

April 1, 2011 FOR GOD SO LOVED. IS THERE SOMETHING AFTER THAT?

Dear Friends & Family,

(3/12) While reading in the gospel of John just a few minutes ago, I came to perhaps the most famous verse in the entire Bible & rightly so, 3:16. I noticed I had in the past highlighted & underlined in red “so loved”, to emphasize in color what the Greek emphasizes in language. [An aside: perhaps one newsletter I should share my Bible color marking system that I taught our three children when they were young & teach both teens & children at camp every summer]. As I did, my mind wandered back to my senior year of high school which I spent in a very small town in Missouri. I had grown up in South Jersey, but moved to Missouri with my parents & three younger sisters after my sophomore year. Some of you may recollect many years ago I wrote re: my conversion experience in a convent out there. For homecoming each year, each class would build a float for the annual parade which proceeded down the main street of this town. We seniors built ours in the phone company’s garage, if I remember right. Our theme was **For God So Loved**. Our float was comprised of a huge open **Bible**, made out of wood, chicken wire, & purple & white tissue paper with those precious words on it. I want to say I remember reflecting to myself something to the effect of, Hmmm that is a noble-sounding, pleasant phrase. I had no idea that there were more words to that verse. I’m not even sure I realized it was a Bible verse, but perhaps just a nice-sounding platitude of man. *I grew up in church, too.*

NO HOLDS BARRED or OH, SO VERY CLOSE, BUT, OH, SO VERY FAR!

While in Luke’s gospel prior to that, I was dumbfounded & marveled as I read the crucifixion account & the events that led up to it how many people had the opportunity cherished by angels to express affection to the incarnate Son of God, & missed it. Earlier in His ministry, Jesus entered the home of Simon the Pharisee. One deciphers from the context that it was customary in that culture for the host to wash his guests’ feet, & greet them with a kiss of welcome, I presume on the cheek, & anoint their heads with oil. Think of it, Beloved: all three of these unfathomable privileges denied to most, when you consider the billions of souls who will have existed since Adam & Eve, were afforded to Simon. He could have hugged Jesus bodily, kissed His cheeks, anointed His head, & washed the 2nd Person of the Trinity’s feet & he missed it! He didn’t recognize the day of His “visitation”, literally.

Judas was another one. He was selected, again, out of *billions* of possible choices, to walk with, audibly listen to, physically greet countless times, recline at table with, perhaps occasionally on His chest as did John (I’d like to believe The Beloved Disciple did not have a monopoly on that much-sought-after position!), & even sleep beside the Creator of all things, both seen & unseen. Yet, as with Simon the Pharisee, his eyes, heart, & mind were blocked by other things! Judas *did* eventually have the cherished privilege to kiss the Son of God, Whom majestic, terrifying holy & evil angels stand in awe of, but, he only did so to betray Him! Pilate & Herod (And, need we say Annas & Caiaphas?) all had their chances too. They stared at the Desire Of The Ages right in the face—

eye to eye, even into the eyes, which, after the Messiah was glorified, would burn with fire! (I surmise, given Who He was, they *already* were burning with fire” as His gaze pierced through religious leaders’ & monarchs’ souls!). They missed it too. I’ve often been afraid at the thought of Jesus looking deep into my eyes, knowing He’d see the ugliness deep & not-so-deep inside of me. Yet, as the song goes, “You see the depths of my heart & You love me the same...You are a mazing, God...” (“Indescribable” by Chris Tomlin). Oh, where would we be without the imputation of His blessed righteousness, which also imputes to us the beauty of His holiness in His sight?!

Pilate could stand “the glare” no longer. He forfeited the gaze of The Christ’s eyes for the favor of Caesar’s & the mob’s! Then, there were the soldiers, who delivered Jesus up to Pilate in the first place upon His arrest, orchestrated by Judas & the Sanhedrin. Luke’s account says, “...the men who were holding Him...”. Oh, Jesus! Why can’t I hold You? Oh, Lord, You know how many times I have longed & ached to hold You, in my darkest hours of despair, confusion, fear, & pain, & when I have felt “love-sickness” after having had spent time in awe of You through Your **Written Word** by Your Spirit in Your presence! Oh, what blessed thought! It says they held Him “in custody”. Let’s be honest, Beloved. Have you ever daydreamed like me to have Jesus all to yourself for a while—to lock Him up, so to speak, so that you had His undivided attention, focus, & gaze— & His alone? (Kim relates to this with mine! Sadly, given my horrendously short attention span, she too often doesn’t get all of it!) These soldiers got to “hold You”, Lord. They got to be so close to You! They felt the warmth of Your arms, perhaps Your sweat that dreadful night too. What did they do with such rare & sought-after-by-angels’ privilege? They, they, they—“beat” Him. WHAT?! They *beat* Him?! Are they insane?! No, No. They’re quite *human*. They did what *any of us* would have done apart from the mercy of God. “*What, Michael?! How can you say that?!*” Because we all have the same nature as they did. Jesus told His disciples the only reason they didn’t leave Him along with the masses who were His “disciples” in John 6 was because *He chose them* (6:70). Don’t be high-minded, Brethren. The oft’-spoken adage, “But for the grace of God, there go I”, is truer of you than you want to believe. **The Scripture** says of us believers, that even though we don’t see Him, we love Him & believe in Him. How each one of us longs to see Je-sus face to face. Well, there was a group of people in His day who were granted that “beatific vision”—O blessed thought! What did they do with such an *infinitely rare & high* privilege, given the billions who have lived on the earth over thousands of years? Jesus Himself told us: “...they have seen both Me & My Father & *have hated* both of Us” (Jn.15:24). Think of the soldiers who laid Him on **the cross**, held His arms & legs down, felt His sweat, then, unfathomable thought—felt His GodMan blood spurt upon them as they drove the nails! Actually sprinkled physi-cally, by the same blood that we His people are washed with spiritually! Dare they wipe it off?! I’m sure they did. Remember the saying, “I’ll never wash that hand again”, when someone of great importance shook it? Think if the Son of God’s blood splattered on you, Beloved.

“GET IT RIGHT THIS TIME”

Unlike the aforementioned “case-studies”, there *were* those around Jesus who “got it right”. Mary, Lazarus’

sister did. She used her "glory", i.e., her hair to wipe the Savior's blessed feet, soon to be pierced by the soldiers mentioned above. John did. He laid his head on Jesus' chest, surely hearing the heartbeat of the Son of God. I've often envied the angel who had the inestimable privilege of "strengthening Him" in the Garden of Gethsemane. I have a print of an old painting I cut out of a book many years ago & placed in a frame of this classic scene. I love to stare at it. I don't even know the name of the original painting nor who brushed it. I'm glad the holy angels are sealed in holiness. If not? I cannot believe that humongous jealousy wouldn't have arisen in their hearts over this lone angel who got to conduct this sacred task at the behest of the Father for the sake of His "Darling of Heaven" Who was undergoing blood-sweating agony in the garden. ("Yeah, right Michael. Even if you *were* granted that indescribable privilege, what would *you* have to offer The Christ in His agony?" I know. I know. At the very least, I would have just held Him close, as the angel in this painting is.) The scene comes to mind from the movie "Narnia", where Lucy & Susan escort the lonely & languid **Aslan** to His death (unbeknownst to them at the time) at the **Stone Table**. I think of John the Beloved. He surely "got it right": "...Him...Whom we have heard, Whom we have seen with our own eyes, Whom we have gazed upon with our own eyes [for ourselves] & have touched with our [own] hands..." (1 Jn.1:1; Amp.) In vs. 3 he gives the inevitable outcome of such close fellowship with The Son of God: "...we *declare* to you...". How can we not? I think you all get the point, Beloved. How Jesus could possibly want our company is beyond me. It's another one of those "That's just the way He is" answers. Praise be His Name, that it is so. No wonder it says that when He returns, He's doing so to be *marveled at* by His people. Let us begin now, via the **written Word**, by His Spirit. Amen. May your & yours have a happy and blessed Easter Season!

Michael & Kim Christ is Risen Indeed!

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***I'd be grateful if you'd print out then cut along the dotted line & affix to your refrigerator the itinerary below re: a reminder to pray for me, should the Lord so direct. Thank you!**