

CHAPTER 14 (II ROMANS)

"You are Jesus' son. What do you expect?" said Tommy. "You are the embodiment of every argument that there is on earth about the existence of God, Allah, and the Devil. It is quite comforting and quite disconcerting at the same time."

"He's right, you know," said Abdul. "Every day I pick up the newspaper and man has made a new discovery in science. They are trying to decipher the very code of human existence and the beginning of the universe and here you sit, total evidence that their efforts are fruitless. Man was created by God. Since this is so, why should we not spend our lives in total praise to our Creator? Doesn't your existence make everything else useless?"

"You are a Prince of the Creator. What would you expect?" Asked Katy.

"Is this the reason for your change in attitude for me, Katy?" asked James. It had finally happened. They were all sitting at the dinner table getting ready to go their separate ways and begin the work of the foundation in other countries, when Lu Chan had requested not to go, but to stay at his side. James knew this moment would come, had wondered when they would be able to ask. He had waited twelve years for some of their questions and was not surprised when they began. He was just surprised it had taken so long.

"What attitude change, James?" shot back Katy.

"Well, ever since we arrived here from the Middle East, you have seemed different. Reserved. I had found comfort in your arms. I know you have good feelings for me, but you seem reluctant to spend any time alone with me as you had in the past."

"And is that why you asked me to come? To provide comfort?" Katy asked heatedly. "If that is all you need; I have a fee structure available."

"No, that's not why you were brought here or what I needed. I'm sorry I offended you." James said hurriedly. "But I have noticed your reserve and I miss your close friendship. It seems that we have this wall built between us ever since the baptism."

"What would you expect of her?" Chimed in Pierre. "She loves a man to find him a God. It would unnerve me. James, it seems in all your travels to learn about men, you still know nothing. Yet your Father created man. How can this be?"

"What do you expect of us, James?" Ahmed asked. "We have followed you because of who you are, but also because you have become a dear friend. We stand confused. You ask us to treat you as a man, but we know you to be the Son of God. Do you even realize your significance?"

"You ask us to treat you as a commoner," Tommy said. "That is like asking us to ignore the fact that Prince Charles is the future king of England and go mucking about in the Thames with him for fish. At some point it just can't be done. At some point, he is the future King."

"I agree," said James. "But the question is, 'What do you want of me?'"

"What do you mean?" asked Mobutu.

"I have heard your whispers for years. And I know you have questions you have wished to ask, but you have never asked them. Do you fear me or the answers? Would it not be easy to answer your own question about what, if anything, I want from you, if I answered the questions you have of me? Do you not truly wish to know why my Father put me here? Would that answer explain your questions? If so, then why not ask it?"

"Because we have been taught never to question the word of God or His ways," said Katy. "And who taught you that?" asked James.

"The Bible and our religious leaders," said Lu Chan.

"And has man done this? Have you done this?" asked James.

"No," said Katy.

They all turned to look at her.

"No we haven't. Look at us, we are questioning Him right now," said Katy. There was a pause as all at the kitchen table considered her response.

"Then what do you expect to happen?" Asked James, looking directly at Katy. "I... I don't know," she finally said.

"Nothing." Said James. "Nothing will happen. Man questions God every day. In all his work, man questions God. He researches genes, DNA, and the atom. He tries to predict the weather and preaches about what God wants and will permit to be done. Each and every one of those acts from the scientist to the preacher questions God. And nothing happens. Oh, man gains a little more knowledge. He understands a little more about this world God created. But God does nothing to him for asking the question. In fact, on numerous occasions, He gives an answer. So you may obviously question God and question me."

They sat transfixed. They thought they had known James and had even tried to protect him from some of the more despicable characters of his travels, but he had known. He had known and had only been waiting for them to ask the questions, they had been afraid to ask all these years.

"Why are you here, James?" asked Pierre. "I know that you have said it is because your Father loved this world and that He desired a son. But is there more? Are we to be the disciples of a future generation?"

"Is that what you wish, Pierre? To be a disciple teaching the people my Fathers and My teachings? To be remembered for two thousand years as the man who sat next to God?"

"I could think of worse fates. But it is not my desire for immortality that makes me ask, James. It is fear. Fear that I cannot live up to the expectations of such a task. Those men were such...."

"Men, Pierre, men. Those men did their best, as you would if called upon. But it is not your place to worry about such matters. You weren't 'chosen' as they were. If you recall, you found me cold and hungry on a boat dock. You believed in me and took me in. I was born on this planet

because my Father and His Father so love this world, and my Father wished to have a son that He could not have when He strode this planet as a man. There is no Second Coming, and I was not sent here to save mankind again. I was sent here out of love, and I was sent here to live as a man."

"Amen," said a soft voice from the kitchen door. "Mom," said Katy to Cindy. "I didn't hear you come in."

"I just brought over some cookies for ya'll to eat. I don't mean to be interrupting," said Cindy.

"Mom, you've known Jesus and I don't mean to be arguing with James," Katy began, "But is what he says true? Can we humans, with all our faults, be that special to God and Jesus?"

"A wise woman once said, 'Why can we always believe the worst of ourselves and never the best?'" Said Cindy.

"Aunt Jenny said that." Mobutu smiled.

"That's right. And she was right." Cindy said. "I will tell you darlin'. I will tell all of you that James is here because He loves us. Jesus truly loves us and He wanted a Son. There is no other purpose, and I find that idea immensely reassuring."

"You know, mom, that gives me a great amount of satisfaction too," said Pierre.

They were all smiling at one another when Katy giggled out, "Yes, I'd say a big warm fuzzy feeling!"

They all laughed and reached out to grab the still-warm cookies placed on the table. Lu Chan had risen to get some milk from the refrigerator and Katy had gone to the cabinet to gather some glasses.

Lu Chan spoke again. "Then you are nothing more at this point than a man? I mean, you have said you are, I know, but you can't drop us dead with thunderbolts or send your angels to seek your revenge. What happens after you die? Will you die?"

They all looked to James again as he spoke. "At my baptism, I was given limited powers to heal. I have always been able to speak to Jesus as you have, I just hear his reply's better. I am aware of future things to come as my Father lets me know them. Will I die? Yes. What will happen after I die? I don't really know, but I expect to be reunited with all my friends and loved ones, including Aunt Jenny." James' eyes twinkled.

"Is there a heaven, a hell." asked Tommy

"Yes." Said James. "But how do I describe it? My Father attempted with much less learned men than you and the best He could come up with is using anecdotes. He described a palace with many rooms, a New Kingdom. But, these are just pale examples of what awaits us all. They were descriptions that these men and women could relate to. How do you describe a soul, an entity that has no substance, no form? What would he need with a room or palace?"

"What are you saying then? No palace, no streets of gold, no rooms, a vague emptiness?" interrupted Tommy.

"Palace, rooms, Gods, Lords. These are all human terms, Tommy. Usually used to put a position or rank upon a man. To show his significance above all others. These are not God's terms. Jesus used these terms to describe to an uneducated mass the great and good things that await them when they die, to assure them that their lives on earth were not worthless and that they faced a better future after death. My Father used these terms because they were the common terms used by common men at the time. They were the only words He felt He could use to convey His message. Heaven is so much grander than this, so much greater. But believe me when I tell you that no amount of abstract thinking on men's part could come close to describing the wonder that awaits you."

"Then you're saying you won't be able to describe it to us because men and women lack the capability to understand?" asked Tommy.

"Exactly," said James.

"How do you know so much about it, then?" asked Lu Chan. "If it cannot be described, how do you know?"

"Because my Father let me know. I don't know how He did it but He did and probably for the same reason He told those people two thousand years ago about it in the first place." Said James. "What is hell, then?" asked Mobutu, quietly and somberly. "Are we to be judged in the next life?"

"The best answer I can give is that hell is the absence of Heaven, and your soul can go there. Will you be judged? Yes, but by your own choosing. No hell is permanent unless you wish it." Said James.

"You seem so cryptic about it. Why?" asked Katy.

"Because I know it also and it makes me grieve heavily for those souls living there. I wish to rescue them all, but the judgement is theirs and I cannot."

"You mention choosing again and again. Why is that so important?" asked Mobutu.

James smiled. "Because that is God's greatest gift to man. Free will, the ability to choose. That is what makes man and women so interesting, so loved. It is what brings out the Godliness in humankind."

"You mean we have a choice to believe or not believe, to change our minds, do as we wish. It is not destiny or fate that guides us. It is a culmination of all of our choices over time?" asked Pierre.

"Yes, and one of the reasons I expect to see you all in heaven when we die our natural deaths. You have chosen to believe in heaven and me and my Father. You will not judge yourselves out of His Love."

"If it is so wonderful in Heaven, why do we not choose to go there now? Commit suicide, join our Father?" Asked Ahmed.

"Once again, it is free choice. As long as they feel alive, humans wish to remain alive. Haven't you heard about how depressed suicide or suicide attempts are? Their choice is to die because they have no free will to live. The perfect remedy for a person with that affliction is to give

them anything, any small thing to hope for, and they will choose to live. You don't die because you choose to live. Your soul will not allow you to die as long as it chooses to live."

"Even for the benefits of Heaven?" asked Ahmed.

"Even for the benefits of Heaven." replied James. "Remember, Ahmed, life is not a contest, and Heaven is not a prize or a reward. Your soul knows this even if your conscious does not. Your soul is happy to be here as it will be to be in Heaven and it and you choose to be here, so you will."

"Then is religion necessary? Do we need to praise God on a weekly or daily basis? Is there a true church?" Asked Tommy.

"A true church? Hmmm. Religion? I would say that any religion that honors God, no matter what they call Him, would be in your terms a true Church. Is religion necessary? Considering the benefits of churches, they would be missed. But praising the Lord? Why would you not? It isn't that God needs your praise, but wouldn't you wish to honor your creator, your Father? You honor football heroes every Sunday by watching them on the TV and buying products they endorse. Why wouldn't you wish to honor Him?"

"Can you have children?" asked Katy. The men in the room smirked.

"He said we could ask," said Katy defensively. "Answer the question James."

James looked at his mother and saw tears well up in her eyes.

"No, Katy, I cannot have children at this time. That is one of the unique drawbacks to being related to Jesus. Could you imagine having two, three, or four little James' around all related to God? Even I can see the problems with that."

"I'm sorry I hurt you. I didn't mean to," said Katy, rushing to Cindy's side.

"That's all right dear. I still got two other children to give me grandbabies. It is enough that I bore James," said Cindy.

"Is that the wall that is between us, Katy?" James asked. "Were you worried to love me as a man when you found out I was related to God? Did you think you would be responsible for the raising of more Gods?"

"That, and other doubts. I mean, your mother had Jesus' child. I will forever honor her for that. What a burden she bore. And your Dad. To be the two humans charged with the raising of Jesus' Son. How could I hope to measure up to those standards? These are truly amazing people and yet she sits here with us night after night. She brings us cookies and wonderful dinners. She serves us when we should be serving her. And your Dad takes us wherever we wish to go, never asking for a penny for his services. He wouldn't even let me take in the groceries from the car, groceries that your mother cooked and served to us. James, they're too human to be great, but too great to be human. I know they are not Gods, but that you will be. And James, just considering my past, I just don't feel worthy to be here, in her presence, being served by her." Katy was fairly sobbing now.

Cindy rose and went to the corner of the kitchen Katy had retreated to and put her arm around her.

"I know of your past, chile." Cindy said quietly.

Katy looked up horrified, into the quiet eyes of Cindy.

"No, chile, it does not bother me," Cindy said. "And I have learned that God does not give us burdens that we cannot bear. I know you to be of a good heart and I know you were there to rescue James when he faltered. Better yet, even Jesus and God know that. And chile, you did that without even knowing who he was, you did that because you cared for him. As for being worthy, well Aunt Jenny knew more about that than we ever will know. I just know James wants you here, I and Dad want you here, and so do the boys. Judy especially wants you. In my book that makes you good enough and worthy enough. So sit down and have another drink of milk and some more cookies. You are welcome here."

Katy looked at Cindy, then James as she sat down. "Is that true, James? Do you want me here? I mean, I know you asked me to come. But...."

"I want you here, Katy. I shall be on this earth for many years, if God will have it so. And as every man has found out in his labors here on earth, the best part of life is sharing it with someone you care for deeply. I care deeply for you, and I want you here to share my life with me."

"You know," said Katy, reaching across the table and taking James' hand, "with any other man I would call that a proposal of marriage."

"And so it is with me." James grinned.

Cindy gasped and the boys hooted. Katy squealed.

"What's your answer?" James said, suddenly a little panicked since there was no response.

"Yes," said Katy. "Yes. Yes. Yes."

It was Cindy who then fell down in a chair and drank a glass of milk.

"A marriage. Really? I'm sure this has never happened before," said Maggie excitedly. "I mean, I don't remember Jesus ever marrying that woman. And we're invited." She turned to John. "You actually get to do the ceremony? Does Jesus know? Of course He knows. Well, a crock-pot is definitely out. What will I wear?"

John suddenly realized he was really not part of Maggie's conversation. She was on a roll. Katy had become a fast friend ever since their meeting in Jerusalem, and this wedding was going to be special for both of them. Suddenly the phone rang. Maggie picked it up, said hello, then squealed.

"Yes, he told me. No... When? And she didn't mind? What?" another squeal. "Yes. Yes. Yes, I'll see you shortly." she hung up. "Isn't that great, John? She called me first and asked me to be the maid of honor. Of course I said yes. I've got to go. We're meeting at the mall; she's giving me all the details." With that, Maggie left the room. John stood by the door, wondering what had just happened.