

THE STORY OF THE CROSS

Don Randolph

FREE AT LAST

I SAW A WORD CARVED IN A TREE
IT SAID REPENT I HAVE SET YOU FREE.
GAZING CLOSER I CLEARLY SAW
THE LIVING WORD CLOTHED IN AWE.

I FELL DOWN FAST UPON MY KNEES
AS ROYAL BLOOD DRIPPED DOWN ON ME.
I LIFTED UP MY BLOOD DRENCHED EYES
I HEARD HIS VOICE, IT MADE ME CRY.

I GAZED BACK UP AT CALVARY'S TREE
AND SAW THE CROSS HE BORE WAS ME.
I KNEW THE CROSS WAS NOT HIS OWN.
YET THERE HE HUNG UPON MY THRONE.

HE SAID "MY FRIEND FORGET THE PAST
THE CURSE IS GONE YOU ARE FREE AT LAST.
THEY NAILED THESE HOLES INTO MY HANDS
TO GIVE YOUR SOUL A PLACE TO STAND.

TREES OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

ISAIAH CHAPTER 61, VERSES 1-3

THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD GOD IS UPON ME; BECAUSE THE LORD HATH ANNOINTED ME TO PREACH GOOD TIDINGS TO THE MEEK; HE HATH SENT ME TO BIND UP THE BROKEN HEARTED, TO PROCLAIM LIBERTY TO THE CAPTIVES, AND THE OPENING OF THE PRISON TO THEM THAT ARE BOUND; TO PROCLAIM THE ACCEPTABLE YEAR OF THE LORD, AND THE DAY OF VENGEANCE OF OUR GOD; TO COMFORT ALL THAT MOURN; TO APPOINTED TO THEM THAT MOURN IN ZION, TO GIVE THEM BEAUTY FOR ASHES, THE OIL OF JOY FOR MOURNING, THE GARMENT OF PRAISE FOR THE SPIRIT OF HEAVINESS; THAT THEY MAY BE CALLED TREES OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, THE PLANTING OF THE LORD, THAT HE MIGHT BE GLORIFIED.

In the Bible trees, and wood in general, are prophetic of mankind. The Bible has been written on parchment and paper over the centuries, which are byproducts of wood. This too is symbolic of God's Word being written and established in our hearts when we become believers in Christ Jesus. Even the ARK OF THE COVENANT was made out of wood and overlaid with gold. The Ark of the Covenant was a type and shadow of the heart of mankind that would one day be a vessel containing the WORD OF GOD. The Ten Commandments, the Showbread and Aaron's Rod that budded were placed in the Ark and the presence of God dwelt there as a type and shadow of things that were to come.

There are Scriptures in the Bible that call the Cross Jesus was crucified on a tree. Among them are: Acts, Chapter 5, Verse 30. Acts, Chapter 10, Verse 39. Acts, Chapter 13, Verse 29. Galatians, Chapter 3, Verse 13. First Peter, Chapter 2, Verse 24.

CHAPTER 1

MY STORY

Hello, my name is---well my name is not important. However, the story I want to share with you about myself might be of interest to you. My story has been written down in the annals of history. Many books have been written about me over the centuries, but none of them have told my side of the story. Many movies have been produced about me, and many sermons have been preached about me over the centuries. Yet nobody has heard the story of my life from my point of view.

My story starts about two thousand years ago on a mountain just outside the City of Jerusalem, called THE MOUNT OF OLIVES. You may have guessed by now that I am a tree. You are probably thinking that trees are not supposed to be able to communicate with people, but I assure you that when you finish reading about my life you will believe they can.

As a young sprout growing up on the mountain I was very naïve. My parents stood near the spot where I grew up. My Father would teach me many things about being a tree and how to enjoy life on the mountain. He warned me about the men who dwelt in and around the City of Jerusalem below. “Many of those men are not trustworthy and kind. The only one that you can trust is our Creator who lives in Heaven,” he would say. Over the years I would learn those lessons, as well as many others, the hard way.

My father taught me that, as trees, God had created us to serve mankind. God created all the tree families to help mankind to perform duties they themselves could not perform. Each family of trees were created for a specific purpose and God had placed within them the ability to perform the task for which they were created. "Always trust in God and He will make you a TREE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS," my father would say.

Many tree families had more than one purpose and could be used in several different ways. I was a member of the Olive Tree family. We were the most prominent trees which stood upon the mountain where I grew up. They even named the mountain after us. We were known far and wide for the oil we produced.

As an Olive tree I was created to produce olives and leaves for the people in the area to use in several different ways. My leaves were used to make medicine. My olives were used for food to nourish the people in the valley below. The oil from my olive berries was used for cooking and to be poured into lamps so mankind could see during periods of darkness.

Our oil was also used in the Lampstand in Temple of God which stood in the city below. The Religious leaders would also use oil to anoint people. Our oil was also used in lamps to help people see in the darkness of the night. There were many other things for which we were used, but I think you get the picture. Many times people would climb the mountain and sit under the leaves of the trees to protect them from the harsh sun during the summer months.

Some trees on the mountain were cut down and used to make housing and furniture for the people below. After being harvested a few of them had the distinction of being placed in the Palace of the King who ruled in the city below.

Unfortunately, many trees that were dead were cut down and used as firewood to keep the people below warm during the winter months and the cold evenings which were frequent. "I would hate to be used as firewood," I would think. "My usefulness to mankind would be short-lived and there would be nothing left of me but ashes to blow away in all directions by the wind."

When the olive trees grew older and could not produce fruit anymore they were cut down and used just like many of the others trees on the mountain. I heard that my uncle was used to make furniture and placed in the King's Palace below. My aunt was made into parchment. My father told me a Scribe penned the Holy Scriptures upon her to inform people of His will and purpose for their life.

My Father told me that one of his great grandfathers was used in Solomon's Temple to build an Altar for the Priests to offer up sacrifices to our Creator. "What an honor it would be to serve God as an Altar," I would think. As a young tree I would dream of being used in the Temple of God in some way. "To serve God in His Temple would be the ultimate joy," I thought. This became my lifelong dream. "Stay true to your calling and Jehovah, the Creator, will be able to use you in another capacity when you are no longer able to produce oil anymore," my father would say.

Many times as a young tree I would watch as men would climb the Mount of Olives and cut down trees and take them into the city below to cut and shape them into something they could use. The olive trees were also harvested when they passed their reproductive age.

At the bottom of the mountain next to the Eastern Wall of the city stood a small hill men called "Golgotha." It was also known as "The Place of the Skull." I would watch in horror as

men would climb the mountain to cut trees and make them into crucifixes. They would place them on the hill called Golgotha to punish men who were evil.

I always thought this to be a very cruel and unusual way to punish men for their crimes. In my mind no human being should ever have to be punished for their crimes in this way. It was most disturbing to see men die in this fashion.

Many times as I was growing up I stood on the Mount of Olives as men were placed on crosses and crucified. My leaves would shed tears, and my branches would bow in sorrow as men were mercilessly punished for their crimes outside the city below. "What a terrible way to punish people for their crimes," I would think. "Surely, there has to be a more humane way to punish men rather than make them suffer in such a horrific way."

As I grew older I heard many stories about the Temple of God which men had built in the city below, and how the Creator would bless the people as they worshipped Him there. As a youth I dreamed of one day being used in the Temple in some way just so I could be near God, my Creator.

I heard some men talking one day that even the trees would someday bow down and worship God. "What a joy that would be," I thought. "Maybe the Altar in the Temple would need to be replaced one day, and God would choose me to replace it," I would dream.

As I started to mature, I became bitter about many of the things which I saw going on around me. Sometimes heavy winds would come through and break off some of my weaker branches. One time two young boys came by and carved their initials in my trunk just for the fun of it.

One day a man was swinging on one of my larger branches. He was so heavy the branch broke off and fell to the ground. It was very painful, and it was the most beautiful branch I had. That branch bore more fruit than all of the other ones.

Later that same week two men were walking by me, arguing as they went. One man stopped and broke one of my branches off and started beating the other man with it. "How can mankind be so cruel to one another?" I thought.

Over the years men had treated me so cruelly I became very bitter toward them. I decided that if all men were like the ones I had encountered in my life I did not want to have anything to do with them anymore. So, I decided from then on to do my best to deprive them of the fruit they used to produce the food, medicine and oil they needed. I tried as hard as I could to become a dry tree.

CHAPTER 2

THE ONLY BEGOTTEN SON

One day as I was soaking up some sun through my leaves I noticed a man walking up the trail below which lead to the top of the Mount of Olives. The trail He was walking up passed right by me so I watched Him as He grew nearer and nearer. He seemed to be talking to someone, but I did not see anyone with Him.

He looked no different than any other man I had seen before, but I soon felt that there was something different about this man. The closer He came, the more I sensed there was something special about Him.

I didn't know who this man was, but I felt something was happening inside me. Every part of me from my deepest roots to the tips of my longest branches felt a strange, but wonderful sensation. The closer He came, the more my branches seemed to bow down in honor to Him. I did not understand what was happening, but I knew that this man's presence was giving me a peaceful warm feeling inside.

He walked up under the shade of my branches, which seemed to be bowing down to Him even more. Then He kneeled down in front of one of the rocks which lay beneath my shade. He folded His hands in front of Him and lifted up His eyes toward Heaven and began to pray to the Creator.

I couldn't believe my ears when I heard Him say, "Father in Heaven I thank you that your mercy endures forever,

and that you love me YOUR ONLY BEGOTTEN SON.” “Am I hearing things?” I thought. “This man is calling God His Father--no man has ever called God his Father! “Who is this man? Why did He call God His Father?” I wondered. I didn’t know God had any sons.

I couldn’t understand how a man could call God his Father. I had heard other men who had visited the mountain say that all men were sinners by nature and that God’s nature was contrary to sinners. Yet, this man called God his Father. “How could God have a Son who was a sinner?” I thought. I was very confused.

After a couple of hours had passed by the man finished praying, lifted Himself back up off His knees, and walked back down the mountain. At the bottom of the mountain I saw a large crowd of people who seemed to be anxiously waiting for Him to return.

I watched intently as I witnessed Him healing people and casting out demons among the people in the crowd below. He performed wondrous miracles and signs among the people. After a while the crowd dispersed, and I saw this man leave the area with twelve other men.

The things I had seen, heard and felt puzzled me. For days I thought about what had transpired the day I first saw Him praying by the rock underneath my branches. “Was God really His Father?” I questioned. I wondered and pondered what it was that made me feel the way I did when He passed my way, and how I felt when I heard Him pray to God.

As the days went by, I wondered if and when I would encounter this amazing and unique one of a kind man again. Then one day as I was preparing for my morning sun bath, I started feeling that same peaceful and loving sensation I had felt a few days earlier. I became so excited I started to forget

about the bitterness I had toward mankind. All I could feel was great anticipation and expectation that I may be seeing Him again.

I looked down the trail, and there He was, walking up the mountain again. As He came closer great billows of peace and love filled my branches and they bowed down in honor to Him. My leaves felt a great sensation as a soft wind blew gently among them. My branches swayed in the gentle wind of the Spirit which seemed to emanate from His awesome presence. I could hardly contain myself this time as my leaves and branches seemed to bow down lower and lower as He drew closer and closer to me.

I couldn't explain it, but one thing I did know was that whenever He came around love would flow through my leaves and branches as a gentle wind blew upon me. It reminded me of the feelings I had before I became bitter when all the trees on the mountain would cry out in praise to their Creator. I had heard them singing out to Him since then, but I could not feel anything but a deadness within me.

As He drew nearer, again He approached the rock which rested nearby and He kneeled down and prayed. This time He lifted up His eyes toward Heaven and said: "FATHER I THANK YOU THAT YOUR SPIRIT IS UPON ME BECAUSE YOU HAVE ANNOINTED ME TO PREACH GOOD TIDING TO THE MEEK; AND THAT YOU HAVE SENT ME TO BIND UP THE BROKEN HEARTED, TO PROCLAIM LIBERTY TO THE CAPTIVES, AND TO OPEN THE PRISONS OF THOSE WHO ARE BOUND. TO APPOINT UNTO THEM THAT MOURN IN ZION, TO GIVE THEM BEAUTY FOR ASHES, THE OIL OF JOY FOR MOURNING, THE GARMENT OF PRAISE FOR THE SPIRIT OF HEAVINESS, THAT THEY MAY BE CALLED---TREES OF RIGHTEOUSNESS---THE PLANTING OF THE LORD, THAT YOU MAY BE GLORIFIED."

I was astonished at the words He had spoken. I had never heard such words before. I then wondered what this all meant, and why He was praying in such a manner. He was still calling God His Father and this time He claimed that God's Spirit was upon Him.

This time He even said something about "trees." He called them, "TREES OF RIGHTEOUSNESS." "Could He have been talking about me?" I questioned. Could God be that interested in trees? I then remembered that my father told me once that trees were symbolic of man, and that wood represented man in the teachings of the Holy Scriptures. I surmised that He must have been talking about men and not trees like me and my family.

A few days passed and I saw Him climbing the mountain again. The same feelings I had experienced before were rising within me, yet this time I was filled with mixed emotions. If He was the Son of God, why was He coming to pray beneath my shade? After all, I am just a lowly tree who had many of my fruit bearing branches broken off.

I was one of the worst sinners of all the trees on the mountain. My deep rooted bitterness had made me look ugly and my trunk and branches had become gnarled and dry. My branches didn't produce fruit anymore, and even the ground around me had become hard and dry. I had refused to let the water which fell from heaven enter my roots which God had planted in the ground beneath me.

"Why did He choose me to pray under?" I questioned. "The tree standing in the spot next to me provided much more shade and was much stronger and more beautiful than I," I thought. I had rejected the wisdom of my father and had become bitter against all the people who had hurt me, cut on me and broken off my branches. Now after seeing this man I

was feeling sorry for the way I had treated others and how I had rejected the counsel of my father.

I hoped He didn't know what a bitter tree I had become, but I had a hard time trying to disguise the mixed emotions I was feeling. Somehow I knew all He had to do was look at the condition I was in and see that I was good for nothing anymore except to be cut up and placed in the fire to be burned. I was just as dead as many others who had been cut down and burned in the fire. Yes, I still had a few leaves left on me, but they two were slowly drying up like the rest of me.

Nevertheless, I was somewhat thrilled and excited to see Him again. This time the man who called God His father brought twelve men with Him. I had seen Him with these men on several occasions at the foot of the mountain. I heard Him call them His Disciples. I didn't understand what a Disciple was, but I was hoping I would soon find out.

As they came closer, I forgot about all the negative emotions and feelings of failure and sorrow I was experiencing. My heart was racing again and the feelings of love and peace were returning. "Maybe I could become a Disciple one day?" I hoped. That way I could follow Him wherever He went and I could always feel that peace and joy I experienced whenever He was near. Then I remembered I was just a dying tree who was stuck in the ground I was standing on.

The man who called God His Father and the Disciples all knelt down and prayed under my branches for a while. Then they all listened as He taught them many things about His Father. They finished with a prayer then they all travelled back down the mountain to the valley below.

I still wondered why He would stop under such an ugly tree like me when there were so many other trees on the mountain who were much more beautiful and vibrant than I

was. "Why me?" I questioned. Sometimes I would dream that He would look at me and see me as a beautiful tree, full of life and grace. However, those were only fleeting moments because shame and discouragement would always rise up within me. Especially, after He had left and gone back down the mountain.

I would remember all the scars on my torso, the broken branches and the withering leaves. My roots had all but dried up. When He wasn't there, all I felt was the same deadness I had experienced since I had become bitter and rejected the counsel of my father.

Even though I loved being in His presence, I felt so unworthy to have Him rest under my branches. I would look again and again at my scars and hoped He couldn't see them. I couldn't help but feel ashamed at times when He was near. He brought so many different emotions to the surface in me.

Sometimes I would watch Him for hours as He preached and prayed for people in the valley below. Thousands of people would come to hear Him teach about God and the Prophets of Old. I thought to myself: "They must surely feel that same love and peace that I feel when I am in His presence."

Sometimes I could hear the sound of His voice echoing from the valley below telling the people about the Love of God. Once I heard Him say that God loved the world so much that He gave His only Begotten Son, and whoever believed in Him would receive Everlasting Life. I really didn't understand much of what He was talking about though.

I am sure that if I could have heard everything He said I might have understood more of what He was saying at that time. You know I even began wondering back then if God could really be His Father. But, I restrained myself from getting too

radical about God. After all, all I had to do was look at myself and see I was not worthy to be someone God could love.

CHAPTER 3

THE GREAT FEAST

One day there was a great feast in the city below. People were singing and dancing in the streets. Many people came from miles around to attend the annual Feast. I couldn't wait to see this strange, mysterious and compassionate man again, the one who continued to proclaim that GOD WAS HIS FATHER. It was rumored that He had a natural father like I had. His natural father's name was Joseph, and His mother was named Mary. Yet, He continued to call God his Father. Could He possibly have TWO fathers? I had never heard of anyone having two fathers. He was so strange and different than anyone I had ever seen! Maybe He could have two fathers, but I could not understand how that would be possible.

I was hoping against hope that in the morning He would again come and pray to his Father God beside the rock beneath my branches. "What did I just say," I thought! I called GOD His father.

I noticed on several occasions as I observed Him in the valley below that religious men would try to set traps for Him. The talk among the other trees was that the religious leaders in the city below did not like Him saying that God was His Father. One time he even called the religious leaders snakes and whited sepulchers. Somehow He was always able to escape from the traps they set for Him.

Just as I began to fall asleep that night I was awakened by a group of men climbing up the mountain. It was dusk, and I could barely see the men as they walked toward me in the darkness. I knew He was with the men because I felt my leaves and branches bowing down to Him again. I felt love and peace enter into me as they always did whenever He was near.

Each time He came to pray underneath my branches, the love and peace that flowed through me grew stronger and stronger. However, this time when He came He left the men who were with Him about fifty yards down the side of the mountain. He came alone to pray under my branches.

He walked underneath me again, and knelt down at the rock just below my branches. Suddenly, He began to pray and weep sorrowfully. Even though I could feel His love and peace flowing all over me, I sensed something was very wrong this time. I could tell He was very troubled about something.

As He prayed laboriously, He began to sweat great drops of blood. He wept and groaned as He prayed in agony to His Father. I wondered if there had been a disagreement between Him and His Father. I felt His love all over me, yet I was feeling a great sadness, the like of which I had never felt before.

I could not imagine what was wrong. Once I heard Him cry out "FATHER IF IT BE THY WILL LET THIS CUP PASS FROM ME, NEVERTHELESS MAY THY WILL AND NOT MINE BE DONE." I didn't understand! So many things were happening lately in my life that I could not explain. My branches swayed in compassion and sadness as He wept and sweated great drops of His blood. The sweat from His brow flowed down His face and onto the rock as he prayed to God, His Father. "Oh, how I wish I could help Him somehow," I thought.

I tried to think of a way to help Him. “If only I could help wipe those tears and blood that flowed down His face away, maybe that would comfort Him,” I reasoned. “Maybe I could encourage Him somehow”, I thought. I wanted to pray and ask God to help Him, but there was nothing I could do. After all, I was just a tree, and I didn’t think God would even listen to a tree—especially a bitter, worthless tree like me. I did understand this much, though, whatever He was going through, He would have to do it alone. It didn’t look like God His Father was going to help Him this time.

After praying to His Father for a long time, He rose up and went back down the side of the mountain where His Disciples had fallen asleep. He woke them from their slumber, and they all walked back down the mountain together. I don’t know what else happened that night, but I know I did not get much sleep because of all the confusion and loud noises I heard in the City of Jerusalem below.

The next morning I woke up still pondering the things which I had heard and seen the previous evening. It was a beautiful spring day. The sky was a deep shade of blue, and the grass on the mountain was wet with the morning dew. It was a great day to be alive.

I was hoping to see the man who called God His Father coming up the hill again to pray beneath my branches that morning. I thought maybe I could ask Him why He was so sad the night before when He prayed to His Father. I wanted to ask Him why the blood and sweat ran down His face like water. I didn’t understand what had happened and why it happened. Why He was so burdened and upset?

On such a beautiful day as this if He would come and pray beneath my branches, that would be all I needed to make my day complete! I always felt peace and love flow over me

whenever He was near. It would be a great joy to see Him again and bask in His presence. It always made me feel so beautiful and clean to be in His presence. I looked anxiously to see if I could see Him coming up the mountain.

That morning there was an unusual amount of activity in the city below. I saw a lot of hustling and bustling in the city, but I could not see Him anywhere. I wondered what all the excitement was about, and if it had anything to do with Him.

CHAPTER 4

MY ANXIETY

That day as I was taking in the morning sun and hoping this man who called God His Father would come to pray under my branches again, I looked below and saw a group of men walking up the trail below me. Was it Him—I hoped so? I rejoiced at the thought of learning more about what this man had to say to His Father. “I hope and pray that He is feeling better today,” I thought.

I couldn’t get Him off my mind. He was so burdened last night. I hardly slept a wink thinking about Him and the agony He was in. I could not figure out why His Father would not help Him this time. His Father had always helped Him before. “Why not this time?” I wondered. I kept thinking about Him and His dilemma, wondering if His Father would show up. I tried to think of a way I could help Him, but I failed again.

As the men drew closer, I could see that it wasn’t Him at all, but a band of men in uniforms carrying axes. My heart sank within me. I began thinking they were coming for me so my destiny could be fulfilled. I wondered what was happening. “What are they going to use me for?” I thought. “What will I be when they get done with me?” Whatever it was going to be, I had a feeling that I would be famous.

“Will I be something useful as my other relatives were? Will I serve mankind to the best of my ability? Oh no, what if

they just want to use me as firewood?” I thought. “Will I be burned to ashes? Will my family even know where I am or what happened to me?” I wondered.

Many thoughts raced through my mind, but most of them were negative. A few of them were positive. After all, I had not obeyed the counsel of my father and stayed true to my calling. I had become bitter with mankind.

I had stopped producing the fruit the Creator had given me to share with humans. I had stopped producing fruit and chose to do my own thing. I wanted to be in control of my own life. I didn't want anybody telling me what I should do, how I should do it, or when I should do it. I had become an outcast, and the olives on my branches were very bitter and dry. I had failed miserably in life.

Yet, I still had hope that somehow I could still be of some use to humanity. Maybe I could still serve in the Temple of God. If not there, maybe they would put me in the Holy place – or even in the Holy of Holies. However, that was just a hope and a dream that came to me for one fleeting moment. I had gone too far.

All hope was gone when I thought about how I had disgraced my father and disobeyed his advice. I had let a root of bitterness bring forth bitter fruit which condemned me to an everlasting punishment. When I realized there was no more hope for me, I wept bitterly.

Nevertheless, as the men drew nearer I held my branches out as far as they could reach. I thought If I stand as tall as I can and look as plentiful as I can, maybe I can fool them into thinking I am a good tree and mankind will honor me and allow me to serve them in a productive way. I hoped against hope, searching within myself for a glimmer of hope, but could find none.

“That one will do,” I heard one of the Soldiers say. He was talking about ME. I had fooled them somehow! “Maybe I am not as bad as I thought I was,” I hoped. After all, these men weren’t just paupers—they were Roman Soldiers. They were important people, who retained a lot of authority. I thought maybe I was to spend the rest of my days in the Governor’s House.

A million thoughts ran through my mind. I was about to fulfill my destiny, and OH, WHAT A DESTINY it was going to be! Yet, I still had no clue as to what I would be doing or where I would be living. What would be my purpose? I wondered if I would be serving mankind with my relatives or with other friends I once knew on the mountain. There were so many questions to be answered.

The anxiety was almost too much to bear. Again, thoughts of being thrown into the fire plagued me, and I could not shake them. Many thoughts came and went as they cut deep into my trunk with their axes. The pain of the axes cutting away at my trunk was excruciating, but I just knew it would be worth it all to fulfill my destiny on earth. At one moment there would be joy--the next moment there was unbearable pain. Then I was plagued with mixed feelings brought on by the doubt I had about my future. Where would I end up and what would I be?

It didn’t take long for them to cut through my heart, and into my deepest parts. I heard a loud crack, and I started feeling dizzy. I felt like I was going to faint. Then I fell, crashing to the ground. Many of my branches were broken as I hit the ground. Again the pain was almost unbearable. However, it didn’t match the pain which I had felt before when the cruel men had broken off my branches and cut on me for no reason at all. “At least this time my pain and suffering was going to be for a good reason,” I hoped.

The Soldiers then tied some heavy ropes around me and hooked them to a couple of oxen they had brought up the mountain with them. One of the Soldiers gave a loud shout, and down the side of the mountain we went. They were ever so careful not to go too fast and risk the danger of having me shake loose from the ropes and go tumbling down the side of the mountain.

At the bottom of the mountain they hacked off all my branches and placed me on a large cart. Then they rolled the cart into the City through one of the Gates. I had heard someone say before that this Gate was known as the "Judgment Gate," but I didn't understand what judgment really meant. I did know that many men were brought out of this Gate and crucified on the Hill just outside the Judgment Gate.

From there I was taken to a Carpenter Shop where they laid me on the ground next to a bench near the back door of the Shop. As I laid there I looked up and saw two crucifixes leaning up against a rock outside the Carpenter's Shop. My heart went out to the two crucifixes. I had known them when they were trees upon the mountain, but I didn't know what had happened to them. They had been treated badly by men themselves. They too had become bitter just like I had.

They weren't Olive Trees like me, but I really didn't think they deserved to be instruments of cruelty and death. They were not really bad trees, they just had a bad life just like I had. "They are two of the unlucky ones," I thought. They had been chosen to be instruments, even symbols of death. They were to be used to help destroy life instead of being a comfort and help to mankind. They were going to be used as instruments of destruction and death.

As I laid there for what seemed like hours, I kept contemplating my fate. I was beginning to wonder if they had

forgotten about me when suddenly the door of the Shop opened and the Carpenter came out with tools in his hands.

As he started cutting on me, I tried to forget about the excruciating pain I was feeling. It was much like the pain I had felt when the cruel people had broken my branches off and cut on me when I was trying to produce good fruit in the past. Again, the pain was almost unbearable, but I hoped my destiny would be worth all the pain I had to endure.

The Carpenter worked and sawed on me for hours. I closed my eyes and tried to rest as the Carpenter did his handy work on me, but the pain was too great for me to rest. I could tell he was a skilled craftsman though, and I knew he was doing a good job on me.

CHAPTER 5

MY DESTINY

Finally, the Master Carpenter's work was done. "What have I become now?" I wondered. The anxiety was almost too much for me to bear. I couldn't wait to find out what the final outcome was and what my purpose would be in serving mankind.

Again, the thought of spending the rest of my days in the Temple of God rose up within me. "Would that be my resting place all the days of my life?" I wondered. Then I remembered how I had become bitter and treated my father with disrespect and disdain. I had not listened to his wise counsel. I had stood firm on top of the mountain in my pride and bitterness.

Then my heart sank, thinking I was not worthy to be placed in the Holy of Holies or the Holy Place. Even the Outer Court of the Temple was too good for me. I was worthy of death! I had no hope left. "Maybe I am doomed to death, and I will be burned in the fire," I thought.

However, I was glad my pain was now over. I was complete and my destiny was sealed. The Carpenter's job was finished. My destiny had been sealed, and I was getting ready to serve mankind somehow. I was glad I had not been cut up into firewood and cast into a furnace to be burned. I had seen that done many times before when men would take the old trees that had rotted and died on the mountain. They took

them down into the valley-- threw them into the fire and burned them to ashes.

The Carpenter then called for two of the Soldiers who were standing around talking outside the wall of the Shop. They walked over, picked me up and stood me against a stone wall. I thought I must still be very heavy if it takes two men to lift me.

There I stood leaning against the stone wall that stood behind the Carpenter's Shop. I was so happy, I held my trunk high. I was quite proud that I had found my place in destiny. Just knowing that I would now be something of value made me forget all the pain I had endured.

"Surely, I must be an object of beauty and will be a great benefit to mankind," I thought. Then the mixed emotions returned and suddenly I began thinking about maybe being burned in the fire. Whatever would happen, I was just glad that my life as an unfruitful Olive Tree was over.

As I opened my eyes to look and see how beautiful I might be, I looked toward the ground and saw below me a vertical shaft resting on the ground. Part of me was some kind of a beam. I followed the beam upward with my eyes and saw that the beam reached up toward the sky. I was about ten feet tall.

I thought the Carpenter had done his job well. "He hasn't sanded me down yet though because my skin still feels pretty rough," I complained. "All my bark is gone, but maybe he wasn't through with me yet," I thought. I didn't have much form or shape as a vertical beam, but I was still strong and sturdy.

Then I glanced to my left and saw another beam beginning on my left side. "That is strange," I thought. I then looked to my right and saw that same beam intersected with

the vertical beam and continued on to my left side. I looked to my left again and then again to my right. Then I looked down and up again. The beam on my right side was actually the same beam which was on my left side. I was not just made into a vertical beam, but a horizontal beam also. Then I realized the two beams were connected at the center together and made into what looked to be a Crucifix.

I was made up of two beams—one horizontal and the other one vertical. “What a strange form,” I thought. I glanced over at the two crucifixes leaning up against the wall close to me, then I looked back at myself. “I looked just like they do,” I thought.

“Oh NO,” I cried in horror, “I looked just like the two crucifixes. I couldn’t believe what my eyes were seeing. “My eyes must be playing tricks on me,” I thought.

Suddenly it dawned on me that I too was a Crucifix. “No, not me,” I cried! “Please not me! Please don’t do this to me,” I pleaded. I had become the very thing I detested the most. I had become an instrument of torture and horrible death for someone.

“What have I done to deserve this?” I shouted in anguish. Destiny had played a cruel and terrifying joke on me, except it was not a joke—it was reality now. What I feared most had come upon me. I was to be the instrument of cruel and inhumane punishment. I had become an instrument of death.

Before I had time to gather my thoughts together, I heard someone coming. I recognized it was the same Roman Soldiers who had brought me down the mountain. The two other crucifixes were hauled off first. Later, two of the Soldiers came back, picked me up and carried me off. “Oh my God, where were they taking me?” I wondered. “Oh please,

somebody help me, I don't want to do this," my heart cried out within me. However, no one listened to my pleas for help.

The Soldiers leaned me up against a wall in an open area near the prison. In an open Courtyard of the prison I saw a man who had been chained to a post. He had been stripped of His garments to His waist. A large crowd standing in and around the area were shouting curse words at the man.

Many people in the crowd consisted of Roman Soldiers and the Priests who served God in the Temple. There was also other religious leaders shouting and calling the man names. I wondered who this man was and what he had done. "Why do the people hate Him so much?" I questioned. From where I was standing he looked harmless to me, but I did not get a very good look at Him. "He must be a very dangerous criminal," I thought.

Some of the people broke away from the crowd, ran up to him and spit in his face. They pulled out large pieces of his beard and his hair. When they pulled out patches of his hair and beard, He would cry out in pain. A very strong Roman Soldier started lashing the man with a leather whip which had pieces of glass, bone and nails tied to the ends of the straps on the whip. Every time the whip would strike the man's back, He would cry out in pain again.

With each lashing, pieces of His flesh and blood would fly from the man's back and splatter on the Roman Soldiers or fall to the ground. Furiously the Soldier lashed at His back. Again and again the Soldier raised the whip and with great strength he would then lower it violently into the flesh on the man's back. With each crack of the whip I heard Him cry out in pain. It was a horrible thing to watch. I closed my eyes and prayed that God would help Him.

Blood was pouring from each wound in His back. Blood covered the man's entire back and ran like a fountain to the

ground beneath Him. The whip kept cutting deeper and deeper into His wounds. The violent lashing from the Roman Soldier's whip found its mark every time. I could hear the sound of each lashing. Each lashing sounded like the falling of a great tree in the forest when lightening would strike it. I had heard that sound many times before.

“Who is this poor man?” I questioned. “What terrible crime had He committed?” I wondered. Another Soldier then walked up to the man and placed a Crown made out of Thorns upon His head. The Crown of Thorns was then pressed deep into His scalp. As the Soldier pressed the thorns into His head, Blood squirted out from each puncture wound. His Blood ran down the side of His head into His ears, down on His face, into His eyes and onto His beard.

The Soldiers then beat Him in the face with their fists. One big Soldier had a large ring on His finger which sliced the skin on his face and His head with every blow. There was no place on this man's entire body His own Blood did not cover.

CHAPTER 6

HIS DESTINY

“Your Cross is over there, Jesus, King of the Jews,” a Roman Soldier shouted. “Pick it up and carry it to the Place of the Skull where we will crucify you,” he added. It was the first time I had ever heard His name.

The man crawled up to me, and when He lifted up His head, He cried out for God and called Him Father. Suddenly, I recognized who this man was. “Oh no, not Him—this cannot be” I cried. It was Him, it was the man that prayed under my branches! The man who said God was His father. Oh, I remember Him now! I could not believe what I was seeing! I could not believe what they had done to Him!

I remembered how I had felt so much love and peace from Him when He prayed beneath my branches. It was the same man who spent hours underneath my shade, praying and teaching the men He called His Disciples about God. Many times He had brought His Disciples upon the Mount of Olives and taught the Holy Scriptures to them there. “What could He have done to deserve death?” I questioned.

“This man could not have done anything wrong. I know He could not have done what He has been accused of doing,” I shouted. “He is a good man.” “I saw this man healing the sick at the base of the mountain”, I cried. “I even heard His Disciples tell how He raised people from the dead and cast out demons from many others.”

“This was the man who healed the lepers and caused blinded eyes to see and made the lame walk. On many occasions I heard him talk to God and tell Him how much He loved everybody,” I cried out. However, no one would listen.

Many of the people started chanting “Crucify Him, Crucify Him.” The crowd that had gathered now included many people from the city from all different walks of life.

The cries “Crucify Him, Crucify Him” became louder and louder, and the crowd grew angrier and angrier. I knew it was useless to say anything. After all, I was only a tree that had been cut down and formed into the instrument of His death. I knew no one would listen to me!

Tears filled my eyes and sorrow pierced my heart and soul. “How could it have come to this,” I thought. I knew trees did not have a voice in the affairs of men, and it was useless to try to help this man who said His father was God. Many in the crowd were mourning and calling out His name. I heard some say He was the Son of God. Others continued to mock Him saying, “He claims to be the SON OF GOD.” I then remembered I had heard this man say He had come to die for the sins of all mankind.

Finally, he struggled to get up off His knees and onto His Feet. Then suddenly I felt Him grab my arm. He then lifted me up to His shoulder. He stumbled slowly towards the Judgment Gate with me on His shoulder. His blood was flowing from the Crown of Thorns which had been placed on His head and the deep wounds in His back. With each step He groaned and cried out in pain and agony.

“Oh what a heavy burden I must be,” I thought. I knew Jesus could not have done anything they had accused Him of doing. He was a good man. He was filled with love and compassion for each and everybody. He never harmed anyone.

I heard Him pray for everyone in the whole World on many occasions.

Oh how distraught I was! “Why did I have to be created a tree”, I complained. Questions filled my heart and soul as I tried to understand what was happening. My heart was broken and my spirit crushed. If only there was something I could do—but it was absolutely useless. There was nothing I could do. I was only adding to His burden as He carried me up toward Golgotha’s Hill.

With every five or six steps he took towards the Gate, he would fall down. Someone from the crowd would run up to Him and spit in his face again. He fell down again and again under my heavy burden.

Each time he fell Roman Soldiers would beat him with a rod and a whip. They would kick Him until He got back upon His feet. He would then continue to stumble on towards the Gate as the crowds hurled curse words and screamed over and over again “Crucify Him, Crucify Him”.

“If I could only walk myself, I would help carry Him to the Place of the Skull,” I thought. But I knew that I was just a lifeless, useless piece of wood, having done nothing good in my life. And this Jesus who called His Father God was carrying us both to our destiny. Oh, and what a horrible destiny it had turned out to be! My heart ached as I wept and groaned in great sorrow.

My thoughts went back to the time when I was just a sapling growing up on the Mount of Olives. Many times I would daydream of being made into a Pillar in the Temple of God. Yes, I knew there were already Pillars in the Temple, but I hoped that maybe God would someday build a new Temple and I could become part of it. I thought it would be so joyous if He would have chosen me for such a prestigious destiny. Then reality

would return, and I remembered how I had disobeyed my own father, turned bitter, and ruined my own life.

Finally, Jesus fell to the ground with me on top of him. He had carried me as far as he could. I felt so guilty and sorrowful that I had added to His agony. Then a man from the crowd ran up and grabbed me, lifted me off of Him and carried me the rest of the way through the Gate to the Hill above. I was so relieved that at least some of the burden I was putting on Him had been removed by a Good Samaritan.

On through the Gate we went, and up the Hill called Golgotha, The Place of the Skull. I was then placed on the ground on top of the Hill with my eyes looking toward Heaven.

The Roman Soldiers had already nailed the two men onto the other crosses and crucified them. I heard the crowds talking and found out that one of the men was a thief and the other was a murderer. One of them was standing to my right and one of them to my left. These two men were guilty and deserved to be punished, but this Man who called God His Father had done nothing but good to all mankind. I could not understand why this was happening to Him no matter how hard I tried. "I should be punished as they were, but this Jesus could have done nothing to be treated in such a manner as this," I thought.

My heart was breaking. I knew this Man Jesus who prayed under my branches could have done nothing wrong. His only crime was to love mankind more than He loved His own life. I could hear the cries of the thieves as they hung on the crosses. I heard them groaning in pain as they hung there bleeding and slowly dying.

I looked up and saw the "Place of the Skull" in the rocks just above the Hill. It was as if the face of death was looking

down on all of us on the Hill as well as the people in the valley below that day.

As I looked toward the heavens, I prayed: “Oh God, why has it come to this? I know I have not been the tree I should have been, and I am sorry for all the bitterness in my life. I am sorry for the things I have done which were not pleasing to you.”

“Please forgive me of my sins and make me a tree of righteousness that can be used to help mankind. I don’t want to be the instrument of your Son’s death,” I whispered. Yet, it was like the Heavens were made of brass. God did not hear my cries. Neither did He seem to hear the cries of the one who called God His Father. The Creator of all things did not respond.

“I have gone too far and the Creator would not hear my prayers anymore.” I thought. There I lay on my back looking up toward the heavens. Feelings of despair, remorse, sorrow and grief filled my heart. I knew there was no hope for me now. God had turned His back on me because of all my shortcomings and sins. Yet, a glimmer of hope broke through the darkness and I thought maybe He would save His own Son!

Then I realized all hope was lost. I had fallen short of the grace and glory of God, and there was no way to remedy my situation. I was condemned to a life of strife, fear and hatred. What was left of my life anyway? There was no reason for me to live anymore. Men were about to use me as a horrible and unspeakable instrument of death. This alone would condemn me throughout eternity. They were going to use me to help kill an innocent man who had done nothing other than to help people in need. “I am the one worthy of death, not Him,” I cried. My heart wept bitterly and continually within me.

I had resigned myself to die along with this Jesus. I would hold Him up, and we would die together. “At least I can

do that," I thought. At least, I could try to hold Him up while He died. There was no other way. I closed my eyes and prayed one more time to the Creator and said, "Please help your Son Jesus. If He is your Son, He does not deserve to die this way. He called you His Father. Surely a father would save His own Son from such a horrible death."

My thoughts then went back to my own father. He tried to save me from the things I did wrong, but I did not listen to him. "I deserve to be punished, but your Son obeyed you in everything you told Him to do," I cried. Still there was no response from the Creator.

Then I remembered that this man called Jesus, the one who said God was His Father, telling His Disciples how God loved the World so much He would give His only Son as a sacrifice for the sins of all mankind. "Surely you cannot love evil men so much that you would allow your only Son to suffer this much," I prayed. For Him to die such a horrible death on a Cross made out of this sinful tree is just too much for me to bear. I just don't understand. I just don't understand," I cried. But Heaven was silent.

As I looked down the Hill, I saw that a large crowd had gathered below us. They were all chanting, "Crucify Him, Crucify Him. Some of the women and men who called themselves His Disciples were also standing at the bottom of the Hill. Many of them were weeping and wailing. Others were laying prostrate on the ground crying and shaking violently as they pounded their fists on the ground.

Next, the Soldiers began to strip him of what clothing remained on his bloody and battered body. One could not even recognize who He was because his face was swollen and covered with Blood. His body was beaten and mutilated beyond recognition. He stood there before the whole crowd,

naked and bloody from head to toe, with a Crown of Thorns on His head.

The crowd, with the exception of His followers, laughed and mocked Him. One man ran up to Him and spit in His face again. He did not say a word. He just looked at the man sorrowfully, with love and compassion in His eyes.

Through all the punishment He had endured, the burden of carrying me on His back, and all the torture He had been through, He said not a word. All you could hear from Him up to this point were His cries of pain and anguish. Could God love men enough to allow His Son to go through all this torture? Did God not love His Son more than these horrible men who were torturing His ONLY SON? I could not come to grips with the humiliation and torture Jesus was experiencing. I just wanted to die with Him and get it over with. He had suffered enough punishment and anguish.

I heard the cries from some of the people screaming at Him as He drug himself up the hill saying: "Jesus, if you are the Son of God, call on God your Father now, see if He will help you!" As a Lamb led to the slaughter, He said not a word.

Now I knew His name, it was JESUS, but what good would that do me now? He was about to meet His demise, and His name would soon be written on a Tombstone somewhere. It seemed as if all of His work and teachings among the people had been in vain.

I myself was taken against my will and made an instrument of death for Him. He was about to meet His demise, and His name would only be remembered in sorrow now. His name would be there only to remind others that He once lived, and claimed that He was the Son of God. Soon He would belong to the ages, and there was nothing anyone could do to stop His Crucifixion.

Suddenly, two of the Soldiers grabbed Him, turned Him around and laid Him down on top of me as I lay helpless and hopeless on the ground. In horror, I looked as one of the Soldiers took a rusty old spike and drove it through His right hand and nailed it onto the arm on my right horizontal beam. Jesus cried out in great pain. Blood squirted out of His hand and into the face of the Soldiers holding Him down.

The Soldier became so irate that he smashed the hammer down so hard on the spike again that His whole body shook and trembled violently in pain. Again, He cried out in agonizing pain. I cried, "Oh God, how can you endure this horrific punishment of your righteous Son?"

Two Soldiers then grabbed hold of His left hand and slammed it down on my left horizontal beam. Again, I heard the sound of the hammer slamming down on the spike. Again the sound was followed by another agonizing cry from Jesus as His Blood begin to flow from His hand onto my beam.

"Oh, God," I cried again, "Please help your Son, and please help me!" Again the Blood of Jesus poured from His hand, splattered to the ground and covered the spike and dripped down on me.

Next, I saw two Soldiers grab the feet of Jesus and hold them together as they began to nail a third rusty spike through both of His feet into my lower vertical beam. I could feel the spike go through me about four feet above the bottom of my vertical beam.

Again, Jesus cried out in pain and agony. Blood was oozing from His head, His face, His hands, His back, and feet. His Blood continued dripping and running down my shank onto the ground. The loud tumult of the crowd could barely be heard over the loud, agonizing cries of His pain. Oh, how I wished it was me that was dying, and not this man who said He was the

Son of God! I was so ashamed that I was taking part in the massacre of this innocent man called Jesus.

They nailed a sign to me just above His head which read: JESUS OF NAZARETH KING OF THE JEWS. Then five large Soldiers dragged us over near a hole in the ground. They lifted us up and dropped us into the hole which had been hewn out of the rock just beneath the PLACE OF THE SKULL.

CHAPTER 7

OUR DESTINY

There I stood, between Heaven and Hell, with the Son of God nailed to me like a common criminal. His whole body was shaking violently as He writhed in pain. His Blood was seeping into the deadness of what had once been a beautiful Olive Tree, but now had become an implement of His suffering and eventually His death. After all He did for me, I could do nothing for Him.

I could not bear to see Him in such pain. The Blood kept flowing from His body, running down my vertical beam and onto the ground below us. His Blood was also dripping onto the ground from the spikes that pierced His hands.

He asked for some water, instead a Soldier brought Him a sponge mixed with vinegar and gall. They mocked Him over and over again. Many hurled foul language at Him. Someone screamed out loudly, "If you are the Son of God, come down from the Cross". The crowd cheered mockingly, "Come down, come on down from your Cross, Son of God." Jesus made no reply, as He clung to me in great suffering and agony.

Suddenly another Roman Soldier ran up to Him and thrust a spear into His side. He cried out again in great distress. As the spear pierced His side a mixture of water and blood flowed out of His side and down onto the ground below. The Water and the Blood was also running down my vertical beam

and onto the ground below us. We were both soaked in His Blood.

Jesus suddenly cried out with a loud voice, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” “Even now He calls out to God, and yet God does not seem to hear Him,” I thought. Disbelief consumed me, I could not believe that God would just ignore His cries for help. If Jesus was HIS ONLY SON, how could He allow Him to suffer so much?

I was in dismay and disbelief. I could not understand why God would allow His ONLY Son to suffer in such a manner. I thought, “If God was his Father, why, why, oh why does He not help Him?” I was beginning to wonder if God was His Father. “How could a loving God who had all power in Heaven and Earth allow His ONLY Son to suffer and die in this manner? I questioned.

If He didn’t help His Only Son, why would He help evil men? I was getting more and more confused. “Surely God could see the agony and suffering His Son was going through. There is no justice,” I thought. This man who did nothing but good has been judged, condemned and crucified by the same people to whom He showed so much love and compassion. “How could they do this to Him after all He had done for them?” I questioned.

He must have hung there for hours. His death was slow and agonizing. I knew His pain was excruciating and distressing. Yet, I understood and knew deep within me that even I could not know the depths of the pain and suffering He was experiencing.

I could tell it was getting harder and harder for Him to breathe, and I could hear Him gasping for breath. His body was shaking and convulsing violently, over and over. His chest would slowly expand as He fought for each breath of air. He

was getting weaker and weaker. He was choking from the blood which was running down His forehead and into His mouth. Blood was also coming from His mouth seeping down into His beard.

Each breath He took was getting shorter and shorter. It sounded like His lungs were filling with fluid. With each breath came a loud wheeze, then a gurgling sound. I wondered how much longer He would suffer. "I want to die with Him," I thought. "I will wait until He dies, then I will die," I cried within me. I didn't want to live anymore. "How could I live with myself after partaking in His Crucifixion?" I thought.

I could feel His heart pounding next to mine. It would beat very fast then would slow down to where I could not even detect a heartbeat. His pulse became very weak. I knew this because His wrist was pressed up against mine. Then His body began to shake uncontrollably again. He was going through the throes of death. "It will all be over in just a few seconds," I thought.

Then, I heard Him say "Father into thy hands I commit my Spirit. IT IS FINISHED". Jesus then cried out in agony with a great groan, bowed down His head and died.

"Where was the mercy," I reasoned. I had always heard that God was a just and merciful God, but there was no mercy displayed at this horrible place, and justice seemed to be non-existent. "Can there be a God if He allowed His only Son to die this way?" I thought.

A Roman Soldier then approached us and looked up at Jesus and said "Truly this was the Son of God." "What did he mean?" I thought. "If He was God's Son, why did God not come down from Heaven to help Him?" Why did God turn His face from Him and allow Him to be crucified?" I thought.

Suddenly, there was a great earthquake. The sky grew dark and fear fell upon the angry mob, and there was a great calm. There was no more cries from the crowd who had been mocking Him and crying out for Jesus to die. All I could hear was the sound of a few of His followers weeping and wailing over what they had seen. Some of them had left because they could not bear to see Jesus being humiliated and tortured any longer. It was too much for them to endure.

CHAPTER 8

IT IS OVER

It was all over. Jesus had died and given up His Spirit. Jesus was DEAD. The man who had healed the sick and raised the dead was now dead himself. The man who had taught men to love and forgive one another was dead. The man who did not deserve to die had died and given up the ghost. JESUS WAS DEAD!

“If Jesus who called God His own Father could be mutilated and killed in such a horrific way, how could there be any hope for anybody?” I thought. “If Jesus could die such a horrible death after doing nothing wrong, what was in store for me--a lowly tree full of hatred, bitterness and unforgiveness?” I cried. “It is over.” “There is no more hope for mankind when people become so cruel they destroy the just and promote injustice and iniquity,” I reasoned. I just wanted to die myself and get it over with.

I searched within my heart and mind for a reason for all this madness, but reason was absent. There were no answers. “Life is cruel and there is no hope for the just or the unjust,” I thought. All I could feel was despair, hopelessness, grief, sorrow and hatred for those who used me to help kill this innocent man--this man who said God was His Father. Jesus was dead and I felt a deadness in my own soul.

My mind went back to the times when He would pray next to the rock on the mountain, and how He would make me feel so alive. Now I felt nothing but a deep, dark hole in my

heart. I had nothing to live for! I was destined to be thrown into the fire to be burned. My destiny would now be fulfilled and had become one of death, just as His death was. I had never felt such sorrow and sadness in my life. I wished I had never been born.

As the crowd began to disperse, the Soldiers came to take Him down. They ripped His hands and feet from the rusty spikes which clung fast to my beams. They pulled His feet from me, leaving pieces of His flesh hanging on the spikes.

I didn't know where they had taken Him at first, but they took me and set me up against a rock wall near a Cemetery. Then some of His Disciples brought Him to the Cemetery and placed Him inside a Tomb which was hewn out of rock near the place where I was standing.

Some women came with spices and white linens and went into the Tomb to prepare His body for burial. After the women had finished preparing His body, the Soldiers took a great stone and rolled it up against the entrance of the Tomb. I heard one of the Soldiers say, "We must guard this Tomb to make sure none of His Disciples come and steal His body".

At dusk the Soldiers began to gather wood as they made a fire to keep warm for the night. "This is an appropriate place for me," I thought. "I am resting against a rock wall outside a Cemetery. I feel dead inside already. Now, these Soldiers are going to see me standing here against this wall, cut me up and place me in the fire to keep themselves warm. "I helped them destroy and crucify Jesus who claimed that God was His Father, and now they are going to throw me into the fire," I thought.

My mind kept going back to the times I saw Jesus on the mountain. I had seen no evidence that God was His Father, yet, I had never before met a man like Him. I could not forget all the

things He had spoken to His Disciples up on the mountain. Over and over again I thought about the days when He climbed the mountain to pray to His Father, and how I felt such peace and love whenever He was near.

Then I remembered the times He would bring His Disciples and teach them underneath my branches about the love of God. I remembered the story He told once about a Cross He must bear, and how He must die so others could live.

My mind could not comprehend how others could live if He was dead. And what about me, I was the very instrument of His death. Even if He was the Son of God, God could never forgive me for being such a burden to Him, and worst of all, participating in His death.

That first night was very cold and dark. My heart felt the same way. I tried to forget that Jesus was lying dead in a tomb just a few yards away. I tried to forget that I helped put Him there. I could not sleep or rest knowing that I too was just as guilty as the Roman Soldiers who had crucified Him, and those people who wanted Him dead.

I was sorry for what I had become to Him. I knew I had been wrong all my adult life when I became bitter against mankind. If anyone could have steered me in the right direction, I knew Jesus could have done it. But, now, all hope was gone, and I was terribly ashamed of what I had become. I knew I now had to come face to face with reality.

I was a disgrace to my father, my family and the entire Olive family. I wouldn't have blamed God if He had decided to destroy the entire World and everything in it. Then suddenly I remembered the Words I had heard Jesus speak to His Disciples: "FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD HE GAVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON THAT WHOSOEVER BELIEVETH IN HIM SHALL NOT PERISH BUT HAVE ETERNAL LIFE."

Those words had no meaning anymore, because men had mocked Him and put Him to death. “How could God still love the World after all this?” I thought. All that is left is for God’s judgment to be poured out on all of us. We are all miserable sinners who deserve to be punished.

CHAPTER 9

HE'S ALIVE

I stood against the wall for three days and three nights, thinking about all the things which had transpired wondering what would become of me now. The Soldiers were still gathering wood at dusk to make a fire to warm themselves with at night; but for some reason, they had not seen me leaning up against the wall nearby.

On the third day I watched as the sun rose over the top of the Mount of Olives. The grass and the flowers were wet with sparkling dew drops. The sky was a deep blue, and I could hear the birds sweetly singing for the first time since I was brought down from the mountain. "How strange," I thought, "everything looks so bright and clear this morning."

Oh how I wished I could go back in time to my home on the Mount of Olives. I wished Jesus was there praying by the rock underneath my branches once again. I longed for the past, but I knew it could never be that way again. Once you are dead, it is all over. "There is no going back to what once was, and there is no future for a dead tree like me," I thought.

I looked over at the spike still clinging to my left beam and then over to the right beam where His hands had been nailed to me. I looked down and saw the spike which nailed the feet of Jesus to me. I was covered with the Blood which flowed from His veins. I felt so guilty and ashamed of myself.

I remembered the pain and agony He suffered as He was nailed to me just a few days ago. The spikes were still colored a deep red from the Blood which flowed from His broken and battered body. He had been so badly beaten and His body so marred that He was unrecognizable as a man.

I remembered when Jesus quoted to His Disciples from the scripture the words "HE WAS WOUNDED FOR OUR TRANSGRESSIONS, HE WAS BRUISED FOR OUR INIQUITIES: THE CHASTISEMENT OF OUR PEACE WAS UPON HIM; AND WITH HIS STRIPES WE ARE HEALED. HE WAS OPPRESSED, AND HE WAS AFFLICTED, YET HE OPENED NOT HIS MOUTH: HE WAS BROUGHT AS A LAMB TO THE SLAUGHTER, AND AS A SHEEP BEFORE HER SHEARERS IS DUMB, YET HE OPENED NOT HIS MOUTH." Surely He had predicted His own death.

I looked at myself, and His Blood was all over me! His Blood had seeped deep within me. I looked down where my horizontal and vertical beams came together to form a Cross, and saw a heart etched into my chest. It looked as though the heart had been formed and created by His Blood. Inscribed in the center of the Heart were the words, "I LOVE YOU."

"How did that get there?" I wondered. I then remembered when He was dying on the Cross how I could feel His heart beating right next to mine. I could feel the power of His love as I had heard Him cry out: "Father forgive them for they know not what they do."

Suddenly, I heard a loud noise. I looked over in the direction of the Tomb and saw that the stone which had been placed there had been ROLLED AWAY! The Soldiers had fallen asleep and the noise of the stone being rolled away had not awakened them.

"What is taking place?" I wondered! Then I saw the most amazing thing I had ever seen in my life. This man who

people called Jesus of Nazareth walked out of the Tomb. HE WAS ALIVE! I couldn't believe my eyes. "It is Him," I cried. "HE IS ALIVE-HE IS ALIVE!" "HE IS ALIVE FOREVER MORE!" I shouted with joy over and over "HE IS ALIVE". My heart rejoiced within me HE'S ALIVE, HE'S ALIVE forevermore, HE IS ALIVE. I don't know how it happened, but somehow "HE IS ALIVE," I shouted those words again and again. I could not contain the joy within in my heart!

I was so happy that He was alive that I forgot about all the thoughts of the past which had plagued me for years. I was thankful that the Soldiers had not used me as fire wood to keep them warm so I could witness Him coming out of the Tomb ALIVE. I shouted over and over with exceeding great joy. I didn't understand how, but He Was Alive. The words rang over and over in my mind and in my heart, "HE IS ALIVE!"

There were so many things I had seen that I didn't understand. I had seen Him die. I even took part in His death, yet, now HE IS ALIVE. "How can this be?" I thought. My heart leaped within me. Now, I wanted to live forever because Jesus was alive. I knew now for certain that He was the Son of God! God did not leave Him in the Tomb, but came to His rescue, and raised Him from the dead.

What joy filled my soul. "This is too good to be true," I thought. "Were my eyes deceiving me?" I questioned. This man whom I helped crucify was standing outside His Tomb ALIVE.

I had seen Him die. I felt His lifeless body next to mine just three days ago as He hung next to me. I knew He was dead. I felt His heart stop beating. I felt His body go limp, and I felt his Blood pouring all over me and all through me. I saw His Blood cease to flow. I saw them prepare His body for burial, and I saw them place Him in the Tomb. I knew He was dead!

Again, my thoughts went back to the time when He taught His Disciples underneath my branches. I could feel His love and peace covering me again and again flowing over me, just as it had when He prayed on the mountain. I then remembered Him telling His Disciples He must spend three days and nights in the heart of the earth.

I remembered hearing Him say that His Father would raise Him from the dead after three days so that all men could live and be free from death. All men could go to Heaven and live with Him for eternity if they believed upon His Name.

It was at that moment I realized that Jesus truly was the Son of God. GOD WAS HIS FATHER. I was beginning to understand why He was crucified. He died so all men could LIVE through His sacrifice. God loved man so much that HE GAVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON as a sacrifice to make a way for mankind to be saved from all unrighteousness and death.

“But what about me? Could His words possibly apply to me?” I questioned. There I stood leaning against the wall with His Blood all over me. I had been such a burden to Him, and even participated in His death. What chance is there for me to be forgiven for what I had done to Him. After all, it was because of my sins He was crucified.

My heart sank within me. The feelings of despair and hopelessness were plaguing me again. I felt so ashamed. “Could He also forgive an ugly, bitter Olive tree like me?” I wondered.

Suddenly, He turned toward me and started walking in my direction. He walked toward the Gate of the Cemetery and stopped. The entire time He never took His eyes off of me.

I tried to hide myself. I wouldn't dare look at Him. I felt so guilty and ashamed of myself. After all, I was the Cross that

He had carried to His death. But there was nowhere for me to hide.

I was hoping He would not be angry with me for what I had been. I didn't choose to do what I had done. I had no strength within myself to keep me from doing all the wrong things I had done in my life. I was guilty of the worst crime in the universe. I had been the instrument of the death of the Son of God.

Again, my thoughts took me back to the times on the mountain when He would come to pray and teach His Disciples about God. I remembered Him teaching them that they must forgive those people who would persecute and revile them, and do all manner of evil against them. If I could just ask Him to forgive me for what I had done, maybe He would find it in His heart to forgive me. I thought of the wrong paths I had taken--all the times I disobeyed my father, and all the unforgiveness and malice I had in my own heart.

I could go on for hours with all the things I wished I had not done, but was helpless to stop myself from doing them. Yet, somehow, I knew He would forgive me of all the things in my past—all I had to do was ask Him. Then in my heart I prayed this prayer:

JESUS, PLEASE FORGIVE ME FOR ALL THE WRONG THINGS I HAVE DONE IN MY LIFE. FORGIVE ME FOR BEING THE INSTRUMENT OF YOUR DEATH. I BELIEVE THAT GOD IS YOUR FATHER AND THAT HE LOVED ME SO MUCH THAT HE ALLOWED YOU, HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON, TO DIE ON A CRUEL CROSS ON CALVARY FOR MY SINS. I THANK YOU FOR THE SACRIFICE YOU MADE IN DYING FOR ME AND SHEDDING YOUR BLOOD AT CALVARY. I BELIEVE THAT GOD RAISED YOU FROM THE DEAD SO I CAN BE A TREE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS. I KNOW WHO YOU ARE NOW, AND I KNOW THAT YOU CAME TO BLEED AND DIE

FOR ME SO THAT YOU MAY CLEANSE ME FROM ALL SIN. I KNOW NOW WHY YOU WERE CRUCIFIED AND I BELIEVE NOW THAT YOU ARE THE SON OF GOD. I KNOW THAT YOU WERE CRUCIFIED FOR MY SINS. I KNOW THAT YOUR BLOOD COVERS AND CLEANSSES ME FROM ALL OF MY SINS. I THANK YOU THAT YOU WERE WOUNDED FOR MY TRANSGRESSIONS AND BRUISED FOR MY INIQUITIES. I THANK YOU THAT YOU MADE A WAY FOR ME TO LIVE WITH YOU IN HEAVEN FOREVER.

He looked me straight in the eyes. Then with a shimmering smile on His face, He said: "I AM HE WHO ONCE WAS DEAD, BUT NOW I LIVE TO HELP THOSE WHO CANNOT HELP THEMSELVES. I FORGIVE YOU OF YOUR SINS AND TRESPASSES. BE OF GOOD CHEER, MY FRIEND, FOR I SHALL MAKE OF YOU A PILLAR IN THE TEMPLE OF GOD, I HAVE MADE YOU A TREE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND YOU SHALL DWELL WITH ME IN THE TEMPLE OF GOD FOREVER."

At that moment, I knew in my heart that everything would be all right. A thousand burdens lifted off me and I knew He had forgiven me. His Blood had covered me and washed away all the sin, hopelessness, despair and grief I knew. My life would never be the same again. I had found the peace my heart desired through the POWER OF HIS RESURRECTION and by my faith in HIS BLOOD.

When we call ourselves Christians we are acknowledging that we have been to the Cross and our identity is found in Him through His sufferings. We believe that He suffered and died a horrible death, and that God raised Him from the dead. We have become a new creation in Christ Jesus through the power of His Blood, which cleanses us from all wrong. Like sheep we have all gone astray. Like DEAD trees we deserve nothing, but to be thrown in the fire to be burned. God does not wish that anyone should perish in the fire, but desires that all men would repent of their sins and receive ETERNAL LIFE through faith in Christ.

The Apostle Paul wrote: "I AM CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST: NEVERTHELESS YET I LIVE; YET NOT I, BUT CHRIST LIVETH IN ME: AND THE LIFE WHICH I NOW LIVE IN THE FLESH I LIVE BY THE FAITH OF THE SON OF GOD, WHO LOVED ME, AND GAVE HIMSELF FOR ME." Galatians, Chapter 2, Verse 20.

Paul also wrote: "FROM HENCEFORTH LET NO MAN TROUBLE ME: FOR I BEAR IN MY BODY THE MARKS OF THE LORD JESUS." Galatians, Chapter 6, Verse 17.

"THEREFORE IF ANY MAN BE IN CHRIST, HE IS A NEW CREATURE: OLD THINGS HAVE PASSED AWAY; BEHOLD, ALL THINGS ARE BECOME NEW." 1 Corinthians, Chapter 5, Verse 17.

If you do not know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, or if you have backslidden or not where you should be in the Lord—please pray this prayer and Ask Jesus to come into your heart and life:

FATHER I COME TO YOU IN THE NAME OF YOUR SON JESUS. I ADMIT THAT I AM A SINNER AND THAT I HAVE COME SHORT OF YOUR GLORY. I BELIEVE JESUS DIED ON THE CROSS FOR MY SINS AND THAT YOU RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD. I KNOW THAT I AM THE TREE IN THIS STORY, AND THAT IT IS BECAUSE OF MY SINS HE DIED. I AM SORRY FOR ALL THE SINS I HAVE COMMITTED. PLEASE FORGIVE ME AND COME INTO MY HEART RIGHT NOW. I ALSO ASK YOU TO FILL ME WITH YOUR HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

DATE:

THE BRIDE

Into a city, a King did ride
On a colt so pretty, to find a Bride.
He came to reign, upon His throne
To remove the stain, that men had known.
They nailed His soul, upon some wood
In a deep dark hole, where their souls stood.
The throngs did sing, as angels cried
To see their King, die for his Bride.
They slew the King, nailed Him to a tree
To find something, they could not see.
And now the King, reigns high above
So his bride can sing, of His great love.

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WEBSITE: eaglesnestprophetic.com

E-MAIL ADDRESS: donrandolph@gmail.com

