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You Were There!

184-A

Series: Miscellaneous Messages

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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You Were There!

I was there.

And it is still as vivid to me as it was the day it happened. No I didn't grasp the full significance of what I was seeing; but as it all began to unfold, little by little, I knew I was witnessing something beyond human understanding. I was actually becoming an eyewitness to the greatest single event in the history of man. I watched God die. Then I watched death die. And I cannot contain it any longer.

I simply must tell you what happened. It was some 2,000 years ago now, and yet it seems like only yesterday. This Jesus of Nazareth had been walking up and down the countryside with His band of disciples (as He called them), talking about a Kingdom of which He would be the King. I can never forget how nervous the religious leaders were when they heard of His words. He was just a carpenter's son, and He was, oh, so gentle, and yet His very name struck fear in the hearts of virtually every one in the religious establishment. Why? Was it the number of followers He had? I don't think so. I remember one point at which He challenged His followers to take up a "cross" and follow Him, and nearly everyone there turned around and left. No, I don't think it was the size of His congregation that bothered them.

And I don't think it was the commitment level of His inner team. They seemed to vacillate so, and every time He would speak of something spiritual, they would try to make it fit in the physical realm, and He had to stop and explain what the stories that He was using to teach them meant. In fact, when the heat was on, this band of supposedly committed followers turned out to be cowards who would simply run for cover or pretend they never knew Him. No, that wasn't it.

It was Jesus Himself. Something about Him was different. He was very human; but when He spoke and when He looked

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at you with those eyes, it was almost as if...no, it was as if God Himself was speaking to you. He spoke with such authority, not like the Scribes or the Pharisees. It was as though He was God Himself in a human body. You couldn't explain it, but neither could you deny it.

I remember following Him that day to the garden of Gethsemane as He crossed the brook Kidron. There was a garden there, a garden He obviously visited often. I watched as He told His disciples to remain in one place while He went inside to pray. Then He took Peter and Zebedee's two sons, James and John, and went a little further into the garden and began to pray. Oh, did He pray. I never understood prayer until I saw Him in that garden. He prayed, *"Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. My Father, if it be possible, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will."*

What did He mean? He told His Father that He could do anything, then asked Him if it would be possible to save Him from whatever was facing Him. I didn't get it then. I do now. The issue wasn't the power. The issue was the plan. He knew God could do anything He wanted. He could call down 10,000 angels, wipe out civilization, and start over with a whole new world if He wanted to. So the issue wasn't whether or not God could save Jesus. The issue was: *Could God save Jesus, and still save us?*

He went back twice to Peter, James and John to see if they were praying the way He asked them to, but they had...fallen asleep. I'll never forget His words, *"Simon, could you not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray lest you enter into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."*

As I said, it wasn't the commitment level of this band of followers of His that posed such a threat. It was almost as if the real battle was being waged someplace else, and the things that were happening here were only shadows of the real conflict.

I watched Him pray as the others slept. No one had ever prayed like that. The Pharisees had their little memorized prayers they said, making sure they had an audience who would appreciate them, but they never prayed like this. He

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was perspiring profusely. Sweat was dripping from His brow, creating a pool on the ground around Him. He was in agony of soul. He cried out to His Father again, *“If it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours be done.”* His perspiration became even more intense; in fact, the sweat became red, like blood, as though He were literally praying His heart out.

What happened next surprised me. He rebuked the disciples again for sleeping through the greatest spiritual opportunity of their lifetime, and then quietly said to them, *“The hour has come; behold, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand.”*

And indeed he was. It was Judas, one of His own, who led the search party which had been commissioned not to come back without this seemingly harmless carpenter in tow. What a scene that was. They came with torches and lanterns and swords and clubs. You’d think they were coming after a Mafia boss or a hardened criminal. Judas ran over to Jesus and kissed Him. That was their signal. Jesus quietly responded, *“Judas, are you betraying the Son of man with a kiss?”* I would have run, but He didn’t. Instead, He went up to these heavily armed soldiers and said, *“Who are you looking for?”* They gruffly responded, *“Jesus of Nazareth! You could cut the silence with a knife. Jesus responded, with such a peaceful look on His face, “I AM He.”* But when He said, “I AM” they fell backwards as though they had been hit with a blast of air, and literally fell to the ground.

That surely would have been my cue to run. But not Jesus. It was as though He had a destiny, and that destiny included this experience. Instead, He asked the men again, *“Whom do you seek?”* and again, they answered, *“Jesus of Nazareth.”* He answered more firmly this time, *“I told you...I AM. If you are looking for Me, let these others go.”* At that moment, the soldiers, now armed with confidence, grabbed Jesus and began to shove Him towards the entrance to the garden.

It all happened so fast. I saw the blood. I heard the blood-curdling scream. Malchus, a bondsman of the high priest, was holding the side of his head, reeling in pain. It was, of course, Simon Peter. Impulsive Simon Peter. Simon, the hero, or so he

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thought, had pulled out his sword and cut off Malchus' ear. You could sense that a riot was about to break out. Then Jesus spoke. It was as though Heaven touched Peter, "*Put your sword in its place for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Or do you think I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels? How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus? The cup which the Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?*" At that point, He reached over and just touched Malchus' ear, and it was whole again. It was as though He had never been wounded.

If I had been one of those soldiers, I think that would have been enough for me. But I wasn't, and it wasn't, so they took Jesus and, treating Him quite roughly, they shoved and pushed Him through the crowds and led Him away to Annas. And where were His trusted followers? Not a one of them stood by Him. These supposedly committed followers all forsook Him and fled.

In a few hours, the soldiers arrived at Annas' house. Annas was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was the high priest that year. I remembered Caiaphas. He was the one who had said that it was expedient for one man to die for the people.

I remember the high priest badgering Jesus, questioning Him about His teachings, about His followers, about His kingdom. I remember them slapping Him in the face when He responded by saying that everything He had done, He had done in the open. I remember seeing Annas order Him bound, and I watched as they took Him, tied up like a common criminal, to Caiaphas, where all of the chief priests, the scribes and the elders were gathered together. It was like a high-level lynching squad. They were going through the motions of justice, without caring about the real truth.

One picture that's so vivid in my mind is that of Simon Peter, the ear-cutting, outspoken, self-proclaimed captain of the Lord's host. He was certain in his own heart that through all those other guys might betray Jesus, it would never happen to him. "Not so," Jesus had responded, "*before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.*"

After the ear episode, Peter seemed visibly shaken. Watching

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Jesus, to whom he had entrusted his life, being carted away by a bunch of soldiers, led by a traitor, did something to him. He followed Jesus, but he stayed way in the distance, lest he be identified and imprisoned as one of his followers. It's hard to imagine how someone so committed to another could become, in essence, a turncoat at the drop of a hat. One of the other disciples entered the courtyard where the high priest was with Jesus, but not Peter. He put on his incognito disguise and hung around outside the door. He wanted to know what was happening in the Christian world, but he didn't want to be so identified with the Christian life that He would die for it. Sound familiar?

It was almost comical. It was a servant girl who first identified Peter standing outside, who said, *"You're one of His, aren't you?"* It was as though Peter changed personalities. He became sullen and indignant. *"I am not!"*, he exclaimed. The others who were gathered around the fire, warming themselves chimed in, *"Are you?"* they chided him. *"I am not!"* he assured them. Later, he was seated in the courtyard, awaiting the outcome of the trial, when another servant woman accused him of being one of Jesus' disciples. Vehemently he denied it. About an hour passed. Then another man, sensing Peter was a Galilean, said, *"Listen to your speech. I just know you are one of His."* At that point, Peter lost it. He began to curse and to swear, *"I don't even know this man Jesus of whom you speak,"* and immediately the cock crowed, and at that exact moment, they led Jesus through the throng. He turned and simply looked at Peter. That look. That's all it took. And Peter ran from the place and wept and wept and wept.

Meanwhile, Jesus had been sent to appear before the Sanhedrin, where He said, *"Hereafter, you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power of God."* *"So you claim to be the Son of God?"* they railed. *"I AM"* was all He needed to say. With that, they bound Him and sent Him to Pontius Pilate, the governor.

Yes, I was there. I was there when Pilate asked, "are you the king of the Jews?" Finally, upon hearing Jesus say He had come to bear witness to the truth, Pilate uttered that question that has been so misunderstood through the ages. He asked,

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“What is truth?” Then, on hearing Jesus was from Galilee, Pilate took the coward’s way out and sent Him to Herod. Herod simply mocked Him and ridiculed Him and sent Him back to Pilate, who knew in his heart that Jesus was innocent, and whose own wife had sent him a note saying, *“Do nothing to that righteous man.”*

And I was there when Pilate turned to the jeering crowd and gave them a choice: Jesus or Barabbas. And even today, after all those years, chills run down my spine as I heard the crowds respond, *“Crucify Him! Crucify Him!”*

I saw them place upon His head a crown of thorns, and as they thrust it upon His sinless brow, I truly began to feel the pain, as well. I watched as they clothed Him in a purple robe, mocking Him as they cried, *“Hail, King of the Jews,”* slapping Him across the face even as they did, Pilate led Him out before the throng and said, *“Behold the man!”* It was as though that simply energized the crowds the more and they began to chant, *“Crucify Him! Crucify Him!”* Pilate, thinking he could absolve himself with words, retorted, *“You crucify Him, for I find no fault in Him.”* With Pilate’s every word, the crowd became more unmanageable, until finally Pilate washed his hands and proclaimed himself *“innocent of this man’s blood.”*

I watched in horror as the soldiers led him to the Praetorium and summoned the whole battalion together to mock Him and humiliate Him. First, they stripped Him of His clothes, and with that crown of thorns on His head, they placed a reed in His right hand and began chanting, *“Hail, King of the Jews!”* Then the soldiers took turns spitting on Him, laughing at Him, and taking the reed from His hand, hitting Him on the head with it.

Then they led Him out to crucify Him, forcing Him to carry His own Cross, until they grabbed Simon of Cyrene who was simply passing by, and compelled him to walk behind Jesus, carrying that awful cross.

And when they brought Him to the place called *“The Skull,”* which in the Hebrew is called *“Golgotha,”* they offered Him a drink, vinegar mixed with myrrh; but having tasted it, He refused to drink it.

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Forever that moment is etched in my mind and in my heart. I pray that it is etched in yours, as well. They crucified Him. It was about nine o'clock. Jesus cried out, "*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.*" And there were two thieves, one on the right and one on the left, who were crucified with Him. Above His head, Pilate had written these words:

THIS IS
JESUS OF NAZARETH
THE KING OF THE JEWS

The throng argued with Pilate, saying, "Write instead, "*He said I am the king of the Jews.*" Pilate simply answered, "*What I have written, I have written.*"

Yes, I was there. I was there when they gambled over His garments. I was there as He hung there dying, and the people passed by wagging their heads, laughing at God, saying, "*You, who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself and come down from that cross!*"

Oh, Beloved, He could have. With one nod of His precious head, or one thought from His precious heart, He could have called down angels from Heaven and been freed. He could have but whispered, and His Father would have sent a thunderstorm the likes of which man has never seen, and all of God's enemies would have been destroyed, while Christ set up His kingdom on earth. He could have. But that's not what He came to do, and because He was the Son of God, He wouldn't come down from that cross. For if He had, you and I would have been destined for an eternity in hell. "*where the fire is never quenched and the worm never dies.*"

I was also close enough to hear the dialog between Jesus and those two thieves who hung beside Him, one on each side. I heard as the one railed at Him, God being made fun of by a common thief: "*If you are the Messiah, save yourself and us.*" But the other answered, "*Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.*" And Jesus answered with those words that have brought such hope to so many, "*Today you will be with Me in Paradise.*"

I was there, as well, when Jesus looked down in His agony,

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and watched as His mother, His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene stood beneath Him, their hearts broken, their lives shattered. Jesus wasn't thinking of His pain, however. He was thinking of His mother. "*Woman, behold your son!*" He proclaimed, as He looked at her and at the disciple He so loved. "*Behold your mother!*" He said to the disciple.

I was there. But none of us knew what to do. It was only noontime, but suddenly the sun went on a sabbatical. There was total darkness. Fear gripped the throng at the foot of that cross. Something was happening of eternal significance. Most of us there didn't understand it at the time. Now we do. Suddenly, about three o'clock Jesus cried out, "*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani*". A few minutes later, He cried, "*I thirst*"; then His voice became a voice of triumph, and He shouted, "*It is finished!*". There was a total hush as He bowed His head and whispered, "*Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.*"

I was there. And it was over. Or so I thought. But suddenly, the veil of the temple was wrenched in two from top to bottom. The earth beneath us began to shake, huge rocks began to move, tombs began to open as though some supernatural force was magnetically drawing those who slept beneath to rise again. The centurion standing just a few feet from me made this amazing statement: "*Truly this was the Son of God.*" Indeed.

It was interesting. The soldiers came and broke the legs of the two thieves; but when they came to Jesus, seeing that He was dead, they did not break His legs, fulfilling that prophecy of old that "*not a bone of Him shall be broken.*" One of the soldiers, however, stuck a spear in Jesus' side, and out came blood and water, fulfilling still another prophecy which said, "*They shall look on Him whom they pierced.*"

By now I was overwhelmed with curiosity about this man of Galilee, so I followed every move His disciples made, I saw them take His body down. I saw a wealthy man named Joseph, from Arimathea, a man who professed to be one of Jesus' followers, provide a tomb in which they could place the body. I followed Joseph that night to the tomb, and watched as Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, and I watched as they placed the body in the tomb and rolled a huge stone against the

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opening, so no one could go in or out.

I watched as Mary Magdalene and the other Mary slipped inside to see the body first, and to marvel at how the body was laid, and then I saw them rush home to rest on the Sabbath according to the commandments.

And, oh, how I observed the grief, the disillusionment, the sadness, the fear on the faces of His followers. It was all over. They had come so close. They thought Messiah had come, and they had been called to follow Him. They thought He would set up a kingdom, and they would rule with Him. They thought He would continue to walk this earth and heal and help and save. But now He was gone, and all hope was gone, as well.

I followed the Pharisees as they gathered that evening too. They weren't satisfied that Jesus was dead. They were worried that someone would steal the body and start a rumor that He was still alive. So they went to Pilate, who agreed that they could use an attachment of guards to stand beside that tomb 24 hours a day, so nothing could happen to the body of this man, Jesus.

The next morning, with the Sabbath past, I decided to visit that tomb again myself. I still could hardly believe what had happened. As I approached I saw Mary Magdalene and the mother of James bringing spices to the tomb. Others came with them, bringing ointments and spices which they had prepared.

Then it happened. The earth began to tremble as it had when Jesus died. I was frightened out of my wits. And as the earth shook, an angel suddenly appeared, and rolled away the stone. His presence was like a bolt of lightening, and his countenance shone like the sun. The guards who were there turned white as sheets and then, one by one, passed out. They looked as if they were dead. Mary saw that the stone had been rolled away and ran as fast as she could to find Simon Peter and tell him that someone had stolen the Master's body. Peter and another disciple ran together as fast as they could. The other disciple got there first, but didn't enter the tomb. Peter, of course, rushed right in, and stooping down, he saw the linen clothes and the folded napkin. They didn't know what had happened, but they

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ran back, confused and amazed. But Mary kept standing there weeping. Finally, she got up her courage and looked inside. When she did, two angels were there, one at the head and one at the foot of where the body had been.

I couldn't help but hear what they said. They turned to Mary and asked, "*Woman, why are you weeping?*" Through her tears, she answered, "*Because they took away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him.*" As she turned, she saw someone standing by her, but she didn't recognize Him as anyone she knew. He spoke to her, too. He said, "*Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?*" She, supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him, "*Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away.*"

Then He stooped down, and said to her, "*Mary!*" That voice. She knew that voice. It was the voice of God. It was the voice of love. It was the voice of eternity. It was Jesus. "*Rabboni,*" she responded. "*Do not hold Me,*" He quietly said, "*I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.'*"

Could it be? They wondered, and I wondered, "What would the disciples say?" They found out soon enough. "He's alive!" she shouted. "I've seen the Master, He's alive!" But they didn't believe her.

Soon Joanna and Mary, the mother James, and some other women came to the tomb. They were unsure who they would get to roll away the stone, but when they arrived, lo it was already rolled away. On entering, they found no body, but found angels, clothed in white. Terrified, they did not know whether to run or stay. Just then, one of the angels spoke. "*Do not be afraid for I know that you seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. Why seek the living among the dead? He is not here; for He is risen, as He said.*"

And they admonished the women, "*Go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead, and indeed, He is going before you into Galilee; there shall you see Him.*"

They agreed, but as they went, someone met them along

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the way. It was that voice, that wonderful voice. *“Rejoice,”* He said. It was Jesus. They seized Him by His feet and worshipped Him. *“Fear not,”* He quietly spoke, *“Go, tell my brethren to go into Galilee, and there shall they see Me.”* I followed after them. Now their gloom had turned to joy. Now their fear had given way to faith. He is alive! And they returned with great joy and told all those things to the eleven, and to all the rest. But their words seemed too good to be true, and the apostles simply would not believe.

The same afternoon two men were walking on the way to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. As they were walking, a stranger came up and began to walk alongside. He wanted to know why they were so sad. Almost condescendingly they answered, *“You must be the only person in Israel who doesn’t know what’s been happening. Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God, has been crucified. And we were trusting that it would have been He who would save Israel.”*

“Oh, foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all the things which the prophets have spoken!” He responded. *“Was it not needful that Messiah should suffer these things and enter into His glory?”* And beginning with Moses and the prophets, he expounded all the Scriptures concerning Himself. Still they did not know who He was. But as they were breaking bread their eyes were opened, and they saw. It was Jesus! He was alive! Suddenly He vanished, and they cried out, *“Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked with us on the road?”*

He appeared to Peter, to the others, even to doubting Thomas. I was there. I saw Him. I heard Him. And I saw something incredible happening to those disciples. I was there on that mountain, too, when He turned to them and said, *“All power has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go, therefore, and make disciples of men and women of all nations; baptize them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Teach them to observe and understand everything I have ever taught you. And I will be with you forever, even to the end of the age.”*

I was also there when He ascended from the Mount of Olives, and went back to be with the Father. Oh, what a moment in

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history that was: Jesus returning to His Father, so He could send His Spirit to live in us and through us forever.

And more than that, I witnessed what happened next. As the Bible says, *“They worshipped Him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God; and they went forth and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs.”*

And Beloved, life has never been the same since. The world has never been the same since. And those disciples were never the same again. They were filled with joy. They went out, as Jesus commanded them, into the whole world, teaching, preaching, making disciples. The brash, harsh Peter became a man of gentleness and love. The quiet, gentle John became a man of vision and boldness. Nothing would ever be the same again.

He was alive! Nothing would ever occupy their time again but serving Him. No idols need ever call out to them again, for their only desire was to worship Him. He was alive! They only lived to tell others. Their desires were not for fame, or fortune, or things. They forsook all that they had, and gave all that they had for only one thing: to please His heart.

I know. I was there. Who am I, you ask? You don't need to know. I could be an angel God sent to walk alongside and witness all these things. I could be an apostle who followed far behind, lest he be discovered. I could be a silent witness who gave my heart to Christ, but just never wanted anyone to know.

Or I could be you. Because you were there, as well. You have the whole canon of Scripture; you were there. You saw them beat Him nearly to death, and heard Him whisper, *“It's worth it, Beloved, just for you.”* You saw Him humiliated, spit upon, mocked, and despised. You saw Him die. And you know He died...for you.

And you saw Him rise again. That's why you celebrate Easter. You saw Him as He walked that Emmaus road, and your heart burned within you, too. You were there. And you were there as He ascended into the heavenlies, to send His Spirit to live within

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your heart forever. You were there. And so was I.

Just one question: If we, like the disciples, were there, then why aren't we like the disciples here? Why aren't we turning our worlds upside down? Why aren't we forsaking all that we have to go to the ends of the earth? Why aren't we, like them, tarrying in His presence, seeking to be so anointed with His power that every word we speak, every thought we think, simply whispers, "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus?"

We were there, Beloved. We were there. But is it possible that as Mark said, *"the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches and the lust of other things entering in choke the word"* until it no longer controls our lives? Is it possible that our world has so squeezed us into its mold, that we no longer celebrate Easter every day? That we don't stand at the empty tomb every morning and shout with the angels, *"He is not here. He is risen as He said!"*?

Tomorrow is a new day. And you and I have been once more to that empty tomb. We can't go back and change the intensity of our commitment in days gone by. But we can begin today to recapture the essence of Easter on a daily basis. We can awaken each morning, and before we so much as think another thought, we can shout in our spirits, "He is alive! I know. I was there."

We can continue celebrating Easter every day of our lives until God calls us home to heaven where it will always be Easter, or until that blessed day when suddenly *"the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, and with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord."*

Oh, Beloved that will be Easter, for sure. He will be alive. We will be with Him forever.

But until then, remember. He is alive. He is risen. And you were there.

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