

BURIED NEXT TO JESUS

I awoke cold from another troubled sleep. As I look out the window, it's still dark and judging by the stars I know how early it is. It is time to get out of bed. I looked at my sleeping wife. She looks so peaceful that I think I'll let her sleep. It is time to get dressed so I pull on my clothing. I can tell it's going to be another very hot day. My wife said she would give me a hair cut this afternoon. I believe this will keep me cooler at work. Now I shall comb my hair and wash my face. The water feels very cool and refreshing. I wash all the salt from my face—the remnants of the tears that rolled down my face during the night. The sun will be coming up soon so I need to hurry.

My morning meal consists of figs, bread and honey. The figs are grown in the orchard out back. They are ripe and sweet and my children love them. It is one of the few sweet things we have around the house. The bread was baked last night, the warm aroma still hangs heavy in the air. The bread is moist. My wife put extra time into making this bread. I make sure to leave plenty for my family. My children will be eating bread and honey this morning also. I bought the honey from a friend. I would have a beehive, but I do not have enough money to afford it. Nevertheless, the honey is exceptional. It is so very sweet. I can almost taste the flowers from which the bees fed. Leah and Matthew, my children, will get some of this honey as a treat if they are well behaved today. I am thirsty and I need to go to the well for some water. I walk out to the well and draw some water using the bucket. Slowly I hoist the bucket back up the well. The bucket is heavy when full of water. I take a drink of the water. It tastes fresh, clean and crisp. The sun is peeking up over the edge of the horizon. I must depart from my house. I go back to the house to find my sandals. I do not see them where my children were playing with them last night. Ah, now I remember. Leah left them by the hearth. Well, there are no scratches, so they should last for a while longer. I put some of the water I drew from the well into my wine skin. I feel sad. I slowly gather up my tools. I wish I didn't have to go to work today. I must face today though—it is my job. I also pack my lunch, which consists of olives, bread, honey and figs. We are a poor family, so we cannot afford to buy many varieties of foods. We buy what we absolutely need and we get by. It is time to leave for work. If I do not go now, I will be late and if I am late, I cannot work as long.

I close the door as quietly as I can. My wife deserves to sleep, and my children played hard yesterday. The vegetable garden looks like it needs weeding. My wife will make sure they do that today. The sun is half way up over the horizon. I can see shapes in the clouds overhead. I see a cow and a flower in the clouds. Little rabbits on the path start on my approach. They sit still for a moment, then bolt. I must stop. There is a rock in my sandal and it is hurting my foot. There! It is out. Now I can resume my journey. I pass by a field of lilies. The flowers are bright white. They have a fragrance of their won. I am saddened at the scene of these flowers. The sadness runs deep into my very soul. I wish I was able to cast it off, but I am unable to. This sadness

washes every happy thing from my mind. I want to cry and be comforted, but I am the adult and I have to get to work. I remember when I used to worry about the future. David Peter fixed that.

David Peter is the man whose gravestone I am carving. He was my best friend. About seven years ago David told me that I should stop worrying about tomorrow. I used to worry about what my children were eating and how well they were dressed. Even though David said this, I still worried a lot. Then David persuaded me to come listen to a man called Jesus talk. David had heard him speak before. David thought that Jesus was the true messiah. I said to David, "I hope this is true, because then would not have to worry about anything." When we got there and was able to see Jesus for myself, I knew instinctively that this was the true messiah. Jesus was preaching to the crowd. David and I got closer, so we could hear him better. He said to the crowd that had gathered: "Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; no about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more that food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly father feeds them Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil no spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you? O you of little faith. Therefore do not worry, saying "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" for after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly father knows you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble." These words changed my life. I ceased worrying about every little detail and I came to trust the fact that God would take care of tomorrow. I am grateful to David Peter for bringing me to Jesus, and to Jesus for giving me such a caring friend. I am eternally I Jesus' debt. He died so I may get to heaven.

I used to worry if my children were eating enough. They always looked too thin. Then I realized that they were actually muscular and healthy. I used to worry about the state of their clothing. I thought it was frayed or too thin. I realized that it was me. The clothes were perfectly fine, not one problem with them. I look back and laugh at the things I used to worry about. I look up and see that the end of the road is near. The sadness returns.

I have reached the end of the dirt and gravel path. I get all of the pebbles out of my sandals and I walk over to the olive tree and sit down for a moment to rest my weary body. I think how lovely the olive tree is right now and how cool and refreshing the shade is. I get up and set my lunch in the shade. I take one drink from my wine skin and go over to get my tools. I choose a chisel and a hammer. Walking over to the granite stone is the hardest thing I've ever done. The sadness is almost unbearable. It eats me alive, but I remember Jesus and have strength. I set to work carving the grave marker. Then I pause. I remember the last time I visited David Peter.

David was very sick. He was not allowed out of his bed for fear he might drop dead to the ground. I was sitting by his bedside while a small fire crackled in the fireplace. Candles were burning in every window. The doctor said David would not last through the night. I sat with him watching the stars out the window or talking to him. He whispered in a weak voice. I made

David's final hours as comfortable as I possibly could. I allowed him time to talk to his wife in private. I could hear her sobbing throughout the night. I comforted her when David slept. As the night wore on, he became less and less alive. In his final hour he gave me the honor of hearing his last wish. David wished to be buried next to Jesus' tomb. He said he wanted me to carve his grave marker. David said, "Let these words be written upon my marker: BURIED NEXT TO JESUS." I said it would be done as beautifully as I knew how. By morning David was dead. I will attend the funeral as soon as I finish the grave marker.

Since David's last wish was to be buried next to Jesus, I went out and found a small plot of land next to Jesus' tomb and bought it. I felt I was repaying David for taking me to see Jesus. But as I said, for that I am eternally in his debt. I am glad in a way to be carving his grave marker. It gives me pride to give something back to David. No matter how small, I think David would appreciate anything I did to repay him.

I carve the words in the granite slowly. I wish this to stand forever as a tribute to the caring man who was my best friend. The inscription David picked is fitting—David is buried next to Jesus' tomb. It is a high honor for David and he deserves it. I am glad David picked the words he did. They are simple yet they say millions. I hope that years from now people will see this stone and say, "How fitting", or some other words of praise. David certainly deserves praise. I am still a little sad. My best friend is dead and I can do nothing to change that. Oh, how I wish I could. Even though I cannot see him now I know that I will get to see him, when I get to heaven someday. I know that since Jesus died for my sins, He paved the way for me to get to heaven.

It is time to head home. I have finished my grave marker for David. On the journey home I watch for birds and rabbits and clouds. What a wonderful place to live, I suddenly realize. These sights are like medicine cleansing my spirit, driving away the disease that is sadness. Oh how great it feels to be joyful. I shall live to honor God. His creations are beautiful. But the most beautiful is man and woman. The sight of my children playing and running around is very pleasant. Even more so is the sight of my wife. She is trying to hang out the wash and cook at the same time. I shall give her a hand and tell the children to play until it is dark. I look at this world now and realize that I am a blessed man.