

Scenes From the Life and Path of Jesus

Many of us have mental images of biblical people and events which have been formed from Bible story books or by reading the Bible. They may not be accurate, because the only reference we have is how we know people, culture, and life to be around us. I have never been to the country of Jesus's birth, or experienced his culture, so my imaginations are little more than that. It is not my intention to lessen the holiness of Jesus, or to portray him as nothing more than an ordinary, earthly man.

Some may wonder how Jesus could experience life just like all the other people around him and still be the Son of God. The Bible says that he was made like unto his brethren, yet without sin. People also said, "Is not this Joseph's son?" and they were offended. Jesus also said a prophet is not accepted in his own country. Scripture references like these lead us to believe that he did not stand out as different from those around him, and that he must have experienced normal human life. We know that he was not the flesh and blood of Mary, but a divine Holy Being; God in human flesh, come to earth to save all of humankind from the clutches of sin. So, read along with me, as we imagine events as they could have happened.

I see him in the distance, small eddies of dust rising from his sandal clad feet as he slowly makes his way down the road. Scores of people press close or sit with outstretched hands waiting for his attention. There is nothing in his looks or demeanor that would cause him to stand out in a crowd, unless it was his eyes; compassion radiates from them when he looks at the needy, and a hint of steel flashes behind them when he talks to the hypocritical leaders. His height and frame are average while his garments are those of the humble of the land.

Many along the road have been waiting a long time for this moment; they are eager to speak to him and experience his healing. They were told he can heal every sickness and disease, and cripples are made perfectly whole with his touch. Jesus is not in a hurry as he bends down; here he talks to a mother with a crippled child, and there a man with blind eyes; no one is afraid of him. The people further down the line have looks of anticipation written on their faces, hoping that his touch will make them whole again.

The boat rocks gently on the water as he settles onto the seat. He speaks quietly to its owner, and they push away from shore, allowing the water to separate him from the crowd of people who are pressing near to hear him. The lines gently rise and fall as the anchors keep the boat from drifting away. Jesus turns to face the crowd and begins to speak. His words have a captivating quality that grasps the attention of everyone listening. "Behold, a sower went forth to sow..."

The sun is just rising over the eastern sky, the birds are awakening from their slumber, while here and there a night creature is making final preparations for their long daytime sleep. I see him walking along the shore of the sea of Galilee alone. Now his head is down as if in meditation or prayer. Then I see him looking out across the sea and there is a distant look in his eye, as if they are seeing something far away in the distance. Out on the sea there are fishing boats pulling in the last of the night's catch and folding and stowing their nets. The water laps near the top of their boats which are laden with the night's catch, while powerful arms pull at the oars, bringing them home.

He knows that one day, some of those fishermen will walk the dusty roads with him, perform miracles, and eventually die because they believed in him.

The table is surrounded by men, grown men, some in the rough outdoor garb of day laborers and fishermen, while others in the finer robes of public figures. They share a meal as a group of people who know each other and are used to each other's ways. Conversation flows easily, and the talk covers a variety of topics. The central figure begins to speak, and everyone looks with eagerness at him. It is like his words have power over them and they listen. He is speaking to them about going to the country round about to preach repentance, cast out evil spirits, anoint the sick with oil, and heal them. They ask questions like: how long will we be gone, what shall we tell the people, who all is going and who is going where? He is saying they should not take provisions with them but depend on the people and the God of Israel to take care of their needs.

We see a younger version of him; all boy; walking down the street surrounded by friends. They carry sticks and other things that captivate boys their age. Their bare feet are dirty, and their clothes have accumulated some wear and tear. There are the usual smiles, laughter, pushing and shoving as they make their way home.

Now we see a smaller, version of this lad, perhaps two to three years old. His sturdy legs carry him out the front door of his house, where he sits down, and begins turning the dusty roadway into miniature streets and houses. His little hands move the small carved wooden donkey up and down his imaginary streets; a look of concentration furrowing his brow. Now and then he looks up and smiles at the woman standing in the doorway. He says, "See mommy! This is the city I want to make when I grow up!" Something in her smile and her look, tell us this is a special little lad. She looks up and says, "Look, daddy is coming home from his workshop!" With outstretched hands his little legs carry him to the waiting arms of his daddy. Joseph tousles the little boy's hair before picking him up and carrying him inside.

The clock of time spins backwards a few years, to an earlier time. Now I see the young mother rocking her little baby. She sings softly to him, and he gives the little sounds that all babies make when they are contented and sleepy. I see the mother's head begin to nod as the weight of the care of new motherhood slips over her. Her face relaxes and she sleeps. It was a difficult and tiring journey but now they are safe. The relief and exhaustion from the weeks of stress, as well as a night with a fussy baby, practically bring the little mother to tears. Occasionally, we see a far off look in her eyes, like she is pondering the future. We see her trying to make a home for her new family in a different land and culture. Maybe now in Egypt, they can stay and rest for a little while.

In another scene I see him helping his mother carry food to the table. As the oldest he is momma's big helper. His younger siblings swing their feet impatiently, telling their big brother to hurry, they are hungry. Daddy comes in, picks up the baby from the floor, and sits at the head of the table. Steaming bowls of food are placed before them while they wait. Soon the clatter of mealtime drowns out any outside noise. Happy sounds, the sound of a happy family.

There are other scenes of stubbed toes, scraped knees, cuts and tears; mother telling him to push his chair in and clean up his room. Father saying, "Son, get the chickens in for the night and feed the other animals before it gets dark."

We now see his father Joseph's workshop; shavings cover the floor, and hammers, saws, and other tools of the carpenter's trade hang in their places on the walls. Drills and wooden pegs lie on the table ready for use. On the far side of the room, we see the young apprentice learning the trade. Joseph's hands rest on Jesus's, as he deftly guides the plane turning the wood glassy smooth. Thin curls of wood exit the plane and gather like a soft carpet around their feet. A slip of the knife, a cut finger; a smashed thumb as a mallet misses a peg; a cry of pain. A beam takes shape, and a birdhouse sits waiting for a final coat of paint. At the close of the day, the house echoes with family sounds; stories told in excited voices; children learning to read and recite numbers.

The crowds pushed and shoved as they exited Jerusalem on their way home. It had been a good Holy week with much to talk about. People are reunited with friends and family. And then there was the Passover; a time of remembering their deliverance from Egypt many, many years ago. There was talk of the cruel abhorrent Roman soldiers; how they wished the Messiah would come to free them from their tyranny. Fathers, mothers, and children, walking along in little groups, laughing, and sharing memories as they make their way home. The day of travel drew to a close, and families began finding each other and making preparations for the night. Joseph and Mary also began to prepare, but where was Jesus? No one has seen him all day! They had assumed he was with other travelers! Mary's heart began to pound, what could have happened to him, where is he? In anxious voices they began calling his name, asking other travelers if anyone had seen him. Time and again shaking heads were the only answers to their inquiries.

After a restless night, they begin their flight back to Jerusalem to look for him. Many anxious thoughts crowded their minds as their hurried footsteps took them back to the city. How could we have missed him? Why were we not more careful? Where oh where can he be? After three grueling, worrisome days of searching, someone suggests the temple. Rushing in, a scene meets their eye that they had never expected. There he was in the middle of the wise men and leaders discussing the law. The elders sat in rapt attention listening to this young man as he talked. Jesus looked up as Joseph and Mary entered. At finding him, his mother's relief turns into a scolding. "Do you not know your father and I have been looking for you for three days?" He looks at her; this time she sees something different in his eyes. Quietly he says, "Know ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" He promptly followed his parents out, while the men looked after this twelve-year-old boy in wonder.

The wedding had been going on for a couple of days already. Among the guests were Mary and Jesus. Mary, slipping out for a moment, notices dismay written on the faces of the servants; hushed whispers something about being out of wine. "What shall we do?" she hears one say. Mary, an observant mother, realizes the significance of the situation. In a lightning flash of inspiration, she points at Jesus and says, "Whatever he tells you to do, do it." Jesus responds to her that his time has not yet come, then turning to the servants says, "Fill all of these jars with water, then take some to the governor of the feast." The governor tasted the water-made wine with amazement. It was clearly the best at the wedding feast. Mary nodded knowingly, like all mothers, she knew the truth about her son like no one else. This was the beginning of many such miracles. Mud from spit on a blind man's eyes and he sees. Crippled walk, deaf hear, and blind see. Children climb on his lap, and miracles happen in Sycamore trees. Not only the healing of bodies, but transformation of lives. Each person is a testimony of the power of the almighty one.

Tonight, we see the disciples in the boat, soaked to the skin from the rain and spray, as they try to make headway against the wind and waves. These are seasoned sea men, who make their living pulling fish from the depths of these same waters. They know the sea; how temperamental it can be and when it becomes dangerous to be out there, and they are afraid. The storm and the wind and the relentless, crashing waves heighten their anxiety, bringing images to their minds of being submerged beneath the waves and sinking to the watery depths of the sea. Suddenly, someone shouts above the howling storm, "What is that!" Immediately, heads turn to look, and fear grips their hearts as a flash of lightning reveals a dark apparition like a man moving across the wave. Is it a spirit coming to hasten their demise? Or is it their Lord, whom they left praying on the far shore? Peter gains his voice and shouts, "Is that you Jesus? If so call me and I will come to you!" They wait expectantly, and then the familiar voice sounds above the crashing waves, "Yes, it is I; come!" Peter, relieved and excited, forgot all about personal safety and the storm, stepped overboard onto the water and began to walk. The other disciples gasp in amazement as they see him go; his footprints on the surface of the water are gone in an instant. Suddenly, they see Peter look around like he is just realizing what he is doing. He falters and begins to sink! "Save me!" they hear him call. In an instant Jesus is pulling him up from the waves to stand beside him saying, "Where is your faith?" As they step into the boat the sea becomes calm, and they find themselves on the far shore.

The scene shifts, three years since the water-made wine miracle happened. We see a group of men crowded together ascending the steps of a house to an upstairs room. Through the window, we see meal preparations being made. The group of men are conversing together as they climb. In the front of the group is one known as The Healer. His shoulders seem stooped and his steps seem tired. The men around him have no way of knowing that they are entering the closing chapter of the earthly life of their friend and Savior. Unbeknownst to them, one will become guilty of betrayal, others of denial.

We see them in the room, the same men we saw around the table in an earlier scene. Jesus and his twelve disciples have gathered to partake of the Passover meal; the last one, he tells them, before he is to suffer. While eating, Jesus says that one of them will betray him. Each disciple asks, "Is it I?" Judas receives the token from the Lord, signaling that he is the guilty one. He then rises from the table and disappears into the night.

Jesus breaks a loaf of bread and hands each of them a piece. He says, "Eat, this is my body which is broken for you." He then takes a cup of wine, passes it from one to the next, and tells them it signifies his blood which was to be shed for them. Afterwards, he rises from the table, girds himself with a towel, pours water into a basin and begins to wash their feet. Peter protests, but Jesus quietly rebukes him and says that he does not need his whole body washed, just his feet to be clean. Peter acquiesces, and Jesus washes his feet. After singing a final hymn, they leave for the garden of Gethsemane to pray.

Here we see him kneeling, or is he prostrate on the ground? He is in the deepest struggle anyone has ever seen. Sweat like blood, appears on his forehead falling to the ground. This is the final surrender of his soul. We see him rise to check on his disciples only to find them too sleepy to pray with him. He shakes them awake before returning to prayer a second and third time. He prays

utterly alone. Then we see a heavenly being near, giving him strength for the path of suffering and death that lays ahead.

In the next scene, we hear the murmur of voices and see a group of men making their way through the trees towards Jesus. Their weapons glitter in the flickering torch light as Judas steps forth and kisses Jesus. There was a flash of metal from Peter's sword and the ear of the servant of the high priest lay cleanly severed on the ground. Jesus bends down, retrieves the ear from the dust and restores it to its owner, while telling Peter to put away his sword. Jesus makes no resistance as he is led away. But Peter, not willing to forsake his Lord, follows at a distance to see the outcome. And there, in the flickering firelight, Peter thrice denies his Lord. As the crowing of the cock is heard, Jesus looks his way. Overcome with shame and guilt, Peter departs, weeping bitterly. The words of Jesus rolling over and over in his mind: "Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice."

Jesus stands; wrists fastened together like a common criminal. His head is bowed as he listens to the discussion of what they should do with him, meanwhile the clamoring crowd demands he be put to death. Obediently, wordlessly, he walks with them as they take him from the palace of the high priest to Pilot, to Herod, and back to Pilot again. His steps are slow, and he looks as if he is carrying the weight of the world on his shoulders. He winces as the crown made of brambles and thorns is roughly jammed onto his head; blood begins to ooze and trickle down his face. He seems impassive to the mockery of the Jews and the Roman soldiers alike.

Sweat stands out on the face of the soldier, as the whip rises and falls across the back of Jesus. Welts and blood appear on his naked back; he stumbles and almost falls. Pilot parades the bloodied prisoner before the crowd of Jews and says, "Behold your king!" The crowd shouts, "We have no king but Caesar! Crucify him!" Pilot recognizes that this is no ordinary man. His wife says she had a dream about him and her husband should have nothing to do with him. He calls for a basin of water and washes his hands, thus showing the people that he is innocent of the blood of Jesus. The cold faced crowd, in their bloodthirsty frenzy, cry out that his blood will be upon them and their children, demanding the release of a murderer in his place!

The weight of reality, the beatings, and the derision have taken the strength out of Jesus, and he stumbles beneath the load of the rough, heavy cross. "Here, you! Carry this cross!" and Simon a Cyrenian, is forced to bear the burden for him. Jesus glances at him gratefully and whispers "Thank you." Blood still oozes from his head where the thorns have pierced the skin, and the lacerations on his back, soak his garments red. Flies buzz and crawl over his wounds. He tries to chase them away, but his strength has failed for such trivial details. The feet of the crowd stir the dust, which slowly settles on everyone and everything.

Unlike the other two prisoners, Jesus did not resist as he was roughly stretched out upon the cross. The splintery wood tore open the lacerations on his back. He winces in pain and fresh blood stains the gnarled, wooden cross and the earth beneath it. With a spurt of red, the spikes pass through the flesh of hands and feet, as they are driven deep into the wood; a groan of pain escapes his lips.

Mary, his mother and other dear friends stand nearby, tears streaming down their faces, as the cross is jerked up and dropped into the hole. There he hangs, naked, vulnerable, and ashamed for all to see, while the Roman soldiers cast lots for his garments which lay abandoned on the ground.

This scene is difficult for those who were close to him. Questions still tumble repeatedly in their minds, as they try to come to grips with the events of the last few hours. Through agony and pain, they hear the voice of Jesus as he tells one of the prisoners who was crucified by his side, that on this very day he would be with him in paradise. Again, they heard words from the middle cross: "Father, why hath thou forsaken me?" His breathing becomes labored. As he struggles, he pushes himself up to get one more breath of oxygen into his lungs, causing the spikes to tear the flesh in his feet. Then the final words come, Jesus addressing his Father, "Into thy hands I commend my spirit." He ceases to struggle for breath; his spirit is released, and his body sags lifelessly on the spikes. His sacrifice is finished; the debt is paid. He said he could at any time have called thousands of angels to come to his rescue, but his love and commitment to humanity were too great to allow him that privilege. Before he died, he looked down on his mother and gave instructions to his beloved Apostle John to care for her. In death, he did not forget her.

A rumble is heard and a shudder runs through the ground, like the earth itself is taking its last breath. Rocks tumble and graves open. The crosses silhouetted against the darkened sky, sway as if blown by a mighty wind. The cloudless sky grows dark like a great hand is covering the sun, blocking out the light. It seemed at this moment, even the earth and its elements are groaning and bearing witness to what has just taken place. People long dead were seen walking through the city. Even the tough Roman centurion was heard saying that this was indeed the Son of God. When the soldier drove his spear into Jesus body, blood and water gushed out and onto the ground. He was already dead; he had simply quit living.

Loving hands took the body of Jesus down from the cross. Because the Sabbath started at sundown, swift preparations were made for his burial. His body was hastily wrapped and placed in a borrowed tomb. A stone was placed at the entrance, a seal was placed, and a guard was set. But as we know, the power of God cannot be trapped in a tomb. From our perspective, we see the story set in history, knowing the outcome. They were not given that privilege. To his family and followers, the end had come, life was gone, the future lost. Grief must have covered them as a blanket, for sure for those like Peter who had denied him in his darkest hours of life. Then on the first day of the week, after a broken-hearted weekend; eyes swollen and red from crying, two women made their way to the tomb, carrying spices to anoint his body. A surprise met their eyes; the stone was not covering the mouth of the tomb anymore! Their steps quickened as they drew near, wondering what could have happened. An angel was at the tomb and told them Jesus was no longer there! They said he had risen from the dead! As one of them rushed back to break the news to the disciples, Jesus himself appeared to the one left behind. She addressed him as the gardener asking him where he had taken her Lord. But as he spoke, she recognized him. He told her to go tell the rest that he had risen from the dead and would show himself to them.

The disciples heard the news and rushed to the tomb to see for themselves. Sure enough! It was as the women had said! The angels gave them the same message; he is not here anymore for he has come back to life. They showed them the place where his body had been, and the grave clothes he left behind.

Jesus showed himself several times to his disciples over the next few weeks. Two were on the road to another town, that Sunday he rose from the dead. As they were discussing the events that had transpired, Jesus himself joined them. He did not reveal himself to them, but as they walked, he opened their eyes to the truth of the prophecy and scripture. As they broke bread at the evening meal, they recognized him and he vanished from sight. Imagine how they felt, one minute he was breaking the bread, the next he had disappeared. In their excitement they rushed back to Jerusalem to tell the other disciples what they had experienced. While there, suddenly Jesus stood among them. At first, they were afraid, wondering if it was really him. To prove he was not just a spiritual apparition, he asked to have some fish and honeycomb to eat. Soon he vanished without a trace.

Thomas was not with the rest that night and seemed to carry some doubts as to the authenticity of their claims. A week later, while he was with the rest, Jesus again appeared. This time he addressed Thomas directly and told him to put his fingers into the prints of the nails in his hands, and to put his hand in his wounded side. And there were the holes in his hands and feet, and within the folds of his robe gaped the place where the Roman soldiers spear had entered. At this, Thomas cried, "My Lord and my God!"

Peter, discouraged by the uncertainty of the future, decides once again to try his fishing trade; the other disciples join him. That night their fishing yielded no results. Discouraged, they called it a night and headed for home. As they near the shore they see Jesus. He has a fire going and is cooking fish. In a gentle voice he calls out to them, "Children, have you any meat?" They gather around the fire and their hearts fill with a mixture of shame and hope. After they had eaten, Jesus asks Peter if he loved him more than these. I suppose he was referring to his occupation and the other things of life. Three times Jesus asks Peter, perhaps in accordance with his three denials, and three times Peter answers in the affirmative. Jesus tells him to feed his sheep; no doubt referring to those who had believed and become his followers. Jesus was turning over the responsibility of his earthly ministry to these men who had walked with him for the last three years.

This next scene is from a distance. Jesus is walking up the Mount of Olives, surrounded by his disciples. They do not know they are receiving their final commission from him before he leaves them. "Go ye therefore and teach all nations," he is saying. As his voice becomes silent, he rises towards the heavens, as though on an invisible road. The disciples stand silently in awe as they watch him slowly disappear from sight. Transfixed, they gaze at the spot where he vanished. No one says anything, for there are no words to describe what they have just witnessed. Suddenly, an angel appears and says, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." Slowly the disciples turn and make their way back to Jerusalem, recalling his words to wait there until they receive the promised power from on high.

Jesus was seen no more in person on the earth, yet his presence lived on in the hearts of his followers. When the Holy Spirit was poured out on the day of Pentecost, they recognized it as the power which Jesus was referring to when he left. That power continues in the hearts of his followers until this day.

Now let us shift to our last scene. We see Mary the mother of Jesus. She has aged considerably and there are bits of gray streaking her hair. Since that day that her eldest son was crucified, she

has found a comfortable place to reside in the house of apostle John. Something about him is a constant reminder of the love of her son Jesus. Many times, she reflects on the bygone years with a mixture of emotions. She sees the hand of God on her life and still feels unworthy to have been such a part of God's plan. Like any loving mother, she rejoiced and suffered along with her son. She rises from her chair and takes down the little sandals she has on the shelf and studies them. She remembers the many hours of play, the bumps and bruises, the times of stress and sickness.

The door opens with a bang, and little feet are heard running across the floor. A group of her grandchildren gather around her, reaching out to touch the little sandals. "Tell us a story grandma!" they say. "Tell us about the angels and the shepherds, and the wisemen!" another little voice chimes in. They never grow tired of hearing those stories. Though their parents were not there to experience the birth of their brother Jesus, they knew the stories well. So, Mary, once again gets that far away look in her eye, as she begins to tell them of the visit from the angel who told her she would be the earthly mother of the son of God. She tells them about her cousin Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, and about their grandfather Joseph. She describes in detail their journey to Bethlehem for the time of the taxation and how tired she was after that trip. The little children listen with rapt attention, occasionally filling in some details of the story she missed. After a while grandma says, "Run along and play, I am tired now and need to rest."

Mary remains for a time after they are gone, remembering; it seems like it all happened just yesterday! She reflects on each of her other children that she and Joseph had with fondness and love. Oh, how she misses Joseph. Sometimes she sees him in their children and grandchildren. How she wishes he could be here now to see their family! She just does not have the energy she once had, and the memories and retelling of the story make her tired. Slowly her head begins to nod as she slips into a peaceful sleep. This woman who has impacted the world, now rests in quiet slumber. She was not special in earthly standards, for God uses humble willing people to do his extraordinary work.

Little is known of the lives of Joseph and Mary after the birth of Jesus. Apparently, Joseph was not living anymore at the time of the crucifixion of Jesus, as Jesus gave the responsibility of caring for his mother to his beloved apostle John. We do know the Bible mentions several other children that they had, but details about them are lost to history. It would be interesting to know what happened to their family after Jesus was gone, but the Bible was written to focus on the life of Jesus, not family history.

May we ever keep this story alive in our hearts. It is not just an old story, but one of hope, power, and redemption for all time.

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