

Mishiael (Former Priest) From Matt 27 and Acts 6 Sunrise 2015

From Matthew 27: Jesus cried again with a loud voice, and yielded up his spirit. Behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom. The earth quaked and the rocks were split.

From Acts 6: The word of God increased and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem exceedingly. A great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.

My name is Mishiael. For all of my life, I was a priest of the temple of the LORD, but no longer. Now you could call me a follower of Jesus. Ahh, I can see that I am confusing you. Please forgive me for starting in the middle of my story. Allow me to try again.

I was born into the line of the Levites—born to serve God. Most of all, I wanted to serve him in the temple.

My first jobs in the temple of the LORD were simple ones—still, I liked sweeping the floors and cleaning, because I often got to “be” in the majesty of the temple all by myself. I could always find quiet and solitude somewhere in God’s house.

God’s house was a refuge from the Romans. My teachers said that the Messiah would come and set us free from bondage—but it couldn’t come soon enough for me! I prayed for him to come quickly. I never imagined that at that very moment he was alive and—of all things—living in Nazareth.

Please let me make one thing clear. Many of us were searching the skies for the coming King. The problem was that our tradition told us how it would happen and what it would look like—and—Jesus the Nazarene was ANYTHING BUT the Warrior-King we expected.

I first heard of Jesus just a couple of years ago, when my mother was dying. As her only son, I was in Bethlehem at her side. He came to Jerusalem while I was gone.

When I returned, I heard the stories about how he had healed a cripple on the Sabbath. You may remember the cripple—the one who always seemed to be begging at the Beautiful Gate.

Everyone was so upset because he healed the man on the Sabbath—that they missed the fact that he healed a man who was crippled all his life.

Because it is written that he will be a healer, my mind immediately went to the Messiah.

The High Priest was very angry—because he broke the Sabbath and because of the sharp words that were exchanged. Caiaphas forbade us to even speak the name of Jesus.

Soon he was traveling all over Judea, teaching and preaching. He was not a Rabbi, but he gathered disciples. But they were fishermen and zealots, and one was (you won’t believe this one) a TAX COLLECTOR!

There were rumors about him in the temple every day. It was said that he had healed hundreds. There were SO many reports that it HAD to be true, he HAD to be doing these things. I even heard that he had raised a little boy from the dead!.

Though he did not fit my expectations, I dared to think that he might REALLY be the Messiah!

I first saw him about a year ago. Ananias came running up, all out of breath and he said that HE was here again—here in the temple! I ran to the outer courtyard as fast as I could.

A crowd had gathered. Because I was a priest, they parted and allowed me to move closer. He was talking with some Pharisees. Old Mariath was so red-faced and short of breath that I thought that he was going to die! I don't even remember what the argument was over, but Jesus was simply saying that which was true.

Uneducated Nazarene or not, he knew the law—but more, he was wise in the ways of the law and even more than that, he was wise in the ways of God. He not only knew the letter of the law, he understood its spirit better than anyone I ever heard.

The Pharisees began to bite the air in anger and to look for stones to throw at him. I worried about his safety, but there was no need. I cannot explain it, but he sort-of walked THROUGH the crowd—with an emphasis on THROUGH.

When he was gone, the one thing I couldn't get over is the love I saw in his eyes—even for those who wanted to kill him. It was definitely love I saw—but it was a sad love.

He stayed here several days, healing and teaching. No one confronted him again until he healed a blind man on the Sabbath—another obvious violation of law, but when he explained, it made the most sense—at least to me. The Sabbath really WAS made for man.

Caiaphas and the Pharisees, believe it or not, agreed on something—the fact that Jesus of Nazareth must die! If they only would have REALLY listened to him, they would never have plotted his death—but they wouldn't—or COULDN'T.

He was soon mobbed by crowds where ever he went. Though it was forbidden, I often went to hear him when I could. I was careful to keep back in the crowds.

I went to Perea on business and I heard that he was nearby—so I went to see him several times.

Soon he was in trouble for healing on the Sabbath again and he claimed to be the LORD OF THE SABBATH! Was he a blasphemer like they said or was he really the Lord of the Sabbath? Hmmm.

Once, while he was teaching, he turned and he looked at me—right at me—with those eyes of his. Oh, how I wanted to run and hide! I was as if he could see inside me—in my soul. I was terrified! I knew that if he saw the real me, he would condemn me—he would reject me.

I was frozen with fear (except for my knees knocking). Just before he turned and continued teaching, he smiled and nodded slightly.

One day, as he was teaching, a messenger ran up—dirty and heaving. Jesus' friend Lazarus was sick—unto death. Instead of going right away, he taught for two more days and then set off for Bethany. I followed along.

Lazarus was already dead. His sister Martha met us and brought the news. She was SO upset. She ranted—saying that if the Master had come right away, her brother would still be alive.

Jesus went to the tomb to mourn. I knew his family and friends, so I stayed at the house. Suddenly there was a shout! We scrambled out of the house and people were running up, saying that Lazarus was alive. I ran to the tomb as fast as I could and I saw him myself—still wrapped up, but definitely alive and well! Jesus raised him from the dead! Any doubts I had melted away—surely Jesus was the Christ!

And others began to think—and to say—that he must be the Messiah. In a way, the raising of his friend was the beginning of the end.

Jesus slipped quietly away. I didn't know at the time, but he was giving final instructions to his disciples.

This past week, he came back to Jerusalem again. Boy did he come back! First, he rode into Jerusalem on a donkey colt—just like the prophet wrote about the Messiah. "Tell the daughter of Zion, behold your king comes to you meekly, riding on the colt of an ass..."

Suddenly, and at the same instant, every soul in Jerusalem seemed to know that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah—the chosen one. They laid palm branches and even their cloaks on the road—so that the feet of the donkey didn't even touch the dirt. They shouted "Hosannah! Glory to God! Praise the LORD!"

When the religious leaders saw this, they were afraid of what the Romans might do. They were also afraid of change—especially if it meant losing their power.

The next day, he stalked straight to the temple and threw out the money changers and those who sold animals for sacrifice. He didn't politely ask them to leave—HE TOSSED THEM OUT ON THEIR EARS. He scattered their wares and tables all over the steps. Lambs and doves and coins were everywhere. He shouted that instead of a house of worship, his Father's house had become a den of thieves!

Caiaphas couldn't allow that. This time it was personal. He allowed the merchants to set up—for a fee, of course. It WAS a service to the pilgrims. But they also cheated man and God by selling unworthy sacrifices.

No one crossed the High Priest and got away with it.

All week he came and went. When he was challenged. He responded by calling us leaders hypocrites—in front of the common people, no less!

The scribes and Pharisees were outraged—but I knew that it was true. They DID tithe to the nth degree and yet steal from widows and orphans—failing to keep the spirit of the law.

The next day is a blur now, but when it was happening, it tore out my heart. Late in the night, Jesus was arrested and tried. He was found not guilty, but sentenced to die anyway!

A crowd gathered, “crucify him, away with the traitor.” I know that some of these were the ones who shouted, “hosanna!” a few days before, but now they said, “let his blood be on us!”

The other priests went to see the spectacle—to see him get what he deserved. I was heart-sick and stayed behind at the temple. I sat on the floor near the Holy of Holies and I prayed to God to spare him.

About noon, the sun almost seemed to go out. It was SO dark. I was afraid and I went deeper into the temple—thinking I would be safe. The floors and walls began to quake and rock and it almost looked like the temple would fall. Suddenly, the veil which covered the entrance to the Holy of Holies ripped into two pieces—from the top to the bottom! It fell away and I could see inside. Only God could do such a thing!

I hoped that it was a sign—that the angels had come and that God had saved his Servant. Almost as soon as I had wished it, another priest ran in and said that Jesus was dead! Ohhhh—woe!

Now I understood! This HAD been the Messiah and we had killed him—surely God sent the earthquake and split the veil in his anger at us. He WAS the Messiah, but WE had killed him! I wondered what good is a dead Messiah?

The next day I lay in bed all day, begging for forgiveness and seeking answers.

This morning I got up and wandered—in a daze—toward the tomb where they had buried him. A woman—one of his followers—ran past me, shouting and crying. “They have stolen the Master!” “They have taken his body!”

I continued on, but was almost run over by two men who were running toward the tomb. Then there were soldiers and others. There were whispers at first—that he had raised himself up. Then there were more than whispers. They said that he was alive!

It seemed impossible—but I saw what he did for Lazarus. T

he soldiers said that the disciples stole the body, but I know better. I saw him in the garden! I know that it was him—because he looked at me and you could never mistake those eyes..... God's eyes!

He's alive! He's ALIVE!