

# extreme GRACE

## Hard to Follow

*In his reply to Nicodemus, Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." John 3:3*

Jesus is a hard one to follow. Most leaders ask for a few minutes of your time after work or before going to the bank. Not Jesus. He makes "following" a real challenge, a marathon of commitment, a daily campaign of giving up and taking on!

He caused quite a stir three years ago as He began wandering the country with his ragged followers. You should have heard the "Fishermen's Messiah" jokes in the halls of the Sanhedrin. The rumors of healings, normal for most backwoods messiahs, didn't convince anyone around Jerusalem. In fact we laughed all the louder, glad that God was wiser than His imposters.

Then He came to Jerusalem, healed many, and spoke pure sense to adoring listeners on the temple steps. We leaders stood back in frowning distaste for this pollution of God's house. Our jokes were replaced with whispered conspiracies and hurried schemes. Jesus was good, an actor whose skill would bring Him attention, fame, and groupies willing to wage war on tradition. He must be stopped!

Knowing my vote would soon be commanded to help determine His end, I disguised myself as a commoner and slipped to His hiding place one midnight. I needed answers, and an inner yearning pulled me to ask Him my questions personally. What if he really was more than a charlatan?

He recognized me immediately, not as Sanhedrin member

Nicodemus, but as a pretender whose stammered questions spoke eloquently of my own fears. He waved my words aside and talked commitment.

"Start over," He commanded. "Be born again. Accept me as God's son, sent to Gethsemane because God loves you." Then came the kicker, "Nicodemus, follow me."

Jesus is a hard one to follow. He demanded more than I could give. Instead of joining His disciples, I followed at a discrete distance, fascinated with the changes He brought to those who accepted His gifts, but unwilling to be changed myself.

I watched for nearly three years. Interested, but not committed. Near, but not beside.

This week He came to our Passover feast and rode an unbroken donkey to the hilltop as conquering King. Ten more minutes and the entire country would have swept Him onto the throne, and swept the unbelieving Sanhedrin leaders and Roman officers aside. Instead, He slipped from the donkey and disappeared into His cheering crowd. The moment passed, and most leaders sighed with determined hatred.

He was around all week. He taught at the temple, worshiped at evening sacrifices, and even brought His fisher friends to the city for a Passover meal. Everything He did was normal, but abnormally visible and important to everyone in Jerusalem. Especially to me. The more I watched, the closer I came to His command of commitment.

My Sanhedrin friends began to ask pointed questions about my allegiances, and my brush-off answers no longer satisfied anyone. Especially me. I was in love with everything Jesus represented, everything He did, and everything His ministry did for me. I was changing, and I loved it. But I was still a silent follower.

The Sanhedrin met yesterday, and I was not invited. I think some feared I might lose my silence. By

the time I learned of the meeting, the vote, and the actions of my friends, it was too late for my voice to make any difference. Jesus already had wood across his shoulders and was being whipped up the trail to Golgotha. In that moment I became a committed follower.

Too late to stop the tragedy, I dashed from shop to shop pressing my fortune into the hands of thieves who sold myrrh, aloes, and embalming oils for the price of diamonds! I bought 75 pounds of spices and oils, far more than necessary, but far less than my king deserved.

Joseph, another Sanhedrin friend who had chosen commitment over fame, ran with me to Pilate and secured permission to bury "The Christ" in Joseph's personal tomb. We then sprinted, lugging my bags of spices, to the tomb and on to the cross.

Soldiers helped us take Him down, dead weight, a body that flopped in uselessness while somehow commanding our total allegiance.

We carried Him to the tomb and laid His cold flesh on a colder stone slab. The spices we placed on the floor beside Him. It was too late on the Preparation Day to do a full embalming. That would have to wait until tomorrow, till after the Sabbath.

Today is Sabbath, and I am home, an outcast from my friends and still unknown by His friends. Alone, with only Joseph understanding the pain of commitment.

Jesus is a hard one to follow. He has cost me everything I ever thought valuable.

I am alone, yet somehow not lonely. I am sad, yet not discouraged. Instead, I am filled with a powerful energy, an eagerness to stand before the world and shout my allegiance to my living king. A Spirit Wind is blowing in me, filling this body shell with a new Nicodemus, a new vocal disciple, a committed follower of the man who lies beside a fortune in spices. It is as if I am newly alive, powered by his death.

*Dick Duerksen*