

THE
GREATEST



ALABI .T

THE GREATEST LOVE



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All scripture quotations are from the Living Bible, except otherwise stated.

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to Dr Alabi whose teachings moulded my perspectives on the love of God.

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INTRODUCTION

Every love story has a great or an unexpected beginning. Have you heard the greatest love story? It is about a girl who is a notorious criminal; she was known for all atrocious acts and was sentenced to death one day. Then, a just young man with high status who had loved her from the very beginning and had tried to help her live right said to her executors “do not harm her in any way, I know according to the law she ought to die because of her actions, but you all know I am a just and honorable man, I choose to die in her stead, I will receive the stripes and die the death of a criminal on her behalf only let her go free”. After much conversation, the notorious criminal was freed and when she saw what happened, she said to herself “he died in my stead for the atrocious acts I committed and now I am free, my past has been judged and my future is not determined by my past but by the path I choose to follow from now on, he took my shame and died in my place that I may live”. This just young man is similar to Jesus Christ and the notorious criminal is similar to the world. This is unquestionable the greatest love story. “And here is how to measure it – the greatest love is shown when a person lays down his life for his friends” – John 15:13.

Thank God the story did not end at His death. Let’s now go and enjoy the full story of the greatest love ever demonstrated.

CHAPTER ONE

Who Is Jesus?

Let us begin this chapter by answering the question “who is Jesus?”

Many people have different opinions about Jesus even while He was here on earth; some called Him John the Baptist, others called Him Elijah or one of the prophets. Jesus then asked His disciples "Who do you think I am?" Simeon Peter answered, “The Christ, the Messiah, the son of the living God” - Matthew 16:16. Let’s take a look at Jesus’ response, he did not refute the answer Simeon Peter gave but agreed with it. He said, “God has blessed you Simeon, son of Jonah, Jesus said, “for my father in heaven has personally revealed this to you – this is not from any human source” –Matthew 16: 17.

Again when Jesus was arrested and taken to the high priest, the high priest asked him “are you the Messiah, the son of God?” Jesus said “I am and you will see me sitting at the right hand of God and returning to earth in the clouds of heaven” – Mark 14: 61-62.

Apostle John in John 1:1-5, 12 also wrote about the deity of Jesus.

“Before anything else existed, there was Christ, with God. He has always been alive and is himself God. He created everything there is – nothing exists that he didn’t make. Eternal life is in him, and this life gives light to all mankind. His life is the light that shines through the darkness- and the darkness can never extinguish it”.

In verse 12, he says “But to all who receive him, he gave the right to become children of God. All they needed to do was trust him to save them”.

So, is Jesus God? Yes. There is only one God but three persons. God has chosen to reveal Himself to us in three persons: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. They are co-equal and have different responsibilities. Jesus is God the Son. It is not God the Father or God the Holy Spirit that died for our sins but Jesus. Phil 2: 5-6 says

“Your attitude should be the kind that was shown us by Christ, who though he was God, did not demand and cling to his rights as God, but laid aside his mighty power and glory, taking the disguise of a slave and becoming like men”

When Jesus was on earth, He was 100% God and 100% man. John 1:14 says

“And Christ became a human being and lived here on earth among us and was full of loving forgiveness and truth. And some of us have seen his glory – the glory of the only son of the heavenly Father”.

Since Jesus became a human being, does it mean He was born of a woman? Yes. Let’s now consider just two prophecies about the birth of Jesus.

Prophet Isaiah’s Prophecy about the Birth of Jesus

Prophet Isaiah foretold the birth of Jesus when God sent him to King Ahaz to tell him not to worry about the Kings coming against his nation for their plan will not succeed. The Lord also told King Ahaz to ask for a sign however, the King refused and said he will not bother the Lord with anything like that (Isaiah 7:1-13). In Isaiah 7:14, Isaiah prophesied saying “all right then, the Lord himself will chose

the sign- a child shall be born to a virgin! And she shall call his name Immanuel (meaning God is with us)”. The fulfillment of this prophecy is seen in Matthew 1:18 – 25

“These are the facts concerning the birth of Jesus Christ. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant by the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph her fiancé, being a man of stern principle decided to break the engagement but to do it quietly, as he did not want to publicly disgrace her. As he lay awake considering this, he fell into a dream, and saw an angel standing beside him. “Joseph, son of David”, the angel said, “Don’t hesitate to take Mary as your wife! For the child within her has been conceived by the Holy Spirit. And she will have a son and you shall name him Jesus (meaning ‘savior’) for he will save his people from their sins. This will fulfill God’s message through his prophets – Listen! The virgin shall conceive a child! She shall give birth to a son, and he shall be called “Emmanuel”(meaning “God is with us”). When Joseph awoke he did as the angel commanded, and brought Mary home to be his wife, but she remained a virgin until her son was born; and Joseph named him “Jesus”

Prophet Micah’s Prophecy about the Birth of Jesus

Prophet Micah also prophesied about Jesus “O Bethlehem Ephrathah, you are but a small Judean village, yet you will be the birthplace of my king who is alive from ages past” –Micah 5:2. This prophecy was fulfilled when Christ was born in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:1). Some astrologers saw the star of Jesus and immediately followed the star which led them to Jerusalem. When they got to Jerusalem, they entered King Herod’s palace to inquire about the new born king,

but when King Herod heard that the king of the Jews was born he was greatly troubled because he did not want to be displaced as king. So king Herod called the Jewish leaders and asked "Did the prophets tell us where the Messiah will be born?" "Yes, in Bethlehem" they said "for this is what the prophet Micah wrote: "O little town of Bethlehem, you are not just an unimportant Judean village, for a Governor shall rise from you to rule my people Israel"- Matthew 2:5-6. After King Herod had confirmed the birthplace of the Messiah, he told the astrologers (who has come to inquire about the new born king so they can worship him) to search for the child and tell him where the child is, so he too can go and worship him. However, God warned the astrologers in a dream to go home another way and they obeyed (Matthew 2:7 -12).

The Baptism of Jesus and Beginning of His Ministry

When Jesus was about thirty years old, He came from Galilee to Jordan to be baptized by John the Baptist and as soon as Jesus was baptized Matthew 3:16-17 recorded that "At that moment heaven was opened and he saw the spirit of God descending like a dove and lightening on him. And a voice from heaven said "This is my son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased ". After the baptism, Jesus was led to the desert by the Spirit where He fasted forty days and forty nights.

Temptation of Jesus

After fasting forty days and forty nights, Jesus became very hungry. "Then Satan tempted Him to get food by changing stones to loaves of bread. "It will prove you are the son of God" he said, but Jesus told him "No! For the scriptures tell us that

bread won't feed men's souls: obedience to every word of God is what we need ". Then Satan took him to Jerusalem to the roof of the temple. "Jump off" he said "and prove you are the son of God; for the scriptures declare, " God will send his angels to keep you from harm", ...they will prevent you from smashing on the rocks below". Jesus retorted, "It also says not to put the Lord your God to a foolish test!" Next Satan took him to the peak of a very high mountain and showed him the nations of the world and all their glory. "I'll give it all to you", he said " If you will only kneel and worship me". "Get out of here, Satan" Jesus told him. "The scriptures say, worship only the Lord God. Obey only him". Then Satan went away and angels came and cared for Jesus" - Matthew 4: 3 - 11

We see from the story above that Satan claimed he would give Jesus the nations of the world and all their glory. Luke 4:5 - 7 puts it this way "Then Satan took him up and revealed to him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time and the devil told him, " I will give you all these splendid kingdoms and their glory- for they are mine to give to anyone I wish- if you will only get down on your knees and worship me". The King James Version of Luke 4:6 says "All this power will I give thee and the glory of them: for that is delivered into me, and to whomsoever I will I give it".

The first question is where did Satan get the power from and who "delivered" it to him? Was it God? Was it man? Or where did he get the power from? The answer is simple; it was the power God gave to the first man Adam. And Adam gave it to the devil when he deceived them in the Garden of Eden. God said do not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil but they did after being deceived by Satan, the old serpent (Genesis 3). Then Satan usurped the power God man to

have dominion and authority in the earth. But when Jesus gave His life for us, He stripped the devil of all his powers and restored us back to God's original plan. So, if you are a Christian, Satan has no power over you. John 10:10 tells us the purpose of Satan, "The thief's purpose is to steal, kill and destroy ". Satan uses a lot of strategies to carry out his purpose; some of them are to distract, to kill and to offer shortcuts. From the temptation of Jesus we see that Satan also used these strategies. In the first temptation of Jesus, Satan tried to use the distraction strategy " turn these stones to bread, it will prove you are the son of God", but Jesus did not come to "prove that He is the son of God", He came that we might have life and have it more abundantly, He came to restore us back to God and to give us eternal life. In the second temptation, he wanted to kill Jesus, "Jump off" he said, he wanted Jesus to jump off from the highest point of the temple to prove He is the son of God, but Jesus told him, do not put God to a foolish test. In the third temptation, he offered Jesus a shortcut " kneel down and worship me and I'll give you all the power...for that is delivered unto me". Jesus came to restore back the power and authority man lost to Satan, so the devil tried to offer a shortcut. Even today, Satan still uses these strategies, he tries to use circumstances to distract people from God and their God given destinies, he tries to kill and offers a "shortcut" to victory. But as Jesus overcame the temptations of satan, we too can overcome him through God's word. James 4:7 says "so give yourself humbly to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you".

After Jesus overcame the temptations of satan, He began His ministry by calling the first disciples and they are Andrew, Simeon (peter), James and John. He later called Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James (the son of Alphaeus), Thaddaeus, Simeon and Judas Iscariot.

CHAPTER TWO

THE TEACHINGS AND MIRACLES OF JESUS

Jesus is much more than a prophet, He is the Christ, the Messiah, the son of the living God.

Let's consider some of His teachings.

On Anger He says "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, "Thou shall not kill, and whosoever shall kill shall be in the danger of the judgment". But I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire – Matthew 5: 21-22 KJV. From the verse above we see that anger without a cause is bad, but anger as an emotion is not evil unless it affects us negatively (for instance when we keep malice or seek revenge). Ephesians 4:26 says "If you are angry, don't sin by nursing your grudge, don't let the sun go down with you still angry – get over it quickly". So when next you feel angry, don't nurse your grudge, keep malice or seek revenge, get over it quickly.

On Adultery He says "The laws of Moses said "You shall not commit adultery". But I say: Anyone who even looks at a woman with lust in his eye has already committed adultery with her in his heart" – Matthew 5:27-28. Why is it so? Proverbs 23:7 (KJV) says- "For as a man thinketh in his heart so is he". That means what a man thinks in his heart or meditates on is who he really is. Proverbs 4:23(KJV) says "Keep your heart with all diligence for out of it are the issues of

life". This verse reinforces the fact that what you meditate on influences everything else in your life.

On Divorce He says "The laws of Moses says anyone who wants to be rid of his wife, he can divorce her by giving her a letter of dismissal. But I say a man who divorces his wife, except for fornication causes her to commit adultery if she remarries again, and he who marries her commits adultery – Matthew 5: 31-32. Some people believe that the verses above encourage a man to divorce his wife if she is unfaithful, but Jesus does not encourage divorce. Matthew 19:3-9 tells us more, it says "some Pharisees came to interview him, and tried to trap him into saying something that will ruin him. "Do you permit divorce?" they asked. "Don't you read the scriptures?" he replied. "In them it is written that at the beginning God created man and woman and that a man should leave his father and mother, and be forever united to his wife. The two shall become one – no longer two, but one! And no man may divorce what God has joined together". "Then why' they asked did Moses say a man may divorce his wife by merely writing her a letter of dismissal? Jesus replied, "Moses did that in recognition of your hard and evil hearts, but it was not what God has originally intended. And I tell you this, that anyone who divorces his wife except for fornication and marries another commits adultery.

On Oaths He says "Again the law of Moses says "You shall not break your vows to God, but must fulfill them all" But I say don't make any vows! And even to say, "By heavens!" is a sacred vow to God, for the heavens are God's throne. And if you say "By the earth!" it is a sacred vow, for the earth is his footstool. And don't swear "By Jerusalem!" for Jerusalem is the capital of the great king. Don't even

swear “By my head!” for you can’t turn one hair white or black. Say just a simple “Yes, I will” or “No, I won’t”. Your word is enough. To strengthen your promise with a vow shows that something is wrong” – Matthew 5:33 -37. This simply means let your yes be yes and your no be no, don’t go about swearing just say yes or no and be true to your words.

On Retaliation He says “The law of Moses says “If a man gouges out another’s eyes, he must pay with his own eye. If a tooth gets knocked out, knock out the tooth of the one who did it”. But I say: don’t resist violence! If you are slapped on one cheek, turn the other too. If you are ordered to court, and your shirt is taken away from you, give your coat too. If the military demand that you carry their gear for a mile, carry it two. Give to those who ask and don’t turn away from those who want to borrow” –Matthew 5: 38-42. This simply means we should not repay evil with evil or insults with insults, but we should repay evil with good and live generously. I like the way The Message Translation puts Matthew 5:38-42 it says “Here is another old saying that deserves a second look: “Eye for eye, tooth for tooth! Is that going to get us anywhere? Here’s what I propose: “don’t hit back at all” if someone strikes you stand there and take it. If someone drags you to court and sues for the shirt off your back, giftwrap your best coat and make a present of it. And if someone takes unfair advantage of you, use the occasion to practice the servant life. No more tit-for-tat stuff. Live generously.

On Enemies He says “There is a saying, ‘love your friends and hate your enemies”. But I say: love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way you will be acting as true sons of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust too. If

you love those who love you, what good is that? Even the heathen do that. But you are to be perfect, even as your father in heaven is perfect (Matthew 5: 43-48). The Message translation of the same verses say “You are familiar with the old written law, “love your friend” and its unwritten companion “Hate your enemies”. I’m challenging that. I’m telling you to love your enemies. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst. When someone gives you a hard time, respond with the energies of prayer, for then you are working out of your true selves, your God created selves. This is what God does. He gives his best- the sun to warm and the rain to nourish – to everyone, regardless: the good and bad, the nice and nasty. If all you do is love the lovable, do you expect a bonus? Anyone can do that. If you simply say hello to those who greet you, do you expect a medal? Any run-of-the-mill sinner does that. In a word, what am saying is, Grow up. You’re kingdom subjects. Now live like it. Live out your God created identity. Live generously and graciously toward others, the way God lives toward you”

On Giving to the Needy He says "Take care! Don't do your good deeds publicly, to be admired, for then you will lose the reward from your Father in heaven. When you give a gift to a beggar, don't shout about it as the hypocrites do--blowing trumpets in the synagogues and streets to call attention to their acts of charity! I tell you in all earnestness, they have received all the reward they will ever get. But when you do a kindness to someone, do it secretly--don't tell your left hand what your right hand is doing. And your Father, who knows all secrets, will reward you"- Matthew 6:1-4. Don't show off, don't give because you want the praise of men and don't seek to impress others with your giving.

On Prayer He says "And now about prayer. When you pray, don't be like the hypocrites who pretend piety by praying publicly on street corners and in the synagogues where everyone can see them. Truly, that is all the reward they will ever get. But when you pray, go away by yourself, all alone, and shut the door behind you and pray to your Father secretly, and your Father, who knows your secrets, will reward you. "Don't recite the same prayer over and over as the heathen do, who think prayers are answered only by repeating them again and again. "Remember, your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him!" Matthew 6:5-8. Again these verses tell us not to seek the praise of men and not to give a show of spirituality.

On Fasting He says "And now about fasting. When you fast, declining your food for a spiritual purpose, don't do it publicly, as the hypocrites do, who try to look wan and disheveled so people will feel sorry for them. Truly, that is the only reward they will ever get. But when you fast, put on festive clothing, so that no one will suspect you are hungry, except your Father who knows every secret. And he will reward you" -Matthew 6:16-18. This simply means seek to please God and not men

On Treasures He says "Don't store up treasures here on earth where they can erode away or may be stolen. Store them in heaven where they will never lose their value and are safe from thieves. If your profits are in heaven, your heart will be there too" - Matthew 6:19-21. How do we store up treasures in heaven? By being generous to others and helping the needy with aim of pleasing God and not men.

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