

THEY NEED A SAVIOR



3 A SUFFICIENT SACRIFICE

HE HAD NEVER BEEN DOWN TO EARTH before, but now that he had been sent, Harry was determined to make the best of it. He was determined to get along.

If the truth be known, Harry had never been terribly impressed by the human species; he had always considered them a most inconvenient, unsightly bunch. But ever since The Son had gone down to be born and live amongst them, Harry had acquired a new level of interest in the inhabitants of earth.

Harry had been set down in the hill country of Lower Galilee, directly west of the lower tip of the Sea of Galilee, the great fresh water lake around which lay the cities of Capernaum, Gennesaret, and Tiberias.

Almost immediately his feet began to ache. The road was hard-packed soil, and on this day it seemed to the angel that it may as well have been forged iron be-



neath him. Each step on the compacted earth jarred his bones. Meanwhile the gravity of the globe worked against him. Harry was unaccustomed to these physical constraints; heaven's surface did not press back against one's feet, and there was likewise no force constantly pressing one down toward the ground. *How do these humans bear it all?* He wondered.

The road followed the contours of the land, rising and falling, curving around the small hills. After awhile the road widened, here and there small dwellings began to appear nearby: a metal smith shop, an inn, a pottery shop surrounded by orderly rows of mud bricks drying in the sun. The private dwellings became more numerous, even pressed together, sharing walls, until Harry realized he had entered what these people would call a town, or village.

To the angel everything was intolerably filthy. The walls of the houses were constructed of baked mud; the street was made of the same: dry or wet dirt; even the people themselves, in Harry's opinion, were badly in need of a bath: their exposed flesh—and especially the feet—was caked with dust. To Harry even the air itself was filled with dust, making it a challenge for him to breathe.

Feeling perfectly miserable, and increasingly homesick for the purity of heaven, Harry continued on, passing down the road bordered by businesses and houses, until he came upon a shop surrounded by the pleasant aroma of freshly cut wood. Affixed to the outside wall was a hand-lettered sign that read 'Carpentry.' Harry peered inside the open window; planing a new table-

top, a middle-aged man stood working on a floor littered with the curled shavings created by his tool.

Harry heard a rasping sound coming from a narrow alleyway next to the building. Crouched on a bench was a teenage boy filing a narrow piece of wood, smoothing the rounded surface to become a leg for the table being finished by the older man inside.

What is it about him? Harry thought. *He looks familiar, but how can that be. I've never been here before.* But something drew

him closer to the boy. He stepped into the alley and moved toward him, mentally devising reasons he could use to explain his interest. Just then the boy heard Harry and looked up. Instantly his face broke into a broad smile, and the angel suddenly knew what it was that had drawn him.

"J—Jesus?" He said, not daring to imagine it was true.

"Harry!" The boy cried, leaping to his feet. "It's sure good to see you!"

His heart beating and his throat choked with emotion, Harry embraced Jesus, but then, remembering himself, quickly pulled away and bowed. "I—I'm sorry, God."

"Oh Harry," Jesus grinned, embracing him again, "I'm just so glad to see you again."

"I wasn't sure it was you," Harry said, suddenly aware of the odd sensation of touching flesh. He touched Jesus' arms, shoulders, gripped his hands. "So this is what it's like."

"How have you been, Harry?"

"I've missed you. We *all* miss you."

"I've missed you, too," Jesus said, picking up the table leg

“My living like them won't save them, Harry. But my dying like them will.”

on which he had been working. “But I’ve got a pretty good life here.”

“So,” Harry glanced around, “when will it begin?”

“What?”

“C’mon,” Harry said confidently, but leaned closer, in case Jesus didn’t want others to hear, “you’re the Messiah! You came down here to save these people. When will you be taking over?”

“Take...over?”

Once again Harry was confused—and it was an unpleasant sensation. Why did he always end up feeling like such a dunce around The Son? There was always such a vast gulf of understanding stretched between them—as if Jesus had already made it safely to shore, but he still floundered out in the waves.

“Am I missing something?” Harry said, betraying his frustration. “Isn’t that why you came down here in the first place? You said they needed a Savior!”

Jesus looked down, and Harry could feel the powerful wave of sadness emanating from him. “Oh, they sure do.”

“So when will it begin?” Harry said insistently.



“Come with me,” Jesus said, drawing Harry out from the alley and into the street. He led him down the street a ways, to where the houses stopped, then pointed toward a nearby hillside. “Harry, do you see that shepherd over there—the one surrounded by all his sheep?” Harry nodded, wondering what Jesus was getting at.

“Do you see how he keeps the flock close by, protecting the sheep from any predators.”

“Predators?”

“Wolves, jackals—they can come attack the sheep, kill them for food.”

“Hmm—yes, I see,” he nodded.

“Harry,” Jesus explained, “I’ve come as a good shepherd, to offer protection and life to my flock.”

“These people are up against some pretty stiff competition,” the angel snorted. “Caesar, the Roman army, Herod—don’t you think they could use a little more than a simple shepherd?”

“You’re right,” Jesus said, “and they *will* have more.”

“Well, I would think so.”

“Notice the small lamb in the arms of the shepherd,” Jesus said, pointing again. “See how quiet and gentle it is, so spotlessly pure?”

“Yes, I see it,” Harry sighed impatiently.

Jesus said quietly, “I’ve come as the Lamb of God—the sacrifice that will take away the sins of the world.” The angel could only stare at Jesus incredulously.

“Harry, these people need a Savior,” Jesus continued, “but not another king or warrior. They’ve already had that. I’m not here to save them from a power-hungry emperor, or an army, or a wicked king. I’m here to save them from themselves. Only God Himself will be a sufficient sacrifice to cover all that.”



Harry couldn’t believe his ears. “So, you gave up everything... only to...”

“I love these people, Harry. I came to experience what it’s like for them—what it’s like to live with a body that ages and dies, what it’s like to suffer loneliness and pain, to feel the pull of sin, to experience—as much as I can—what it is to be human.”

“And I’m sure you’ve already experienced all that. Isn’t it enough?”

Jesus turned to Harry, and again the angel could feel the powerful emotions of The Son pushing out from the small body of Jesus. “My living like them won’t save them, Harry. But my dying like them will.” He sighed and moved toward the hillside sprinkled with grazing sheep, as if he would like nothing better than to simply step away from his responsibilities. But then he stopped. “Later, when I’m an adult,” Jesus continued, “I’ll spend some time teaching and discipling a few followers. But most people won’t believe, and the religious leaders will conspire against me. They’ll work with the Romans to put me on trial.”

“Trial?” Harry squeaked.

“This isn’t heaven, Harry. They won’t easily believe who I am. They’ll find me guilty—”

“Guilty of *what*?” Harry cried, his voice rising.

“It doesn’t matter—it won’t to them. They’ll humiliate me, and put me to death with other criminals.”

“But *you’re* not a criminal!” Harry protested.

“I have to die, Harry. It’s necessary—for them.”

The thought of The Son being tortured and killed for these low, sinful beings filled Harry with anger and revulsion. How could they? How dare they kill the very one who had come to save them? Didn’t they realize it was He who had *created* the world? Created even *them*?

His gut ached, and his mind was gorged with anger at these people. But still—even through his powerful emotions—Harry understood that all this was, incredibly, part of God’s plan, and it was not his place to question. But his sadness for The Son was almost overwhelming. He reached toward his friend. “Jesus...”

“But it’s all right, Harry,” Jesus consoled him. “Don’t feel badly. It won’t be the end—but a new beginning!” He smiled. “I won’t stay in the grave. I’ll return to heaven. And because of it, these people will have a chance for life—*real* life with the Father!”

“How much longer will you be here?”

“In earthly terms, quite awhile,” Jesus said, placing his hand on Harry’s shoulder affectionately. “But in heavenly terms, no time at all.”

“Then we’ll look forward to that day,” Harry said bravely.

“As will I, my friend,” Jesus said, turning back toward his home, “as will I.”

Harry turned to leave, but then glanced back at Jesus, watching him return to his work at the carpentry shop. He would be returning to heaven still confused about the reason for Jesus to be here on earth. But he also understood that it really wasn’t important that he understand. More important was that the *people* understood, for they were the ones needing a Savior.

“THIS IS MY COMMANDMENT, THAT YOU LOVE ONE ANOTHER, JUST AS I HAVE LOVED YOU. GREATER LOVE HAS NO ONE THAN THIS, THAT ONE LAY DOWN HIS LIFE FOR HIS FRIENDS.”

JOHN 15:12-13