



The Cross

Luke 22:54-62; 19:1-19, 30

"Tally ho, tally ho!" Sir Praise-a-lot called out to his cousin.

"Good day, cousin!" Prince Loves-a-lot returned the greeting.

Cousin, riding Shadow into the castle grounds made me think of all that happened to Jesus the last week before He died," Sir Praise-a-lot said thoughtfully.

"It started off so well as the crowd waved palm branches and praised Jesus as He rode into Jerusalem," Prince Loves-a-lot replied.

Sir Praise-a-lot added, "But the sad thing is that later that week, when He was praying in the garden, the soldier arrested Him. They led Him away for an unfair trial and He ended up dying on the cross."

"Oh but, cousin, that is not a sad story. That is the greatest love story in all of history," the prince exclaimed as he stretched his arms wide to show just how great the story really is.

"Are you sure we are talking about the same story?" Sir Praise-a-lot asked.

"I am!" the prince answered.

Before Sir Praise-a-lot could say another word, Rufus the Royal Messenger popped up in his window with a palm branch in his mouth.

The prince took the branch as he greeted, "Ah, Rufus! Are you celebrating Palm Sunday?"

"Yes!" Rufus meowed. "It's almost Easter!"

"You are right. It *is* almost Easter." Sir Praise-a-lot said sadly.

Sir Praise-a-lot is sad because He doesn't like to think about Jesus going to the cross." Prince Loves-a-lot answered for the knight.

Rufus meowed joyfully. Sir Praise-a-lot was confused. "You also think Easter is a happy holiday? I can't understand why?" He said.

"It was on the first Easter that the world realized Jesus was King of Kings!" Prince Loves-a-lot exclaimed cheerily.

Rufus looked into his messenger bag and carefully removed a circle of twisted, thorny vines.

"What is this? A crown of thorns?" Sir Praise-a-lot asked as he gingerly took the twisted vines from Rufus.

Prince Loves-a-lot looked closely at the crown. "It's just like the one Jesus wore on the day He died for us. Thank you, Rufus, for reminding us of how Jesus suffered to become our King." Rufus smiled and flew off toward the castle.

"Oh cousin, my heart is cleft in twain," Sir Praise-a-lot groaned.

Prince Loves-a-lot stared at him. "What does that mean?"

"I am sad, sad, sad," the knight sighed and wiped a tear from the corner of his eye.

"Still? Don't you know King Jesus chose to give His life?" his cousin asked.

Sir Praise-a-lot continued to sigh. "Poor Jesus, His friends turned away when He needed them most. Judas betrayed Him and even Peter denied that He knew Him!"

"But, Jesus knew all of that was going to happen." Prince Loves-a-lot explained.

Sir Praise-a-lot looked surprised. "He knew and He still did it? Why?"

"For the answer to that question we must open His Word! I will go and get the King's Manual from its special window," Prince Loves-a-lot said. As he sat back down next to his cousin, he asked, "Do you remember at the Last Supper, Jesus told His disciples everything that was going to happen?"

Sir Praise-a-lot nodded. "Yes, Jesus said, one of you will betray me and one of you will deny me. Of course, I get it! God had told Jesus His plan."

"It was God's plan of love!" Prince Loves-a-lot explained.

"I see," Sir Praise-a-lot said hesitantly. "Is that why Jesus didn't put up a fight when the soldiers arrested Him?"

"Yes," the prince replied. "Jesus said, '...for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world...'"

"If only everyone could have known what Jesus knew, then maybe Peter would not have denied Him." Sir Praise-a-lot offered.

"Who knows! But the important thing to remember is that Jesus still loved him anyway." Prince Loves-a-lot assured.

Sir Praise-a-lot jumped up from the bench and threw his hands in the air in frustration. "I don't see how Jesus could still love Peter after he let Him down!"

"Jesus doesn't love us for what we do or even what we don't do. He loves us because we are His children." The prince paused for a moment and then sang, "Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world..."

Sir Praise-a-lot asked for the Bible from his cousin and looked closely at Luke 22:54-62. "But the Bible says that three different times Peter was asked if He was a follower of Jesus." The knight began to read. "Peter replied, 'Man, I don't know what you're talking about!' Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed!" Sir Praise-a-lot looked up and said, "Imagine how bad Peter must have felt."

"But look what happened after that." Prince Loves-a-lot said as he stood up and looked over his cousin's shoulder. He pointed to the next verse and read, "The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered what Jesus had told Him earlier: 'Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times.'"

"That's what I mean; when Jesus looked at him, Peter must have felt just terrible," Sir Praise-a-lot pointed out.

"Or maybe Jesus looked at Peter with love," the prince offered. "Maybe His look said, 'It's all right, Peter. You're My friend and I love you no matter what.'"

Sir Praise-a-lot gave the Bible back to his cousin and asked, "Do you really think a look can say all that?"

Prince Loves-a-lot nodded. "Oh yes, cousin, it can if it's from Jesus! You have helped me to see that Jesus never stops loving us even when we fail. Remember what you like to say?"

The knight smiled and said, "He knew, He obeyed, He loved, He saved."

Prince Loves-a-lot thought for a moment. "Do you think that's why Jesus said, 'It is finished' when He was on the cross?"

"Yes!" Sir Praise-a-lot added, "By giving His life, Jesus finished God's plan to save the world."

"He is truly the King who loves us. No wonder we love serving Him." Prince Loves-a-lot said.

"Well, you know, serving the King is the noblest thing!" Sir Praise-a-lot said with a grin. "And speaking of serving, the King's head gardener, Theophilus, asked for help cutting palm branches for the Palm Sunday parade. Why don't we go give him a hand?"

"Great idea, my good cousin! Lead the way!" Prince Loves-a-lot agreed.