

*Searching for  
the Messiah*

*By Grace Dvorachek*

*“And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.”*

*—Matthew 11:6*

**“H***E’S* in ‘ere,” The burly prison guard said, inserting a key into a large, rusty lock.

I heard a click, and the heavy, wooden door swung open to reveal darkness. Swallowing, I peered inside the cell, immediately noticing the damp smell that came from within.

What state would we find John in? Though the other disciples had been visiting him all along, this was the first time he had called for us.

“Well, are ye gonna stand there all day, or are ye goin’ in?” The guard snapped, his hot breath blowing on the back of my neck.

I glanced over at my older brother, Micah, and he nodded for me to go ahead.

Taking a breath, I stepped over the threshold into the cell, Micah following behind. The door slammed shut behind us, and I heard the guard’s heavy footsteps as he walked away, mumbling something about the “fool Jews.”

I turned from the door, and my eyes were immediately attracted to the small, barred window on the opposite wall—the only source of light in the small cell. The late afternoon sun reflected off a murky puddle beneath the window.

“Jabin, Micah.” A deep, powerful voice came from the far corner of the cell. “You came.”

I took a step closer, and stumbled on the uneven, stone floor. Now that my eyes had adjusted, I could see the outline of a small cot, a huge figure hunched on it.

“Rabbi John.” Micah bowed his head respectfully.

I winced at the term “rabbi.” Perhaps Micah was more comfortable using it since he had been with John longer, but I had never gotten used to calling John by that title. He was different from the other rabbis I’d met. Partly because I’d never heard of a rabbi who called the Pharisees a generation of vipers.

My lips curled into a slight smile at the recollection of the first time I’d heard John preach. Micah had finally convinced me to come with him, though I had already heard plenty of stories about the

madman who ate locusts and honey. I have to admit, the main reason I went was curiosity. I wanted to see this John the Baptist for myself.

A large crowd had gathered at the Jordan River—where John was going to preach—but Micah had managed to find us seats on some large boulders. Everyone was waiting expectantly, and seemed to fix their eyes on someone—presumably John.

At first, I couldn't see anyone among the crowd who looked like who I'd imagined John to be. Then I heard a booming voice carrying above the noise of the tumult.

“O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?”

Startled, I'd looked in the direction of the voice, and finally spotted the man who had spoken.

And what a man he was! He was clothed in a scratchy, brown material, which nearly matched his scruffy beard. Huge muscles rippled underneath his tanned skin, and his strong hands were nearly twice the size of mine.

By now, everyone's gaze was fixed on John as he continued, his loud voice carrying out over the sparkling waters of the Jordan River. “Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, ‘We have Abraham to our father,’ for I say unto you that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.” He waved his hand wildly at the boulders strewn about the shoreline.

“And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.” John's eyes had flashed with a vehement fire of their own as he spoke.

I was mesmerized by his way of teaching, so unlike the style of the other rabbis. Micah had tried to describe him before, but it was nothing compared to being there in person. And from that day forward, I had joined Micah in following this John the Baptist. There was something about him—something about his message—that made me long for more.

And now that same, zealous preacher was cramped into a tiny cell, at the mercy of Herod himself.

I forced myself to focus on the task at hand, though it was hard not to look at John's strong hands, now resting unusually idle on his lap. “You have a task for us, John?”

He nodded, his wiry, brown hair limp against his head. “I must know if it is He.”

John never beat around the bush when he wanted something done, but there were times when I wished that he would explain things a little more thoroughly. And it appeared that this would be one of these times. I had no idea who or what he was talking about.

Micah frowned, his light brown eyebrows furrowing. “Of whom do you speak of?”

“My cousin, Jesus.” John straightened. “You know of Him, do you not?”

I felt something bitter-tasting in my mouth at the mention of the name. Everyone these days knew of Jesus. A short while ago, it had been John whom everyone spoke of—it was John for whom the crowds had gathered. Now his cousin had stolen the people with tales of His amazing miracles.

It was as if they’d all forgotten about John. There had been so many who I’d thought to be loyal, but they had followed the crowds to this Jesus.

*Andrew.* The name flashed through my mind, and I remembered the handsome, witty young fisherman who had been a follower of John long before I. None of us would have dreamed that he, of all people, would forsake John.

And yet, he too had disappeared one day while fishing in Capernaum. We never knew for sure what had happened to him, but we suspected that he had gone with the rest of the masses—to Jesus.

Many of the other disciples had left the same way, not even giving word of where they were going, though we all knew. Micah and I were among the only disciples left.

Micah put a restraining hand on my arm as I opened my mouth to speak. He gave me a look that told me to hold my peace.

I sighed. My brother already knew what I thought about Jesus—and he himself was wary of this One who claimed to be the Messiah—but Micah *had* always been the even-tempered one.

“We know of Him,” Micah said to John, in a calmer tone than I could have managed. “But what would you have us do?”

John sighed wearily. “The crowds have gone so readily, and I have heard reports of the miracles He has done. It appears as if His claims are true.”

“Ah yes, that’s right. The fool thinks He’s the Messiah.” I smirked. “Imagine, a Nazarene being the Promised One!”

“Yes, but I have met Him.” John raised his head, and a glint of the old fire came back into his eyes. “I remember when I baptized Him. It was unlike any other baptism.”

I had heard this story before, though Micah and I had been away when it occurred. And, quite frankly, it had left me utterly confused.

“I was baptizing in the Jordan River, as usual, when Jesus steps out of the crowd.” John seemed to sit a little straighter on the cot as he recalled the day. “He comes straight up to me, and tells me to baptize Him. I was astounded, for I believed already that He was the Messiah. At first, I refused, but He insisted. So we stepped into the river together, and I pushed Him under the water.”

Beside me, Micah tensed, and his brown eyes gleamed with interest. We both knew the next part of the story. “But then the heavens opened.”

John nodded. “The heavens open, and light pours down from the sky—light brighter than even the sun. And a dove, pure white, descends, and alights upon Jesus as He comes out of the water. That would have been enough for me, but then a voice booms from heaven, ‘This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased.’”

John’s hands waved for emphasis and, for a moment, it was almost as if we were back at the Jordan River, listening to him preach like old times. “From that day on, I was convinced of who He was.”

“Then why would you have us find out?” I questioned. “You have always said he is the Messiah.”

Sighing, John sank back against the wall, the fire in his eyes dying. “Because I’m not sure of it anymore.”

“I don’t understand.” Micah frowned again. “You heard the voice of God Himself. Is that not enough?”

I looked over at Micah with a frown of my own. It almost sounded as if he was beginning to believe this Messiah-nonsense, too.

“But if it’s true, then why am I here?” John motioned around the damp cell. “Why am I imprisoned, while my cousin preaches freely? I was meant to be the messenger, the voice crying in the wilderness, ‘Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make His paths straight!’” His voice boomed as he raised one hand as though he were preaching.

After a moment, John sighed, his hand dropping again into his lap. “But here?” He looked away, his voice hoarse. “What am I but a whisper?”

Micah and I were silent, not knowing what to say. Never before had we seen John so broken and defeated.

At last, John raised his head. “You see now why I must know. If He is not the Messiah, then I will know to search for another. But if He is...” John sighed. “Perhaps He will tell you why I am here.”

While I didn’t share in John’s hopes that Jesus was the Messiah, I understood his doubts. After all, he had gone from one of the most popular preachers in Israel to one who could hardly draw a crowd. On top of that, he had been imprisoned simply for speaking out about the right thing.

The others of John’s disciples had visited him often, and no doubt kept him informed of Jesus’ popularity. I could only imagine how hard it was for John to spend his days in a prison cell, knowing that his Cousin was at that moment preaching to the crowds that had once been his.

Micah cleared his throat. “We will do as you have asked, Rabbi.”

“I thank you.” John’s lips turned upwards slightly.

A loud pounding from the door interrupted the silence. “You two done in there, or do ye wish to be locked up with ‘im?”

John glanced at us with a sudden twinkle in his eye, and raised his head. “Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” He hollered in the direction of the door.

A muffled growl came from behind the heavy wood. “Don’t you say nothin’ else?”

John chuckled, and I was relieved to see that he wasn’t discouraged enough to lose his sense of humor.

“We are ready,” Micah said, moving towards the door.

“It’s ‘bout time!” The guard snapped, and a key rattled in the lock. “I thought ye’d be in there until the kingdom o’ heaven comes, whenever that’ll be.” He gave the door a shove. “Never, if that screamin’ fellow ‘as anything ta do with it.”

The door swung open slowly with a groan, and I turned back to John. “We’ll hurry back as quickly as we can.”

“You’d better,” John said gruffly, but I knew that was only his manner of speaking. The lines around his eyes softened as he stood, and followed Micah and I to the door. “Shalom.”

I stepped out into the hall after Micah. “Shalom, John.”

The door slammed shut behind us, and Micah and I were alone in the hall with the guard. For a moment, I stood motionless, my eyes fixed on the door.

“Well? Are ye expectin’ it to fly open?” The guard snapped. “Start walkin’, or you’ll be spendin’ the night wi’ the rats!” He headed down the damp, stone hallway, his hobnailed boots echoing in the darkness. “I got better things to do than babysit a couple o’ Jews.”

“Come, Jabin.” Micah placed a hand on my shoulder. “The only thing we can do for him now is find Jesus.”

I sighed, and stepped down the hall after my brother. Micah was right. We’d do John no good just standing there.

We had a task to accomplish.

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Capernaum was a bustling little fishing village on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Not a very significant place, but it was here that we would find Jesus. It had taken us nearly six days just to travel from the Fortress of Machaerus to Capernaum, but our task from there was quite easy. All we had to do was find Jesus.

It wasn’t very difficult to locate Him. Though it was early morning, it seemed as though the whole of Galilee had gathered at the shore. And there was only one reason for crowds of that size—Jesus.

The fishermen had brought in their nightly catch but a few hours before, and had spread the fish out on the beach. Their nets lay abandoned next to their boats as they joined the throng around Jesus.

I hadn’t been sure what to expect from this Man, but now I knew at least one of the rumors was true. He certainly was popular.

Micah surveyed the crowd. “Can you see Jesus?”

“No,” I replied, though I was sure I would know Him when I saw Him. After all, a man who could draw such masses surely must look out of the ordinary.

“Let’s try to get a better view,” Micah said, pushing into the crowd.

I followed as best I could, though it was hard to navigate in between tightly-packed people. My foot was stepped on two times, and I was elbowed at least thrice. I lost sight of Micah, but continued to make my way towards the center of the crowd, where I knew Jesus must be.

At last, I shoved my way past the last person, and found myself on the edge of a ring of people that encircled one Man.

I blinked in disbelief, and looked again. Surely, *this* couldn't be Jesus!

Seated on a small boulder, and clothed in coarse linen, He wasn't at all what I had expected. After hearing about Him from some of John's other disciples, I had anticipated someone a little more... extraordinary.

He spoke in a voice that was soft, yet carried over the crowd with a tone of authority. It was so unlike John, who would have been standing on the boulder, telling them all to repent. But Jesus' preaching wasn't like the other rabbis, either. He spoke with love and compassion, but also with power and firmness.

Micah appeared at my shoulder suddenly, his eyes fixed on Jesus. "Is it Him?" He breathed.

I gave no reply. We both knew that it was.

We stood there for a moment longer, drinking in His words as if we had never heard preaching before. And, indeed, we'd never heard anyone speak quite like this.

Finally, Jesus finished speaking, and the crowd began to converse among themselves. Jesus turned to speak to one of the several men who still remained—presumably His disciples.

Micah nudged me, and we both stepped forward.

One of the disciples—a short, muscular man with a scruffy beard—glanced our way, and came toward us.

"Well? Do you have business with the Master?" He demanded in an unfriendly tone.

Micah was taken aback by the man's gruff voice, and stood speechless for a moment. Looking at the man's bulging muscles, I decided it was a wise choice for me to also remain silent.

Another disciple—taller in stature and kinder in tone—laid a calloused hand on the man's shoulder. "Peter, let them be."

"Jesus doesn't have time for every drifter that wanders to Him," Peter said, but he stepped back anyway.

"I apologize for my friend's behavior." The other man turned to us with a friendly smile. "He loves the Master as much as any of us, but he is bit overprotective at times."



“I see.” I felt Micah relax beside me.

“What’s going on here, John?” A handsome man with hair as black as coal moved into the circle. “Is Peter giving these fellows a hard time again?”

The young man turned to us with a smile. “I assure you, my brother is as harmless as a turtledove.”

Something about the fellow was familiar, and suddenly, I knew who he was. “Are you not Andrew, the fisherman?”

His eyebrows raised. “Micah and Jabin! Where have you been?”

“We could ask you the same thing,” Micah said, though good-naturedly. “You disappeared without giving word of where you were going.

Andrew shrugged. “It all happened so fast. Jesus called me, and I only knew I had to follow.”

“You know these men?” Peter appeared to relax.

“We were disciples of John the Baptist,” Andrew replied. “This is Micah and Jabin.”

“Shalom.” The tall, friendly man dipped his head. “I am John.”

“And I don’t believe you’ve had the pleasure of meeting my brother yet.” Andrew motioned to the muscular man. “This is Peter.”

Peter grunted, but his eyes twinkled. “Shalom.”

“Andrew,” Micah began, and then paused. “Why did you leave?”

Andrew’s face sobered. “I– I had to. There is something about Him, Micah. Something different. I have never met anyone like Him.”

“I’d say John is as different as a man can be,” I spoke up. “Why, he called the Pharisees a generation of vipers!”

Andrew smiled a little. “Believe it or not, Jesus did the same thing.”

“Jesus?” Micah echoed. “He said *that*?”

Peter’s lips twitched. “Your John isn’t the only one who’s not afraid to speak out.”

“I see.” Micah frowned thoughtfully.

“So what brings you here to Capernaum?” Andrew asked.

“We must speak to Jesus,” Micah replied, glancing over at Him. “We’ve been sent on an urgent task.”

“Urgent task?” Andrew looked at us curiously.

Micah nodded, but said no more.

“Well, then, come,” John motioned to us. “Now is a good time to speak to Him.”

Up close, Jesus looked as ordinary as anyone else on the beach. He was speaking with a tall, thin man, who looked up apprehensively as we approached.

“What do these men want, John?” The tall man asked.

“They wish to speak to Jesus.” John gently pushed Micah forward.

“Master,” Micah bowed his head respectfully. “We have been sent from John the Baptist to ask You something.”

“My cousin.” Jesus nodded His head, almost as though He had already known we were coming.

“What is your question?”

I looked at His face again, closer this time. The features themselves were plain, like any other man in Israel. But there was a certain light in His eyes when He looked at me, as if He knew who I was. As if He loved me.

“Are You He that should come,” Micah glanced back at me, his face tense. “Or do we look for another?”

Jesus regarded us with a serious face for a moment, and we waited almost nervously for Him to speak. In that moment of silence, I glanced around, and realized that the crowd had ceased their conversation, and were watching us closely.

At last, Jesus turned towards the crowd as though we had never spoken to Him. They seemed to take His glance as a signal, for the air was instantly filled with their cries.

“Please, heal my niece!”

“My father is very ill!”

“Master, heal me!”

Micah glanced at me, and I knew he was as bewildered as I. Why hadn’t Jesus answered our question?

A tall man shoved his way through the multitude, clasping the hand of a boy who struggled almost inhumanly against the grip.

“Master,” The man said, his voice thick with emotion. “My son has been possessed by an evil spirit for much of his life. Can you not help him?”

Jesus beheld the man quietly, and then turned His gaze on the boy. Instantly, the struggles ceased, and the boy looked up at Jesus, confusion flickering in his eyes.

“Go your way, and depart in peace.” Jesus turned away.

The man glanced down at his son, and his eyes widened. “Praise Jehovah’s name,” He said softly, and then raised his head to look at the crowd. “My son is healed!”

Once again, the crowd erupted into noise, and pressed in on the Master.

A bent, old woman grasped Jesus’ hand. “Lord, I lost my hearing many years ago, but I believe You can heal me.”

Jesus looked at her, his eyes full of compassion, and placed his hands over her ears. In that moment, I noticed how scarred and calloused those hands were, and I remembered how it was said that His father was a carpenter.

*Imagine, the son of a respectable carpenter making His living off of fake healings, I thought disgustedly, for I did not believe for a moment that He had actually healed anyone.*

Jesus removed his hands, and the woman stood there, her brow furrowed for a moment. Slowly, a wrinkled smile spread across her face. “I can hear! Oh, thank You, Lord! Thank You!” She moved back into the crowd, her face shining.

“Make way for a blind man! Make way for the blind!” A scratchy voice called out. A short, balding man carrying a stick pushed his way to where Jesus was. “Are You the Son of David?” He looked in Jesus’ direction with sightless eyes.

“I am.”

“Lord, I would be healed of my blindness.” The man motioned to his eyes. “From my birth, I have never been able to see, but I have heard that You can do miracles.”

I glanced over at Micah, but his eyes were fastened on Jesus. *He may have been able to fake the other healings, I thought. But this man is surely blind. Perhaps He will send the man away.*

Jesus looked at the man for a long moment, and then moved His hands up to cover the man’s eyes.

I frowned. Was this a trick? How could He expect to heal this man?

After a few, long seconds, Jesus removed His hands. “In the name of the Father, be healed.”

My jaw dropped in amazement. The man’s eyes were clear! Blinking confusedly, he looked about him,

“I– I can see...” He said slowly, and a jubilant smile spread across his face. “I can see!”

The man tossed his stick away. “I can see!” Head held high, he disappeared into the crowd, but his voice could still be heard, exclaiming, “I can see!”

I turned to Micah, and swallowed. “Is this real?”

Surely my older brother, would have an answer. He’d always had the answers, even from the time we were children. There had to be an explanation.

He looked at me, his face thoughtful. “I– I don’t know.”

I knew Jesus could get a few people to act for Him, but not the whole crowd. If these healings were fake, then He was just another man. Just a swindler. But if it was real...

Then Jesus was truly the Messiah.

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Though the morning sun now beat down on the crowd with vehemence, they showed no signs of slowing. As Jesus continued healing after healing, I sank to the boulder, utterly exhausted. We had only been in Capernaum for less than two hours, but already it seemed that the whole of Israel had been healed.

Micah took a seat beside me, but didn’t seem to even realize I was there. He looked out across the Sea of Galilee with a somber expression.

There were no words for what we had seen. No way to describe it. It was impossible to tell how this Man had done it. We had even witnessed Him raising the dead.

Suddenly, I realized that the crowd had ceased their shouting, and I straightened.

Jesus was looking at us.

“Rabbi?” Micah looked up respectfully.

“Go your way.”

Micah bit his lip, a sure sign he was thinking. I knew he wanted answers as much as I did.

Jesus regarded us calmly, as though He knew the questions that hovered in our minds. “Tell John what things you have seen and heard; how the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached.”

Slowly, understanding lit up Micah’s face. “Yes, Lord.” He stood to his feet, confidence back in his countenance. “We will tell him.”

I rose also, but I was still confused. How could it be that He had healed so many? It couldn’t be true that He was the Messiah—it couldn’t. But after what I had seen... I wasn’t so sure anymore.

Jesus nodded to us, as though signaling that we were supposed to depart. Without a backward glance Micah turned towards the road that led back to Machaerus, his steps sure and confident.

But I waited, hoping for something more. Some kind of confirmation—anything that would help me understand what I had seen.

And Jesus took a step towards me, placing a hand on my shoulder. “And blessed is he, whoever shall not be offended in me.”

He fixed His eyes on my face, and they seemed to see into my very soul. I stood there, too awed to speak.

Finally, Jesus released my hand, and stepped back without another word. He moved on down the beach, the people trailing behind Him.

I stood there, watching until His robe blended in with the crowd.

“Jabin!” Micah called from behind me. I could tell he was impatient to leave.

“I am coming!” I yelled back.

I turned my head to where Jesus had disappeared, and His words echoed in my mind: “*Blessed is he, whoever shall not be offended in me.*”

And, suddenly, I understood. I knew how Jesus could have healed those people. I understood what He had been telling me.

I turned back to Micah. “I am coming,” I repeated firmly.

It was with a much lighter heart that I made the journey back to Machaerus.

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Several days later, the heavy, prison door swung open again, and Micah and I stepped inside. John leaped from his seat on the bed as soon as we had entered.

“Well?” He finally asked, his face filled with anxiety.

For a moment, all three of us were silent, the only sound coming from dripping water in a dark corner of the cell.

“We— we went to Capernaum,” Micah finally managed to say. “And we saw Jesus.”

“And?”

“And we saw Him perform miracles!” Micah’s voice still held plenty of awe. “Blind received their sight, lame walked again, deaf heard, and the lepers were cleansed! It was unlike anything I have ever seen before in my life!” He shook his head in amazement at the recollection.

“But what of my question, Micah?” John asked sharply. “What did He say?”

“Nothing,” Micah said. “Only to tell you what we had seen.”

John’s eyes were intense. “Then is He the One? Is He the Messiah?”

For once, Micah appeared at a loss for words, and I felt much the same way. How could we describe what we had seen?

But in the silence, I recalled again what Jesus had said. “*Blessed is he, whoever shall not be offended in me.*”

I swallowed. “He is.” I said, surprising myself with the strength of my voice. “Jesus is the Messiah.”

John drew a sharp breath, and sank back onto the bed.

And then I knew what I was saying was true. With all my heart, I knew that Jesus was the Messiah. He was the Promised One—the Christ. He was the Savior of the world.

I drew myself up, and stepped closer to the bed.

“John.” I laid a hand on his shoulder, and he looked up. “He is the One.”