

*They had come to the garden for
solace, to wrap their sorrow in its
cloak of familiarity.*

*They came looking for answers to
tortured questions.*

*They left the garden with
an expectant hope for
tomorrow.*

Is This the End?

IN THE HEAVY DARKNESS JUST BEFORE DAWN, the walls of the city loomed ominously over the Garden of Gethsemane, nestled in the valley beneath. Hidden deep in the shadows of the ancient olive grove, two men huddled together. Pursued by the guards, those with orders to arrest anyone associated with the rabbi from Nazareth, they had escaped. And even though it was no secret that the rabbi and His disciples had frequented this garden, the two brothers were willing to risk the danger. This had been not only their home away from home, but in its precincts they could still feel the presence of their Master and Lord.



JAMES, THE OLDER OF THE TWO, finally broke the silence. "Is this the end?" He asked. "Is *this* the end of it?"

John answered his brother with a weary sigh. "I don't know, James. I really don't." As he looked around, he was struck by the change that had taken place in what used to be a place of comfort and fellowship. "So many memories—and now that's all there is. Just memories."

"This garden was our home—our refuge."

"We were safe here. We were family. The Master seemed almost one of us.

"So what happened? This isn't how we began. This certainly isn't how it was to end." James leaped to his feet, agitated, pacing. "Now what? What are we to do? Do we all just go back home, back to work, as if none of this happened? Do *we* just go back to our nets?"

"I—I don't think so."

"You were the closest to Him, John. Did He know this was coming?"

"Of *course* He did—He spoke of it a number of times."

"But how were we—how was *I* to know when He wasn't speaking in riddles! I'm just a fisherman. How can I remember all He said? How am I to understand such things?"

"None of us understood at the time, James. Still don't. But He *did* tell us He would be betrayed, and that this would—"

"He was betrayed, all right. Right here, in this very refuge," James spat angrily. "He was betrayed by that snake Judas. He should rot in hell for what he did! How could Jesus have been so blind as to include *him* in our family? What treachery! What deceit!"

"Was it?" John answered unexpectedly, surprising even himself. "Or did Jesus know *that*, too? We had a habit of underestimating Him. It was too easy to think of Him as just one of us. But He

wasn't. For all his faults, Peter saw it. Our Master was 'the Christ, the Son of the living God.'" John paused to digest the meaning of what he had just said. "Would the Son of God be fooled by a traitor? He knew it at the supper. He knew it at the end. Surely He knew it when He *called* Judas."

James shook his head, as if to clear away the cobwebs of uncertainty. "I'm beginning to think I didn't even know Jesus. It all happened so fast. Did we really know Him? Did we have any idea what it was like for Him? What was it like for Him to live with all of us, knowing who we were in our hearts? What was it like for Him to approach the end, *knowing* what would happen?"

James sank back against the boulder he had been using as a seat, overwhelmed by the realization of his Lord's burden. "What a horrible way to live," he moaned. "What He must have gone through."

Remembering that awful night—the last time they had been together in the Garden—John muttered sadly, "And He went through it alone."

"When Jesus needed us the most, we were asleep!" James agreed bitterly. "Each time He woke us we had lost more of Him. By the last time, I barely recognized Him." He could see again in his mind the face of their Master—a visage twisted by His torment. "The sorrow. The horrible pain He was suffering written across His face."

John dropped down next to his brother, his voice quivering with a sadness blended with self-loathing. "And that face will haunt my dreams."

"And we were asleep."

"We were asleep."



THE MORNING LIGHT creeping warily into the shadows beneath Gethsemane's gnarled and ancient olive trees did little to assuage the grim reality of the dark events surrounding the sons of Zebedee. Even so, as the leaden weight of their Master's crucifixion and burial bore down on their

hearts, they struggled to remember happier times.

John noticed his brother staring blankly off into the distance. "You're off somewhere else," he said.

"Hmm? Oh, I was thinking of the day Jesus called *us*. We were with Father, mending nets, remember?" James said. "Here was our cousin, standing on shore. There was nothing special about Him—He was still just Aunt Mary's son. But He had Simon and Andrew with Him—which I thought very odd. They were just standing there, on either side of Him, and they had the strangest look in their eyes."

James almost laughed out loud when he recalled the look on their fellow fishermen's faces that day. But then he remembered what came next. "Then Jesus spoke. Do you remember what He said? 'Come with Me,' He said, 'and I will make you into fishers of men.' Well, *that* was very odd, too."

John did laugh out loud when he added, "When He said that, I immediately thought of our fishing nets bursting with men!"

"But when He said those words—," James continued seriously, "I can't explain it any better—it was no longer our cousin there. That voice, the way He spoke. I don't know, He was different. He looked the same, but somehow He was changed—as if the person *inside* was not the same."

John agreed. "Yes, I felt that, too. Over the years I had said no to our cousin so many times. But at the sound of His words that day, I lost all resistance."

"Yes, that's it! Exactly. And another odd thing that day—when we did what Jesus asked, and stepped ashore, I expected Father to haul us back into that boat—but he didn't say a word."

"That's because he and Mother already knew about the change that had come over Jesus. I heard them talking about it. Jesus was away for a time—no one knew where He was. But when He returned, He was different. After John baptized Him, He disappeared—must have been

more than a month—and He came back changed. And there was an urgency about Him."

"So that wily old fisherman knew all along."

"If he hadn't, he *would* have hauled us back into that boat. Not many things get past Zebedee."

They sat in silence for a moment as they both recalled the days when their cousin became their Master. Then James said quietly, "I want to go talk with him."

"With who?"

"I guess for the last three years we've been so occupied with our Master, I haven't thought much about Father. But of course, *both* our parents have been supportive of all this. And now I want to talk with him. He's hurting too—I know it."

"And he's probably as confused as we are. No matter what Jesus said, none of us saw this coming. And none of us know what will come next."

James, always the more impetuous of the two, let his recollections roam unhindered, but, as was often the case, they did not stray far. After another moment's thought, he said, "When we were younger, when I was growing up, God was just God to me. Something to sacrifice to, to be afraid of. But Jesus always referred to God as 'Father'—His Father and ours—our 'Father in heaven.'"

"And that's what got Him into trouble," John interrupted.

"I know. But it worked on me. It personalized this One who has demanded the blood of our sacrifices. But I was thinking," James continued darkly, "Jesus has just been killed—buried. What must His Father think of *that*."

"Turn it around," John answered. "How would Zebedee feel if either of us had been the one hanging on a tree?"

James had not considered it that way. "Do you think God is really *that* kind of Father?"

"I think Jesus meant every word He said," John replied soberly. "One of the last things He said before He died was to ask His Father to forgive those who had just

crucified Him.”

“You’re not serious,” James said, incredulous.

“He did. And I believe His Father *will* forgive them. Jesus would not have called God ‘Father’—and He wouldn’t have taught us to pray to our ‘Father in heaven’—unless God *was* that kind of Father.

“All of heaven must have wept to see the Son nailed to that tree.”



JOHN ABRUPTLY TURNED TO JAMES. “Do you think it had to happen?”

“What.”

“Do you think Jesus *had* to die?”

James shrugged his shoulders, resignedly. “It was inevitable. The priests, the Sanhedrin—all of the rulers—were determined to get Him. It was just a matter of time.”

“I *know* the rulers were against Him,” John said impatiently. “That’s not the point. Was it necessary? Was He *supposed* to die?”

James screwed up his face, bewildered. “What do we accomplish in death? What can Jesus *do* on earth if He isn’t here? Whatever happens to us when we die, our work on earth is done.”

“So after three years, that’s it?! That’s all there is? Whatever He accomplished in that time—that’s it? I can’t accept that. I *won’t* accept that. The very Son of God comes down to be with us for a few years—then He just dies? There has to be more.”

“What more could there be?”

“He told us He would suffer—that He *had* to suffer. I just didn’t realize it meant death—and such a horrible death.”

“What are you saying, John?”

“I don’t pretend to understand it, but there had to be purpose behind what happened. There had to be a reason.”

James threw up his hands. “The Master told us He came to save sinners. But how

can He do that—when He’s dead?”

John hadn’t an answer. All he could do was return to that awful scene of the crucifixion in a search for some explanation for why Jesus came, and what could possibly have made it all worthwhile.

“Aunt Mary was leaning against me for support,” John began quietly. “She could barely stand. The sight before us was hideous. Her son, hanging there—it would have been easier if He were dead. But He wasn’t. After the abuse He suffered, I don’t know why He was still alive. Day had turned to night—it was a waking nightmare. At one point Jesus cried out. It seemed He was nearing the end, so I left the women and moved closer. The last thing I heard Him say was, ‘It is finished.’”

Suddenly those three simple words meant something to John. He, along with everyone else who had stood beneath the cross and heard those words, had thought it was just Jesus’ declaration of the death that came to Him just a moment later. But now he realized it may have meant far more than that.

“‘It is finished,’ James,” John said excitedly. “Whatever Jesus came to do—He *did* it. We may not know what it was; perhaps some day we will. But it was *something*. The cross finished something important—which means it was part of it.

James let this new thought vibrate through his mind. If his brother was correct, then the question had been answered.

“Then it’s not the end,” he said almost in a whisper.

“It’s *not* the end,” John agreed.



“I CAN’T SHAKE THE FEELING that we’ve let Him down,” James said, sadly. “And now He’s gone.”

John nodded his head. “I know. I feel the same. I keep going over our time with Jesus—over and over in my mind. What a sorry lot we were.”

“Maybe you’re right. Maybe none of this means it is over—that there is still

something for us to do. But what?” James paced, frustrated by lingering doubt. “I feel like a young boy who just finished only his first day at synagogue. If we were so ignorant when we were with Jesus, how can we ever be more without Him?”

“I’m not sure it’s possible to be ‘more’ without Jesus.”

“John, He’s gone!”

Clearly there were still unanswered questions to work through. “I don’t know,” John replied, then brightened. “Maybe not. The cross ended His time with us. But maybe it began something new. Maybe the cross was necessary to begin this new... new...”

“What?”

John struggled to put words to something brand new. “Fellowship? Friendship? Ministry? Life? I don’t think Jesus would have invested so much of Himself in us if it was all going to end with His death. So I have to believe that there is more, and the cross is *part* of it—the essential part. Somehow—in ways we can’t yet imagine—the cross is the gateway to what will follow.”

“If you’re right,” James said, “it was a hard price to pay.”

“But wouldn’t Jesus be the perfect one to pay it? Wouldn’t the Son of God be the only one able to pay that price?”

“Something just ended.”

“And something just began.”



WITH UNFORMED yet expectant promise the brothers left the shadows of the garden to begin a new day. They still did not know what lay before them; they still did not know the fullness of what life would be without the physical presence of their Lord.

But they did know Jesus had not left them. Already they could feel His Spirit guiding their thoughts and steps.

Already, even in their grief, they could feel the joy of a new beginning.

In Him.