

F O L K H E R O

LYRICAL NOVEL #4

In the Series
THEY MET JESUS



KATHERYN MADDOX HADDAD

They Met Jesus ~ Book 4: Folk Hero

Other Books by this Author

Historical Novels

Ongoing Series: *Intrepid Men of God*

Series of 8 Lyrical Novels: *They Met Jesus*

Series: *The Philosopher's Quest*

Series: *Mysteries of the Empire: Klaudius & Hektor*

Topical

Applied Christianity

Christianity or Islam? The Contrast

The Holy Spirit in 365 Scriptures

Inside the Hearts of Bible Women

Revelation: A Love Letter From God

Worship Changes Since the First Century

Worship the First-Century Way

Life-Changing Scriptures Day by Date

You Can Be A Hero Alone

Survey Series: Easy Bible Workbooks

Life of Christ, Acts of the Apostles, Letters of the Apostles-Pt I & II

Old Testament Survey, Questions You Have Asked-Part I & II

Genealogy: How to Climb Your Family Tree Without Falling Out

Volume I: Beginner-Intermediate

Volume II: Colonial-Medieval

Cover design by www.RoseannaWhiteDesigns.com

Shutterstock, LightStock, and iStockPhoto

Copyright © 2014 Katheryn Maddox Haddad

NORTHERN LIGHTS PUBLISHING HOUSE



ISBN-13: 978-1508579205

ISBN-10: 1508579202

All rights reserved, including the right to reproduce this book or portions thereof in any form. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored, transmitted, or distributed in any form or by any means without prior written permission from the author. The only exception is for a brief quotation in a printed review.

Printed in the United States

They Met Jesus ~ Book 4: Folk Hero

DEDICATED TO

Everyone Who Has Ever Doubted

INSERT YOURSELF INTO THE STORY

Although the events take place shortly before and during the first century AD, this story is written to help you in our modern world identify with the characters who lived then. While true to the life of Christ in every known aspect, conversations often take a modern flavor as though the characters were speaking today. After all, did they not speak what was “modern vocabulary” in their day, even in the Aramaic language?

You will see places in the story where you are invited to participate either as an encourager or discourager of a character, as though you were there with them. This is your chance to become their friend. You will easily spot those places in the story. Instead of wondering who is talking, remember, it is you.

A COMMENTARY IN NARRATIVE FORM



1 – PHARISEE SIMON *Pound of Flesh*

*S*in. How idiotic. Only losers use that word. Stand up for yourself. No one else will. Never admit anything. There are more than enough people out there bad-mouthing you. That word, sinner, will eat you alive.

Simon is one of the power heads of his sect, the Pharisees. It is no accident. He knows how to play the game. Since it is the popular thing to do around religious fanatics, Simon will say he is a sinner, but, for the life of him, he cannot figure out what those sins could possibly be. He has to say he sins to play the game. Part of the game is to offer sacrifices for sins.

Simon enjoys power. Power over people. Of course, power has three requirements—wealth, continual new rules to keep people jumping, and an organization to rule. Simon chooses religion to exercise his power.

The common person is completely powerless. It is people like them that make people like Simon possible. They give their tithes which gives Simon his wealth. And they cower when Simon tells them they are breaking one of his rules, one of his amendments to the Law of Moses, his creed.

Summer AD 28
Somewhere in Province of Galilee

“I’m glad you could make it, Zerach.” Simon dismisses his



servant with a wave of his long arm, and shows his old friend a seat on an elaborate chair. He gets right to the point.

“That Jesus is dangerous,” Simon says, his small head, short neck, and big ears turning red. He pounds on a table next to his chair.” He’s tearing down everything we have built up.” Simon is angry. “So what have you heard?” Zerach asks.

“I went to one of his speeches.”

“I, personally, haven’t heard him. But what you are saying is the same I’ve heard from everyone else I know who has,” Zerach replies. “We’ll have to think of some way to stop him.”

A servant walks in with a pitcher of water. Zerach had already kicked off the sandals from his feet and is ready for the servant.

“He says he didn’t come to destroy our religious laws, but that’s an outright lie,” says Simon, pulling at his black beard.

Efficiently and quickly the servant washes Zerach’s feet.

“So what can we do?” Zerach asks while enjoying the brief foot massage. “We need a plan.”

The servant leaves and Simon escorts his friend to some silk cushions by a window.

“He tells the people to keep the laws better than we, their leaders, do. He’s dangerous, Zerach.”

“We must make him look bad in front of people,” Zerach replies, looking out the window.

Three more servants walk in, one with a low table, a second with a tray holding a pitcher and two silver chalices, and a third with a tray of refreshments.

“He mocks us, you know. He says long prayers in public are hypocritical.”

Simon pushes some over-ripe figs to the edge of the table. “I’m sure you can do better than this,” he tells the third servant standing nearby.

At this, Simon rises and paces, his strong jaw clamped tight and gritting his teeth. He stops in front of his friend. “That Jesus will destroy our religion.” He paces again. He picks up a scripture scroll and shakes it at his friend. “He must be stopped! He must be.”

“How can people go after a fraud like that Jesus, anyway?” Zerach asks.

“He claims many religious leaders who have prophesied and done wonders in the name of God will be sent to hell. And do you know who's going to send them? Jesus,” Simon says, pacing again like a stalker. “He said he'd actually be the one to keep them out of the new kingdom of God. You know,” Simon adds, spinning around to face his guest, “he is talking about us.”

“He's hearing voices in his head of God telling him what to say and do,” Zerach replies. “Sounds like he is going mad and taking the people with him.”

“I have an idea,” Simon says, sitting back down on his plush cushion. His grin is wide, showing his sharp teeth. “How about dinner with that heretic?”

“Dinner?”

Simon smirks. “Yes. I'll invite him over, and we can ask him questions ourselves. I'll have a scribe here so we can catch him in his own words. He can't possibly answer without trapping himself.”

“Brilliant, Simon! When?”

“I'll see if he can come a week from today. At my house. I'll have about a dozen Pharisee leaders here, and you of course. We'll have plenty of witnesses.”

“Uh, do you think he'll come?”

“He's a fool. He goes everywhere he's invited. Such a fool.”

After one of his sermons, a small scroll is handed to Jesus by a courier.

Jesus opens and reads it.

The courier stands there waiting. Jesus pays him. Still he stands there.

“He wants a reply. Can you give me a reply?”

“What does it say?” Peter asks.

“A man named Simon has asked me to come over for dinner,” Jesus replies.

“You're not talking about Simon, one of the most influential Pharisees today, are you?” asks Judas.

“Well, that seems to be the case.”



“You're not going, are you?” asks Thomas.

“If I don't, I miss another opportunity to talk to an enemy of God and try to turn him into a friend.”

“It's no use. They won't turn. Not his kind. These Pharisees are so holier-than-thou you can't touch them. They're too good for everyone. They insist on being called by titles like most elevated righteous reverend or doctor so-and-so.” It's Philip.

John gets into the conversation. “They pray so long in synagogue, half the people fall asleep,” he snickers.

“You're not going, Jesus,” James replies.

“We're keeping the courier waiting. Of course, I'll go.” Jesus scribbles one word on the bottom of the scroll and gives it back.

The courier leaves. But Jesus' friends reprimand him still.

“How could you crawl into the mouth of the lion like that?” John says. “You've already told those self-righteous Pharisees they're all going to hell. There could be no good reason for them inviting you for dinner.”

It's just a trap. Do you hear that, Jesus? A trap.



“Hi, Eliana.” Samuel is outside washing his employer's personal mule. It is a sleek black, not white like what kings' families ride. Not real opulent or anything. That would mess up Simon's political and religious image as a representative of the common man, not the rich. But it should be kept clean.

Samuel may be just a servant, but it does not mean he isn't keenly aware of what his employer is up to. The common people, for the most part, don't know where his employer lives, so his grand house and the number of servants he has around isn't general knowledge. Samuel and the other servants are always cautioned about mentioning who they work for when they are out at the market, at the synagogue with their friends, or any other public place.

“Hey, what's happening, Eliana?” Samuel asks, throwing his brush down in the pail of water.



They Met Jesus ~ Book 4: Folk Hero

“Oh, I just stopped by to say hello to Simon. I have a wineskin of his favorite.”

“Oh, you do, do you? And what else do you have for him?”

She smiles coyly, then walks in Simon’s front gate without knocking.

“Hello, Eliana. Haven't seen you in a couple days. Simon is in his study.”

“Thanks, Betzalel,” she replies, heading across the courtyard.

She turns around and walks backward a moment. “When's your day off, Betzalel?”

“Why?”

“Oh, just wondered.” She grins, then turns back around and bumps right into Simon.

“Eliana, haven't I told you before not to use the front gate? You must be more discrete.”

“You're just afraid to be seen with the likes of me,” she responds slyly as he escorts her to the stairway. “How many years have I been coming to see you? Your little secret is still safe.”

She looks over her shoulder at Betzalel. “Your servants certainly are not going to say anything. They like the pay you give them.”

“I'm having a dinner tomorrow, so I want you to stay away,” Simon growls.

“Oh, and who is the special guest?”

“Jesus.”

She is taken aback. “I thought the priests and Pharisees like you didn't like that Jesus any more than he likes you.”

“He's from Satan,” Simon barks. “Pure and simple. And I'm going to prove it.”

“Has he accepted your invitation?” Eliana asks.

“That man is an idiot. Of course, he has,” Simon grunts. “He's walking right into my lair. We're going to catch him in his own words tomorrow.”

Eliana grins mischievously. “You are a devil, my dear Simon,” she teases. “Then next week at synagogue, you're going to....”



“I'm going to stand in front of the congregation and expose him for what he is. We're losing too many members. He's got to be stopped.”

In a little while, Eliana leaves out a back gate. She thinks about this Jesus. He will actually be at Simon's house tomorrow. Wow! The man who everyone has been talking about lately? She is amazed. She knows he has been tearing down the established religious traditions, the amendments, as they have been for hundreds of years. *He is actually going up against powerful men like Simon.*

On her way home, Eliana stops to see her grandfather.

“I'm so glad you stopped by, Eliana.”

“Hi, Grandfather.”

“Are you okay? How is your health, Eliana?”

“I'm just fine, Grandfather.”

“I've been thinking. I am rattling around in this big house all alone. Why don't you come live with me?”

“I've already got a place to live,” Eliana replies. “It's a nice place. I've told you that before.”

“Well, if you ever change your mind, you would make a lonely old man happy. Now, my cook has prepared some honey cakes. Would you like one?”

“Well, not this time. I have to watch my fig... my weight.”

“I understand, sweetheart. Is there anything you need?”

“I'm fine. I just came by for a hug from my grandfather.”

He embraces her.

“Well, I've got to be going. See you next time, Grandfather.”

“Eliana, before you leave, I heard a sermon recently by Jesus you should have heard.”

“Religion? That's not for me. Maybe you, but not me.”

“I wrote some notes when I got home. Please, Eliana, take and read them. It's just a few sentences. Please humor an old man and take it home with you. It's just a little scroll. Please.”

“That arrogant hypocrite? No way,” she replies, shaking her head.

“Who told you he is arrogant?”

She cannot say, of course, since it was Pharisee Simon. She shrugs.

“Can I bribe you with anything?” her grandfather asks with a grin. “How about coming over for dinner one night? No? Well, how about....”

“Okay, Grandfather. I'll read it, but just because it is you. I wouldn't do it for anyone else.”

They both smile, she takes the small scroll, they hug goodbye, and she leaves.

Once home, Eliana has a bite to eat, then nestles down on her bed, sitting cross-legged, and reaches for the scroll. “Okay, Grandfather, this is for you.” She opens the shutter for more light. The scroll has eight sentences arranged like a list.

You're happy if you recognize how spiritually poor your life is and that you're a sinner.

I know I sin, and Simon doesn't allow me to be seen at synagogue because of it. What a double standard he has. He gets by with it. But how could admitting my sins make me happy? That just makes me a loser.

She reads on.

You are happy if you grieve over your sins, because then God can comfort you and forgive you.

She lays the scroll aside and thinks.

God couldn't possibly forgive my sins. I've really made a mess of my life. People use me, but they don't like me They exploit me, but they don't want to be seen in public with me. People prefer my company only in private. I am their loathsome secret. Always good for a drink, a laugh, whatever they want. In private. Could God ever forgive all that? The people couldn't. They'd never let me forget what I have become.

Tears come to her eyes. Gentle tears. Tears that are always on the brink of appearing. Controlled tears that she carries with her everywhere. Moments later she lifts the scroll back off her lap.

If you are gentle, moderate and temperate, the whole world can be

yours.

Why temperate? Because I'll be satisfied with less? Because I won't be willing to pay any price to get attention and beautiful clothes and expensive perfume?

She looks around at her home, so lavish and extravagant. Everything she ever wanted. But it has cost her soul. Deep down she knows that.

If you hunger and thirst for what is right, you'll find it and be filled with it.

Eliana goes right to the next point written by her grandfather.

Since God has shown you mercy and you've eliminated your sinful habits, you will in turn be merciful to others, you'll be pure in heart, and you will help make peace between God and others.

Once again, she puts down the scroll.

Do I dare hope? Did Jesus actually say I can turn my life around and God will help me so I, in turn, can help others? I know a lot of people who've messed up their lives like me. Could I help them? I'd know what life is like for them right now, and what it could be.

Faces of her friends slowly move across her mind. Would they laugh at her instead? Jesus' next statement tells her exactly that.

If you are persecuted by these people you try to help, it means you're getting to them. God will bless you for trying, despite their derision. God will count you a citizen of his heavenly kingdom.

Eliana looks around her at one elaborate object after another. Slowly. Her beautiful things. Her hollow, hollow things. She knows that, if she tries to turn her life around, she will no longer have a nice place to live. *I'll have to get a legitimate job at minimum pay. Some of my friends will turn against me. Could I do it?*

Tears. She looks toward the ceiling. Then over to the window. Then the floor. She feels drawn. She stares still at the floor. She feels a divine presence with her. How do you react to a divine presence when you're such a sinner?

Slowly she slides down off her bed. She is on her knees. On the floor. And for the first time since she was a child, Eliana

prays.

“Oh God. I want to do better. But I'm afraid. I'm afraid my friends will turn against me. I'm afraid the good people will not trust me. Then I won't have any friends at all. Oh, God, help me.”

She remains where she is in silence. After a while, she tries to compose herself. She tries to feel she has perhaps come to a landmark in her life. She tries to feel that she can, indeed, rise out of what she has become.

She stands and returns to her plush cushion where she looks at the scroll again. Jesus says she'll be happy. How? “Oh, God, show me how.”

Trying to bring herself back into the real world, she walks outside. It is now a balmy early evening. Three men pass, and she hears one of them say that they are going to a dinner the next day where Jesus will be attending.

That's what Simon was up to yesterday I'll bet. I wouldn't put it past him. He's going to fatten Jesus up for the kill.

The moon sadly rolls across the sky behind her house. The heavens weep and crystal tear drops appear on the window sill.

Eliana has a fitful night of sleep. She dreams she meets Jesus in a desert and everyone is laughing. Laughing at her. Laughing at Jesus. But a cloud comes down. The laughter disappears, and suddenly there is singing. She cannot see the crowd anymore. She cannot tell who is singing either. She searches and searches. Then she realizes it is almost morning, and she hears birds outside her window.

In the pre-dawn sweetness, Eliana lies still upon her bed. Shortly the sun that is hidden behind the horizon, swells, rises, and touches the tip of the hills. The sun is up.

She rises and walks around her home, occasionally looking out her window down at the people walking through the street below. She dresses and sprinkles her wrists with some perfume. As she does, she remembers Jesus. When was the last time he enjoyed a simple pleasure like a spicy ointment for his dry skin?

She looks in her special chest, the one inlaid with rubies. She has an alabaster jar of perfumed ointment which she bought for Simon's birthday. She takes it out and stares at it a moment.

She knows what she will do.

It is noon. Simon is standing in his courtyard greeting guests.

“Hello there, Zerach. Glad you could make it.”

“I wouldn't miss this for the world,” he replies.

Simon takes his friend's robe, handing it on to a servant, gives him a kiss on each cheek, and directs him to a side room where guests are pampered as they await the meal.

Servants are stationed in the room to wash each guest's feet, and massage fragrant oil on their hair usually dried out by the sun and wind. As each guest completes his usual period of refreshing, he is escorted to another room where refreshing pomegranate juice is being served until all the guests arrive.

“Well, hello there, Nechemia. Glad you could make it.”

Simon takes yet another friend's robe, gives him the kiss on each cheek, and directs him to the side room for refreshing.

“Afterward,” he calls back to Nechemia, “you will enjoy the pomegranate juice freshly prepared.”

Guests gradually arrive.

Then Jesus. Jesus the enemy. If he thinks he is going to get the royal treatment, he is wrong. As Jesus walks through the front gate, Simon makes a point to turn his back and walk into the guest room to his awaiting friends.

“Am I at the right house?” Jesus asks. “Is this Simon's house?”

“Yes, sir.”

But the servant, catching Simon's scowl at the guestroom doorway, walks away and leaves Jesus standing there. Alone. No greeting kiss. Jesus looks around, wondering what to do next. He takes off his robe and places it over his arm. He stands in the courtyard awhile, but no one is there.

He hears low talk nearby. In the guest room. Then a butler enters the guest room and ushers the group of men to the dining area.

•

Jesus follows along behind them. Each is shown his place at the table. Each is given some pillows of velvet on which to recline at the grand ivory-inlaid table. Still on his own, Jesus decides to look around for himself. At the end of the table away from the host, he sees an empty place. He decides that is where he belongs. At the end of the table. Away from the host. Away from all the important people. Away from the respectable religious leaders. Simon has sunk his claws into Jesus.

Perhaps Jesus should just leave. This is such a farce. Simon has no good intentions inviting Jesus to eat with him. That is obvious. Jesus could slip out right now while he has any semblance of dignity left. No one would miss him.

He does not. Jesus stays for the slaughter. The butlers go from place to place giving each guest a napkin and pouring new wine in their goblet. Everyone but Jesus. He is given no napkin. He is given no wine.

“Oh God!” Jesus hears. “We give our bounteous thanks for this food you have given us by your own hand. We bless you for your abundance and grace. May you bless us so we can live long and fruitful lives in your service. Amen.”

Amens are echoed around the room by the self-righteous. Jesus, too, says amen.

Eating commences. Conversations emerge. Small talk.

“Ovadia, I understand you just bought some acreage outside of town. Is it very far out?”

“Oh, not too far. I am planning to plant an orchard there,” Ovadia replies.

“Shimshon, I heard you made a trip to Syria recently.”

“Yes, I have an investment there. It is working out well.”

“Tzvi, you’re still limping I see. What did the physician say about your broken leg?”

“Apparently, I’ll always have this limp. I’m having a new cane made. Chose ebony for it.”

“Chaim, have you heard any more about building a new synagogue over in Jericho?”

“We are half way to our goal. When we get it built, we will have the finest anywhere in the world.”

They Met Jesus ~ Book 4: Folk Hero

Everyone talking with mutual friends. With everyone but Jesus. Jesus is not included in the conversations. No one even looks at him. No one is interested in him. Actually, it is growing apparent that no one even likes Jesus.

But Jesus had known this before he had come. He came anyway. Even if they won't talk to him, he can talk to them. Jesus, you're so brave. But, Jesus, why bother? It's obvious they don't like you.

On and on they talk.

"Tzvi, how is your wife? I heard she has been sick for a while."

"She is doing much better now, thank you."

"Ovadia, your son is about ready to graduate from scribe's school. Does he have a job lined up yet?"

"Yes, he's going to go to work for his teacher."

"Shimshon, how's that new house coming along?"

"We got the roof on last week. We're bringing in tile artists to make a mosaic on the foyer floor."

Jesus listens, but does not try to enter into their conversations. He will, when invited. He will know when the time is right.

The dining hall door between the guests and the kitchen is pushed open over and over as food is brought in. Jesus is given a plate too. The meat is overcooked, the parsley has brown spots on it, and the bread is hard. Jesus silently eats it.

So far Jesus has not said anything. He is not taking the bait. Someone needs to come up with something shrewd to ask him. But, perhaps a little more of their treatment, the shunning.

Someone appears in the doorway between the courtyard and dining hall. Of course, no one has stopped her. They are used to seeing Eliana around the house. She walks in slowly, looking around. Everyone is busy talking. Everyone but Jesus. She hopes she will be able to recognize him. She does.

No one seems to realize she is in the room. Eliana is relieved.

But after a few moments, she comprehends what they are doing to Jesus. How well she understands being an outcast. She



walks over to him. He does not look up. She sees he has placed his robe on a bench behind him. She also sees he has no napkin. She walks to another room and gets two for him. Returning, she places one napkin by his hand and one by his plate. Then she stoops so that she is eye level with him.

“Is there anything else you need?” she asks. Jesus looks up at her briefly, but says nothing.

She moves back near his feet and kneels on the floor. She looks at his feet left dirty by a hateful host. How her heart aches for the way Jesus is being treated. Somehow it reminds her of the way she is treated. Tears well up and fall baffled and confused onto his feet. More and more, the way that she has been treated all these years rushes to the surface and drowns in her tears. Heavier they flow. The drops make marks on his feet.

Embarrassed, she takes her long black hair and wipes away the tears, and along with it the dust. She looks back up at Jesus.

“You do not deserve treatment like this. I do. I am the one who deserves all the snubs. I am so worthless. I am so sorry,” she whispers.

She does not know what words she is supposed to say—the correct words. Eliana is trying to repent. To give up her past. Her whole being is trying to turn around and straighten itself out. In the process, her heart is breaking.

Jesus smiles at her. She sees sympathy in his eyes.

Eliana pulls out the imported alabaster jar from its silk pouch and sets it on the floor next to Jesus. The very expensive imported one. Fit for a king. Jesus watches her in silence.

“I don't know what else to give you,” she whispers. Quietly she pours some of the perfumed oil out onto her hands and rubs them onto Jesus' tired feet.

“Your sins are forgiven,” he whispers.

“What?”

Eliana looks up at him, her brow furrowed, a mist forming once again in her dark eyes.

“Did you say forgiven? Just like that?” she asks. A whole lifetime in a moment? Forgiven? Gone? Never to be remembered

again?

Sensing the aroma of the rare perfume, one of the men dares glance in Jesus' direction. "Hey, look. What's Jesus doing with that woman?" he growls.

A few near him turn in Jesus' direction at the end of the table and stare. Others notice and they, too, stop their chatter and stare. A din of complaining rises and falls. What in the world is Jesus doing talking to that kind of woman?

Not yet ready to break the silent treatment everyone is giving Jesus, Simon mumbles to himself and whoever is nearby. "If he really was a prophet, he'd know what kind of woman this is. He's even letting her touch him," he grunts. "She's devoted her life to sin. Jesus is really showing the kind of man he is."

Oh yes, Simon, do your thing. Righteous indignation. That will take the pressure off you and onto someone else. Attack someone else to avoid the attack onto yourself. Good thinking.

Jesus hears what Simon is muttering way up at the head of the table. The head where the superior people sit. The head where the more holy people sit. Jesus, at long last, breaks the silence himself.

"Simon!" he calls out. Simon pretends not to hear and takes another bite of cheese.

"Simon, I have a riddle for you," Jesus repeats.

Everyone looks either at Jesus or Simon. The showdown. Is Simon's scribe ready with his quill and scroll to take down Jesus' self-incriminating words before these witnesses? Here it comes.

"Sure, speak up," Simon replies at last, although he is skeptical of what kind of riddle it will be.

All his guests stop speaking and stare at Jesus. Will this be his downfall? Simon is still in control and is sure Jesus cannot win.

"Two men are in debt to a money-lender," Jesus begins. "One owes his lender five hundred denari, and the other fifty. Neither can pay him back. But, out of his generosity, he cancels both debts. Which of them appreciates him more?"

Uh-oh. Simon is not baiting Jesus. Jesus is baiting Simon.

•

What is he going to answer?

“Anyone can answer that one,” Simon answers. “I suppose the one who owes the most.”

Simon hates to admit it. But he must say something. That is the only logical reply. Maybe it wasn't such a good idea inviting this Jesus to the dinner after all.

“That's it,” Jesus replies. “You've solved the riddle.”

Jesus turns toward Eliana, still kneeling by his feet. Tears streaming from her mascara and staining her cheeks. He turns back to Simon.

“You see this woman?” Jesus asks.

She slowly rises and faces her benefactor, Simon. All eyes in the room are on her.

Simon grows red with anger and glares at her.

“You see this woman, don't you?” Jesus repeats.

Who could help but see her? Everyone is aware who she is.

“When I entered your home, you did not wash my feet, but she has washed them with her tears and wiped them dry with her hair. You did not give me the kiss on the cheeks, but she kissed my feet. You did not have anyone put your oil on my hair, but she has put expensive perfumed oil on my feet.”

My birthday perfume? She said she was going to give me perfume for my birthday. Instead, she's gone and wasted it on this heretic, this Zealot? Is Eliana out of her mind? She's going to pay. Simon is fuming and alternately glares at Eliana and Jesus.

“So, I'm telling you right now, that her sins—and there are many of them in her life—are forgiven. For she has greatly loved.”

“Love?” Simon says, his eyes now slits as he glares at her. “What does she know about love? She uses men. She gets jewelry and clothes and expensive perfumes. Everyone knows that. This woman is nothing but a tramp. This woman could never know about love. How did she get in here anyway? Servants! Get her out of my house.”

Instead, Jesus turns to her. In a voice loud enough for everyone in the room to hear, he tells her, “Your sins are forgiven.”

Amidst Eliana's sobs, she laughs, then sobs again, her



hands up to her face and her head bowed low.

The men in the room look at the woman, then at each other. Will their secret be exposed? How much does Jesus know? She knows them all by name. How much will she tell? Jesus is ruining everything. Something must be done about this woman lest they be taken away from their position of respect in the temple.

Time for another offensive play. It had better be good. It isn't.

“Just who is this, this man?” they demand.

“Who does he think he is to even forgive sins?”

“That's hypocrisy. That's blasphemy pure and simple.”

“He's acting like he's holy or something.”

“He's a fool if he thinks we believe anything he says.”

The men at the table refuse to look at Eliana any longer—to look at their own guilt. All but Jesus.

Jesus stands, helps her up, and looks in her eyes and into her soul. “Your faith has saved you,” he says gently. “Go, now, in peace.”

Go in peace? Complete release of her life as it has been up until now? She feels herself returning to the decent person she used to be. Her former self that had become vague and distant. She feels herself taking a new breath, as though born again. A breath into a new world. A world of the really and truly living.

“Thank you, Jesus. I believe you really can forgive me,” she whispers. “I believe you really are from God.”

Eliana hasn't even asked for a miracle. Funny, no favors has she asked for. She hasn't asked that Jesus help her find a new job, someplace else to live, or anything. Just forgiveness. Just a new life. That is all.

She rushes from the room and leaves the house through the front gate. But she turns around and comes back in. She heads for the kitchen.

“He forgave me,” she tells her friends. “This is the last time you're going to see me here.”

“Where are you going, Eliana?”

“I don't know yet. Maybe home to my parents. I'm going to make up with them. Maybe they'll let me stay there until I can

learn a trade and get a decent job.”

“I've got an extra tunic. My mother made me a new one,” one of the maids tells her

Already reaching out to Eliana. Already trying to help her stay on the straight and narrow.

“Here are ten denari. That's all I can give you right now,” says a butler.

Someone else reaches into his money pouch and hands her some copper coins. “It's not much. But maybe it'll help until you get on your feet.”

“What happened, anyway? Why all this changing?”

“Jesus. That's what happened. He's here right now.”

Silence.

One of the maids speaks up with a wide grin. “You didn't!”

“I did. I interrupted his holy highness's fancy dinner.”

“What did Simon say?” asks one of the servants.

“Nothing. He had to pretend he didn't know me. But how could I find my way through the house unless I've been here before? Everyone knew that.”

“So, what did Jesus say? You did talk to him, didn't you?”

“Yes, I talked to him. He understood what I wanted, well, what I needed. He knew, without my even telling him, that, well, I have been living a rather bad life.”

Eliana is quiet a moment. Her tears return. “Do you know what he said to me? This man who is so good?”

“No, Eliana, please tell us,” someone replies gently.

Her tears grow. “He...” she has trouble saying it. “He said...” More tears. She puts her hands back up to her face and weeps. Her friends wait patiently.

“That's okay. Take your time,” one of them reassures.

“Jesus said 'I...’”

She sobs. But between the sobs, she blurts it out.

“He said... 'I forgive you.' He...he forgave me.”

One of the maids walks closer and puts an arm around her. “Oh, Eliana. Life has been so hard for you.”

Eliana wipes her tears with a dirty napkin taken from a nearby counter. “I feel reborn,” she says between tears and

They Met Jesus ~ Book 4: Folk Hero

laughter. "I feel like I can really start over."

"That'll be the day," someone says from the back of the kitchen. "You could never change."

"Now quit talking like that and just mind your own business, Dov," the maid says turning toward the skeptical stable boy. "She's going to try. That's all anyone can do. Just try."

"I'm not only going to try," Eliana adds, now a little more in control. "I'm going to make it. I'm going to admit what I've been thus far, then I'm going to tell others what Jesus did for me. If Jesus can forgive me, he can forgive anyone."

Most in the room smile, but some stand back and roll their eyes heavenward in disgust. "Oh, brother! Another one of those fanatics "

Eliana walks out of Simon's house for the last time. Forgiven. Fresh. New, Feasting on the bread of life.

Simon stays behind. In denial. Stale. Rotting. Starved.

LIFE APPLICATION

1. Most people can think of a few sins like murder and prostitution and grand theft. But there are many sins of attitude that we all have that can cause us to be left out of heaven where Perfection lives. Romans 1:29-31 in the Bible lists both murder and God hating as sins. But right along with them, it also lists envy, deceit, gossip slander, arrogance, and boastfulness as some of the other sins. We are all guilty of these things. Would you say that we deserve to be in heaven with Perfection—God? How does this new knowledge make you feel?

2. In most, if not all, people's lives, there is something they have done that they either hope no one will ever find out about, or they hope everyone will forget. Think about what it is in your own life. Would you say that you deserved to be in heaven with Perfection? How does it make you feel?

3. Romans 3:23 says that everyone in the world has sinned; and Romans 6:23 says the wages of sin is death - spiritual death. Death is defined as separation. So, if we're spiritually dead, we are separated from God. Yet, God gives a remedy.

Romans 6:3-5 says that “all of us [that includes the Apostle Paul] who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead...we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.” Are you willing to be united with Christ in this way?

CITATIONS IN THIS CHAPTER (In Order of Appearance)

•

NEW TESTAMEN OF THE BIBLE: Matthew 5:17-20; Matthew 6:5, 7; Matthew 7:21-23; Matthew 23:2-9; Luke 7:36; Matthew 5:3-12; Luke 7:36; Luke 7:37-50

OLD TESTAMENT OF THE BIBLE: Judges 5:10; Judges 10:3-4; I Kings 1:33-34

FLAVIUS JOSEPHUS, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Bk. 8, 10:6

RABBI SOLOMON GANZFRIED, *Code of Jewish Law*, Vol. II, Pg. 6-7

**REFERENCES TO OTHER BOOKS IN THIS SERIES
made in this chapter in order of appearance**

Book 4, *Folk Hero*, “Cosmic Chaos “

~~~~~`