed and her eyes wide.

Salome: We've seen Jesus.
John: So Mary said. But we didn't see him.
Joanna: Mary saw him too?
Peter: Yes, weren't you all together? You mean, Jesus appeared twice! Come off it!
Salome: He did, he met us in the garden.
Mary: I thought he was the gardener.
Peter: It probably was the gardener.
Joanna: He didn't look like the gardener to me. And he gave us a message for you.
John: Mary already gave it to us. Something about going back to his Father.
Salome: No - Galilee! He's going back to Galilee!
Peter: Oh great! They can't even agree on the message now!
Joanna: It doesn't matter to us whether you believe it or not. We've seen the Lord, we've touched him! He's alive and you missed him. I think that says something, don't you?
Peter: I think it says your tired and seeing things! Women! It's just hysterics. They'll get over it.

The Chief Priests Concoct a Cover Story

The two guards at the tomb had now recovered from the shock of the angels and the earthquake. They went straight to the chief priests and told them what had happened. The priests called an emergency meeting with the elders to hatch a cover story.

Annas: This is a big problem! We have to be very careful now. Joseph – what are you grinning about?
Caiaphas: Yes, I'm surprised you look so happy – it's your tomb that's been broken into.
Joseph: Oh... Just something I heard.
Caiaphas: Well I suggest you forget it and get your mind round this problem. Before we know it there'll be all sort of rumours about resurrection.
Joseph: Is that a problem?
Annas: Yes!
Caiaphas: Of course it is. If the word gets out that Jesus is on the loose we'll never live this down.
Joseph: Is he on the loose then?
Annas: No!
Joseph: In that case we have nothing to fear.
Annas: Why not?
Joseph: Well... If he's not come back from the dead then he's still lying cold somewhere and the whole thing will blow over.
Caiaphas: Hmm, I'm not sure about that. His disciples are a persistent lot.
Joseph: That's not what I heard. I heard they all fled like frightened mice when he was arrested.
Caiaphas: That's not the point, they may take heart from this and rise up again.
Annas: I agree with Caiaphas. We must quash any rumours now.
Caiaphas: We'll bribe the guards to say that his disciples broke in during the night, moved the stone and stole his body while they were asleep.
Joseph: Oh that's likely. Have you seen his disciples? Twenty of them together couldn't move a molehill.
Annas: Well, perhaps they took Jesus's advice about moving mountains and commanded the stone to roll away.
Joseph: You think so? You were paying quite a lot of attention to Jesus's teachings, weren't you?
Annas: No!

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So the guards were paid off and the story spread that the disciples had stolen the body and spirited it away during the night.

The Emmaus Road

Later that Sunday two of Jesus's followers were travelling to Emmaus, a village about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened.

Cleopas: Do you believe what the women said?
Nathanael: I don't know, I want to, but it seems to good to be true.
Cleopas: And too confusing! Mary says one thing, Salome another. Joanna another...
Nathanael: Not strictly true – Joanna and Salome had the same story.
Cleopas: Yes, but they couldn't remember how many angels there were supposed to be, and exactly where Jesus was when he met them. Joanna actually thought that Mary was still with them at one point! Hardly corroborating evidence.
Nathanael: They all agree on the main point though, Cleopas.
Cleopas: What's that?
Nathanael: You mean I have to tell you? Jesus – he's alive!
Cleopas: Oh that! True – but that's what they want, isn't it?
Nathanael: Yes, but wishful thinking doesn't bring a man back from the dead.
Cleopas: Exactly! That's my point!
Nathanael: Keep your voice down, we're being followed.
Cleopas: Oh great – you don't think it's one of the Pharisees do you?
Nathanael: Doubt it, they're too busy spreading slanderous rumours to worry about us.
Jesus: Excuse me, are you going far?
Nathanael: Just to the next village. You?
Jesus: Something like that.
Nathanael: Walk with us if you like, safety in numbers.
Jesus: You seemed to be having a heated discussion as I approached.
Nathanael: Us? No. Just chatting about things.
Jesus: What things?
Nathanael: Well, you know, all the troubles in the city.
Jesus: Has there been trouble?
Cleopas: Oh come on! Where've you been this past week, everyone's talking about it.
Jesus: I'm a little slow to catch on sometimes, I'm afraid.
Cleopas: You're telling me. Tell him, Nathanael.
Nathanael: We were just talking about that Jesus of Nazareth. Heard of him?
Jesus: No, don't think so. Is he famous then?
Cleopas: Famous! I'll say – the crowds have been swamping him for months. Everywhere he goes he causes a stir. Raising the dead, healing the sick, insulting the Pharisees – it's been a right circus!
Nathanael: There isn't anything he can't do. Well, couldn't do.
Jesus: Couldn't? What happened?
Nathanael: You really have been out of things, haven't you?
Cleopas: He upset the Pharisees and the Pharisees saw to it that he upset the Romans. One thing led to another and before you know it there he was – nailed between two criminals.
Nathanael: But that's not the end of it. This morning some women we know went to his tomb early but couldn't find the body. They came back shouting about visions of angels and resurrection. It's very disconcerting.
Jesus: Did you go and see the tomb?
Cleopas: No, but two of our closest friends did and they don't believe he's risen from the dead.
Jesus: Why not?
Cleopas: Why not!
Jesus: Yes. Don't you know the scriptures concerning the Messiah?
Cleopas: Well, yes... But - remind me.

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As they walked the stranger explained the prophecies given by Moses and the other prophets down through the ages. He described the sufferings of the Son of Man, and the reason for such barbarity. He spoke with a gentle calm in his voice, and he never once faltered or repeated himself. As they drew near the village he finished his talking and gazed into the distance.

Jesus: This road goes on into hill country, doesn't it?
Nathanael: Yes, but this is Emmaus. It's getting dark and the road can be treacherous. Why not come and stay with us? At least have a meal before you go on. What do you say, Cleopas?
Cleopas: I suppose so – if the stranger wants to stay, let him.
Jesus: Then I will. I'm certainly hungry, and after lecturing you for so long my throat could do with a drink!

They went inside, got ready for the meal, and then sat down at the table. Without waiting the stranger scooped up the bread and held it aloft. It may have been the words he prayed that first alerted them, or the confidence as he addressed his Father, but as his sleeves fell back and the scars appeared they were left with no doubt.

Cleopas: Jesus! It's you!
Nathanael: It's true, what the women said – you're alive!

As they said this they turned to each other, but when they glanced back the stranger had gone.

Cleopas: I knew it!
Nathanael: You did not!
Cleopas: No but I knew something was strange, as he talked it was like my heart was on fire.
Nathanael: We should have guessed! He knew so much!
Cleopas: Come on.
Nathanael: Where are you going?
Cleopas: Where do you think? Back to Jerusalem – to tell the others! Quick!
Nathanael: But we've only just got here.
Cleopas: Who cares? News this good can't wait! Come on! Run!

Back to Jerusalem

The two got up and hurried back to Jerusalem. They burst into the house where the disciples were hiding and beat mercilessly upon the locked door inside.

Cleopas: Let us in!
Peter: Who is it?
Cleopas: It's us! Cleopas and Nathanael.
Peter: I thought you were leaving.
Nathanael: We were but something happened.
Peter: What?
Nathanael: Open this door and we'll tell you!
Peter: Open it up.
James: You open it up!
Peter: Oh for goodness sake...
Andrew: All right, all right, I'll do it. There!
Cleopas: At last! What took you so long?
Peter: We don't know whether we can trust you anymore – running away like that!
Cleopas: I don't think you can say much about running away!
Andrew: All right, all right, let's keep calm. Nathanael – what's your news?
Nathanael: We've seen Jesus!
Peter: So have we – many times.
Nathanael: No! We mean now! He's alive!
James: Are you sure?

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Cleopas: Not a doubt in the world. He stood that close to us, told us everything about the scriptures and then broke bread. He said...
Jesus: Peace be with you!
Cleopas: Ahh!

Jesus Appears to the Disciples

As they were talking Jesus appeared among them.

Cleopas: How did you get back here so fast? We ran all the way!
Jesus: It's of no matter. Peace to all of you. How are you all?
Peter: Well... we... we... we... we've been better...
Andrew: Lord is it really you?
James: But how? How can you be alive?
Nathanael: See? We told you!
Jesus: Why are you all so shocked? Didn't you believe the women?
Peter: Oh yes, of course, Lord. Absolutely! No doubts at all.
Jesus: So why are you so surprised?
Andrew: Good question!
Jesus: Did the women give you my messages?
Peter: Oh yes, absolutely. We wrote them down.
Andrew: We didn't Lord, we took no notice of them.
Jesus: Then, listen to me now. My Father sent me into the world – now it's your turn – I'm sending you into the world.
Peter: But Lord – you come with us!
Jesus: I will be with you – but not in person as I am now, instead by my Father's spirit. In fact – I give it to you now.

He walked around the room breathing on each person there.

Jesus: Receive this spirit of God, let it inspire and empower you. From now on you have the power to forgive sins – if you forgive them, they are forgiven. If you do not forgive, they are not forgiven. People no longer need to visit the Temple with sacrifices – you can bring forgiveness to them wherever they are.

And Jesus turned and left them.

Thomas Doubts

Peter: Did you see that? I told you he was alive!
James: You did not!
Andrew: It doesn't matter! He's alive – that's the point!
James: Listen – he's coming back!
Thomas: Hello – what are you all looking at me like that for?
Andrew: Thomas! It's just you.
Thomas: Yes. Who did you think it was – Jesus?
James: Yes!
Thomas: What?
Andrew: Thomas – we've seen him!
Thomas: You have not!
Peter: We have. All of us! He was standing right where you're standing now.
Thomas: You're delirious.
James: Don't be ridiculous! We all saw him, Thomas.
Thomas: Because you wanted to.
Peter: You're just annoyed that you missed him.
Thomas: I am not! I'm just not gullible like the rest of you.
Peter: Oh really? Well you sound very gullible now.
Andrew: Thomas, please believe us. He's alive, he really is.

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Thomas: No way. It would take more than a two-minute apparition to convince me. Let him walk in here and show me those wounds – then I would know it was him. Let me see that stab scar in his side then maybe I might believe.

Thomas and Jesus

A week later the disciples were together again in the same room. This time Thomas was with them.

Jesus: Peace be with you.

Thomas: Lord! It's you!

Peter: See!

Jesus: Thomas, come here. Look. See the gashes there – see the holes - look straight through if you want. See my side, come here, give me your hand, don't be squeamish, put it inside.

Thomas: Lord, I'm sorry, I didn't mean what I said...

Jesus: Yes you did, Thomas, it mattered to you. Well look, I'm here. See the scars where the crown of thorns sat. It's really me. No ghost, no tricks. Now will you believe?

Thomas: Yes Lord. I'm sorry. You're my Lord and my God.

Jesus: You have seen me Thomas, and now you believe. Well – happy are those who believe without ever seeing. And there will be many – a lot of them because of your testimony, Thomas. So take heart – and receive my spirit.

Thomas States His Case

The others have chided me for my words and actions. In fact, my name has become synonymous with doubting amongst my friends. They laugh and shake their heads - but I know the truth - they have all doubted from time to time - they all had their misgivings. When the women returned from the tomb on Sunday morning every last one of them were stupefied - staring at Mary and Joanna with faces that said, "I don't think so!"

I was the one who said so out loud. Why is it always down to me to spell out the truth? It was the same at the last Supper, when Jesus told us we all knew where he was going the others just smiled and nodded benignly, it was down to me to speak up and say, "No Lord - we don't know at all." Jesus could be very enigmatic and I'm not the sort of person who says things subtly. So I told him. I hadn't got a clue what he was meaning. Jesus often left me in the dark. It was the same on that Sunday night in the upper room - when the others were all up there suddenly full of froth and faith. "We've seen the Lord, we've seen the Lord!" they hollered at me, eyes bright and faces flushed and beaming like lamps. Well I hadn't. I hadn't seen the Lord. So I said as much. What would you have done? I did what I always did, I told the truth. I'd gone out for the food, I'd braved the streets, whilst the others stayed inside and hid. I went out for them. It wasn't my fault I was away when he dropped by. It may have been ten against one, and it may have sounded shocking to argue - but what could I do?

Everything had changed for them - nothing had changed for me. Peter tried his usual tactic to persuade me - he raised his voice. James and John told me that my attitude was tantamount to blasphemy. Matthew and Bartholomew just shook their heads in bewildered amazement, as if I were the only person in the city who'd ever doubted the resurrection stories. A few of the others - Simon, Thaddeus, Andrew - sat down with me and tried to methodically persuade me. I listened, nodded, understood... but at the end of the day it came down to one thing. They had seen Jesus and I hadn't. So I said, "Of course I'll believe - I just need to see him with his crucifixion scars. Surely that's not much to ask." He'd appeared to them hadn't he? So why not to me? At which point Peter threw a loaf of bread at me and slammed the door.

The following week was a long one. The others had only sighs and raised eyebrows for me. I tried to believe. I really did. I prayed for a miracle. I tried to conjure up images of Jesus with his wounded hands and broken feet. I had imaginary conversations with him in my head - but it was all to no avail. The doubts wouldn't go. I grew desperate. I seriously considered leaving the city on my own. I could see the others had changed - but I just felt lost and isolated. Eventually the following Sunday came around and there we all were again - locked upstairs in the upper room, only this time, I wasn't leaving the place. I just sat in a corner, huddled up for safety, legs pulled tight against my chest and my head pressed hard against my knees. The others were talking together, there was a little light from the oil lamps and Andrew passed around some food. Someone suggested singing a hymn. They were about to start when suddenly there he was - just stood there - back from the dead. No apparition or dream - the real living Jesus. Then every eye in the room turned on me. I think they all expected some kind of furious outburst. My cheeks grew hot, and my eyes couldn't

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move from his face. Then I was up and throwing myself at his feet, sobbing and worshipping and thanking him for coming back. I heard him say something about studying his hands and feet but I didn't care, not now that I'd seen him. I just wanted to be with him, he was alive. It was true. I was ecstatic. My dreams had come true. I just threw myself at him. Well - what would you have done?

Jesus Appears to Seven Fisherman – Breakfast on the Beach

The disciples returned to Galilee to meet Jesus there as he had promised them. But the days slipped by and there was no sign of the Messiah. So Peter, being Peter decided to do something.

Peter: Come on, let's go fishing. James, let's find your father Zebedee, we'll borrow a boat and throw out a few nets.

So they went down to the Sea of Tiberius. James and John were there, also Nathanael, Thomas and two others. They found one of their old boats, pushed out in it and fished all night. They caught nothing.

Thomas: This was a good idea, Peter.

Peter: Shut up, Thomas, it was better than sitting around gathering dust. At least we get some fresh air out here.

James: Yes, and that's just about all we'll get.

A figure appeared on the shore.

Jesus: Haven't you caught anything yet?

James: No! We've been out all night and haven't even caught a cold.

Jesus: Throw your nets over the other side.

Peter: Don't be stupid! What's the point of that?

Jesus: You might just catch something.

Peter: Who does he think he is? We're the fisherman, we should know what we're doing.

Jesus: Just try it.

Thomas: What have we got to lose Peter? Have a bit of faith in the suggestion.

Peter: A bit of faith? A bit of faith? Thomas! Who are you to talk about a bit of faith?

Thomas: At least I didn't deny him!

Peter: Right!

Nathanael: Settle down you two, there isn't room to fight in this boat. Just throw the nets over the other side.

Jesus: Caught anything yet?

Peter: Give us time, we're just doing it now. We won't catch anything.

James: Well, it'll be a miracle if we do!

They pulled in the nets and threw them over the right side of the boat. They had barely dropped them in the sea when the water began to teem with fish.

Peter: You're joking!

Thomas: What?

Peter: Look!

James: Quick! Pull them in!

Peter: It'll break the nets.

James: No it won't, come on. Nathanael, John, give us a hand here.

So they dragged the mammoth catch aboard. Peter stood gaping at the writhing mass of seafood lying on the deck.

Peter: This happened once before.

James: What?

Peter: This happened once before. We were out fishing all night and caught nothing. I was like a bear with a sore head.

James: What's new?

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Peter: And then someone on the shore told me to throw my nets over the other side, just like this. And when we pulled them in they were bursting... It's him, isn't it?
James: Who?
Peter: On the shore. He's done it again – it's Jesus. Lord! Is that you? I'm coming to see you.

And without another word Peter leapt over the side of the boat and began wading back through the deep water. As he drew near the shore he saw wisps of smoke rising from a fire on the beach, and a lone figure crouched over it, warming himself.

Peter: Lord! Is it you?
Jesus: What do you think Peter? Bring some fish, I'm starving. Let's have some breakfast together.
James: Peter, give us a hand here – so far we've counted 153 and that doesn't include the one's we lost when the net got torn.
Peter: I told you it would tear!
Jesus: Hurry up, I'm hungry!

Jesus Reinstates Peter

The disciples dragged the boat ashore and brought some of the fish for the fire. They ate hungrily, tearing the cooked fish into strips with their fingers and swallowing the hot pieces hastily. After the meal Jesus put a hand on Peter's shoulder.

Jesus: Let's go for a walk Peter.
Peter: What about the others?
Jesus: Just you and me.
Peter: It might not be safe for just the two of us.
Jesus: Peter – you're a giant fisherman and I'm fresh back from the dead, I think we'll be all right. Come on.

They walked in awkward silence for a while, Peter glancing back and wringing his large, battered hands.

Jesus: Simon.
Peter: Simon? You haven't called me that since we first met.
Jesus: Simon, listen to me. A lot has happened in these past days. Do you love me? More than the others, I mean?
Peter: Yes Lord. You know that. You know everything.
Jesus: Then I want you to do something for me.
Peter: Anything, Lord.
Jesus: Take care of my lambs.
Peter: You mean it, Lord?
Jesus: Yes, if you truly love me. Do you?
Peter: Yes, I've just said. I do love you. More than anyone could.
Jesus: Good. Then take care of my sheep.
Peter: I will, at least I'll try – you know what I'm like though. You know what I've done... You know about my broken promises...
Jesus: Simon, I have to ask you once more. Do you love me?
Peter: Lord! What can I say? I try. I tried before, but it all went wrong. Yes I love you. You know I do. But I can't get it right – I seem to have spent these past three years getting it wrong. But I love you Lord, I promise you that.
Jesus: Then feed my sheep. Be a shepherd for the people of God, Peter. Care for them, guide them, help them, listen to them. It won't be an easy task.
Peter: I'll do it Lord.
Jesus: Peter, when you were younger you lived your life as you wanted. You had complete freedom and did whatever you liked. But following me will change that. Obeying me will take you to difficult places, lead to hard decisions. And in the end someone

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will take all your freedom from you. But remember Peter, everyone who loses their life for my sake, will find it. Will you follow me?

Peter: Yes. Yes I will. But Lord, what about the others? And John, what about him? Will these things happen to him too?

Jesus: You worry about yourself Peter, you'll have plenty to think about there. John's life is his – if I want him to live until he's a decrepit old man and I return with the angels – what is that to you?

Peter: You mean he's not going to die!

Jesus: No Peter, I don't mean that! I mean mind your own business! Come on, let's get back to the others.

The Ascension – Jesus Returns to Heaven

Jesus continued to appear to his followers over the coming days. Then, forty days after his resurrection, he led them up the Mount of Olives. There were more than five hundred followers with him, along with eleven of his disciples. Judas Iscariot was no longer with them. He had committed suicide after realising he had betrayed Jesus to death. They had found him hanging from a tree, a lonely, dark figure in a place that became known as the Field of Blood.

On the mountain many of Jesus's followers were still confused in their faith, but they worshipped him there.

Jesus: My Father has given me all authority in heaven and on earth – so now I'm telling you – go and conquer the earth with love. Change the face of mankind with the power of God. Make disciples from every nation and baptise them in the name of the Father, the son and the Holy Spirit. Go in my name and I will always be with you. You will never be abandoned or alone.

Peter: Lord – what about your kingdom? Are you going to bring that in now? Is Israel going to be set free?

Jesus: I can't answer that, Peter. My Father knows the plans, not me. But I want you to go back to Jerusalem and wait. Wait for my Father's next move. He will send great power on you – and you will certainly see the kingdom start to move in Jerusalem.

Peter: What about you Lord?

Jesus: Peter – the prophecies have been fulfilled. The Christ had to suffer and die and be raised to life so that repentance could be preached to all nations. And that's why you must wait in Jerusalem, because it will start there.

Andrew: Can't you wait with us?

Jesus: No Andrew, if I leave you then my Father will send the Holy Spirit on each of you. And when he does you will take his kingdom to the ends of the earth. Not just to Judea and Samaria – but to places you've never even heard of. You'll go and you'll preach and baptise, heal and do miracles. And the world will never be the same again.

Peter: How will we know what to do?

Jesus: Wait Peter, wait and all will become clear.

John: You're going aren't you? This is the end.

Jesus: Yes, John. But it's not the end. Please remember, I will always be with you. I have loved you all deeply – now make sure you love each other as I have loved you.

He went around the inner circle of close friends embracing each one and saying a quiet private word to each in turn. There were tears, there were silent nods, there were grim faces. But in the end, as Jesus stepped away from them and began to rise up into the air, there was a smile on his face and he breathed on them one last time. A cloud fell from the sky and masked his final going, and when it cleared there were two strangers standing in the middle of the circle.

Angel: What are you doing here? Why are you looking up there?

Peter: You've just missed it, Jesus was here.

Angel: I know that – but weren't you listening? He told you to go and wait in Jerusalem. It's no good standing here gawping up there.

Peter: But suppose he comes back?

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Angel: He will do – in the same way that he went. But I thought you promised to do what he said.
Peter: Who are you?
Angel: Someone who knows about such things. Now go back to Jerusalem and whatever you do – do nothing!

Peter's Call

As the disciples returned to Jerusalem to wait for the promise of God, Peter and Andrew walked slowly together talking about all that had happened.

Peter: Andrew.
Andrew: Yes Peter.
Peter: D'you remember that amazing miracle Jesus did?
Andrew: Which one? There were one or two...
Peter: You know, the one with the fish.
Andrew: Oh yes! Feeding the five thousand, with a few bread rolls, that was incredible!
Peter: No, no, this one was on the lake.
Andrew: Oh, you mean walking on the water, when you learnt to swim...
Peter: No, it was the one when we were in the boat.
Andrew: Yes I remember now, the storm blew up and you went white and fainted.
Peter: Shh! No! I'm talking about before that.
Andrew: Before?
Peter: Yes, it was the first miracle he did.
Andrew: Oh at the wedding. All that wine, no wonder you like that one Peter, although I'm surprised you can remember it...
Peter: NO! The very first one. In the boat. Don't you remember?
Andrew: In the boat?
Peter: With the fish.
Andrew: With the fish?
Peter: We'd been out all night, and caught nothing.
Andrew: Oh yes!
Peter: And he was on the shore and he said, 'Throw your nets out one more time'.
Andrew: Yes, and you said...
Peter: Please! Don't remind me! I remember exactly what I said. And I don't want it repeated.
Andrew: But you did do what he said. You threw the nets over again.
Peter: Yes, and it worked. Those nets were so heavy we could hardly pull them in.
Andrew: I'd forgotten about that one you know. What about it anyway?
Peter: Well, that's my favourite miracle.
Andrew: What? But, what about Lazarus, or the little girl who came back from the dead?
Peter: No. That's my favourite, that's my all time number one favourite miracle, because on that day he really spoke our language. Do you know what I mean? We were fishermen, Andrew, fishermen, both of us. I'd been doing it a long time and yet suddenly he came along and showed me how it was done. He took my boring job and turned it on its head. He brought the kingdom of God to me in a netful of squirming smelly fish. I could really relate to that and I knew right then there was something different about him. I mean those fish don't listen to anyone, do they? We've tried talking to them, shouting at them and telling them to get out of the sea and into our nets. Never worked for us, did it? But it did for him. They obey him. And if it's good enough for the fish, then it's good enough for me.
Andrew: But wait a minute, you fell on your knees and told Jesus to go away. Don't you remember?
Peter: Course I do. I was ashamed. He'd shown me how to do my job! It was a little humiliating. But I was only interested in catching a lot of fish, whereas he was interested in a lot more than that. He wanted to catch us, didn't he? I suppose that's why he went out of his way to find us. You know, standing next to him that day I saw myself for what I really was, a shoal-minded, mackerel-grabbing fisherman.

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Yep, he really spoke my language that morning. I mean he could have told us one of his parables, like the prodigal widow, or the lost Samaritan, or the unforgiving sheep.

Andrew: You never were that good at remembering the parables were you?

Peter: Exactly. So instead he used what I knew... Boats and wriggling fish and water. And when I saw that, though I didn't know it at the time - it changed my life forever.

The Day of Pentecost

The disciples returned to the city, back to the room where they had been hiding. They stayed together, talking, praying, debating – and most of all – waiting for the next move.

It came on the feast of Pentecost, seven weeks after Jesus had risen from the dead. The disciples were there, along with Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Salome, and some of the other women. Jesus's family were there too – his brothers and Mary his mother. They had been praising God together when suddenly they heard the sound of a rushing wind. It wrapped itself around the building then flung wide the doors and thundered through the house. Flames blew in with it and then separated into individual tongues of fire that fell on each person in the room. The thundering wind and crackling flames gave way to another sound – excited voices chattering in a host of different languages. The disciples pushed back their chairs and ran from the room, still babbling and shouting. Outside, the streets were full of visitors for the feast, many from different countries. When they saw the disciples and heard what they were saying they were amazed – because these uneducated men and women from backwoods Galilee were speaking about God in a myriad of different languages. A crowd soon gathered and the astonished visitors heard and received the message of God, and as Peter preached his first sermon - three thousand people were converted.

Peter's Sermon

Peter: In the scriptures the prophet Joel saw this day and said this – ‘In the last days I will pour out my spirit on everyone, says God, sons and daughters will prophecy, the young will see visions, the old will dream dreams. There will be signs in the heavens and wonders on the earth. My power will be unleashed upon the world and the humble, the lost the broken and the poor will be swept up in it.’ That prophecy is revealed to you today. Who are we? Nobody - just stumbling people from Galilee. Do we have the strength to do what we're doing now? Of course not, until five minutes ago we were cowering in a back room. I was thinking about going back to my old life, back to fishing. And my friends here were worried sick about the authorities. Not now! Now God is at work. Look! Every one of us cowards is out here proclaiming to you what we saw and heard, that Jesus of Nazareth – who the people here tortured and crucified - is not dead – but is alive. We saw him; we heard him and we watched him ascend to heaven. This was all God's plan. His death seemed a disaster – but not any more. It was actually the masterplan. If he had not died he would not have been raised, and if he had not been raised we would not be here now telling you to turn back to God. Forget yourselves; leave your lives of rebellion and selfishness. Look to Jesus and live for God. Repent of your sins and be baptised and saved today. Anyone can do it – I should know. I deserted him, I denied that I ever knew him; I turned my back on God and tried to run away. Yet Jesus forgave me – more than that – he gave me a job to do. He trusted me again, and he will trust you – if you will just trust him. He believes in you – so please – believe in him.