

ACT 2

Prayer: O Lord God, King of the universe, blessed art Thou, and blessed is Thy Son, our Savior, Yeshua ha Meshiach, Jesus our Messiah, who has given us new life in Him. Let the words of my mouth and the meditations my heart be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer. Amen.

It is so good to be with you again, brothers and sisters of the church of Sidon. For those of you who weren't with us two evenings ago, I am Simon of Cyrene. That evening I **shared with you** how I carried the cross of Jesus, how He told me to deny myself, take up my cross and follow Him, and how He showed the love of God in His words from the cross. When He died, the shofar sounded, announcing the afternoon sacrifice, and the ground shook beneath our feet. I ended my account telling you of the spear that confirmed the death of Jesus of Nazareth.

Soon, two members of the ruling council came for Jesus' body. I thought they were the ones that brought Jesus to Governor Pilate, but these two must have felt differently than the others. One of them was going to bury Jesus in his own new family tomb. That was sure to end their positions on the Sanhedrin. By caring for Jesus' body, they were **forfeiting** participating in the Feast of Firstfruits and Unleavened Bread, the feasts I had traveled here to experience. The Sabbath was about to begin so they made haste to place Jesus' body in the tomb and wrapped his body with a cloth and spices. They planned to return to visit the body, hoping the spices would cover the stench of decay.

I **went to a fellow Cyrenian's home** for the Sabbath. It was close enough to make a Sabbath day's journey to our synagogue so that I could participate that evening in the worship in Greek. When I arrived at the home, preparations had just been completed for the next seven days of the feast. Several of my host's **guests were arguing** about Jesus. Some thought that He was a blasphemer. One even said that when he was in Galilee he heard Jesus say we had to **eat His flesh** and drink His blood to have life. Another asked how a blasphemer could heal the sick or even raise the dead. He told of seeing a man from Bethany called out of his tomb after four days. Voices were raised on both sides.

When they saw I was present, most expressed sympathy for me being forced to carry the cross. They waited for a response. All I could say was, "I never met anyone like Jesus. **How could God allow** the Messiah to be cursed by being hung on a tree? But how could a mere prophet face death like He did? What was that eerie darkness that set in for three hours? Was it mere coincidence that the Baptist said Jesus was the Lamb of God and that He died at the time of the afternoon sacrifice? There were mumblings amongst the guests but no one spoke openly.

That evening, we went together **to the synagogue** for the readings from the sacred scrolls. The crowd was very somber. Usually this time of year is filled with joyous

expressions of God's goodness. The crucifixions had changed the atmosphere. Our reading was from the section that spoke of the Exodus from Egypt and the preparation of the unleavened bread, but my mind kept wandering to what that man had reported Jesus saying, "Eat my flesh and drink my blood to have life." Was there some connection to the Passover? How could He call the dead back to life?

The next morning I went with my host and his other guests **to the temple**. There was no sign of the disciples on the streets. We learned that the tomb had been sealed by Rome and a watch of guards had been set. The temple courtyard was buzzing with the same kind of conversations that went on the night before in my host's home. I tried to listen in on the quiet conversations taking place around me. "How could He be Messiah? He was from Nazareth!" "Who else could do the things He did?" "What good is a dead Messiah?" But the one comment that captured my attention more than all the others was when one man said, "Jesus said something about being like **Jonah** and rising from the depths in three days. Let us see if He rises." But those listening mocked the man.

After our prayer time we left the temple. I just **had to find one of the disciples** of Jesus and find out what Jesus had said. What did they expect to happen next? But everyone I asked about the disciples whereabouts turned away from me, refusing to even talk. There was so much fear that everyone refused to talk about Jesus or His disciples. After a few hours of being shunned I gave up and decided I would have to wait to see what happened the next morning. On my way back to my host's home, I **went by the tomb** where they had interred Jesus' body. It had indeed been sealed by Rome. The four soldiers on guard were joking among themselves about making sure a dead man didn't break out the tomb. Two were playing some kind of gambling game on the limestone beneath their feet. They paid no attention as I passed.

That night I **could not sleep**. Rise from the depths in **three days like Jonah** and take up your cross and follow me. What did it all mean? Where were His disciples? Were they going to bring a Jewish army to Jerusalem, or would Jesus rise and take over? Would I ever return to my wife and sons in Cyrene? I tried to quiet my mind, but nothing seemed to help. Suddenly I woke to the light of dawn. I must have dozed off a short time before. I threw on my outer robe and ran out into the crisp spring air. As I headed toward the tomb, a woman ran past me. Her face was lit up with joy. I wondered where she was going and felt as if I should follow, but I was too anxious to see the tomb.

Arriving there I saw – the **soldiers were gone!** The stone was rolled back! I stepped slowly into the mouth of the tomb. When my eyes adjusted to the dark, I could see the grave cloths lying where He had been laid. Who would take the body and put the linen neatly back on the stone slab? Stepping back out of the tomb I could hear someone coming, and fearing it was the Romans, I hid among the bushes. But it was that young man John who had been at the cross, along with an older man. John arrived first and

stood looking in. The older man dashed right in and John followed him. This was my chance to meet them, but did I dare get involved in a revolution? I could hear John exclaiming, "He is alive. He rose just like he said. The Magdalene was right after all!" The older man kept cautioning him and telling him to keep his voice down.

When they came out of the tomb, I **startled them** as I stepped out of the bushes, but then John recognized me as the man who had carried the cross for Jesus. He embraced me and told me to follow them; that Jesus had risen. He introduced the older man as Peter. We took some back streets looking over our shoulders to making sure we weren't being followed. Then up an outer staircase, we entered a large **upper room**. The men and few women looked shocked to see a stranger, but John quickly explained who I was, and then immediately started telling them about the empty tomb. John repeated what he had said at the tomb. "He's alive. He rose just like He said!" The woman I had passed that morning was there. She said, "Now do you believe me?" One of the men with pained expression responded, "He can't be. You saw His dead body. You saw the spear go into His heart. Those two from the Sanhedrin must have taken His body to Gehenna." John explained about the grave cloths being just how he had left them when they buried Jesus. If someone took the body, the cloths would have been in a pile on the floor of the tomb. Arguments went back and forth.

There was a **loud knock** on the door. Everyone was immediately silent and moved to the back door and window in case they needed to escape. To their relief, it was two of Jesus' followers. They told a marvelous tale of their journey to Emmaus and how a stranger had joined them. He asked why they were so downcast. When they told Him about their hope that Jesus would have been the Messiah, He explained to them from the Scriptures that the Messiah had to suffer these things. They said their hearts burned in them when He shared the Scriptures with them. They invited Him to join them for their meal. When He blessed the Father for providing the food and handed them the bread, they were shocked to see the nail holes in His hands. Only then did they realize ... it was Jesus! ...Then, He vanished.

The **arguments broke out again**. "Maybe it was His spirit. Maybe it was someone who looked like Him. What Scriptures did He talk about?" Suddenly ... the **room became filled with a golden light**. There He was! Standing there in our midst. Alive! Vibrant! No one moved, except for jaws dropping, "Shalom," He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." Some of His disciples dropped to their knees. Tears began to roll down cheeks, including mine. And to show us how real and present He was, He said, "Do you have anything here to eat?" One of the disciples handed Him a little salted fish. He ate it with a smile, as we watched in joyful wonder. He was no ghost!

But **what happened next will burn** in my heart through all eternity. He began to teach us, scripture after scripture from Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms, prophecies that had come to pass in His life, death, and resurrection. Passages I had known since I was a child I now learned had been fulfilled, some of them right in front of my eyes. I thought I was already in the heavenly Kingdom. I think He could have gone on like that forever, and I would have been thrilled if He did. But just as suddenly as He came, He was gone.

Well, **pandemonium** broke out. The disciples were jumping up and down and saying what John had said, "He's alive! He's alive!" They started dancing the horrah. Peter was telling them to keep it down, but John's brother, James yelled back, "Why, they can't kill Him!" Peter said, "Yes, but they can kill us!" Now it was John's turn, "Yes, and they probably will. But remember what He said to Martha and Mary, 'I am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.'" Well, then Peter was the loudest of all of them. In fact, they ran out into the streets and started telling everyone.

I was a bit **bewildered**. There was no army. Rome was still in power. Jesus had fulfilled many of the Scriptures about the Messiah, but what about reigning in the earth? I went **back to my host's** home to tell them Jesus is alive and **consider** what I should do next. Should I return home and bring my family back to learn from Jesus' disciples. Would Jesus keep showing up and teaching? I didn't want to miss that! But the disciples were told to go to Galilee and wait for Him there. Should I go with them?

Soon the **word had spread** and **Roman** soldiers were bursting into homes looking for Jesus' body, asking if we knew where it was hidden. I told a centurion that there was no dead body. I had seen Him alive. When the soldier asked me where, I knew I was in trouble. I lied. I hope that God will forgive me. I told them it was near the tomb. They questioned me for some time, but I was able to keep from saying anything about the disciples. Finally they told me I was a delusional Cyrene. They threatened to punish me if I spread a rumor of Jesus being alive and then let me go. That's when I **decided to return** home for my family. I took the first boat I could find.

On the journey, I had to tell others aboard what I had seen and heard. I shared with them how Jesus had borne our iniquities and carried our sorrows to the cross, just as Isaiah had foretold, how the Psalm of David came to pass right before my eyes. I shared how He appeared after He rose from death and ate a salted fish right before our very eyes. Some scoffed, but many had questions. I couldn't tell them much more than I had witnessed and heard Him share with us. But I did tell them we were to take up our cross and follow Him.

I **needed to get back** to Jerusalem and study as a disciple of Jesus' apostles. I knew I needed to learn every detail of what He said and did. All the while I was away from my

new brothers, I feared I was missing another appearance of Jesus. My plan was to make it back with my wife and sons, Alexander and Rufus, before Pentecost.

Arriving home I couldn't wait to tell my family how I had carried the cross, about Jesus' appearance after the crucifixion, how He taught us the Scriptures! I must have talked non-stop for a quarter of the day. They were completely with me until I told them we were going to sell all we had and go to Jerusalem. My wife was quite hesitant. She questioned me about everything and I really didn't have many answers. But she was a good Jewish wife and told me... "We aren't moving!" A man has to pray about situations like these. Amen brothers? Well, the Lord gave me the answer. I told her she could stay and I'd just take Alexander and Rufus. It wasn't a happy household for the next month, but it was an excited household. The boys kept asking to hear the stories again. They especially liked the part about Jesus appearing and disappearing. What we couldn't sell we gave to relatives and to the poor.

We **finally boarded** the boat in time to make the journey there for Feast of Pentecost. I couldn't wait to get back to the disciples and hear more of Jesus' teaching. My zeal had dampened a bit as time had passed, nevertheless, three Jews on the boat had decided to come with us to hear more about Jesus. I guess you could say they were my first converts. That just goes to show you that God can use anyone!

Arriving in Jerusalem, everyone was talking about the appearances of Jesus and wondering if the Pentecost Feast would see more crucifixions. This concerned my wife quite a bit. I got a few of those, "I was afraid of this!" and "I told you so." We found the disciples in that **same upper room** where Jesus had met with us. I was saddened to hear Jesus had ascended to heaven but insisted on them telling us every detail. He told them they would receive power to be witnesses of His resurrection to the ends of the earth. After He ascended in the clouds, two angels told them Jesus would return in the same way He departed.

I missed all the times He appeared to the disciples so I asked each disciple what had heard. They told me of the miraculous catch of fish. They said Jesus warned Peter that he would be killed by Rome, and something about John not dying. John later told me that part was a misunderstanding that arose.

About 120 of the followers of Jesus assembled to fast and pray, and soon my wife's fears subsided. She can out pray me any day. But then women like to use a lot more words than men. What a great time of seeking God! O beloved, it was as if we were rising to the heavens. Each day the prayers were more intense, more filled with passion. John had told me that Jesus said we were to wait for the Promise of the Father, the pouring out of the Spirit that Joel had promised. Even my sons were completely given to prayer in anticipation of what would happen next.

The **morning of Pentecost** finally came. There was a sound of a mighty rushing wind that filled the room. What appeared to be tongues of fire came and settled over our heads. I felt the same as that day Jesus appeared in the room. I thought my heart would burst through my chest. We all began to praise God, saying the same words in many different languages, languages we had never learned. A great crowd had gathered outside. The sound of the wind and hearing all the praise had drawn them. We continued to praise God as we walked to the southern steps of the temple with the crowd following. There we began to proclaim what Jesus had done and praise Him for His mercy and grace to pour upon us His Holy Spirit. We were so joyful that some people accused us of drinking too much wine.

Then **Peter** held up his hands, and quieting the crowd he began preaching the good news. His voice thundered out as he told the people, "These men are not drunk this early in the morning. This is the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy of the pouring out of the Spirit. Jesus, whom God attested among you with miracles, whom you crucified, was raised from the dead. God has made him Messiah and Lord!" Great conviction fell on the crowd. They asked what they should do. Peter told them, "Repent, and believe in Jesus, and be baptized so your sins can be forgiven and you will be filled with the Holy Spirit just as we are."

There were a number of **baptismal pools** in front of the southern steps. We Jews use them to cleanse ourselves before going into the temple. The apostles now used them to help the crowd confess their conversion to faith in Jesus as the Messiah and Savior of their souls. We counted 3000, many of whom had come from all the places we Jews had scattered around the world. **How strategic** of God to have Jews who knew the Scriptures and were from many different regions and languages to be the first ones to be filled with the Holy Spirit. They could go back and share with their synagogues about the teachings about Jesus we were about to receive.

In the following days, the **teaching I had come for began in earnest**. All day long the apostles would share with us about the life and teachings of Jesus. Later on we began to call their teaching the Apostles' Doctrine. They even asked me to recount my story of carrying the cross and what Jesus had said to me. Brothers and sisters, those were glorious days. We couldn't wait to begin again each morning. It's all we would talk about, the parables, His prayer, the feeding of the multitude, and the many miracles.

No one among us had any needs. Everyone was **willing to share** what they had with whoever needed it. And when the apostles were spending time in prayer, the rest of us would go into the streets and share with whoever would listen.

Then persecution came. First Stephen, one of our beloved deacons, was stoned by our fellow Jews. Next was James, John's brother, was killed by the sword. The High Priest's henchman, Saul, began to hunt us down and take us bound to the Sanhedrin, where

we were interrogated, whipped, and imprisoned. But God turned the tables again. The first time was when they killed Jesus and it resulted in salvation for mankind and His Spirit in His followers. The second time was when Saul met the resurrected Jesus Himself on the road to Damascus. Ha! Our greatest enemy became our greatest evangelist! You know, Jesus is pretty good at flipping tables! Who can know the mind of God that he should counsel Him? God's ways certainly are not our ways! Remember, things are never as they appear.

After Saul's conversion, my wife became like a mother to him, the man we came to know as Paul. Rufus, my son, went to preach in Rome. Alexander, his brother, returned to Cyrene to teach the Apostles Doctrine there. I, well, I'm on my way back to Antioch to join my wife for the few years I have left until I see Jesus again. But I'm always willing to go wherever I'm called and share about the day I carried the cross of Jesus. Take up your cross, beloved, and follow Him. He is risen! ... (repeat) Never forget that! He is alive! And He will live in you by His Spirit, and touch the world through you, if you place your trust in Him. Your life can be a witness of the risen Lord! Shalom.