

Matthew 28:1-15
April 24, '11
Easter Sunrise

“WHILE YOU WERE SLEEPING”

MOST OF YOU ARE PROBABLY AWARE THAT THERE ARE OTHER DOCUMENTS FROM THE EARLY YEARS OF THE CHURCH THAT SPEAK ABOUT JESUS.

THERE ARE THE SO-CALLED “MISSING BOOKS OF THE BIBLE.”

THERE ARE A VARIETY OF BOOKS OTHER THAN MATTHEW, MARK, LUKE & JOHN THAT ARE CALLED “GOSPELS.”

I THINK IT’S FAIRLY SAFE TO SAY THAT THOSE OTHER DOCUMENTS HAVE BEEN LEGITIMATELY REJECTED DUE TO LACK OF EVIDENCE OR INCONSISTENCY WITH WHAT WE READ ELSEWHERE ABOUT JESUS.

ONE OF THE MOST FASCINATING OF THESE EARLY DOCUMENTS IS “*THE INFANCY GOSPEL OF THOMAS.*”

THIS ISN’T TO BE CONFUSED WITH “*THE GOSPEL OF THOMAS.*”

“*THE INFANCY GOSPEL OF THOMAS*” IS SUPPOSED TO BE A RE-TELLING OF THE CHILDHOOD OF JESUS.

IT COULD EASILY BE SUB-TITLED “*BAD-TEMPERED CHILD WITH SUPERPOWERS TERRORIZES VILLAGE.*”

THE OPENING STORY SETS THE STAGE FOR WHAT’S TO FOLLOW.

LITTLE 5-YEAR-OLD JESUS IS PLAYING BY A STREAM, GATHERING WATER INTO LITTLE POOLS & PURIFYING THE WATER MIRACULOUSLY.

HE’S ALSO SCULPTING SPARROWS FROM THE SOFT MUD.

BASICALLY, HE’S JUST MAKING FANCY MUD PIES.

A FAITHFUL JEW COMPLAINS TO JOSEPH ABOUT WHAT HIS SON IS DOING SINCE HE’S VIOLATING THE SABBATH BY MAKING THINGS ON THIS DAY.

JESUS’ RESPONSE IS TO MAKE THE SPARROWS COME ALIVE & THEY FLY AWAY.

LATER ON, JOSEPH CALLS JESUS IN FOR A PRIVATE TALK, ADMONISHING HIM FOR HIS ACTIONS & WARNING HIM THAT THEIR FAMILY IS BEING PERSECUTED BECAUSE OF HIS BEHAVIOR.

SO JESUS SIMPLY BLINDS ALL OF HIS ACCUSERS.

JOSEPH, INFURIATED, GRABS JESUS’ EAR & GIVES IT A HARD YANK!

IN ANOTHER INCIDENT, JESUS & ONE OF HIS LITTLE FRIENDS, ZENON, ARE PLAYING ON A ROOF.

ZENON ACCIDENTALLY FALLS FROM THE ROOF & DIES.

HIS PARENTS ACCUSE JESUS OF HAVING PUSHED HIM OFF, WHICH HE HADN’T.

SO JESUS SIMPLY BRINGS ZENON BACK TO LIFE SO HE CAN TELL EVERYONE WHAT REALLY HAPPENED.

ONE MORE STORY FROM THIS FASCINATING BOOK:

JOSEPH MAKES A COSTLY ERROR WHILE BUILDING A BEAUTIFUL BED FOR A VERY WEALTHY MAN.

JESUS CORRECTS THE ERROR BY STRETCHING THE WOOD TO THE DESIRED LENGTH.

WOULDN'T IT BE INTERESTING IF THERE WERE OTHER DOCUMENTS AVAILABLE THAT HELD MORE TRUTH THAN THE FANCIFUL STORIES OF "THE INFANCY GOSPEL OF THOMAS?"

IS IT COMPLETELY OUT OF THE REALM OF POSSIBILITY THAT SOMETHING LIKE THE FOLLOWING MIGHT SOMEDAY BE DISCOVERED?

GRACE TO YOU & ALL IN YOUR HOUSEHOLD.

I AM COMPELLED TO SHARE WHAT I HAVE COME TO KNOW & BELIEVE.

MY FATHER NEVER SAID A WORD ABOUT THE INCIDENT THAT DEFINED HIS LIFE.

NOT A WORD.

WHenever asked, he would take on a wistful look of regret & respond, "I have nothing to say about the matter."

I wasn't sure if it was guilt or regret that I read in his eyes as he spoke but that was all he would say – until the day he died.

On that day, as he lay on his bed, struggling with each breath, I sat in an outer room with my brothers & sisters, while my mother tended to his needs.

She came to us, and motioned to me.

"Marcus, he's calling for you."

I went & sat near him & I saw that wistful look in his eyes that I had seen so many times over the years.

"Marcus," he said, "it is time."

Thinking he meant he was about to die, I said, "No, father. Stay strong. Keep trying."

He said, "No, I'm not speaking of death, though I know it is near.

I'm speaking of "that night."

I knew precisely what he meant.

HE WAS REFERRING TO THAT OF WHICH HE WOULD NEVER SPEAK – THE NIGHT THAT HAD ALTERED FOREVER THE COURSE OF HIS LIFE.

“WHY, FATHER? WHY SPEAK OF IT NOW?”

“I MUST. THE WORLD MUST KNOW. THE WORLD MUST KNOW THE TRUTH OF THAT NIGHT.”

MY FATHER CONTINUED, THE WORDS FLOWING FREELY – WORDS THAT HAD BEEN PENT UP INSIDE HIS SOUL FOR SO MANY YEARS.

“I AM THE ONLY ONE WHO STILL LIVES & THAT IS THE PACT WE HAD MADE WITH ONE ANOTHER.

WE WOULD KEEP SILENT UNTIL THE END...PROTECTING ONE ANOTHER & OUR FAMILIES AS WELL.

BUT NOW – NOW THE TIME HAS COME & THE TRUTH MUST BE TOLD.

LISTEN CAREFULLY, MY SON, BECAUSE NOW IT WILL BE UP TO YOU TO SHARE THE TRUTH OF THAT NIGHT.

THE EVENTS OF THOSE DAYS WENT SO FAST THAT NO ONE WAS REALLY SURE WHAT WAS HAPPENING.

MY SQUAD – ALL OF US – WERE GIVEN THE RESPONSIBILITY ON SATURDAY TO GUARD THE TOMB OF THE NAZARENE.

IT WAS SUCH A MENIAL & TEDIOUS TASK – SIMPLY STANDING OUTSIDE A TOMB TO BE SURE THAT IT WASN'T DISTURBED.

WHY IN THE WORLD ANYONE WOULD WANT TO DISTURB THE TOMB OF AN EXECUTED CRIMINAL WAS BEYOND ME.

BUT WE KNEW BETTER THAN TO QUESTION ORDERS.

WE DID WHAT WE WERE TOLD TO DO.

WHAT WE HAD EXPECTED TO BE A MENIAL & TEDIOUS TASK, THOUGH, PROVED TO BE ANYTHING BUT THAT.

MARCUS – MY SON – WHAT HAPPENED DURING THE NIGHT I COULDN'T POSSIBLY EXPLAIN TO YOU BUT IT WASN'T – BELIEVE ME – IT WASN'T AS THEY SAID IT WAS.

WE ALL WENT BACK & TOLD THE CHIEF PRIESTS EVERYTHING THAT HAD HAPPENED.

THEY LEFT US & THEN CAME BACK.

THEY GAVE US MONEY – A LOT OF MONEY – AND THEY SAID, ‘YOU MUST SAY, ‘HIS DISCIPLES CAME BY NIGHT & STOLE HIM AWAY WHILE YOU WERE SLEEPING.’

“WHILE YOU WERE SLEEPING!?”

NEVER! NEVER WOULD WE HAVE SLEPT ON THE JOB!

BUT THEN THEY SAID, ‘IF THIS COMES TO THE GOVERNOR’S EARS, WE WILL SATISFY HIM & KEEP YOU OUT OF TROUBLE.’

SON, IT WASN’T THE MONEY – THOUGH IT DID PROVIDE US WITH SOME SECURITY.

IT WAS OUR FEAR OVER WHAT WOULD HAVE HAPPENED HAD THE TRUTH COME OUT.

WE WOULD HAVE BEEN SILENCED – SILENCED IN THE MOST EXTREME FASHION.

MARCUS – I DID IT FOR YOU – FOR YOU & YOUR MOTHER AND YOUR BROTHERS & SISTERS.

WE ALL DID.

WE ALL AGREED TO KEEP OUR SILENCE UNTIL ONLY ONE OF US REMAINED.

MARCUS – I AM THAT ONE & NOW THE TRUTH MUST BE TOLD.”

WITH THAT, MY FATHER RAISED UP IN HIS BED & TOOK HOLD OF BOTH MY HANDS.

THE WISTFUL LOOK IN HIS EYES TURNED INTO A MIXTURE OF SERIOUSNESS, HOPE, FEAR & EXCITEMENT.

HE SAID, WITH ALL THE STRENGTH HE COULD MUSTER –

“WE SAW HIM. HE WAS ALIVE.

THERE WAS NO MISTAKING IT.

THE DEAD, EXECUTED CRIMINAL NAMED JESUS WAS ALIVE!”

A WRY SMILE CAME TO HIS FACE AS HE WHISPERED-

“AND THEY SAID ‘HIS FOLLOWERS STOLE HIS BODY WHILE YOU WERE SLEEPING!’

AS I HEARD MORE ABOUT HIM, SON, I HEARD WHAT HAD HAPPENED THE NIGHT BEFORE HIS EXECUTION.

I HEARD OF HIS AGONY IN GETHSEMANE.

IT WOULD BE FAR MORE ACCURATE TO SAY TO THOSE FOLLOWERS WHOM THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS CLAIM STOLE HIS BODY, THAT THEIR MASTER ENDURED HIS PERSONAL TORMENT ‘WHILE YOU WERE SLEEPING.’”

THEN, WITH A LOOK OF UTTER DETERMINATION, MY FATHER SAID, “MARCUS, IT’S TOO LATE FOR ME – BUT NOT FOR YOU. I SAW HIM – WE ALL DID.

THERE WERE TWO WOMEN THERE - BOTH OF THEM NAMED MARY, ONE OF THEM FROM THE REGION OF MAGDALA.

FIND THEM, SON. FIND THEM & TELL THEM MY STORY.

AND THEN, LISTEN TO THEIRS.

MARCUS – I SAW HIM.

I DIDN’T SLEEP THAT NIGHT. I SAW HIM. I KNOW I DID.

AND NOW, AS I SLEEP FOR ETERNITY, I WILL SEE HIM AGAIN. I KNOW I WILL.”

AND WITH THAT, MY FATHER CLOSED HIS EYES & FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE THAT NIGHT LONG AGO, I SAW A LOOK OF UTTER CONTENTMENT & FULFILLMENT ON HIS FACE.

I SAID, “YES, FATHER. I KNOW YOU’VE SEEN HIM AGAIN – WHILE YOU WERE SLEEPING.”

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