

# "LOOK ON JESUS"

Rev. J. K. Lawton (1918-2002) was a Methodist Minister who worked for the British Council of Churches from 1963 to 1968 and was the Secretary of the Churches Council on Alcohol and Drugs. After retiring he spoke at many Quaker, Pacifist, Social Housing and Addiction conferences.

# Kenneth Lawton also published

# Mark '71

## The Sober Truth

The Prevention of Alcoholism and Drug Addiction

# "LOOK ON JESUS"

AND WHAT DO YOU SEE?

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**By Kenneth Lawton** 

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ISBN-10: 1468001987 ISBN-13: 978-146800195 Look on Jesus and what do you see? Listen to his words, and what do you hear?

This story explains itself. "K" is my daughter, Keyna, but the reader can use any initial or name that may be relevant in the retelling of the gospel. Truly good news. Rewrite, adapt and do as you will, but it must be relevant.

"Look on Jesus" is based on Luke's text with the addition of material from Matthew and John to form a more complete biography.

This book was written by Kenneth Lawton over a number of years and written as a follow on from his book Mark '71. It was going to be called Luke '91 but he never got round to having it published. So, twenty years after it was meant to be published, I have decided to have it printed and published, posthumously.

His son, Martin Lawton

#### Dear K,

Many teachers, preachers and writers have done their best to explain the story of Jesus. They passed on what they had learned from others. The Bible was for them a true record of what had happened a long time ago in Bethlehem, Nazareth, Galilee and Jerusalem. I have heard the stories you hear, I have read many of the books your teachers have read and, in addition, I have had the chance to visit the places where it all happened. But I tell you it did not happen a long time ago far away. It is happening now and you ought to know this.

A certain Canon Exe and his wife Elizabeth lived in a cathedral city. They were greatly respected; in fact no one said a word against them. They seemed happy enough, because they loved each other, but some people said it was a great pity that they had no children. There were getting on in years, so the possibility of Elizabeth ever becoming pregnant was very remote indeed.

But a strange story is told about them, and about Elizabeth's cousin, whose name was Mary. They say truth is stranger than fiction; who knows how it happened; it's up to you to make up your own mind, but what there is no dispute about is that Elizabeth's son and Mary's son (because they both became mothers unexpectedly) changed the whole understanding of life for millions and millions of people, and introduced a reality to existence which is as significant at this very minute as it was when first it all happened.

The story goes that one day Canon Exe, a very proper cleric who never expected anything exciting to happen to him, was conducting a service in the

cathedral when a strange feeling came over him, and his knees went weak, and he thought he was going to faint; but surprisingly enough his mind was clearer than it had ever been, just as if he were being lifted out of himself. As he told the story later he thought he heard a voice saying "Don't be afraid. God hears your prayers; Elizabeth is going to have a baby. Call him John. He will give you a happiness that will spread far and wide. He will be a great man, but he mustn't smoke, use alcohol or take drugs, he will not need these things being filled with a new spirit which will restore people's faith in God. He will be proclaimed as a revolutionary who will get rebels to think of truth and peace, and create an atmosphere of expectation."

Canon Exe couldn't believe this and as a result of the shock he lost his speech. However, there was an assurance that his speech would be restored when the "promise" came true.

The service ended and the congregation could only think that the Canon was ill because he stopped speaking and made strange signs with his hands.

When his cathedral service was over the Canon went home. When Elizabeth discovered she was pregnant she didn't leave the house for months. All she could say to her friends was "The Lord has answered our prayers."

Meanwhile, Elizabeth's cousin Mary had a similar vision. Mary was going out with a local electrician called Joe. She heard the words "Peace be with you, the Lord will greatly bless you." She was afraid and couldn't explain this. The voice continued "Don't be scared, you are going to have a son, who you will call Jesus. He will be famous

and will be known as God's son. Jesus will be the greatest leader and teacher of all time; his revolution will never end."

Mary couldn't understand this, she wasn't married and she had no father for the child. The answer was simple and direct. "Remember your cousin, Elizabeth, it was said she was passed having a child but that was six months ago, look at her now." Mary said "Let it be. I'm in your hands."

Sometime later, Mary visited her cousin, Elizabeth. When they met they said it was as though the unborn child jumped for joy.

# Magnifique!

Mary found herself saying in words that surprised her: -

"Bless the Lord

Life is good and we can sing

Dance and sing, dance and sing

God is good

He has answered all my prayers, a mere no-one that I am

From now on, we will know, he loves us.

His kindness and his mercy will last forever and ever

God Cares

All who turn to him can really know

His strength is irresistible

The proud and arrogant are nothing in his sight

The mighty fall from their thrones

The plight of the poor is eased

The wealth of the rich buys worthless things

By him the starving multitudes are fed

He has come to help us all

The promises of old are true

We inherit what sages and prophets foretold

What is just and right is for us, and for our children It is for now and forever"

## **Excitement for others**

Elizabeth had her baby and all her neighbours and relatives gathered round to share in the excitement.

When the baby was a month old he was going to be christened with his father's name but at the last moment his mother said "No! His name is John" at this everyone around was speechless, with one exception – his father.

#### Bless 'im

Canon Exe's voice returned and he said "Yes – he is to be called John."

Let us make speeches, write to the papers and devise new programmes for television
The God of history is the God of our time

He is with us

To free us from tyranny

We have a leader

A revolutionary who will give us all we need

Fear and war will be no more

Evil power will melt away

The promises and dreams of past years will come true

Not for one day but for every day

My son is the call boy to bring real actors to the stage

He gets out the props, sees to the lights
Prepares the program, pulls up the curtain
He speaks the lines of the prologue
He's the commentator

The event we have all been waiting for is now to take place
From fear to freedom
Lights - Camera - Action
So it was, and is. The child grows up
Slowly, but surely, we understand more
And see the light more clearly

#### What a welcome!

It was at a time of national emergency. A census was taken; everyone had to be given a registration number so those who could went back to their home to be registered with their own folk.

Joe travelled from Harlem in New York to Soho in Royal London. Joe's descendants were all proud of their British citizenship and he took Mary, his girlfriend with him. They were engaged and she was pregnant.

London was full of visitors and they hadn't found any accommodation by the time the baby was born. There was a hospital around the corner but they didn't make it. So it was that Mary gave birth to her son underground on a tube station platform. They wrapped him in strips of torn cloth and laid him in an orange box. This is how he spent his first night on earth all because no one would find any room above ground for him in a city full of people.

# What an experience

There were only night workers about, postmen, workmen and others on their early morning rounds, but it was a youthful apprentice who tuned in to other worldly music on his transistor radio. Suddenly, the postmen stopped in their tracks, the

cold morning air seemed warm and they were spellbound. They heard a voice "Don't be afraid, I have an important announcement for you. It is for the people of all nations. It's good news which should bring joy to everyone. Last night, in this city, in Soho a Saviour was born. For proof, you will find a baby wrapped in rags lying in an orange box on a station platform." The music came again louder now and this time it was accompanied by the finest singing human ears had ever heard: -

"From lowest earth to Highest Heaven Brilliance, splendour, light Do the right and God is pleased Peace on earth tonight"

Then there was silence and the postmen said "Let's get below and see this miracle we have been hearing about" and they hurried down and found Mary, Joe and the baby in an orange box. After seeing the baby they went on their way telling everyone what had happened. People were amazed at what the postmen said but the men went on their rounds praising God for everything that had happened to them.

Mary was impressed too and kept turning it over and over in her mind trying to understand what it all meant.

# <u>Mao's Intervention</u> - (or Matt's addition)

Jesus was born in Soho in the time of Chairman Mao. Soon after his birth students from the East came to Britain looking for a new life. They hoped to make a fresh start with another philosophy. They'd seen a star rise in the eastern sky and interpreted its movement as pointing to England. When Mao heard about it he had been worried and so was everyone else in China. He called the committee together, leaders, teachers and professors and asked them where this revolutionary was to be born. "In Soho" they suggested "Did not Marx write 'Das Kapital in London?' So it was that Mao, in a secret meeting, ordered the students to go to Soho to verify the facts. "Go and find out all you can" he said "And when you have found him let me know so that I can do whatever is appropriate."

# Valuable but Unusable Gifts.

With these instructions they followed the light and finally came to where the child lay. Students, reporters and interviewers knelt by an orange box, opened their wallets, took out their notebooks, exposed their films and offered gifts – a microscope, a stethoscope and a dictionary.

# <u>Daydreams give way to nightmares</u>

Soon after this Joe and the students were troubled by strange dreams. The students began to realise that Mao would see the baby as a future enemy so they decided to thwart him and stay abroad to continue their studies. Mao was 'mad' when he discovered he'd been tricked. He changed his plans and ordered his agents to arrange for the abduction of newly born babies answering to the description he'd been given. The revolutionary code gives an explanation of this anticipated action.

## **Baptism**

For the early weeks of his life the baby Jesus was christened according to the tradition and customs. He was taken to the Cathedral at the time that had been fixed and there was there at that time a good religious man called Simeon. Simeon was convinced, by what he called 'a revelation' that he would not die before he had seen the healer who would lead God's people to a new life. Led to the Cathedral that day by an inner conviction he took the child in his arms and prayed.

## Let you people go

Thank God
It's just as you've promised Lord
I do not resist
Let me go in peace
I've seen him with my own eyes
He who will save the people
His light gives hope and shows the way to all the people
No one is left out
Let your people go, Glory, bliss and joy for all

# What, when and how?

Mary and Joe couldn't make it out at all. Simeon said "Bless you both" and to Mary "This baby is destined to be a Deliverer." Those who see him will see themselves; their secret inner thoughts will come to light and there will be turmoil, destruction and an unmistakable challenge to take sides. Your

hearts will be broken. You will suffer but the people will be saved.

An elderly, retired deaconess Anne was in the Cathedral every day, daughter of a well-known family, married for a bare seven years she was an eighty four year old widow. She was fasting and praying at all times and she was there at that moment so she too joined in, adding her conviction, that this was the child they were all waiting for.

#### Out in the cold

Joe took Mary and the baby to Iceland where they stayed until there was a change in the political situation and the danger was less acute.

# A Teenager

Jesus' parents went to Washington every year for a celebration weekend. When he was twelve they went again, as always, and when the weekend was over they started back home, travelling back by Greyhound coach with their other friends but the boy did not join them having stayed behind in Washington. His parents didn't know this and thought he was with other youngsters in the group so it was not until they had reached New York that they started looking seriously. They visited their friends but he was not with them. Eventually after reporting this matter to the police, and many telephone calls they had to go back to Washington themselves. It was three days later when they found him in the Smithsonian Museum surrounded by a group of students. They watched and were amazed that he was in a central place, asking searching questions and answering some of the points raised by the students and visiting teachers. Everyone around thought it incredible that this young boy had such knowledge and intelligence. His mother said "Son, why did you do this to us? Your father and I have had a terrible time worrying about you. We've spent days trying to find you." Answering he said "Why did you feel you had to come and look for me? Didn't you know that I had to be about my father's work?" But they didn't understand anything he was saying.

So Jesus went back with them to Harlem where he lived quietly as a good, well-mannered son. His mother treasured the memories of these events. Jesus grew up physically, mentally and spiritually.

#### This time is NOW

It's important to get the dates right. The time is now. John is a popular hero. He would be exceptional and outstanding in any company. Wherever and whenever his voice is heard, by radio, TV, or on the stage, the people respond. Crowds become hysterical.

"Take a bath
Turn away from your old ways
Give up your bad habits and start again" he said
"When you are clean
When you look for forgiveness
You'll be free"

## It's the old Scriptures

A voice crying in the wind
Throw out the rubbish
Drain the swamps
Take away the blind corners
And then... Violence will be unknown
Every lane and highway
Every village and every City
Shall be safe
Fear will be no more
All mankind shall see and know
They shall understand
God's way will be clear

# What a crowd

The crowds flocked around John. They were likened to snakes in the grass but they committed themselves to his cause in spite of the insults and warnings.

"What makes you think you can escape God's judgement?" he asked. "Prove you're sincere by changing your life style. Don't think you've any inherited rights or that you can claim family privileges – you can't. God can bring a new generation to birth from the dust. The charge is in place for a complete demolition even now and the fuse is set."

The perplexed and troubled people asked "What on earth can we do?" John's answer was clear enough "Share what you have with those who have nothing. If you have more than you can wear, eat or use give it away to those in need – shirts, dresses, food, drink or spare rooms."

#### Black-coated and uniformed

Even officials in Government service joined the band and asked what there was for them. They were told to keep the spirit of the law - not the letter and to protect the interests of the ignorant and the weak.

When the military asked "What shall we do?" He said "Don't bully anyone, use no violence, be honest and peaceful."

Expectations were high, the spirit of hope filled the air. John was in the centre of the stage, he was seen as the leader everyone was looking for.

# A Surprise Announcement

In a well-publicised interview John denied having any personal ambitions. He made it clear that he would not accept the role of the people's leader. "I'm a mere voice, my part is confined to the prologue. It's the one who comes next, the one

I'm here to introduce, who is the man you've been waiting for. He's the people's champion, I don't even consider myself fit to make the announcement. He will not be content to play on the banks of the stream, he'll take you across the oceans. The power of the atom will be nothing to him, he'll tame the deserts. The filthy sewers will be flushed out, dishonest traders will be brought to bankruptcy. The peccadilloes of politicians will be seen to destroy them."

# The end of the beginning

In many different ways, using all the media, John proclaimed the Good News - the death of evil and the provision of plenty for all.

The President intervened when he was himself the target of public criticism. His private life and the question of his adultery with his call girl sister-in-law was the last straw.

John was arrested and put in prison without trial.

# <u>Jesus - his credentials</u>

Crowds joined the new movement. Jesus joined them, washing himself publicly on the beach before swimming out into deep water. He looked up to the heavens as though praying and a gull flew down and perched on his shoulder and the voice of God was heard to say "You are my Son and I am well pleased with the way things are going."

# It had been a long apprenticeship

Jesus was thirty years' old when he set out on his life's work. The people had known him as a young boy who had left school early to support the family.

They had known his grandfather and his great grandmother. Indeed they could trace his Family Tree back as far as anyone. He was one of the original immigrants.

# After the incident by the sea

He came out of the water, dried himself and went off into hiding. For forty days and forty nights he survived in Ireland the "no man's land" of desolation and death. During the whole of this period he never complained, there was no sign of fear or hunger and no evidence to suggest that he ate a single meal during the whole time.

When he came back from Belfast he must have been exhausted and extremely hungry.

#### The Devil's tricks

This was when the Devil got at him - "If there is anything special about you - just say the magic words and change a newspaper into a loaf of bread."

"What's the point?" Jesus replied "The Bible says man cannot live on bread alone."

Then he was taken up by rocket and shown the earth from the window of a space station. "It's all yours" was the promise, "Sell your soul to the devil or just make a token display of witchcraft and you can have whatever you want. Power, wealth, and influence are all there for the grabbing."

Jesus just pointed to the Scripture "Worship the Lord your God, serve Him and no one else."

Then for his last trick, the Devil took him up by helicopter over a battle area. "Jump out and get

down there to make them live in peace. Go on, if you are God's son that's the work you should be doing, the Bible you're so fond of quoting promises God will order his angels to take good care of you. It even says they will hold you up so that your feet will not even get hurt on the stones."

Jesus just opened the Bible again at the words "You must not put the Lord your God on trial."

The Devil tried all he knew but had no success so he gave up and went away for a while.

#### Thrown out of home

Jesus went back to the family apartment to work among his own community.

In the surrounding state he was a popular guest speaker but the local community was not so enthusiastic.

One Sunday he went, as usual, to the local church and was invited to speak to the congregation. The Bible was open at Isaiah 61 and he read: -

The Spirit of The Lord is on me
Because he has chosen me to preach
Good News to the poor
He has sent me to open the prison doors
And to give sight to the blind
To free the slaves
And to proclaim this as the year
When God will save the people

He closed the book and everyone's eyes were upon him. His simple comment was "This is the day and you are the people who can know these words are true." There was a buzz of conversation. "He can't be talking about himself" they said "This is Joe's son."

Sensing their thoughts he spoke again "I'm sure you're quoting the old proverb 'Doctor heal yourself'. You're also watching to see if I can really do the things that you heard I did in other places! Let me remind you, a prophet is not accepted, at the time, by his own family or in his own country. Do you remember the old Hebrew story of the prophet Elijah? No rain fell for 31/2 years and there was a great famine throughout all the land. Israel had many widows at that time but Elijah was not sent to a single one of them - only to a woman with a strange name who lived in quite a different country. Think of Naaman the Syrian who was cured as a result of Elisha's efforts and don't forget the many lepers in Israel who were left to their fate."

All the people in the congregation were made angry by these words. They leapt to their feet, surged forward, grabbed him and dragged him out into the streets. Now a wild mob they took him to a nearby bridge to throw him over. Somehow he got away. He picked himself up and walked off.

# New jobs for old

Jesus was standing on the waterfront and a group gathered round in an attempt to hear what he was saying. In the jostling crowd passengers and crew pushed past and, seeing that two cranes were not in use, he climbed up into one of the cabins and from this new vantage point he talked to the people.

He broke off the dialogue and called to Simon, the crane driver, "Swing out over boats. You and your

mates have a big load to get ashore." "Boss," Simon shouted, "We've worked hard all night and we've finished! The ships are empty, but I'll do what you want just to prove it." Soon he had his mates helping him unload what proved to be the heaviest cargo they had ever had to get ashore. So heavy was the load that the cranes were taxed to the limit. Simon jumped down from his cabin and with his hands over his face he pleaded "Go away Chief – I'm a bad and rebellious good for nothing."

They were amazed at the variety and weight of what had been unloaded on the quay. Jim and his brother John stood staring at it with Simon. Jesus said "Don't panic fellas, you've got a job ahead of you in the future – you've to bring people ashore – out of the darkness into the light."

Strolling through the Customs Hall Jesus looked at one Matt and said, quite casually, "Follow me." So it was that Matt walked out on his old job, there and then his decision was taken.

Sometime later Matt threw a party and invited excolleagues, tax collectors and their wives: Evangelicals and radicals combined forces and complained loudly, "Why does he fraternize with that lot?"

On another occasion – after spending the night alone in a vigil of prayer – he chose the other members of his group of twelve who were to be his closest friends. He gave them confidence and skill to deal with smokers, alcoholics, drug addicts and psychopaths. Their names were Pete, Jim and brother John, Andy, Phil, Matt, Tom, Tim, Sue, Jane, Sarah and Jake. They all discovered that Jesus offered new jobs for old.

# The eyes of the world were on him

A great crowd of people from all over America, from Europe, Africa and Asia look to Jesus, they came to be healed and saved from the materialistic spirit of the age. Jesus looks at everyone and says: -

True happiness is achieved by those who realise their inadequacy

When things are as they should be they will be at home

Lasting happiness is found by those who have lost everything

God will give them what they need

Deep happiness belongs to the self-effacing God will look after them

Those whose main desire is to please God Will be satisfied

Those who have a deep concern for others, and can forgive

Will receive God's forgiveness

Those who have a pure heart and mind

Will understand God's will

True happiness is discovered by those who are committed to work for peace

They are God's people

Deep happiness can be experienced in suffering by those who suffer as a result of obeying God

They are the true revolutionaries

Lasting Happiness is yours if you will commit yourselves to be my followers said Jesus, even though you are ill-treated for it

When it seems as though everyone is against you take courage

Lift up your spirits and shout for joy - great will be the victory

The true prophets who lived before you suffered in the same way It's bad men who thrive on flattery

# You can't get away with it!

Don't imagine that you can forget all about commandments and the old code morality. This is not what I am saying.

The morality of past generations has been handed down for a purpose. It is easier for the universe to be destroyed than for a fragment of the law to lose its force.

Those who make their own rules and break what they think the least important commandment, and then encourage others to do the same, will be the least of my friends.

And in contrast, those who keep the commandments, accept true morality and help others to do the same, will come into their own after the revolution.

Beware, you will never get anywhere near the kingdom of God unless you show yourself to be better men and women than the lawyers and ministers of our day.

It is not just a matter of doing no murder – murderers will be arrested, brought to justice, and sentenced by the courts: they will always be condemned by their contemporaries. It's the angry and bad tempered who must face the timeless final judge. All who call their sisters "good for nothing" have much to answer, and those who can think of others as "worthless fools" are in danger of complete extinction.

You've heard the commandment "Do not commit adultery" but beware, for to lust can be just as evil. So, if a glance puts you in danger, cut it out. If what you fear drags you down, turn it off and move away. It is far better to miss some experiences than to try everything and be among the lost whose lives become a living hell.

## Compromise?

Come to terms with those who have anything against you while you can. It's better to agree out of court than to be at the mercy of the judge and in danger of imprisonment. Once the legal process gets under way there will be no reprieve until the last cent is paid.

When you give to a good cause or make your offerings to the church – remember – if anyone has a complaint about you, or if all is not well in your relationships with others, you should stop in your tracks and go at once to make peace. Get things right without delay then you will be in a position to give and your prayers will be heard.

# Madness or a New Sanity?

Understand your opponents. Do good to those who harm you. Speak softly to those who swear at you. Pray for those who stab you in the back. When anyone kicks you stand still, don't run away, let him kick a second time if he wants but don't retaliate. When someone steals from you, be ready to give him something else – voluntarily, as a gift.

Give to those in need and when anyone steals from you don't demand retribution. Treat others as you'd like them to treat you. The most wicked love

those who show them kindness. What credit is there if you lend only when you are sure you will be repaid? The most devilish will lend when they are sure to get interest on their loans. Remember God is good to the ungrateful and wicked, so be merciful like him.

Don't judge others and God will not blame you! Don't condemn others, or you will have much to answer for.

You must love your enemies and learn to do good. Give and lend without expecting to be repaid then you will get your reward and be worthy of being counted members of the family.

Give to others and God will give generously to you. To get all you can hold you will need both hands.

The measure you use for others is the measure God uses for you. You have the ice to cool the world's fever, if the ice melts the water runs away and will be lost in the sewer.

We must give the light the world needs to disperse the darkness - the light fails if the fuse is blown;

The sane man connects an electric bulb to the electric power, not to the supply of natural gas. You have a supply of energy and power, satisfy the world's people. Use it properly – and learn to live God's way. This is the way to appreciate his goodness.

#### **IDEAS**

## **Illustrations**

One blind man, without help or past experience, can't lead another with safety; if he does, both may fall under a car.

# Worry, Don't!

Look at the birds, without a care in the world they soar up into the sky: they are not engaged in any financial enterprise - aren't you worth more than the birds?

Which of you can extend his life by worry? On the contrary worry shortens your life. Why worry about your clothes? Look at the wild flowers. They don't resort to mass production or fall victims of a fashion craze.

They don't even choose their own colours; but no film star, or millionairess ever had such beautiful clothes.

It is God who clothes the wild grass that is here today and gone tomorrow, cut for hay or scorched in the drought. You should trust him to provide for your needs – oh faithless generation.

Don't be worried over meals or what other people think about you. Life is worth more than comfort and health more than popularity. Stop worrying about next year's wages, next week's prices, tomorrow's menu. These are the obsessions of the age. God knows what we need... and he is more concerned about the poor and refugees.

Get your priorities right. Give yourself to his cause and then everyone can have a chance to get what they need.

Worried about tomorrow?... stop it. There will be enough problems to face without making more. Don't add to the day's trials.

#### Critical? Leave it to God!

Stop making judgements on others or God will judge you by the same standards.

The rules you set will be used on you.

Why do you gaze at the minor faults of others and overlook your own major defects?

How dare you correct others when you can't manage your own life?

Charlatan – get yourself right first. You must get your mind clear, your eyes open and your hands clean before you get the dust out of your brother's eye.

An overdrawn bank account is no security for a credit card. You don't get credit on debts. A good balance is worthy of credit. Bad debts lead to a loss of credit. Your credit card carries the value of your collateral.

Why do you keep on saying "Ok... ok... I'm working on it," and then do nothing?

Everyone who understands the Bible, accepts and follows the true way is like one who has a balanced diet and good health; whereas those who go to Church, sing hymns and shout Hallelujah without ever living the life of obeying the teaching might

just as well be taking heroin and smoking opium, for just as surely, they are ruining their lives and are riding for a fall.

## Shadows in the White House

One day when all the talk was over he went to Washington where one of the President's aides had a friend who was in real trouble: he was ill and thought to be dying. Hearing of the presence of Jesus the aide arranged for men with influence to approach him. This they did, pleading that his man really deserved help because he loved the people and had given generously to set up a scholarship programme and build an art gallery.

Jesus went with them and was not far from the hospital when the aide sent messengers to say "Don't put yourself out. None of us deserve having you go to all this trouble. Neither the White House nor the Hospital is fit for you to visit. We are not worthy to come to you either. I have people who do what I tell them to do and am myself told what to do by those above me."

Jesus was noticeably moved by this and said to those around him, "I tell you I've not seen more faith than this in any of the churches. People will travel from the four corners of the earth to attend ecumenical conferences but many of those who should be in at the revolution will be found to be on the wrong side and will be lost in the darkness. They will protest and cry out in despair but all to no avail." To the messengers he said, "What you merely believed possible has already happened."

They went off and found that the aide's friend was fit and well.

# A case of live or death

Soon afterwards Jesus visited the twin cities – and the crowds flocked out to hear the visiting speaker.

One of the leading men in the community had been killed in an accident and a large crowd assembled holding up the traffic. The man's widow and children were badly shaken, and distraught with grief, so Jesus pushed his way through the crowds to comfort them, but first he went to look at the man and when he touched his face the man opened his eyes. The people fell back in amazement unable to explain how one who had been pronounced dead could live. "Who is this man... what is the secret of his miracles? God save us..."

News of the event was broadcast throughout the national network.

## The world's questions

John, who was in prison, asked two of his visitors to go to Jesus and ask "Are you the one John was announcing as the leader who was to come, or should we expect someone else?" Many people had been healed by that time; the blind had been given sight and the disillusioned found new faith. So Jesus said "Go back and tell what you have seen. The poor are becoming rich and those who have no doubts are truly happy."

# The Talk Show

After John's friends had gone, Jesus took part in a "talk show" and was questioned at length about "the movement." Jesus had a way of turning the questions back on his interviewers – "What did you expect to see when you took your cameras out to interview John? A man who is fashion conscious? Did you think you would find a man who reflected the latest trend? Were you expecting to see a "yes man" who would play your games and say what

you wanted to hear? Tell me, what are you after? Do you want to find a new leader? I tell you this; you have got more than you bargained for... John was prophesised in the Bible. He is the prologue to the real drama. His voice makes the announcement. The words from his lips have greater significance than anything heard before. Even so, when the revolution is complete he'll be seen to be the least significant of the new generation."

The interviewers probed further wanting to know where they stood. They asked about the scientists and the poets, the politicians and the churchmen of the day.

"What of them?" asked Jesus. "They are like a bunch of kids all caught up in their own thing; all believing they have the truth and blaming others for not accepting their particular theory or teaching. John, who was sober and temperate, is accused of being a crank.

The true leader eats and drinks with the common people and is condemned as a socialist or an addict or whatever the popular scapegoat may be. Whereas God's truth is only recognised by those who are willing to accept it."

# What a reception

There was a civic reception to which Jesus and his friends were invited. It took the form of a cocktail party with a Scandinavian type buffet and there were all types of people milling around. A notorious prostitute managed to gate-crash the party and made straight for Jesus. She had a crystal bottle of the most exotic and expensive perfume and standing behind him she burst into

tears, fell at his feet and splashed the scent all over him. Then as she kissed him and wiped up the perfume with her hair the local dignitaries could stand it no longer. "God help us!" they cried. "If this man was all they say he is he'd know what she was and would soon put a stop to this. He'd not let her touch him."

"Judge, I have a question for you" said Jesus. The legal man replied "Ask on!"

"There were two men who had to face a charge of theft. One had stolen fifty dollars and the other five hundred. Suppose both were put on probation, which would be the most grateful?" "I suppose the one who had the most to fear" came the answer. "Correct" said Jesus. "Do you see this woman? She came and sought me out whilst the rest of you merely accept me as part of the social scene. You provide no special place for me unless it be as an object of curiosity. She poured out her wealth on me. I tell you her repentance and love brings her forgiveness."

Among those who overheard these remarks many asked "What sort of man is this who takes it upon himself to give sins?"

# Soliciting

When everyone else had left to go home, Jesus went for a walk by the river. Early the next morning he was at the magistrate's court. Outside, before the proceedings began he found himself in the midst of a group of sightseers and he took the opportunity of talking to them about the nature and purpose of the Law.

The police pushed their way through the crowd, bringing with them a prostitute who had been arrested for soliciting. Hearing the conversation with Jesus they tried to show him up by asking "Clever one, this woman has been caught committing an illegal act. She is an immoral woman and there is a law against this sort of thing. What would you do – let her off?"

Jesus took out a diary and tapped it with a pencil whilst they continued to fire questions at him. Then he said "Ok, if there is anyone here who has never broken the law – and never had an immoral thought – he can make the charge." As he looked around everyone – including the policemen – turned and walked away. Looking at the woman he said "Where are your accusers?" "They've gone" she answered. "Well" said Jesus, "I'm not passing a sentence on you – go off and don't have any reason to be caught again."

Later Jesus travelled round the world talking about the need for revolution. The friends who travelled with him included many women, the highly respected wife of a public figure, a converted prostitute, and many others – the known and the unknown.

# A night call

One night, Norman, an academic educationalist approached Jesus. "Doctor", he began, "We accept the fact that you have a gift for teaching – and, that your wisdom is of God. No one could succeed as you do if God was not with him."

Jesus replied – "You know the truth is that no one can understand, let alone accept God's revolution without undergoing a new birth."

- "But, how can any adult begin again" asked Norman, "It is obvious that he cannot go back into his mother's womb."
- "Nonetheless," said Jesus, "A man cannot be part of this revolution if he is not born of water and the Spirit; flesh comes from the flesh, spirit gives birth to Spirit."
- "Do not be surprised that I tell you that you must all begin again. The wind blows as it will, you hear the sound it makes but most of you have no idea where it has come from or where it is going. It is just the same with those who have a spiritual birth."
- "Tell us how" pleaded Norman. Jesus told him
  "You admit that you've not shared our experience.
  You cannot believe or accept all you have been told
  about this world. How will you ever manage to
  understand the Unseen World? No one has had a
  complete experience of reality except the fully
  human Son of God. He must be presented so that
  everyone can believe and be changed."

# Sunday Lunch

One Sunday he went to lunch with one of the leading Free Churchmen and many watched him closely. One man in the group had a dislocated knee and Jesus asked "Is it right to heal on a Sunday or not?" There was no reply. So Jesus took hold of his leg and manipulated the joint back into place. Then he said "If your car was involved in an accident, would you call the Police, send for help from the nearest garage and if necessary go to the hospital? Wouldn't you do all this without hesitation even though it was Sunday?" Again they said nothing.

Then he gave a word of advice to them for he had noticed how they chose what they thought were the best seats for themselves.

"When you are invited to an informal party or a reception, don't go up to the important guests for the honour of speaking to them and don't make yourself conspicuous. The most likely result will be to embarrass everyone. If these are your aims your success will be short lived. No, when you go to any gathering where the people move around, make yourself inconspicuous and talk to those who look lonely. When your host sees you he will introduce you to other guests at the proper time. Mark my words, everyone who tries to make himself look important will be seen for what he is a nobody. But the man who feels himself to be a nobody will find himself to be of some importance."

## Eastern Intransigence

Jesus was determined to complete his tour even though he was sure that his life would be comparatively short.

He asked his friends to get the visas. They went off to the travel agents only to discover that it was not possible for him to travel through Tel-Aviv to Russia. When James and John realised this they were furious saying "Can we pray for the Jews to be driven back into the sea and for the communists to be blasted into Hell?" Jesus, turning on his heel, told them off. They were to do no such thing - the itinerary would be changed.

# Would-be recruits

En route there were several offers from those who wanted to join the party. One was certain that no

task would be too great but he lost all his enthusiasm when he was told that "the bee has a hive, the dog a kennel and you a home but the ideal man, the world's servant has nothing and no shelter in which he can rest." One other, a girl who was invited to join the group, asked for time to go home and care for a dying parent. To her he said "Leave the dying to die - you have to work for the revolution among the living." Yet another failed to make the grade by just asking for time to say "Goodbye" to his family - so they would know where he was. Jesus said "No one will make a good revolutionary if he turns back after starting out on a journey. No one who drives along a motorway continually looking back at the traffic is going to help bring God's Revolution. When the day of the Christian Revolution comes it will call for sacrifice and absolute obedience. The Revolutionary will be like the explorer who has a chance to go where no one has ever been before. He will make every sacrifice and not allow anything to stand in his way."

# More recruiting

After this they enrolled 72 more recruits. He sent them off to the various towns and villages which he was to visit. Before they set out he told them that the possibilities were tremendous if only they had more workers. "Pray", he said "That the Lord will recruit more to work for him. Go, I am sending you as children into a world of criminals. Don't carry an overnight bag or a rucksack – don't stop for entertainment. Offer peace and friendship wherever you go but don't waste time on those who don't want you. You must not impose yourself on an unwilling host – or overstay your welcome. Accept all hospitality which is freely offered:

workers have a right to their wages. Avoid the temptation of trying to please everyone. When you are made welcome, enjoy your food - but remember to heal the sick and prepare the people to live God's way - for they must be told that the revolution is to be expected at any moment. When the last day comes there will be no mercy for the town that rejects you. For whosoever listens to you listens to me: those who reject you reject me: and anyone who rejects me rejects my message and the one I represent."

# The fall of the great cities

It will be terrible for Peking! How terrible too for Johannesburg. If the miracles which were performed in your cities had been seen in Tyre and Sidon the people would have sat down, put on sackcloth and sprinkled ashes on themselves to show that they had repented of their sins. On the day of Judgement God will show more mercy to Tyre and Sidon than to you. As for New York – you try to build into the sky – you will be thrown into the sea

The 72 were highly excited when they reported back. "Say boss" they said, "The devil himself seemed to be on our side." But Jesus warned them "Don't get carried away by the fact that you can overcome the power of evil. I've given you the ability to live in the midst of evil and to be fearless. Remember I've seen the devil fall. God, my father, has given me this privilege and he gives me all I need.

No one else knows what we know, and no one knows the Father except those who are introduced by the Son."

Jesus took his friends on one side and turning to them, he said "You ought to be happy to have seen what you have seen. Poets, artists and politicians have longed to see what you've seen... and they couldn't. They would have given anything to hear what you've heard... but they've not heard anything like it."

Then it was that Jesus, filled with the spirit of God, prayed joyfully "Father, Lord of all, seen and unseen. Thank you for showing me all that has been hidden from the intellectuals."

#### The Bishop's question

Once a Bishop asked Jesus what he must do if he was to have a trouble free conscience. Jesus asked him what he'd learnt from the Bible and he replied "You must love God – giving him your absolute allegiance and then you must go out to care for other people; caring for the other man just as much as you care for yourself. These things are essential and the commandments demand complete obedience."

"So," said Jesus, "You are right. What are you worrying about? Live like that and you've nothing to fear!" "But," said the Bishop, "Who is the other man... there are so many of them I can't care equally for everyone."

# The Hijacking

A South African plane was hijacked on a flight to New York. There was a scuffle and the plane was diverted to Brazil. One air hostess was injured while the rest of the crew were held at gunpoint. A Catholic priest gazed on with fascinated horror. An Englishwoman fainted. An American had a lot to say and gave advice to everyone.

But it was a black African student who got up out of his seat and defying the threats of the gunman he got the girl a drink and bandaged up her wounds, tearing off his shirt to do it.

"Now which of the passengers do you think proved that he cared about the air hostess's wounds?"

"The one who took the risks, defied the threats and offered first aid," answered the Bishop.

"Right," said Jesus, "Now you know what to do."

## Family Tension

Jesus and his friends called on Meg in her suburban home. Mary, her sister, sat on the floor at the feet of Jesus. She was spellbound and hung on his word. An agitated, irritated Meg left to do all the work burst out saying, "Say, don't you care about me. Sister Mary leaves me to do everything. Tell her to stir herself and help me." Jesus answered, "Meg, Meg, you worry too much. You are too anxious about material things. Your sense of proportion is wrong. Mary knows what she needs and that is something that will last forever."

## <u>Prayer</u>

Once when Jesus had been praying, one of the group said, "Chief, teach us to pray – just as John taught his followers."

Jesus warned them of the dangers of public prayer. "Don't show off or use long words – like the religious folk do. Pray in secret and avoid formality."

This is how you should pray. Put yourself in the right relationship with God. See him as your Father and put him first in your thoughts, say

"Let everything praise you. May your will be accepted and so help us to achieve what you want here on earth. Give us today the food we need for tomorrow and teach us to live a day at a time – in faith. Forgive us for our past sins and help us to see that our forgiveness is bound up with the way we forgive others. Save us from being overcome by the trials and temptation of daily life."

Then Jesus said to Church Members. "Just imagine that you have an uninvited guest, what do you do? Go to a friend's house at 3am and knock him up calling 'Friend lend me some food, I've got an unexpected visitor and we've got nothing in the house to give him,' and suppose your friend answers from the bedroom window, 'Don't bother us at this hour, you will wake the children! Go to bed, we will help you in the morning,' Well what then? I tell you, He will help you not because he is your friend, or because it is a reasonable request but for the sake of the neighbours and because you are making such a row."

So I say to you "Call and you will be heard. If you go on trying and knocking at the door it will be opened, for everyone who asks gets something. The seeker finds and the door is opened to those who knock. Would any of you who are mothers have given your babies whisky when they cried for milk? Would you give your children a rat to eat when they ask for a sweet?

Selfish though we may be we know how to give good things to our children. And it follows that God, the Father who knows everything, will share his spirit and power with all who ask for it."

## **Devilish Multiplication**

Whenever anyone throws out a devil it travels in all directions looking for somewhere to lodge and sooner or later returns to see if there is any room in the place it left. So if the space it occupied has been tidied up and remains empty it will be seen as an invitation to the Devil to come back bringing seven other devils worse than itself

Evil loves a vacuum and can be relied on to fill any empty space. Beware, therefore, lest you end up worse than you began.

## Or Genuine Happiness

Hearing this, a woman in the crowd said "Your mother must be a happy woman," but Jesus answered, "You've got it all wrong, genuine happiness is not won for you by your children, it's the result of obeying the Word of God when you hear it."

# Popular Demand

The people crowded around Jesus as he went on to say "Our contemporaries are extremely selfish. Evil attracts them not the Good. They demand proof of God's existence. They call for clear rules but they'll have to manage with the Bible as it is."

Jonah, the preacher, spoke to the people of Nineveh. "Today you have a clearer witness. At the end of time everyone will be judged. The Queen of the South will accuse the present generation because she travelled halfway round the world to hear Solomon's wisdom but you have heard greater words than his. Alas, on that day Ninevehites will seem to be better than you because they listened to Jonah's warning and changed their ways. Beware, therefore – the challenge to you is clearer."

# Hard to Digest

After Jesus had finished speaking he was invited to a meal at the local bishop's palace. When they sat down to eat the bishop was surprised to see that he started to eat without waiting for, or saying, Grace. He looked surprised and was astonished when Jesus said, "You church leaders say prayers before meals and have liturgies for special occasions. You dress well, always conscious of what others think of you. You choose your words very carefully. You must be warned – this is the action of foolish men. God is not deceived. He knows you for what you are. He considers your thoughts and is not taken in by what you say.

Your Bishops bring disgrace upon themselves. Collectively they give more time to formal ritual than to seeking justice for the poor. You should be seen to be practising Christianity in your actions.

Your Episcopal systems are an anachronism. You enjoy sitting on your cathedral thrones. You are proud to have a place in the British House of Lords. You are really without moral authority. You walk over the graves of your predecessors and trample on the people."

# Insulting the Church!

A theologian who heard this said "You say this to insult the church. We are all condemned by what

you say." Jesus replied, "Yes, it's awful for you too. You teach a moral law that suffocates modern man. The church is so busy raising money that it fails to use its wealth on the needy. You are in a terrible state. You kill the scriptures and fossilize the prophets. Indeed you admit teaching, appointing and advising religious leaders who question and undermine the truth. Today's men of light are men of darkness. In his wisdom God sent prophets and teachers who have been persecuted and killed. Note well - this generation will be punished for the murder of prophets. (For all the murders since Abel, including Zechariah put to death between the altar and the Holy Place.) You and your colleagues share the responsibility for the death of all the prophets killed since the creation of the world. You cannot escape God's judgement.

How awful for teachers of religion. For those who refuse to open the door to the house of knowledge. Not content with refusing to go in themselves they stand in the way of others who are trying to enter."

When Jesus moved on the Minsters of Religion, teachers and priests, began to criticize him and to analyse his attitudes. They disliked his manners and began to lay traps to catch him out in what he said and did.

# Beware of Confession

There were so many people around that the crowd was unbearable and Jesus stepped aside saying to his friends, "Beware of the aggression, hypocrisy and intolerance of the priests. Whatever you have whispered in the confines of the confessional will be broadcast to the whole world. The hidden will be revealed and every secret will leak out.

#### Fear or respect

Friends, you should not fear people whose power is limited to taking your life. That's all they can do. God is different. You are in his hands in life and death. After death he has the power to throw you into Hell. Yes, you have cause to respect him.

Are not five small chickens sold for a couple of dollars? Not one is forgotten by God.

Every hair on your head is numbered. Take courage you are worth more than any number of chickens.

## To admit or deny?

I tell you this – if you speak out as a Christian then you'll be defended at the final trial but everyone who rejects the faith will be accused. Those who speak against the good man can be forgiven. But not those who speak ill of the spirit of God.

However, you mustn't worry about what you are going to say when you are brought before the courts of Church or State. If you trust God he will give you the right words."

# Death in search of riches

A man in the crowd called out, "Boss, tell my brother to divide up the money that our father left us." Jesus said "Who gave me the right to act as lawyer to divide up a legacy?" He turned to the crowd and warned them, "Watch out, keep on your guard lest you are ruined by greed. A man's life is not to be valued in terms of material things no matter how wealthy he may be."

## A hedge against inflation

Jesus told this story: -

"A rich man had a large, successful factory. He could sell everything he made. One day he turned his thoughts to the future and said to himself. "You've been lucky, you've had all that you wanted and your children haven't gone short of anything. Your investments should cover all your needs for the foreseeable future. But even so you need a hedge against inflation. You had better make sure that you can ease off and live it up - with fine food and the best wine together with all the entertainment and travel you wish. 'How shall I do this?' he asked. 'I know, I'll take out an insurance. buy land and property, I'll step up production, build large warehouses and stock up for the years ahead and then I will be able to relax without a care in the world."

"Wait," God says. 'You fool! Who will inherit the things you leave behind? There is another world and tonight you will be finished with this one.' People may think they are rich now but they are paupers in God's sight. 'Be warned,' said Jesus, 'that's what it will be like for those who live for money, power and position.'"

# Don't be scared

There is no need for you to be afraid... if you sell all your capital and share out your money with the poor. Make sure you have a balance that cannot be overdrawn - in Heaven where there is no fear of bank robbers and where moth and rust can do no damage. Your mind and heart will always be with your wealth.

#### Fill up know

Be ready for anything with full tanks.

The Christian revolution will come suddenly, expected and yet unexpected. It is the same every day, in every street where there are ten motorists. Five will be wise and five foolish. They put their cars away in the garage, one group are ready for the next day, prepared for any journey long or short, they are prepared for anything. The others, the foolish, have little or no reserve, their tanks are empty.

There is an emergency. The need is for a good neighbour and the thoughtless will try to persuade the others to lend them some petrol. But the wise will say "No." There is no point in trying to siphon petrol out of tanks now, we will only spill some and lose time. We will go and take the mother to hospital. So the wise were ready, they made new friends and shared the joy of celebrating the new birth. The foolish, as a result of thoughtlessness and the selfishness of living for the moment, lost the friends they had.

Take note, keep on the lookout: be prepared for the unexpected, be ready for anything. You do not know when the hour will strike, when you will be wanted. Remember this – if the householder knew when the burglar would come to his house he would have stayed at home and have prevented the break-in. So too, you must be ready for God's call. His servant will call when you least expect him.

## The complainant gets more than he bargained for

Pete complained "Who are you getting at? Are you talking about other people or us?" Jesus replied by asking and answering another question. "Who are the good and loyal workers? Those who can be trusted to work without supervision. Those whose work is always up to standard whether watched or not, these are the ones who will be promoted. It is from them that one will be picked out to be made supervisor. The shop stewards are happy when all goes well, but if they abuse their power and misrepresent those they should serve, or if they lose their moral standing, for example, by becoming alcoholics, then on the day when the facts come to light neither the management or workers will show any mercy. They will be out. The worker knows what the management requires. When anyone falls down on the job it is natural and just to expect dismissal. The worker who makes a mistake in ignorance will get off with a caution, but the more the ability, the more the authority, the higher the expectation and the greater the fall."

Jesus continued, "I came to set the world on fire - other people seem determined to blow it up. I have a message to give - and I know the frustration of speaking to those who will not listen. Don't deceive yourselves into thinking I came to offer an easy way out of the troubles of the day. My way is tough not easy."

## A bomb in the pub

Even today some people pray like informers telling God about the sins of others. Jesus rebuked us all. "Don't think that the atrocities of the last generation make this one any better. No, there is no hope for any of us if we cling to the old ways.

Remember the eighteen who were killed in the city when the bomb exploded. Did you think it was because they were worse than the other people who were living around? Certainly not, if we don't make a fresh start and begin to live a new way, we will all die as they died."

## The laboratory gets a reprieve

Jesus told this story. "A scientist had a laboratory. He and his team worked on year after year looking for a clue to the understanding of what they said was an incurable disease. The administrator and accountants examined the reports each year hoping to read of progress, but there appeared to be none. 'This is the end,' they said," 'Close it down, the project's over. Switch your research to something else.' 'But wait,' pleaded the scientist, 'just one more year, give me another research assistant, spare us some computer time, and then if there is no progress you can call it off."

# A cripple dances in the church on a Sunday

One Sunday Jesus was in church. A woman was there bent double as a result of an ugly accident some 18 years previously. Jesus just called to her "Woman, you are free from your trouble." He put his hands out to her and in an instant she stood erect – praising God. The elders of the church were angry. This was not the sort of thing that happened in their church, and certainly not on a Sunday. One of them turned to the people and said "There are seven days in the week, you have no need to use Sunday for this sort of thing. Come and be healed on the other six days if you want." Jesus said, "What is this insincere theatrical part you are playing? Don't you take your car out on Sunday, water your plants and feed your pets!

Here is one of our sisters who has been suffering for years, would you prolong her trouble for one unnecessary day?" His reply made his enemies ashamed of themselves.

#### Involvement in the revolution

Jesus asked "What can we use to illustrate the Christian revolution? It is like the yeast used in home bread making, easy to obtain, involving ordinary families, mixed in with a kilo of flour until the whole batch of dough rises."

## Pedestrians only

Travelling through towns and villages en route for the capital, discussing the problems of the day and involved in question and answer sessions, someone asked "Sir, who will get us out of this mess? Everyone and everything seems to be in trouble. the world's in a mess!" Jesus told them to "Get out and walk. Most people flock together, pushing, crowding, causing traffic congestion, but to no avail. The roads will be blocked, rail and air links out of action, you will shout and scream, pleading for special privileges, but you will not be recognised. Like all the bystanders in the riot you will be caught up in the violence of the times. You will think of Moses, Amos, Isaiah, Peter and Paul but you will not be in their number. Asians and Latin Americans will enjoy the banquet while the rest go hungry. The privileged and underprivileged will change places: austerity will triumph over sophistication."

# Commitment

It was then that the religious told him to make himself scarce. "You must get out of here, the

establishment is out for your blood." Jesus responded by saying, "Tell the devil that I am casting out the works of darkness and offering new hope to the people. Life in place of a living death - today, tomorrow and the day after. There is no time to lose, it is not right for a prophet to be martyred anywhere. Jerusalem, Berlin, Moscow, London, New York, you shoot the prophets and sabotage God's work. I have wanted to save you from yourselves but you would not listen. Farm land will be turned into desert. Alas, you will lose your vision until you learn to bless those who come in the spirit of the Lord."

#### Tea with the evangelical

A leading churchman, an evangelical, invited Jesus to tea on a Sunday afternoon. Would he walk or go by bus? Would he play games with the son of the house who had been sick? Did he know anything about football - the boy's great interest? Or could he only be expected to talk theology? Bystanders watched and listened with critical curiosity. Nothing went quite as expected. Jesus took the initiative and asked the questions. "Does you religious code give you precise details of what you are to do or not to do on each day in the week?" To this there was no answer. Jesus played with the boy and asked if anyone knew of an accident in which the victims or even a trapped animal had gone without help just because it was a Sunday - and no one had an answer.

# A welcome for the unwelcome guest

The next day a Free Churchman invited Jesus to lunch and Jesus accepted. Just as he was about to sit down a bank robber burst in. He had heard the rumour that Jesus was there so he brought

thousands of notes, piled them up on the floor and threw a match on them. He stood there with tears falling down his cheeks and then went forward to shake hands with Jesus. When the Free Churchman realised what was happening he tried to stamp out the fire. If this is the Christ, he thought, he would know where this money came from and who it is that is shaking him by the hand. Jesus said, "Son, come here, I have something to ask you. Who were you expecting to give the place of honour to at this luncheon, the expected guest? Surely that place belongs to this man. He has thrown himself on our mercy. He has given all he had. He who was an outcast must now be honoured. His sacrifice and his example is great."

Jesus turned to his host and said, "Next time you give a lunch or dinner, don't confine your invitation to your friends and relatives or rich neighbours. Don't have one eye on your reputation, or expect to the invited back by your guests. When you give a feast, remember to invite the repentant sinner, the outcast, the weak and the sick, then you will find happiness. They will not be able to pay you back, you will have to depend on God for your reward."

## The charter flight

They listened with rapt attention as Jesus said, "A certain man decided to charter a plane to visit the New World. He was sure that many of his friends would be interested. This would be a vacation to remember. Some would have relatives and friends to visit, for others there could be a special itinerary. It would be a holiday of a lifetime."

The response was overwhelming. Those who were invited were enthusiastic and said they would not

want to miss this opportunity for anything. The charter contract was signed, hotels were booked and coach tours fixed. The organiser, having considerable wealth himself, paid the deposits without asking his friends to pay their share. So it was that when the final details were sent out with a request for payment the excuses began. One man said he had just paid a deposit on a house so it was obviously impossible for him to go even at the economical terms at which the tour was offered. He was sure his friend would understand.

Another man said he had taken a new job so, naturally, his holiday dates and been altered and he knew that no one would expect him to throw up the job, surely the organiser would see it from his point of view.

Among the others, a couple married only a year ago were now expecting a baby so it was obviously impossible for them to go. Would it have been any different if the whole thing had been free, the organiser wondered? He sent round to the various clubs, retirement groups, homes for the elderly, to the hospitals to social workers, inviting the poor and the needy, pressing them to come. He said "This will be a trip to remember, come and enjoy it. Those who said they would come have let me down so now it is all for you."

# Some things are free but others are costly

Great crowds used to listen to prophets and preachers but Jesus said to those who listened, "No one can be my friend unless he is ready to be separated from his mother, father, wife, or husband and children, not to mention brothers and sisters. Even more, he must be ready to sacrifice his own life.

No one can be with me without some suffering. That is what you must expect for nothing of any significance is achieved without considerable effort. No competent architect or builder will attempt a building that costs more than is available. If a building is left half-finished the effort will be wasted.

What small country without arms declares war on one of the big powers? They accept the realities of the situation and make peace. In a similar though different way we give up the claim to have anything for ourselves when we are one with God. Our favourite ideas and selfish interests must be set aside. Wood is an attractive and useful material for building but if it is eaten away by dry rot it is only fit to be burned."

#### Lost child

Many businessmen, trade unionists, wild-looking youths and others came to listen to Jesus. Some were respectable, some political, others openly immoral. When they went to the churches and asked for a room they were turned away. People complained when parsons and church members gave their time to be with people like that. "Look," they said, "They should not have special preferences."

Jesus told this story. "Think of a town of 130,000 people from which a baby goes missing. What happens? It is in the papers. The news is broadcast by radio and film is shown on TV, police are taken off normal duties. The clinics, hospitals and all the community are alerted. Everyone is on the lookout. The missing child is talked about until the baby is found. When the baby is returned the mother is so happy she cries. All the relatives

and neighbours call. There is great relief throughout the town. The nation rejoices. It is just like that in the Christian community when someone changes his way of life and finds faith. There is more joy over one convert then over a large and respectable congregation that feels no need for conversion."

"Suppose a woman loses an insurance policy. What does she do? She turns out the house. She may even ask strangers for advice. When she finds the policy she will take her friends out for the night and make merry, "For I have found my lost insurance policy," she cries. There is even more rejoicing when one lost person is saved."

#### A family dilemma

The founder of a thriving business had two sons. The younger was academically the brighter but had very little interest in following father's footsteps. The elder, less bright and apparently showing less initiative, had never thought of doing anything else. He left school at the first possible moment and starting at the bottom, he worked for his father.

The younger boy passed all his examinations with distinction. He never really had to exert himself. Eventually, gaining a travelling scholarship, he had the chance of post-graduate studies abroad. He asked his father if he could have his share of the family wealth. The boy told his father he was not going into the family business and thought, with his qualifications, he would not make any other requests for help.

The father said he would give the boy all his spare capital. He had never kept anything from either

boy and this seemed fair. The younger lad could settle abroad if he wished and both would feel they were being treated alike.

The young student was very popular. He threw himself into all the social activities that were going. He was president of this, active in that, and, as the saying goes "he tried everything." When the time came for him to take his doctorate and for the first time in his life he failed. So, leaving academic studies behind he moved around from place to place only to find that his money gave out. He got a job as a taxi driver, a waiter, a dock labourer, and eventually taking to drugs he was in debt and finally found himself in prison.

Then one day he had a good look at himself and, coming out of prison without any real friends, a home or settled job, he thought of his family. He wrote to his father and set out working his passage home.

In his own country and a few miles from home he made a telephone call. When his father heard the lad was near he said "Wait there boy," and he took the car out and went to meet him.

Back home mother baked a cake and made a special meal. Soon the lad was dressed in one of his father's suits and they sat down for a reunion meal with turkey and all the trimmings.

The elder brother had been away seeking export orders and he came back and caught them enjoying the feast. At the door he heard sounds of mirth and instead of turning the key he rang the bell. Father came, face aglow and said "Come in, your brother is here."

The elder lad remained on the step and said "Why should I, what has he done to deserve all this fuss? He has wasted your money, kept bad company, disgraced the family and you are giving him a feast. What about me? You have never shown such an interest in me."

"Well," said the father, "You are always here. Your brother's been away, he was lost and now he has come back."

## Insuring for the future

Jesus told his friends "The head of a certain insurance company employed a manager who was accused of losing money by pursuing an unsuccessful investment programme. He called him to give an account of his policy. 'Can you justify your handling of the company funds? Let me have a full report. We cannot go on if we have lost our clients' confidence.' The manager, certain to be dismissed, turned to considering his future. 'What shall I do?' he asked. 'I am not fit for hard physical work. I have no qualifications for any other job. There is only one thing to do - I will keep well in with the clients and make sure they feel indebted to me.' So, calling on his largest client he said, 'You pay a thousand a month. I will offer you a special discount of twenty per cent if you double your cover.' To another who paid one hundred pounds a week he offered a fifty per cent discount for trebling the premium. The chief commended the cunning manager for his shrewdness. Thus it is with men of the world they show more forethought than those who are ostentatiously religious."

Jesus says, "Make friends when you can. Live life to the full, accept responsibility, for those who live

well and are honest in worldly things will know how to die. They are the ones who will be trusted with eternal truths. If you don't learn to use responsibility in the present you won't be trusted in the future. If you can't be trusted to look after others how can you look after yourself? No one can look two ways at the same time. There are some choices that are inevitable. You must choose between good and evil. You cannot be loyal to God and worship money. To hell with the world or a new life with Jesus – that's the choice!"

Before the time of Jesus it was a matter of turning to the old book – the law, the prophets and the writings. Now those who have ears to hear and eyes to see can receive the good news of the revolution where everyone is free. Jesus said "It is easier for the whole of the universe to disappear than for one scrap of the law to lose its bite."

## Marriage - an indisputable law

Anyone who marries twice when the other spouse is alive rejects the idea of monogamy and undermines the morality of the community. A woman who divorces her husband and marries again is in no position to make the same vow in the same way, and any man who rids himself of his wife in order to take another woman should expect to lose respect.

# The morning after

There was once a wealthy man of the world who dressed in 'trendy' clothes and dined in the most expensive restaurants. Laddie, as he called him, had a newspaper stand at the corner of the avenue. He had been blown up in action during the war and was a pathetic figure with twisted

legs, a burn-scarred face and broken mind. He listened for a kind word and hoped to be given the odd drink by a customer. In fact the stray cats and dogs proved to be his most consistent friends.

One day both died and the poor suffering Laddie had a pauper's funeral and an immediate transfer to the joys and riches of Heaven. The rich man had an elaborate and ostentatious cremation. service and found himself relegated to the consuming fires of eternal torture. He looked up and in the distance through the flames he could see Abraham and the prophets far away. "Send Laddie with a drop of iced water to cool my tongue, for I am in agony in this heat," he cried but the reply came, "Remember the excitement and opportunities you had, remember, too, all the bad luck that was his and how he suffered. Now the tables are turned, he's safe and your cause is lost. That is all there is to it. There is an unpassable barrier between you. No one can pass from one side to the other." "Father," he prayed, "Will you send him to my friends and brothers to warn them so that they are not condemned to this unending torture?" The reply came "They have had the prophets and their Sunday Schools. Let them understand what they are taught." "No, Father," he protested, "If someone would only rise from the dead and visit them they would repent." "No", came the reply, "If they have not listened to the Bible they will pay no heed, not even to the story of the Resurrection."

## What a life

"Obstacles and pitfalls are inevitable in this life, but it's hell for those who cause them. It would be better to be killed here and now, or even for you to be drowned in highly corrosive acid than to be

guilty of exploiting a child or harming the weak, so keep a good check on yourself.

If anyone wrongs you take it up with them then and there. If he changes his ways or is truly sorry that you have been hurt, forgive him. Even though you are wronged seven times a day you must forgive those who are really sorry."

#### Faith

All this seemed to be asking too much so the friends of Jesus pleaded with him, "Deepen and extend our faith." He replied, "If you have faith as great as a speck of dust you could destroy all the world's stockpile of arms."

#### Duty

Suppose one of you has a secretary taking minutes or typing your letters, will the secretary be taken out to dinner after the office is closed? Most unlikely! She will be asked to bring in sandwiches so that she can go on working! No one should expect thanks for doing what is expected of them. It is the same for all of us. When we have done all that we should we ought to say we are here to help others and deserve no credit for doing our duty. We have only done what any reasonable person would do.

## Hope for all, thanks from a few

In the course of his journey from Manchester to London he travelled on the motorway via Birmingham and saw many people. Visiting a service area he was confronted by ten people with a problem. One was an alcoholic, one a heroin addict, another a girl seeking an abortion, a man with an incurable cancer, a woman suffering from venereal disease. There was an ambulance patient who had had a coronary thrombosis, another was suffering from schizophrenia, and finally a sick immigrant family with tuberculosis, one of whom called to him, "You, man, come here. Take pity on us." When he saw them, he said, "Sure, but you are to go back home and report to your own doctor." Then as they set off on their way their health seemed to improve. One of them, realising what had happened, came back praising God to all she met. She flung her arms round Jesus and thanked him. She, more than any of the others, might have been thought to have been the "outcast." Jesus looked round and said "Were there not ten of you who had the chance to start life again? Where are the other nine? Are you, the forgiven and the outcast, the only one that has taken the trouble to come back? Are you the only one who thanks God for what has happened?" And so it was that Jesus said to her "Go on your iourney. Live a new life. Your faith has made this possible."

# Not a committee job

The revolution will not be planned by a committee or scheduled for a particular hour – it will depend on the commitment that is within the heart and mind. In the circus of life religious contortionists try to make your heart miss a beat. Clowns play on your emotions, they frighten you and then offer comic or pathetic relief. The fair-ground titillates your appetites and then empties your pockets, but when the fire breaks out many will die and very few will be saved.

When the Christian revolution comes it will call for complete sacrifice. It will be like the explorer who

has a chance to go where no one has ever been before. He will make every sacrifice and not allow anything to stand in the way.

#### Stories of Jesus

# (a) For the Discouraged

# The Irritable Wife and the Weary Husband

He was a well known character. He liked to be thought of as independent. He feared no one, not even God. His wife had suffered much, her children had died and she was ill. "Help me, sit by me, don't leave me," she pleaded. He, alas, only heard her say "Get me this, do that," and he cultivated the art of not hearing. But finally he gave in. She kept him awake that night and he said to himself, "I don't fear God and I am not willing to be dictated to by my wife, but if this goes on much longer she will wear me out and it will be the death of me. Poor woman, she is in a bad way, I had better stay in more and give her some attention."

So it is with men, how different with God. Never deceive yourself into thinking that God does not hear your cry.

# (b) For the Satisfied and the Good

# The Priest and the Prostitute

A man and a woman went to church – a priest and a prostitute. She fell on her knees in the aisle and wept. He walked in without needing to look where he was going. He ignored everyone around him and fell over the crying woman. Picking himself up, brushing himself down he prayed audibly. "Thank God I am not like that poor wretch there, I have nothing to

cry about. I say my prayers nightly, I listen to confession." Turning to the woman he said loudly, "If you will come with me I will hear your confession." But she turned away and ran out crying, "I am not fit to speak to anyone, I am too ashamed. God help me." God helped her and was with her in that moment. He was not with the priest. Everyone who puts himself above others will fall – it is the fallen who will be lifted up.

## (c) For the Seeker

#### The Search and the Solution

Many families have trouble in finding somewhere to live. Newly married couples, people who move from one town to another and even established families with growing children are no exception. Mary and Joe had this problem. They began their married life living with his mother and this proved quite a problem. They were glad when Joe was transferred to another town. Here they found a furnished room, it couldn't be called a flat, and the rent was very high. The other people in the house were not the easiest to live with, and when promotion came two years later they were glad to move into the city.

In the city accommodation was even more difficult to find. They searched and searched until they found one room at an exorbitant rent. When Mary eventually heard of a self-contained flat they jumped at the chance and moved once more. The neighbours both above and below turned

out to be noisy, but they soon settled down and bought new furniture and a carpet.

When their baby was born the flat became impossible. It was then that they both realised that what they wanted was a place of their own. They looked and looked until they came across the perfect house near enough to the city but with room enough for them to have two children. This was perfect. All their dreams had come true. It was the discovery of a lifetime. The search was over, or at least it would be if they could get a mortgage. Alas they hadn't enough for the deposit so they started to save in earnest. They gave up cigarettes, alcohol, the occasional meal out and all luxuries. They sold the car and gave up the television. They raised the money for the deposit and sacrificed to meet their repayments. But they were happy. They had been looking for something all their lives and now they had found it. They would pay the price whatever it was.

## (d) For New Recruits

# <u>To Spoil or Save Our Children - That is the Question</u>

A man surrounded his family with good things and gave his children the very best education. But TV programmes what would never have been his choice were screened and received in his home.

Other, more evil influences, were rife in the community and affected his whole family; good thoughts and bad abounded. The

family turned to mother and asked, "What is happening to us? Didn't you do your best? Why are we all in such a mess?" She replied to the effect that it was an enemy's work. "Then," they said, "We will go out and fight every evil, root out all mischiefmakers and introduce stricter legislation." "No," she said, "You may root out the good with the bad. Let them be until the harvest time, for on that day the good will be on display and the diseased will be destroyed. This is what will happen on the day of the Christian revolution."

## Help for Those in Need

Jesus draws near to the market place and a simple man walks along the pavement looking for help. The man, seeing a crowd walking past asks where they are going, and why. He was told by a child that they were going to be with Jesus. He cried out, "Jesus Christ have pity on me." Jesus, who was on the other side of the road stopped and called him across. When he got to the other side Jesus asked him what it was he really wanted. He said, "Sir, help me to understand and give me some purpose for living." Jesus said, "It is done understand and see. There is a job for you - you are needed by other people. Faith is what you need - that is all." Immediately the simple man found a new sense of purpose and went to worship where he was joined by many other people who, when they heard his story, thanked God.

# Nick and the Plan that Misfired

Jesus visited Liverpool en route for Ireland. It was on a day when the city was full of football crowds that Nick set out to see Jesus. Nick was a rich and successful pop star who wanted, on this occasion, to maintain his own anonymity. He hired a cab and coasted along the road following the crowd. As the car driver drew level with Jesus he called him to slow down to walking pace. Jesus broke away from the mass of the people and stepped in front of the car. "Stop," he said, "Step out, Nick, and join the crowds. Walk along with me, I want to be under your roof tonight." Nick jumped out, paid off the driver and took Jesus by the arm. He led Jesus back to his hotel for a meal.

The people were astonished and highly critical – "Jesus staying at an expensive hotel – accepting hospitality from this controversial man of the theatre."

After dinner Nick, in words that have been recorded, said to Jesus, "Look man, I will give half my wealth to the third world. If I have harmed anyone in my career, or done wrong by anyone, I will repay devoting the rest of my life to good works. I will pay back four times over for anything I have taken from others." "Great!" said Jesus, "Hope, light and lasting happiness are beginning to dawn here today. The child of God lives and dies for the outcast."

In Ireland he told the story of: -

## The Holiday Accommodation

A man built himself a cottage by the sea and let it out to holidaymakers. He didn't go near the place for a long time and when the season ended he put the property in the hands of an estate agent. The cottage was let for the winter, but at the end of this time there was no rent, and the occupants refused to leave. Letters were returned unopened,

rent collectors had the door slammed in their faces. He changed his agent, but still received nothing. He tried a third time with yet another agent, but still without success. Then the owner said "What shall I do? I will ask my son to take charge. He will be respected and should be able to get occupation of the cottage." When the tenants realised what was happening they conspired with a gang to have the son involved in an accident and killed. So it was that his car was blown up and the son died.

What then will the owner do? He will get the crooks brought to justice and have the squatters condemned and evicted.

When the people heard this they protested and said surely this is carrying things too far.

#### To East or Not to Eat

The friends of Jesus kept urging him to get a meal, but he said, "I have food that you know little or nothing about." They then asked each other who had been supplying their recent rations. Jesus, overhearing them, said "My food is the satisfying work I do. This fulfils the purpose for which I have been given life. Is there not a saying 'A few months after sowing the seed, the harvest will come.' Look around you. It is already harvest time. Wages are being paid, workers are being laid off. The research and work of the past is giving us many benefits in this, our day. Therefore the whole world could rejoice together... the old proverb holds true 'one works and another gets the benefit.' You have received more than you worked for. Others have struggled and suffered to enable you to get what you have got."

Many Irishmen in the city of Belfast believe in the testimony of the church, and ordinary men and women in the city said of Jesus, "He understands me and knows me through and through." So it was that the Irish approached Jesus and begged him to stay with them. He spent a weekend in their homes and now they can say "It is not just because of what others have told us, we have heard and seen for ourselves, we know that he really is the Saviour of the World."

From Ireland he went on to the USA where he again captured the imagination of the crowds.

## The Rise and Criticism of a President

The capitals of the world seemed so near and everyone had a sense of mounting crisis, political and spiritual. In this context Jesus continues his storytelling. "A well known, wealthy industrialist had political ambitions. He set out on a presidential campaign contesting primary elections right across the continent in an effort to win his party nomination. Realising that he would have to neglect his industrial empire while he was away, he delegated authority to a team of ten managers, leaving them to act as co-directors. Of course, many of his employees and fellow citizens felt that his political ambitions would come to nothing - for they supported his opponents. However, he won the party nomination and eventually became President. At this point he returned home for a while to sort out his business affairs. He sent for his co-directors and called on them to give their reports on progress and profits. The sales director reported a ten-fold increase in orders, the production manager had stepped up the output by a factor of five, whilst the accountant could only show that he had been able to maintain the profit

at the same level as the previous year. He had achieved this by a very delicate, cautious and careful planning of expenditure to give what he called "stability." "You roque," roared the President, "You knew our policy and you have flouted all recognised business practice. Why, why, why?" "Now we must turn our attention to the future," he said. "You must go. The Sales Manager can take over the overall management and responsibility for profits and all our successful colleagues will be given increased power in direct ratio to their achievements and capabilities." After this there was much public criticism. In answer to the protesters he said "Men who have will gain more, and the men who have nothing will lose what they have."

The President adopted the same policy in his political life calling for a complete list of the activities of his political opponents, their achievements and malpractices. "We need unity and co-operation" he said. "This means that those who are not with me one hundred per cent are out."

# Making the Grade

Jesus made his way through many towns and cities on his way to Washington. When asked "What must we do, is there any chance for us, or will there just be a few people who make it?" Jesus answered "There is no excuse for those who fail to do their best. Problems may seem insurmountable, but don't give up. Many will try hard and not make it." The Dean of the College may close his list and there will be no more entrants. Some will demonstrate on the college steps. Others will write or call by telephone, but he will say "Too late". You will protest that you

have made the grade and are eligible for entry. But he will reply "I don't recognise your credentials. I don't accept people with divided loyalties."

About this time, as the hour of the final crisis drew near, he told: -

### The Story of the Thief

"I tell you what you know. A sane, law-abiding man does not climb through the window instead of entering by the door. It is the thief or criminal who climbs through the window or plans a break-in. The security guard opens the gate for the authorised person. He recognises an authentic pass, he knows the names of those who have a right of entry. Those who belong to the family, or who have a legitimate right of entry can get in easily whenever they want. On the other hand, those who plan a break-in fail to acknowledge the greetings, they miss some necessary action, the vital key is missing, and someone gives the alarm.

I am your security man. Others have misled you and made false declarations. In the past people have only responded in a fleeting way. The world has never known lasting security. We have had police forces and a security council, but we have not enjoyed enduring peace."

## To Fight or Not to Fight

I offer you peace and security - but at a price.

I am the security officer without a gun. I don't depend on police protection. I am one of you. I am defending my own people. Your case is my cause. A hired hand will do what he is paid to do and no more – but with me, my life is in your hand and I will readily die for you. I am not going to fight for my life or to protect myself. I will sacrifice myself for you. Peace and security will come only when we give up the idea of fighting for freedom, and put God first. No one can take your life off you if you give yourself up freely.

#### Hostile Public Opinion

The people turned against him for a variety of reasons. Some thought him unstable or mentally ill, others were convinced that he could only behave in this way if he were a spy or perhaps a double agent. Even his onetime friends believed that his political views were eccentric, whilst those who were most consistent and sympathetic came to the conclusion that he was naive and illogical.

### Utopia Can Be Realised

Come the day when the "ideal man" rules everyone will be called to account.

The goodies and the baddies will be divided up for keeps, the goodies on the right and the baddies on the left. Those on the right will be offered lasting happiness. "Come," he will say, "Come and enter the longed for Utopia – a real place, not just a

dream, an essential part of creation built into the plan from the beginning of time. When I was deprived you met my real needs; when I was without food and dying of thirst you came to my aid. When I was a casualty and when I was in jail you visited me." The good will protest and say, "Surely you have got it wrong, we don't deserve your praise – when did we do these things? We didn't see you in trouble, destitute or ill." The answer will be "Indeed you did. It was when you were least conscious of it that you met my needs."

It is then that those on the left will be dismissed. "Away with you - you're lost and face everlasting mockery. When I was despised you stood by observing a diplomatic silence; when I was without food and dying of thirst you discussed charity and took no political action. When I was a casualty and in jail you didn't want to know." Those on the left will argue back and say, "No, you have got it wrong, we never saw you" and the unanswerable reply will be unmistakable. "Oh! But you should for every time you debated an issue or put off the action, whenever you failed to meet need and passed judgement on the poor and the weak, each time you ignored others in hospital and in prison you chose to hurt me and added to the world's suffering. So the goodies deserve unending gratitude and the self-righteous, ("thought we were do-gooders!") the baddies, face an everlasting and utter ruin."

## Mounting Disaster

The closer he came to the capital the sadder he was and the greater the weight of sorrow he carried. The Pentagon and Kremlin alike caused tears to roll down his cheeks. When the city came in sight he cried, "If only the people could realise

what their leaders were doing; if only mankind knew what was needed for peace. Modern technology, strategic weapons will destroy modern civilisation. What is taken for granted today will be renounced tomorrow. All this is because the people will not understand and respond to love and truth."

### Striking Camp

They camped for the night before entering the city. He made the arrangements himself with a friendly farmer.

He dug the latrines himself and filled in the trenches the next morning. In addition to this he was up early cleaning the shoes of all his friends. "You can't do this chief," said Peter. "Why not?" said Jesus. "If there is a dirty job to be done, that is my job. If something needs cleaning up that is what I am here for. If you don't understand this and accept it you are not part of my plan." "I surrender" said Peter. "I need cleaning up, every bit of me. Start with my feet and don't stop until you have me in a fit state to be your man."

When they had finished, and as they were ready to move on Jesus said, "Do you understand what has happened? You call me chief, you look to me for leadership, you need to do what I do, for students must be willing to learn from their teachers. You are beginning to see the truth. You will experience true happiness when you make your body respond to your conscience."

### The Informer

It was just before the holiday. The police and military had been put on standby duty. State

authorities and the religious leaders were apprehensive. Jesus, popular with the people, was seen as a threat to tradition, to authority and to discipline. In a moment of what seemed like devil possession, Jake offered himself as an informer and began to look for an opportunity to stagemanage a show down.

### A Farewell Party

On the evening of the holiday they sat down together for a celebration meal, little realising at the time what it was that they were celebrating.

Jesus took his place at the table and it was obvious that there was something wrong. "I think we had better have it out straight away. One of you, a friend, has agreed to play the role of informer." The friends looked at one another as though it was unbelievable. Who could it be? One of his closest friends who had been sitting next to Jesus was beckoned over by Pete. "Ask him what on earth he is talking about." So moving even closer to Jesus he whispered "Who is it?" Jesus said for all to hear "I will break this bread and give it to him," so taking the bread he broke it, handed a piece to Jake with the words "Do what you must do quickly." Jake took the opportunity, picked up his coat and slipped out into the night. No one else understood what was happening. Jake was treasurer and they assumed he had some special errand to do.

## A New Law

After Jake left Jesus said, "I will not be with you very much longer. You will look for me but you cannot go all the way I am going. What you can do is to love one another. Love is the new way I

have shown you. I have given myself to you. Give yourselves to one another. Love as I have loved you and you will be my friends forever."

#### Misunderstood

Even then the spirit of competition and jealousy threatened their unit. Who was going to succeed best? Who would be the leader in the absence of Jesus? Jesus shook his head. "How can you misunderstand? Kings, princes, politicians exercise power. They like to be thought of as the friends of the people, but it won't be that way with you. The way to strength is through weakness, to authority through humility, to leadership through service. I am among you as one who lives for others.

You have been trying to keep up with me so far but you have much further to go yet."

#### Wait For Me

"Wait for us" said Pete, "We want to keep up to the end. It is not so easy to follow what you have been saying." "You can't follow now" said Jesus. "You can't come where I am going, but you will be able to follow later." "But I am ready now" protested Pete. "Are you really ready to die at this moment?" asked Jesus. "I am telling you the truth. You are not ready. Before day breaks you will have said you don't even know me, furthermore it will not just happen once, it will happen again and again." Then Jesus took the cup and said "Drink, take your share of the blood of the revolution. You will know no rest, spiritual peace or physical ease until everything is arranged."

#### Protective Clothes

Jesus asked them if they had gone short of anything when they had been limited to an overnight bag. "Well then," said Jesus, "You must go prepared for anything. Take the necessities for a long journey and if you have no credit card go to the banker and get one. If you haven't a bullet-proof vest you had better sell your shoes and buy one." "Look, two of us have got guns" they said. "It is enough, we don't want any more arms" he replied.

### Prophetic Prayer

Jesus looked up and prayed, eyes open, looking round at his friends. "Father, this is the hour. Help your son to be consistent and worthy of you. This is the hour when past and future meet. Open the eyes of the world to see that you are the one and only God. May they come to understand who I am and what it is that I do.

I pray for these my friends, the group on whom you depend. What I have is from you, and I offer it to them. Give them security. The world of today hates them for failing to conform to the popular secular pattern. The environment is hostile. I am not asking you to let them escape from the painful realities, but I pray that they may hold fast to your word and truth. I am sending them into the world's darkest places as you sent me.

I am not only praying for them, but for those who will hear their message. Help them to believe. I pray that all who believe may have unity of purpose and mission. May they be one in faith and one in unity with us, just as we are one in prayer, thought and action, so may they be one. And

when we are all one and recognised to be one, the world will know why you sent me to them and that you love them just as you love me."

#### Under the Trees

After prayer in the restaurant, crossing the busy street, they set out for a walk in the park. They sat on a bench under the trees and talked. He reminded them that his life only made sense to those who realised that the key to it all was prayer. "Remember that you are saved from falling," he said. Leaving them to their private thoughts he moved away into the shadows where he knelt by a large boulder of rough stone. "Father," he was heard to say, "Humanly speaking I wish you would release me from the mounting crisis, but no, I am here to do what you require, let it be." Then it was that it looked as though he was sweating blood, and he was for a moment caught up in a pool of light. He rose to his feet, walked over to the others and found them dropping off to sleep. "What, are you asleep already?" he asked. "Shake yourselves, we must be off."

## The Informant and the Cops

He was still speaking when the shriek of sirens drowned all other sounds. Jake appeared out of the darkness, and going straight up to Jesus he hugged him warmly. Jesus said, "Is this the greeting of betrayal?"

When the friends who were around saw what was happening one whipped out his revolver and another struck out and knocked off the hat of a policeman. "That is enough of that, hand over your guns." He stooped to pick up the hat and offered it back saying to the police "Did you have

to come after me with all your sirens at full blast? There is no need for violence. I have been around in the day time, you could have come for me in the church. Still this is the hour of crime and the moment of darkness." They bundled him into the police car and drove off at high speed.

### Being Put on the Spot

They drove along the riverside drive and stopped in the traffic just by the Council of Churches headquarters. Senior executives came out to see what all the commotion was about. The windows of the car were lowered and the police, recognising the church leaders, called out "Say, you there, do you recognise this man?" "Were you speaking to us" they replied. "You know right well we are" they said. "Will you come to the police headquarters to identify him?" "Identify whom?" they answered, and looking at Jesus added, "You'd have told us, wouldn't you, if you really are who you say you are." "Well" he said, "You studied my words often enough!" The traffic began to move off and the driver commented "We cannot hang around here any longer. We've got all we need and you've heard what they said."

A moment of two later Pete drove by and was called to stop. He took no notice, pretending not to have any connection with anyone or anything. The roar of traffic seemed to re-echo in his ears and he felt extremely uneasy, like a hunted man.

### The Awakening

At dawn Pete awoke after a restless night. The sound of traffic disturbed him again and he had a haunting memory of words echoing in his mind "Again and again you will."

### Conflicting Evidence

The court room was crowded for a preliminary hearing. Everyone was talking about him, but all the evidence was hearsay. "We saw him speaking to the people." "The people said he said they were not to pay taxes." "Is it not true that the soldiers say they have been incited to desert?" "Morality is being debased, you know." "Religious authority is being flouted."

"But where is the evidence?" and "What is the charge?" said the judge. "I can't order a formal trial without evidence."

### Third Degree

Back in the cells he was kept without food, questioned, taunted and unofficially threatened with violence. He was then cleaned up and given new clothes for visits by the Governor, foreign ambassadors and United Nations personnel. He was unwilling to press charges against his accusers so it was only after the event that anything leaked out about what had happened in the cells.

#### Not Proven

Finally they had to call the President himself to make a decision and even though his aides tried to shield him it became quite clear that he was himself either unwilling or unable to come to any conclusion. The only thing that remained for him to do was to order him to be deported.

En route for the airport the bulletproof van in which he was being transported broke down and they had to flag down a taxi driver from Harlem to take him the last few kilometres to the airport.

## <u>An Unknown Assassin is Used by Unnamed</u> <u>Conspirators</u>

Then it was that the shot was fired.

Someone took deliberate aim from across the street and then escaped into the crowd, who, by their unbridled curiosity succeeded all too unconsciously in aiding and abetting in the crime.

Jesus slumped forward in a crumpled heap on the rear seat of the cab.

Before he died he was heard to whisper "Forgive them, forgive them Father, they don't understand what they are doing."

The churchgoers muttered "He was better at looking after others than he was a looking after himself." A policeman kicked him, an armed security guard mocked "Some triumphant procession this. You will soon be a corpse not a hero and you can't do anything about it, can you?" One who was travelling with him, a frightened convert said "Don't you fear God? That bullet

might have got us not him." Turning to Jesus he said "Thanks mate, I'll remember you." Jesus said, "I'll remember you too, you and I will be together late in the day."

### The Dead of Night at Noon

It was mid-day when he died, in the heat of the day, but a dark cloud covered the sun and an unexpected eclipse caused an almost total blackout. A flash of lightening hit a nearby church shattering the steeple and Jesus cried, "Father I am yours, take me." And with this he died.

An army officer who happened to be passing and witnessed the event said "God save him he hadn't a chance." Other eye witnesses just went on their way numbed and sick at the sight of the violent scene. Those who knew Jesus personally kept their distance and went off broken-hearted without saying a word.

Joseph, a rich, influential Jew made arrangements for the burial.

As they took him off to the mortuary his shoes and socks and coat were divided up among the bystanders. The decision as to who had what being decided by the toss of a coin.

## At Crack of Dawn

On Sunday morning at crack of dawn the women took flowers to the funeral home. They found the door open and went in to find the coffin empty; they looked round but there was no sign of Jesus; they stood in silence.

Suddenly, without warning, they saw two men dressed in shining white suits standing before them. Frightened out of their wits the women fell on their knees, and the men asked "Why are you looking among the dead for one who is full of life? He is not here, he is now more full of life than ever. Don't you remember what he told you when he was in England? Evil men will try to crush the ideal man, he will be condemned and shot only to be restored to life again within three days."

The women remembered the words, and with the exception of Mary, went back to their friends, the eleven and the others and told them what had happened.

#### <u>Understanding the Incomprehensible</u>

But the eleven thought it was nonsense, the illusions of hysterical women. However, Pete broke away from the rest and ran off to the funeral home with a friend following closely on his heels. The friend got there first but stood outside by the open door. As he hesitated Pete pushed past and saw the empty casket with the funeral robe draped over the foot with a silk square that might have covered the face where the head had lain. They turned away, beginning to understand the things which, until then, had been incomprehensible.

# Seeing Through the Tears

Mary stayed on after all the others had left. She remained sobbing. Through her tears she saw the two men in white standing there again, and they asked, "Why are you crying?" and she said "They have taken away the only one who ever really loved me." And looking up she saw Jesus standing before her, but she didn't recognise him. Even

when he asked her why she cried, "Who are you really looking for?" Thinking he was the funeral director, she said, "If it is you that moved him, tell me where he is so that I may go and see him again." Jesus said, "Mary" and she replied instinctively, "Lord." Jesus said, "Don't try to cling to me, I have to go to my father. You ought to go to my brothers and tell them that I must be with my father and your father, with my God and your God."

Mary went off to tell the comrades. "I have seen him" she said, and she joined the others in passing on the message.

#### Two or Three for the Road

Later that day two of them were out for a walk on Long Island, about seven miles from Manhattan. They were discussing all the things that had happened. Jesus followed them, overheard their conversation and joined with them as they walked along. They didn't recognise him, even when he asked what they had been talking about. But then, realising that something was a little strange they stopped in amazement and one of them. Charles, said, "What have you been doing these last few days? You must be the only man in New York who has not heard the news." "What news?" asked Jesus. "Why, the Jesus of Soho affair, the inspired leader who fell foul of church and state. He was assassinated. When they couldn't get any evidence against him that would stick he was about to be deported. You must have heard about it, everyone is talking about the assassination. At the last moment as he was about to be taken to the airport he was shot down. Now the whole city is numb, and nobody seems to be bothering anymore. We hoped he would save the nation and

bring peace to the world, but it is now the third day since it all happened. The odd thing is, some women in our group have amazed us with a story that they have seen a vision of men dressed in white suits who tell them that he is alive. They say they went to the funeral parlour at dawn and found an empty casket. Others in our group have checked up on the story and they found things just as the women had said, but they didn't see him."

Jesus said, "How sceptical you are, and slow to believe what has been prophesised. Isn't it inevitable for there to be suffering before glory, death before resurrection?" And he explained the scriptures beginning with Moses and the prophets. Even so they didn't understand.

When they got near to the community where they were going to stay Jesus acted as though he would walk on, but they restrained him. "Stay with us it is getting dark. It's too late to go on." So he stayed with them and at dinner took a piece of bread in his hands, broke it and said the blessing in such a way as to be quite unmistakable. They recognised him at that moment. He smiled, turned and left. They agreed that it had been an unforgettable experience as they had listened to him explaining the scriptures. They said it was as though there had been a fire burning within them.

When they met the others they told them everything that had happened and how they had recognised his presence at supper.

### Amongst the Administrators

The group met to discuss their experiences in the administrative headquarters of an office block. As they were talking they realised that there was an

extra member present. No one had seen the door open, there had been no sound from the lift, he just sat there among them and said, "Relax, have confidence, be at peace."

In the coldly efficient, business like office they felt scared, they wondered if they had seen a ghost, but he just continued, "Stop trembling, what are all these questions, doubts and fears. Look into my eyes, hold my hands, put your hand on my shoulder, listen to my heart. A ghostly spirit doesn't breathe like this, the dead have no pulse beat. Listen and see!"

They were still uncertain, unable or unwilling to give way to the excitement of the moment, so he asked "Are we going to have a drink?" They ordered coffee and cake which he shared with them.

#### <u>Underground</u>

Tom, the sceptic, was missing on this occasion and it was not until they were on the subway that he joined them. When told of what had happened he said "You can say what you like, but I think you're dreaming. Unless I see his wounded chest and hear the heartbeat I will not believe that he is alive." At that moment another figure joined them on the stairs and he said "Look inside my shirt Tom, go and get a stethoscope and listen to my heart, or if that doesn't satisfy you let us obtain an ECG reading." "No, no, no!" protested Tom, "That is not the way I want it at all. My God forgive me." "Bless you," said Jesus, "You have found faith now. How much happier will those be who have not seen me as you have, but who still find faith." In the elevator on the way up to the street level Jesus said "Remember all the things that have been

written - after pain is glory, after death, life. Go out into the city, north, south, east and west. Tell everyone the good news. If you will keep together in each place and pray for power it will be given to you."

### <u>Light Restored - Promises Fulfilled</u>

Sometime later they visited a power station. The new night shift had come on duty but there was no work. The explanation they were given was that a technical problem had led to a complete loss of output. They were taken on a tour of inspection and saw the staff standing around with nothing to do. It was then that Jesus called out, "Haven't you any work?" "No" came the reply, the whole plant is idle, to which he responded, "Throw over that switch to the right." At this point he had not been recognised, even by his friends. But then, as the generator started to turn and the whole place became a hive of activity they knew that it could only be one person – it was Jesus.

### Paying the Price in the Market Place

They were out in the shopping precinct. They had just bought some food and were jostling with the crowd. Looking up they saw political slogans and election propaganda, "X will speak for you, Y will take up your cause, and Z will do what you want."

Jesus turned to look at Pete and said, "Are you committed to me more than these?" "I'll say I am your friend any day" came the answer. "Give the kids that they need" said Jesus.

Then again he asked Pete, "Are you really my friend?" Pete, deeply offended by the third question said "Chief you know best, you know what

my friendship is worth." "Then give the people what they need" said Jesus. "Don't let them down. When you were young you did as you liked, but when you are old other people will make the decisions for you, and what is more they will do things to you that are not of your choosing."

## Self-Confidence by the Riverside

"Boss, we can do anything" cried Pete as he leapt from the bridge. But, as he waded ashore he was cold and somewhat chastened. They had coffee and pancakes nearby and their breakfast talk was a reminder of the last supper they had together. He handed round the pancakes in the same way as on that last occasion before the assassination.

#### On the Escalator

"It's just like life – a continuous ongoing process. The rise and fall of mankind." The group were talking about life and death, but uppermost in their minds was the whole question of Jesus. What had happened to him, and then there was the other matter. What was going to happen to them? It was at this point that they realised that Jesus was with them on the escalator. "Why do you worry about so many unnecessary questions? Keep your eyes on me and follow in my footsteps" he said. He was there in front of them and they were following one step behind. One moment they were in doubt, the next they could see him clearly, but then a moment later and they were by themselves again.

### At the Heliport

He was still with them at the airport, and he said "Off with you now on international flights to all

nations." They looked up at the incoming flight and when they looked round again he was nowhere to be seen.

### The Unending Book

The story of these events – the book of life – has no ending. No single library will ever contain all that can be written. The story is unending. Every century a host of modern martyrs, every year the birth of countless numbers of contemporary Christians, every month the closing of one age and the beginning of another, every week a new book every day a fresh chapter.

'Look on Jesus' is based on the Gospel of Luke and also includes text from the Gospels of Matthew & John to form a more complete biography of Jesus.

What do you see ? Born underground and assassinated in our century



Kenneth Lawton was a Methodist minister, but considered himself ecumenical.