

George does not take a direct route home. Instead, the Spirit leads him to the west, into an unfamiliar area. The traveling is hard, but he is used to that. He spends several nights in the mountains in the fast-breaking warmth of spring. It is a barren spring, without the beauty of new blossoms or the happy singing of returning birds. I can tell he is troubled in his spirit, but that is not because of his surroundings. He wonders what the days ahead hold for him.

The Spirit whispers to him in the still hours of the night and the darkness leaves him. He sleeps without fear of the future. The Lord speaks to me of things to come as well, and I worship Him.

The next day we come upon a large valley, a broad open area of what was once farmland. The crops have ceased to grow and most people who lived there have long since left. Tents are scattered about the valley, but they are the sort used for recreation, not for homes. Lined up to one side of the tent area sits an assortment of vehicles of many sizes and descriptions, including a fleet of buses with the words “Church of Universal Being” painted on the side of each in large letters.

Knots of people stand around among the tents, while others busy themselves going to and fro. In another part of the valley, away from the tents, some of the men erect a platform, while others set up various kinds of electronic equipment.

George is curious about what is going on, and for a while he says nothing as he looks the valley over. Satisfied that he knows what is happening, he asks the Lord, “What am I to do here? This is the camp of the enemy.”

I have people near here, but they have grown discouraged and weak. I brought you here to build them up, but not as you think. What is about to happen to you will be very painful, but you will suffer in my name and for my sake. After that is done, you will see me and I will speak to you.

George seems reluctant to go at first, but he obediently sets off for the camp area after a little while. He slips in among the tents unobserved and soon mixes with the people who wander toward the platform area. The loudspeakers are already blaring, inviting the faithful to come to hear the featured speaker.

Demons flit about everywhere. The Lord has not yet shown me to them and they ignore George for the time being. One of the demons is especially large and powerful, an overlord who probably controls some important person at the meeting.

The program begins with loud and raucous music, a wave of sound designed to assault both brain and body. Many of those in the audience revel in the cacophony, swaying back and forth to some rhythm only they can hear. The planned pandemonium goes on for over an hour. For George the whole experience causes intense pain; he looks miserable. When the din finally ceases his face floods with relief and his whole body relaxes. There is worse to come.

“And now, brothers and sisters, here’s what we’ve all come to see and hear. Right here in eastern Kentucky, right out here in the wilderness, straight from Louisville, let’s give a big Universal Being welcome to – Manny – Jarrow!”

Scattered applause greets him, but mostly the crowd reacts with bored silence. It seems that Mr. Jarrow is not the main attraction for many in the audience. He is a man of medium height with thinning hair and dark-rimmed glasses. He speaks in a dry, flat voice, so low it can hardly be heard even with amplification. He

reads a prepared speech full of stock language, probably one he has used many times before.

“Greetings, fellow believers, from the leader of our glorious church, the Pontifex Maxima. We are all one in him and all of the universe is one being. Man is God and God is Man. Day by day we are moving toward the time when the whole universe will be one perfect whole.

“How do we do this, you ask? We do it by seeing that all the world is submitted to our glorious leader, for he alone has the truth of life. We do it by destroying everything which corrupts the universe and prevents it from being in harmony. We especially must destroy the Christian superstition and all other false religions which have brought so much trouble to our world in recent years and for thousands of years before.

“It is our duty to report all followers of this dead outlaw Jesus to the Security Police. Very soon we will begin a final campaign to eradicate the last of this brood of vipers and at last true harmony will reign in the world.”

He drones on in the same vein for half an hour. The crowd stirs restlessly, tired and bored, until the Lord suddenly removes the scales from their eyes. One of the men who wanders near George is Jake, the man who assaulted him near the store so many months before.

When he recognizes George, Jake grabs him by the arm, which he twists behind George’s back. “Hey. Minnie, or whatever your name is,” he yells, “I got myself a *Christian* here, a Jesus freak. He’s a nigger, too!”

Manny suddenly stops his speech, and his face changes from a mask of placidity to one of hate and lust. He drops his notes to the lectern. His voice strengthens now.

“There’s a good Universal Being man, folks! He didn’t waste any time in doing his duty. Bring that traitor up here on the platform, Brother, and let’s all have a look at him.”

The crowd forgets its lethargy and comes to life. Those around George punch him and spit on him as Jake frog-marches him to the stage. Once the two men reach the platform the crowd roars its approval. Some shout “Skin him alive!” and others, “Give him to us!”

Manny, in his element now, raises his hand for silence. “Now brethren, we must be fair. Let’s find out if this one really is a Christian.”

He turns to George and asks, “Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior?”

“Of course,” George answers without hesitation. “He’s my only – ”

“That’s enough,” Manny says sharply, striking George on the mouth. “That’s all we need to know here. That trick works every time.”

He turns back to the crowd. “Now, folks, some of you have come a long way to be here. We have people from Salyersville, Paintsville, Prestonsburg, Pikeville, even Stopover.” The crowd laughs appreciatively. Manny has their undivided attention now. “In a group like this, from so many different places, there must be a *lot* of good ideas about what to do with a Christian. We’ve heard a few already. Let’s here some more.”

“Boil him in oil!”

“Cut him up into little pieces!”

“Smash his skull with a car!”

“Kick him to death!”

Manny smiles condescendingly and raises his hand for silence once more. “Some *excellent* ideas. I like the way your minds work here in the hills. But – the problem with those ideas is that only a few people get to participate, as much as the rest might enjoy watching.

“I’ve found that the simplest ideas are often the best. Look around you. – What do you have the most of around here? What are these hills made of?”

“Rocks!”

“Stones!”

“Very good! In the old times they used to get rid of troublemakers by stoning them to death, like they did with that bandit Stephen in the Bible. Well, we’re a body here, so we do things together. Everybody look around for a good rock, the size that’s easy to throw. That’s right; they’re all around. We won’t start until everyone has his or her weapon, so take your time.

“In the meantime, some of you brothers find some good stout rope and help our good brother – What’s your name? – Brother Jake tie this nigger – uh, black man – to that tree. Tie him real tight so he won’t slide down before everybody has their chance.

“That’s good – He won’t get away from us now. Now, form a line, over there, but don’t come any closer than about twenty feet from the tree. We don’t want our friend to die too soon. One rock per person, then go to the back of the line. You brothers who tied him up go first, then make sure the others follow the rules.”

The first rock hits George in the mouth, and blood gushes out. This draws a cheer from the crowd. Other rocks, mostly aimed at the head, draw blood as well. Soon George’s face is a red mass; he is no longer recognizable. He makes no sound when the first few rocks hit, but he loses control of his body. Scream after scream tears from his mouth and the crowd grows more and more excited. The demons dance.

George loses consciousness, but the stones keep coming. Some people come through the line again and again, fighting for a place near the front. George’s spirit leaves his body and I join him. I walk with him through the lighted way to the gardens of Paradise. The Lord meets him there as He promised.

Welcome, my son. You have suffered much for my sake. I rejoice to see you here.

“Am I to be with you now, always?”

No, my dear brother. Not yet. There is yet a little work for you to do. In a little while you will be with me forever. For now, though, I must send you back. There are those who pray for you even now.

George’s face is sad with the news; he clearly wants to stay. His eyes drink in the beauty of this spot in the Lord’s presence, but he turns away when the Lord touches him gently on the arm.

When we return to George’s body, it is no longer in the same place. Instead, it lies in a bed in a room lit only by a candle. Several people kneel around the bed, travelling in prayer. George re-enters his body, which someone has washed and dressed in clean clothes.

The Lord touches George in the temple of his flesh and mends that which the stones had broken and torn. He

knits the bones together in their places and restores the organs. George opens his eyes in a body as whole as it had been before the stoning.

One of the people hears George stir and looks up.

“Hallelujah! Praise God! Thank you Jesus! He’s come back from the dead, brethren! *Look!*”

The four men and three women who were gathered in prayer spring to their feet and gather excitedly around George.

“His wounds are healed.”

“There’s not even a bruise there!”

“How do you feel?”

“What was it like?”

“Did you see Jesus?”

One of them, an elderly man who seems to be their leader, calls them to be quiet. “One at a time, brethren. He can’t answer all of us at once.

“Brother, we’ve been praying here for you for most of the night. We saw what happened to you from a distance, but there was nothing we could do. We waited until dark and sneaked into the camp and cut you down. We knew you had to be dead, but I had the strongest feeling we had to pray for you. We haven’t done much for the Lord for a long while, and I just decided we weren’t going to let Him down this time.

“So, anyway, we brought you back here to the house, cleaned you as best we could and put some clothes on you. Since then, we’ve been here before the Lord praying that He would restore you to life in the flesh.”

“I am grateful to you, brethren, and your faith humbles me. I really didn’t want to come back, but the Lord said my work is not finished.”

“What was it like where you were?” asked one of the women.

“It’s impossible to describe. I went down a lighted pathway with my guardian and we came into the most beautiful open meadow I have ever seen, more beautiful than you could even imagine. The place was full of light and it all came from the Lord. There were flowers so incredibly beautiful it makes me cry just to remember. And the smell! It made my spirit sing. But the best part of all was seeing the Lord just as I see you now, face to face, and hearing His lovely voice. I can’t wait to go back to be with Him.”

They all look at him with faces transformed with rapturous joy. When he finishes talking, they begin praising God with one accord, and the Spirit descends upon them in power. As had happened that night in front of the Bakers’ home, they are transported to the throne, surrounded by the Hosts of Glory. I join with the angelic choirs in praise to the Lamb who sits at the Father’s right hand.

The bedroom surrounds us once more, and still I sing praises to my God. The people in the room say nothing until a spirit of prophecy descends upon George.

“Thus sayeth the Lord. ‘My children, you have hidden too long in the darkness. You are children of Light; why do you fear what men may do to you? Do you not know that Satan is cast out already? His time is short;

your time is beyond all time, for I have given you the gift of eternity. He who clings to his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will gain life everlasting.

“ I have sent my servant to you that he may instruct you and build you up. When he leaves, you will go forth into the hills and valleys and seek out those who are lost. When the time is full, I will bring you into your reward. Your flesh will suffer, but do not fear the death of the body. Do you not know that your life is in me? ”

Their leader begins to weep. “It’s true. We’ve been such cowards. We saw our friends and brethren taken away and we were so frightened we hid away, running wherever we could. We asked the Lord to protect us, but our prayers were empty. We got out of the Word. Satan had totally defeated us until we watched today as you gave yourself up willingly to be stoned. The Lord gave us courage through you.”

George touches the man’s shoulder. “Brother, that’s behind you now. Forget about all of that; the Lord will free you from it. He sees the spirit of repentance in you. God intervened in your lives tonight in a most sovereign way. Only once before have I experienced the kind of outpouring of praise and power we shared here tonight.”

One of the women begins crying afresh. The old man asks her what’s wrong.

“I was there!”

“*What!*”

“I was there, in Bentown, at the Bakers’ house. I was one of the ones who escaped.”

“One? There were others?”

“Yes, four of us in all.”

George face turns white, then red with excitement.

“And the other three, who were they”

“Jack Baker, Ham Moses and Bertie Clem.”

“Jack? Alive? Where?”

“The last we heard he was way over in Licking River country, near Salyersville, preaching the Word.”

“But how? What happened? I thought you were all killed.”

“So did they. That’s why we’re still here. It was an awful, horrible night. Still gives me nightmares thinking about it....”