

# THE STORY OF JESUS THE NAZARENE

(over 1 million copies of this material [originally in booklet form] have been printed)

For thirty years the high and mighty didn't take any notice of him. "Jesus, who?" would have been the common question if anybody had asked. But few people did. His father was a simple carpenter. His mother, a homemaker, had much work with his brothers and sisters. He never traveled more than 150 miles from his birthplace. He never attended college. He had almost nothing he could call his own.

Nevertheless his life was a watershed. Many of his contemporaries admired him ardently. Others hated him profoundly. The leaders of his time envied him. But all of this didn't seem to impress him. He showed love to everyone, even his enemies. But they made shocking accusations against him. In an unfair trial they sentenced him to death. Finally he died on a cross, despised and deserted.

Three days later he rose to new life. Hundreds met him. Thousands were changed by him. During the centuries, millions have given their lives for him and his cause. Even today, 2000 years later, his name is on innumerable lips. His name is "Jesus the Nazarene", called such after the little town of Nazareth in Israel where he lived most of his life.

Who is this Jesus Christ? Why is he so unique? What are his goals? And what can he mean for you? These are questions that will be answered in the following material. Eyewitnesses will report about him. What they have experienced could well provide the greatest challenge of your life.

Get an easy to understand version of the Bible and look up the following passages of Scripture:

1 John 1:1-3; Luke 2:1-7; John 1:4-5.9-14; Luke 2:8-20; Matthew 2:1-15a, Matthew 19-23; Luke 2:41-52; Luke 3:1-6; John 1:15-4:54; Luke 6:12-19; Matthew 5-7; John 5:1-6:71; Luke 9:28-36, 57-62; Luke 10:1-37; John 7:1-11:57; Luke 14:15-35, Luke 18:15-17, Luke 15:10b-32; John 12:1-50; Matthew 11:28-30; Matthew 24:1-25:46; John 13:1-19:27; Luke 23:39-43; John 19:28-21:24; Acts 1:3-15a; Acts 2:1-47.

The sermon by Peter made one thing clear: Jesus is different. He is more than just a nice fellow with a decent philosophy on how to live with your neighbors. His demands are so high that no one is able to fulfill them alone. Some people were so angry when they heard such words that they began persecuting Jesus' followers.

One of these persecutors was Paul, an intellectual leader and part of the day's religious establishment. He said later, "I used to believe that I ought to do many horrible things to the followers of Jesus the Nazarene. I imprisoned many of them, and when they were condemned to death, I cast my vote against them." But then Paul met Jesus! In an instant his whole life was changed. He realized there was nothing more important than to tell the story of Jesus the Nazarene to everybody.

Why? Because Jesus did not just interpret the world in a different way. He has changed it! And he can change your life and your world, too. But he wants to change you from the inside out.

Do you remember Nicodemus, the religious leader who came to Jesus one night? To him Jesus said, "you must be born again." This is necessary because no one is born and raised in a neutral sphere. Every person is separated from God and Jesus Christ by open rebellion or indifference. That does not necessarily mean you are a thief, a murderer, an immoral person or a person of outward evil. You may actually be highly respected and considerate. But that does not change the major problem of your life, your separation from God.

The good news is, God loves you. That's the reason Jesus came. He did not have to emphasize to people that they were lonely and lost, depressed and destitute. Most people know that anyway. Jesus the Nazarene came to explain one important truth,

God is your friend. He loves you, and he has opened the way for you to experience his love and friendship.

How can you experience God's love and friendship? In three very simple steps,

(1) Write down all you can think of in your life that may be contrary to God's expectations. Keep in mind that living without his friendship and love is what hurts God most. All other things are by-products of this separation from him.

(2) Speak to God in prayer. Tell him what you have written down, and ask him to come into your heart and be your friend. If you don't know what to say you can use the following words: "Lord Jesus Christ, there are many things out of order in my life (you may name specific things). Most of all I have tried to run my life on my own and have lived without your love and friendship. I ask your forgiveness. Please, come into my heart now and be my savior and friend. I want to live with you, now and forever. Thank you so much that you are now my friend. Amen."

(3) You will probably not see Jesus or hear an audible voice, but he knows whether you really mean what you say. He has listened to your words, and he promises, "Those who come to me I will never, never reject." Now take your sheet of paper you have written and add on top of it, "The death of Jesus on the cross cleanses me from every wrong." And then destroy it, because God has destroyed the separation and has accepted you into his friendship and love.

This is the beginning of your friendship with Jesus. In the future you will experience wonderful things with him. Today is the birth of your new life with Jesus. And he has granted you specific presents for this special birthday. Among them are,

- his word, the Bible, and with it a solid foundation,
- his fellowship, the Holy Spirit, and with this a significant future,
- his family, the Church, and with it a set of friends.

These presents are yours to be used. You will hear more about these presents in the next section, "The Way of Jesus the Nazarene."

Remember to ask God in prayer to help you understand what you read and try to answer the following questions:

- Does this text say anything for which I can thank God?
- Does this text show me any place where I need to change my life?
- Does this text suggest anything for which I should ask God's help?

You will be astonished about the changes God will begin in your personal life and in your neighborhood. Some people may not like that. Some may even look down on you or work against you. Sometimes your life will be difficult. You will have to face problems and new challenges. But there will be one major difference, you will not need to face them alone. Jesus Christ will be with you and help you. He knows what you need. Always remember, he has lived on this earth and can sympathize with your problems. Just talk to him in prayer. He has promised that he will hear and help you. He is your friend indeed, and he loves you.

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