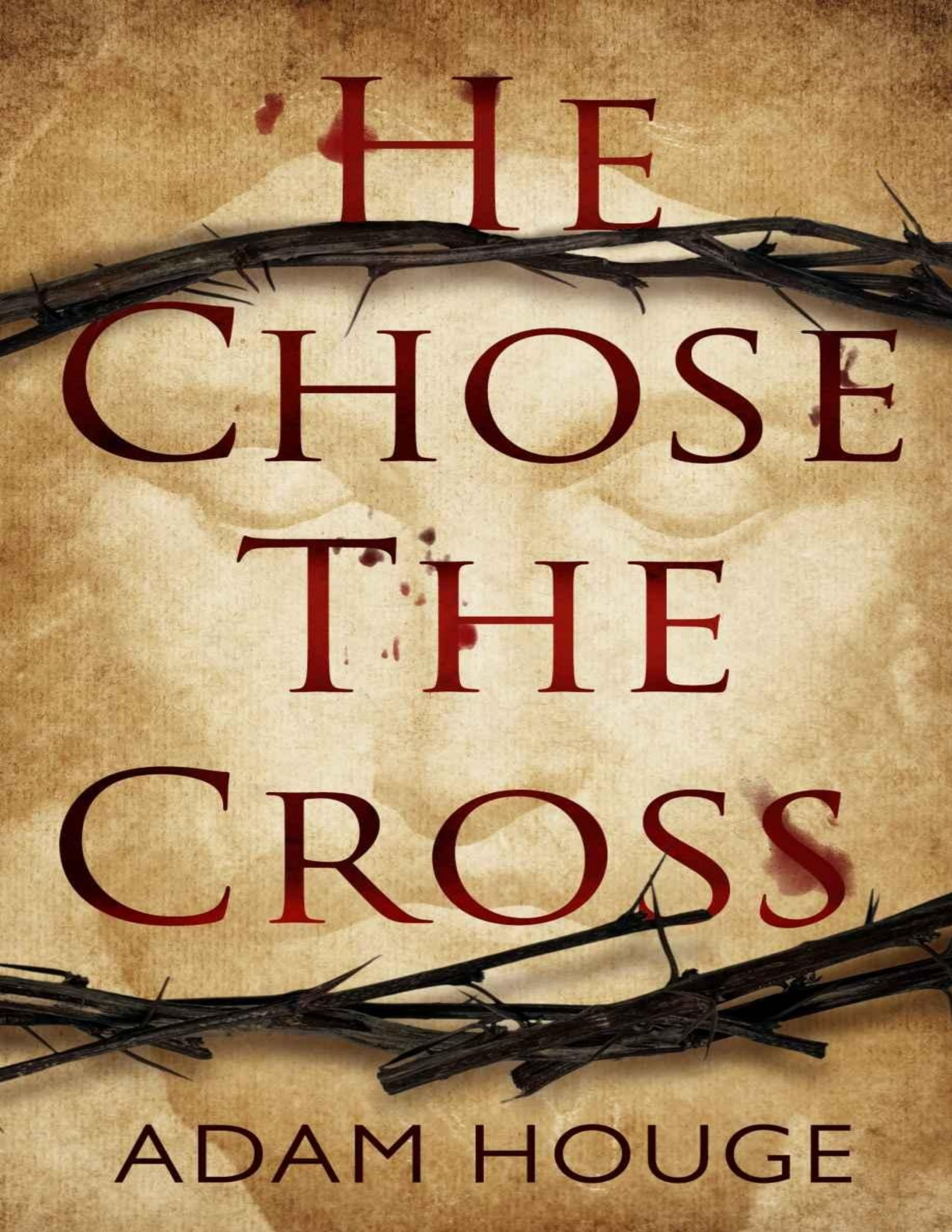

HE
CHOSE
THE
CROSS
ADAM HOUGE

He Chose The Cross™

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Encouraged By This?

Also By Adam Houge

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I’d Love To Hear From You

Note to the Reader

This short story is a fictional take on the gospel narrative, portraying it from Jesus' possible perspective as He suffered the last twelve hours of His life. This story is extracted from our doctrine but, due to its fictional nature, is not in any way to be construed as doctrine, a personal interpretation of doctrine, or an augmentation of doctrine. Rather, it was written to portray the heart of Jesus at Calvary. It is a suggestion of what may have been going on in His mind as He chose to lay down His life for you and me. It was written to reflect the reality of God's heart toward us, that we may better understand the nature of His love and humility in His suffering. That way, we can learn from His heart and suffer—lovingly and humbly—for Him in turn.

Chapter One
The Chosen Fate

Jesus remembered the time He walked through the crowd unscathed. Their hands gripped Him tightly. Their teeth gritted as they thrust Him toward the brow of the hill. But He loosed their hands and walked away free just before they pushed Him over the edge. Their murderous hearts had no hold on Him, for He is the living God. They gnashed their teeth and tried to lunge at Him, but their power was taken away from them. For it had not yet been His time.

But now He looked at His wrists, shackled in iron. The grip He had once shaken free now took hold of Him. The Pharisees had recently arrested Him in Gethsemane and He desired to be loosed, but He remembered His prayer: “Not as I will Father, but as You will.”

Jesus saw it all. His mind flashed forward to Peter in prison after the murder of James. Jesus saw Himself seated on high as He motioned to an angel to help Peter. The angel was sent to shake loose Peter’s bonds. Then Peter walked away a free man.

Jesus knew Peter wouldn’t be free if He chose His own life over the cross. A tear streaked down His cheek as His heart kindled with love at the thought of you. He clenched His fist as He thought of the bonds of everyone who would be set free by His sacrifice. “Not as I will, Father, but as You will,” He whispered again under His breath.

He felt a yank on the chain that held Him as a guard pulled Him to His feet. “The High priest will see you now,” said a deep-voiced man who compelled Jesus to follow.

Jesus was forced to stand before the high priest and the Sanhedrin to be judged. As He stood before the man who was arrayed in a gorgeous robe it reminded Him of His humble life. He flashed back to a sunny afternoon when all had seemed better than it was now.

***

Jesus smelled the fresh air as He walked along the path. The sense of peace brought a deep smile to His face.

He was walking with His disciples along a wilderness road. His feet were covered in dust, and the hair on His head was knotted and snarled from sleeping

in the rain the night prior. He didn't have a home, so He traveled light. He didn't own much more than the clothes on His back. He didn't even have an ounce of gold for a crown—a crown He deserved.

He didn't have a palace in which to rest His head. The grass in the field made a good bed; so did the forest floor a time or two. It was refreshing to be invited to someone's house, but that didn't always happen, and sometimes He just didn't have time. He didn't always know where He'd be in the winter, but He had peace because He knew the Father would work His circumstances altogether for good. He was a king who deserved a kingdom but looked like a beggar. Yet none of this mattered to Him because He had the peace of the Spirit and a mission to accomplish. And His mission was to captivate your heart.

***

"What do You have to answer for Yourself?!" Yelled the impatient priest, interrupting His pleasant memories.

Jesus brought Himself together with a sigh, then replied calmly, "I was always in the open, preaching and teaching. I spoke in the open squares. I taught in the Temple. I never hid anything, nor was anything done in secret. Everyone knows the things I teach. Why don't you ask them?"

His reply was met by a swift punch to the face, which caused Him to buckle at the knees and fall to the ground.

"How dare You answer the high priest like that!" said the assailant, as if a punch in the face were evidence that this priest, this supposed holy man, was worthy of respect.

The crowd further accused Him, but nothing seemed to make sense. Person after person looked for a reason to condemn Him in His innocence, but no one could find anything. Then, after searching long and hard, another accuser came up with an idea. "This fellow said that if we destroy the Temple, He will raise it up in three days! He's *mad!* He's out of his mind!" the accuser insisted.

"ENOUGH!" answered the high priest roughly. He narrowed his eyes at Jesus with a scowl on his face, "Just tell us plainly, are you the Christ or not?"

Jesus paused and sighed again. Then, looking up at the priest, He replied, "It is as you say, and hereafter you will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of Heaven with great glory and power."

The chamber echoed with the sounds of tearing fabric. Each man ripped his own

garment in vehement protest against Jesus. “What more do we need from Him?! He testifies against Himself!” yelled the crowd.

The high priest’s eyes narrowed at the guard. “You know where to take Him…”

Jesus felt a pull from His chain again, forcing Him to do an about-face as He was led out from the council.

Chapter Two
Innocent and in Control

“They’re at it again,” said a voice from the door. The man at the desk continued writing as if he didn’t hear.

“Sir,” the voice persisted. But the man continued to ignore it as he put the finishing touches on the letter and sealed it with his signet.

“Pilate, please—it’s urgent!” insisted the voice.

The man slammed his fist on the table. “What is it?! Haven’t I told you not to interrupt me while I’m in here?!”

“The Jews are here in great number and force, demanding to be seen by you.”

Pilate’s demeanor changed, “For what?” He asked, considerably more concerned.

“They have imprisoned a Man and want you to condemn Him.”

Pilate stroked his chin for a moment. Then after considering the facts he decided it wasn’t worth his attention after all. “This hardly sounds important. They can see me later,” he replied, waving the servant away.

By the servant refused, “I’d rather think that they would storm in here if I tried to turn them away.”

By this Pilate understood the urgency of the matter. He paused as if thinking to himself, then with a sigh he reluctantly pushed back his chair to rise to his feet.

“I’ll see them.”

***

The massive crowd roared with anger and accusations as soon as Pilate walked out. He motioned for them to be silent, but they didn’t listen. He motioned to the guards, who pushed back the crowd with force, using their spears. This seemed to quiet them.

“Why have you interrupted my fine afternoon, gentlemen?” Pilate asked testily as he sat down in his chair.

The high priest motioned to a guard, who then compelled Jesus to stand before the judgment seat.

Pilate turned to the servant who had met him earlier in the study then whispered, “All this for one Man?”

His servant shrugged.

“What is His crime?” Pilate called to the priest. But the crowd yelled back, and some answered with one thing and others answered with another. He motioned to his soldiers, who calmed the crowd again.

“If you cannot answer me in an orderly manner, then I will not see you today!” he said sternly.

Then the priest answered for the people. “This man claims to be the Messiah!”

His statement was met by a temporary silence.

“What is that to me?” Pilate finally responded.

“The Messiah is a king long foretold by Jewish prophecy, and we have no king but Caesar!”

Pilate stroked his chin for a moment as if in deep thought, then motioned to have Jesus brought to the back. Jesus was led by His chain into an inner room.

Coming up to Jesus, he asked, “Why have Your people handed You over to me?” But Jesus didn’t answer.

“Are You their King?” Pilate pressed.

“Is this question from your heart, or is this something they told you?” Jesus asked him.

“Am I a Jew? Your people handed You over to me, so what have You done?”

“My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, then My people would fight for Me so that I would not be delivered into this situation. But it is certain that My kingdom is not from here.”

“So You are a king then?” asked Pilate.

“It is as You say. For this reason I have been born, and for this reason I have come into the world: to testify to the truth; and those who know the truth will hear and understand My words.”

“What is truth, anyway?” Pilate mocked as he walked away.

Coming back to the crowd, Pilate shouted, “I find no fault in this Man, nor reason for Him to be crucified!” But the crowd roared in protest against him.

After silencing them he continued, “What, then, shall I do with this Man?”

“Have Him crucified!” they persisted.

“Why? What has He done?!”

“He stirs the people into a rebellion, beginning from Galilee to here!” they cried.

Then, when Pilate understood that Jesus was from Galilee, he determined to send Him to Herod, for that was Herod’s jurisdiction. So Jesus was led away from the presence of Pilate, and the crowds followed Him.

Chapter Three

The Humbled King Is Higher

Herod was delighted when he heard that Jesus was coming. He had heard of Jesus' miracles and had hoped to see them. Although the crowd had come, only a few of the council members could stand before Herod's presence, for the room did not permit a crowd.

Then, before Jesus was led into Herod's chamber, a guard stopped the group. Looking down at Jesus' feet, he growled in low voice, "This Man cannot come in here with filthy feet like this. This is Herod's chamber!"

"Sir," said a member of the council, "He deserves no respect."

"But Herod does, and this is his chamber! Have this Man's feet washed." And the guard motioned to a slave, who had a garment around his waist only, to prepare Jesus. As Jesus watched him clean His feet, it reminded Him of the Passover He had just celebrated with the disciples.

***

"Everyone sit down, please," Jesus said to the twelve.

Then He took off His robe and wrapped a towel around His waist like a slave. He took a bowl of water, then stooped down to wash the disciples' feet. As He came to Peter, Peter resisted Him. "Look, it is I who should wash Your feet—You're the Lord!"

But Jesus replied gently, "Let it be so for now, and it will make sense to you later."

"No, my Lord!" Peter insisted.

"If I do not wash your feet, then you will have no part with Me, for I have come to serve you and cleanse you of your sin." Jesus explained.

"Well, then, wash my hands and head as well!" Peter said, trying to be zealous. But Jesus replied with a gentle half-smile at first then responded,

"Those who have taken a bath have no need of cleansing. But those who walk along dirt roads in sandals may have dirt cover their feet from time to time. Even so, I will wash your feet so that your walk may be clean before Me."

Then, as He finished serving them, He told the twelve, "I am the Lord and have

not come to be served but to serve you. How much more should you, My servants, be found serving one another and loving one another, even as I have done for you? Deliver each other from your needs and meet them as I would do for you, and serve with love. And as I have washed your feet, help your brethren walk clean before Me, washing them with the water of My word."

***

The servant finished with Jesus, and He was led into the chamber to stand before Herod. With great delight, Herod exclaimed, "Look! It's Jesus!"

Then he clapped his hands with joy as he stepped down from his throne to approach the Man. "I have heard that You can do mighty things!" Herod exclaimed jovially.

But this made the Jews indignant. "Herod, we have come here because of His crimes!"

"Shhh!" Herod said to quiet them.

"Please, Jesus, will you show me something? I am quite excited to see You!"

But the Lord paid him no attention and didn't reply.

Then the Pharisees accused Him, vehemently demanding that He deserved death. Herod, knowing that Jesus didn't deserve death, took pleasure in mocking Him and arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe instead. Then Herod sent Him back to Pilate. From that moment forward, Pilate and Herod became friends, for they had previously been at odds with one another.

***

Pilate had summoned the people, hoping now to release Jesus.

"You have brought this Man to me as One who misguides your people. I have examined Him concerning everything you accused Him of, after which I found no fault in this Man. Neither has Herod: I sent you to him, and he found nothing deserving of death in this Man! Seeing that neither I nor Herod has found anything wrong in Him, I will therefore have Him released."

But this caused an uproar among the people. "Away with this Man! We will not have Him!" they cried out.

"What shall I do with Him?"

"Have Him crucified!" they shouted back.

“No!” Pilate resisted.

Then hoping to appease the crowd and save Jesus’ life, he decided to have Him scourged. “I will not crucify Him, but I will teach Him a lesson. Then He will be safe to release to you!” Pilate motioned to have Jesus led away.

As they brought Jesus to the back room for punishment, they unshackled His hands to strip Him down. They removed the cloak Herod had put on Him and stripped Him naked. Then, when the soldier stooped down to loose His sandal, Jesus remembered John the Baptist.

***

It was a hot summer day as He walked along the stony ground. He had heard that John was baptizing in the Jordan and He was going to meet him there. Coming over the hill, He saw John in the distance. Multitudes thronged around him, begging to be baptized by the man. Jesus smiled at the sight of it.

John was walking out of the river as he spoke to the people. “He who comes after me is mightier than I! Him you shall follow, and Him I proclaim: Make way for the Lord and make His paths straight!”

One man came to him at the edge of the river and urgently begged John to baptize him.

“What shall I do?” the man asked.

“Well, first of all, you’ll need to take off your sandals!” John said with a little humor.

As the man acted quickly to remove them John said, “Let me serve you. I’ll help you with that.” Then he stooped down to unloose a sandal. As he did so, he continued informing the man, “What you need to do is confess your sins to the Lord. Consider them for a moment and recount them. Then, with remorse in your heart, repent of them and be converted to follow the Lord. Seek a relationship with Him, and He will wash you clean, baptize you with fire and the Holy Spirit, and give you redemption.”

Then as he was untying this man’s sandals, he saw the feet of another man step before him.

This newcomer asked John kindly, “Will you baptize me as well?”

“Yes, I will, only wait until I’m finished, and I’ll help you.” Then after he had finished he turned to this man’s sandals, not having looked up, and went to untie

them. But he felt horribly convicted not even to touch the man's feet. Then looking up, he realized it was Jesus.

"MY LORD AND MY GOD!" John reeled with excitement. "Who am I that I should remove Your sandals?! I'm not worthy to unloose them, nor even to baptize You! I should be baptized by You!"

Then Jesus removed His own sandals with a smile and said, "Baptize Me for now, that all things may be fulfilled." And John felt humbled that he could partake in fulfilling Jesus' life and ministry.

***

The soldier loosed Jesus' sandals and threw them to the side without respect. Then the two tormentors assigned to Jesus pushed Him forward and led Him to the scourging post. It was a wooden pole with a metal ring on top for holding the victim in place. The torturers bent Him over to prepare Him for the scourging and then tied His hands to the ring above His head. They shackled His wrists so that He couldn't move and bound Him in place. Then the tempter, which is the devil, came.

"Why do You allow these people to do this to You? Are You not God, the Son of God? Can You not snap Your fingers and cause all of these accusers and sinners to return to dust? What are You thinking?! Just overtake them by force and seize the crown You deserve! Force them to kneel and respect You—are You not the Lord?"

But Jesus replied under His breath., "I will not stop this. I do this because I love them! And without My blood, no one will be saved. I choose to be wounded for their transgressions; I will be bruised for their iniquities. The chastisement of their peace will be upon *Me*, and by My stripes they *will* be healed!"

Then the devil left, waiting for a more opportune time.

Meanwhile, the two torturers were examining their instruments on the table. They picked up a long scourging tool, about two feet in length with long leather cords that served as whips. Attached to the ends of the whips were jagged pieces of metal, bone, glass, and wire. The Romans were known to take pride in their perfection of the scourging process. Many other nations had used it, but Rome had perfected it like a work of art. These punishments inflicted the most pain possible by ripping the flesh little by little off their victim. They would bring a person as close to death as possible through pain without actually killing them. It is likely that the Roman method of scourging was the worst kind of pain any

human being could suffer -even to this day.

One of the torturers laughed as he swung the weapon around in the air, trying it out before using it. The torturers were usually sadistic with the punishment, having fun and taking joy in tearing their victims to shreds. And these wicked men seemed to love their job a little more than they should have.

As they approached Jesus, He trembled in fear of the first blow. His body went rigid with terror as the muscles in His stomach knotted up, and His face went white as his lips stretched thin across His teeth.

Then He prayed, while He shook in terror, “Not My will, Father, but Yours.”

Tears were streaming down His face as He waited in anticipation. Every victim feared the scourging; there was nothing as terrible as experiencing it.

“O Father, not My will but Yours! Not My will, Father, but Yours be done!” He fumbled in His prayers, trembling as they approached. Then the torturer swung.

The first blow was dealt, and the random, jagged pieces sank deep into His back. The man pulled back on the whip, tearing out small pieces of flesh and blood with it. Jesus shrieked in His agony as the men continued to beat Him, again and again, laughing all the while. The whips struck His back but stretched so far that it tore at His face and chest. They continued beating Him like this, ripping Jesus apart while He cried in agony. When they finished, they turned Him over to tear up His front side as well.

By this, His image was marred more than any man’s. His face was no longer recognizable because He had been beaten beyond comprehension. Afterward He was loosed from the scourging post, but He didn’t move because He had passed out from the pain and loss of blood.

The men forced Him to His feet and brought Him to the Praetorium, where the solders twisted a crown of thorns and then pressed it into His scalp. The searing pain made Jesus shriek again in His torment. Then they forced Him to stand so that they could mock Him. As the blood streamed down His face from His forehead, it dripped on His feet, and He was reminded of a moment better than this one.

***

He was in Simon the leper’s house, talking to His disciples, when He felt the oil dripping on His feet. Looking down, He saw Mary crying over Him, having anointed Him for burial. She was washing His feet with her tears and drying

them with her hair.

“O Lord, I have nothing to offer you but my humility. Thank you, Jesus, for what You’re choosing to do!” she said as she sobbed uncontrollably, worshipping Him.

He had received more respect then, but now He was mocked for our sakes—that we may be convicted by His love to repent and be saved.

***

Jesus was awakened from His memory with a strike to the face. The men began to hit Him as they mocked Him. Then one man found a staff and beat Jesus over the head with it, crushing the thorns deeper into His scalp. He fainted from the pain, but the solders continued beating Him on the ground. Afterward Jesus lay there in a helpless heap, but they lifted Him to His feet so they could continue mocking Him.

“All hail the King of the worms!” they exclaimed in their laughter. Then they bent their knees and stooped before Him.

Afterward Jesus was given back His robe from Herod and was brought before Pilate to be presented to the people.

***

Pilate was astonished at His appearance.

“I told you to teach Him a lesson, not beat Him to death!” Pilate scolded. But the men were speechless.

Then he turned to present Jesus to the crowd.

“Behold your King!” Pilate exclaimed.

Jesus stood before them, bloodied, bruised, swollen, and looking humiliated.

“Crucify Him!” the crowd shouted, shaking their fists at Jesus.

“I will not crucify Him. He has been chastised!” Pilate responded. Then hoping to set Him free he continued, “I always release someone to you at this time, and whom would you rather I release: Barabbas, the murderous, thieving rebel, or Jesus, whom you call King?”

He gave them this choice hoping they would choose the innocent over the guilty.

“He is not our King! We have no King but Caesar! Release Barabbas to us!”

This astonished Pilate because they had handed Jesus over claiming that He was stirring up a rebellion. But the rebellion of Barabbas was truly dangerous. By this he knew for certain that they had handed Jesus over because of envy. But the crowd continued to roar as Jesus looked on.

Chapter Four

His Majesty, the God of Heaven

Jesus flashed back again—back so far that His memories trailed to before His birth, just before He came down to earth.

He was seated on Heaven's throne and covered in glory while angels stood before Him. Some of the angels of God were discussing the sanctification of man amongst themselves as they looked down at the earth.

"When do you think the redemption will come?" one angel asked.

"Everything is always in His Majesty's timing," another replied.

"It's awe-striking, really…"

"What is?" a third responded.

"Well, that His Majesty, the only Potentate, the Lord of lords and King of all kings, would choose to humble Himself and step down from His throne of glory to love these sons of men who sin against Him. Certainly no man would love his enemies, but He cherishes them."

God watched as they spoke; then, looking intently at one of the angels, He called out with a voice like the rushing of mighty waters: "Gabriel, I have a message for you to carry!"

Then angel hastened to stand before the Lord.

"Yes, Your Majesty! Here I am, Your servant at Your service, my Lord the King!" Gabriel replied as He paid homage to God. God bent over and began whispering in his ear.

"My Lord! Now?!" Gabriel exclaimed.

"Yes," God replied for all to hear, "and the woman I told you about, the one who has found favor in My eyes, is named Mary. Go and carry this message to her swiftly. For this must take place at the appointed time, and that time draws near."

"Yes, Lord!" Gabriel replied abruptly, as he sped down toward earth as fast as lighting streaks across the sky.

Then the other angels stood looking at God inquisitively. "My Lord, is it time?" they asked.

“Yes, I have sent him at this hour to give a message to a young woman named Mary. For she has found favor in My eyes.”

“What message, My Lord?”

“I am going now to give the sons of men hope, and I have appointed her to bear My body in her womb.”

By this time, many more angels had gathered around His throne, having heard the conversation.

“I will go, and My blood shall cleanse them. By this I will bring many sons to glory, and they will dwell with Me always, even as you do,” He continued.

“And I shall fulfill what I promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, along with Moses and all the prophets. Yes, soon I will usher in a period of grace and bring forth the redemption of man.”

Then all the angels of heaven came and stood before Him, for they had heard what He said regarding Gabriel’s message to Mary and the redemption of man. Their multitude was beyond number as they filled the sky farther than the eye could see. Then they all bowed before the Lord, and with one voice they worshipped Him with a new song and proclaimed, “Worthy is the Lamb Who is to be slain! And worthy are You, O God, Who sits on Heaven’s throne and reigns forever and ever! For You alone shall save Your people, the sons of men, and redeem them by Your blood. Might and honor, dominion and glory, and power belong to You and You alone! For in all that You are, and in everything You do, You prove that Your love is better than life!” And the thunder of their worship filled all of Heaven while Jesus sat in glory on His throne.

***

“CRUCIFY HIM!” yelled the crowd, awakening Jesus from His memory.

“Why can’t you see to this yourself?” Pilate responded, continuing to resist them.

“Because we can’t kill Him!”

“Why should He die?”

“Because He makes Himself out to be the Son of God, which is blasphemy, and according to our law He is required to die!”

This saying made Pilate fear. With a bit of nervousness, he turned on his seat and asked Jesus quietly, “Where did You say You’re from again?”

But Jesus didn’t answer.

“Don’t you understand that I have the power to have You killed or to set You free? Why won’t You talk to me?!” Pilate asked, marveling.

Then Jesus replied through a swollen bruised face, “No authority has been given to you over Me except from My Father’s authority in heaven.” And with that statement, Pilate trembled.

“I find no fault in this Man!” Pilate cried out nervously to the crowd. “You see to it according to your traditions!”

But the crowd cried out all the more: “It’s not lawful for us to put a man to death! Crucify Him!”

“You want me to crucify your King?!”

“We have no king but Caesar, and if you don’t kill Him, then you’re no friend of Caesar’s!” they rebutted.

Pilate feared killing Jesus in His innocence, but he feared the crowd more, lest there be an uproar and a rebellion. So he released Barabbas and ordered a cleansing bowl with water to be brought to him. Then his servants poured water over his hands as he washed them before the crowd.

“I have nothing to do with this innocent Man! You see to it!” Pilate exclaimed. And Jesus was led away to Golgotha, which is Calvary.

Chapter Five
He Chose the Cross

The Romans took Jesus' robe by the hem of the garment. Then they ripped it off of Him, tearing open His wounds again. For by this time, some of the smaller wounds were already forming scabs, which had mingled with the fabric.

Then they took a newly-made cross and laid it on His shoulders. The burden of His cross was heavy. The pain from the scourging made it even harder to bear. As He dragged it along, He prayed, "Father, forgive them. They would compel me to go a mile, but I will go with them for two."

He was forced to follow these men to the place of His death, and it reminded Him of those who followed Him. Then He flashed back to a sermon He gave.

***

As He walked along the road, crowds followed Him and pressed all around Him. Then, yearning in His heart for them, He turned around and taught them:

"I see that you're following Me! If anyone desires to follow Me, let him deny himself and his own life. Let him lay aside his ambitions in order to live for My Father's will. If you desire to follow Me, then take up your cross for Me as I will take up Mine for you. If anyone loves his life, he will lose it. But if you lose your life for My sake, then you will gain it! What does it profit if a man should gain the whole world only to lose his soul in the process? If anyone follows Me, let him carry his cross and not be ashamed of Me. For those who are ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of when He comes with the angels of heaven in all His glory. He who confesses Me, I will confess before the angels of God. He who denies Me I will deny before the angels of God.

"Let not any man put anything before Me! For he who seeks to gain his life will lose it. If your family and friends reject Me, they will reject you also. If you deny Me to please them, I will deny you. He who loves father, mother, son, or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. For if anyone comes to Me and does not reject his father, mother, wife, children, brothers, and sisters— yes, even his own life—he cannot be My disciple! For whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple!

"Which of you intending to build a tower doesn't sit down to count the cost first to see whether he can finish it or not—lest, when you have laid the foundation,

all should mock you because you can't finish what you began. Even so, I call you this day to count the cost of loving Me! Lay down your life and your own heart. Remember that you're on a pilgrimage! Let go of your ambitions, take up your cross, and follow Me. For this is love, that a man should lay down His life for another. Even as the Son of Man will do for you because I love you, so I call you to do for Me."

***

The cross jarred as it hit a stone along the road. The wood pressed into His wounds along His back, forcing Him down from the pain. The weight of the structure caused His knees to buckle as He fell along the road. The soldier tried to get Him back on His feet, but He couldn't bear the burden any longer. So they compelled a man named Simon, the son of Alexander, to help Him. Simon heaved the weight of the cross on his shoulder and then continued to drag it. As they walked along the road, he looked at Jesus and whispered, "It's almost over. You're almost there…"

Jesus turned and replied through His swollen, bruised face, "As you bear this burden for Me, bear the burdens of your brothers and so fulfill My love. If any man has need, then fill it. If any man needs to be washed in My word, then do it. Help a sinner out of the fire and help any of your brethren who are feeble in their spiritual knees to walk. If they're caught up in a sin, help them overcome it and do not condemn them, even as I do not. For this purpose I came, and for this purpose I'm being crucified. Remember My love for you; be perfected in it; and go love others with the same."

Chapter Six

Embracing an End

Coming to the brow of Calvary, Simon dropped the cross, and the soldiers forced him to leave. There was another man screaming as the executioner pounded his nails in place. The second wasn't yet on his cross, and he attempted to flee. A soldier caught him and laughed.

"They always try to run away!" one he said, "And to where will they go?!" They jested amongst themselves.

Jesus looked up at the man who was flailing in his pain as he was being nailed into place. Then He looked down at His cross and swallowed hard at first. Then remembering His work He comforted Himself with the words, "It's almost finished…"

The soldiers finished crucifying the second man and approached Jesus.

Just when they expected Him to run away, He lay down next to the cross and held it while He prayed, "Father, I glorify You now in this hour, that by this You would redeem all those I love and all those who have loved Me…"

Then a soldier blurted out, "HE'S EMBRACING HIS CROSS!" Still expecting Him to run, the executioner approached Him with caution. But Jesus laid down on the cross, then stretched His hands and feet out to freely offer Himself.

This confused the executioner.

Then He prayed again, "Thank you, Father, that it was in Your will to redeem these. Please, Father, convict them through My cross! I do this freely to love them. Now may they freely love Me, offering themselves to Me, that they may be saved and You glorified!"

With that the executioner positioned a nail on His hand and pierced Him with it. Jesus shrieked with every hammer strike as they pounded the spikes deeper into His flesh and through the wood. As the executioner continued to His feet, the pain was so unbearable that He would have begged the Father for mercy, but He knew He wouldn't find any for our sakes. And they set Him up on His cross and nailed this accusation above Him: "This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." But this saying deeply disturbed the Jews.

***

Pilate was writing again when the Pharisees came in.

“Sir, you can’t say that He was the king of the Jews, but that He called Himself the king of the Jews!” the group protested.

But Pilate ignored them.

“Sir. You can’t write this…”

“What I wrote, I wrote,” he said sternly, cutting them off. “Now leave my study.” Then he continued writing as he waved them out.

“But He is not our King!”

“If He were not your King…” Pilate started sharply, “then He would not be a threat to Caesar. If that were the case, then Roman law would forbid me from executing him. Therefore, He is your King! Should we now undo what we have done?”

Then Pilate motioned to His guards, who forced the Pharisees to leave.

***

The Pharisees came back in a rage and mocked Jesus: “If you are the Son of God, then come off of that cross! We will worship you and hail you as king!” The devil had enticed their hearts as well as the hearts of the two who were crucified next to Him.

“Come down from your cross if You are the Messiah!” the two thieves jeered.

Then the devil tempted Jesus, saying, “Are You really going to sit there and let them do this? I know what You should do: You should come down from Your cross and force them to kneel before You. They said they would bow before You! Why should You die for these miserable sinners? Jump off Your cross and prove to them that You are Lord!”

“The Lord rebuke you, Satan! As if all My other works were not enough for them to believe that I Am? But I will fulfill the will of my Father and love even these.”

“Are You seriously going to let these people kill You?! Look at how wicked they are! You would die to love them?!”

“Yes. That they may live in Me.”

“Have You lost Your mind?! Who dies for his enemy? WHO?! You should kill your enemies, NOT SAVE THEM!” the devil insisted.

“Then, obviously, neither you nor they have known a love like Mine! I give Myself freely. For I know I could jump off. But I’m choosing to go to the place of death, and the Spirit of my Father shall restore Me. Even so, I will ransom these men and call many sons to glory.”

And with that the devil left in a rage, knowing he was defeated.

Then Jesus cried out loud in prayer for His mockers: “Father! Forgive these men, for they know not what they do!” With this saying, the thief on the cross next to Him was heavily convicted, but the other kept mocking Him.

“Jump off! Show us You are Lord!”

“Be silent!” said the convicted thief. “Do you not even fear God? We deserve our punishment, but this Man has done nothing wrong, and here we sit mocking Him.”

Then he turned to Jesus. “Forgive me, Lord, I’m sorry. Please remember me when You come in Your kingdom.”

Jesus’ heart swelled with love for the man. “I tell you the truth,” He began through a bloodied, swollen mouth, “today you will be with Me in paradise!”

Jesus continued to hang until He lost all strength. Every breath was a struggle, and fluid was filling His lungs. Just for a single gulp of air, He had to force His feet against the nails and heave to arch His back so He could breathe. But the process became tiring as the nails slowly tortured Him to death.

Then a darkness fell over the land. For the Light of the world was about to depart it.

“My God! My God! Why have you forsaken Me?” Jesus cried out. This He said, not because of His being forsaken, but to turn the onlookers to Psalm 22, which prophesied about Him.

But they were confused and wondered if He cried out for Elijah to remove Him from the cross. Because they believed He was the Messiah but rejected Him due to envy, they waited in anticipation to see if Elijah would come.

“I thirst,” He said. Then a solder dipped a sponge in vinegar and offered it to Jesus. He wet His tongue on it and recoiled in disgust. When He thirsted, the world offered Him gall to drink. Yet He so loved the world that He offered His life to save mankind.

“Let us see if the Elijah will now come,” they said to one another after giving

him the drink. But Jesus' breath was becoming shallower as His life slipped away. Then with one last effort, He forced His feet against the nails to arch His back for air. While quivering from the pain, He breathed for one final word "It is finished! Father, receive My Spirit!"

With that, He died.

Then the foundations of the earth shook. The ground trembled mightily as the Spirit of the Lord was released from His Majesty. This knocked the soldiers and all who stood around to their knees. All the region trembled as well as Jerusalem.

The pillars in the temple that held the veil rocked back and forth. For God knew that He would shake the world in this very hour; so since the days of Moses, He had commanded that the curtain be draped not from top to bottom but from side to side. Then, as the pillars shook, they tore apart the veil, revealing the most holy place. For Jesus died and opened up the way to the most sacred places of God's heart.

Chapter Seven

Understanding Our Lord's Heart

There is no greater story told then the story of God's love. At any moment Jesus could have jumped off of His cross. He knew that Judas was coming while He waited in the garden, and He could have hidden Himself. He was aware of everything that was happening to Him and of everything He would suffer.

For this reason He came into the world, and for this reason He was born: to be condemned, that you would have life. Jesus chose the cross. Not for His own glory after He resurrected. Before He came down, He was the Lord reigning on Heaven's throne. Remember that He is and *was* and is to come. Even so, our Lord is risen, *was* crucified, and is coming to draw us to His side.

And that's exactly what He hoped to gain in dying for you! We read that He endured the cross for the joy set before Him. If He was Lord before, is Lord now, and always will be Lord, then surely being Lord again after the cross wasn't the fullness of His joy. For these things were already His, and who rejoices in suffering to get what already belongs to him?

Yet consider that, although we think of heaven as a perfect place with endless joy, God didn't consider heaven to be perfect without *you*. His heart has yearned for you since creation—and much more now, in this time.

You see, Jesus wasn't crucified to receive back what already belonged to Him. No, Beloved, but *you* were the joy set before Him. Heaven wasn't a perfect place of joy for Him without you, and He has shown you by His sacrifice that He would rather be hated, mocked, beaten, scourged nearly to death, betrayed by His friends, rejected by His nation, spit on, punched in the face, and murdered on a cross than spend another moment in eternity without you! You have meant so much to Him! He has loved you so much!

Have you considered today how loved you are by God? Remember that Jesus led a sinless life. How did He do it? He said that love fulfills the Law. And how did He proclaim it? He stated that the two greatest commandments were to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself. Now, when we hear this, we think, "Yes, we should apply these things as our Lord has told us." But aren't you catching the other thing Jesus was saying?

Remember that He led a sinless life and that He is God. Jesus was saying, "I was

sinless because I love the Lord God with all My heart, soul, mind, and strength, and you as Myself." But Jesus *is* God! God loves you as much as He loves God! With all His heart, soul, mind, and strength, God loves you!

We are required to love God above all others. If a gun were placed to our brother's head and we were told, "Reject God, or your brother will die!" we are called to deny our brother and embrace Christ. But this isn't what God did for you. Jesus didn't have you killed to embrace Himself as you are commanded to do. Rather, God rejected His own life to embrace *you*.

No one else in heaven or on earth could ever love you as much as He does—no one! But is this all that hard to believe? That God loves you as much as God, with all His heart, soul, mind, and strength? Remember first that a relationship with Him is like a marriage, and even so we are called to put our spouse above all. This is what God does for you, calling you to put Him above all, even as He has put you above all. But that you are loved as much as God by God is evident. For as Jesus said when He prayed,

"'I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and <u>that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me</u>.

"'Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, <u>that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them</u>.'" John 17:20–26

God has loved you as much as He loves His own Son, Jesus! Jesus is God! Yes, Jesus loved the Father more in that He obeyed the Father's will and not ours. But God loves you as much as He loves Jesus! Who can even begin to comprehend that kind of love? How special you are, but how amazing He is!

God chose His cross. He didn't have to bear it, but He chose it to love you. Have you been choosing your cross for Him lately? Judge for yourself and ask yourself with a sincere heart if there is anything you haven't been surrendering to Him. Are you letting Him guide your life? Are you letting Him work through

you, or are you trying to do God’s work of yourself? Are you seeking out your own good or God’s best? Are you deciding what path to take? How are you letting God decide for you? Remember that He has a plan for you, and you should submit to it. If you don’t know what God’s daily plan is for you, then it’s likely that you’re not being led by His Spirit.

Consider this and turn to His Holy Spirit for direction. Let Him guide your steps in life, that you may know without a doubt that you are pleasing God in all your steps. Be willing to carry your cross for Him. Remember that we are on a pilgrimage, and life is not about this present life or this present world. For all these things we see shall be dissolved, with the sky and earth being on fire. God has determined an end to this age; and knowing this, what manner of people ought we to be? Even as it is written,

“But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.” 2 Peter 3:10–13

Conduct yourself in godliness and remember His love for you. Be convicted by it and approach Him with the same love—a love that dies to self to love another. Has not our Lord been resurrected from the dead? Even so, God will resurrect you to a better life. Yes, even in this life, when you suffer, God will raise you from the ashes of pain and deliver you from every form of evil that comes your way. Simply be good to surrender your will to Him. Submit to His will and let Him not only govern over you but also guide your life.

Don’t live for a good life in this world, being distracted by the continual entertainment of the flesh. Instead, occupy yourself with the things of grace and meditate on the Holy Spirit always. For in what manner has the Holy Spirit ever led a man astray? Yet the more obedient we are to Him, the more we will be justified. Remember that His first fruit is love and that love fulfills the law. Therefore, fulfill the love of Christ by faith through the leading of the Holy Spirit.

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Adam is a preacher, teacher and #1 internationally bestselling author of over 60 books on the Christian faith. He is a devoted husband and father of 3 boys. Through His travels he’s seen the need for a new awakening and a new revival: A revival of the heart. Come join Adam on this journey of redemption and experience God like never before!

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