

## Not Just Any Baby

I would like to introduce you to a Baby. You may wonder why I would want to do so. The reason why I want to talk about this particular Baby is because I hope to show you that this Baby was not just an ordinary baby, but was a very special Baby. It is true, of course, that every parent will say that their baby is very special, and not like any other baby. And I am sure every parent is right, for no babies are alike. However, the Baby I want to talk about was really unlike any other baby ever born on this earth, since His birth was actually foretold in the Bible long before it happened. You can read of Him, for instance, in Isaiah 9:6

***For to us a child is born, to us a son is given. And the government will be on his shoulders.***

And in Isaiah 7:14, where you can read

***The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel.***

The day finally came when what had been foretold happened. The young woman who was to give birth to this child was visited by an angel who told her the following in Luke 1:30-31

***But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son and you are to give him the name Jesus."***

When this Baby was eventually born, His birth was announced by an angel, accompanied by a whole group of angels. I don't think that happened when any of your babies were born. You can read of this event in Luke 2:8-14

***And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today, in the town of David, a Saviour has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a Baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. Suddenly a great company of heavenly hosts appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom His favour rests."***

Having heard this, I think you'll agree with me that Jesus was a special baby, am I right? Now, we all know that babies don't remain babies; they all grow up. That is what happened to the baby Jesus, for he too became a boy and eventually became a man. But just as Jesus was a special baby, so He became a special man. While growing up, He lived at home with his parents and He, very likely, helped his father in his carpenter's business.

However, when He turned thirty, that all changed, for He left home and began to travel throughout his nation, which was the nation of Israel. As he travelled, He began to teach the people about God. One day, while He was teaching a great crowd of people, they became hungry, and He fed all of them, as you can read in John 6:1-13.

***Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), and a great crowd of people followed Him because they saw the***

*miraculous signs He had performed on the sick. Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with His disciples. The Jewish Passover Feast was near. When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming towards Him, He said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" He asked this only to test him, for He already had in mind what He was going to do. Philip answered Him, "Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite." Another of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?" Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and the men sat down, about five thousand of them. Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish. When they had all had enough to eat, He said to His disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.*

Feeding all these people was very kind of Him, but the amazing thing is that He did not feed these people with food He had prepared beforehand. That would have been impossible, for there were at least five thousand people present. No, He only used the lunch of a little boy, of five small loaves and two fish. And that little bit of food was multiplied as He asked God to bless it, so that there was enough food for everyone.

That was not all that He did for when He walked from town to town and village to village He encountered people who were sick and He healed them. It did not matter to Him, what age anyone was, or what status or gender. He healed all of them because He was concerned for each one of them. I will give you a number of examples to show you how much Jesus cared about people.

1. Jesus healed a man who suffered with leprosy, as you can read in Matthew 8:1-4 *When He (Jesus) came down from the mountainside, a large crowd followed Him. A man with leprosy came and knelt before Him and said, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean." Jesus reached out His hand and touched the man. "I am willing," He said, "Be clean." Immediately, he was cured of his leprosy. Then Jesus said to him, "See that you don't tell anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."*

2. He healed a woman who had suffered a physical problem for twelve years. She had tried to quietly touch Him so she could be healed. However, Jesus noticed that power had gone out from Him, for she had been made well. You can read that story in Luke 8:43-48

*And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years, but no one could heal her. She came up behind Him (Jesus) and touched the edge of his cloak, and immediately her bleeding stopped. "Who touched Me?" Jesus asked. When they all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the people are crowding and pressing against You." But Jesus said, "Someone touched Me, I know that power has gone out from Me." Then the woman, seeing that she could not go unnoticed, came trembling and fell at His feet. In the presence of all the people, she told why she had touched Him and how she had been instantly healed. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace."*

3. He healed a woman who had been crippled for eighteen years, as you can read in Luke 13:10-17

***On a Sabbath Day Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. When Jesus saw her, He called her forward and said to her, "Woman, you are set free from your infirmity." Then He put His hands on her, and immediately, she straightened up and praised God. Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue ruler said to the people, "There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath." The Lord answered him, "You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?"***

When He said this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things He was doing. You would expect everybody to have been delighted with the healing of this woman, but some of the religious leaders were, in fact, very angry with Jesus because He had healed this woman on a Sabbath day.

4. He healed a little girl who was dying and, in fact, had died by the time He arrived at her home. Nevertheless, He took her by the hand and told her to get up and she did, as you can read in Luke 8:41-42

***Then a man named Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue, came and fell at Jesus' feet, pleading with Him to come to his house, because his only daughter, a girl of about twelve, was dying. As Jesus was on His way, the crowds almost crushed Him.....***

And Luke 8:49-55

***While Jesus was still speaking, someone came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue ruler. "Your daughter is dead," he said, "Don't bother the Teacher anymore." Hearing this, Jesus said to Jairus, "Don't be afraid; just believe, and she will be healed." When He arrived at the house of Jairus, He did not let anyone go in with Him except Peter, John and James, and the child's father and mother. Meanwhile all the people were wailing and mourning for her. "Stop wailing," Jesus said, "She is not dead but asleep." They laughed at Him, knowing that she was dead. But He took her by the hand and said, "My child, get up." Her spirit returned, and at once she stood up. Then Jesus told them to give her something to eat. Her parents were astonished, but He ordered them not to tell anyone what had happened.***

5. He healed a blind beggar who was sitting at the road side near Jericho, as you can read in Luke 18:35-43.

***As Jesus approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard the crowd going by, he asked what was happening. They told him, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by." He called out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Those who led the way rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus stopped and ordered the man to be brought to him. When he came near, Jesus asked him, "What do you want Me to do for you?" "Lord, I want to see," he replied. Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has healed you." Immediately he received***

*his sight and followed Jesus, praising God. When all the people saw it, they also praised God.*

Interestingly, Jesus did not just presume that this blind beggar wanted to be healed but asked him what he would like Jesus to do for him. And Jesus healed him only after he had responded to His question.

Not only did Jesus heal people, He delivered people from evil spirits. Once again. I will give you a number of examples, so you will know that Jesus cared so much about people that He was even willing to set them free from demonic oppression.

1. He delivered a man from many demons who controlled him to the point that he could not live with other people, as you can read in Luke 8:26-39

*They sailed to the region of the Gerasenes, which is across the lake from Galilee. When Jesus stepped ashore, He was met by a demon-possessed man from the town. For a long time this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell at His feet, shouting at the top of his voice, "What do You want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg You, don't torture me!" For Jesus had commanded the evil spirit to come out of the man. Many times it had seized him, and though he was chained hand and foot and kept under guard, he had broken his chains and had been driven by the demon into solitary places. Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" "Legion," he replied, because many demons had gone into him. And they begged Him repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss. A large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside. The demons begged Jesus to let them go into them, and He gave them permission. When the demons came out of the man, they went into the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned. When those tending the pigs saw what had happened, they ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting at Jesus' feet, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. Those who had seen it told the people how the demon-possessed man had been cured. Then all the people of the region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them, because they were overcome with fear. So He got into the boat and left. The man from whom the demons had gone out, begged to go with Him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, "Return home and tell how much God has done for you." So the man went away and told all over the town how much Jesus had done for him.*

This man, while under the control of demons, did not wear clothes and did not live in the town but in a tomb outside the town. As soon as he was set free from the demons, he got dressed and went back home to tell others what Jesus had done for him.

2. He delivered a boy from a demon that threw the boy into convulsions, as you can read in Luke 9:37-43

*The next day, when they came down from the mountain, a large crowd met Him (Jesus). A man in the crowd called out, "Teacher, I beg You to look at my son, for he is my only child. A spirit seizes him and he suddenly screams; it throws him into convulsions so that he foams at the mouth. It scarcely ever leaves him and is destroying him. I begged Your disciples to drive it out, but they could not." "O unbelieving and perverse generation," Jesus replied, "How long shall I stay with you and put up with you? Bring your son here." Even while the boy was coming, the demon threw him to the ground in a convulsion. But Jesus rebuked the evil*

*spirit, healed the boy and gave him back to his father. And they were all amazed at the greatness of God.*

3. He delivered a young girl from demonic oppression, as you can read in Matthew 15:21-28

*Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. A Canaanite woman from the vicinity came to Him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession." Jesus did not answer a word. So His disciples came to Him and urged Him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." The woman came and knelt before Him, "Lord, help me!" she said. He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs." "Yes, Lord," she said, "but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed from that very hour.*

This little girl was not even Jewish, but her mother believed that Jesus could and would set free even her daughter. And He did. It seems Jesus insulted this mother very much by comparing her to a dog because she was not Jewish. However, this mother understood that even dogs could and did eat the crumbs from under their masters' table, meaning even she could receive a measure of His healing for her daughter. Jesus was very pleased with her answer and, consequently, her daughter was healed.

Jesus did not only teach people about God, nor did He only heal people, nor only deliver people from demonic oppression; He even raised some people from the dead. Let me give you some examples to show the great compassion Jesus had for people.

1. One time, Jesus met a widow whose only son had died. She was, in fact, on her way to bury him. Jesus walked up to her and told her not to cry. How could He say such a cruel thing? Did He not understand that there was now no one to take care of her? But perhaps she did stop crying because she may have sensed He would do something for her. And He did, for He then went to the coffin and raised her son back to life, as you can read in Luke 7:11-17

*Soon afterwards, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and His disciples and a large crowd went along with Him. As He approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out – the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her. When the Lord saw her, His heart went out to her and He said, "Don't cry." Then He went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still. He said, "Young man, I say to you, get up!" The dead man set up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother. They were all filled with awe and praised God. "A great Prophet has appeared among us," they said, "God has come to help His people."*

2. Jesus even raised someone from the dead who had been in the tomb for four days already. His name was Lazarus and Jesus knew him and his sisters very well. These two sisters had expected Him to come to their home when their brother Lazarus had fallen ill, but He had not done so. Consequently, their brother had died and they had had to bury him. When Jesus finally turned up at their village, four days after the funeral of their brother, both sisters told Him that His visit was too late, but Jesus

knew He had come at exactly the right time, for He had come to do an even greater miracle; He had come to bring their brother Lazarus back to life, and that is what He did, as you can read in John 11:1-44

*Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same person who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped His feet with her hair. So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick." When He heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's Glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. Yet when He heard that Lazarus was sick, He stayed where He was two more days. Then He said to His disciples, "Let us go back to Judea." "But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the Jews tried to stone You, and yet You are going back there?" Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? A man who walks by day will not stumble, for he sees by this world's light. It is when he walks by night that he stumbles, for he has no light." After He had said this, He went on to tell them, "Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to wake him up." His disciples replied, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better." Jesus had been speaking of his death, but His disciples thought He meant natural sleep. So then He told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." Then Thomas (called Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him." On His arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet Him, but Mary stayed at home. "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if You had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give You whatever You ask." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the Resurrection and the Life. He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?" "Yes, Lord," she told Him, "I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world." And after she had said this, she went back and called her sister aside. "The Teacher is here," she said, "and is asking for you." When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to Him. Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met Him. When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there. When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw Him, she fell at His feet and said, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. "Where have you laid him?" He asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied. Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, "See how He loved him." But some of them said, "Could not He who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. "Take away the stone," He said. "But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odour, for he has been there four days." Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the Glory of God?" So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. I knew that You always*

***hear Me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that You sent Me.” When He had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”***

So Jesus was not just an ordinary person, like you and I; He was a very special person, you'll agree. And He had been born for a very special reason. He had not just been born to teach people about God, even though that was very important. Neither had He just been born to heal and deliver people, even though these things were very important too. He had, in fact, been born to die for people. Not just for the people in His nation, Israel, but for all people everywhere, and at all times. That is what He did, for after having travelled through His nation for three years, He allowed himself to be put on a cross, and that is when He died for all people, including you, as you can read in Luke 23:33

***When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified Him (Jesus), along with the criminals – one on His right, the other on His left.***

Why did He allow himself to be crucified? Because of His love for people, including you. For three years He had shown people His love for them by teaching them about God, by healing them, delivering them and even raising some of them from the dead. But He showed his greatest love for them and for you when He died on the cross. You see, Jesus knew that all people everywhere, including you, are separated from God because of sin for God is not only a God of love but God is a holy God too. And that no matter what good works you have done and might be doing to become acceptable to Him it is impossible for you to do enough good works to become as good as God. That is why Jesus came into the world as a Baby.

It is true that Jesus has always been in existence as part of the Godhead, as God the Son. And as God the Son, He, together with God the Father, created the Universe, including the first two human beings, as you can read in Genesis 1:27

***So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.***

This first couple had a wonderful relationship with God until they disobeyed. Then everything changed, for their sinful actions caused them to become separated from God. Their sinful actions affected not just them, but everyone born after them, including you, as you can read in Romans 5:12

***Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned.***

That is why God the Son left heaven and entered the world as a Baby, so He could identify with human beings. And since He lived a perfect life as a human being, He could die on your behalf and take your sins upon Him, so that once again you can have a close relationship with God, just as the first couple had originally. You could say, Jesus became the Bridge for you to God. His death paid the price for your sins, so you do not have to pay the price, which is separation from God, not just now, but even after you die.

Perhaps you do not have this close relationship with God, and you may never have heard how you can have that close relationship with God, as your heavenly Father.

That is why I have shared with you about Jesus being the Bridge to the Father, for no one can come to the Father except through Jesus, as you can read in John 14:6  
***Jesus answered, "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."***

Even though you may know about God, you may not know Him intimately. But God knows you, and He desires for you to learn how you can become His child, and how He can become your heavenly Father. So what are the steps you need to take to have that close relationship with God?

First of all, you need to recognise that you are a sinner, and that nothing you do can bring you into a proper relationship with God, including taking care of your family, other relatives, or even your neighbours, good as these things are. These things cannot make you right with God.

Secondly, you need to realise that Jesus has, in fact, already paid the price for all your sins when He died on the cross two thousand years ago.

Thirdly, you need to recognise your need to confess your sins, including specific sins that you may be aware of, and to ask God to forgive you of all your sins, because Jesus has already paid the price for them on the cross, in His role as your Saviour.

Fourthly, you need to realise your need for Jesus to help you live in a way that is pleasing to God by asking Him to be the Lord of your life. If you are not yet God's child, then God wants to invite you to become His child.

Therefore, I would like to lead you in a prayer so you can acknowledge that you are a sinner, and that you accept God's forgiveness based on Jesus' death on the cross, so you can become a child of God. He will then become your heavenly Father, and you can know that you will be with God in heaven after you die. I would now like to invite you to pray the following prayer:

**Dear God,**

**I know that I am a sinner and I cannot make myself right with You.**

**But I know too that You sent Your Son Jesus to earth to die for me on a cross 2000 years ago so I can be forgiven of all my sins.**

**I confess my sins and repent of them.... (if you are aware of anything specific you can just mention them to God) and I receive Your forgiveness of them.**

**By faith I accept that I have now become Your Child and You have now become my heavenly Father and I will be with You in heaven when I die.**

**I ask Jesus to be the Lord of my life and to help me live in a way that is pleasing to You with the help of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

Having prayed this prayer, you can now know that you have become a child of God and that is wonderful. You can now ask the Lord to guide you each day. If possible, spend time with other believers, so you can learn from them how to live in a way that is pleasing to God. Over time, you may be able to share with others what you have learned about God.

## Not Worthy Of Attention

Jesus has gone to Capernaum, no doubt led by His Father, for He only does what He sees His heavenly father doing, as you can read in John 5:19

***Jesus gave them this answer: “I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by Himself, He can do only what He sees the Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.”***

You can find the reason for His going to Capernaum in Luke 7:1-3

***When Jesus had finished saying all this in the hearing of the people, He entered Capernaum. There a Centurion’s servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die. The Centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to Him, asking Him to come and heal his servant.***

The Centurion is a Roman soldier and, therefore, not one of the Jewish chosen people. One of his servants is very ill and is, in fact, on the point of dying. What is he to do? He has done everything possible so far and no medicine has worked. He is really at his wit’s end. But then he learns that Jesus has entered Capernaum and he has heard that this Jesus can, and does, heal people. It is true, he, as a Roman citizen does not belong to the Jewish people and Jesus’ ministry is always among Jewish people. However, his situation is very desperate, for his servant is near death. Perhaps Jesus may have mercy upon him, and will come to see his servant, even though he is not worthy to receive Him in his home, as an unclean Gentile. Not feeling worthy even to speak to Jesus in person, he asks some of the Jewish elders if they are willing to plead his case before Jesus, on his behalf, as you can read in Luke 7:4a

***When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with Him, “This man deserves to have you do this, because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue.” So Jesus went with them.***

Jesus listens to the plea of the elders, and in response goes with them to the house of the Centurion. However, the Centurion, knowing that he is not of the chosen race, does not think that Jesus, who is of the chosen race, should enter his home, as you can read in Luke 7:4b-10

***He was not far from the house when the Centurion sent friends to say to Him, “Lord, don’t trouble Yourself, for I do not deserve to have You come under my roof. That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to You. But say the word and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, “Go,” and he goes; and that one, “Come,” and he comes. I say to my servant, “Do this,” and he does it.”***

The Centurion asks some Jewish friends of his to meet Jesus on his behalf to pass on to Him the request that He simply speak a word of healing over the servant, for that will be sufficient for the servant to be made whole. The Centurion understands the principle of rightful authority, for in his own life he simply speaks the word, and those under his authority will do what they have been told. Likewise, he understands that Jesus has authority over sicknesses. Therefore, when Jesus simply speaks the word for the sickness to go, it must go. Jesus’ response to the request of the Centurion can be found in Luke 7:9-10

***When Jesus heard this, He was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following Him, He said, “I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel.” Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well.***

Jesus is greatly delighted with the faith of this Centurion who is not even a Jewish person. And as a result the servant receives his healing. Likewise, you too can ask the Lord to meet your needs, even though you may not feel you are worthy of His attention. All Jesus asks is that you step out in faith, believing in His willingness to listen to your request, and to answer in accordance with His perfect will, as you can read in Philippians 4:6-7

***Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.***

Now, Jesus does not stay in Capernaum, because there are other people He has to minister to. Let's read Luke 7:11

***Soon afterwards, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and His disciples and a large crowd went along with Him.***

Please understand that Jesus does not find Himself near Nain by accident, for He has not lost His way, as some of us may do at times. No, He is definitely in the right place at the right time, as you will soon learn. Let's read Luke 7:12

***As He approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out—the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her.***

As Jesus gets to the entrance of the town, He meets a very sad and wailing crowd. And it is no wonder, for in the coffin lies the body of a young man. We would expect everyone to be upset about his death, for he is too young to have died. Moreover, he is the only son and his mother is a widow. So, who will now take care of her since she has already lost her husband and is now about to bury her only son? Surely it looks like Jesus has missed it this time. He may well be in the right town, but He has arrived at the wrong time. He should have come when the boy was still ill. At least then He could have done something for her by making her son well. However, there is no point for Him to be here now, unless He has come to share in the grief of the widow. And it seems that is what He has come to do, as you can read in Luke 7:13

***When the Lord saw her, His heart went out to her and He said, “Don't cry.”***

Jesus is moved with compassion for the widow who has now lost her son. No doubt, He wants to comfort her. But telling her not to cry anymore does not seem to be very helpful. I can well imagine that the widow might like to say to Jesus, ***“Sorry, Jesus, I know You mean well. But how can You expect me to stop crying? I have just lost my son. Why did you not come a few days earlier for then I might not be walking behind his coffin today?”***

However, she does say not these things, and that may well be because something in the tone of His voice actually makes her stop crying. She does not know what Jesus is going to do, but somehow she knows that everything will be well because Jesus has come. And her faith in Jesus is justified, as you can read in Luke 7:14-15

***Then He went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still. He said, “Young man, I say to you, get up.” The dead man set up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother.***

Having told the woman to stop crying, Jesus walks up to the coffin next, and then speaks to the dead young man lying in it, commanding the young man to get up. Jesus' approach is a no-nonsense approach. He does not go through a series of rituals to make this miracle happen. After all, He is the Resurrection and the Life, as you can read in John 11:25 where Jesus is speaking to a woman named Mary, as follows ***Jesus said to her, “I am the Resurrection and the Life. He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies.”***

Therefore, Jesus has power over death, as demonstrated here, by bringing this young man back to life. The moment the young man hears the command to sit up, he does, and he begins to talk, as a sign that he really is alive. Jesus then helps him climb out of his coffin and gives him back to his mother. What a reunion that will have been. The people will all have been so amazed at the miracle that has happened among them, as you can read in Luke 7:16-17

***They were all filled with awe and praised God. “A great prophet has appeared among us,” they said. “God has come to help His people.” This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country.***

This miracle helps the people to begin to have a greater understanding who Jesus is for they are beginning to recognise that He is more than just a Man. According to them He must at least be a great Prophet because of what He has done in their midst. Just as Jesus ministered to this widow's need by giving her back her son so He wants to minister to your needs by giving you back what you may have lost. Perhaps, you have lost your joy or your peace because of life's challenges. However, Jesus promises His Peace in the midst of your difficulties, as you can read in John 14:27 ***Peace I leave with you; My Peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.***

Therefore, ask the Lord for His Joy, His Peace just as He brought joy and peace to the widow when He gave her back her son.

Sometime later, Jesus is once again on His way to a specific destination, because there is someone He is supposed to meet, as you can read in Luke 18:35

***As Jesus approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging.***

Jesus is on His way to Jericho. He is not going there because His disciples have told Him about the wonderful food you can eat there. No, He is going there because His heavenly Father has directed Him to go there to meet someone. Who is that someone going to be? Yes, the story mentions there is a blind man sitting by the roadside begging, but surely he is not the one chosen by God to receive the ministry of Jesus that day, or is he....? Let's read Luke 18:36-37 to find out

***When he (the blind man) heard the crowd going by, he asked what was happening. They told him, “Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.”***

The man realises something unusual is happening for it is very noisy on the road. That can only mean one thing; a large group of people have gathered at the road. Why are they all there, and what are they talking about? Since he cannot see anything, the only

way to find out what everyone is so excited about is to ask the people. Perhaps they will be kind enough to tell him. That is how he learns that Jesus is on his way to Jericho. He has heard about Jesus, and he knows from the stories people have told him that Jesus has been doing many miracles. And now, this same Jesus is about to pass by him. He knows that his moment has come; it is now or never. This means he must take action, never mind what people say or think of him, as you can read in Luke 18:38-39

***He called out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.”***

***Those who led the way rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me.”***

Those around him are embarrassed by his behaviour, and tell him to be quiet. But they don't know what it is like to be blind, and to have to sit at the roadside every day to beg. So he completely ignores them, and shouts even louder than before, determined that he will not stop until Jesus responds to him, and Jesus does so, as you can read in Luke 18:40-41

***Jesus stopped and ordered the man to be brought to him. When he came near, Jesus asked him, “What do you want Me to do for you?” “Lord, I want to see,” he replied.***

Jesus stops and has the man brought to him. Jesus will have instantly realised that the man is blind, so we will expect Jesus to just go ahead and heal him. After all, what else will he have called out to Jesus for? But Jesus does not just go ahead and heal him. No, Jesus begins to personally interact with him by asking him a question. And the question Jesus asks him is: ***“What do you want Me to do for you?”*** He is, thereby, laying the groundwork for a personal relationship between the man and Him. His blindness will have cut him off from personal relationships with people. Many times people will have passed him by when he sat at the road side begging and will have ignored him. And here, Jesus starts a conversation with him, to let him know that he is a person worthy to be heard, a person with an opinion worthy to be listened to. He is not just a nobody, some blind person who cannot even properly function in society. No, he is precious in God's sight and the reason Jesus is on His way to Jericho is to meet him, this blind person. Moreover, Jesus hears his request, treats it with great respect and acts upon it, as you can read in Luke 18:42

***Jesus said to him, “Receive your sight; your faith has healed you.”***

Jesus restores the man's sight in answer to the man's words. The man's response to his healing can be found in Luke 18:43

***Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus, praising God. When all the people saw it, they also praised God.***

What else can the man do, once he has received his healing, but praise God? And the people, who are privileged to have witnessed the miracle, join him in praising God. Perhaps, like this man you too are blind but your blindness is a spiritual blindness. And people have tried to help you by being kind to you, but their help has not been sufficient, because you still feel desperate for something beyond what they can give you. Like the blind man, you too need Jesus to minister to you so you can receive your spiritual sight by believing that Jesus died on the Cross for your sins so you can become a child of God. And, just as the blind man began to praise God once he could see, so you too will begin to praise the Lord, when you receive His forgiveness.

The healing of the blind man takes place while Jesus is still on His way to Jericho, He has not reached Jericho yet. Once He enters Jericho, God has someone else for Him to minister to, as you can read in Luke 19:1-2

***Jesus entered Jericho, and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was but, being a short man, he could not, because of the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see Him, since Jesus was coming that way.***

The man God has chosen for Jesus to minister to that day in Jericho is Zaccheus. Like the blind man, Zacchaeus has heard of Jesus, and he too will do what he can to have an encounter with Him. His problem is not that he is blind, but that he is short, so he decides to climb a tree enabling him to have a view of Jesus anyway. What is Jesus going to do about this short man Zacchaeus? Will the fact that he is too short to see Jesus hinder him from meeting Jesus? Let's read Luke 19:5 to find out

***When Jesus reached the spot, He looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus come down immediately. I must stay at your house today."***

Jesus, being aware what Zacchaeus has done to see Him, stops at the right sycamore-fig tree. He does not just stop but He addresses Zacchaeus and invites Himself to Zacchaeus' home for He knows that it will bring joy to Zacchaeus' heart, as you can read in Luke 19:6

***So he came down at once and welcomed Him gladly.***

But what about the others who see Jesus going home with Zacchaeus? Are they glad too for Zacchaeus that the Lord has chosen his home to have a meal in? They all know Zacchaeus very well, for they have had to pay taxes to him, and they all know that tax collectors, including Zacchaeus, are notorious cheaters. So what is their reaction? Let's read Luke 19:7 to find out

***All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be a guest of a sinner."***

The people are obviously not pleased that Jesus has chosen to stay with Zacchaeus. No doubt, each one considers himself a better choice for Jesus to stay with than Zacchaeus. They may even wonder about Jesus for, surely, He must know that Zacchaeus is such a great sinner, or does He...?

Jesus does know. However, He knows as well that His willingness to give special attention to Zacchaeus will turn Zacchaeus into a changed man, as you can read in Luke 19:8

***But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."***

The reason for Jesus' visit to Jericho is to touch the heart and life of this one man, as you can read in Luke 19:9-10

***Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and save what was lost."***

The reason Jesus has come is to save lives, including the life of Zacchaeus, as you can read in John 3:16

***For God so loved the world that he gave His one and only Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.***

Jesus' visit to Zacchaeus' home caused him to become a transformed man. And his transformation was so real that he became a blessing to his community. Perhaps, you can identify with Zacchaeus in that you feel you too do not measure up to the standard of other believers, for you know you have committed sins that have separated you from God. But Jesus wants you to know that He sees the longing in your heart to be made right with Him. And He wants to spend time with you, as you can read in Revelation 3:20 where Jesus says

***“Here I am! I stand at the door. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with Me.”***

Therefore, be like Zacchaeus and allow Jesus access into all the areas of your life, and He will transform your life so you will become a blessing to others. Of course, Jesus cannot visit you physically, as He was able to do with Zacchaeus. But you can spend time with Him when you pray to Him and read His Word.

As you have seen from the stories you have looked at, Jesus loved all kinds of people and touched the lives of all kinds of people, be they rich or poor, young or old, and whatever their particular problem. Nothing was too hard for Him to take care of, and no one was too sinful to be changed by Him. And He wants to touch your life too and bring healing to your life, be it physical, emotional, mental or spiritual. Your status in this life does not matter, as far as heaven is concerned, for God cares about you, and sent His Son to die for you regardless of your status, your background, your age, or your gender. None of these things matter to Him. All He asks of you is that you cry out to Him and ask Him to touch you, to help you and He will.

### **A Favoured Home**

Jesus has developed some very special friendships beyond His close relationship with the twelve disciples. These special friends include one brother named Lazarus and his two sisters Mary and Martha. One day, Jesus and his team of twelve pass by their home and are invited to stay for a meal, as you can read in Luke 10:38

***As Jesus and His disciples were on their way, He came to a village where a woman named Martha, opened her home to Him.***

It does mean a lot of extra work for Martha, for suddenly this meal is not just for three people but for sixteen people, including thirteen very hungry men, for these men will have been on the road for a few hours already, and their previous meal may well have been some time ago. So Martha goes to work. First of all, she must make a quick trip back to the market. Hopefully, she will still be able to get what she needs so she can provide her guests with an excellent meal. After all, she is known in the village for her culinary skills. Once back from the market, she gets to work in the kitchen. But where is her sister Mary? Let's read Luke 10:39 to find out

***She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet, listening to what He said.***

Doesn't Mary know that she is needed here in the kitchen? It is true, Martha knows that she is a very capable housekeeper, and that Mary is not as interested in household duties, especially since they have gotten to know Jesus. But they are having many

guests, and surely Mary must realise that right now her place is with her in the kitchen helping her with the preparations for the meal. However, knowing Mary, she has totally forgotten what she should be doing and will be sitting at the feet of Jesus, completely absorbed in the things He is teaching her. She must go to Jesus and tell Him to sort Mary out for, no doubt, He will agree with her that Mary needs to give her a hand in the kitchen in order for her to provide them with that delicious meal she has in mind for them. She cannot possibly be expected to do the work all by herself. Oh, if only Mary was more like her, more practically minded... Well, she better go and speak to Jesus right now for there is too much to be done here. After all, Jesus, being a Jew, knows that the place of any Jewish woman is in the kitchen and not at the feet of a teacher. To be honest, she doesn't quite understand how Jesus can accept Mary at His feet, for no respectable teacher would ever allow a woman to do so. But Jesus does, and that may well cost Him His reputation one day. So perhaps she can even help Him keep His reputation by telling Him to remind Mary to do what is right; to help her in the kitchen with the food preparations, as you can read in Luke 10:40

***But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to Him and asked, "Lord, don't You care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"***

But things do not work out the way Martha expects, for when she approaches Jesus, she fully expects Him to agree with her and to tell Mary off for listening to Him, despite the crisis in the kitchen. But is that what Jesus does?

Let's read Luke 10:41-42 to find out

***"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."***

Contrary to Martha's expectation, Jesus lovingly helps Martha to see that she has allowed the stress of the moment to take over her life. Therefore, she is not able to recognise what matters most while Mary, because she has been spending time at Jesus' feet whenever possible, does understand what matters most. Does this mean that Martha does not love the Lord Jesus? No, not at all, but she remains that practical person, as you can see in John 11, where we read the story of the illness of their brother Lazarus. Let's read John 11:1-4

***Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped His feet with her hair. So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick." When He heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it."***

Martha and Mary's brother, Lazarus, has become ill and the sisters are expecting Jesus to quickly come to heal him. However, things do not happen as they expect, as you can read in John 11:5-16

***Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. Yet, when He heard that Lazarus was sick, He stayed where He was two more days. Then He said to His disciples, "Let us go back to Judea." "But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the Jews tried to stone You, and yet You are going back there?" Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? A man who walks by day will not stumble, for he sees by this world's light. It is when he walks by night that he stumbles, for he has no***

*light.” After He had said this, He went on to tell them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up.” His disciples replied, “Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better.” Jesus had been speaking of his death, but His disciples thought He meant natural sleep. So then He told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.” Then Thomas (called Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with Him.”*

It seems Jesus takes no notice of the urgent request of Lazarus’ sisters to come, for He makes no move to leave the place where He is. Finally, after two days He and His twelve disciples decide to go to Bethany, the village where Lazarus, Martha and Mary live. However, it looks like Jesus has come too late, as you can read in John 11:17-19 *On His arrival Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother.*

The ever practical Martha decides that she needs to tell Jesus off for not coming any sooner, as you can read in John 11:20-27

*When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet Him, but Mary stayed at home. ”Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “If you had been here my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give You whatever You ask.” Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life, He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?” “Yes, Lord,” she told Him, “I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.”*

Jesus’ words to her do bring her a measure of comfort, so she goes home to tell her sister Mary Jesus has arrived in the village, and would like to see her, as you can read in John 11:28-31

*And after she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. “The Teacher is here,” she said, “and is asking for you.” When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to Him. Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met Him. When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.*

When Mary sees Jesus, she shows Him her grief using the exact same words her sister Martha used earlier on *“Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.”* However, she does not say these words to tell Jesus off, she says these words to share her deep felt pain with the Lord, as you can read in John 11:32-37

*When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw Him, she fell at His feet and said, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.” When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. “Where have you laid him?” He asked. “Come and see, Lord,” they replied. Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, “See how He loved him!” But some of them said, “Could not He who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”*

Martha's words did not move Jesus to tears, but Mary's words cause Him to weep with her. This is followed by Him going to the tomb. On His arrival, He tells the people to remove the stone, as you can read in John 11:38-39a

***Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. "Take away the stone," He said.***

Once again, the ever practical Martha speaks up, as you can read in John 11:39b  
***"But Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odour, for he has been there for four days."***

Martha knows that the body of a person who has been dead for four days has decomposed already to such a degree that it will give off a terrible smell. Perhaps, Jesus does not realise that. After all, He has never been around a person who has been dead for such a long time. Every time that He had been around a dead person that person had only been dead for a few hours and, in each case, He had brought that person back to life as Martha remembers from the stories she has heard. The first story she remembers is about the widow's son who had been raised from the dead, as you can read in Luke 7:11-15

***Soon afterwards Jesus went to a town called Nain, and His disciples and a large crowd went along with Him. As He approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out – the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her. When the Lord saw her, His heart went out to her and He said, "Don't cry." Then He went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still. He said, "Young man, I say to you, get up!" The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother.***

The second story she remembers is about a twelve year-old girl. Luke writes about her in 8:40-42

***Now when Jesus returned, a crowd welcomed Him, for they were all expecting Him. Then a man named Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue, came and fell at Jesus' feet, pleading with Him to come to his house because his only daughter, a girl of about twelve, was dying.***

She died, in fact. But Jesus brought her back to life, as you can read in Luke 8:53-55  
***They laughed at Him, knowing that she was dead. But He took her by the hand and said, "My child, get up!" Her spirit returned and at once she stood up. Then Jesus told them to give her something to eat."***

But the situation with Lazarus is totally different, for Lazarus has not been dead for a few hours only, or even for just one or two days. No, he has been dead for four days. Jesus will not realise that, for He was not with them while Lazarus was dying. He only arrived on the scene an hour or so ago. However, it seems Jesus completely ignores Martha's practical advice, for He continues to tell them that they are to remove the stone, as you can read in John 11:40-44

***Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. I knew that You always hear Me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that You sent Me." When He had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a***

*cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”*

Of course, the two sisters are overjoyed that their brother has come back to life, and so a dinner is prepared in honour of Jesus. You can find this story in John 12. Let’s read John 12:1-2

***Six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Here a dinner was given in Jesus’ honour. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with them.***

Martha is in her element preparing her special dishes for Jesus. She wants to show Him her love and gratitude for giving them back their brother Lazarus. Mary wants to show Jesus her love and gratitude as well, but she does it in a different way, as you can read in John 12:3

***Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus’ feet and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.***

While Martha is serving her delicious dinner, Mary slips into the bedroom. She knows that she is not the excellent cook that Martha is, and she knows she will never be as good as Martha when it comes to cooking the special dishes Martha is known for. However, she knows that she can show her gratitude to the Lord in a way that will please Him as much as eating her sister’s dishes will please Him. So she quietly slips into the bedroom and gets from the special place, where she keeps her treasures, a bottle of the special perfume she has kept all these years, for she knows the moment has come to use this perfume. But she knows too that this perfume is not to be used on herself. So she re-enters the dining room where everyone is gathered around the table, moves behind Jesus and without saying a word, pours the perfume over His feet. She then loosens her hair and uses it as a towel with which to dry His feet. Everyone at the table watches what Mary does, shocked by her actions, for no woman would loosen her hair in public. But Mary does not care about her dignity. All she cares about is showing her love and gratitude to Jesus, just as Martha did by cooking her most special dishes for Him. Then Judas speaks up, complaining about Mary’s behavior, as you can read in John 12:4-6

***But one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray Him, objected. “Why wasn’t this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year’s wages.” He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.***

However, Jesus tells Judas off, for He knows the reason why Mary poured the perfume on His feet, as you can read in John 12:7-8

***“Leave her alone, “Jesus replied. “It was intended that she should save this perfume for My burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have Me.”***

Jesus understands that she has done this to prepare Him for His burial. And Mary, very likely, knows that the time for His crucifixion is near. Other disciples may not have grasped that fact, but spending time at His feet has helped her to understand that

Jesus has come into the world to die for her, and that the time of His death is close at hand.

These two sisters both love the Lord and both show it in their own way. I wonder who you can identify with most. You may say, **“I can really identify with Martha for I am a very practical person like she is. I can see myself saying and doing the same things she did”**. Or you may say, **“I can identify more with Mary for I love to sit and pray and meditate on God’s Word.”**

I would like to suggest that you can learn from both women. For those of us who tend to be more practical, Mary can teach us to sit at the feet of Jesus. Of course, today you cannot literally sit at His feet, but you can sense His Presence with you when you read His Word and when you pray. But the Lord does not only want you to be like Mary and sit at His feet 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, so you can learn from Him. He wants you to be like Martha as well, meaning He would like for you to do the things He has prepared for you to do as, you can read in Ephesians 2:10

***For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.***

When you spend time in His Presence, reading His Word and praying, the Lord will begin to give you a sense what He has for you to do. Moreover, He will give you the ability to do, whatever it is He has prepared for you to do, so you will be able to do it well, and be a blessing to others.

## Love Poured Out

Jesus receives an invitation from one of the religious leaders to have dinner at his home. And Jesus accepts the invitation, as you can read in Luke 7:36

***Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so He went to the Pharisee’s house and reclined at the table.***

You may wonder why this man asks Jesus to come to his home. Is it perhaps because, secretly, he wants to become a follower of Jesus? Let’s read Luke 7:37-38 to see what happens during that dinner

***When a woman who had lived a sinful lifestyle in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee’s house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, and as she stood behind Him at His feet weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.***

The news that Jesus is eating at the home of the religious leader spreads throughout the town. One of the inhabitants of the town is a woman who, as Luke describes it, has lived a sinful lifestyle. This very likely means that she has worked as a prostitute. She too learns that Jesus is at the home of the religious leader. No doubt, she has heard of Jesus’ kindness though she, very likely, has never met Him in person as yet. And she decides her moment to meet Him has come. She takes the bold step of going to the home of the religious leader so that she can see Jesus face to face. However, she does not want to go empty-handed, so she takes with her an alabaster jar of perfume, which will have been very precious to her. She manages to enter the home of the religious leader and, as soon as she spots Jesus at the table, she goes to His seat. No longer being able to control her deep-felt emotions at the sight of Him, she begins to weep. Her tears fall on His feet. Not having a towel available to dry His feet with, she

loosens her hair and uses it to dry His feet. No respectable Jewish woman will ever loosen her hair in public, but this woman is not interested in her personal dignity. All she wants to do is to show her love to this Man named Jesus. And Jesus allows her to minister to Him in the way that she desires to. He does not send her away. Perhaps that is because He does not know what kind of woman she is, or does He know..?

The religious leader has that question in his mind as well, as you can read in Luke 7:39

***When the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet, He would know who is touching Him and what kind of woman she is – that she is a sinner.”***

Outwardly the religious leader is very polite to Jesus, making no comment whatsoever on what the woman is doing. However, inwardly, he is very critical of Jesus, and decides that Jesus cannot possibly be a prophet since he does not even recognise what kind of woman touches Him. But Jesus is a Prophet and is, in fact, much more than a Prophet, and knowing what the religious leader thinks, He begins to speak to him, as you can read in Luke 7:40-42

***Jesus answered him, “Simon, I have something to tell you.” “Tell me teacher,” he said. “Two men owed money to a moneylender. One owed him five hundred dinarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back. So he cancelled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?”***

Jesus addresses the religious leader by telling him a story about two people who have to pay a debt which neither of them can pay off. Jesus follows His story up by asking Simon, which is the name of the religious leader, a question related to the story. And Simon, having to be polite, reluctantly answers him, as you can read in Luke 7:43

***Simon replied, “I suppose the one who had the bigger debt cancelled.” “You have judged correctly,” Jesus said.***

The time for telling the truth as it really is has come, so Jesus begins to compare the actions of the woman with the actions of the religious leader, as you can read in Luke 7:44-47

***Then He turned towards the woman and said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet My feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give Me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing My feet. You did not put oil on My head, but she has poured perfume on My feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven – for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little.”***

Jesus shows the religious leader that he considers himself a person who has little or no sin in his life, and therefore does not need to be forgiven much. This causes him to have little or no love for Jesus, for he has not shown Him any care or kindness when Jesus entered his home, since he never even bothered to have Jesus' feet washed when He entered his home, which was a service offered to anyone considered an honoured guest. Neither had he kissed Jesus to welcome Him in his home, or poured oil on his head. But the woman knows that she is a great sinner, and in need of much forgiveness. This causes her to have a great love for Jesus, as is shown in her many kind acts towards Him. For she knows that all the religious leaders, including the

religious leader in whose home she is now, have already judged her for her sins. However, she knows as well that Jesus is different. He is her only hope to find forgiveness for her many sins. And her hope is fulfilled, as you can read in Luke 7:48-49

***Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."***

Jesus turns to the woman and speaks to her the words she has been longing to hear: that her sins are forgiven. She understands that she is now able to go in peace, knowing that she has been set free, and no longer needs to walk in the bondages of the past. Others around the table are not so sure what they have just witnessed. To them, Jesus is just a man, and how can a man claim to be able to forgive sins? No doubt, many who are present at that table that evening will have gone home with questions on their mind. Will they eventually have discovered the truth about Jesus? Only God knows....

This story reminds me of another story where another woman pours perfume over the feet of Jesus. You can find it in John 12. Let's begin reading John 12:1-2

***Six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honour. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with Him.***

The dinner mentioned in this story is held at the home of Martha, Mary and Lazarus and takes place a few days before Jesus' crucifixion. Martha has been cooking a wonderful meal and she has begun to serve the meal. She is looking for her sister Mary to help her with the serving of the food but Mary is nowhere to be seen. Where has Mary gone? She always seems to be doing other things when she is needed in the kitchen. For instance there was a time when she, Martha, was busy in the kitchen and Mary completely forgot to help her because she was listening to Jesus. Luke tells us this story in Luke 10:38-42

***As Jesus and His disciples were on their way, He came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what He said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to Him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me." "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better and it will not be taken away from her."***

Remembering that event, Martha decides that perhaps Mary is doing something Jesus has specially asked her to do, so she better not get upset with her. In a way Martha is right for Mary is doing something special for Jesus even though Jesus has not specifically asked her to do so. Let's read on to see what Mary is doing, in John 12:3

***Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.***

While Martha is busy serving the dinner, Mary goes to her bedroom, and goes to her secret shelf to fetch something she has kept all these years; a bottle of special perfume. This perfume represents her life's savings and may well be all that she has,

as far as any financial security for herself. But today she has come to the decision that this perfume is not to be saved up for the day that she may be in financial need. No, it is to be used for the One who has met her eternal needs by giving her eternal security. So, with the perfume in her hand she returns to the room where the dinner is being held, walks up to Jesus and without saying a word, she opens the bottle and pours the perfume over His feet. She then loosens her hair and wipes His feet with her hair. For a moment everyone around the table will have been in such a shock over what they see happening in front of their eyes that they dare not speak. It is too much to take in, for they realise that Mary is throwing away her life's savings. Such extravagance. It is good to show care and love for Jesus. But to give away her life savings might just be a little too much of a good thing. And then to loosen her hair in public! Mary ought to know that a proper Jewish woman never loosens her hair in public. It is simply not the proper thing to do. One of them expresses this thinking in words, as you can read in John 12:4-8

***But one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray Him, objected, "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it. "Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of My burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have Me."***

Judas Iscariot speaks up. He is indignant about what has happened. After all, this perfume is worth a lot of money, which has now been wasted. But Jesus, knowing that he does not really care about the poor anyway, rebukes him for his words. He then discloses Mary's reason for pouring perfume over His feet. For Mary has sat at the feet of Jesus and has learned from Jesus that the reason for His coming to earth is to be crucified. She knows the time of His death is near and has anointed Him for that moment.

These two stories of two different women pouring perfume over the feet of Jesus help us to see that Jesus cared deeply about both of them by receiving their ministry to Him.

One of the women, as we know, was considered a sinful woman. Yet, Jesus did not reject her. Instead, He accepted her and her ministry to Him as a way to express her love for Him. He knew she was repentant of her sinful lifestyle, so He forgave her of all her sins, and enabled her to begin a new life empowered by Him. The other woman was Mary. She was a disciple of His and had great understanding of who He was and what He had come to earth for, because she had spent much time sitting at His feet. He received her ministry to Him because He knew by pouring perfume over His feet she was not only showing Him her love and devotion, she was, in fact, preparing Him for His death and burial.

Like these two women, Jesus welcomes your ministry of love and devotion to Him because you matter to Him as much as these two women did. Of course, you cannot physically pour perfume over the feet of Jesus as these two women did because Jesus is not physically with you. But you can show Him your love and devotion by giving Him your time, when you read the Word of God or pray, as well as when you share your faith with others, or when you serve Him in other ways that He has shown you.

And you too will sense His love for you, and His approval of you, as these two women did.

## In The Heat Of The Day

One day Jesus has to travel from Judea to Galilee, and He decides to travel through Samaria, as you can read in John 4:4-6

***Now He (Jesus) had to go through Samaria. So He came to a town called Sychar, near the plot of the ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as He was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour.***

In fact, Jews avoid travelling through Samaria. But Jesus has a purpose to go there, and you may wonder why. What could possibly be of such importance to Him that He has to go there? By the time He arrives at His place of destination, He is tired and needs to take a rest. John takes notice of the time: it is the sixth hour, or to put it in our language; it is 12 o'clock midday. No doubt, it is hot at this time of the day, and He will be thirsty. Moreover, He will be hungry, for He sends His twelve disciples into town to get something to eat for lunch, as you can read a little later on. However, there does not seem to be anyone around who is in need of His ministry. How strange. Perhaps Jesus has made a mistake, or at least a miscalculation as far as the time is concerned, for everyone knows that 12 o'clock midday is the hottest hour of the day and no one will come to the well at that time of the day. But then, surprisingly, someone does come to the well. Who can that be? Let's read John 4:7-8 to find out ***When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give Me a drink?" (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food)***

A Samaritan woman appears on the scene. But she cannot possibly be the person Jesus has gone to Samaria for, to minister to, since Jesus, as a Jewish Rabbi, is not supposed to talk to women in public. Moreover, she is a Samaritan woman, and Samaritans are considered unclean. But Jesus actually begins to speak to her. Perhaps it is because He is extremely thirsty and his disciples are not around to provide him with some water. So this may be an emergency and, therefore, Jesus may be willing to forego the proper rules and talk to the woman. The woman is extremely surprised as well that this Jewish man is willing to ask her for a drink, as you can read in John 4:9 ***The Samaritan woman said to Him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans)***

She knows the rules well, and is completely taken aback that this Jewish Man breaks all of these rules. It seems Jesus does not care that she is a woman, and that He is not supposed to talk to her. Neither does He seem to care that she is a Samaritan woman and is, therefore, considered unclean, for not only does He ask her for water, He continues His conversation with her, as you can read in John 4:10

***"If you knew the gift of God and Who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked Him and He would have given you living water."***

By talking about water Jesus has the woman listening to Him. After all, the reason she has come to the well is to draw water. But that water supply will run out, and she will need to come back the next day for another supply of water, and the day after, and the

day after... This time He turns the invitation around, for this time He does not ask the woman for water. No, He invites her to receive water from Him. However, it a very special kind of water, it is called **“living water.”** And what an invitation that is. No wonder the woman wants to find out more about it because this **“living water”** is worth further investigation. So she begins to question Jesus. And Jesus is not upset about her questions, for He recognises that these are honest questions and deserve an honest answer. Let’s read John 4:11-12

***“Sir,” the woman said, “You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can You get this” living water”? Are You greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?”***

The woman has observed that Jesus has nothing with Him to draw water with, so she is very puzzled about His statement on **“living water”**. To her natural mind even **“living water”** has to be drawn from a well and to be able to draw from a well a container is needed. Yet, at the same time she wonders if perhaps He is able to offer her this **“living water”** from a well without the need for a container. If that is so then this Jewish Man standing in front of her must be even greater than her forefather Jacob, at whose well they are having this conversation. Jesus, encouraged by the woman’s honest questioning, begins to expand on His words, as you can read in John 4:13-14

***Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”***

Jesus makes her this amazing promise that the water He can give will mean she will never be thirsty. This is surely an offer no one, including this Samaritan woman, can refuse, as you can read in John 4:15

***The woman said to Him, “Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.”***

The woman still thinks Jesus is talking about natural water and, of course, it will be so wonderful if she does not have to make that daily trip to the well. Especially because she is making that trip at midday, the hottest time of the day. That is very unusual, for the usual time for the women to draw water is in the early morning and in the early evening, when it is cooler. No doubt Jesus is very aware that this woman has come to the well at an unusual time to draw water. However, He does not ask her why that is so, but He begins to talk about a matter which seem to be totally unrelated to water; He begins to talk about her husband, as you can read in John 4:16-18

***He told her, “Go, call your husband and come back.” “I have no husband,” she replied. Jesus said to her, “You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.”***

The woman must have been surprised at His request for her to call her husband. As far as she is concerned, her husband has got nothing whatsoever to do with her receiving living water. Nevertheless, she decides to tell him the truth, or at least give Him a glimpse of what she considers to be the truth. Jesus next shocks her even further by telling her the true situation about her marital status. The woman begins to realise that the person in front of her is not an ordinary Jew, but must at least be a

Prophet. And He may well be the One who is able to answer some questions she has had for a long time already, and which no one has been able to give her a satisfactory answer to, as you can read in John 4:20

***“Sir,” the woman said, “I can see that You are a Prophet. Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.”***

Perhaps she is trying to change the subject as well, because talking about her failed relationships is possibly too painful. Whatever her reason for bringing up the issue of worship may have been, Jesus takes it up, and gives her insights beyond what she has known, as you can read in John 4:21-24

***Jesus declared, “Believe Me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is Spirit, and His worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth.”***

Jesus’ revelation about true worship is completely new to this woman. She has never heard anyone say this before. His explanation that true worship is not related to a particular place, but to the condition of a person’s heart and mind before God, encourages her to speak about the coming Messiah as the One who will help her understand everything, as you can read in John 4:25

***The woman said, “I know that Messiah (called Christ) is coming. When He comes He will explain everything to us.”***

Jesus answers her beyond her expectations, as you can read in John 4:26

***Then Jesus declared, “I who speak to you am He.”***

Here you have the reason for Jesus going to Samaria. It is not to meet an important political or religious leader. No, it is to meet a sinful Samaritan woman, a woman with a past, a woman rejected by her community, a woman who has had to draw water at the well at midday, to avoid being with the other women of the town. Such is the love of Christ for this woman that He is willing to go through Samaria, which no Jew ever did, is willing to suffer heat, thirst and hunger in order that this woman might get to know Him, her Messiah. Moreover, He has a plan and a purpose for her beyond her getting to know Him as the Messiah. As Jesus’ conversation with the woman is coming to an end, His twelve disciples rejoin Him. They have been food shopping in town and have now returned with lunch, as you can read in John 4:27

***Just then His disciples returned and were surprised to find Him talking with a woman. But no-one asked, “What do You want?” or “Why are You talking with her?”***

As proper Jewish men, the disciples are obviously very surprised to see Jesus talking with a woman, and a Samaritan woman at that. They may well have wanted to say to Jesus, “Please, Jesus, what about Your reputation? Don’t You know You are not supposed to talk with her? Do You realise the damage it will do to Your reputation? Perhaps, if You don’t care about Your reputation, will You not consider our reputation, for our reputation will be damaged as well if word goes out that You have

been talking to this woman.” But they say none of these things. Perhaps they are learning that Jesus' standards are somewhat different than everyone else. The woman, overwhelmed by her encounter with Jesus, completely forgets why she has come to the well, as you can read in John 4:28-29

***Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, “Come, see a Man, who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?” They came out of the town and made their way towards Him.”***

The woman having received so much more than what she originally went to the well for, cannot keep to herself what she has just received; eternal life. So she runs back to the town to share with others the Good News that she has met the Messiah, the One they have all been waiting for. This woman, who up till that time had been rejected by all the people of the town, now becomes an evangelist for Jesus, and those who have not been willing to be seen in her company, listen in awe to her story of redemption, believing it for themselves. They, in turn, want to meet this Messiah too, as you can read in John 4:39-42

***Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in Him because of the woman's testimony, “He told me everything I ever did.” So when the Samaritans came to Him, they urged Him to stay with them and He stayed two days. And because of His words many more became believers. They said to the woman, “We no longer believe, just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Saviour of the world.”***

Jesus chose a sinful Samaritan woman to save her whole town. Is that not wonderful? He looked beyond her sinful lifestyle and saw a heart that longed to get to know Him. He knew that once she had been set free to serve Him, she would serve Him with all her heart and all her strength, for His glory. He wants to use you too. You are not too young or too old or too insignificant for God to play a role in His Kingdom. The question is: Are you willing to be used by Him? He will help you. He will equip you for the task that He has for you. All you need to do is to be willing, just like this woman was. The moment she received the revelation that Jesus was her Messiah, she went to her town to share that Good News with all the people of the town, regardless of the way they had treated her in the past. The past was the past, a new day had begun. So it was for her, and so it will be for you. Whatever you have experienced in the past, leave it there in the past, and move into your future with Jesus, as the Apostle Paul explains in Philippians 3:13-14

***Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do, forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead. I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.***

Jesus loves you beyond what you know and wants you to share with others His love for you and for them which He has shown you by dying on the Cross for you, as you can read in John 3:16-17

***For God so loved the world that he gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him.***

So, make a decision today to do whatever He lays on your heart to do. And then go and do it, just as the Samaritan woman did when she told others in her town what Jesus had done for her.

## A Handful Of Mud

Jesus and His disciples are out and about, and while they are walking they see a man who has been blind all his life, as you can read in John 9:1

***As He (Jesus) went along He saw a man blind from birth.***

To Jesus' disciples, the fact that this man is blind and has always been must be because of a sinful condition of either this man himself, or of his parents, as you can read in John 9:2

***His disciples asked Him, "Rabbi who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"***

According to them, that is the only logical explanation for this man's situation. Blindness to them is a curse, and this man is under a curse because of someone's sin. They may well have remembered the words in Exodus 20:5b

***..... For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me.***

The question is: Will Jesus as a good Jew agree with them? Let's listen to Jesus' answer in John 9:3-5

***"Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. As long as it is day, we must do the work of Him who sent Me. Night is coming, when no-one can work. While I am in the world, I am the Light of the world."***

Jesus' answer is not what His disciples expect to hear. However, Jesus helps His disciples to see beyond their narrow understanding. He wants them to understand that the purpose of this man's blindness is not to show up anyone's sinfulness, but rather to demonstrate the power of God in this man's life. And so Jesus goes to work, as you can read in John 9:6-7

***Having said this, He spat on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. "Go," He told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means Sent). So the man went and washed and came home, seeing.***

Why does Jesus spit on the ground, make mud with his saliva, and then put the mixture on the man's eyes? Because, according to Jewish Tradition, the saliva of the first born son contained healing power. However, none of us, whether or not you are a first born son, should make a practice of it thinking that is the proper formula to heal someone's blindness, for that is not the case.

Please remember as well, that the man is not yet healed at the time that Jesus puts mud on his eyes. It is only after he has obeyed Jesus fully, and has gone to the Pool of Siloam to wash his eyes, that he is healed. This shows us that it is important to obey Jesus fully in order to receive what God has promised us. You can see that principle taught in I Samuel 15:22

***But Samuel replied: “Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.”***

No doubt, you will expect all those who learn that this man is no longer blind to be very happy for him. Let's read John 9:8-12 to find out if that is so

***His neighbours and those who had formerly seen him begging, asked, “Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?” Some claimed that he was. Others said, “No, he only looks like him.” But he himself insisted, “I am the man.” “How then were your eyes opened?” they demanded. He replied, “The Man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see.” “Where is this Man?” they asked him. “I don't know” he said.***

His neighbours are somewhat puzzled by what has happened to this man, and rather than rejoicing with him over the miracle that has taken place, they seem suspicious of his healing, and suspicious of the Person responsible for the miracle. Not knowing what to believe, the neighbours decide to take him to the Pharisees, the religious leaders of their day. Surely they will know what to do with this man's claim, that he has been miraculously healed, as you can read in John 9:13-17

***They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes was a Sabbath. Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. “He put mud on my eyes,” the man replied, “and I washed and now I see.” Some of the Pharisees said, “This Man is not from God, for He does not keep the Sabbath.” But others asked, “How can a sinner do such miraculous signs?” So they were divided. Finally, they turned again to the blind man. “What have you to say about Him? It was your eyes He opened.” The man replied, “He is a Prophet.”***

Unfortunately, the religious leaders are not much help either. Their stumbling block is the fact that the healing has taken place on the Sabbath. Jesus seems to have a habit of healing people on a Sabbath, as you can read in Luke 6:6-11

***On another Sabbath He went into the synagogue and was teaching, and a man was there whose right hand was shriveled. The Pharisees and the teachers of the Law were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus so they watched Him closely to see if He would heal on the Sabbath. But Jesus knew what they were thinking and said to the man with the shriveled hand. “Get up and stand in front of everyone.” So he got up and stood there. Then Jesus said to them, “I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath; to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?” He looked round at them all, and then said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He did so, and his hand was completely restored. But they were furious and began to discuss with one another what they might do to Jesus.***

And Luke 13:10-13

***On a Sabbath day Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. When Jesus saw her, He called her forward and said to her, “Woman, you are set free from your infirmity. Then He put His hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God. Indignant because***

***Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue ruler said to the people, “There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath.”***

And Luke 14:1-4

***One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, He was being carefully watched. There in front of Him was a man suffering from dropsy. Jesus asked the Pharisees and the experts in the law, “It is lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?” But they remained silent. So taking hold of the man, He healed him and sent him away.***

Matthew gives us some insight into why Jesus is performing miracles on the Sabbath, when he writes in Matthew 12:8

***For the Son of Man (Jesus) is Lord of the Sabbath.***

Jesus, as the Lord of the Sabbath, is not bound by the religious rules of men, even if these men are the religious leaders of His day. And, these men are so bound up by their religious rules and regulations, that they are not able to recognise that this miracle has been performed by a Man sent by God. This whole event leaves these religious leaders totally confused. In their confusion, they again turn to the previously blind man, and ask Him for his opinion about the One who has healed him. The man declares that He must be a Prophet. The religious leaders are clearly blind to the truth about Jesus, even though they are supposed to know, and are supposed to be the ones to help the blind man understand who has healed him. Instead, it is the blind man who gives them further insight into Jesus. Not having the knowledge of Scripture, he is already at a place of understanding where he recognises Jesus as a Prophet. Jesus is indeed a Prophet, but He is so much more, as this man will soon find out. Not being satisfied with the man’s answer, the religious leaders speak to him once again, as you can read in John 9:24-34

***A second time they summoned the man who had been born blind. “Give glory to God,” they said. “We know this Man is a sinner.” He replied, “Whether He is a sinner or not, I don’t know. One thing I do know, I was blind but now I see.” Then they asked him, “What did He do to you? How did He open your eyes?” He answered, “I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become His disciples too?” Then they hurled insults at him and said, “You are this Fellow’s disciple! We are disciples of Moses! We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this Fellow, we don’t even know where He comes from.” The man answered, “Now that is remarkable! You don’t know where He comes from, yet He opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does His will. Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this Man were not from God, He could do nothing.” To this they replied, “You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us.” And they threw him out.***

These religious leaders want the previously blind man to agree with them that Jesus is a sinner, because He has not followed their rules with regard the Sabbath. Their hearts are so hardened that they cannot receive the simple testimony of the man that once he was blind but now he can see, because of what Jesus has done for him. However, their questioning has the opposite effect, for it awakens in him a strong faith in the Person who has healed him, because he knows that this Man cannot be a sinner, no matter what these religious leaders claim. As for these religious leaders, in their pride, they

are unwilling to humbly accept the truth who Jesus is and where He has come from. Consequently, they throw the man out of the synagogue. The blind man has received his sight, but it has cost him dearly, for he can now no longer worship in the synagogue because of his testimony about Jesus. However, Jesus, when He learns what has happened to the man, goes to look for him, as you can read in John 9:35-38 ***Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when He found him, He said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" "Who is He, Sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in Him." Jesus said, "You have now seen Him; in fact He is the One speaking with you." Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshipped Him.***

Jesus, knowing that the man is in need of His support, goes out of His way to find him, so that He can minister to him. And the man, already realising that Jesus is a Prophet, now understands that Jesus is not merely a Prophet, but is in fact the Son of Man, who has come to die for the sins of all mankind, including his sins. He believes and worships Him, the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

This man was not only physically blind but spiritually blind, and Jesus takes the time to open not just his physical eyes but, more importantly, to open his spiritual eyes.

That shows us that this man matters very much to God, even though he is barely known by his neighbours, and is certainly not known by the religious leaders. This, despite the fact that they are supposed to take care of his spiritual wellbeing. Likewise, you matter to God, even though you may not be known to those who are in authority over you, and who are supposed to take care of you. So, take heart, for God knows you and knows your needs. And just as He opened the spiritual eyes of this man, so He wants to open your spiritual eyes. Moreover, just as this man got to know Jesus more and more, so you can get to know Jesus more and more, as you spend time reading God's Word and praying. You may not be able to be physically in the presence of Jesus as this man was, but you can be in the presence of Jesus because, once your spiritual eyes have been opened and you have become a child of God, the Spirit of God will help you understand God's Word as you read it, and He will help you to pray, as you can read in Romans 8:26

***In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.***

Studying God's Word and praying to God will help you to know God as your heavenly Father. Isn't that wonderful? And He will show you the things that He has for you to do, since He has a plan and a purpose for you to be and to do all that He has prepared for you to do, as you can read in Ephesians 2:10

***For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us.***

### He Knew Her By Name

The unthinkable has happened: Jesus has been crucified, as you can read in Matthew 27. Let's read Matthew 27:45-56

***From the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over all the land. About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" –***

*which means “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” When some of those standing there heard this, they said, “He’s calling Elijah.” Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a stick, and offered it to Jesus to drink. The rest said, “Now leave Him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to save Him.” And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, He gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split. The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus’ resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people. When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, “Surely He was the Son of God.”*

Among those watching His crucifixion were some women disciples as, you can read in Matthew 27:56

*Many women were there, watching from a distance. They had followed Jesus from Galilee to care for His needs. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee’s sons.*

After the crucifixion Jesus’ body was placed in a tomb and a big stone was placed in front of it. One of the women disciples named Mary Magdalene had seen all of that, as Matthew tells us in Matthew 27:61

*Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting there opposite the tomb.*

Early in the morning, on the first day of the week, this same Mary Magdalene returns to the tomb to take care of the body of her Lord, as you can read in John 20:1

*Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance.*

Mary Magdalene has gone to the tomb bringing with her all that she needs to take care of her Lord’s body. She has not yet quite decided how she can remove the heavy stone from the tomb but she is fully confident that, once she gets there, somehow she will be able to do so. But then to her shock and horror someone has been on the scene before her and has already removed the stone! This can only mean one thing: the body of her Lord is no longer there. What is she to do now? Let’s read John 20:2 to find out what she does next

*So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and said, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb and we don’t know where they have put Him.”*

Mary Magdalene knows this tragic news is too much for her to bear by herself, so she goes to find Peter and John, to tell them about the loss of the body of the Lord. The two men listen to Mary Magdalene. They are not quite sure if they can believe her. After all, it is still very early in the morning. Therefore, it is possible that Mary accidentally went to the wrong tomb. So they decide they better go and check things out for themselves. They know Jesus is dead, and it is not possible for Him to leave that tomb. Moreover, His tomb is very secure, for the stone in front of it is really very heavy. It takes supernatural strength to remove that stone. Neither they nor Mary possess such strength. How Mary could even consider going there to take care of the Lord’s body all by herself is something they cannot really understand. However, this

is not the moment to bring that up, for she is too distraught about the situation. And so Peter and John go to the tomb, followed by Mary, as you can read in John 20:3-10 ***So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked at the strips of linen lying there but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. Finally the other disciple who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) Then the disciples went back to their homes.***

As soon as the two disciples get to the tomb, they realise that Mary Magdalene is right: the stone has been removed and there is no body to be seen. Strangely enough, the linen, as well as the burial cloth, are there and everything is very neatly folded up. But the body of the Lord is not in sight! They do not know why. Nor do they know what to do about it. Suddenly, they realise that they have left home in such a hurry that they have not had breakfast, so they better get home for some breakfast. After all, there is no point in hanging around the tomb, since there is no body to take care of. At least that is what these two disciples decide. But what about Mary? Does she go back home too? No, for Mary cannot leave the place where she knows the body of her Lord and Master has been laid to rest. He was, and is, everything to her, for he had set her free, as you can read in Luke 8:1-3

***After this time Jesus travelled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom of God. The twelve were with Him and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary called Magdalene from whom 7 demons had been cast out; Joanna, the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod's household; Suzanna and many others. These women were helping to support them of their own means.***

Jesus had done for her what no other man had ever been able to do for her, including the religious leaders: He had set her free from a number of demons. We do not know how long these demons had afflicted her, nor do we know the manner in which they bothered her. But we do know that which is most important: she was delivered from these demons. The fact that this is specifically mentioned may well mean that it had been a significant event in the ministry of Jesus, and it most certainly was a significant event in the life of Mary Magdalene. It seems very likely that she had been to many of the religious leaders to ask them for help in her predicament, but no one had been able to do anything for her. Then Jesus appeared on the scene and He had been able to do what no one else had been able to do for her: He had set her free from her demonic oppression. That would have filled her with great joy and gratitude, for it was only then that she had begun to live the life God always intended for her to live. She was determined that no family member, friend or neighbour, would prevent her from doing so. She was going to follow her Lord and Saviour no matter where He would lead her. Consequently, she had become a disciple of Him, following Him everywhere He went. Her new lifestyle would have gone against the rules for women in Jewish society for, in Jewish society, women's lives were regulated by Rabbinical teachings. These teachings restricted the lives of women to their homes, and forbade women to study the word of God. But Mary Magdalene had met Jesus, and He had completely transformed her life. This had given her the courage to put aside many of

the restrictions that Jewish society had placed on her, for Jesus had loved her, had given her dignity as a woman, had shown her that she was a daughter of Abraham and, therefore, worthy to receive the blessings of God. So, regardless of any opposition she may have faced from family, friends or neighbours, she became Jesus' disciple and followed Him all the way to the cross and on to the tomb.

If you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ then, like Mary Magdalene, He has liberated you from the restrictions society may have placed on you, and He has restored your dignity. And you too are a child of Abraham by faith, as you can read in Galatians 3:7

***Understand then that those who believe are children of Abraham.***

Moreover, you are blessed, as Paul writes in Ephesians 1:3

***Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus.***

Therefore, you too are to follow Jesus daily, as Mary Magdalene did. Of course, this may not mean that you are to physically leave home as she did. However, you are to leave home in a spiritual sense. With that I mean that you must make Jesus your priority in everything that you say and do, being determined to please Him in every way, rather than trying to please your family, friends or neighbours. Your family, friends or neighbours may well be opposed to you following Jesus, especially when it involves you being set free from restrictions society may have placed on you. Jesus explained this principle in Matthew 10:37-39

***Anyone who loves his father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And anyone who does not take up his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me. Whoever finds his life will lose it and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.***

You may not have needed to be delivered from seven demons as was the case with Mary Magdalene but, no doubt, Jesus has delivered you from your sinful condition and you have received a new life in Him. You may even have followed other gods in the past but they could not do anything for you. However, having met Jesus you have received eternal life and God wants you to obey Him every day of your life.

Let's now return to Mary Magdalene. Peter and John have gone back home, but she remains at the place of the tomb. However, her Lord and Saviour is no longer in the tomb. What is she to do? Without Jesus, she is lost and without hope. So, feeling hopeless, she begins to weep. But she does something more, and it is something which does not make any sense in the natural, as you can read in John 20:11-12

***But Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent to look over into the tomb, and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.***

Mary does something which is not very logical for, after all, she has already looked in the tomb and knows that it is empty. This has been confirmed by Peter and John. Why then does she look again? Is she hoping against hope that her Lord's body will miraculously reappear? That is not what happens. But what happens is something so much more wonderful than Mary Magdalene could have ever imagined. It begins with her seeing two beings she has not seen before: two angels. Very likely, they will have been there when she looked inside the tomb the first time. They will, as well, have

been there when Peter and John looked inside the tomb. But somehow she and the other two disciples had not seen them at that time. However, this time she is allowed to see them. Had she left with the other two disciples, she would have missed seeing the angels. And these two angels are somewhat mystified as to why she is crying as, you can read in John 20:13-14

***They asked her; “Woman, why are you crying?” “They have taken my Lord away”, she said, “and I don’t know where they have put Him.” At this she turned round and saw Jesus standing there but she did not realise that it was Jesus.***

Obviously the angels have a very different perspective on the situation but, after all, they are angels and not human beings. So Mary Magdalene tries to explain to them why she carries so much grief. As she is talking to the angels, she turns round and sees another person. He must be the one who can help her find the body of the Lord for it does not seem the angels can do much for her. This man begins to speak to her, as you can read in John 20:15-16

***“Woman”, He said, “why are you crying? Who are you looking for?” Thinking He was the gardener, she said, “Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have put Him and I will get Him.”***

Mary stops crying and filled with hope, turns to this “Gardener”, for she is convinced that He will be able to help her find the dead body of her Lord. She knows, of course, that her Lord is dead, for she has personally seen Him hang on a cross, being taken off the cross, and placed in a tomb. And this Man does not even have to help her carry the body around. No, she will take care of the body, once she knows where it has been placed, such is her love for her Lord. But then the “Gardener” speaks again, and everything changes for Mary. Let’s read John 20:16

***Jesus said to her, “Mary”. She turned towards Him and cried in Aramaic, “Rabboni, which means “Teacher.”***

This Man, this “Gardener” knows her by name. The moment she hears Him say her name, she knows she is not speaking to the gardener, for there is only one Person who calls her by her name in the way she hears it: her Lord and Saviour. She does not know how He, who had only so very recently been crucified and buried, can be alive. But she does know it is true! And she is not going to let go of Him ever again. At least that is Mary’s plan, but Jesus has an assignment for her, as you can read in John 20:17

***Jesus said, “Do not hold on to Me for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to My brothers and tell them, “I am returning to My Father and your Father, to My God and your God.”***

Jesus has to go to the Father to let Him know He had accomplished His mission, and Mary Magdalene needs to tell the other disciples that the Lord has risen. And that is what she does, as you can read in John 20:18

***Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: “I have seen the Lord”, she said. And she told them that He had said these things to her.***

In obedience to Jesus’ words, Mary Magdalene goes and finds the other disciples. What a story she has to tell them, for not only did she have the privilege of seeing two angels, she had the privilege of seeing the Lord. And it was not a hoax, no, it really was the Lord she had seen, for He had called her by her name, as only He could, and she had touched Him so she knew she had not been dreaming. She explains as well

that the Lord has gone to His Father to tell Him His task has been accomplished, and that is why He is not here in Person. Mary's joy is restored to her: her Lord has come back to life. It is true, He has gone away again and she does not know when she will see Him again. But this one thing she knows: He is alive and because of Him she too will live.

God equipped Mary Magdalene for the task He had for her, so she was able to do what He had for her to do. Likewise, God has a task for you to fulfil, and He will equip you for your task by providing you with His spiritual gift or gifts, so you will be able to do what He has for you to do, as you can read in I Corinthians 12:4-11

***Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues. All these are the works of one and the same Spirit, and He gives them to each one, just as He determines.***

Please remember that whatever the Lord wants you to do, He wants it to be based on love, as you can read in I Corinthians 13:1-2

***And now I will show you the most excellent way. If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of Prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.***

You can read about the love that God wants you to love others within I Corinthians 13:4-7

***Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no records of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.***

As a believer, you have the Holy Spirit living on the inside of you. He desires to display this kind of love as part of the character of God, or the fruit of the Spirit, through you, as you can read in Galatians 5:22-23

***But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.***

Mary Magdalene allowed God to use the circumstances in her life to develop Godly character in her, so God could use her for what He had prepared for her to do. God was able to do this work in her and through her, because Mary Magdalene had developed a very intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus. Therefore, she knew His Voice, and was willing to be obedient to whatever He had for her to do. Likewise, God wants to develop Godly character in you, this fruit of the Spirit, through your circumstances, so that God can use you to minister to others in whatever way He has designed for you. Please remember, that this can only happen as you develop an intimate relationship with Jesus, by reading God's word and prayer, and by being obedient to do whatever God calls you to do.

## A Greater Miracle

In the village of Bethany there lives a man named Lazarus, as you can read in John 11:1-6

*Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. This Mary, whose brother now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped His feet with her hair. So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick."*

Lazarus lives with his two sisters Mary and Martha. They have a special friend named Jesus, who loves to come to their home whenever He has the opportunity. One day, Lazarus gets ill, and what is the first thing his two sisters do? They send a message to Jesus, informing Him of the illness of their brother. The question is; why do they want Jesus to know that their brother is ill? Is it because He is such a caring friend and would, therefore, want to know of their brother's condition? No doubt, this is so. However, that is not the main reason the sisters want Jesus to know of Lazarus' illness. They want Jesus to know about Lazarus' condition because they know He is the only One who can do something about it. You may want to say, **"Ok, that is all very well. But on what basis do these sisters know that Jesus can actually do something about the condition of Lazarus? Is He perhaps a medical doctor who has studied at the best Medical College?"** If the sisters were here today, they would say to you that their friend Jesus was so much more than just a kind and caring man, and even so much more than a medical doctor, because He had healed many people, not by prescribing the right kind of medication, but by speaking words of healing over these people. They would tell you that He could do so because he was the Son of God, who had been sent by God. That is quite a statement to make, is it not, to call someone not just a good and caring person, but to call Him the Son of God? Going back to the story, let's read John 11:4-7 to find out Jesus' response to the sister's message

*When He heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. Yet when He heard that Lazarus was sick, He stayed where He was two more days. Then He said to His disciples, "Let us go back to Judea."*

No doubt, the sisters expect Jesus to come and see them right away but that is not what He does. Instead, he stays on for two more days. You may well want to say to Jesus, **"Jesus, how can you do that? Is that how You show Your love for Your friends? You must know they are expecting You to come as soon as possible. What if Lazarus dies because You have delayed Your departure for Bethany?"**

Eventually, Jesus arrives in Bethany, as you can read in John 11:17-27

*On His arrival Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet Him, but Mary stayed at home. "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if You had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give You whatever You ask." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha answered, "I know He will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Jesus said to her, "I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE. He who believes in Me will live, even though*

*he dies; and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?" "Yes, Lord," she told Him, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world."*

The unthinkable has happened; Jesus has not come in time, so Lazarus has died and has had to be buried. Then, four days after his funeral, who appears on the scene? None other than Jesus. Martha is the first sister to seek Him out for she just needs to let Him know how she feels about His delay, as you can know from her words "***If You had been here, my brother would not have died.***" To her, Jesus could have prevented the death of her brother and she does not understand why He did not come when He was needed.

Jesus' answer to her was very interesting, "***I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE.***" What did He mean by these words? Let me explain.

In fact, Jesus said, "***Mary, you believe that I am not only a man but that I am the Son of God. And Mary, I have come to give life to all who believe in Me.***"

Why would Jesus want to say that? Because He knew that, just as Lazarus has died, so all people everywhere have died and will die, including you, and He had come to bring change into that situation. For people were not meant to die but to live. Now, you may want to say, "***If people are not meant to die, then why does it happen?***" To help you understand that I will need to take you back to some events that took place a long time ago. In fact, I need to take you back to the time when the world was created by God. At that time, He created a man and a woman, as you can read in Genesis 1:26-28

***Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, in Our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground. So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."***

Life was wonderful for them. They had a great relationship with each other and a very close relationship with God. They had been placed in a Garden to take care of you, as you can read in in Genesis 2:15-17

***The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the Lord God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the Garden, but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will die."***

But then one day something happened that changed everything: they disobeyed God, they sinned, as you can read in Genesis 3:6-8

***When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realised they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as He was walking in the Garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the Garden.***

One day, they did eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and, because of their disobedience, their close relationship with each other, and their close relationship with God, was broken, and a separation between each other and between them and God took place. Their sin has affected all people everywhere, including you, for everyone comes into this world with a sinful nature, and is separated from God, not just now, but after death, as you can read in Romans 5:12

***Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned.***

For God is a Holy God. Therefore, your sinfulness makes it impossible for you to have a close relationship with Him, no matter how hard you may try by doing good things and being kind to others. For your good things are never up to God's standards. But God is a God of Love too and in His love He designed a way whereby you can have a close relationship with Him. He did that by sending His Son into the world to die on a cross for all people everywhere, including you, as you can read in John 3:16 ***For God so loved the world that he gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.***

This happened 2000 years when His Son came to earth as a Baby, as you can read in Luke 2:7

***And she (Mary) gave birth to her firstborn, a Son. She wrapped Him in cloths and placed Him in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn.***

The name of this Baby is Jesus and He lived on earth for 33 years. In the last three years of His life, He taught people about God, healed sick people, and afterwards He was crucified, as you can read in John 19:18

***Here they crucified Him, and with Him two others – one on each side and Jesus in the middle.***

When He hung on the cross He bore the sins of the world, including your sins so that you can be forgiven of all of your sins and be made right with God as, you can read in II Corinthians 5:21

***God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.***

And when you receive forgiveness of all of your sins you become a child of God and you receive real life, not just for now but for eternity, as you can read in John 1:12

***Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His Name, He gave the right to become children of God.***

So when Jesus said that He was the Resurrection and the Life, He was referring to the fact that He had come to die for all people and that includes you.

Now, when Martha is talking to Him, He has not yet been crucified, but it did happen soon after. She understands that Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life, but she does not know that she is about to see a demonstration of the fact that Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life. However, she is so comforted by the words of Jesus, that she goes home to encourage her sister Mary to go and see Jesus. And Mary does just that. When she sees Jesus, she falls at His feet and uses the same words her sister has used, for she too says to Jesus, ***“Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not***

*have died.*” However, her words are spoken in a very different tone from her sister for they are a sign of her grief. She next breaks down in weeping, and her weeping moves Jesus into action, for He asks them to take Him to Lazarus’ tomb.

Let’s read John 11:38-44 to see what happens at the tomb.

*Jesus, once more deeply moved came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. “Take away the stone,” He said. “But, Lord,” said Martha, the sister of the dead man, “by this time there is a bad odour, for he has been there four days.”*

*Then Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?” So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. I knew that You always hear Me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that You sent Me.”*

*When He had said this, Jesus called out in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!”*

*The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”*

Jesus has come to do an even greater miracle than the sisters expect. They expect Him to heal their brother, and have become very distressed when that has not happened.

But Jesus has something much greater in mind for them to experience, to help them have an even greater understanding of who He is. So He asks them to take Him to the grave. That will not have made much sense to them, apart from the fact that they may have thought He wants to go there to mourn the loss of His friend Lazarus. But that is not what Jesus has in mind, is it now? For it is not the time to mourn the death of Lazarus, quite the opposite, in fact. As soon as they get to the cave in which Lazarus’ body is laid, Jesus tells them to do something that cannot have made sense to anyone; He tells them to remove the grave stone. And the ever-practical Martha makes a comment, which others may have wanted to say too. **“Lord, it is not a good idea to remove the stone for You may not realise it, but Lazarus has been dead for four days already. You were not there at his funeral. But I was there and I know it took place four days ago. So by now his body is in the process of decay, and that will mean a very bad odour.”**

But Jesus insists that the stone be removed and that is what happens. He then simply speaks three words. They are like a command. **“Lazarus come out.”** The people must have held their breath to see what will happen next. But Jesus knows what is going to happen and yes, that is exactly what happens. First, the people hear some noise coming from the inside of the tomb, and soon thereafter a figure appears. They can’t really make out who it is, for this figure is all wrapped up in grave clothes, but it can only be Lazarus, for they had witnessed him being placed in that tomb just a few days ago. And this figure is obviously very much alive, even though he is hindered in his walking by the grave clothes. So Jesus tells the people to remove these grave clothes from Lazarus, for he does not need them any longer. In fact they are a hindrance to him.

Now, Jesus is no longer walking the earth. After His crucifixion and death, He came back to life and then went back to heaven. However, He sent someone in His place, the Spirit of God and you may sense the Spirit of God saying to you as you read this **Jesus says of Himself, “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one can come to the Father except through Me”. “Jesus died on the Cross 2000 years ago so that**

***your sins can be forgiven and you can be made right with God, so that you can become a child of God and receive true life which will be for ever and ever.”***

Jesus is calling you out of your tomb of spiritual and emotional death, just as He called Lazarus out of his tomb of physical death. And He wants you to respond to His words of hope and life.

How can you do that? By recognising that you are a sinner and that you cannot get yourself right with God, no matter how hard you try. And then, by faith, accepting the fact that Jesus died for all of your sins, so you can become a child of God. God will then help you to live right, as you make Jesus the Lord and Saviour of your life. Why don't you say the following prayer:

**Dear God,**

**I know that I am a sinner and I cannot save myself.**

**Thank You for sending Your Son to die on the Cross so I can be forgiven of my sins.**

**By faith I now receive Your forgiveness.**

**I now accept Your Son Jesus as my Lord and my Saviour.**

**Please help me to live in a way that is pleasing to You.**

**Amen.**

You have now become a child of God and are now a part of the family of God. However, you will need a lot of help to know how to live right. That is why I would like you to join a church, for they will be like a family to you to help you learn more about God.

And remember, Lazarus, after he had come out of the tomb, was still wrapped in grave clothes, and Jesus told the people around him to help him get rid of these grave clothes. You too, will have some “grave clothes.” These are wrong habits that you may have formed, as well as painful and challenging things that have happened to you in your life, and you will need others to help you deal with these issues, so you can be set free from the affects of them. It is, therefore, very important for you to join a church fellowship, so you can grow in your faith. And, one day, you will be able to share with other people your faith in Jesus, and help them be set free from whatever prevents them from living life as God means for them to live it.